Title
By Choice or By Circumstance: Singlewomen in Early Modern France

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Publication Date
2020

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

By Choice or By Circumstance: Singlewomen in Early Modern France

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements

for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in History

by

Christine Ryan Hilliard

2020

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

By Choice or By Circumstance: Singlewomen in Early Modern France

by

Christine Ryan Hilliard

Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2020

Professor Kathryn Norberg, Chair

By Choice or By Circumstance: Singlewomen in Early Modern France concentrates on the social and cultural importance of never-married women in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. During this period, unmarried women appeared at the center of French social, political, and intellectual debates on issues such as proper gender roles, an imagined population decline, and the apparent degeneration of family values and sexual morals. This study explores how working-class and bourgeois singlewomen navigated heightened criticism as well as their seemingly ambiguous positions in the highly patriarchal, family-oriented society of early modern France. Utilizing sources such as Parisian police, court, and notarial records dating from 1661-1789, this project takes a novel approach to the historical study of unmarried women. Rather than examining their lack of marital bonds, it instead focuses on their alternate social relations, such as those they shared with family, friends, community members, and institutional associates.

By examining non-elite singlewomen as connected and connecting individuals rather than marginalized outsiders or aberrant outliers, this study interrogates whether the prescriptions and assumptions articulated by authorities reflected the realities of unmarried women's lives in the early modern period.

This dissertation reveals that singlewomen were active members of their communities who supported French society far more than they undermined it. While unmarried women faced many challenges, such as economic insecurity and unique social vulnerabilities, they also actively employed strategies to overcome these obstacles. By forming expansive networks, planning for their financial futures, and adopting certain lifestyle choices, such as cohabitation and collaboration, singlewomen were able to negotiate the instabilities of daily life and the rise of new institutions of control during the long eighteenth century. Moreover, they performed multi-faceted roles that allowed them to adapt to changing circumstances while still remaining independent. As sisters, aunts, nieces, friends, laborers, employers, neighbors, and surrogate kin, they engaged in mixed economies of care, interpersonal bonds, and community alliances that offered reciprocal aid and mutual stability for members of French society. By buying life annuities, fostering and raising orphaned children, participating in neighborhood life, and acting as bridges between provincial and Parisian associates, unmarried women were central rather than marginalized members of the early modern French public. Ultimately, this work highlights the importance of voluntary alliances, the prevalence of non-traditional household structures, the existence of alternate forms of kinship, and the ways female agency could be achieved and enacted in Old Regime France.

The dissertation of Christine Ryan Hilliard is approved.

Ellen Dubois

Muriel McClendon

Malina Stefanovska

Kathryn Norberg, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2020

For Mary

Matriarch, Artist, Lover of History, Paris, and Us.

Who is, without a doubt, enjoying going here and there, doing this and that, with the Finest Kind.

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AN
Archives Nationales, Paris

AP-HP
Archives de l'Assistance Publique – Hôpitaux de Paris

BA
Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Five years ago in the National Archives in Paris, a scholar inquired as to the subject of my research. When I responded that I study singlewomen in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France, he was dubious as to the feasibility of this project. Gesturing to the notarial documents on my desk, he told me I would not find my unmarried women in those records, which he had been using in his work for many years. When I shared that I had, at that point, found over three thousand singlewomen in my examination of police, court, and notarial records in that archive alone, he was incredulous. Nonetheless, our conversation ended cordially enough and I returned to my work. The following week, the scholar approached me again. This time, he wanted to tell me that ever since our conversation, he was seeing singlewomen everywhere in his research. "It wasn't that they weren't there," he told me, "I had just never noticed them before."

This encounter reinforced what I already knew to be true regarding the views on unmarried women in early modern France, particularly those of the bourgeois and popular classes. Contemporaries and modern scholars have presumed they were marginalized and unimportant, leading to a scarcity of scholarship on the social category of singlewomen and few studies of their lived experiences during the Old Regime. At the same time, however, this conversation, and many like it, reinforced my commitment to this project and my strong belief in its significance. This dissertation is but one stage of a study that could, and likely will, last an entire academic career. As I wrote "By Choice or By Circumstance: Singlewomen in Early Modern France," I was continuously struck by how each chapter could, in fact, have been its own dissertation. I look forward to continuing this study in many forms as I move forward in my research. Yet, I would have never accomplished what I have here without the support of so many scholars, colleagues, students, friends, and family members. I can say, with great pleasure, that

none of the individuals below ever responded to my project's description with disbelief or dispassion. Each gave me the confidence and drive to move forward in my work, shaping both me and this study in the process.

First, I am very grateful to the organizations and individuals who supported my research, including those in the UCLA Department of History and the Center for Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Studies, the Fulbright Commission, the Social Science Research Council, and the FACE Foundation. Thank you to staff, faculty, and students at the École des Hauts Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris, specifically Fanny Cosandey, and the Université de Tours, particularly Marie-Paule de Weerdt-Pilorge. I am very appreciative of the staff at the archives and libraries I utilized during my research, including the Archives Nationales in the Marais, the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, the Archives de l'Assistance Publique - Hôpitaux de Paris, the UCLA Libraries, especially the Young Research Library, and the incredibly kind team at the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library. Thank you all for your kind instruction, patient guidance, and friendly enthusiasm and also for your contributions to spaces that promote community among scholars, students, and the public as we engage with one another and with our historical subjects.

I am so appreciative of the wonderful community at UCLA who has fostered my development during my graduate studies. To the staff, faculty, and students in the Gender Studies Department, thank you for welcoming me into your classrooms as a graduate student concentrator and as an instructor. Your engagement has helped me cultivate and advance the interdisciplinarity of this particular project and my identity as a scholar.

To all those in the Department of History, I am incredibly grateful to have had the opportunity to be part of this community and work with each of you. I wish to express my thanks to every member and interlocutor of our department, including, the staff, faculty, my graduate

colleagues, and my undergraduate students. In particular, I would like to recognize my appreciation toward Lynn Hunt, Margaret Jacob, Ann Major, Katherine Marino, Minayo Nasiali, Carla Pestana, and, last but certainly not least, Teofilo Ruiz. Teo, I am certain that a full expression of my admiration and gratitude would constitute a second dissertation. Your mentorship and friendship have changed my life and made me a better teacher, scholar, colleague, and human being. Teo and Scarlett, you have been my family in Los Angeles and I will carry you in my heart everywhere I go. We will always have Paris.

To my committee members, Ellen Dubois, Muriel McClendon, Malina Stefanovska, and my advisor, Kathryn Norberg—this project and my growth as a scholar would not have been possible without your support, instruction, and feedback. I am so grateful to each of you for your investment in me and my work. Ellen, your passion for the study of women, gender, and sexuality has encouraged and heightened my own dedication to our field—I promise to keep the flame ablaze. Muriel, your mentorship, guidance, and training have inspired my teaching pedagogy and identity as an academic. Our conversations always left me feeling confident and calm during periods of flurry and flux. Malina, your gracious collegiality and attentive instruction have taken so many different forms over the course of our work together and I am very appreciative to have had the opportunity to learn from and collaborate with you. Finally, Kate, words cannot express how grateful I am to have had you as an advisor. From our post-archive debriefings over Portuguese pastries in Paris to our meetings in your kitchen in Pasadena, you have accompanied and guided me in every step of this process. You have been my constant ally, advocate, and mentor. Your counsel on the use of the *scellé* records at the Archives Nationales made this project possible and your extraordinary support brought it to fruition. I am

indebted to you for your advisement and friendship over the past seven years and I look forward to our continued work together.

To my colleagues at UCLA and beyond, thank you all for your support, engagement, and graciousness. There are so many whom I wish to recognize but I would like to express particular gratitude to Andrea Christmas and Maia Woolner. Your scholarship has inspired me, your feedback has been instrumental to my work, and your friendship has shaped me in many wonderful ways. I am also incredibly appreciative of my friends and family members for their many years of encouragement, which predate this particular project and my academic trajectory. In particular, my siblings, Sean, Kevin, and Catherine, and my parents, Arthur and Laura, have been constant companions and supporters of my endeavors. Thank you for reminding me of the importance of balance and for bringing so much joy and laughter to my life.

Eric, you have been my partner and teammate throughout this project. You have moved across the country, flown across the Atlantic, encouraged and supported me with patience, kindness, and confidence through the successes and the challenges that came with this work. Throughout it all, you have infused my life with so much love and happiness. If any man should be recognized in this work on singlewomen, it is certainly you.

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INTRODUCTION

In early modern France, the singlewoman seemed to represent a figure of both disdain and sympathy. For some, she was a nuisance, contributing to population decline and the degeneration of social mores. Others pitied her, believing that to be unmarried meant to be financially unstable, socially unsettled, and emotionally unfulfilled. To all, however, her independent status represented a threat—to herself, to the family, to public order, and to French society as a whole. Her existence outside of marriage and, once an adult, outside of patriarchal control, made her a figure requiring supervision. In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France, contemporaries viewed singlewomen not as a social group with unique features, but as a hollow chasm defined as much by its ability to divide as its potential to be filled. "But with what?" was the question authorities asked, an inquiry posed with contempt but also tinged with an uncomfortable fear.

In many ways, the singlewoman represented the general condition of French society from the late seventeenth century through the Revolution, a period characterized by instability and change. She appeared just outside of control, escaping the grasp of authorities just to morph into another form. If her nature was static, most reasoned, it was only because she was in a state of incubation. Contemporaries viewed the singlewoman as a resource they wished to utilize but also a danger they hoped to avoid. In order to direct her toward "productive" ends, most believed that her potential needed to be managed. The institutions built and the discourse spread over the course of the long eighteenth century aimed to punish the possibility the unmarried woman presented, to contain the chaos she seemed to evoke.

Her singleness was represented by the word "*fille,*" a term which intentionally depicted her as young, submissive, and incomplete. The designation positioned her as a daughter trapped

in a constant state of adolescence, unable to graduate to the full status of womanhood represented by the term "*femme,*" which also signified the status of "wife." In official records, the designation of a woman's marital status typically occupied the space where a man's profession would be noted. Indeed, documentation during this period of growing bureaucracy and heightened centralization tended to follow a prescribed format that allowed scribes to sketch unique details into premade outlines and readers to glean the most important information rapidly and with relative ease. The designation of a subject as a *fille*, despite its association with individuals believed to be unimportant and non-contributing members of French society, was not meant to glossed over by contemporaries reviewing the records, nor should it be skimmed past today by modern scholars. Instead, it was intended to draw the reader's attention, to stand out from the predictable jargon included in each formulaic document. It should rise out from the mundane minutiae that gestured to the mechanisms of power and order that kept the wheels of the Old Regime turning until the Revolution finally brought it all to a shuddering halt.

Despite this, historians have tended to skip over those associated with this status or, conversely, to take contemporary attitudes at their word. Singlewomen have long been relegated to the margins of historical narratives on women in early modern France. Only a single monograph focuses on singlewomen as a unique social category in this specific period of French history and its title evokes the popular conception of who these women were and how they lived: *La Solitude.*[1] Indeed, the overwhelming perspective of unmarried women as insignificant and even ostracized has resulted in the conflation between the singlewoman, *la femme célibataire*, and the woman alone, *la femme seule*.

This study aims to offer a new perspective on singlewomen, one which highlights their social status, relationships, and participation in public life in early modern France. In particular,

[1] Scarlett Beauvalet-Boutouyrie, *La Solitude, XVIIe – XVIIIe Siécle* (Paris: Belin, 2008).

this work examines non-elite women of the bourgeois and working classes who lived in Paris from the beginning of Louis XIV's personal reign in 1661 until the French Revolution in 1789. Paris is a particularly apt site for the study of singlewomen because the city's population was incredibly diverse in terms of rank, socioeconomic status, profession, and household structures. In addition, many unmarried women and men migrated to Paris in search of work and marital prospects, and thus the study of single individuals in this location is be more feasible than in rural areas or smaller cities.[2] In addition, the French capital represented the site that contemporaries believed was most rife with the problems of social disorder and sexual vice, both of which were linked to the large number of unmarried women among the urban population.

Finally, Paris is an excellent site for the study of singlewomen in this period due to its available source material. While most of the Parisian parish records were lost in a nineteenth-century fire, the city also had uniquely detailed records that were the product of the French capital's growing and increasingly bureaucratic police system in this period: *scellés*. These are police-generated death records that document the circumstances of individuals' lives, their residences, and their interlocutors in order to facilitate the execution of their wills and the division of their estates. As such, they contain descriptive statements and estate claims from their neighbors, cohabitants, friends, family, and creditors, as well as inventories of their property. *Scellés* also reference associated records such as wills, notarial proceedings, police investigations, and court cases.

These documents serve as excellent sources in the study of non-elite singlewomen for three reasons. First, they allow one to examine a category of women who are otherwise difficult to locate: those who never-married. By starting at their deaths, one is able to affirm that they

[2] Olwen H. Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France, 1750-1789* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 28-29, 92-96.

were single throughout their lives. Second, these records offer detailed insight into the lives of individuals who did not leave behind written documents, as very few women of the bourgeois or lower classes did in this period. Finally, as they reference associated records, they allow one to trace historical actors backward through the archives in order to find additional notarial, court, and police documents, which allows one to reconstruct a fuller and long-term view of these individuals' lives.

While the title of this study, "By Choice or By Circumstance," appears to reference the question that is ever-present in relation to singlewomen—why didn't they marry?—this study reframes this inquiry to offer both a different approach and, thus, a distinct assessment of female singleness in the early modern period. The intention is not to understand *why* a woman did not marry but *how* she lived as a singlewoman. Thus, this project focuses on the on the choices singlewomen made and the circumstances they faced as a result of their status and sex. The answer to this question of *how*, in large part, highlights an often-overlooked aspect of unmarried women's lives in all historical narratives, not only those from this period. This study proposes that singlewomen navigated the trials of everyday life and, especially, those that arose from their identities as non-elite unmarried women, through their social relations. By examining unmarried women's familial bonds, community alliances, social capital, and forms of voluntary kinship, one learns that unmarried women were far from alone. In fact, their social relations were their most important resources.

While early modern contemporaries feared unmarried women's ability to take on multiple forms and thereby evade classification—from the yet-to-be-married girl, to the wayward daughter, from the elderly spinster to the sex worker—this study instead views singlewomen's capacity to negotiate and adapt their social roles as a beneficial characteristic and a strategy of

survival. Unmarried women held multiple and concurrent positions as sisters, aunts, nieces, friends, neighbors, laborers, employers, and fictive kin who served in a variety of surrogate roles. By approaching unmarried women as multi-faceted individuals who evolved individually and developed collectively, one moves away from traditional perspectives that situate female status along the linear course of the female lifecycle, which charts women's progress according to their changing relationships with male kin. In order to reexamine what it meant to be unmarried and female in Old Regime France, however, one must first reconsider the question: who was the singlewoman?

The Figure of the Singlewoman in Early Modern France

In early modern France marriage seemed to represent the natural state, desired fate, and foremost priority of all women and men. The seventeenth-century writer Jacques Chaussé captured this view succinctly when he described marriage as "the true path to paradise."[3] Throughout the ideological movements and institutional changes that occurred over the course of the long eighteenth century, marriage remained the foundation of moral welfare, political strength, and public order. This is not to say that marriage itself was isolated from the broader transformations taking place during this period. Conceptually, marriage shifted from a patriarchal custom that formalized familial alliances to a more intimate relationship established on the principle of free choice. As French contemporaries debated the roles of parental authority, love, friendship, rank, and equality in marriage, they continuously highlighted and reinforced the institution's significance as a central tenant of early modern society. Even as new conceptions of "private" and "public" theoretically divided and gendered the realms of domesticity and politics, marriage seemed to supersede and, in many ways, tie together these disparate parts. As a result,

[3] Jacques Chaussé, *De l'excellence du mariage* (Paris, 1689), 42.

within both the "family-state compact"[4] of the Old Regime's body politic and in Enlightenment principles that sought to redefine the family's sociocultural significance, unmarried women appeared as outliers in the collective imagining of the French "public."

At the same time, the non-conforming nature of the singlewoman did not make her an insignificant or undesirable member of French society. Instead, the centrality of the unmarried woman in intellectual, social, and political debates in this period demonstrates how important contemporaries believed she was both in principal and practice. Within these discourses, the singlewoman represented an anomaly to be defined, a threat to be controlled, and a problem to be solved. She also stood as a resource to be honed, one that was essential to supporting and strengthening French society.

Historian Jean Claude Bologne describes the early modern period in the history of singleness as one characterized by "*la diabolisation du célibat* [the demonization of singleness]."[5] Several changes gave rise to the distrust and disdain of unmarried individuals in this period, including: the secularization of society, the nuclearization of the family, the perceived degeneration of morals, and fluctuations in the European Marriage Pattern that led to fears of population decline. The imagined population crisis stemmed from shifts in marital and procreative practices brought about by factors such as dowry inflation, warfare, famine, and increased migration. While historical demographers disagree over the rate of change, most concur that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, French subjects were marrying later and having less children than in earlier periods.[6] Also at this time, the royal government implemented

[4] Sarah Hanley, "Engendering the State: Family Formation and State Building in Early Modern France," *French Historical Studies* 16, no. 1 (1989): 4-27.

[5] Jean Claude Bologne, *Histoire du célibat et des célibataires* (Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2004), 123.

pronatalist policies they hoped would promote both the growth of the French kingdom and the spread of social stability.[7] While the fears of population decline were ultimately unfounded,[8] the concurrent spread of populationist discourse and legislation of pronatalist policies led to a sense of urgency around the subjects of marriage and reproduction.

Consequently, celibacy rates became a source of anxiety and unmarried individuals appeared to be more a conspicuous demographic than ever before. This is clear by the inclusion of the term *célibataire* or "single person" in the fourth edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*. While prior editions of the dictionary only included the term *célibat,* which refers to the state of singleness, the 1762 publication introduced the personified noun *célibataire*, meaning "One who lives in celibacy, though in age and state able to marry."[9] This definition not only designated a specific social category for single people but also encouraged readers to question why someone who was capable of marrying did not. Furthermore, the eighteenth-century definition of *majeur*—the term used to designate an individual who reached the age of legal majority—included as an example of its usage: "A *fille majeure* can marry without the consent of her parents."[10] It appears the writers of the *Dictionnaire* struggled to imagine or declined to

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[6] See: Tracy Dennison and Sheilagh Ogilvie, "Does the European Marriage Pattern Explain Economic Growth?," *The Journal of Economic History* 74, no. 3 (September 2014) ; Jacques Dupâquier, *La population française aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris, 1979); Maryanne Kowaleski, "Singlewomen in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: The Demographic Perspective," in *Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250-1800,* eds. Judith Bennett and Amy Froide (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

[7] Leslie Tuttle, *Conceiving the Old Regime: Pronatalism and the Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 4.

[8] The number of French subjects actually grew by thirty percent over the eighteenth century. Tuttle, *Conceiving the Old Regime,* 6.

[9] *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 4 ed., (1762) University of Chicago: ARTFL Encyclopédie Project (Spring 2013), ed., Robert Morrissey, http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu/.

[10] *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française.* 5 ed.*,* vol. 2 (1798) University of Chicago: ARTFL Encyclopédie Project (Spring 2013), ed., Robert Morrissey, http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu/.

promote how else a woman might use her rights of legal majority.

The criticism of celibacy applied to both men and women who appeared to be intentionally avoiding marriage. Particularly in the late eighteenth century, political theorists viewed bachelors as selfish individuals unwilling to build the social bonds that were expected of citizens and essential to the new French republic.[11] Some revolutionaries argued that bachelors should pay higher taxes. One of the proponents of this measure, Ange Goudar, suggested that if suicide was illegal, voluntary secular celibacy should be as well, since both acts steal citizens from *la patrie*. "Each individual citizen," Goudar writes, "is a portion of the general population; as a member of the Republic, he is obligated to work toward its survival and to provide . . . for its perpetuity."[12] Procreation was no longer a means of just securing one's familial lineage and patrimony; it was the social responsibility of all members of the French public.

At the same time, however, the discourse on celibacy demonstrates that spinsterhood was a far more controversial and threatening state than bachelorhood. Rather than describe the long eighteenth century as a period of "*la diabolisation du célibat*,"[13] I would instead characterize it as one marked specifically by a crisis of female secular celibacy. While procreation and marriage may have been expected of men, it was seen as intrinsic to the biological lifecycle and social position of women. To be an unmarried woman was to walk the line between the distinct spheres of public and private, to be masterless without purpose, and to blur the boundaries between men's rights and women's roles. This crisis not only centered on attempts to curb the number of singlewomen in French society but also encompassed those who sought to direct unmarried

[11] Susan Desan, *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 231.

[12] Ange Goudar, *Les Intérêts de la France mal entendus dans les branches de l'agriculture, de la population, des finances et de l'industrie, par un citoyen* (Amsterdam, 1756), I: 272.

[13] Bologne, *Histoire du célibat*, 123.

women toward "productive" (i.e. *reproductive*) ends as well as those who, conversely, promoted secular celibacy as an acceptable option for women.

The majority of the literature published at this time illustrated only two paths for women in adulthood: the convent or marriage. Beginning in the seventeenth century, however, debates on the subject of marriage led to more widespread discussion of the virtues and benefits of female singleness. Many writers, including social critics, *salonniers*, and the so-called *précieuses,* debated the desirability of traditional marriage, advocating for companionate partnerships based on love and free choice. The theme of the *maumariée* or "*la mal mariée*" [14] appears frequently in literature from this period, cautioning women to consider their long-term interests and personal desires before giving themselves to an inescapable fate. Other writers argued that the entire institution of marriage was unnecessary, outdated, and oppressive, particularly for women. French noblewoman Duchesse of Montpensier, also known as "La Grande Mademoiselle," for example, described marriage as "that which has given men the upper hand." She asserted that the purported "dependence" of women on men stemmed from "custom," rather than any natural inferiority. Female submissiveness did not originate in marriage but began in a woman's birth home, where the pressure to wed led women to marry "often against our will and because of family obligations of which we have been the victims."[15] La Grande Mademoiselle saw the gendered constraints of conventional society to be insurmountable and advocated for the building of an isolated retreat in which friendship reigned and marriage was forbidden. This imagined community would allow men but the relations between the sexes

[14] Ibid., 138.

[15] La Grande Mademoiselle was the cousin of Louis XIV and was once considered to be the most eligible bachelorette in Europe, as she inherited a large estate from her parents and was an only child. She refused all royal suitors, however, only marrying in secret for love later in her life. This marriage was never recognized and, therefore, she died 'unmarried.' Anne-Marie-Louise d'Orléans to Madame de Motteville, Letter 3 in *Against Marriage: The Correspondence of La Grande Mademoiselle*, ed. and trans. Joan DeJean (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 47-49.

would be predicated on civility and equality. La Grande Mademoiselle believed this dynamic could be achieved by removing marriage, which she viewed as, "[that which] has caused us to be named the weaker sex."[16] This is just one example of what Barbara Woshinsky calls a "feminutopia," or a sequestered "utopic female space" that appeared in a number of female writings in this period.[17] In this discourse, female secular celibacy remained antithetical to the broader public. In La Grande Mademoiselle's imagining, the singlewoman could flourish only in the private retreat, separated from the society that condemned and resisted her way of life.

As debates over women's proper social roles continued into the eighteenth century, other female writers suggested that this separation was neither necessary for singlewomen nor beneficial to French society. In her 1700 text, *Du célibat volontaire ou La vie sans engagement,* French writer and defrocked nun Gabrielle Suchon advocated for singlewomen's participation in what would come to be known as the "public sphere." According to Suchon, secular celibacy or, "*la troisième voie*,"[18] offered women a more tranquil, independent life than one experienced in either the convent, where one was detached from the outer world and lived in isolated ignorance, or marriage, in which "women are subjects of their husbands," "attached to their children," and spend their lives worrying about their domestics and other "temporal" concerns. While Suchon recognized that the unmarried, uncloistered life was more often associated with "caprice rather than reason and libertinage rather than virtue," she promoted the idea that this "neutrality" offered women more opportunities to contribute to French society.[19] In freeing women from the limitations on female autonomy found in monastic or married life, secular celibacy allowed them

[16] Ibid.

[17] Barbara Woshinsky, *Imagining Women's Conventual Space in France, 1600-1800: The Cloister Disclosed* (Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010): 124-134.

[18] Gabrielle Suchon, *Du célibat volontaire ou La vie sans engagement* (Paris, 1700), I: 124.

[19] Ibid., I: 37.

to better serve those in need, such as the poor, the orphaned, and the afflicted.[20] Suchon and like-minded contemporaries attempted to legitimize *"la troisième voie"* as not only an alternative life course for women but as an important path to the betterment of French society.

This promotion of female singleness, particularly when coupled with anxiety over how it would impact France morally and demographically, provoked defenses of marriage and criticism of unmarried women. This discourse typically represented the singlewoman as either a threat to be curbed or a victim to be protected. Eighteenth-century moralist writer Louis-Sébastien Mercier depicted the unmarried woman as unrestrained and unsupervised in his text *Tableau de Paris.* His image of the singlewoman responded to the aforementioned fears about how female celibacy could undermine French society. Mercier asserted that one could see their influence most prominently in Paris. There, he wrote, "Marriage has become an insupportable yoke, which one avoids with all their might." Celibacy, by contrast, "appears to be a more pleasant, stable, and tranquil state." According to Mercier, the woman who chose to be unmarried brought about a "strange disorder" by attempting to "live in a masculine space." "Free from the pain and the pleasure of marriage" he warned, singlewomen would become more like men than women. He writes, "These decrepit women are typically more masculine, more disagreeable, more annoying, and more miserly than women who have a husband and children."[21] If Mercier described the desired objective of women's "voluntary renouncement" of marriage, Rousseau noted the threatening outcome of this resolution: "Unable to make themselves into men, the women make us into women."[22]

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[20] Ibid., I: 521-522.

[21] Translation is my own. Louis Sébastien Mercier, *Tableau de Paris* (Amsterdam, 1782) II: 236-7.

[22] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Letter to D'Alembert and Writings for the Theater,* eds and trans. Allan Bloom, Charles Butterworth, and Christopher Kelly (Hanover: UPNE, 2004), 325.

Other eighteenth-century writers sought to portray spinsterhood as a state to be avoided, arguing that even if celibacy was preferable for women in principle, it was a miserable experience in practice. These texts highlight the incertitude and instability of single life for women at a time when female financial autonomy was incredibly rare and difficult to achieve. Simon-Nicolas-Henri Linguet portrayed marriage in his eighteenth-century text as the more favorable of two undesirable options for secular women, writing, "In marriage she finds a cruel servitude and, in celibacy, continuous dangers."[23] The foremost risk an unmarried woman faced was seduction, a fall from which there was no return. Having lost her honor, the unmarried woman had two choices: "the cloister or infamy." Should she choose or be reduced to the latter, a state characterized by prostitution, her outcome was inevitable. Linguet writes, "[she] will die on the dung-heap, unhappy, forgotten, treated like the last excrement of nature: voilà."[24]

According to some medical theorists, the bleakness of celibacy was not only socially certain but biologically determined. The author of the eighteenth-century manuscript, *Paradoxe qu'il fault que les filles se marient ou deviennent folles*, suggests that, as an unmarried woman ages, she will begin to experience a "darkening of the mind . . . a storm which agitates reason with an incredible violence."[25] The author attributes the onset of madness to the long period of time in which an unmarried woman lives "in a state contrary to the intention of nature." In this description, female celibacy is akin to a disease, spreading through the body and mind, manifesting itself first in "physical palpitations" and culminating in the loss of one's senses.[26]

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[23] Simon-Nicolas-Henri Linguet, *Oeuvres de M. Linguet* (London, 1774), II: 64.

[24] Ibid., II: 69.

[25] BA, Archives de la Bastille, MS 3532, *Paradoxe qu'il fault que les filles se marient ou deviennent folles* (Charles Adrien Picard, 1774), 16.

[26] Ibid., 20.

The idea that "girls can live in this state of neutrality," the author writes, utilizing the same language as Suchon to describe the path of secular celibacy, "is a dangerous heresy."[27] This connection between celibacy and madness was supported by M. Chambon de Montaux, a doctor in the Royal Society of Medicine, who suggested hysteria was not found in married women and thus offered marriage as a treatment for this illness and its associated physical manifestations.[28]

Finally, Madame de Verzure, a rare female voice among eighteenth-century moralist writers,[29] acknowledged that while "most [women] would prefer to simply remain single,"[30] ultimately, "celibacy is not a state of liberty."[31] Although Madame de Verzure recognized that "marriage is an endless source of pain," she also recommended that individuals, "follow natural law, cooperate as citizens for the good of society and for the welfare of the State."[32] This last directive reflects the overwhelming attitude toward secular celibacy by the end of the eighteenth century: even if marriage was a flawed institution, it was both the natural and socially productive choice.[33] To remain unmarried, conversely, was to deviate from nature, to promote disassociation, and to undermine public welfare and the French nation. This would be even more gendered over the course of the Revolution, when political rights excluded women and the new government defunded and dispersed the religious organizations—both cloistered and

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[27] Ibid., np.

[28] M. Chambon de Montaux, *Des Maladies des Filles* (Paris, 1785).

[29] Julie Candler Hayes, "Sex and Gender, Feeling and Thinking: Imagining Women as Intellectuals," in *The Cambridge Companion to the French Enlightenment,* ed. Daniel Brewer (Cambridge UP, 2014), 101.

[30] Mme de Verzure, *Réflexions hazardées d'une femme ignorante : qui ne connoît les défauts des autres que par les siens, & le Monde que par relation et par ouï-dire* (Amsterdam, 1766), première partie, 146.

[31] Ibid., 148.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Even those who advocated for divorce typically couched their reasoning in the promotion of remarriage and, ideally, reproduction.

uncloistered—that previously offered women alternatives to marriage and motherhood.

During the long eighteenth century, contemporaries from nearly every social sector considered how singlewomen could be brought into alignment with changes in sociocultural ideologies and the political order. In the mind of French contemporaries, these transformations could only be complete and successful if everyone was willing to submit to their social roles and fulfill their gendered responsibilities. In characterizing female celibacy as detrimental to personal and public welfare, proponents of marriage sought to limit the routes to female social productivity even as they purported to expand the realm of female authority. The bifurcation of "public" and "private" not only ideologically separated men from women, but homogenized proper womanhood as well. Unable to take part in the "public" sphere and incompatible with her proposed role in the "private," the singlewoman appeared increasingly out of place. Female celibacy was not a state of "neutrality," it was one of disorderly ambiguity and even dangerous contrariety. Efforts to promote marriage and motherhood, ranging from populationist pleas to cautionary tales, from medical advice to political propaganda, demonstrate that contemporaries believed the singlewoman was an essential factor in the stability and sustainability of the French nation. Her presence was a marker of its progress, a demonstration of its defects as well as its potential. But as much as she helped shape the visions of what this public could become, in the paths laid for the road ahead, there would be no place for "*la troisième voie*."

The Singlewoman as a Category of Analysis

While the category of "*célibat*" [singleness] was, therefore, becoming clearer and more conspicuous in France during this period, scholars are less decided on the identity of the "singlewoman." One of the primary questions is whether the category includes all women without men, such as widows and separated women, or only those who are distinctly unmarried.

Historian Amy Froide, for example, argues that in the early modern period, the most significant difference was not between unmarried and married women, but instead between the "*ever-married* (women who had ever been married in their lifetimes—thus, both wives and widows) and *never-married* women."[34] However, even within the category of "never-married" women, one must distinguish between those who are yet-to-be married and those who will not marry at all. In their anthology *Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250-1800,* Judith Bennett and Amy Froide reflect on this distinction, writing that the category of singlewomen typically "encompasses both women who would eventually marry and those who never would."[35] To address this need for differentiation, Bennett and Froide distinguish "*life-cycle singlewomen*," who "lived single only for the years between childhood and marriage," from "*lifelong singlewomen*" who "might have expected to marry while they were young but, for a variety of reasons, never did." For *life-cycle singlewomen* singledom was a temporary state, while for *lifelong singlewomen* it was a permanent one.[36]

Scholars such as Ariadne Schmidt, Isabelle Devos, and Bruno Blondé argue for expanding the lens of marital status and interrogating "single" as a broader category. "The single," as they point out "is not easy to define in that singleness is not a universal category, but a historical one. The actual legal status, marital history, age and even their residential arrangements are all among the possible denominators for the categorization of singles."[37] While Froide and Bennett do not include widows or wives (separated, abandoned, or otherwise) in their

[34] Amy Froide, "Marital Status as a Category of Difference: Singlewomen and Widows in Early Modern England" in *Singlewomen in the European Past,* 237.

[35] Bennett and Froide, *Singlewomen in the European Past*, 2.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ariadne Schmidt, Isabelle Devos, and Bruno Blondé, "Single and the City," in *, Single Life and the City 1200-1900* (NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 18.

own study or definition of singlewomen, they too acknowledge that "all women—perceived as less able than men and restricted in terms of both political and economic opportunities—shared disabilities peculiar to their sex." Thus, while unmarried women's lives may differ from once-married women's, "the distinctions were neither firm nor unchangeable."[38]

The experience of living without the support, protection, or authority of a male spouse was not limited to the unmarried girl, or *fille*. Early modern French law itself recognized the different paths that led to being single. As Dena Goodman observes, in Old Regime France singleness and marriage were distinct *états* which "were understood differently before the law and carried with them different privileges, just as noble and commoner did. The title 'madame' was thus not simply honorific (or sexist) but legal as well."[39] In this way, any woman whose marital status deviated from normative understanding of 'married'—whether she was unmarried, separated, or widowed—existed outside the *état* of marriage.

Yet there was an identifier that applied specifically to unmarried adult women in early modern France: the legal designation of *fille majeure*. *Majorité* was a particular judicial status that applied to unmarried individuals who reached age of legal majority, which was twenty-five years old for both men and women in most of France during this period.[40] This meant that upon either reaching the age of twenty-five, or by successfully filing for emancipation, an individual could make one's own legal decisions, which included entering into contracts, marrying without parental consent, and representing one's self in court. While this standard applied to men and women, a man was very rarely identified as "*un garcon majeur*." A man's legal status did not

[38] Bennett and Froide, *Singlewomen in the European Past,* 15.

[39] Dena Goodman, *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2009), 282.

[40] Pierre-Jean-Jacques-Guillaume Guyot, « majorité » dans *Répertoire universel et raisonné de jurisprudence civile, criminelle, canonique et bénéficiale: ouvrage de plusieurs jurisconsultes,* (Paris, 1785) XI: 161.

need to be qualified in relation to his unmarried state; once he left the period of tutelage, he was a legally autonomous being. This was not true for women, who the law imagined would, upon marriage, exchange their fathers' homes and authority for their husbands'. In this way, the term *fille majeure* was meant not to distinguish adult singlewomen from adult bachelors, but instead to delineate the differences between the legal rights of adult singlewomen and those of other women, including unmarried minors [*filles mineures*], wives [*femmes*], and widows [*veuves*].

Table 1: Legal Identity by Gender, Age, and Marital Status

Legal Status	Qualifications of Status	Judicial Rights	Designation
Garçon/fils mineur Male Minor	Unmarried male under the age of legal majority (< 25)	Legally Dependent All legal actions or contracts must take place under the supervision of an adult, typically a parent or guardian	*Garçon*
Garçon/fils émancipé Emancipated Man (Unmarried)	Unmarried man granted legal emancipation by the court, which entitles him to the privileges of an adult while still under the age of majority (< 25)	Legally Autonomous	*Homme*
Garçon/fils majeur Adult Bachelor	Unmarried man legally designated as an adult because he meets or exceeds the age of legal majority (≥ 25)	Legally Autonomous	
Homme Adult Man	A man legally designated as an adult. His marital status is considered irrelevant and he could be unmarried, married, separated, or a widowed	Legally Autonomous	
Homme séparé Separated Husband	Legally Separated Man, either: *Séparation de biens* Separation of Property **Or** *Séparation de corps et de biens* Separation of Person and Property	Legally Autonomous	
Veuf Widower	Widower	Legally Autonomous	*Homme*

Legal Status	Qualifications of Status	Judicial Rights	Designation
Fille mineure Female Minor	Unmarried girl/woman under the age of legal majority (< 25)	Legally Dependent	*Fille*
Fille émancipée Emancipated Woman (Unmarried)	Unmarried woman granted legal emancipation by the court, which entitles her to the privileges of an adult while still under the age of majority (< 25)	Legally Autonomous **However** Rarely used as an independent status for any purpose besides contracting marriage	*Fille émancipée*
Fille majeure Adult singlewoman	Unmarried woman legally designated as an adult because she meets or exceeds the age of legal majority (≥ 25)	Legally Autonomous	*Fille / Fille majeure*
Femme Wife	Married Woman	Legally Dependent	*Femme*
Femme séparée Separated Wife	Legally Separated Woman, Either: *Séparation de biens* Separation of Property **Or** *Séparation de corps et de biens* Separation of Person and Property	Quasi-Legally Autonomous As divorce does not exist, one remains married and, thus, tied to one's husband in legal and religious perspectives	*Femme séparée*
Veuve Widow	Widow	Legally Autonomous **However** Widows with children are subject to control and supervision by male kin	*Veuve*

Contemporary recording practices reflected gendered social evaluations that defined women according to their relationships with men. Official records always document a woman's marital status because it reflects her legal rights. A woman is a *fille mineure, fille majeure, femme, femme séparée,* or *veuve,* while men are either a *garçon/fils mineur* or simply an *homme*. However, the only status which offered women full legal autonomy was that of *fille majeure*.

Widows are often compared to unmarried women, typically with favorable assessments of their social status. Indeed, widows enjoyed a number of benefits and privileges unavailable to

unmarried women, the foremost of which was a more respected social status.[41] As Amy Froide argues, "Widows had a public and independent place within the patriarchal society; singlewomen did not."[42] The unique authority and agency offered to widows was only available through the deaths of their husbands and, furthermore, through their roles as mothers to near-orphaned children. For example, if a widow's deceased husband held an official office and had no male heir, a widow could sell it because it constituted a form of property. Widows could take over family businesses upon their husbands' deaths and they were also offered protection and support by male trade associations if their late spouse was a member of a guild.[43] In addition, as Olwen Hufton observes, "The widow had allies at various levels which the spinster did not. She had three distinct family groups, his family, her own, and her children (who could, of course, be a liability), all of whom were of potential assistance."[44] For the laboring poor in general, and singlewomen in particular, one needed to form networks of support and find sources of assistance in order to survive. This was more difficult for unmarried women than for widows, who had more social connections and were generally seen as more worthy of charity.

The widow could also represent a threat to patriarchal order. As historian Janine Lanza writes, widows "disrupted gender norms, occupying a liminal space, by acting as men could in some circumstances, but constrained as women were in other instances."[45] While widows could conceivably rely upon the social status accorded to them upon marriage and childbirth, European

[41] Olwen Hufton, "Women without Men,"; Janine M. Lanza, *From Wives to Widows in Early Modern Paris* (Aldershot, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007).

[42] Froide, "Marital Status as a Category of Difference" in *Singlewomen in the European Past: 1250-1800,* 237.

[43] See Clare Crowston, "Engendering the Guilds: Seamstresses, Tailors, and the Clash of Corporate Identities in Old Regime France," *French Historical Studies* 23. 2 (2000): 339-371; Amy Froide, "Marital Status as a Category of Difference" in *Singlewomen in the European Past,* 236-269; Daryl M. Hafter, "Artisans, Drudges, and the Problem of Gender in Pre-Industrial France," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 441, no. 1 (April 1, 1985): 71–88.

[44] Olwen Hufton, "Women without Men," 364.

[45] Lanza, *From Wives to Widows,* 9.

contemporaries also viewed these women with suspicion, apprehension, and even disdain. Widows were, in a way, accorded the rights of an "honorary man"[46] while still being expected to conform to the constrained social norms of femininity. As Lanza writes, widows held a "middle, ambivalent ground between male and female spheres," and, in this way, moved between the realms of prescriptive and contested femininity.[47] Nonetheless, the fact that she *had* married made her a more acceptable figure, as she fit into the linear tract of the female lifecycle and the ideals of womanhood. These made her a more sympathetic figure eligible for charitable assistance and social association. For these reasons, widows belong in a category apart from married women but also apart from *filles majeures*.

The death of one's spouse was not the only way a married woman's life might revert back to a state akin to singleness. While divorce did not exist in early modern France, there were other official, legal means of breaking from one's spouse. In extraordinary circumstances, the church might grant an annulment, but this was typically reserved for cases of fraud, impotence, or abduction.[48] More common were legal separations, which could take two forms: the separation of property [*séparation de biens*] or separation of property and person [*séparation de corps et biens*].[49] The parties involved in petitions for separation generally came from the upper to middle echelons of society—in short, those who had property worth disputing and dividing legally. Significantly, it appears that women initiated the majority of separations. As historian

[46] Ibid., 7.

[47] Ibid., 12.

[48] Pierre Darmon, *Trial by Impotence: Virility and Marriage in Pre-Revolutionary France* (London: Hogarth Press, 1985); Cathy McClive, "Masculinity on Trial: Penises, Hermaphrodites and the Uncertain Male Body in Early Modern France," *History Workshop Journal* 67 (2009): 45-68; Patricia Simons, *The Sex of Men in Premodern Europe: A Cultural History* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[49] Julie Hardwick, *Practice of Patriarchy: Gender and the Politics of Household Authority in Early Modern France* (Penn State Press, 2010), 111.

Julie Hardwick notes, "Separation was a possibility open primarily to wives, as men had other means to resolve marital grievances: they could discipline their wives, abandon their families, or put their wives into convents."[50] As such, it is important to recognize legal separation as a resource for women whose marriages were unhappy or unstable.

The first form of separation, separation of property, allowed a woman to protect her dowry by giving her control over the property she brought into marriage and any she might inherit or earn in her own right. In such instances, spouses would continue to live together.[51] However, in a case of separation of property and person, a wife would not only gain control of her own property, but was also granted the right to live legally apart from her husband. While the sacramental bonds of marriage were not dissolved, the boundaries of marriage were renegotiated to offer women some independence from their husbands. As such, this latter form of separation was more difficult to secure, generally being reserved for cases of: severe mistreatment and abuse; adultery that surpassed 'normative' transgressions; and attempted murder or fear thereof. As one commentator noted, "separations of person must only be granted for grave causes: thus the different temperaments and even the little altercations which can arise between husband and wife are not sufficient cause."[52] Like widows, however, these women had married, which made them less derisive than those who remained single. In addition, as divorce did not exist, they remained legally bound to their husbands and to their status as wives.

When considering *filles majeures*, one must also differentiate between religious and secular singlewomen. While nuns and adult unmarried women had the same legal status, they

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[50] Julie Hardwick, *Family Business: Litigation and the Political Economies of Daily Life in Early Modern France* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 16.

[51] Julie Hardwick, "Seeking Separations: Gender, Marriages, and Household Economies in Early Modern France," *French Historical Studies* 21, no. 1 (1998): 178.

[52] Hardwick, *Family Business,* 23.

were *always* differentiated socially. A *fille religieuse* [religious singlewoman] may have been a *fille majeure* but she was rarely referred to as a member of this social category. This is clear by the fact that a nun would never be referred to using the contemporary term for a "spinster," which was often directed at their secular counterparts: "*vieille fille*." Furthermore, the nun's experience was substantially different from the secular singlewoman's in early modern France. Indeed, while the convent represents a female-exclusive community only available to unmarried women, the cloister imposed by the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century restricted nuns' mobility and engagement with the world outside of the convent's walls. Many scholars have convincingly demonstrated that the cloister was porous and permeable, enclosed more in theory than in fact.[53] As the convent was porous and its doors did offer entry to some laywomen, this study considers how the convent may have offered resources to secular singlewomen, such as a site of retirement and hospice in one's old age. However, the impact of pervasive attitudes surrounding celibacy was much more limited in relation to nuns than it was to secular singlewomen, who dealt with these social stigmas and practical challenges much more directly and on a more frequent basis. Most importantly, nuns were 'brides of Christ,' wedded to the church, and thus they imbued female identity with spousal meaning. As Bennett and Froide note, "Taking final vows in ceremonies that mimicked secular weddings, many nuns probably thought themselves irrevocably bound to a husband as were wives in secular marriages."[54] For the purposes of this project, it is not their vows of celibacy, but instead their identities as quasi-wives, wedded to an institution, that render nuns a category distinct from *lifelong singlewomen*.

As is evident by the distinctions above, identifying the "singlewoman" is often treated as a process of elimination. Historically and in this particular period, singlewomen are often defined

[53] Barbara Woshinsky, *Imagining Women's Conventual Spaces in France, 1600-1800* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010).

[54] Bennett and Froide, *Singlewomen in the European Past,* 11.

in the negative—that is to say, by who they are *not*. The singlewoman is not: the widow, the legally separated or abandoned wife, or the nun. Yet, rather than leaving behind a void, filled only with social misfits and legal stragglers, winnowing down this group allows one to identify a sharply defined social category that had a recognized legal status in early modern France: the *fille majeure* and, in some cases, the older *fille mineure,* who was sexually mature, on the verge of legal majority, and who had the prospect of independent employment and residence outside of the family home. Through this approach, one is able to reconceive singlewomen—not as individuals defined by the lack of a specific type of relationship (marital) but by a plurality of social bonds.

The Singularity of Singlewomen

While the members of singlewomen's networks did not differ dramatically from those of married or widowed individuals, there were some significant distinctions in the nature, maintenance, and importance of singlewomen's associations. First, family members were more likely to play central roles in the lives of married and widowed women than in the networks of singlewomen. Married or widowed women's primary relationships tended to be with their children or spouses. While singlewomen often enjoyed close relationships with sisters, cousins, or nieces, these bonds typically did not require the same emotional or financial investment as those with one's husband or offspring. Singlewomen who lived apart from their nuclear families, even those who lived with individual family members, often had more time, energy, and need to cultivate relationships beyond their kin group. While women of all marital statuses might enjoy close friendships and associations with community members, women who married or had children were more likely to deprioritize those relationships to focus on their familial responsibilities. For these women, the centrality of non-familial relationships might be situated

within specific moments in their lifecycles, such as before marriage or upon widowhood. As historian Amy Froide observes, "Kinship . . . appears more significant when we attend to life-cycle. When a woman was single or widowed she might well have activated ties of kinship, friendship, or neighbourhood that she did not need to rely on during her married years."[55] In comparison to married or widowed women, singlewomen were less likely to experience life stages that changed the nature of their relationships. While they might move or temporarily shift their attention to caring for an aging parent or sick family member, singlewomen often continued to depend on non-familial relationships for emotional and practical support and were thus motivated to maintain these associations.

In addition, singlewomen did not experience the significant shift in circumstances that many married women underwent when their husbands died. Widowhood signaled a change in identity, social status, and access to resources. While singlewomen could certainly be impacted by the death of a loved one, particularly a cohabitant, the changes they experienced tended to be less dramatic than those incurred by the loss of a spouse. Widows could be left without the means to care or provide for themselves and their children. In addition, a widow might be left to settle any outstanding debts her husband had at the time of his death. If her children were underage, a widow's parental rights might be usurped by the appointment of a male tutor, who could have the authority make educational, financial, and marriage-related decisions for her children. Furthermore, if she remarried, particularly if her second husband was of lower status, a widow could lose her rights to her children and any property that remained from her first dowry.

For many married and widowed women, children were expensive investments with unpredictable returns. Aside from daily subsistence, children could require dowries, payment for apprenticeship training, and financial support when ill or implicated in criminal activities. While

[55] Amy M. Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford UP, 2005), 7.

contemporaries believed the parent-child relationship should be reciprocal, with children caring for their aging parents in return for the support they received when young, this inter-generational dynamic was not guaranteed. Distance, a lack of resources, disputes, or apathy could cause children to shirk their duties towards elderly, ill, or indigent parents. Indeed, the potential of assistance from one's children did not always outweigh the liabilities they presented.

The majority of singlewomen did not have children and thus did share these concerns or responsibilities. Rather than financially and emotionally investing in their children's futures, singlewomen instead focused on their own. Unable or unwilling to depend on inter-generational care, singlewomen actively employed alternate financial and social strategies to plan for their futures. Many singlewomen invested in *rentes* [life annuities] because these scheduled disbursements could help offset the risks of unemployment or could even act as a form of retirement fund. In addition, the relationships singlewomen formed throughout their lives could play as central a role in their old age as familial support might for married or widowed women. Rather than anticipate familial fidelity, singlewomen were more likely to seek out and bond with individuals in similar circumstances. They cultivated these relationships over time and the resulting alliances were more likely to be born out of voluntary allegiance rather than a sense of obligation. As Amy Froide writes in her study of aging spinsters in early modern England, "Elderly single women may in fact have benefitted from not focusing all their affection and resources on spouses and children, but rather on those whom they chose."[56] The voluntary nature of these non-familial associations is significant, as these connections were built on mutual trust rather than shared kinship. Singlewomen's relationships with friends, coworkers, and neighbors—freely-chosen, developed, tested, and solidified—could be just as likely to offer

[56] Amy Froide, "Old Maids: the lifecycle of single women in early modern England," in *Women and Ageing in British Society since 1500,* ed. Lynn Botelho and Pat Thane (Harlow, England: Pearson Education Ltd., 2001), 103.

support in times of need or in old age. In terms of their relationships, identities, and forms of support, singlewomen were more likely to enjoy continuity than to experience change than their married or widowed counterparts. As a result, their networks tended to remain relatively similar throughout their lives—if not in the exact individuals involved, then in the nature of the bonds that occupied central positions.

Studying the non-familial alliances of singlewomen demonstrates how early modern individuals built, sustained, and utilized informal networks as forms of sociability and unstructured systems of relief.[57] Singlewomen's networks reveal how interpersonal relationships could supplement or even replace the types of support typically offered by kin. At the same time, these community alliances were voluntary in nature, meaning they were predicated on intentional and reciprocal engagement. As a result, these relationships needed to both formed and maintained through acts of mutual aid and adherence to communally accepted behavioral norms. To be a member of these relationships meant to be someone deemed deserving of association whose connection would support, rather than undermine the common strategies and goals on which they were built. As a result, one needed to continuously demonstrate one's worthiness of inclusion within community networks by actively participating in these local systems of support and sociability and by maintaining one's public honor.

In this way, these extra-familial networks offer insight into early modern women's social status by examining their autonomous positions within their communities. By studying singlewomen in particular, one is able to identify how sociocultural norms, economic structures, and the French legal system impacted and defined women independently and apart from their relationships with men. Outside the contexts of the home and the family, early modern women

[57] By "unstructured systems of relief," I specifically refer to acts of assistance that typically take place between individuals, rather than through institutional channels.

appear as independent subjects, disentangled from the ahistorical archetype of "the eternal feminine"[58] and the preindustrial labor structure of the "family economy."[59] Both of these constructs often to limit women's identities to their domestic roles and prioritize familial relationships over independently-built support systems.

Moreover, these paradigms tend to reinforce the political patriarchy perpetuated by the mutually supportive and relationally defined association between paternal and monarchical authority. As Sarah Hanley elucidates, this "Family-State compact" tied together the objectives of family formation to state building in a way that "outlined a family model of socioeconomic authority under patriarchal hegemony."[60] Legalists who sought to strengthen both magisterial power and paternal authority enacted a number of judicial initiatives that aimed to define the family in strict terms. By sanctioning gender distinctions under French law, the Family-State compact "widened the gap in social entitlement by empowering male heads and placing females at risk."[61] Jurists promoted the status of the male-headed household, strengthening the authority of fathers while limiting the legal, social, and economic agency of female family members.

While women of all marital statuses might subvert these laws and customs in practice, adult singlewomen seemed to do so by their very existence. In particular, singlewomen living and working apart from their families deviated from sociocultural and political prescriptions that situated the male-headed family as the foundation of the French kingdom and defined womanhood in relation to this domestic unit. Existing outside of direct patriarchal supervision, adult singlewomen evaded—either in theory or in fact—the forms of female dependency and

[58] Daryl M. Hafter and Nina Kushner, "Introduction," in *Women and Work in Eighteenth-Century France*, ed. Daryl M. Hafter and Nina Kushner (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2015), 5.

[59] Louise A. Tilly and Joan W. Scott, *Women, Work, and Family* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 12.

[60] Hanley, "Engendering the State," 15.

[61] Ibid., 21.

control deemed essential to social order. While subject to certain regulatory measures, such as inheritance policies and the required registration of extramarital pregnancies, singlewomen who held the judicial status of *fille majeure* or *fille emancipée* were largely exempt from the patriarchal legislation that applied to their married and widowed sisters.

As legalists framed these laws as "natural" or "protective," undertaken for the good of the individual French subject and the broader French kingdom, the singlewomen's existence outside of these regulations was typically understood as disruptive and dangerous, rather than liberating. When entwined with gendered conceptions of morality and intelligence, contemporary beliefs about female sexuality, and the realities of the labor market, the "freedom" singlewomen enjoyed seemed more like a liability than an advantage. Without the protection of a man, the economic partnership of marriage, or the support and purpose purportedly offered by a family, singlewomen were often seen as socioeconomically vulnerable individuals who existed at the margins of the French moral community.

Emphasizing the centrality of kinship relations ultimately minimizes the forms of support offered through non-familial connections and reinforces beliefs about singlewomen's marginalization. By assuming that family members were or should be central actors in women's networks, other associations appear peripheral in nature and less significant in praxis. However, singlewomen's relationships with friends, neighbors, coworkers, and community members may have been just as likely to offer companionship and support in times of need. Networks characterized by the prominence of non-familial relationships could offer the same support that would typically be provided by kin: emotional support, division of household responsibilities and expenses, care in times of sickness, money in times of financial strain, support in legal matters, and assistance in old age. In many ways, these associations offered sources of security and

sustainability within a society that considered a woman's existence outside of the family to be unnatural and unsupportable.

Approaching the Singlewomen in Early Modern France

While this work begins with an examination of singlewomen's familial bonds it does so through a new perspective. Rather than approaching unmarried women as daughters, which has been the traditional and well-studied approach to this social category, the first chapter examines them as unmarried sisters and aunts. Focusing on these roles allows one to image singlewomen as adults with independent rights, changing circumstances, and developing relationships not predicated on a patriarchal model of the family. This is especially important during the seventeenth through the late eighteenth centuries, when changes in wage labor, migration patterns, and inheritance practices led to the nuclearization of the family and the increasing exclusion of adult unmarried women. By examing singlewomen's positions as sisters and aunts, one can reimagine the early modern family outside of the nuclear structure and explore extended kin networks and alternate familial patterns. This chapter also, however, challenges the belief that the family was the most secure and important source of companionship, purpose, and support by demonstrating how kin members could hinder singlewomen's prospects and attempts at independence.

The second chapter moves outside of the family to consider the relationship between unmarried women and the urban public in Paris from the late seventeenth through the eighteenth century. Specifically, it attends to the mixed economies of care that singlewomen utilized and helped construct through institutional systems of charitable aid and interpersonal connections singlewomen formed with neighbors, friends, coworkers, and community members. Employing theories and methods from social and cultural history, anthropology, sociology, and social

network analysis, this chapter explores the roles informal care practices and community alliances played in the survival strategies, social lives, and support systems of unmarried women.

The third chapter explores the relationship between social capital and sexual honor in relation to singlewomen. In particular, it concentrates on how allegations of sexual impropriety and accusations of prostitution could impact singlewomen's reputations, alliances, and financial viability within the setting of the Parisian neighborhood. Using police complaints and legal cases in which singlewomen fought accusations of immorality, this work reconsiders long held associations of unmarried women and sexual vulnerability by examining how even insinuations of dishonest behavior could have detrimental impacts on the lives of singlewomen. At the same time, these records illustrate how unmarried women refused to concede to their marginalization and fought back against those who sought to rob them of their social capital, community status, and even their freedom.

Finally, the fourth chapter focuses on "voluntary kinship," a concept which ties together the preceding chapters while also offering new views of singlewomen's social relations in early modern France. In particular, this approach employs methods and theories from anthropology and sociology to frame singlewomen's long-term, mutual bonds with other women as "family-like" in nature. The ties of voluntary kinship resemble the forms of support, practices of co-residence and inheritance, and the reciprocal emotional bonds believed to be found primarily if not exclusively in familial relationships but, for singlewomen in early modern France, often went beyond these practical similarities to parallel familial ties in both name and relational identity. This chapter explores how singlewomen formed, described, and protected the bonds of voluntary kinship that they enjoyed with domestic servants, friends, and even surrogate children. Through these relationships, singlewomen actively reimagined what "family" could relative to their own

lifestyles and they coopted traditions, language, and notarial practices to imbue these associations with the legal rights and social significance they felt they deserved.

Two main tracts run through and tie together this study. The first is a focus on homosocial bonds. This is the product of certain conscious choices as well as many unexpected discoveries. Any intentionality lies largely in the goal of reconsidering how to define women's social and legal identities if one does not do so through their relationships with men. This study does not suggest that singlewomen were celibate or that they lacked romantic or domestic bonds with men outside of marriage. Singlewomen's engagement in sexual encounters and conjugal relationships with men will appear throughout this work. However, by moving away from the study of seduction, unwed pregnancy, and sexual assault, one can better attend to those social relations that have been hitherto overlooked in studies of singlewomen. Indeed, the narratives of danger and vulnerability arising from singlewomen's encounters with men are well-known and excellent pieces of scholarship, which will be referenced throughout this work. However, they also represent one of the few ways unmarried women have been historically approached as an independent social category. Revisiting these subjects would not offer new understandings of singlewomen in early modern France and, in fact, would reaffirm the problems that already exist in the existing narratives of unmarried women's lives in this period. When discussing these topics, therefore, the aim is to approach them through alternate viewpoints. Rather than considering how an unmarried woman became pregnant, with whom, and what options she had in this particular situation, for example, this work will instead consider how these situations and individuals impacted singlewomen's social identities, community status, relationships, and resources on both an immediate and long-term basis.

Yet the prevalence of homosociality in this study of singlewomen is also a product of the evidence and the social circumstances of the period. The sources examined—court cases, police records, and notarial documents—repeatedly insist that singlewomen's most significant relationships were with other women and, in particular other unmarried women. These homosocial relations took many forms, from unmarried sisters who shared lifelong bonds, aunts and nieces who created intergenerational practices of matrilineal inheritance, cohabitating friends who formed joint households, and childless singlewomen who fostered orphans. As social conventions and moral codes made female sociability more frequent and acceptable than relationships between men and women outside of marriage, one finds that singlewomen spent more time together in public and private with women rather than men. Yet, as this study argues, women faced similar circumstances that bound them to one another. The financial insecurity that often arose from women's low wages, along with the gender-exclusivity of trade structures in this period, mean that the domestic and labor realms of singlewomen's lives were often characterized by homosocial relations. In addition, the desire for social companionship, when coupled with the fear of public condemnation and physical considerations, often gave rise to patterns and social rituals in singlewomen's lives that were predominantly practiced with other women. The nature of these bonds is information that belongs to the historical subjects alone, and while questions regarding queerness and sexuality may naturally arise, they will not be answered here.

The final thread in this work a dual theme of negotiation and adaptation. As the following chapters will illustrate, singlewomen navigated a period of increasingly hostility and consistent unpredictability through social relations that were largely elective. Their successes can be measured in many ways, from their public contributions to their long-term alliances. However,

what becomes clear is that single life was far from static, it required constant revaluations, small shifts and large leaps, multiple strategies, and, above all, an appreciation of collectivity. For unmarried women were not alone, nor would they ever wish to be. Ultimately, their survival depended on being together.

CHAPTER ONE

The Singlewoman and the Family: Sibling Relations, Avuncular Bonds, and the Trials of Kinship

On March 9, 1780 Anne Regnault was forty-eight years old, single, and in the throws of an illness she feared would be fatal. Recognizing that her death was an immediate possibility and foregone eventuality, she reflected on her life and contemplated her legacy.[1] From the perspective of many in early modern French society, her existence had been marked by a central and defining failure: she never married. As a singlewoman, Anne Regnault deviated from the gender norms, cultural ideals, and family practices that her contemporaries promoted as essential aspects of both personal fulfillment and sociopolitical order in early modern France. A woman's success was measured by her ability to progress through the female lifecycle linearly and to completion—beginning as an unwed daughter, advancing to a wife, and becoming a mother. In particular, the last two stages, marriage and motherhood, were the roles believed to offer women social status, stability, and the ability to make valuable contributions to their families, communities, and kingdom at large.

In the patriarchal, family-oriented society of Old Regime France, adult singlewomen like Regnault who diverged from this course appeared to contest and undermine the foundations of public order and political organization. Indeed, French society was organized around male-headed family households in which each individual's status was defined in relation to the patriarch. Particularly in the eighteenth century, when the family became increasingly narrow in definition and nuclear in structure, the figure of the unmarried female relative represented either

[1] AN MC Étude XVIII 811, 6 September 1780.

an unincorporated outlier or an unproductive burden. In both forms, she seemed to present far more challenges to her kin than any contributions she might offer them. To a great extent, the adult singlewoman appeared to be antithetical to social unit of the family and thus to French society as a whole.

It is clear, however, that these beliefs did not reflect the realties of unmarried women's lives in early modern France. The example of Anne Regnault represents how singlewomen were assets to their kin. Indeed, as she faced the prospect of her death that day in March of 1780, Regnault did not dwell in fear, regret, or isolation. Instead, she acknowledged the significant role she played in her family and therefore considered how to best arrange her affairs so she could continue to contribute to the stability of her relatives, even after her death. Regnault recorded her final bequests, wishes, and sentiments in an informal will that demonstrated her lifelong commitment to her family. She acknowledged that she and her sister were the primary caregivers of their deaf niece, then provided financial support and instructions for the latter's education and long-term sustenance. Regnault recognized the close relationships she shared with other young relatives and allocated gifts in celebration of their future marriages. She thanked her siblings for their "tender friendship" and expressed gratitude for the "sincere union" they had always enjoyed. In particular, she recognized her aforementioned sister, Angélique, who was also unmarried and with whom she lived for her all of her life. Finally, Regnault ended her will by asking her kin to recognize their time together and the bond they shared by fulfilling her final wish: to remember her in their prayers.[2] While her family was central to her existence, it is also clear that Regnault played a prominent role in her extended kin group. Though unwed and childless, Regnault's contributions to her relatives, particularly in her roles as a sister and an

[2] AN MC Étude XVIII 811, 6 September 1780.

aunt, supported and stabilized her kin group. Her primary goal, even in death, was the sustenance and success of her family.

While singlewomen are typically represented as either dependents or outsiders in historical studies of early modern kinship, unmarried female relatives like Anne Regnault were central and contributing members of their families. Rather than being marginalized outliers, singlewomen were both connected and connectors within their kin networks: they maintained lifelong relationships with siblings, parents, and cousins, formed intergenerational bonds with younger kin, and even tied together geographically distant or socially detached family members. Unmarried women promoted familial success and stability through their roles as caregivers, financial contributors, and conscious collaborators. In moments of crisis and on long-term bases, singlewomen were familial allies who provided practical resources and communal solidarity to their relatives.

This chapter presents the argument that singlewomen were familial assets by *virtue* of their unmarried status—not in spite of it. While married individuals might deprioritize their families of origin in favor of their families of procreation, unmarried relatives' kinship bonds were less subject to change over time. As a result, they often formed cooperative alliances with relatives. Especially when the relevant parties lived in the same community, these bonds could be consistently strong throughout their lives, rather than subject to the ebbs and flows that come with changing life circumstances. This was particularly true in the connections between unmarried kin, such as single siblings, cousins, or unwed aunts and their younger kin. Indeed, singlewomen typically lacked dependents such as a spouse or children, who might monopolize their interest, time, and finances. Unmarried women may have put more effort into maintaining connections with married relatives and extended kin because they had fewer familial

interlocutors. In these kinship networks, unmarried women represented allies who may be able to allocate resources or provide interpersonal support more readily than those who had other familial duties or dependents. As a result, singlewomen often assumed responsibility for kin in need, such as those who were ill, destitute, in periods of transition, or who required comprehensive, long-term care.

Finally, even if they did not had children, singlewomen engaged in intergenerational inheritance practices that benefitted the larger kin network. Unmarried women's successions often advanced kin who would not have precedence in family financial planning. While all children had equal inheritance rights upon the death of their parents, family economic strategies often prioritized older children, especially eldest sons. As a result, singlewomen's bequests to nieces and non-eldest nephews created multiple branches of family inheritance that could open up new opportunities for their beneficiaries. A donation might allow a young relative to learn a trade, establish a business, or even get married. Moreover, these alternate streams of economic support could benefit the legatee's entire family. For example, if a singlewoman's bequest provided the funds for her niece's dowry or her nephew's venal office, the beneficiary's parents could reallocate household finances to better support other children, address existing economic concerns, or keep the family patrimony intact. In this way, such an inheritance could reduce the economic pressures and raise the prospects of the entire family.

Examining the relationship between the singlewoman and the family in the early modern period prompts new understandings of both social categories. In histories of the family, singlewomen tend to be limited to two positions: the unmarried daughter or the spinster relative.[3]

[3] On women and the family in early modern Europe, see: Olwen Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe, 1500 – 1800* (London: HarperCollins, 1995); Margaret R. Hunt, "Families," in *Women in Eighteenth-Century Europe*" (New York: Pearson, 2020), 49-89; Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, "The Female Lifecycle," in *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 63-111.

This focus stems from the practice of linking women's familial roles tied to normative female lifecycle. In this trajectory, singlewoman only appear as in the phase delineated for yet-to-be-married daughters. The adult unmarried woman doesn't have a space within the lifecycle. Instead, she exists off to the side, representing a woman who has gone off course. Whether this divergence is intentional, accidental, or coincidental is irrelevant. All that truly matters is that she is out of line and out of place. Over the course of the early modern period, this perception would not only remain continuously relevant, but would intensify. As the nuclear family became more narrowly defined, the unmarried woman appeared increasingly incongruous with both proper womanhood and traditional kinship.

Singlewomen as Kin in the Early Modern French Family

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the concept of the "family" signified those individuals who either resided in the household or existed within extended kinship networks. As Jean Louis Flandrin explains, "the word 'family' most often referred to a set of kinsfolk who did not live together, while it also designated an assemblage of co-residents who were not necessarily linked by ties of blood or marriage."[4] While the co-residential understanding of "family" as was inherently patriarchal in nature, structured by the presence of a male head who served as master over all household dependents, including his wife, children, and servants,[5] it also served to highlight how domestic relationships constituted familial ties. Adult singlewomen thus fit neatly into this definition of the family—aside from being daughters and sisters, they were also considered "family" in their roles as co-residents, extended kin, and servants.

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[4] Jean Louis Flandrin, *Families in Former Times: Kinship, Household, and Sexuality*, trans. Richard Southern (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979), 4.

[5] "Famille," in *Dictionnaire de l'Académie,* Volume 1 (1694), University of Chicago: ARTFL Dictionnaires d'Autrefois, https://artfl-project.uchicago.edu/content/dictionnaires-dautrefois.

However, by the end of the eighteenth century, the notion of the "family" narrowed to become more nuclear in structure. Historians have traced this change to the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, during which time the expansion of the urban economy and loosening feudal relationships led to increasing instances of geographic mobility.[6] As a result, extended kinship ties weakened and direct involvement of individuals outside of the "simple family" became less frequent. These changes, coupled with what scholars have recognized as patrimony-oriented family planning,[7] led to the development of what Laurence Stone calls the "restricted patriarchal nuclear family" by the end of the seventeenth century. In his study of early modern England, Stone defines this familial structure as one characterized by increasing affective attachment between simple family members and by the rise in paternal authority.[8] The family changed in similar ways and these shifts were reinforced by the existence of what Hanley calls the "Family-State Compact."[9] Gager observes that by the end of the eighteenth century:

> [T]he family slowly evolved into a more privatized and streamlined domestic unit, which excluded individuals such as servants from the ranks of family members, while at the same time pruning the branches of the family tree, thereby weakening ties with extended kin.[10]

While the dual forces of the French Revolution and Industrial Revolution would solidify these changes in familial structures and values, these shifts in ideology and practice were already in place at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

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[6] Natalie Zemon Davis, "Ghosts, Kin, and Progeny: Some Features of Family Life in Early Modern France," *Daedalus* 106, no. 2, (Spring, 1977): 87-114 .

[7] See Etienne Van de Walle, "Motivations and Technology in the Decline of French Fertility," in *Family and Sexuality in French History*, ed. Robert Wheaton and Tamara Hareven (Philadelphia: UPenn Press, 1980), 135-178.

[8] Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 123.

[9] See discussion of the "Family-State Compact" in chapter four. Sarah Hanley, "Engendering the State: Family Formation and State Building in Early Modern France," *French Historical Studies* 16, no. 1 (1989): 15.

[10] Kristin Elizabeth Gager, *Blood Ties and Fictive Ties: Adoption and Family Life in Early Modern France* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1996), 17.

In the context of these changes, one expects that the relationship between the singlewoman and the family at the end of the early modern period would result in three patterns: first, that unmarried women became increasingly less important within extended kin networks; second, that adult sibling prioritized their nuclear, marital families over their relatives by birth; and, finally, that singlewomen who had close kin bonds were fortunate because familial support was overwhelmingly beneficial, whereas unmarried women were often liabilities. However, when one examines singlewomen's lived experiences as sisters and aunts, roles which were not defined explicitly in relation to a male patriarch and which were commonly occupied by adult unmarried women, one finds that these conclusions are far from definitive. In fact, singlewomen's performances in sibling bonds and avuncular relations demonstrate that they often served as essential caregivers, advantageous allies, lifelong companions, and active members of familial networks.

Unmarried Sisters and Sibling Relations

One of the most significant bonds between singlewomen and their kin were those they shared with their unmarried siblings. While many singlewomen had lifelong connections to all or several of their siblings, they often engaged in more continuous, collective, and longterm activities with those who were also unwed. These endeavors including collaborative efforts, such as unmarried siblings setting up joint households and pooling their resources to fund shared expenses, as well as their commitment to mutuality, such as performances of reciprocal care and the formalization of communal property.

The most common and also visible evidence of these bonds can be found in patterns of cohabitation among unmarried siblings.[11] If marriage was not forthcoming and, especially if their parents were deceased, unwed sisters might live together or with their unmarried brothers. These households of unmarried siblings challenge the normative view of the lifecycle for men and women, as both were imagined to leave their childhood homes upon adulthood to start their own families. At times, there could be multiple unwed, adult siblings living together in a single household, which likely reflected the family home in which they were raised. Jean Claude Vaubertrand, for example, lived with his adult, unmarried sisters Anne Sophie, Marie Jeanne Adélaïde, Marie Anne Victoire in an apartment on rue Roi de Sicile in the parish of Saint Paul.[12] More commonly, however, there were only two unmarried siblings residing in common lodgings, as in the case of Marie Madeleine Caillet, who lived with her brother Jean Baptiste.[13]

Some siblings may have opted for coresidence due to their affective bonds, rather than simply their ties of kinship. Indeed, while familial association created a sound foundation for material support and interdependency, these relationships were also important sources of emotional support. This was certainly the case of the three Chebron siblings, two sisters and one brother, who lived together in an apartment on rue Gallande in Paris. After Anne Nicolle Chebron died in 1761, her sister, Elisabeth, began to suffer from "violent attacks of the *vapeurs,*"

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[11] On communal households among siblings, see: Christopher H. Johnson, "The Sibling Archipelago," in *Becoming Bourgeois: Love, Kinship, and Power in Provincial France, 1670–1880* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 125-170; Steven King, "Chance Encounters? Paths to Household Formation in Early Modern England," *International Review of Social History* 44, no. 1 (April 1999): 23–46; Peter Laslett, "Family, Kinship and Collectivity as Systems of Support in Pre-Industrial Europe: A Consideration of the 'Nuclear-Hardship' Hypothesis," *Continuity and Change* 3, no. 2 (August 1988): 153–75; Sylvie Perrier, "The Blended Family in Ancien Régime France: A Dynamic Family Form," *The History of the Family* 3, no. 4 (January 1998): 459–71; Sylvie Perrier, "Coresidence of Siblings, Half-Siblings, and Step-Siblings in Ancien Régime France," *The History of the Family* 5, no. 3 (November 2000): 299–314; Anne D. Wallace, "The Problem of the Sister in the House," in *Sisters and the English Household: Domesticity and Women's Autonomy in Nineteenth-Century English Literature* (New York: Anthem Press, 2018), 85-126.

[12] AN MC Étude VI 859, 18 November 1788.

[13] AN MC Étude X 775, 12 April 1788.

a psychological manifestation that male doctors in the nineteenth century would identify as "hysteria."[14] Their brother described to the police that Elisabeth Chebron "was very attached to her sister," who died only fifteen days before the incident. In her grief, Elizabeth had allegedly succumbed to such a "terrible depression" that she "fell out of the window." While the police ultimately ruled the death an accident, the neighbors were quite resolute on the subject. She had not "fallen" from the third-floor apartment, she had "thrown herself out of the window."[15] The case of the Chebron siblings is significant, as it demonstrates the intensity of family relationships and, specifically, the emotional intimacy of unmarried siblings.

Single sisters and brothers could certainly have strong bonds as well. Some of these relationships may have even replicated or replaced marriage for those who were unable to wed or simply preferred celibacy. As Adams demonstrates, some brothers may have even served as "surrogate husbands" for their sisters.[16] Many singlewomen contemplating marriage discussed the prospect with their elder brothers; some looked for advice, others sought assurance that they would not be burdensome if they chose to turn down a proposal. For example, Catherine de Saint-Pierre acknowledged in a letter to her brother that she knew, "the poverty of some should not crush the others."[17] She ultimately chose to reside at a convent and later at the Hôtel-Dieu rather than establish her own lodgings because, as she wrote, "In my view, a household would have weakened the fortune of my brother, who is just beginning to achieve some comfort."[18]

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[14] See Sabine Arnaud, *On Hysteria: The Invention of a Medical Category Between 1670 and 1820* (University of Chicago Press, 2015). The term "hysteria" appeared as early as 1701 and became more widespread around 1760.

[15] AN Y 11480, 26 Septembre 1761.

[16] Christine Adams, "A Choice Not to Wed? Unmarried Women in Eighteenth-Century France," *Journal of Social History* 29, no. 4 (1996): 887.

[17] Quoted in Goodman, *Becoming a Woman*, 282.

[18] Ibid, 287.

Most frequently, however, unmarried sisters lived together and worked collectively to support themselves and care for one another. One of the ways in which they did this was by making a *donation entre vifs,* also known as a *donation mutuelle*, through which they joined their property. This was a common practice among unmarried siblings throughout France during this period, although its form varied by region. For example, in her study of eighteenth-century Brittany, Nancy Locklin found evidence of unmarried sisters who created "perpetual societies," between one another, which were essentially domestic partnership.[19] In the 1725 customary code of Brittany, the section on marriage notes an alternate "natural and tacit society," by which: "Two unmarried women may be tied by friendship, having together contracted a perpetual society by an act in the form of a testament or mutual donation, reciprocal in all their goods, with the capacity of the survivor to dispose of said goods, on condition of the execution of pious legacies contained in said act."[20] In late medieval and sixteenth-century France, unmarried men could enter into similar arrangements, called *affrèrements*, through which men created joint households and estates.[21] As will be demonstrated in several different context throughout this study, singlewomen in eighteenth-century Paris used the *donation entre vifs* similarly, formed mutual estates and household unions with individuals—some kin and others unrelated—whose property rights they wished to legitimize, recognize, or protect. One of these groups was unwed sisters. For example, Louise Jeanne Delespine and Alexandrine Geneviève Delespine lived

[19] Nancy Locklin, "'Til Death Parts Us: Women's Domestic Partnerships in Eighteenth-Century Brittany," *Journal of Women's History* 23, no. 4 (Winter 2011): 36–58.

[20] *Coutume de Bretagne et usances particulières de quelques villes et territoires de la même province* (Nantes: Nicolas Verger, 1725), 384, quoted in Lockin, "'Til Death Parts Us," 36.

[21] Allan Tulchin, "Same-Sex Couples Creating Households in Old Regime France: The Uses of the Affrèrement," *The Journal of Modern History* 79, no. 3 (2007): 613–47.

together and formed a mutual partnership through a *donation entre vifs* in January of 1787.[22] Marie and Madeleine Renel also entered into such a contract in June of 1751.[23]

Singlewomen gave further evidence of their affectionate relationships with their sisters in the specific endowments they made in their wills to honor their late sisters' legacies. Several women, such as Marie Anne Berthe[24] and Marie Anne Angélique Binet,[25] made bequests to the goddaughters of their deceased sisters. While Marie Charlotte Rempnoux *dite* Renoux left funds so that masses could be held in honor of her deceased relatives,[26] Marie Thérèse Dantraques asked specifically for services and prayers be dedicated to the soul of her late sister.[27]

These relationships did not, of course, preclude singlewomen's other singling bonds. When Anne Riboutté died, for example, she left behind a handwritten testament in which she made her sister and long-term coresident, Marie Geneviève, her heir and the executor of her estate. In her will, Riboutté notes, "I make no mention of my brother knowing his disinterest, except to thank him for all that he has done for me until the present." The "disinterest" Riboutté refers to appears to be her brother's lack of desire to receive anything from her succession. However, her decision to include a specific reference to him, especially considering she had two other sisters whom she does not mention in the will at all, indicates a bond of significant value to

[22] AN MC Étude C 902, 2 January 1787.

[23] AN MC Étude XVIII 617, 24 June 1751.

[24] AN MC Étude LXIV 364, 10 April 1759.

[25] AN MC Étude LIX 261, 11 October 1758.

[26] AN MC Étude XCVIII 448, 2 January 1733.

[27] AN MC Étude XLVI 309, 30 July 1746.

the writer.[28] However, Riboutté appears to agree with her brother's presumed assessment that the sister with whom she lived, Marie Geneviève, would benefit more from her estate.

In fact, many singlewomen expressed particular concern and care for the sisters who would survive them. These fears were valid when the dying individual was either a caregiver, emotional companion, primary financial supporter, or the economic collaborator of a relative, who would, undoubtedly, be impacted by their absence. Marguerite Quentin de Saint Victor indicated at both the beginning and the end of her will that she wanted her succession to be used to support her sister. She also asked her relatives "to please continue after I'm gone their care for my sister."[29] Marie Fuzelier *dite* Dalier made a donation of twelve hundred *livres* to one relative, a local vicar, "under the condition that he not require a pension" from her sister "for the time she had lived with him and so she could continue to reside there." Although she noted in her will that she felt certain he had only taken her sister in "out of the pleasure he derived from her company" and not out of financial considerations, Dalier still wanted to endow him with these funds for her sister's maintenance to provide some assurance that he would be willing able to continue supporting her.[30] In a case of more immediate and direct care, Marthe Noiseux was the primary guardian of her half-sister, a six year-old named Anne whom she had cared since her birth. In her will, Noiseux made Anne her heir and asked for all of her belongings to be sold to support her.[31]

Anne Regnault, with whom this chapter commenced, also used her will to privilege her relationship with her unmarried sister. However, her succession was intended to primarily benefit their deaf niece, Louise Adélaïde Bernard, whom Anne and her sister Angélique supported. In

[28] AN MC Étude CXVII 947, 24 February 1790.

[29] AN MC Étude LXXVIII 833, 15 April 1778.

[30] AN MC Étude XLVI 309, 6 June 1746.

[31] AN MC Étude V 739, 22 September 1778.

her handwritten, three-page will, Anne left all of her property to her sister Angélique, a bequest intended to sustain her as she moved forward without her lifelong companion and to also provide support for the continued care and financial assistance the sisters provided for their niece, whom Regnault noted "was deaf and mute from birth." In particular, Regnault wished for the funds to be allocated toward her niece's education. While there is no specific explanation as to what kind of instruction Bernard received, Regnault makes a specific reference in her will that offers insight into this subject. In particular, she left her niece, "thirty books of her choice, subject to my sister's approval." Regnault notes, "I am making this donation to her because I am convinced that by the care of Monsieur L'Abbé de l'Épée—care for which I am eternally grateful and for which I ask God reward him—that she will be in a state to profit from this donation because she will know all of her 'signs.'" The individual she references, L'Abée de l'Épée was a well-known instructor of the deaf and mute who opened up an institution for poor children dealing with communication disorders in Paris in 1760.[32] It appears that the Regnault sisters were supporting Bernard's education at L'Épée's institution. They may have even served as her guardians, as her mother, their sister, was a widow and may not have had the financial means or personal resources to support a child with communication limitations.[33]

In this way, Regnault's testament served as both a memorial of the past and a plan for the future. Her will demonstrates she recognized her relatives would struggle in the wake of her death and used her succession to anticipate and alleviate the difficulties they would encounter once she was gone. Yet the conscientiousness and confidence Regnault exhibits when

[32] Christine Aicardi, "The Analytic Spirit and the Paris Institution for the Deaf-Mutes, 1760–1830," *History of Science* 47, no. 2 (June 1, 2009): 175–221; Marius Dupont, "The Abbé de l'Épée and the Teaching of Speech," *American Annals of the Deaf* 43, no. 5 (1898): 316–26; Charles-Michel de L'Epée, *La véritable manière d'instruire les sourds et muets: Confirmée par une longue experience* (Paris: Fayard, 1984); Jonathan Rée, *I See a Voice: Deafness, Language and the Senses, A Philosophical History* (NY: Metropolitan Books, 1999); Sophia Rosenfeld, *A Revolution in Language: The Problem of Signs in Late Eighteenth-Century France* (Stanford UP, 2003).

[33] Will: AN MC Étude XVIII 811, 6 September 1780; Death Record: Archives de Paris, V3E/D 1263, fol. 23.

designating her bequests suggests that any need for alterations was improbable. Indeed, for every allocation specified in her will, Regnault explained why she chose the designated legatee and how she hoped they would use the bequest. While this commentary could certainly be interpreted as a premeditated response to anticipated objections, in this case it appears to be Regnault's proactive attempt to construct a legacy of care.[34]

Singlewomen in Avuncular Bonds

In many ways, the Regnault sisters served as their niece's surrogate parents. In her work on avuncular relations in Enlightenment France, Marion Trévisi describes how aunts and uncles, like the Regnault sisters, functioned as "*parents de secours*" or "backup parents" for younger kin.[35] Avuncular guardianship typically occurred when family circumstances left children without adequate parental care or practical support. The roles of these "replacement parents" would be to provide nieces and nephews with resources such as housing, financial assistance, religious instruction, education or occupational training, and moral supervision.[36] This practice occurred frequently in families of all socioeconomic levels in the early modern period. Noblemen and women, for example, sent children to live with aunts and uncles at court to make their introductions to society and find suitable marriage partners. Bourgeois children resided with avuncular kin when pursuing education, training, or commercial enterprises. Artisan and working-class families used avuncular relations to relocate children for employment, apprenticeship, or marital purposes. In addition, aunts and uncles intervened when their kin died,

[34] Ibid.

[35] Marion Trévisi, *Au cœur de la parenté: Oncles et tantes dans la France des Lumières* (Paris: PUPS, 2008), 321.

[36] Trévisi, *Au cœur de la parenté,* 321.

became ill, faced financial instability, or could not provide for their offspring. Therefore, avuncular guardianship could be temporary or long-term, pre-planned or interventional.

The formality of these arrangements varied according to the circumstances and parties involved. One significant determinant, however, was the guardian's gender. Uncles could officially exercise custodial authority through their positions as tutors to nieces and nephews who "found themselves without paternal authority."[37] Through the system of *tutelle*, or tutelage, orphaned and fatherless minors were assigned guardians, called "tutors," whose primary responsibility was to "oversee the protection of those too young to protect themselves."[38] The process of appointment involved the gathering of a family council, made up of kin and other close associates, who determined the most suitable individual for the position. They would then submit their nomination to local civil court authorities for approval and appointment. While uncles were frequently assigned to these positions, which granted them access to official familial authority in avuncular guardianship, aunts were not permitted to become tutors. The eighteenth-century jurist Josèphe-Nicolas Guyot justified this exclusion by noting that, "Tutelage is a *virile* task; as such, women cannot undertake it."[39] Mothers and grandmothers were exempt from this

[37] Josèphe-Nicolas Guyot, "Tutelle, Tuteur," in *Répertoire universel et raisonné de jurisprudence civile, criminelle, canonique et bénéficial* (Libraire Visse: Paris, 1775-1783), 17:306.

[38] Guyot, "Tutelle, Tuteur," in *Répertoire universel et raisonné de jurisprudence,* 17:306.

[39] Emphasis added. Ibid., 322.

prohibition, although widows often encountered difficulties exercising their parental rights and were barred from serving as their children's' *tutrices* if they remarried.[40]

As a result, unmarried women engaged in avuncular guardianship unofficially and voluntarily. The gendered dynamics of tutelage meant there were rarely any formal records according their positions or obliging their responsibilities. This can obscure how pervasive this practice was among singlewomen in early modern France. Rather than relying on their legal designation as tutors for their nieces and nephews, one must instead examine social practices that signify more informal variances of guardianship. One indication of such arrangements—or, at a minimum, singlewomen's avuncular functions within family networks—are patterns of cohabitation between unmarried aunts and their nieces and nephews.

While focusing on household structures can overemphasize the nuclear family unit rather than extended kin dynamics,[41] examining singlewomen's engagement in "avuncular cohabitation"[42] offers several advantageous and novel perspectives on family life and women's roles in kinship relations. Specifically, it requires that one decenter conjugal bonds and patrilineal traditions to create new categories of demographic and social analysis. Furthermore, by studying singlewomen as heads of familial households, one moves away from categories and concepts that align singlewomen's practices of co-residential kinship with narratives of female

[40] On widows in early modern France in general and their parental rights in particular, see: Guyot, "Tutelle, Tuteur," in *Répertoire universel et raisonné de jurisprudence,* 17:311; Scarlett Beauvalet-Boutouyrie, *Être veuve sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris: Belin, 2001); Christopher Corley, "Gender, Kin, and Guardianship in Early Modern Burgundy," in *Family, Gender, and Law in Early Modern France*, ed. Susan Desan and Jeffrey Merrick (University Park, PA: Penn. State UP, 2009), 183-222; Julie Doyon, "À 'l'ombre du Père'? L'autorité maternelle dans la première moitié du XVIIIe siècle," in "Maternités," ed. Françoise Thébaud et Yvonne Knibiehler, special issue, *Clio* 21 (2005): 162-173; Janine M. Lanza, *From Wives to Widows in Early Modern Paris: Gender, Economy, and Law* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007).

[41] Robert Wheaton, "Family and Kinship in Western Europe: The Problem of the Joint Family Household," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 5, no. 4 (1975): 601-28.

[42] Marion Trévisi, *Au cœur de la parenté,* 324.

vulnerability. In this way, this approach revaluates the historical presumption that when unmarried women appear in mixed family households, they do so as dependent members.

In most cases, unmarried aunts welcomed nieces and nephews into homes where they were either the head of household or they shared this status with another singlewoman. These domestic arrangements could be long-term or temporary and could take a variety of forms, such as guardianship for younger kin, occupational training, education, or the short-term lodging for relatives facing residential insecurity. The presence of more than one adult singlewoman may have facilitated avuncular guardianship or made the arrangement more appealing to family members who wished to place children in relatives' homes for protracted periods. For example, avuncular guardianship frequently took place in households where two unmarried sisters lived together, sharing both a residence and custodial responsibilities for a young relative, as in the aforementioned Regnault family.

Another example of this arrangement can be found in the household of Elizabeth and Catherine Ollivier, two unmarried sisters who overtook the care of their great-niece, Catherine Margueritte Robert, when she was eleven years old. As their roles as Robert's guardians were unofficial, there is no associated *tutelle* record or any other document specifying the circumstances that prompted this arrangement. In her will, however, Elizabeth Ollivier offers some insight into the relationship between the three female relatives. She notes that the sisters first took Robert into their care when she was eleven years old. From that time until Catherine Olliver's death, which took place before Elizabeth wrote her will in 1719, the three women enjoyed a relationship characterized by "faithful companionship [*fidelle compagnie*]."[43] After the death of Catherine Ollivier, Robert continued living with her remaining aunt, Elizabeth, until the latter died in 1726. While the records relating to Elizabeth Ollivier's death and succession do not

[43] AN MC Étude LIX 198, 15 September 1726.

specify Robert's age, they note that she is a *fille majeure*, which means she was at least twenty-five at the time and had lived in the household for a minimum of thirteen or fourteen years.[44] Ultimately, Ollivier's description of their collective bond as one of "*fidelle compagnie"* highlights the evolution and endurance of a relationship that the women formed voluntarily, enjoyed affectionately, and continued out of mutual dedication.[45]

Elizabeth Ollivier's will and postmortem inventory provide further evidence of the significance of this association. First, as in previously discussed cases, she indicates the close bond she shared with her unmarried sister Catherine, who was just one of her many siblings. While several of their deaths predated Elizabeth's, she only mentioned Catherine in her will. Specifically, she asks to be "buried next to my dear sister," wishing to be reunited with her consummate companion whom she had undoubtedly missed in the intervening years since her death. They not only resided together their whole lives, but also worked alongside one another as schoolmistresses. While alive they merged their property through a mutual donation [*donation entre vifs*] and also prepared for their retirement by purchasing joint *rentes viagères.*[46] In addition, they collectively planned for Robert's continued care, purchasing a *tontine* in her name and constituting a *rente viagère* on her behalf. After Catherine's death, Elizabeth Ollivier purchased three additional *rentes viagères*, which she left to her heir, Robert, in her will.[47]

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[44] AN Y 11290, 16 September 1726.

[45] See "*Compagnie*" and "*Compagnon,*" in Antoine Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel, contenant generalement tous les mots francois, tant vieux que modernes, et les termes des sciences et des arts,* ed. M. Basnage de Beauval and M. Brutel de la Rivière, vol. 1 *A-D* (La Haye: Chez Pierre Husson et al., 1727), n.p.

[46] *Donation mutelle:* AN Y 216, no. 3211, 7 May 1669. The *rente*, constituted on 3 March 1717, is mentioned in the inventory taken after Elizabeth Ollivier's death: AN MC Étude LIX 198, 15 October 1726.

[47] Will: AN MC Étude LIX 198, 15 September 1726; the *tontine* and *rente viagères* are noted in her postmortem inventory: AN MC Étude LIX 198, 15 October 1726.

However, some relationships between nieces and aunts represented a pair-bond structure—a one-on-one relationship without the ready or frequent participation of additional family members. Marie Fuzellier *dite* Dalier, for example, had many siblings, nieces, and nephews, but her most significant relationship was undoubtedly the one she shared with her unmarried niece Louise Thérèse Fuzellier. The two *filles majeures* lived together for several years before Dalier's death.[48] In her will, she made Fuzellier her heir.[49] Marie Anne Lorin also lived with her niece, Geneviève Lorin. However, in this case, the two women also worked together. Marie Anne Lorin was a mistress seamstress who took Geneviève into her home as her niece and her workshop as her apprentice.[50]

Many singlewomen facilitated the employment of their avuncular kin. Some actually found positions for their nieces alongside them as domestic servants. For example, Marie Hurion and her niece Madelaine Hurion both worked as domestic servants for Marie Claude Loin.[51] Similarly, Marie Geneviève Dalbret took over her aunt's position as Suzanne Beaubrun's *femme de chambre* [chambermaid] and her aunt remained living in the household.[52] Some mistresses even extended special privileges or made specific bequests to their domestics' nieces, indicating that they recognized how important these relationships were to their servants. For example, Jeanne Luce Bellew made a donation to Marie Constance Chapendant, the niece of her *femme de chambre* Marie Françoise Chapendant.[53] Aunts also appeared frequently as representatives for

[48] AN Y 10762, 2 September 1748.

[49] AN MC Étude XLVI 309, 6 June 1746.

[50] AN MC Étude XLVII 118, 11 March 1748.

[51] AN MC Étude XVIII 814, 11 January 1781.

[52] AN MC Étude LIX 206, 23 November 1730.

[53] AN MC Étude I 585, 13 March 1781.

their nieces and nephews in apprenticeship contracts. For example, in May of 1703, Jeanne Gobin placed her nephew into training with a carpenter.[54] Another singlewoman, Jeanne Borne, represented her eighteen-year old nephew when he entered training with a Parisian cabinetmaker in March of 1709.[55] While these arrangements did not appear to be instances of avuncular guardianship, they demonstrate how important unmarried aunts were to their nieces and nephews as bridges between familial and professional networks.

This was especially true when a singlewoman lived in a different city than her kin and her avuncular relatives moved into her residence. On these occasions, unmarried aunts not only bridged the gap between various networks, but distant locations. Singlewomen could be instrumental in facilitating the establishment of their nieces and nephews in new cities, professions, and communities. This appeared to be the case for Marie Nicole Lebeau, a Parisian schoolmistress who shared her apartment on rue de Picpus with three nieces and one nephew: Nicole Lebeau, Nicholas Lebeau, Marie Marguerite Lebeau, and Marie Jeanne Rabutot. It is unclear how long the group lived together or what prompted their cohabitation. However, the unmarried aunt's Parisian location may have been an important aspect of the arrangement. Marie Nicole Lebeau appeared to be the only member of her sibling group who lived in the French capital: her brother lived in Orly while her two sisters resided in Thiais. It is therefore possible her nieces and nephew chose to live with her because they wished to move to Paris. If this was the case, Marie Nicole Lebeau represented an intermediary for her young kin as they transitioned from their family households to independent lives. Her home, by extension, would be a safe

[54] AN MC Étude XXVIII 67, 17 May 1703.

[55] AN MC Étude XXXI 39, 11 March 1709.

destination for her nieces and nephews upon their arrival to Paris and a refuge as they integrated into their new communities and pursued their various goals in the French capital.[56]

At the same time, Lebeau's position as a schoolmistress may have been another factor in her nieces' and nephew's migration to the city. In her will, Lebeau referenced wages owed to her niece Nicole and her nephew Nicolas. As this unmarried aunt also had two domestic servants in her household, it is unlikely that her niece and nephew performed household labor. Instead, they may have assisted her at the school where she worked. When the aunt Lebeau died in January of 1783, all four of her young kin were unmarried and legal adults. It appears, however, that Marie Nicole Lebeau viewed the employment status of her niece Nicole and nephew Nicholas as a feature that distinguished their needs and required level of support from her other avuncular kin. In her will, Marie Nicole Lebeau made financial bequests to Nicole and Nicholas; however, she designated her other two nieces, Marie Marguerite Lebeau and Marie Jeanne Rabutot, as her universal heirs. This meant that they would divide all of the material property and financial holdings that remained after paying their aunt's debts and fulfilling her desired allocations.[57] Ultimately, they would receive more as their aunt's heirs than Nicole or Nicholas.

Indeed, not all aunts divided their estates equally. Many, as in the case above and that of the Regnault family, designated larger endowments to the kin they felt needed more support. Another differentiation they made in their bequests was in the special allocations offered to their

[56] Will: AN MC Étude XCIX 673, 24 January 1783; *scellé*: AN Y 15482, 24 January 1783; postmortem inventory: AN MC Étude XCIX 673, 30 January 1783.

[57] Ibid.

godchildren.[58] Unmarried women were frequently appointed as godmothers to their nieces and nephews. When they had a special bond of spiritual kinship on top of their avuncular ties, unmarried women consistently prioritized their godchildren in financial allocations such as wills, donations, and the constitution of *rentes* and *tontines*. For example, Marie Madeleine Lebrun had two nieces, two great-nieces, and one nephew. Of these kin, only one was her *filleule* [goddaughter]: Madeleine LeBrun. To her goddaughter, Lebrun made a bequest of five hundred *livres*, as well as many material possessions, which included several pieces of silver. She also gave her niece Margueritte Lebrun a sum of five hundred *livres* and one piece of silver. To her two great-nieces, Lebrun gave a sum of two hundred *livres* each; to her nephew, she made a bequest of one hundred *livres*.[59] Marie Louise Contenet's will offers an even more striking example of aunts privileging godchildren. While Contenet had several nieces and nephews, she chose to appoint a single niece, her goddaughter, as her heir. Not only is this the only avuncular kin that she made a bequest to—it is the only person Contenet mentions in her will at all.[60]

While unmarried aunts played important roles raising their avuncular kin and helping establish their professional futures and social relations, nieces and nephews also offered numerous benefits to their single aunts. This was especially true in cases of elderly or ill singlewomen, who lived with and were supported by their younger nieces and nephews. For

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[58] On early modern godparenthood, see: Guido Alfani, Agnese Vitali, and Vincent Gourdon, "Social Customs and Demographic Change: The Case of Godparenthood in Catholic Europe," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 51, no. 3 (2012): 482–504; Camille Berteau, Vincent Gourdon, and Isabelle Robin-Romero, "Godparenthood: Driving Local Solidarity in Northern France in the Early Modern Era. The example of Aubervilliers families in the sixteenth–eighteenth centuries," *The History of the Family* 17, no. 4 (2012): 452-467; Stephen Gudeman, "Spiritual Relationships and Selecting a Godparent," *Man* 10, no. 2 (1975): 221-37; Louis Haas, "Social Connections between Parents and Godparents in Late Medieval Yorkshire," *Medieval Prosopography* 10, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 1-22; Joseph Lynch, *Godparents and Kinship in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton UP, 1986).

[59] AN MC Étude I 384, 29 May 1737. Lebrun also had four additional godchildren (three goddaughters and one godson), who were not related to her by kinship.

[60] Will: AN MC Étude VI 747, 12 December 1761; *scellé*: AN Y 11178, 23 December 1761; postmortem inventory: AN MC Étude VI 747, 24 December 1761.

example, Anne Gaillardon opened her home to her aunt Françoise Provot in 1737. There are few details on Provot's health or even her age at the time of her death, as it was the unfortunate result of an accidental gunshot on the street outside of the apartment where the women lived. However, at the time, Gaillardon was already fifty-three years old and was the individual identified as the primary resident of her apartment. If her aunt were older than her by even seven years, Provot would have been considered "elderly" by contemporary standards.[61] Additionally, the neighbors did not seem to know Provot, although they were acquainted with Gaillardon. This suggests that the aunt may have moved in with her niece shortly before her death or, alternatively, may have had mobility restrictions that limited her time in the building's common areas.[62]

The example of the Gaudinat sisters is even clearer in its demonstration of nieces caring for elderly aunts. In February of 1788, Marie Madelaine and Marie Anne Gaudinat entered into a mutual donation [*donation entre vifs*] with their unmarried aunt Marie Maguerite Legras. This contract unified the three women's property, which would made the Gaudinat sisters the primary beneficiaries of their aunt's estate upon her death. However, the contract stipulated that the sisters agreed to provide lodgings, material necessities, food, medical care, and general support for Legras until her death. If they failed in this duty, the agreement would be voided.[63] This was also the case for Margueritte Tanet, who also engaged in a *donation entre vifs* with her aunt, Thérèse Tanet. In this case, the aunt Tanet was a childless widow and, therefore, the arrangement

[61] Silvana Seidel Menchi, "The Girl and the Hourglass: Periodization of Women's Lives in Western Preindustrial Societies," in *Time, Space, and Women's Lives in Early Modern Europe,* eds. Anne Jacobson Schutte, Thomas Kuehn, and Silvana Seidel Menchi (Kirksville, MO: Truman State UP, 2001), 41-74.

[62] AN Y 10754 A, 6 February 1737.

[63] AN MC Étude LXXIX 285, 26 February 1788.

would provide her with the same benefits unmarried women required as they grew old: reliable material support, guaranteed lodgings, and various forms of personal care.[64]

The social practices that indicate singlewomen's avuncular significance therefore include guardianship, cohabitation, inheritance choices, engagement in collaborative labor, allocation of financial and material resources through donations, and practices of care during times of crisis. Ultimately, a study of these forms of social engagement between singlewomen and their avuncular relations in police, court, and notarial records indicate that unmarried women buttressed their kinship networks by supporting younger and older kin in forms that spanned the entire lifespan, ranging from guardianship for adolescents, collaboration in adulthood, and even elder care. Singlewomen often helped raise their nieces and nephews and provided them with the resources necessary to pursue their goals and achieve stable futures, which included undertaking education, engaging in professional training, entering religious communities, or getting married. However, unmarried aunts received equal support from their avuncular relations as they entered the periods of old age. Securing assistance could be a matter of simply asking for it, contractually obligating it, or perhaps some blend of the two, which could benefit all participants.

Familial Dangers: Unmarried Women and Conflict in Kinship

Avuncular guardianship was not always a favorable experience or one that ensured the protection of unmarried women. Children, especially female orphans, had few rights, resources, or avenues of recourse when subjected to adverse or even abusive treatment. While unmarried women had conflicts with their female relatives, including mothers, sisters, cousins, and avuncular kin, their most contentious relationships were consistently with male family members. Popular discourse often warned singlewomen about the dangers presented by men, who could be

[64] AN MC Étude XXIII 760, 6 June 1778.

predators, seducers, and violent brutes. Yet, these cautionary narratives presented unmarried women as vulnerable *outside* of the family household and *away* from kin. Unfortunately, however, domestic violence was a prevalent occurrence that went largely unreported. While historical studies of spousal abuse shed light on partner violence both within and outside martial bonds, child abuse is an area that requires and deserves further attention. Indeed, children who had indirect ties to the family home, such as orphaned kin or step-children, may have been especially vulnerable to abuse due to the fragility of their household positions and the instability of their prospects outside of familial assistance.

In 1736, for example, a parish priest contacted the Parisian police on behalf of Margueritte Thérèse Eloy. The priest conveyed that Eloy's uncle had mistreated her so severely that she had fallen ill. The priest does not describe Eloy's ailments or their connection to the alleged abuse. This reference may be an allusion to a venereal disease, pregnancy, mental anguish, physical injuries, or a combination therein. Regardless of its manifestation, the uncle's mistreatment of Eloy was serious enough to warrant juridical intervention. The priest requested Eloy be placed in protective custody "so as to remove her from his violence."[65]

The register of arrests does not name the uncle in question, as the resulting order only mandated Eloy's removal and not her abuser's prosecution. However, it was almost certainly Eloy's maternal uncle and legal guardian, Nicolas Chardin. He became Eloy's tutor in 1729, after the death of her mother.[66] Eloy's father was still alive at the time of this appointment but he died only two years later, in 1731.[67] The orphaned Eloy had a brother, Louis, but he had been

[65] BA, MS 10135, *Affaires de mœurs, assassinats et vols*, 1 February 1736.

[66] AN Y 4441, 26 March 1729.

[67] AN Y 4468 B, 27 June 1731.

"absent" since approximately 1720.[68] Left without any immediate family members while still in her legal minority, Eloy would have been vulnerable to destitution and mistreatment. As her tutor, Chardin was responsible for protecting his young niece until she reached the age of legal majority, achieved legal emancipation through court proceedings, or married. Eloy was fourteen years old when she entered Chardin's care and was twenty-three at the time of the 1736 order. Rather than attend to Eloy's interests and wellbeing, Chardin subjected her to such violence that the priest felt it was necessary to request her removal. This would signal, in effect, the end of Chardin's rights as her tutor, establishing a rare fourth avenue for Eloy's liberation. The priest's petition to the police and their subsequent removal of Eloy from Chardin's household indicate that the abuse was significant enough to warrant institutional intervention in family affairs and the negation of the uncle's patriarchal authority.[69]

Marie Anne Dornel also had a difficult relationship with her uncle. According to her 1756 statement to Parisian police, Dornel moved into the home of her aunt when she was only nine years old. When she turned twelve, her aunt's husband, Dupréil, taught her how to paint handheld fans. He paid her one hundred *lives* per year and then, at the age of fifteen, she formally entered apprenticeship under his tutelage. From that time until the age of twenty-six, he financially exploited her labor and controlled her by withholding her earnings. He refused to pay her, telling her that he was using her wages to reimburse the costs of her lodging and sustenance.[70]

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[68] AN Y 4469 B, 28 July 1731.

[69] BA, MS 10135, *Affaires de mœurs, assassinats et vols*, 1 February 1736.

[70] AN Y 11939, 12 February 1756.

As Dupréil had repeatedly stated he would only support her until she turned thirty, Dornel then asked him to split their earnings so she could profit more directly from her labor and to begin saving for her future establishment. The prospect of losing both her wages and his control over her more generally, Dupréil began to treat Dornel with increasing derision, even bringing in his daughter, her cousin-in-law, to kick her out of her room. He intended to force her into submission by making her feel desperate and vulnerable. During Dornel's seventeen years in Dupréil home, however, she had not been isolated. She made friends and allies in the neighborhood, whom she turned to in this time of need. Neighbors opened their home to her and allowed her to take refuge with them away from her uncle's ire. Her uncle stormed into her room in the middle of the night and ordered her to leave his home. She had to depart so quickly and unexpectedly that she didn't even have time to take any of her belongings, which Dupréil refused to relinquish her. As she had been sleeping at the time her uncle ejected her from his residence, she didn't even have any of her clothes and had to borrow a skirt and top from a friend to have something to wear on a daily basis.[71]

Singlewomen's issues with male kin also extended to their brothers, some of whom attempted to exert control over their sisters in the absence of fathers or other patriarchal figures.[72] In 1743, Geneviève Brières opened her apartment to her recently unemployed brother, Jean. Unfortunately, rather than being grateful to his sister for opening her home to him, Jean violently abused her.[73] Nicholas Allouel mistreated his sister in a similar fashion, stealing "everything that

[71] Ibid.

[72] For further discussion of the dominance of the brother after the French Revolution, see: Juliet Flower MacCannell, *The Regime of the Brother: After the Patriarchy* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

[73] AN Y 10855, 29 October 1745.

she possessed, after having chased her from his residence, and mistreated her with his servant, with whom he lived in debauchery."[74]

Another sister contested the image of the happy household shared between unwed brothers and sisters in her 1746 statements to the police. Marie Marguerite Wagon's brother, Martin Josèphe, filed a complaint with the Parisian police in which he accused her of theft. During her interrogation with the police, Wagon refuted these charges, instead telling the interviewing official that she had attempted to leave with her own belongings after many forms of mistreatment by her brother, who refused to allow her to live elsewhere or marry, beat her, and "treated her like a servant but never paid her." The police asked her, "isn't it true that she had promised her brother that she would not leave him again and that she would keep him company all of her life?" To this, Wagon responded simply, "*non*." It was clear that lifelong sibling partnership was not the companionship, household arrangement, or lifestyle she desired.[75]

However, in most cases, unmarried women's conflicts with family members stemmed from issues related to their sexual activities and choices of male partners or prospective spouses. As Arlette Farge and Michael Foucault note in their study of *lettres de cachet*s, there existed a specific "critical" moment in parent-child relations, when adolescents were most likely to experience such contention in their relationships with their families that administrators of justice were asked to intervene in family affairs.[76] The *lettres de cachets* were orders administered directly by the lieutenant general of the Parisian police on behalf of the monarch. Individuals appealed to the police requesting immediate juridicial intervention that allowed for automatic

[74] BA MS 10135, *Affaires de mœurs, assassinats et vols*. 5 June 1735, fol. 45r.

[75] AN Y 10990 A, 11 January 1746.

[76] Arlette Farge, and Michel Foucault, *Disorderly Families: Infamous Letters from the Bastille Archives,* ed. Nancy Luxon, trans. Thomas Scott-Railton (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 123.

imprisonment without any judicial process in the form of a sentencing hearing or a trial. The *lettre de cachet* was, in many ways, an order to execute an immediate arrest under circumstances where the "cause" and "crime" inducing incarceration was subjectively assessed by an authority who had information that—while, typically, limited to one side of the narrative—offered enough evidence that the individual in question presented a threat to public order.[77] During the years of 1728-1758, the ages at which children were most likely to be imprisoned by their parents were:

> Less than 17 years old: 6
> From 17 to 19: 13
> From 20 to 22: 20
> From [23] to 25: 26
> From 26 to 28: 15
> From 29 to 31: 7
> Over the age of 31: 6

As the above figures from Farge and Foucault's study illustrate, the years immediately preceding an adolescent's transition from familial minor to legal adult marked the period in which s/he was most likely to be involved in familial disputes that resulted in juridical intervention.[78] These "conflicts at the threshold," as they are referred to by Farge and Foucault, represented attempts at submission as well as invitations for remediation. One could choose to concede to one's parents' will and be granted the honor of familial reabsorption, or contest parental authority and experience familial dissociation.[79]

In cases wherein a *lettre de cachet* was issued to imprison a daughter, the cause cited was almost always sexual in nature. As Farge and Foucault note, "What seemed most unbearable for families was when their daughter settled close to them, in the neighborhood or nearby, and

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[77] Farge and Foucault, *Disorderly Families*, 20-26. See also: Julia M. Gossard, "Breaking a Child's Will: Eighteenth-Century Parisian Juvenile Detention Centers," *French Historical Studies* 42, no. 2 (April 2019): 239–59.

[78] The following figures can be found in ibid., 123.

[79] Ibid., 130.

displayed a multiplicity of liaisons, a succession of protectors, or a still more episodic procession of lovers."[80] The dual components of sexual misconduct and close proximity made her dishonest behavior all the more aggravating, as it incited local gossip, impacted the family's social capital, and detracted from the honor and reputation of the entire kin group.

In their complaints to the police, individuals often evoked or specifically referenced familial honor. At times, this was a strategy that allowed complainants to demonstrate harm. Jeanne Marie Perrine Mercurin, for example, began her seduction complaint against M. Sénéchal by telling the police that she "was descended from the most honest and distinguished family." When parents or guardians represented their underage daughters, they often evoked family honor to distance themselves from the misconduct or criminality that occurred in the case and, furthermore, to differentiate between what one would expect of the injured party/parties and what actually occurred. To accomplish this, they framed their families' traditions, conduct, reputations, and education in contrast to the actions that occurred. For example, in 1748 a widow filed of complaint of seduction in relation to her underage daughter, a twenty-two year old named Marie Florence Merlin. The mother told the police, "she had done everything possible to raise her daughter to be a good Christian." "By the way [her daughter] conducted herself," the mother "hoped [her daughter] would uphold the sentiments of honor with which she had been raised when she finally left the family home." Furthermore, the widow told the police that they were "an honorable family." She laid this foundation to emphasize how shocking and uncharacteristic her daughter's engagement in a sexual relationship was. All of this was used, therefore, to further the claim that the daughter *must* have been seduced under the promise of

[80] Ibid., 128.

marriage because, as the mother told the police, "by birth" and "morals," her daughter would not have willingly behaved in this way.[81]

However, when related to familial discord—whether the opposition between unmarried women and their relatives is elucidated by the evidence or represented by the parties in litigation—honor is often used as a form of condemnation, through which the kin group invites police and court authorities to view alleged misconduct from their perspectives. In these cases, the line between the family's sense of injury and the singlewoman's attempt at independence was often thin and blurred. Many instances of police intervention, including complaints to local commissioners and not only *lettres de cachets*, reflect tension between unmarried women of or nearing the age of legal adulthood who are striving for autonomy and the ever-tightening strings of familial authority. One father followed his daughter and her lover from Chantilly to Paris and filed a complaint against them both with the police. He did not approve of his daughter's suitor and refused to consent to their marriage. They did not want to concede to his authority and attempted to start a new life together in Paris. The father tracked them down and, intent on "reclaiming" his daughter, he filed a complaint with the police, who "returned" the daughter to him. The father then took the daughter—not back to their home in Chantilly, but to be placed in a convent.[82] This scenario was very common and the outcome could even be considered fortuitous and mild by eighteenth-century standards. Indeed, the alternative, and common result, was imprisonment in definitively carceral institutions.

This was the outcome in the case of Magdeleine Blanchet, a *fille majeure* whose father wrote to the lieutenant of the Parisian police to request she be incarcerated because she was

[81] Y 10762, 28 June 1748.

[82] AN Y 10809 A, 15 February 1788.

pursuing a "scandalous" and "infamous" life by residing in concubinage with her male partner.[83] Blanchet claimed her father "wronged [her] of more than five thousand *livres*" from the estate of her late mother and, furthermore, had "abused her and chased her from his house." She had no wish to return to his home or to concede to his wishes, particularly because she was an adult of legal age and he had married a second wife, with whom he had additional children.[84] When Bernard made these statements, she had been imprisoned by the police and was writing to the Lieutenant General to petition for her release. Her father, however, asked that "the Lieutenant General of Police to give no regard to the complaints of this prostitute who asks for freedom only to be able to continue living in libertinage and to finish covering her family with ignominy."[85] One can see how the father's charge against his daughter escalated from living with a single man outside of marriage to being a prostitute. Her immorality was made more egregious by her contempt for her patriarch and her refusal to submit to familial authority, even as a legally autonomous adult.

It is clear, therefore, that kin did not offer singlewomen the best safeguard against the trials of daily life and specific obstacles they faced as a result of their gender and marital status. This was a difficult reality that Antoinette Louise Delamontagne would face. While living in her parents' home, her mother and father consented to a neighbor's request to visit their daughter under the presumption that he planned to marry her. However, she had been seduced by the man, who became possessive of her yet refused to fulfill his promised of marriage. When he transmitted a venereal disease to her, Delamontagne realized she needed help. She expressed fear

[83] Letter from le *père* Blanchet to the Lieutenant General of the Police, undated, BA MS 11004 (1728) in Farge and Foucault, *Disorderly Families,* 158.

[84] Letter from Marguerite Blanchet to the Lieutenant General of the Police, undated, BA MS 11000, fol. 174 (1728) in Farge and Foucault, *Disorderly Families,* 161.

[85] Letter from le *père* Blanchet to the Lieutenant General of the Police, undated, BA MS 11000, fol. 176 (1728) in Farge and Foucault, *Disorderly Families,* 163.

that she would become pregnant, fate that could bring long-term instability. However, her parents did not offer her assistance. Instead, she had to leave their home just to escape her seducer and his growing aggression, which was now manifesting in threats to have her incarcerated. It was a widowed neighbor who offered her aid. La Dame Paté was sympathetic to Delamontagne's plight when her own family had not been. Paté brought Delamontagne into her home, paid to have her illness treated by a doctor, and trained her to paint fans so that she could make a living.[86] In doing so, she taught Delamontagne a lesson that many Parisians and unmarried women in particular knew: one's family was not always the best or most reliable source of assistance. Sometimes, a good neighbor was a better resource that one's kin.

[86] AN Y 11954, 2 September 1767.

CHAPTER TWO

Unmarried Women and the Urban Community: Mixed Economies of Care, Public Engagement, and Local Alliances

In the seventeenth century, a Dauphiné lawyer named Louis Fornet opened his family's *livre de raison*, a book containing a register of genealogical information, and recorded a generous endowment to his heirs. The bequest was not an estate, a house, or a valuable item; instead, it was "advice on how to live well in the world." After encouraging his kin to be pious, charitable, and, on a more practical note, to always refer to original records rather than extracts when drawing up legal documents, he offered guidance on navigating social relations. "Try to make yourself liked by everyone," he counseled his heirs, "and above all, by your neighbors. To achieve this," he instructed, "seek out occasions to serve them. For it's true, what they say, that a good neighbor is worth more than a distant relative, from whom you can expect little service. From a good neighbor," he wrote, "you can receive pleasure all the time."[1]

Despite the proclamations in every sector of early modern French society—from royal officials to local priests, from Provincial jurists to Parisian *philosophes*—that family bonds represented one's most important alliances, many contemporaries would have recognized the truth that lay in Fornet's sound advice. In daily sociability and moments of crisis, proximity was undoubtedly as important as kinship. This would have been especially clear to singlewomen in Paris during the eighteenth century, where even small shifts in circumstances could spell disaster. For unmarried women who lived outside of their families' homes, and especially those who were financially independent, it was often their neighbors, not their relatives, who determined their stability and even their survival.

[1] A. Vachet, "Le Livre de raison d'une famille de robe au 17e siècle," *Revue de Lyonnais*, 5th ser., 13 (1892): 309-311, quoted in Natalie Davis, *The Gift in Seventeenth-Century France* (Madison, WI: U. of Wisc. Press, 2000), 140.

In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France, the family appeared to be the primary site of women's status, support, and, responsibility. It represented the standards of female success, the sphere of women's productive value, and even the source of their identity. At the same time, the milieu of kinship was neither insular nor impermeable. Instead, the family was deeply entrenched in broader social institutions that intersected with one another and offered individuals additional realms of public affiliation and personal identity. For many in early modern France, one's community represented an equally important arena as one's family for building social relations, securing sources of assistance, and participating in public life. As a result, social status and public identity were not immediately or irrevocably imbued with familial associations. Instead, the formation of independent alliances within one's community, as well as one's personal engagement with gender ideals and behavioral norms, all impacted one's access to resources and one's accumulation of social capital. Although, ideologically, the family represented the most significant organizing unit in early modern French society, in practice, relationships formed with non-kin, such as friends, coworkers, and neighbors were equally important determinants of survival and success.

As this chapter will demonstrate, Parisian singlewomen during the long eighteenth century constructed, employed, and engaged in mixed economies of care. These were support systems constituted by the collaboration and intersection of familial associates, charitable resources, and community alliances. While historians have long focused on singlewomen's marginalized position in early modern society, this view has largely stemmed from the belief that the family most effectively protected women, especially the unmarried, from public condemnation, sexual vulnerability, and economic disadvantage. When expanding out from the realm of kinship to situate unmarried women as members of broader communities, especially as

participants in expanding urban populaces, one finds that there were a variety of resources they could both utilize and provide in early modern French society.

Indeed, unmarried women experienced a unique relationship with the urban community and the broader French public in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As moralists derided their disorderly presence in the French capital and police officials' passing glances hardened into unflinching glares, unmarried women carved out spaces in the city's population where they could contribute to public welfare, build social networks, and find some stability in a period and place often characterized by chaos. By forming alliances in their communities with neighbors, coworkers, and friends, unmarried women negotiated the shifting tides of public opinion, the unpredictable circumstances of daily life, and even the unique struggles of female singleness. Alongside their neighbors, they navigated the transitions evoked by significant structural, demographic, and institutional changes in the French capital, and even facilitated the development of multi-faceted systems of support for all Parisian residents. Even as authorities insisted singlewomen were different, cautioning that this social group wrought irrevocable havoc, unmarried women melded into the Parisian masses and, ultimately, supported the urban community far more than they undermined it.

Single Women, Social Networks, and Mixed Economies of Care

One's access to aid depended predominantly on the size of one's support network and the strength of one's associates within it. The ability to tap into avenues of assistance was the fundamental difference between "structural" poverty and "conjunctural" poverty in Old Regime France. As Rachel Fuchs describes, structural poverty was a state of constant instability afflicting those "who were too poor to support themselves even under ideal circumstances." Conjunctural poverty, conversely, was temporary, situational, and theoretically survivable as long as one could

secure interventional assistance. As Fuchs notes, those who experienced conjunctural poverty could survive under normal circumstances but, because they were unable to stockpile resources, became highly vulnerable during periods of insecurity.[2] Historians have long presumed that unmarried women in the Old Regime faced structural poverty *unless* they were able to access familial assistance, in which case they could survive in conjunctural poverty. While this was especially true for lower-class singlewomen, bourgeois and upper-class women could also face this dynamic. As a result, familial dislocation appeared as near insurmountable state of vulnerability.

By focusing on community membership, local resources, and public life one shifts from a question whether singlewomen *could* survive outside of the family in this period to a inquiry into *how* singlewomen functioned within a society that believed the family was both the foremost source of informal assistance and the important form of social organization. Decentering familial relationships thus offers insight into the other types of bonds singlewomen formed and how these associations might also provide companionship, collaborative solidarity, and assistance. Specifically, the framework of the mixed economy of care considers how various sources, forms, and methods of assistance might exist and operate simultaneously and cooperatively. As Peregrine Horden and Richard Smith write, the predominant belief that the family was the most reliable source of aid is often based on "an underlying value judgment" that familial support is preferable to outside sources of care.[3] They argue that there is no "golden age of family care" in

[2] Rachel Fuchs, *Abandoned Children: Foundlings and Child Welfare in Nineteenth-Century France* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1984), 11.

[3] Peregrine Horden and Richard Smith, "Introduction," in *The Locus of Care: Families, Communities, Institutions and the Provision of Welfare since Antiquity,* eds. Peregrine Horden and Richard Smith (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 1998), 2.

the history of welfare because the family has never been insulated or self-sufficient.[4] Indeed, personal networks exist as mixed economies of care, in which families, institutions, and neighbors work together to allow for a semblance of stability on a quotidian level. Survival in early modern cities, particularly for the poor, required employing many different types of strategies and seeing which proved effective. Olwen Hufton describes this system as an "economy of makeshifts," in which viability depended on one's sustained but not necessarily uniform tactics of material survival.[5] The most effective strategies were those that did not disrupt the status quo. One sought out relationships of sociability and solidarity with those who resembled themselves in some way, whether it be individuals with similar identities or those facing parallel circumstances. By appealing to sources that were already sympathetic to one's circumstances, one increased one's access to predictable and immediate assistance.

The various channels of assistance—family, community, and institution—existed concurrently and, typically, cooperatively. As Horden asserts, "we should not speak of any automatic opposition between familial, communal and institutional care" but should focus instead on the "complementarity" of these sources of support.[6] As a number of factors influence the strength of associations between individuals, relationship type is not always an accurate indication of its functionality.[7] Local support networks functioned through heterogeneous and multidirectional ties that connected an individual to various sources of potential aid. One's social

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[4] Ibid., 9.

[5] Olwen H. Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France, 1750-1789* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 69-130.

[6] Peregrine Horden, "Household Care and Informal Networks: Comparisons and Continuities from Antiquity to the Present," in *The Locus of Care*, 27.

[7] Zvi Razi, for example demonstrates how demographic, political, and economic changes brought on by the breakdown of family-land bonds, instances of plagues, and serf migration led to decreased kin density and the denuclearization of families in English villages between the thirteenth and sixteen centuries. See Zvi Razi, "The Myth of the Immutable English Family," *Past and Present* 140 (August 1993): 3-44.

allies, for example, could be conduits of charitable assistance, just as one's family could facilitate community-based connections. For unmarried women in early modern Paris, neighbors played pivotal roles in daily life and moments of crisis. However, they also operated alongside familial associations and institutional intervention. Therefore, in order to examine singlewomen's mixed economies of care, one must study how they engaged with and contributed to a variety of available social relations and public programs operating at the municipal, community, and institutional level.

Singlewomen, Public Assistance, and Local Institutions

In the early modern period, the most predominant sources of charity were the Catholic Church, which operated through local parishes and religious organizations, and the French monarchy, facilitated by royal officials and their ancillary representatives. Institutional support typically flowed through community establishments such as hospitals, churches, and refuges. Individuals could also access assistance by appealing directly to the institution or asking one of their contacts to do so on their behalves, which is how one issued requests for royal pensions. While institutional assistance appeared more egalitarian than personal aid, it often involved a similar process of evaluation and categorization to distinguish those who were worthy of assistance as, if deemed to be so, how much and what kind of aid they were eligible to receive. Administrators of charitable funds and resources determine the type, level, and frequency of support using seemingly uniform approaches; however, their assessments of prospective recipients varied according to personal identity and individual circumstances. An applicant's "worthiness" depended on multiple factors, including how one compared to others of similar rank or socioeconomic background, how one intended to use the potential provisions, and

whether one could tap into powerful connections that could exert influence in one's favor or would present some prospective benefit to the institution.

One's membership within a community was also an important aspect of institutional aid, as most organizations limited assistance to natives of the relevant area or those who could prove their residence over a designated minimum number of years. This dynamic upheld the pervasive belief that assistance should be provided to "care for one's own," even at the institutional level. One's social connections could also be instrumental, as parishes typically held intercessory positions in systems of poor relief. Parish administrators received donations from individual benefactors and annual contributions from the royal government, which they then distributed to members of their congregations. They also connected needy individuals to charitable organizations, such as the *Grand Bureau des Pauvres*, a centralized poor relief agency in Paris that chose their beneficiaries from lists provided by parish administrators. Private institutions, which were small and selective, often required that applicants provide a recommendation from their parish. This practice, which aimed to ensure only the "deserving" poor received assistance, demonstrates the important role one's local network could play if one needed access to community resources. By tapping into one's social allies and working one's way outward through one's community associations, one was more likely to identify and establish connections to parish administrators and gain access to charitable institutions.[8] As a result, one's rank, status, and network of contacts determined one's access to institutional aid.

Most singlewomen entered into the public assistance system through facilities that allowed for the voluntary admission of those who needed financial support or medical care, as well as the forcible placement by authorities of those deemed unfit to be freely circulating and mixing in the broader public. These sites, known as *hôpitaux,* housed the "deserving" poor, such

[8] David Garrioch, *The Making of Revolutionary Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 55-58.

as orphans, invalids, and the elderly, and also served as sites of incarceration for convicted prostitutes, "debauched" women, vagrants, mendicants, and petty thieves. This mixture of those deemed worthy beneficiaries and others believed to be deviant criminals prompted conflation among all entrees, with the negative associations prevailing in public perspective.

This was not the original intention of the *hôpitaux générales,* which were designed in the seventeenth century by Catholic priest St. Vincent de Paul. In his initial plans, De Paul imagined the *hôpitaux* would provide shelter, sustenance, and employment for those who both deserved and, importantly, wanted such assistance. This latter element of volunteerism was central to De Paul's vision of the institution's form, function, and success. As Hufton observes, St. Vincent believed, "The poor would come, without coercion, because they would see in the institution an asylum from their wretchedness, a place provided by an all-merciful God to succor them; and the rich would freely donate towards its maintenance because they would be aware that this was their Christian duty."[9]

The French government, however, ultimately coopted the idea of this institutional reformatory but with a different agenda in mind: a "Great Confinement." For Olwen Hufton, who describes this undertaking as "*un grand projet du renferement des pauvres,*"the particular focus of this program was the urban poor. [10] For Foucault, the "Great Confinement" targeted all who were deemed socially unfit but aimed even more specifically at curbing and sequestering "madness."[11] In either case, municipal authorities viewed the new urban *hôpital* as the ideal vehicle for achieving their goal of ridding the city of "undesirables." In forcibly removing these

[9] Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France,* 142.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York: Random House, 1965) 38-64.

individuals from the general population, the intention was not reform with the aim of reintegration but, instead, incarceration for the purpose of suppression. The power to confine these individuals ultimately represented the ability to slacken the flow of immorality and criminality that seemed to be spreading through the French capital like a disease, infecting the city's residents and polluting the urban atmosphere with as much acridity as the ever-lingering stench that assailed visitors upon their arrival to Paris.[12]

This project of reforming the French capital began under Louis XIV, who sought to make Paris the "new Rome."[13] When Colbert passed an edict in 1667 establishing key aspects of the new Parisian police system, the stated goal of these changes was "to purge the city of everything that can cause disorder, and to procure abundance."[14] This endeavor included: the implementation of a new police system; instilling urban planning developments that included widening the streets, adding better sewage systems, and bringing in more sources of light to the streets at night; and centralizing the institutional sources of relief and punishment in Paris. The latter included offering new forms of support for those in need, as well as new cites of incarceration for those who threatened public order. All of these changes had significant impacts on singlewomen in Paris.

In most cases, institutional donors and their conduits continued to deprioritize singlewomen in favor of widows, orphaned children, and indigent families.[15] As Olwen Hufton observes, the spinster and bachelor are virtually absent from the eighteenth-century

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[12] On the smell of Paris in the eighteenth century, see: Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination* (Harvard UP, 1986).

[13] Holly Tucker, *City of Light, City of Poison: Murder, Magic, and the First Police Chief of Paris* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2017), 19.

[14] Colin Jones, *Paris: The Biography of a City* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 167.

[15] See Lanza, *From Wives to Widows in Early Modern Paris*, 183-219 and Kathryn Norberg, *Rich and Poor in Grenoble, 1600-1814* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 184-185.

correspondence of clergymen discussing the local distribution of alms.[16] For singlewomen, the potential of charitable contributions typically depended on one's stage in the female lifecycle. Unmarried women were more likely to receive institutional aid when young, in the form of dowry contributions or trade instruction, or in old age, as a practice of elder care.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, growing discourse on the necessity of female education bolstered the charitable endeavors available to young, unmarried girls.[17] While most asserted that the education of girls fell under the purview of their mothers and, furthermore, should be undertaken with the objective of improving women's performances of familial roles and domestic responsibilities, several institutions oversaw multi-faceted instruction of young girls in religious subjects, secular affairs, and practical trade instruction. The private institutions that offered such aid to unmarried women were typically small, selective, and based on class. For example, unmarried daughters of impoverished noble families were candidates for royal charity, including placement in Madame de Maintenon's *Maison Royale de Saint-Louis*, a school for elite girls located at Saint-Cyr.[18]

Girls from artisan and lower-class families also benefitted from this type of charitable assistance, often in the form of vocational training. Some entered apprenticeship directly with mistress trade leaders, such as those in the seamstress [*couturière*] or laundress [*lingère*] guilds. While in theory, the Parisian institutions supporting orphans and abandoned children provided dowry funds for former female residents, they also offered financial support for trade training.

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[16] Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France,* 4.

[17] See: Nadine Bérenguier, *Conduct Books for Girls in Enlightenment France* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011); Jean Bloch, "Discourses of Female Education in the Writings of Eighteenth-Century French Women," in *Women, Gender and Enlightenment*, eds. Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 243-258; Martine Sonnet, *L'éducation des filles au temps des Lumières* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2011).

[18] Carolyn C. Lougee, "Noblesse, Domesticity, and Social Reform: The Education of Girls by Fénelon and Saint-Cyr," *History of Education Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (1974): 87–113.

As will be discussed in further detail in chapter four, hospital administrators help facilitate and fund apprenticeship and *allouage* contracts, wherein female residents would be placed in the homes and workshops of local tradespeople to learn crafts.[19] These administrators even consented to petitions from girls who wished to use the prospective dowry funds to "establish themselves" in trades, rather than in marriages.[20] Furthermore, several charity schools opened in Paris during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries that had the specific goal of offering lay education to local girls. These included the *Sœurs de la Communauté de Sainte-Geneviève* [Sisters of the Community of Saint Genevieve], the *Filles de Sainte-Agnes* [Daughters of Saint Agnes], and the *Filles de Sainte-Anne* [Daughters of Saint Anne], the *Filles de Saint-Josephe* [Daughters of Saint Joseph], and the *Filles de Saint-Maur* [Daughters of Saint Maur].[21]

All of these institutions—and many others in Paris—were run by groups of religiously devoted by still secular unmarried women called "*les filles séculières*" or "secular maidens."[22] These singlewomen were part of a Counter-Reformation movement that aimed to reform the realm of charity in the mid-seventeenth century.[23] Many were members of the *Filles de la Charité* or, "Daughters of Charity," a community of non-married women formed in 1630 by the aforementioned Vincent de Paul and a widow named Louise de Marillac. The Daughters of

[19] While similar to apprenticeship in practice, one could not gain trade credentials or guild membership through *allouage*. Instead, the intended outcome of the training was the development of skills and the formulation of social connections. See Clare Haru Crowston and Claire Lemercier, "Surviving the End of Guilds: Apprenticeship in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century France," in *Apprenticeship in Early Modern France,* ed. Maarten Prak and Patrick Wallis (New York: Cambridge UP, 2019), 293.

[20] AH-HP, Fonds de l'Hôpital des Enfants-Trouvés, Liasse 9, "Registre des délibérations de Messieurs les directeurs des Enfants-Trouvés en France"; AH-HP, Fonds de l'Hôtel Dieu 148, Liasse 877, C 4216, "Actes par lesquels diverses personnes s'engagent à soigner et à élever comme leurs propres enfants des enfants né à l'Hôpital Dieu."

[21] Crowston and Lemercier, "Surviving the End of Guilds," 282-308. See also: Anna Bellavitis, *Women's Work and Rights in Early Modern Urban Europe* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 171-196.

[22] Elizabeth Rapley, "A New Approach: The Filles Séculières (1630–1660)," *Vincentian Heritage Journal* 16, no. 2 (October 1995): 111-136.

[23] Elizabeth Rapley, *The Devotes: Women and Church in Sevententh-Century France* (McGill-Queen's UP, 1990).

Charity stemmed as an offshoot from the *Dames de la Charité* [Ladies of Charity], a confraternity of women from aristocratic backgrounds who worked for the local poor by collecting and distributing alms, as well as by providing food for those in need. While the Ladies of Charity acted in more administrative capacities, the Daughters of Charity worked with poor individuals directly, serving as nurses in hospitals, delivering food to the needy, and teaching Catechism to schoolchildren around France. This group facilitated the reform that royal officials and municipal authorities aimed to bring about in Paris. They were an unpaid labor force that performed vital tasks that went relatively unacknowledged and, certainly, underappreciated.[24]

Unmarried women also supported the broader goal of social reform through financial contributions. Singlewomen frequently left funds to needy members of their parishes and to local institutions, such as orphanages, religious communities, and confraternities. In addition, they were important members of the Parisian credit market, as they regularly purchased *rentes.* These were life annuities that allowed individuals to invest small sums, which would collect interest and then be paid out in regular installments. As Hoffman et al. note, unmarried women "had savings to invest and powerful reasons to put their money to work." They could not "lean on children or pensions for support in their old age," and therefore, these *rentes* helped provide for their retirement and support in their later years, when they may not be able to work and would likely need funds for medical care.[25] While they often purchased their *rentes* from private

[24] Susan E. Dinan, *Women and Poor Relief in Seventeenth-Century France: The Early History if the Daughters of Charity* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006).

[25] Philip T. Hoffman, Gilles Postel-Vinay, and Jean-Laurent Rosenthal, *Priceless Markets: The Political Economy of Credit in Paris, 1660-1870* (University of Chicago Press, 2000), 5.

lenders,[26] many also supported public initiatives by buying contracts from hospitals,[27] the clergy,[28] and even the Company of the Indies.[29]

If they did not have personal support or these financial investments to provide for them, older singlewomen benefitted from charitable aid primarily through resources available for "worthy" indigent, elderly, or ill community members. However, the aged singlewoman was not an altogether sympathetic figure. As David Troyansky writes in *Old Age in the Old Regime*, "women who had never married could expect nothing in old age. They lived on the margins of society . . . the plight of the unmarried old woman was generally dreadful."[30] Elder care functioned through three primary avenues: the hospital, the convent, and via parish-community collaboration. The processes involved in the administration of such care are unclear and seem to vary from case to case. In some instances, elderly singlewomen were admitted to the Hôtel-Dieu because they lacked other sources of financial support or medical assistance. On other occasions, they were described as *pensionnaires,* although the sources of their pensions differ widely.

Some received traditional alms from religious organizations, others accepted charitable assistance through their former guilds or confraternities, while, in certain cases, these pensions took the form of upfront care provision by individuals who expected repayment during the execution of the deceased's estate. Marie Valet, for example, lived in a second-floor apartment in

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[26] Philip T. Hoffman, Gilles Postel-Vinay and Jean-Laurent Rosenthal , "Private Credit Markets in Paris, 1690-1840," *The Journal of Economic History* 52, no. 2 (June, 1992): 300.

[27] See, for example, AN MC Étude XVI 759, 23 November 1763, wherein Jeanne Margueritte Paillet bought a *rente viagère* from the Hôpital Royal des Invalides de la Marine or

[28] See, for example, AN MC Étude XCIX 673, 1 February 1783, in which Anne Geneviève de Chezeaux constituted a *rente viagère* of fifty *livres* in support of a municipal loan granted to Parisian clergy members.

[29] See Marie Charlotte Rempnoux *dite* Renoux's will, in which she references the many *rente* contracts she owns from the *Compagnie des Indes*: AN MC Étude XCVIII 448, 2 January 1733.

[30] David Troyansky, *Old Age in the Old Regime: Image and Experience in Eighteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1989), 93.

a building on Rue Saint-Honoré that had an annual rent of forty *livres* per year. Valet's lodgings were paid directly by a charitable pension from the Saint Roch Parish.[31] Margueritte Cot, conversely, lived as a pensioner in an apartment owned by her nephew, although the funding and conditions are unspecified.[32] Meanwhile, when she died in March of 1757, Margueritte Garel was a former *marchande lingère* who was living as a pensioner in the home of Mademoiselle Andrieux.[33] In 1756, Andrieux purchased part of Garel's business in exchange for a pension of two hundred and fifty *livres* per year, which would be used to support the cost of her lodgings, furniture, associated housing expenses, and daily sustenance.[34] Finally, Marie Anne Delaporte was a pensioner at the Hospice of Saint Jacques at the time of her death in 1786.[35] While there were certainly sources of assistance for aged singlewomen, there did not seem to be a formal process that operated at the public level.

Adult singlewomen had far less access to avenues of charitable aid, or at least the channels that were officially constructed and publically available. However, it was possible to petition institutions and individuals within one's community for assistance. For example, in 1751, forty-one year old Madeleine Desjours approached the priest and the vicar at Saint Roch Parish in Paris. She was a domestic servant who was unemployed at the time and in "extreme need." She appealed to the religious authorities for assistance, stating she wished to repent her sins and reform her morals after having lived "for a very long time" in a general state of libertinage. While there was no formal program that the parish oversaw for adult singlewomen

[31] AN Y 10872, 6 December 1758.

[32] AN Y 10856, 2 February 1746.

[33] AN Y 14677, 25 March 1757.

[34] AN MC Étude LIV 871, 5 March 1757.

[35] AN Y 15214, 1 April 1786.

like Desjours, the priest and the vicar connected her with the parish's *Sœurs de la Charité* [Sisters of Charity], made up of both *Dames de la Charité* and *Filles de la Charité*, who offered her religious instruction and temporary lodgings. After approximate two months of care, they facilitated her reintegration into the community by finding a local couple to take her on as a domestic servant. In this case, Desjours ran away from the household after a short time in service. She was eventually captured, reprimanded for taking advantage of those who offered her charity, and imprisoned at Saint Martin in Paris. While, unfortunately, this case may have encouraged the suspicion of adult singlewomen and even hindered those involved from helping similar women in the future, Desjours' journey through unofficial channels of institutional and community assistance demonstrates how such aid could be accessed and utilized during the eighteenth century.[36]

Many adult singlewomen, like Desjours, recognized they were less likely to receive assistance if they asked for financial aid explicitly and, therefore, they adapted their strategies accordingly. Rather than requesting money, some would instead ask for thread they could use to earn their bread.[37] This approach demonstrates that they recognized how most institutions felt that unmarried women, presumably without children or other dependents, should be able to support themselves. This belief prevailed over the reality that, on average, women made half as much as men and were excluded from the highest-paying forms of work. At the same time, this tactic allowed unmarried women to keep these institutions at arm's distance—to benefit from charitable aid without becoming too deeply imbedded in the systems of public assistance.

[36] AN Y 13759, 30 July 1751.

[37] Judith A. DeGroat, "Women in the Paris Manufacturing Trades at the end of the Long Eighteenth Century: Continuity and Change," in *Women and Work in Eighteenth-Century France*, 208-209.

Unmarried Women, Community Membership, and Social Solidarity

Rather than relying on institutional intervention, singlewomen typically sought out informal, situational assistance from members of their communities. As opposed to familial or institution care, informal assistance is typically based on loosely defined relationships, voluntary associations, systems of mutual aid, or sentiments of sympathy or solidarity. For singlewomen in particular and for the non-elite in general, the most important sources of daily support and interventional assistance did not depend on how close one was socially but instead, geographically. The most likely source of informal aid was an individual in close proximity who could relate to the plight of the needy party. As Fornet's statement at the beginning of this chapter reflects, this was often not one's closest kin, but one's nearest neighbor.

It is particularly useful to see community systems of informal support as "self-help networks." Martin Dinges defines "self-help" as "the ability of individuals to endure a period of poverty or distress beyond the short-term logic of the market economy without asking for assistance."[38] The notion of "self-help" is especially revealing for singlewomen, for whom public assistance was limited and who, at least in theory, lacked the ideal degree of support offered through kinship. As Dinges explains, self-help was, "[f]or poorer members of the community . . . a strategy for survival, especially in emergencies."[39] While informal care is often considered to be less secure than other forms of assistance due to its unofficial and decentralized nature, Dinges asserts these are the very qualities that allow self-help networks to operate effectively. "Self-help," he writes, "operates best in a certain social structure characterized by social relations

[38] Martin Dinges,"Self-help and Reciprocity in Parish Assistance: Bordeaux in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in *The Locus of Care*, 113.

[39] Ibid., 123.

with a low specificity."[40] In a city such as eighteenth-century Paris, with a high population density, constantly shifting neighborhood boundaries, and an increasing influx of migrants, informal support could be essential to survival, particularly for those who might lack access to the other two sources cited in mixed economies of care. In this way, studying the roles of community alliances in singlewomen's networks offers insight into how mixed economies of care operated in theory and applied in practice to those individuals believed to have weaker ties to familial and institutional support.

Concentrating on support systems, social status, and public engagement through the lens of the community rather than the family helps overturn some long-held notions about female singleness in the early modern period. In particular, the image of unmarried women as socially marginalized, vulnerable, and unhappy arises from two historical presumptions about her familial status. The first is that that she would be experience familial paucity or outright dislocation by the nature of her unmarried status. The second, associated belief that encourages this representation is that a singlewoman's kin would be her most significant interlocutors and, thus, their absence would render her defenseless and alone. As the previous chapter demonstrated, singlewomen maintained many important connections with kin throughout their lives and contributed to their families' stability as much as they benefitted from their relatives' support. While this evidence helps deconstruct some enduring presumptions about unmarried women in Old Regime France, it also important to address the foundation on which these ideas rest. The overall emphasis on the family an essential unit of social organization and primary source of informal aid has also reinforced and upheld the assertion that to be unmarried and a woman meant one had limited social significance, communal engagement, and avenues for either assisted sustenance or independent viability.

[40] Ibid., 113.

When viewed through the lens of mixed economies of care, particularly those operating at the community level, singleness seems less socially divisive. While unmarried women may have had more limited familial circles and less access to institutional aid, this might just mean that their non-familial relationships played more important roles in their lives. Exploring how singlewomen formed, maintained, and utilized networks helps explicate how their unmarried status impacted their interpersonal relationships, social status, and lifestyle choices. In this way, studying singlewomen's non-familial networks offers insight into how their lives differed from those of married and widowed women without casting them as outcasts or failures.

Rather than having a limited number of primary relationships stemming from familial connections, singlewomen were more likely to form relationships with those who shared similar concerns, circumstances, and strategies. This could include community members from the same socioeconomic background or profession, those with comparable lifestyle choices, or individuals with parallel challenges. Cohabitation, for example, was a common survival strategy among unmarried women and is thus a productive example of how singlewomen formed bonds with those in similar circumstances. In her study of female textile workers in France, Olwen Hufton described these households of singlewomen as "spinster clusters." These were residences in which women in common industries would gather together to share the costs of living and household labor.[41] Similar female-exclusive households existed in Paris, although they were not solely structured around common employment.

In fact, cohabitation could take many forms. Sometimes, it was a short-term solution to financial or health problems. This was the case for Charlotte Beaudet who lived with another singlewoman, Anne Cuinet, for just three months before her death in March of 1762. Beaudet

[41] Olwen Hufton, "Women without Men: Widows and Spinsters in Britain and France in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Family History* 9, no. 4 (December 1984): 361.

typically lived with her niece but while the latter was out of town, she took in Cuinet as a temporary lodger to offset the cost of the rent and other household expenses.[42] Marie Geneviève LeRoy also opened her home temporarily in 1784, offering her friend Thérèse Batonnier a place to stay after the death of her husband and before she decided to move back into her father's home.[43] Demoiselle Gueroult, a hairdresser, lived with several other women who were part of her social circle. When questioned by the police, who were responding to a complaint of potential laundress work taking place outside of the associated guild, Gueroult explained that the group was not running an illegal workshop. Instead, they simply opted for cohabitation as a way to facilitate economic collaboration and collective responsibility for household expenses.[44]

Cohabitation could be the result of either equitable or hierarchical relationships. A group of women sharing the same apartment might consist of a singlewoman who employed other women as domestics or cooks. For example, two unmarried women named Jeanne Catherine Moreau and Jeanne LeBlanc lived together with their five domestic servants, all of whom were also singlewomen.[45] Some shared an apartment that doubled as a residence and a place of work. One mistress laundress, Françoise Merlu, lived with her apprentice Françoise Vallet in the parish of Saint Sulpice.[46] Marie Jeanne Alexandre, a mistress seamstress, shared a residence with her sister, Thérèse Alexandre, who worked with corsets, and another seamstress, Marie Françoise Beusard.[47] Another mistress seamstress, Marie Anne Guelorget, lived with her two unmarried

[42] AN Y 11481, 17 March 1762.

[43] AN Y 14479, 9 March 1784.

[44] AN Y 11087 B, 28 August 1771.

[45] AN Y 11470, 27 June 1754.

[46] AN Y 11087 B, 3 July 1771.

[47] AN Y 12662, 28 May 1762.

workers, a seamstress named Adelaide Boucheret and an apprentice named Jeanne Girardot.[48] These residences had their own household economies, in which all of the women played important roles and contributed to the overall welfare and sustenance of the group.

As opposed to those who lived with one another due to employment factors or as short-term solutions to difficult circumstances, some singlewomen chose to form communal households in which cohabitation was as much a lifestyle choice as an economic decision. When Marie Jolly died in 1761, her roommate, also a singlewoman, explained to the police that she lived with the deceased "as a friend."[49] Magdelaine Agnes Gonot and Thérèse Beaumont lived together in the same one-room apartment for eleven years.[50] As will be discussed in chapter four, the communal solidarity and emotional affection found between cohabitants could even give rise to relationships that resembled family bonds.

Outside of one's individual lodgings, the *quartier* formed the hub of daily life and one's most frequent interlocutors were those who lived in the same area, worked in the common trades or spaces, and prayed in the same parish. Those who grew up in Paris had the benefit of pre-established networks upon which they could build as they aged and established their personal, professional, and community identities. These networks could include: family members, friends, neighbors, and local figures such as the priests, doctors, midwives, and even police officials. For singlewomen who continued living with family members into adulthood, their networks might remain relatively static, growing or diminishing in more minute ways. Other Parisian-born singlewomen left their childhood homes to enter apprenticeship or domestic service, where their networks would grow to include their employers and their associates, other apprentices and

[48] AN Y 14230 B, 17 June 1781.

[49] AN Y 15459, 28 June 1761.

[50] AN Y 11257 A, 21 March 1770.

coworkers, clients, and potentially new neighbors if their positions required them to move to different quarters. Some women would return to their childhood homes after their apprenticeships ended. Others stayed on in their mistresses' workshops or would take up residence with other women they met in the course of their work, forming new households and integrating into the neighborhood more independently.

However, residence alone did not constitute community membership. Instead, this status had to be earned through a process of public assessment, which involved an evaluation of one's adherence to accepted codes of behavior and one's relationships with others. Typically, local assistance functioned through the high value placed on mutual aid within communities, rather than through charitable inclinations at the individual level. Self-help networks were based on the accumulation of "social capital," which signified "the ability of a person to mobilize others to help [her]," especially in times of distress.[51] An individual acquired social capital through a system of reciprocity: one gave to others in need as a response to the fear that one may find oneself in a similar situation in the future.[52] Records suggest that singlewomen were not only recipients of aid, but actively engaged in assisting members of their communities as well. In 1784, for example, Marie Geneviève LeRoy opened her home a recently widowed friend.[53] In 1790, a man attacked a woman who owed him money; it was her unmarried friend, Pierette Christine de Verdy, who stepped in between them and ultimately bore the brunt of his violence.[54] Singlewomen played important roles within community support systems and were often found caring for sick or aging individuals, lending money, making donations, and interfering in

[51] Dinges, 114.

[52] Ibid., 113.

[53] AN Y 14479, 9 March 1784.

[54] AN Y10010, 4 June 1790.

disputes, either in the moment or by providing evidence in police inquiries.

But these alliances and acts of assistance were not assured. It is important not to idealize or romanticize notions of mutual aid among and toward unmarried women. The potential of assistance depended primarily on one's social standing. While one's visible participation within neighborhood life could create a sense of membership within the broader community, and thus a degree of connection through local ties and friendships, a lack of more direct bonds could negate the possibility of outsider-accountability for a singlewoman's personal, physical, and economic welfare. To maintain and utilize community resources and local networks, one had to first establish one's membership within the related social structure. Indeed, the notion of community is inherently exclusionary and not everyone belongs..

While historians of early modern France typically employ the language of the *ancien régime* to differentiate between the "deserving" and "underserving" poor, the application of this division depends on who creates the distinction between these two categories. Institutions typically had formal, strict, and relatively uniform standards for deciding who was "worthy" of assistance and who was not. These same standards did not apply within unstructured, informal systems of care, such as those that existed in the context of the neighborhood. In these cases, the individual offering aid would personally evaluate the worthiness of the recipient and, thus, the final determination was subjective and situational. As Garrioch points out, an important aspect of community-based charity was the division between the "known" and "unknown" poor.[55] The general suspicion of strangers and the inclination to protect those recognized as "belonging" meant that neighbors were willing to assist one another but were often unwilling to extend that same charity to outsiders.

One was much more likely to be forced to resort to criminal activity or to be a victim of it

[55] Garrioch, *The Making of Revolutionary Paris*, 54.

as a migrant than as an established resident in Paris.[56] Consequently, pre-established links to local networks were especially important when a woman moved to a new village or city. If a woman migrated to Paris, as many unmarried women and men did in search of work or marital prospects, she typically did so with either a travelling companion or with the knowledge of a contact already living in the city. This contact was often another woman, usually a female relative, who would offer temporary or long-term lodging and access to local resources. Utilizing concepts from social network theory, this woman can be seen as a "node," as she acted as a bridge between her family network and the professional or social networks she established in Paris. As discussed in chapter one, a common occurrence born out of this pattern was the cohabitation of unmarried aunts and nieces. Such female contacts could be essential, especially if one wanted to avoid an early and desperate slide into prostitution.

A woman who chose to move to a new city without any contacts was vulnerable to deception as well. Without a network, one would be forced to accept help where one could find it, and those who offered assistance did not always do so with good intentions. This was the unfortunate lesson nineteen-year-old Charlotte Murotte learned on her first day in Paris in March 1778. Mademoiselle Murotte arrived in Paris with the intention of entering domestic service. Without assured housing or employment, she made her way to what she believed would be a temporary refuge, the Hôpital Sainte-Catherine. While it appears Mademoiselle Murotte lacked local contacts, her choice of this Hôpital demonstrates she did have important information on the resources available in her new city. The hospital's purpose in the eighteenth century reflected both the contemporary needs of the city as well as its namesake's protected patrons: it offered hospitality and protection for women and girls who arrived in Paris from the provinces.

The institution, run by Augustinian nuns called "*Catherinettes*," provided female

[56] Ibid., 60-61.

migrants with housing, food, and care during their first three nights in Paris. Occupancy was limited, as the hospital only had three large beds, and the number of visitors frequently exceeded the dormitory resources.[57] As one text from 1639 observed, "Sometimes the beds are so full that one must sleep several women between the two doors of the house where they are locked inside, for fear that they might commit wrongs or have some harm befall them in the night."[58] This was not an unwarranted concern by hospital administrators, as prostitution was frequent in the hospital's Saint-Denis neighborhood. Mademoiselle Murotte's arrival at the Hôpital Sainte-Catherine means she had contact with at least one individual during her journey who offered her important advice for her arrival in Paris.

The notoriety of this institution could be an asset as well as a liability. While women arriving from the provinces recognized it as a temporary refuge, Parisians knew it to be a site where one could find vulnerable women. This is evident in the case of Mademoiselle Murotte, who was approached by a female stranger at the Hôpital Sainte-Catherine. The woman offered Murotte housing and employment, the exact resources recent migrants required, especially those like Murotte, who had no apparent contacts or resources to establish herself. Murotte happily agreed and left the hospital with the woman, who even offered to lighten the young woman's load by carrying her sack of clothing. In the course of their journey to the woman's lodgings, she proposed they stop by a busy fair in the neighborhood of Saint Germain. There, the woman succeeded in loosing Murotte in the crowds, stealing her belongings in the process.[59] While even Parisians could be swindled or robbed, those like Murotte, who had to depend on the kindness of

[57] Christian Warolin, "L'hôpital et la chapelle Sainte-Catherine, rue Saint-Denis, et la confrérie des apothicaires de Paris," *Revue d'Histoire de la Pharmacie* 324 (1999): 419.

[58] R.P.F.J Du Breuil, *Le theater des antiquités de Paris* (Paris: Sté des Imprimeurs, 1639), 3: 710-718 quoted in Jean Cheymol, "L'hôpital Sainte-Catherine à Paris (1181-1794)," *Histoire des sciences médicales* 16, no. 4 (1982): 242.

[59] AN Y 13796, 11 March 1778.

strangers, were incredibly vulnerable to this type of scheme.

While proximity and local connections could offer the foundation for social immediacy and security, community was ultimately defined by accepted sets of behavioral codes. Adherence to these values, more than neighborhood boundaries or personal contacts, determined one's membership within a community and access to the resources it offered. As historian David Garrioch writes: "Membership in a community involves both familiarity with the others who belong and the acceptance of certain norms and behavioural expectations to which all the members generally conform."[60] Dinges has also detected this phenomenon within self-help networks in eighteenth-century France, emphasizing: "Reciprocity assumes a code of 'honest' behavior which makes it possible for the likelihood of a reciprocal gift to be calculated."[61] In other words, an individual must abide by certain rules to qualify as an acceptable partner for aid and association.

This was not an examination that, once passed, offered inclusion. Instead, this involved continuous demonstration of adherence and compliance. As Cashmere observes, "Communal identity was not a constant quality but could be dissolved and reconstituted in altered forms in quick succession, sometimes through communal ritual practice, at other times through communal struggle. The abiding suspicion of the individual was more constant in these face-to-face societies, particularly in relation to the marginalizing of members of the community."[62] In networks characterized by voluntary alliances, one had to maintain their reputations in order to sustain their relationships.

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[60] David Garrioch, *Neighbourhood and Community in Paris, 1740-1760* (Cambridge UP, 1986), 6.

[61] Dinges, 114.

[62] John Cashmere, "Sisters Together: Women Without Men in Seventeenth-Century French Village Culture," *Journal of Family History* 21, no. 1 (January 1996): 58.

However, if one had previously established oneself within a community as an "honorable" individual with a number of local associates, one was much more likely to receive aid even if they broke the accepted codes of moral behavior. This included, for example, unmarried women who became pregnant outside wedlock. When a singlewoman named Cornillon died in childbirth in 1676, for example, she had not declared her pregnancy to the police in a *déclaration de grossesse,* a statement that French law required women to submit to if they became pregnant outside of wedlock.[63] Despite her attempt at evading police and avoiding public attention, Cornillon was not alone when she went into labor. When the police responded to news of Cornillon's death, they found her sister and several of Cornillon's long-term associates at her bedside. This included one individual who knew her for four years, another for a period of seven years, and a third who claimed to have been friends with the deceased for approximately twenty-five years.[64] They claimed she had been seduced under the promise of marriage and, furthermore, that they knew the man who had impregnated and then abandoned her. Although Cornillon had diverged from the community's values and from the ideals of female virtue, her sister and friends remained by her side until the very end.

One can contrast this against the unfortunate case of Marie Anne Nesle, who gave birth to twins in March of 1760. Her neighbors conceded to send for the midwife, who helped Nesle safely deliver her two sons. The babies, however, were very sickly and the midwife and her assistant did not believe they would live long. The assistant brought one of the infants to the nearest church to have it baptized, serving as the baby's godmother and recruiting a man who just happened to be present at the time to appear as the child's godfather in the parish records. However, both babies died before she could repeat the process and have the second infant

[63] This requirement was first instituted by Henri II in a 1556 edict aimed at curbing infanticide.

[64] AN Y 15546, 26 June 1676.

baptized. After the deaths of her twins, Nesle begged her neighbors to bring their bodies to the parish to be interred, but they refused to take this risk for her. When she ventured to bring them herself, no one would lend her the funds to pay for the infants' burial. Crying outside of the church, she solicited the assistance of nearby woman, who took pity on the miserable mother holding the lifeless bodies of her two newborn babies. The woman did not know Nesle and, therefore, it was human sympathy, rather than social alliance, that led her to help. The two women put the infants' bodies in the basement crypt of the church, where they were found the next morning. Nesle was subsequently arrested on suspicion of infanticide. While she was able to prove that the children likely died of natural causes, she was still incarcerated at the prison of Petit Châtelet. The police asked Nesle a question that would appear logical given the nature of eighteenth-century sociability in Paris: "Why didn't [you] ask the neighbors to alert the parish of the infants' deaths?" Nesle's response demonstrated just how marginalized she was within her community: "everyone had abandoned her and none would offer her this service."[65]

The Power of Proximity: Singlewomen's Neighbors in Moments of Crisis

As can be seen in Nesle's case, singlewomen's neighbors were both essential and expected sources of interventional aid and daily support. Immediate neighbors, typically defined as those who shared a common apartment building, demonstrate the significant parallel that existed between proximity and reliability. The close living quarters found in Parisian apartment buildings promoted daily sociability, collective solidarity, and, for better or worse, easy surveillance of interpersonal interactions and individual behavior. As the following chapter will demonstrate, community supervision was a vehicle of social control that often punished unmarried women under the guise of protecting female virtue and public order. As singlewomen

[65] AN Y 9651, 7 March 1760.

appeared suspect, particularly when they were young and living away from their families, it was easy for standard observation, to which all were subject, to take the form of lay policing or even lewd voyeurism. As there could be no expectation of privacy, the most one could hope for was conviviality.

In many ways, however, the structure of the apartment building was also beneficial. It facilitated frequent interaction and, when necessary, immediate intervention. Residents shared common areas in their buildings, such as the stairway, the courtyard, the threshold to the building, the landing on its individual floors, and, in some cases, a communal kitchen located on the ground floor. Even when separated from one another in their individual apartments, residents were connected by architectural features: neighbors on the same floor had common walls; those fortunate enough to have chimneys were linked by their chutes; and one resident's ceiling was their upstairs neighbor's floor. The result, whether consciously pursued or simply a natural consequence of circumstances, was a sense of communality that could benefit all residents but would be especially important to those who lived alone or whose identities or conditions heightened the risks they faced.

Despite the fact that female wages rarely offered women the prospect of financial independence, especially on a long-term basis, many singlewomen lived alone. If an unmarried woman's apartment had more than one room, she often employed a domestic servant who resided there with her. When women lived alone, conversely, they were most often residing in what would be called a *petit cabinet*, a small one-room apartment, or, if their finances were severely limited, one of the makeshift apartments in the building's attic, which typically lacked

ventilation or insulation.[66] Neighbors looked out for unmarried women who lived alone, especially if they were aware that she was ill or elderly.

When a woman died, her neighbors often knew whether or not she had family and where her kin resided. Neighbors were typically the parties who requested welfare checks from the police when someone who lived alone, such as a singlewoman, deviated from her normal schedule or was conspicuously absent from public spaces. Even if they did not have close relationships with their neighbors, there appeared to be a strong sense of counter-responsibility for individuals who resided in the same building. For example, when Mademoiselle Jeanne Françoise Guyot, a mistress seamstress, suddenly fell gravely ill in January 1760, it was her neighbor who first noticed something was wrong. According to the depositions recorded in the police inquiry that followed Guyot's death, a female neighbor named Anne Salmon became worried for Guyot's welfare when she had not heard or seen her over the course of a night and the following morning. In her statement to the police, Salmon refers to her neighbor simply as "an aged singlewoman [*vieille fille*] by the name of Guyot." This vague identification suggests Salmon did not know Guyot well, as she does not include Guyot's first name, age, profession, or other specific information. She did, however, know where Guyot's nearest kin resided and when she decided her worries warranted action, Salmon went to the home of Guyot's sister-in-law, Marie Louise Bellot, whom she knew had a key to Guyot's room. When the women returned together to Guyot's building and entered her room, they found her "on the point of expiring." There was only enough time for Bellot to rush to Guyot's bedside and hold her in her arms one last time before Guyot died. The police noted that the small attic room Guyot resided in had no

[66] On Parisian apartments, residential buildings, and architectural developments during the Old Regime, see: Youri Carbonnier, *Maisons parisiennes des lumières* (Paris: PUPS, 2006) and "Housing and Accommodation" in Daniel Roche, *The People of Paris: An Essay in Popular Culture in the 18th Century,* Trans. Marie Evans and Gwynne Lewis (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 97-126.

paneling, and thus no insulation. The police commissioner suspected and a surgeon confirmed Guyot had died of "cold and need." While Guyot lacked the resources to address or resolve these issues, at least she did not meet the fate so many feared: a solitary and unmourned death.

It is interesting to note that other neighbors seemed better acquainted with the deceased than Salmon. Over the course of their investigation, the police learned that Guyot was a former mistress seamstress who no longer worked and was "very poor." In addition, they were told that she was over sixty years old at the time of her death and was a member of Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs Parish. Yet, it was Salmon who first became worried and decided to act on these concerns. It is possible this is because Salmon lived in the room next to Guyot's in the attic. She would be most likely to hear and see Guyot and would have experienced the same cold conditions as the deceased. Her circumstances paralleled Guyot's in other ways too, however. Like Guyot, she was also living alone, although she was a widow and Guyot was unmarried. They were also close in age, with Guyot reported to be over sixty years old and Salmon stating that she was fifty-five. It is therefore possible that Salmon chose to act because she was able to relate to Guyot's plight on a personal level, sharing her challenges and, perhaps, fearing that she would meet a similar fate.[67]

Neighbors also intervened when encounters involving unmarried women escalated to violence. For example, in 1773 a group of neighbors saved Marie Catherine Chenu when she was violently attacked by her male partner. Chenu had been living with Jean-Baptiste Daumont under the agreement they would marry but she decided to leave him after he began to drink excessively and abuse her on a daily basis. When she attempted to break off their relationship and remove her belongings from their apartment, he attacked her. Chenu called out for help, drawing the

[67] AN Y 9650, 21 January 1760.

attention of her neighbors, who pulled Daumont off of her and then brought him to the police to be arrested.[68]

When Elizabeth Lemaire opened her door to a stranger in 1754, she thought she was buying tobacco from a local merchant. Instead, she found herself suddenly assailed with furious blows. The man on the opposite side of the door quickly pushed his way into her apartment and physically overpowered her. He beat her with a wooden hammer and then, still unsatisfied with the damage he inflicted, he took out a knife and proceeded to stab her several times. At this point, Lemaire had "lost a considerable amount of blood" and was struggling to breathe. She feared she would die at the hands of this stranger. With all of the energy she could muster and with "the little courage she still had, she called out for her neighbors to help her." Hearing the neighbors coming to her aid, the man concluded his violent assault and quickly departed the scene.[69] The neighbors' intervention was not only instrumental in bringing the attack to an end, but it was essential to Lemaire's survival. In cases such as this, neighbors who protected singlewomen in these encounters often exposed themselves to violence. For some, however, a strong sense of solidarity exceeded any sense of self-preservation.

Unfortunately, however, this was not the case in all instances. Even when neighbors strained to witness what was taking place in unmarried women's lodgings, they could not always respond quickly enough to what was happening inside. This was the unfortunate reality Marguerite Bertrand faced on Christmas night of 1733. Bertrand lived in a lodging house where the apartments were divided by thin, makeshift walls made of wooden boards. As a result, the sounds from each room permeated the lodgings of nearby residents. While this was an uncontrollable consequence of the building's structure, the neighbors were not satisfied by mere

[68] AN Y 10787, 9 December 1773.

[69] AN Y 12959, 26 August 1754.

auditory evidence of what was occurring behind each apartment door. Instead, they sought to add visuals to the sounds they heard, to behold the scenes in full. They opened their doors slightly to better observe those who passed, even peering through cracks in the flimsy wooden dividers to see into adjoining rooms.[70]

That Christmas night, many neighbors witnessed Bertrand's interactions with her soldier fiancé, a brute whose visits were often accompanied by violence. Several neighbors not only noticed his frequentations, but watched his movements with attentive interest. Twenty-eight year old Marguerite Collard, who lived on the same floor as Bertrand, described to the police that Bertrand was "in her slippers" when she went to open the building door for her visitor, denoting, perhaps, a failed attempt at furtiveness. While she did not see Bertrand that night, other neighbors peered out from behind their cracked doors, and Collard "had heard she was naked, wearing only a chemise outside of her room."[71] The neighbors noted how long the soldier spent in Bertrand's apartment and, furthermore, how much of that time had been with the door closed. One woman could even describe his posture to the police, mentioning that he sat on Bertrand's bed "with his legs placed firmly on the floor." She may have been trying to lessen the implication for Bertrand's benefit, as her illustration seems to emphasize that he was sitting on the bed, not lying down.

The neighbors were so intent on beholding the encounter that they did not comprehend the scene unfolding before them. In their concentrated voyeurism, they believed they were observing a meeting between lovers. They would soon realize the terrible truth: they were bearing witness to a murder. None of the neighbors saw the soldier raise his sword that night. They did, however, hear Bertrand cry out before her body hit the ground. By the time they

[70] AN Y 11004 A, 25 December 1733; Y 10751, 25 December 1733.

[71] Ibid.

realized she needed help, it was far too late. Bertrand lay in her bed, still in only her chemise but now "bathed in blood."[72]

Several neighbors' statements shift almost imperceptibly at this point in the narrative. Whereas they portrayed the events leading to the crime from their own perspectives, they described the scene in Bertrand's room after her murder from information they apparently gathered secondhand. The transition was not simply discursive dissociation from the crime but evidence of their own withdrawal from the scene. Several who listened to Bertrand's death refused to enter her room after or even peer inside. Their appetite for knowledge was gone; they had witnessed enough. Bertrand's killer, meanwhile, made a swift departure from the scene of his terrible crime. He descended the stairs, left the building, and escaped into the darkness of the night. The police were unable to locate him and Bertrand's murder, if not unsolved, never received justice.[73]

Terrible cases like Bertrand's were, thankfully, rare. Yet, even as an anomaly, it offers important insight into the inner dynamics of the Parisian apartment building and the surveillance to which all residents, though especially unmarried women, were subject. The neighbors were not to blame, of course, for Bertrand's death. Culpability lay only with her murderer, a solider in the *garde française* known only as "Bellerose." Reconstructing the narrative from their police statements, however, demonstrates the intent surveillance of unmarried women who deviated from accepted behavioral codes. Some of the neighbors perceived Bertrand with quiet contempt, even after her death. Others, like a fourteen-year-old girl, observed what was happening that night with simple curiosity. Neighbors told police about previous encounters they witnessed

[72] Ibid.

[73] AN Y 11004 A, 18 May 1734; Y 11004 A, 25 December 1733; Y 10751, 25 December 1733.

between Bertrand and Bellerose. Some knew of his violent tendencies and may well have been ready to intercede that fateful night but didn't have an opportunity to do so.

Yet, not everyone felt a sense of solidarity and accountability for their neighbors. Louise Jacqueline Mahierre, who lived with her husband on the floor below Bertrand, illustrated in her police statement how the combination of curiosity and contempt could prompt active observation but not impetus for intercession. Mahierre described to the police an incident that occurred about three weeks before Christmas, during which she could hear Bellerose "mistreating Bertrand." On that occasion, she climbed the stairs to Bertrand's floor "to better understand what was happening." She did not intend to go into the victim's apartment, she told the police. Instead, she planned to enter the adjoining room to see if she could discern what was happening through the cracks in the dividing wall. When she reaching the landing of the first floor, however, she saw that veiled observation was unnecessary. Bertrand's door was open, offering her a view into the apartment, where one of the neighbors, a widow named Beauregard, "had separated Bertrand from Bellerose, to the extent that she could." Mahierre recalled that Bellerose "was apparently drunk and had fallen on the floor." As she silently took in the scene, the widow looked up from the struggle in which she was engaged and return Mahierre's gaze. Seeing her through the open door, the widow "instructed her to come help." Mahierre—who had climbed the stairs to better see what was happening, who planned to watch furtively through cracks in the wall, who would hear Bellerose abusing Bertrand on future occasions, who lay in her bed on Christmas night and listened to Bellerose's footsteps and Bertrand's cries from the floor above as he approached her with a sword in his hand—explained to the police why she did not concede to the widow's request on that day in early December of 1733. Her reasoning, however, also seems to explain

her inaction that Christmas night. She "did not know those people," Mahierre reported, "and did not want to know them."[74]

Neighborly Sociability and Support in Daily Life

Typically, however, neighbors did want to know one another. The assistance and sociability from nearby residents was vital to all individuals and cutting off social contacts meant limiting one's potential sources of support. Aid was typically informal and situational but small acts of care and support could be the difference between suffering and sustaining or, even, between life and death. When Demoiselle Marie Françoise Boisseau became ill, for example, her neighbor Sieur Denis allowed her to stay in his kitchen on the ground floor of their shared building so that she would not have to endure the painful exercise of walking up the stairs to her third floor apartment.[75]

Neighbors often lent small or even large sums of money to one another and also often took on the responsibility of paying for sick nurses and internment fees of those who lacked the personal funds or family resources support these costs. When Demoiselle Marie Joly fell ill in 1780, for example, she received two informal loans to help pay for medical services and her daily needs. As her sister recounted after her death, "in the first days of her illness" Joly borrowed sixty-two *livres* from "her friend and neighbor Dame Amebe." Later, she borrowed one hundred and eight *livres* from Monsieur Dufresne,[76] whom Joly described in her testament as "the son of my oldest friend." She used these funds to pay back Amebe and to continue providing for her medical care and daily sustenance during the period she was unable to work.

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[74] AN Y 11004 A, 26 March 1734.

[75] AN Y 12063, 19 January 1776.

[76] AN Y 11021 14 April 1780.

Both of these loans had been made "manually," meaning outside of the notarial office and, thus, the unofficial nature of the monetary exchange underlines the shared confidence between the individuals.[77]

Neighbors also engaged in the social rituals of daily life together, sharing meals and enjoying one another's company. When Germaine Pepin died in 1733, for example, her upstairs neighbor, a widow named Marie Anne Tuault, helped settle her postmortem affairs. Her reason for assuming this responsibility, she told police, was simple: "She consider herself to be [Pepin's] friend." Tuault told the police that the women "drank and ate" together frequently, a habit which led them to grow from mere neighbors into friends.[78] These seemingly small moments of sociability could, therefore, develop into long-term, meaningful relationships.

This is evident in the case of Mademoiselle Jeanne-Madeleine Chaumier, a seventy-four-year-old singlewoman who resided alone in a small third-floor apartment at the time of her death in 1762. Neighbors described Chaumier as a woman with a "delicate temperament," detailing that she suffered from "weak eyesight and legs" and frequent attacks of the "*vapeurs*." Yet despite Chaumier's advanced age and poor health, her death had been entirely preventable. While trying to keep warm amid the winter chill one December night, Chaumier made the mistake of drawing too close to the hearth. She caught fire and, without anyone to help stamp it out or call for aid, she burned to death in her room, alone.[79] Despite this sad end, Chaumier did not live in solitude or marginalization. Instead, she had a wide network of associates, which

[77] Ibid.

[78] AN Y 10751, 12 November 1733.

[79] AN Y 11348, 15 December 1762.

included community members, friends, coworkers, and kin.[80] The most central members of Chaumier's support system, however, were the two singlewomen who occupied the apartment above her own: Elizabeth Charlotte Regnault and Marie Anne Duverly. While the three women shared no formal bonds, their daily practices of sociability, communality, and reciprocity fundamentally shaped their individual experiences and collective existence.

The records from after Chaumier's death illustrate that these singlewomen were inextricably linked—not through familial ties but through corresponding circumstances. All were older singlewomen, aged 50, 62, and 74. They engaged in practices of professional collaboration, as the two younger women were mistress seamstresses who gave Chaumier daily work to facilitate her financial sustenance. Finally, they shared meals and also helped one another with household responsibilities and expenses. As Chaumier's weak legs made it difficult for her to go up and down the stairs easily, Regnault and Duverly brought her meals and dined with her on a daily basis. They also checked on her when they entered or left the building. As a result of this practice, they were the ones who discovered she had died. Due to their intimate knowledge and familiarity with her practices and residence, they were even able to take the police and medical officials through the apartment and point to what was out of place, observations which helped clarify how Chaumier had caught fire that night.

Although Chaumier had many local associates, as well as several nieces and nephews living in Paris, she only mentions three legatees in her will: Regnault, Duverly, and her goddaughter. Chaumier left Renault and Duverly personal possessions, the arrears from her life annuity, and additional sums of money "in recognition of the services and kindness [they] have

[80] Ibid.

offered me for many years."[81] Chaumier's financial bequests appear especially significant, as the records indicate her nieces and nephews believed they would inherit these funds as her familial heirs. Chaumier instead proactively prioritized social bonds over familial ties in her inheritance choices. Yet, the small bequests Chaumier made were equally noteworthy: she gave Renault and Duverly all of her kitchenware, goods that would have little resale value to others but would maintain special significance to their recipients. Every time Renault and Duverly used them, they would be reminded of the meals they once shared with Chaumier, a collective practice they enjoyed together every day for many years.

Singlewomen's Support Networks and Local Solidarity

The study of singlewomen's mixed economies of care and non-familial relationships offers new understandings of unmarried women's experiences in the early modern period. Ultimately, this approach highlights the importance of community alliances, the prevalence of non-traditional household structures, and the ways female autonomy could be achieved within a highly patriarchal society. In this way, singlewomen's informal networks of care and relationships with friends, coworkers, and neighbors disrupt prominent notions of *la femme seule* by exposing how the presumption of singlewomen's marginalization was based upon the singlewoman's deviation from the normative female lifecycle, rather than her dissociation from society. It is clear that the singlewoman was not alone, but had social networks that could offer security and stability in both her daily life and in moment of crisis. Unmarried women tapped into and contributed to local systems of support at the interpersonal and institutional level, facilitating the circulation of care and even reform in a city undergoing immense change. In particular, however, their community alliances demonstrate how singlewomen were able to exist

[81] AN MC Étude XXIV 783, 25 January 1763.

outside the normative structure of the nuclear family and deviate from the traditional and expected female roles of wife and mother while remaining integrated and important members of early modern French society.

CHAPTER THREE

Sexual Honor as Social Capital:

Unmarried Women's Reputations as Sites of Conflict and Sources of Support

In the late eighteenth century, Parisian printer Simon Calvarin republished a sixteenth-century play entitled, *Nouvelle moralité d'une pauvre fille villageoise, laquelle aima mieux avoir la tête coupée par son père que d'être violée par son Seigneur* or "The new morality of a poor village girl who would prefer to have her head cut off by her father than be violated by her lord."[1] The work centers on a young peasant maiden who lives with her widowed father in ineludible poverty but happy harmony. Their peaceful household is thrown into turmoil when the daughter becomes the object of her local lord's desire. This interloper is not an honest suitor seeking marriage, but a licentious oppressor who believes his status and wealth entitle him to subservience in all forms, especially from his most vulnerable subjects. He knows the daughter is a virgin but cares only for his personal gratification and, thus, commands her sexual compliance. In return, he offers to provide her with expensive gifts and a suitable marriage arrangement with another man, a proposal he believes will appeal to the poor family. The daughter and her father, however, vehemently reject this proposition, preferring to remain in virtuous poverty than live, as the daughter says, with "beautiful trimmings" on a "ruined body."[2]

Their staunch refusal incenses the lord, who threatens to compel their submission by forceful seizure and violent incapacitation. Recognizing his resolve and her own dilemma, the daughter asks her father to cut off her head so she may die with her honor intact. When he refuses to carry out this request, the maiden is left to decide between suicide, meaning eternal

[1] *Nouvelle moralité d'une pauvre fille villageoise, laquelle aima mieux avoir la teste coupée par son père, que d'être violée par son seigneur* (Paris: chez Simon Calvarin, c. 1799-1802), 29.

[2] *Nouvelle moralité*, 21.

damnation, and submission, the choice to live but always in disgrace. She ultimately determines, "I will die by my own hand before my honor suffers injury."[3] The lord, seeing the maiden's conviction, is ultimately placated. Rather than see her head cut off, he instead adorns it with a crown of flowers. He extols her "invincible chastity" and rewards her "meritorious honor" by enriching her father and freeing them both from servitude.[4]

The decision to republish *Nouvelle moralité* in the wake of the Revolution may have stemmed from its timely critique of the immoral and despotic aristocracy. Indeed, the play's characterization of the *seigneur* perfectly captured late eighteenth-century condemnation for the nobleman who, in the words of Tocqueville, "loved to console himself for the loss of his real power by the immoderate use of his apparent rights."[5] Yet, the lord's acquiescence at the end of the narrative is not meant to represent the aristocracy's potential for redemption. Instead, it serves as a vehicle for highlighting the final victory of virtue over vice.

While a great deal changed between the play's debut in the sixteenth century and its republication at the end of the eighteenth century, one aspect of French society that remained consistent in its cultural significance and social definition was female honor. Discourse on political order, domestic life, and social mores from this period frequently highlighted the importance of women's virtue, which was defined as sexual in nature and familial in orientation. As in *Nouvelle Moralité*, a woman's virginity was believed to be her most prized asset, one which deserved protection and evoked praise. Her adherence to the moral standard of premarital chastity represented the most fundamental indication of her social value and personal success. A

[3] Ibid., 32.

[4] Ibid., 38.

[5] Alexis de Tocqueville, *L'Ancien Régime,* trans. M. W. Patterson (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1947), 96, quoted in Carol Blum, R*ousseau and the Republic of Virtue: The Language of Politics in the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1986), 25.

woman's worthiness as an individual and as a member of the broader public depended on her conformance to the gendered moral codes that defined "honest" society. Her sexual virtue was, therefore, the key to her successful progression through the social rites of womanhood, especially marriage and motherhood. Yet, the significance of female virginity also stemmed from its fragility; it was treasured, in part, because it was irreplaceable. Above all inducements, most believed that singlewomen should follow the prescription of premarital chastity because it was, ultimately, in their best interest to do so.

At the same time, however, an unmarried woman's virtue did not belong to her alone. Instead, it was collectively shared, protected, and governed by her family and especially its patriarch. Members of a kin group were obliged to invest in the protection of female honor because its results, for better or worse, were often experienced communally. As discussed in chapter one, most believed a virtuous daughter would marry well, forming an alliance that could offer the entire family access to social mobility and economic security. A daughter whose behavior was disreputable, conversely, opened her kin up to threats as irrevocable as her own dishonor. Her disgrace would be projected onto her family, reducing their collective respectability, draining their social capital, and, if she was unable to marry as a result, becoming a long-term financial liability to her kin. *Nouvelle Moralité* highlights this dynamic by representing the direct correlation between the daughter's honor and her father's fate: her potential disgrace seems to predicate his devastation; her successful resistance induces his enrichment. Ultimately, the text reinforces the importance of this gendered moral principle and its subsumptive subjugation to familial authority by suggesting that an unmarried woman should be willing to die—even by her father's hand—before she relinquishes her virtue.

Although the narrative accurately represents the links between singlewomen's honor, sexual morality, and family dignity, it fails to depict the myriad of threats and far-reaching consequences unmarried women faced in relation to their virtue. Indeed, *Nouvelle Moralité* offers a limited, highly insular view of the daughter's dilemma, which takes place in the text through personal and familial estimations that weigh the value of honor against the price of disgrace. In the tale, the only omnipresent "other" who waits in expectant judgment is God, whose divine pronouncement offers the daughter the choice between earthly defilement and eternal damnation. While she ultimately chooses to die with virtue rather than live in dishonor, the daughter never specifies what the latter option would entail or the source from which worldly suffering would spring. The reader is left to believe that its intolerability would stem from the crushing weight of personal shame, which would be brought on by one's conscious deviation from religious convictions and family values.

What the play does not represent is the public stage on which singlewoman's sexual honor was asserted and coopted, performed and contested, and, ultimately, attacked and defended. As this chapter will illustrate, in early modern France unmarried women's sexuality evoked public distrust and even provoked social aversion. Consequently, singlewomen had to protect themselves from more than just the corporal threats of seduction, pregnancy, and sexual violence. They also had to defend themselves against accusations of sexual misconduct and the damage inflected by mere insinuations of impropriety.

In this way, female honor was defined not only by private virtue but also by public reputation. As singlewomen in early modern France knew well, the village maiden's neighbors, friends, enemies, coworkers, and community members could impact her honor as greatly as the local lord. The belief that singlewomen were vulnerable to sexual scandal both justified

communal suspicion of unmarried women and encouraged public surveillance of their activities and relationships. Ultimately, singlewomen's sexual morality was socially constructed, collectively evaluated, and interminably evoked as either proof of respectability or the grounds for condemnation. As evidenced by its deployment as a weapon in personal attacks and its defense by singlewomen in legal filings, sexual honor was not merely a private asset imbued with religious principles, familial associations, and metaphysical implications, but also a social characteristic defined by independent behavior, public perception, and community status.

While the definition of female honor remained consistent between the initial writing and the later republication of *Nouvelle Moralité,* several developments during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries impacted the regulation of sexual morality, particularly in relation to unmarried women. This chapter will demonstrate how these changes impacted public opinion, leading not only to widespread associations between singlewomen's sexuality and social disorder but also frequent invocations of immorality during interpersonal conflicts. In response, unmarried women in eighteenth-century Paris utilized the burgeoning municipal bureaucracy to protect their reputations. Specifically, they employed legal protections and official processes to publicize their repudiation of these charges and to inhibit further harm by their detractors. Through these means, unmarried women both recognized and reinforced public valuations of female virtue but resisted its use as a vehicle for their own marginalization.

Early Modern Perspectives on Singlewomen, Sex, and Honor

In early modern France, public discourse on singlewomen's sexuality focused on two coexisting perspectives: an appreciation of its benefits and a fear of its consequences. These views were especially prevalent during the imagined population crisis of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when French contemporaries considered the potential impact of

singlewomen's sexual behavior. Some cited singlewomen as contributors to population decline, while others believed they could help end the crisis if directed toward socially productive—i.e. biologically reproductive—ends.

Populationists attempted to promote the growth of the French kingdom and the spread of social stability by encouraging marriage and procreation. One manifestation of this goal was a series of pronatalist laws that promoted marital fertility among French subjects. Beginning with the 1666 "Edict on Marriage," the monarchy offered financial incentives to French subjects who married before the age of twenty and to fathers with more than ten living, legitimate children.[6] While the edit was revoked in 1683, the custom of rewarding *familles nombreuses* [large families] with tax exemptions continued in many regions. The royal government reinstituted its pronatalist program in 1760, which remained in place through the fall of the monarchy in 1789.[7] Throughout this period, authorities encouraged singlewomen to marry by providing charitable contributions for this purpose. As detailed in the preceding chapter, the funds designated to singlewomen by royal and religious institutions typically restricted their use to dowry purposes.

Similar projects took place in the colonies, as both royal administrators and commercial companies recruited metropolitan singlewomen to travel to French settlements in modern-day Canada, Louisiana, and the French Antilles. The goal of this enterprise was to support colonial growth and stability by encouraging marriage and reproduction between French subjects. Officials believed the success of this initiative hinged on the ability to import *honorable* women. As a result, they expressed their concern with protecting female virtue during the transatlantic journeys. Indeed, when a convoy of one hundred and fifty women from Salpêtrière Hospital

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[6] Leslie Tuttle, *Conceiving the Old Regime: Pronatalism and the Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 4.

[7] Tuttle, *Conceiving the Old Regime,* 127.

arrived in Martinique in 1680, the governor was instructed, "Her Majesty [Queen Maria Theresa] wants you to take care of said girls until they are married."[8] The French crown prioritized the sexual virtue of the women and, thus, placed them under royal protection during their journeys.

Colonial administrators in Louisiana were especially interested in the importation of young, marriageable women, whom they imagined would encourage stable agricultural communities. The early years of the colony had been plagued by hostile relations with local indigenous tribes, rampant disease, poor soil, and unruly male colonists who often deserted their positions and settlements.[9] One French bureaucrat was forthright in his proposed solution to this issue, writing, "There are . . . young men and soldiers who are in a position to undertake farms; it is necessary for them to have wives. I know only this one way to settle them."[10] When the first ship carrying recruited women left France for Louisiana in 1704, the French Minister of the Marine wrote to the colonial governor to inform him that the female arrivals met these desired qualifications. He relayed that the women had "been brought up in virtue and piety" and knew "how to work." His letter indicates the importance of the female virtue to this endeavor in the inclusion of an additional assurance that the women were of "recognized and irreproachable virtue."[11] In September of that year, the governor confirmed the venture's success, reporting, "all the girls have married Canadians and others who are in a position to support them."[12]

Encouraged by this initial success and, later, by the ambitious colonial plans of French

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[8] Bambuck, *Histoire de la Martinique,* 286, cited in Jacques Roget, "Les femmes des colons à la Martinique au XVIe et XVIIe siècle," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 9, no. 2 (1955): 211.

[9] Emily Clark, ed., *Voices from an Early American Convent: Marie Madeleine Hachard and the New Orleans Ursulines, 1727-1760* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 10.

[10] Commissaire Ordonnateur Jean-Baptiste Martin d'Artaguiette to Jérôme Phélypeux, comte de Pontchartrain, Minister of the Marine, February 12, 1710, cited in Jennifer M. Spear, *Race, Sex, and Social Order in Early New Orleans* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 18.

[11] Pontchartrain to Bienville, January 30, 1704 cited in Spear, *Race, Sex, and Social Order,* 47.

[12] Bienville to Pontchartrain, September 6, 1704, cited in Spear, *Race, Sex, and Social Order,* 47.

financier John Law, officials continued the practice of transporting Frenchwomen to Louisiana. However, successive shipments often prioritized marriageability and availability over personal characteristics in the selection of female transports. Popular sites of exportation included Parisian hospitals and prisons. Some of the women were recruited for transportation, incentivized by offers of better lives and by material provisions they would carry in small trunks, leading them to be called *filles de la cassette* or "casket girls."[13] Other women were deported after being arrested in Paris or port cities, disembarking in Louisiana alongside rumors of their immorality.

When these arrivals proved less effective in promoting marriage, colonial officials blamed the failure on the women's lack of virtue. As colonist Nicolas-Michel Chassin observed in 1722, "The Company [of the West] has already sent four or five hundred girls, but officers and those who hold any rank cannot make up their minds to marry such girls." Chassin wrote that, "in addition to the bad reputations they bring from France," some feared the women also brought "remnants of infirmaries of which they have been imperfectly healed."[14] These characterizations of the women, as well the common conflation of female criminality with sexual promiscuity, led to the presumption that all of the women were prostitutes and some may even be carrying sexually transmitted illnesses.[15] These rumors persisted despite the fact that some of the female migrants had been rounded up after being charged with begging or theft, while others had acquiesced to recruitment because they were orphans with no better prospects. The continued social disorder in Louisiana was thus not only attributed to unmarried women, but specifically to their lack of sexual honor.

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[13] Spear, *Race, Sex, and Social Order,* 48.

[14] Cited in Ibid, 49.

[15] See, for example, Abbé Prévost's narrative of Manon Lescault in *Histoire du Chevalier des Grieux, et de Manon Lescaut* (1731).

In both the colonies and in the metropole, it was clear that contemporaries believed sexual virtue was far more important in unmarried women than in unmarried men. While bachelors were also admonished for their single status and sexual behavior, the criticism they received typically centered on how these factors led them to evade their social and political responsibilities. An unmarried man's sexual honor was rarely called into question or cited as a contributing cause of his continued singleness. Furthermore, as in the context of the colonies, writers in France often cited singlewomen's immorality as the reason men chose bachelorhood over marriage. In his eighteenth-century text *Tableau de Paris,* Louis-Sébastien Mercier described unmarried women in Paris as "enjoying their licentious libertinage, which brings no profit to the population except to make an infinite amount of unmarried girls."[16] He reasoned that any increase in the city's population of bachelors could be attributed to singlewomen's poor lifestyle choices. As Mercier proclaimed, "men no longer marry or do so only with regret. What a reversal in the social order! And what is the remedy to this political vice?"[17] Through this discourse, Mercier depicted sexually promiscuous singlewomen as endangering family relations, cultural norms, gender order, and pronatalist intentions. Their dishonor, according to Mercier, was not only a personal failing but also a "political vice."[18] In this way, singlewomen represented a formidable threat to the power, status, and stability of entire the French kingdom.

The discourse on sex and singleness during this period demonstrated that the regulation of singlewomen's honor was necessary for both public order and social stability. However, not all agreed with Mercier's depiction of singlewomen as intentionally unmarried and willfully promiscuous. In fact, most believed that the dangers presented by singlewomen stemmed from

[16] Louis Sébastien Mercier, *Tableau de Paris* (Dublin: J. and W. Porter, 1782) II: 230.

[17] Mercier, *Tableau de Paris,* II: 231.

[18] Ibid.

their inherent vulnerability. As sexual honor was the defining attribute of female respectability, its loss seemed to promise an inevitable and wretched fate. The prevailing narrative proposed that if an unmarried woman were to engage in sexual relations, she risked losing all access to support and security. If her parents were to discover her sin, they might deny her all future support or even have her locked up. If she became pregnant, her lover might abandon her, either by choice or because his family would not consent to their marriage. An unmarried pregnant woman would have few options to support herself and her unborn child, as employers risked their own reputations in hiring or maintaining a dishonorable woman. Even if she were to find work, an unmarried woman was unlikely to earn enough to sustain both herself and her child. As Parisian orphanages and hospitals were structured only to support children born within wedlock, most believed the single mother would be forced to abandon her child or even to take its life. Even if she did not become pregnant, the loss of her reputation would make a future in any "respectable" profession impossible and she would have to engage in prostitution to survive. French writer Simon-Nicolas-Henri Linguet bleakly proposed that the dishonored singlewoman's death would be as miserable as her life, writing, "[she] will die on the dung-heap, unhappy, forgotten, treated like the last excrement of nature: *voilà*."[19]

As has been established in the preceding chapters, this narrative was intentionally prescriptive and, therefore, fails to capture historical realities of single life in early modern France, where unmarried couples lived together, singlewomen raised children, and community members tolerated commercial and recreational sex as long as it did not impact them personally. At the same time, the ubiquitous association of the singlewoman with sexual promiscuity, pregnancy outside of wedlock, prostitution, infanticide, and destitution made her a conspicuous figure who encouraged surveillance and invoked suspicion. The interconnected and linear nature

[19] Simon-Nicolas-Henri Linguet, *Oeuvres de M. Linguet* (London, 1774), II: 69.

of these states, as well as the seemingly fragile foundation on which they rested, meant that unmarried women appeared perched on the precipice of scandal and disaster. As this fall seemed so plausible and its results were so damaging, the suppression of singlewomen's sexual activity appeared to be a matter of public interest.

These attitudes were especially prevalent in the French capital, which seemed to represent the epicenter of vice and disorder. Significantly, the period in which criticism and fears concerning singlewomen's sexual behavior intensified aligned seamlessly with époque of transformation in Paris. From the beginning of Louis XIV's personal reign in 1661 through the end of the eighteenth century, the French capital became the site of momentous bureaucratic development, institutional change, and structural transformations. The process of "cleaning up" the city impacted Parisian singlewomen of all classes, who faced increasing levels of scrutiny and surveillance. Laboring unmarried women were undoubtedly targeted more frequently and punished more severely than those of bourgeois or elite backgrounds due to their inclusion in the "dangerous classes" and their frequent association with prostitution. Yet, all singlewomen were subject to expanded forms of social, familial, and institutional control. Elite families used *lettres de cachet* to punish wayward daughters, while the Parisian police developed new departments that had the specific task of keeping up-to-date dossiers on women believed to be connected to immorality, including actresses, dancers, singers, *filles galantes* of the *demimonde*, brothel madams, and infamous workers in the world of sexual commerce.[20]

[20] BA MS10234, "*Les relations des filles galantes, des actrices, danseuses et cantatrices de Paris*"; BA MS10235-10237, "*Bulletins de police sur la vie privée des actrices, danseuses et cantatrices de Paris*. Années 1749-1758"; BA MS10238-10242, "*Bulletins rédigés par l'inspecteur de police Meusnier sur la vie des filles galantes de Paris les plus remarquées*. Années 1749-1758." On madams, see: Kathryn Norberg, "In Her Own Words: An Eighteenth-Century Madam Tells Her Story," in *Prostitution and Eighteenth-Century Culture: Sex, Commerce and Morality*, eds. Ann Lewis and Markman Ellis (New York: Routledge, 2012), 33–44. On the *demimonde,* see: Nina Kushner, *Erotic Exchanges: The World of Elite Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2013).

Parisian institutions also prioritized singlewomen as they attempted to contain and curb the city's heightened problems. The primary sites of development in the French capital during the long eighteenth century addressed issues that were frequently linked to singlewomen within public discourse: foundlings, sexual disease, and immorality. For example, at the beginning of the eighteenth century there were three main institutions for orphaned or abandoned children in Paris: La Trinitié, l'Hôpital des Enfants Trouvés, also known as "*La Couche*," and l'Hôpital des Enfants Rouges. During the eighteenth century, all three institutions expanded and another, the Maison du Faubourg St. Antoine, was added to accommodate the rapidly rising numbers of needy, abandoned, and orphaned children in the French capital.[21] In addition, new institutions were created to control the city's population of prostitutes and other sexual libertines, such as Salpêtrière Hospital in the seventeenth century and the Prison of *La Petite Force* in the late eighteenth century. Bicêtre Hospital dedicated most of its efforts from 1750-1792 to treating and controlling the spread of venereal disease.[22] At every turn, Parisians were told they were facing rising problems of a sexual nature and, at each corner, the signposts all seemed to point to one source of these issues: singlewomen.

The supervision and control of singlewomen's sexual honor thereby emerged as a collective responsibility undertaken for the common good. Families, community members, and local authorities independently and collaboratively imbued these attitudes in their encounters with unmarried women. As these groups asserted their right to monitor singlewomen's sexual behavior, unmarried women experienced the ramifications of public distrust. Singlewomen found that their sexual honor was not only subject to suspicion but also vulnerable to attack. In the

[21] Fuchs, *Abandoned Children,* 9.

[22] Susan Conner, "The Pox in Eighteenth-Century France," in *The Secret Malady: Venereal Disease in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France*, ed. Linda E. Merians (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 15-33.

complaints they filed with Parisian police commissioners in the eighteenth century, singlewomen reveal that maintaining their honor was not just a matter of preserving their virginity. They also had to protect their reputations from charges of immorality. Amidst spreading discourse and popular contempt, unmarried women recognized that establishing and sustaining public respectability could be far more difficult—and important—than simply remaining chaste.

Singlewomen's Sexuality, Public Respectability, and the Law

For singlewomen, sexual honor was a prerequisite of social membership and public credibility. In order to build and maintain relationships within their communities, singlewomen had to be recognized as acting in accordance with the rules that governed and defined "honest" society. Adherence to these values, more than neighborhood boundaries, family membership, or personal contacts, determined one's membership within a community and access to the resources it offered.[23] With few institutions oriented toward public assistance, limited access to financial viability, and a familial group more limited in size and structure than those of wives or widows, singlewomen depended heavily on assistance and support from local allies. As these relationships were voluntary in nature, they were typically predicated on trust. The parties involved had to establish that they merited association. For unmarried women who lived apart from their families and sustained themselves independently, maintaining public respectability was more than simply a matter of decorum. Community acceptance was essential for survival. Therefore, singlewomen's sexual honor was a vital aspect of their social capital.

Furthermore, an unmarried woman's sexual conduct defined her reputation because its social implications were public, rather than personal. As sexual dishonesty could lead to social disorder, the suppression of immorality was a matter of civic importance. Community gossip

[23] David Garrioch, *Neighbourhood and Community*, 5-6.

regarding singlewomen operated as a form of collective surveillance and social control. Neighbors commonly exchanged observations of unmarried women's conduct and speculated on the nature of their interpersonal relationships. Public evaluations of their behavior could even unintentionally lead to rumors of their sexual misconduct. However, neighborhood gossip was not always malicious in its intent. According to social psychologist Nicolas Elmer, "a fundamental purpose of gossip as social observation is to make reputational inquires. The continual activity of gossip allows individuals and communities to accumulate behavioral evidence about others and to form and refine judgments about their vices and virtues."[24] In this way, gossip was a mechanism for evaluating others that could be born out of self-interest or mere curiosity, rather than distrust or derision.

As in the instances of neighborly intervention outlined in the preceding chapter, the accumulation of information about an unmarried woman could be beneficial. Communal knowledge about a singlewoman could be employed to her advantage, for example, if she needed to offer evidence of virtuous behavior and an honest reputation. This was a requirement of successful seduction cases, wherein pregnant singlewomen alleged that they had only engaged in sexual activity because they had been seduced under the promise of marriage. This was not only a popular defense against the social charges of sexual impropriety, but also a tactical one. Under French law, verbal promises of marriage were legitimate pacts with legal implications. These cases presumed that a woman only engaged in premarital sex due to her vulnerability to deception, rather than her inclination for immorality. Women in seduction suits framed their honor as a valuable attribute that, once lost, could not be replaced through alternate means. The intention of a seduction case was therefore to compel a man to either fulfill his promises of

[24] Nicolas Elmer, "Gossip, Reputation, Adaptation," in *Good Gossip,* eds. Robert F. Goodman and Aaron Ben-Ze'ev (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991)*,* 133.

marriage or pay financial damages so the woman could support their child. As the eighteenth-century French legal theorist Jean-François Fournel observed, "In demanding damages and interests, the girl does not solicit the price of her dishonor. What she demands is compensation for the breach of a legal pact; in this manner, if the seducer offers to fulfill his promise, she finds herself without action."[25] Monetary compensation therefore only mitigated the damage caused by one's dishonor. As only marriage allowed a woman to recover her virtue, the French courts prioritized this result. As Fournel specified, if a man offered marriage to the seduced woman as a response to her complaint, this became the only possible outcome to the case. She could either accept his proposal or receive nothing.

Prior to 1730, the crime of *rapt de séduction* proposed a very different set of outcomes: if the woman did not agree to marry her seducer, he could be put to death.[26] After Louis XV issued a royal ordinance abolishing the use of capital punishment in these cases, the law maintained that the case's resolution would continue to fall under the female litigant's purview. However, while the choice was still, theoretically, hers to make, there was no longer an option that punished the male party if he consented to marry her. Should this occur, a "successful" case no longer gave the woman an option to reject him. Interestingly, eighteenth-century jurists saw this change as advantageous to the seduced party, as the severity of the death penalty made it difficult to secure a conviction. Guyot, for example, noted that the former system, "often punished the seduced individual and rewarded the seducer."[27] The true benefit of this change, however, lay in its

[25] Jean-François Fournel, *Traité de la séduction considérée dans l'ordre judiciaire* (Paris: Demonville, 1781), 9-10.

[26] Adrienne Rogers, "Women and the Law," in *French Women and the Age of Enlightenment,* ed. Semia I. Spencer (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984), 41.

[27] Guyot, "Rapt" in *Répertoire universel et raisonné de jurisprudence,* 14:454.

support of populationist goals, as the cases now encouraged marriage as well as the legitimization of offspring who would otherwise be considered bastards.[28]

Throughout the eighteenth century, however, the success of a seduction case depended on a woman's ability to prove two things: that the man made promises of marriage before the sexual encounter and that, up to that point, she was an "honest" woman.[29] Community alliances, social capital, and even neighborhood gossip could thus be harnessed to the singlewoman's benefit. Friends, family, neighbors, and even passing acquaintances would be questioned by the police commissioner during the investigation to help establish whether or not these two factors could be established. Very few women, particularly those from the working class, had the ability to provide physical proof of marital promises or intentions. While family members could make statements in support of a singlewoman's claim, their own interest in the case made their testimony less reliable than non-kin witnesses. As a result, unmarried women often relied on their neighbors to testify to what they had seen and heard in their daily encounters, such as details of the man's frequentations of the woman, the fact that he was the only man she was seeing, and discourse they heard either directly from the involved parties or indirectly from others that the two intended to marry.

If a woman's conduct was otherwise above reproach, witnesses could also help verify that she had been honorable before and even during her sexual activity with the man. This was essential because, as the legal theorist Fournel asserted, one had to establish that the sexual encounter was "a licit affair undertaken in accordance with good morals."[30] This would be

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[28] Rachel Fuchs, "Paternity, and the Law in Fin de Siècle France ," *The Journal of Modern History* 72, no. 4 (December 2000): 944-989; Jillian Slaight, "Resisting Seduction and Seductive Resistance: Courtroom Conflicts over Consent in the Late Eighteenth Century," *Journal of the Western Society for French History* 42 (2014): 55-64.

[29] Fournel, *Traité de la séduction*, 9-10.

[30] Ibid., 8.

hindered if the woman had a reputation for sexual promiscuity. If there was any insinuation that she might be a prostitute, the claim of seduction would be entirely without weight because "she could not reasonably request damages and interests because she could not expect a promise of marriage" and because "the pregnancy of a prostitute does not impact her reputation, as she has nothing left to lose."[31] These cases also show the situational definition of female honor in French courts and communities. While prescriptively and discursively, female honor was defined by morality and chastity, the reputation, circumstances, and social standing of a woman could mitigate her sin and frame her "dishonest" act as one undertaken with honorable intentions.[32]

French law also allowed for the recovery of one's honor in cases involving defamation, which fell under the broader charge of "injury." Unlike in seduction cases, singlewomen filing these types of complaints asserted that they had been dishonored by implication rather than by action. In other words, they claimed that assertions made about them in public were both false and injurious. Most cases centered on sexually implicit insults that tarnished an unmarried woman's reputation and, therefore, her prospects more broadly. Attacks on a woman's public character typically focused on sexual themes and insults, regardless of her marital status. Sexual morality was not only the attribute valued most in women; it was also the feature that defined female honesty. As a result, insults used against women almost always contained sexual inferences because they most clearly demonstrated a deviation from ideal female behavior. Therefore, the use of language such as "*gueuse* [wench]," "*putain* [whore]," or "*coureuse* [loose

[31] Ibid., 31.

[32] Véronique Demars-Sion, *Femmes séduites et abandonee au XVIIIe siècle, l'exemple du Cambrésis* (Hellemes: L'Espace Juridique, 1991); Danielle Haase-Dubosc, *Ravie et enlevée: De l'enlèvement des femmes comme stratégie matrimoniale au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 1999); Marie-Claude Phan, "Les déclarations de grossesse en France (XVIe-XVIIIe siècles)," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 22, no. 1 (January – March 1975): 61-88; Georges Vigarello, *Histoire du viol du XVIe au XXe siècle* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1998).

woman]" would be used to delineate any form of misconduct committed by a woman, even non-sexual transgressions. The insult was gendered even when the wrongdoing was not.

Such language could take the form of a reproach, one intended to call the subject's attention to her improper behavior and, thereby, prompt the rectification of her conduct. However, when evoked in front of an audience of the subject's known or potential associates, these attacks undoubtedly aimed to punish the woman. In these latter instances, the insults were not merely expressions of personal disapproval but represented attempts to incite more widespread condemnation. Whether the denouncer consciously implied sexual dishonesty or the audience, lacking context for the confrontation, simply assumed this was the misconduct being alluded to, the subject's association with immorality could impact her social status, economic stability, and, as a result, her ability to survive. The focus in such cases was therefore on harm, rather than intention. However, being able to demonstrate that an adversary's goal was to inflict injury would bolster evidence that one suffered harm.

Laws concerning "injury" were not gender specific. Men also filed these types of complaints, although the insults levied against them focused predominantly on the ideals of male behavior, and, therefore, typically related to men's trustworthiness in business and civic matters. At the same time, jurists recognized the need to provide legal recourse in cases that specifically involved sexual insults against women. As eighteenth-century lawyer François Dareau observed:

> Society should not be indifferent to women's reputation. Morals and education oblige them to live with more decency and restraint than men. Their principal merit is their virtue: often it is the only thing for which they are valued and sought out. If one manages to discredit them in the hearts and minds of men, all is lost for them. Excluded from offices, dignities, and ranks, their ambition is limited to a husband who secures their glory and their happiness: but how will they obtain it if insult and calumny take away from

> them the precious treasure with which they can to acquire it, their honor and reputation?[33]

While Dareau did not mention unmarried women specifically, he is clearly referring to them in the quotation above. Indeed, they were the social group most vulnerable to this type of injury because they had yet to marry and, therefore, had not secured "their ambition" or the benefits it purportedly provided.

Therefore, when subject to sexually-oriented insults, unmarried women had to mitigate potential harm by matching the public nature of the charges with equally public defenses of their honor. One's performative refutation was as important a component of sexual honor as one's embodied chastity. Through this public process, singlewomen emphasized their commitment to the collective values that determine community membership and attempted to reinforce the perception that they abided by and upheld the codes of conduct that defined proper social order.

Defending Sexual Honor to Protect Social Capital

Singlewomen's complaints to the police indicate that they faced frequent and destructive accusations of sexual immorality in eighteenth-century Paris. However, the filings also highlight how singlewomen utilized available legal avenues to defend their credibility and, thereby, their community membership. Singlewomen recognized the need to match the publicity of the charges against them with equally public repudiation. Ultimately, the choice to pursue legal remediation through this official process indicates that unmarried women filed these complaints to not only reaffirm their virtue, but to also protect their social bonds.

While married and widowed women also requested police intervention when facing such allegations, their complaints often did not detail specific damages incurred, demonstrating the

[33] François Dareau, *Traité des injures dans l'ordre judiciaire , ouvrage qui renferme particulièrement la jurisprudence du petit-criminel* (Paris: Prault, 1775), 294.

aim was to protect their reputations but not necessarily their livelihoods. This is clear in a case from 1733 in which a mother and her daughter claimed to have been insulted by their male neighbor. The neighbor alleged that the daughter was a "*putain*" or a "whore" and that the mother was her "*maquerelle*" or "madam." While both claims were damaging, the daughter filed the complaint independently, with her mother present to support her testimony as a witness but not to appear as an injured party. It seemed the two women felt the harm incurred by the daughter was far greater than that suffered by the mother, and thus only the daughter sought judicial intervention in the matter.[34]

However, family honor was also a factor in singlewomen's decisions to file complaints against their defamers. For example, in August of 1773 Marie Françoise Ruèle, who worked for her brother, brought forth a complaint against a local fruit seller referred to as the widow Tirard. In the complaint, Ruèle alleged that Tirard "ceaselessly insulted her on a daily basis everywhere they met." Specifically, Ruèle asserted that Tirard "treated her like a whore [*putain*]" and "a slut [*garce*]." Although the report only briefly mentions the circumstances that led to the women's dispute, Ruèle noted that Tirard's son had "for a long time sought to marry her." It is possible that Tirard disapproved of her son's choice and thus sought to discredit Ruèle. More likely, however, Ruèle incited Tirard's ire by rejecting her son's proposal. Evidence for this can be found in the litany of insults that Ruèle alleged Tirard made against her, which included, "she wants to marry my son but he's not suitable for her." This statement seems to indicate either that Tirard was angry Ruèle would not accept her son's proposal or, alternatively, that Tirard wished to reframe the narrative and thereby suggest that Ruèle, not her son, was the one who pursued the

[34] AN, Y 14010A, 19 August 1733.

engagement. From this perspective, the assertion that he was "not suitable for her" could be used to suggest that Tirard's son was too good to accept Ruèle as his wife.[35]

However, Tirard's son was not the only family member who became indirectly involved in the women's conflict. Ruèle's complaint also indicates how Tirard's public statements impacted her male relatives. According to Ruèle, Tirard not only insulted her but also her father. Specifically, Tirard claimed that Ruèle's father "had been ruined."[36] While insults against men typically focused on civic or professional honesty, they also frequently referenced a man's inability to fulfill patriarchal responsibilities, such as financially supporting one's family. If the "ruin" Tirard alluded to in this denouncement drew upon ideals of male conduct, she was likely attempting to further degrade Ruèle by suggesting that her father was destitute.

More likely, however, Tirard was implying that the father's "ruin" stemmed from Ruèle's immorality. This would be a derisive remark that pointed to a different type of failure associated with men's positions as family patriarchs. Fathers were charged with controlling the sexual conduct of female household members, thereby protecting women's virtue, preserving gender order, and maintaining family honor. As historian Laura Gowing notes, "Sexual honour was imagined entirely through women, and in the language of abuse women's dishonesty was interpreted through its direct and material effects on the whole household."[37] Ruèle was certainly conscious of how her own reputation for honesty could impact her family's status within their community and this was likely a strong motivating factor in her decision to file a complaint. In her statement to the police, Ruèle framed the damage posed by Tirard around both the statements

[35] AN Y 10787, 27 August 1773.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London* (New York: Oxford UP, 1996), 109.

she made and the audience who witnessed them. Indeed, Tirard's allegations and insults were especially injurious because they had been heard by "poultry merchants and assistants."[38] Ruèle's brother, for whom she worked, was a master roaster. She was concerned that Tirard's accusations would not only damage her reputation, but might also impact her family's business and, specifically, her brother's professional status.

Ruèle considered the matter serious and injurious enough that she not only brought the complaint to a Parisian police commissioner but clarified that she "had already presented a statement on this subject to Monsieur le Lieutenant Général de Police." This prior declaration was then sent to police inspector Le Doux, who attempted to act as an arbitrator in the dispute. Ruèle asserts that Le Doux "explicitly prohibited" the widow from insulting Ruèle "but Tirard never followed [these directives]." By pointing to prior police intervention, Ruèle accomplished several goals. First, she gestured to a pattern in Tirard's behavior that both necessitated her complaint and provided evidence in support of her claims. Furthermore, in specifying the names of those police officials with whom she had contact, Ruèle facilitated the process of verifying her allegations and established a history of harassment. Perhaps more importantly, she situated these police officials within her own network of contacts, thus highlighting her proximity to power. Finally, by citing this prior instance of attempted police arbitration, Ruèle underlined Tirard's additional yet unspoken crime: insubordination to the authority of the Parisian police. The language of Ruèle's complaint emphasized this defiance of police authority by characterizing the police inspector's orders to Tirard as "*très express*" and by representing Tirard's continued insults as a failure, perhaps even a refusal, to follow those commands. By framing her complaint in this way, Ruèle positioned the police themselves as an impacted party within the dispute,

[38] AN Y 10787, 27 August 1773.

inviting them to act not only on her behalf but in order to maintain their own authority and thus social order.[39]

As the outcome of this case is unclear, so too is the ability to know how or whether the police responded to Ruèle's call for action. However, her case and many others that cite repeated complaints demonstrate that police interference was not always effective, at least not on the first attempt. While the request for police involvement seems to signal a lack of alternate forms of recourse, the filing of a formal complaint did not always bring resolution. Often the injurious behavior continued despite formal orders from the police to stop.

In fact, many complaints detail how unmarried women first tried to deal with the situations themselves. Those who chose to file complaints often felt that it was their only remaining form of recourse. This was certainly the case for Rosalie Gauthier *dite* Laurent,[40] a lace-worker who filed a complaint against a member of her Parisian neighborhood named Sieur Regnard. According to Laurent, Regnard told others "that she was a woman of poor conduct." The father of Laurent's apprentice heard the rumors and recalled his daughter from Laurent's service. Laurent reported that she tried to resolve the situation by going to the home of this father to appeal to him directly. However, she was unsuccessful in this attempt because Regnard's claims had already led the father to doubt her honor. It was not only Laurent's sexual morality that was called into question by Regnard's assertions, but also her credibility more generally. The father did not want to risk the potential damage his daughter might suffer either within Laurent's household or as a result of her association and he didn't believe Laurent's assertions

[39] Ibid.

[40] "*Dite*" was used to denote a nickname or alternate name used by the individual.

that Regnard was lying. As Laurent now appeared "dishonest" in all forms, the father refused to return his daughter to her service. [41]

While visiting the father, Laurent saw Regnard and decided to confront him, recounting to the police that she "reproached him for speaking ill of her and for tarnishing her reputation." Significantly, Laurent "recommended that he did not do this again in the future." It appears that this attempt to control his behavior incited a violent response from Regnard. According to Laurent, "Regnard became furious, kicking her twice violently in the lower stomach . . . and slapping her twice." Laurent asserted that, were it not for the intervention of those present during the encounter, she was certain the abuse would have continued. It was only after this interaction, once the situation became irreparable and escalated to violence, that she decided to go to the police and file a formal complaint. [42]

Financial expenses also factored into whether or not singlewomen pursued legal action against their opponents. It cost approximately 3 *livres* and 30 *sols* to file a complaint with the police, a price that could equate to several days' work.[43] Thus, laboring women had to carefully weigh whether or not the insults were serious enough to warrant spending their limited income on legal action. In some cases, women were willing to pay this sum because the rumors of sexual impropriety impacted their financial wellbeing. For example, in August of 1769 Thérèse Henriette Bernard brought forth a complaint against her colleague, the widow Merisse. Bernard reported to the police that, "The widow Merisse, without any cause, insulted her and treated her as a thief, a whore, and other, more indecent terms." Bernard outlined in her complaint how

[41] AN Y 11037, 4 December 1771.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Jeffrey Merrick, *Order and Disorder under the Ancien Régime* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 184.

Merisse not only insulted her directly, but also spread these allegations to the wider community, stating: "the widow Merisse, not content with these insults, looked for ways to tarnish the reputation of the complainant." Apparently, Merisse's tactics were effective, as Bernard reported these actions "brought a considerable prejudice against her" and she had subsequently been unable to find work. Bernard, it appears, felt that escalating the issue to the police was her only form of recourse. Her other methods of contesting or overcoming such claims, particularly through the assistance of friends and community members, had failed. As was the case with many unmarried women, Bernard was willing to pay the fee to make this complaint, even in a time of economic strain, because the rumors of sexual impropriety impacted her immediate financial wellbeing and long-term professional prospects.[44]

Adrienne Veignet also made this evaluation in 1753 when she filed a complaint against an unemployed servant named Periat. Veignet alleged that what incited Periat's defamatory statements was an incident in which he attempted to sexually assault her. While she managed to escape his violence, she became the subject of his public ire. After this attack, Periat "threated to have her put in the hospital" and attempted to injure her reputation by alleging that "she had given birth to a child at the Hôtel-Dieu." As discussed in the preceding chapter, associations with the hospital were often interpreted through the lens of sexual misconduct. In this case, however, Periat was not only encouraging this inference but making the connection directly. Veignet recognized how injurious these claims could be and feared the impact they would have on her reputation. Unfortunately, it appears that her concerns were justified, as the community believed Periat accusations. By spreading these rumors throughout the neighborhood, Veignet asserted that Periat "had reduced her to the cruelest extremities." She was been unable to find work and

[44] AN Y 13674, 7 August 1769.

could not support herself. [45]

Significantly, Veignet had only recently arrived in Paris at the time of her initial encounter with Periat and her subsequent police complaint. While she had some affiliation with the community through her brother, with whom she was temporarily residing, she had few local allies and a relatively unestablished reputation. It appears neighbors were already suspicious of this young, unmarried outsider and Periat's allegations confirmed the immorality they already presumed. Guilty in their minds as well as in Periat's account, these community members were unwilling to employ or associate with Veignet. The latter had not yet garnered enough social capital or demonstrated enough honest conduct to effectively refute Periat's claims. As in most cases, the evidence one needed to disprove such allegations could only be found in demonstrable patterns and a recognized history of honest behavior, both of which needed to predate the charges. Having only recently arrived in the neighborhood, Veignet was unable to successfully repudiate the accusations or hinder their injury to her social status and local prospects.[46]

As the cases above demonstrate, allegations of sexual immorality were rarely isolated incidents. In their statements to the police, singlewomen frequently situate these injurious insults within longer disputes, many of which did not relate to sexual conduct. One such example is the case of Magdeleine Duhamel, an unmarried fruit vendor who filed a complaint against the Guilberts, a married couple who sold fruit near her at the market. One morning in February 1749, the two parties' carts accidentally knocked into one another while they were bringing fruit down to their stalls. This led several of the Guilberts' apples to fall on the ground and be crushed by the carts' wheels. The couple was so incensed that they violently attacked Duhamel. The latter alleged that, since this encounter, the Guilberts attempted to ruin her business through several

[45] AN Y 10767, 5 May 1753.

[46] Ibid.

tactics, which included making injurious remarks about her at the market. They publicly asserted that she was not only a thief but also a "*coquine,*" an insult that implied general roguery when directed against men but sexual debauchery when associated with women. Duhamel stated that, as a result of these machinations, the couple had "destroyed her reputation."[47]

In cases such as Duhamel's, the attack on an unmarried woman's sexual honor was often a calculated blow or a form of collateral damage. Allegations of sexual misconduct were often just one part of a multi-pronged attack that included threats of imprisonment and acts of violence. Most cases with these additional factors and, in particular, those in which the singlewoman faced threats of incarceration, stemmed from incidences of sexual rejection rather than sexual activity. In the wake of a marriage proposal's rejection, the denial of a sexual relationship, or, as in Veignet's case, a failed attempt at sexual assault, some men chose to weaponize allegations of immorality. These opponents recognized how vulnerable singlewomen were to charges of sexual dishonor and thus strategically used them to inflict harm and to reaffirm the power they likely felt they had lost. These deliberate attacks evoked the widespread discourse on singlewomen's sexual honor by using language that strategically capitalized on fears of the disorder wrought by their immorality. Such allegations, particularly when made in public, placed an unmarried woman in a perilous dilemma. If she acknowledged the allegations by filing a complaint, she might breathe life into the harmful assertions, spreading and even documenting the harmful associations. If she ignored the claims, however, her lack of defense may be interpreted as an admission of guilt.

Charlotte Hanon decided to proactively deal with such accusations. In December of 1764 she filed a complaint against her upstairs neighbor, Monsieur Dupin. Hanon alleged that when she moved into the same building as Dupin the previous October, he made it clear he "wanted to

[47] AN Y 11236 A, 18 February 1749.

become more closely acquainted with her." Hanon stated Dupin attempted visit her while she was alone in her apartment but she "had refused his frequentation*,"* referring to either his company in general or his attempts at courtship in particular. Hanon testified that this rejection angered him, leading Dupin to "overwhelm her with insults and to treat her like a prostitute." For Hanon, her home was no longer a safe refuge. It was a space fraught with danger.[48]

In the enclosed quarters of the apartment building, it was difficult for Hanon to escape the dejected Dupin's wrath. Hanon characterized the staircase as a particularly perilous site of encounter, as both tenants used it frequently and it offered her few options for escaping Dupin. Hanon asserts in her complaint that, even when she was locked in her room, Dupin would insult her through the closed door or would even push against and knock on it with "brutality." Hanon alleged that six weeks prior to filing her complaint, Dupin's insults escalated to violence. While in her room, she heard someone crash against her door, perhaps in an attempt to force it open. When she cracked it ajar to identify the source of the commotion, Dupin immediately seized her by the throat, calling her a "whore [*putain*], a bitch [*garce*], and other atrocious insults." Taken off guard and unable to defend herself, Hanon called out to her neighbors for help. Publicizing the attack had been Hanon's only form of resistance and it proved to be an effective tactic. Facing the prospect of neighborly intervention and condemnation, Dupin finally let her go.[49]

Even then, in the wake of these insults and this violence, with her neighbors as witnesses, Hanon did not go to the police. What finally motivated her to file a complaint was when Dupin threated to tell the soldiers of the Parisian guard that she was a prostitute. Hanon alleged that the day before filing her complaint, she was walking up the stairs with her supper when she had the

[48] AN Y 11080, 17 December 1764.

[49] Ibid.

misfortune to encounter Dupin.[50] It was not the punch he gave to her stomach or his act of knocking over her soup that scared Hanon most. Instead, it was that "Dupin threatened to have her arms broken by the soldiers of the guard and to attack her publicly in the streets and then have her arrested as a whore." Dupin's threat to bring his injurious allegations out from the confines of the apartment building and into the streets would have been serious on its own. However, it was his intended audience—members of the Parisian militia who had the authority to make arrests—that escalated his threat to a clamant level of extreme peril.[51]

It is clear that both Dupin and Hanon believed his allegations would be trusted over her protestations. At stake in this case was not only Hanon's reputation but also her freedom. Hanon states in her complaint that, "these insults undermine [her] honor and reputation" and, "moreover," that "she has every reason to fear the effects of his threats and the assaults he had already committed against her." Hanon's statement to the police clearly demonstrates that she recognized her vulnerability to Dupin's insults and threats. She evidently felt that not even her neighbors' testimony would be able to prevent her incarceration if Dupin chose to report her as a prostitute to the Parisian guard. Hanon thus employed the same course of action Dupin threatened: juridical intervention. She chose to pursue legal action against him rather than face criminal charges herself. In this way, Hanon acknowledged that her best defense was to take an offensive stance, as this allowed her to frame the narrative of their dispute. Rather than succumb to these threats, Hanon instead actively protected herself through judicial action.[52]

[50] Many Parisian apartment buildings in this period had communal kitchens located on the ground floors and this is likely where Hanon was coming from at the time of her attack.

[51] AN Y 11080, 17 December 1764.

[52] Ibid.

Unmarried women facing allegations of sexual misconduct were already in vulnerable positions and, by filing charges against those who made these claims, complainants like Hanon exposed themselves to further harm. In order to successfully restore their honor and protect it from additional injury, singlewomen needed to offer evidence of their own innocence as well as their adversaries' guilt. In particular, they needed to prove that they were credible complainants, whose claims should be taken seriously, and honest women, who were incapable of the accusations made against them. Laying the foundation for these aspects of the case helped singlewomen substantiate their two principle charges: first, that their adversaries consciously made defamatory statements against them and, second, that the accusations were injurious, perhaps even intentionally so.

A singlewoman accomplished this by outlining her adverse history with the defendant, describing their past encounters, quarrels, or grounds for dispute. The police would be able to verify these details by interviewing her neighbors, friends, and family members, who may not have witnessed the encounter that prompted the complaint but who could, nonetheless, offer testimony on its context. As in the case of Hanon, this approach demonstrated that the relevant accusations existed within a larger dispute and would indicate why the defendant was motivated to intentionally and maliciously make false statements about the complainant. Authorities who recognized the accusations as attempts at retribution would be more likely to believe that they were lies intended to harm the complainant. Yet, as few cases moved beyond the complaint and even fewer resulted in monetary awards, singlewomen who filed charges of defamatory injury typically did not do so with the goal of legal amelioration or financial restitution. Instead, they likely sought to recover their honor. Doing so would help restore the public trust and social capital unmarried women needed in order to be considered worthy of association and assistance.

However, there were instances when singlewomen could not or did not disclose what prompted theses disputes and the injurious insults. In these cases, complainants would often highlight the impetuous nature of their attackers, using this as evidence of their own innocence. Magdelaine Thévenot, for example, detailed an unprovoked and unanticipated public attack in her 1746 complaint against the widow Ferrant. Thévenot stated that on August 17, 1746 she had been delivering milk and eggs when Ferrant suddenly assaulted her near the Porte Saint Antoine. According to Thévenot's statement, Ferrant delivered several blows to her back and face with a baguette before she discarded the makeshift weapon, threw herself on Thévenot, and proceeded to grab her by the throat and kick her in the legs. Several witnesses intervened in the attack and separated the two women. Thévenot stated that after this encounter, she returned to her work, deciding to continue her deliveries instead of pursuing further conflict with Ferrant. The altercation, however, was far from over. Despite her attempt to remove herself from the situation, Thévenot asserted that Ferrant followed her and "threw herself on her again like a madwoman." In this assault, Thévenot claimed that Ferrant punched and kicked her, causing a "considerable bruise on her left leg and several scratches to her face." As in the earlier episode, several individuals also witnessed this encounter and came to Thévenot's aid.[53]

Despite being separated again and finally going their own ways, it appears Ferrant was only temporarily pacified. The following morning she came to Thévenot's apartment, where the women again became involved in a physical altercation. This time, Thévenot sustained scratches to her face and a bloody lip. Thévenot's neighbors heard the commotion and came to her aid. They restrained the widow Ferrant who, according to Thévenot, "not having the liberty to exercise her malignity" through physical violence instead resorted to verbal arracks. In her complaint, Thévenot asserted that Ferrant "called her a whore [*putain*], a bitch [*garce*], a tart

[53] AN Y 10990A, 18 August 1746.

[*rouleuse*] . . . and other invectives . . . so horrible that prudence does not permit one to write them." She also alleged that Ferrant threatened to kill her the next time they met. Following this third incident, Thévenot decided to file a formal police complaint against Ferrant. Her stated goals were to prevent Ferrant from carrying out her death threats, to suppress further verbal attacks or physical violence by the widow, and to induce financial restitution for the dozen eggs Thévenot claimed broke during the first skirmish at the Porte Saint Antoine.[54]

To achieve this outcome, Thévenot structured her account in a way that contrasted Ferrant's unrelenting antagonism against her own purported passivity. In her complaint to the police, Thévenot asserted that she "had given no cause" for Ferrant's attacks. Her narrative appeared to begin *in medias res*, with no inciting action or pre-existing conflict to rationalize Ferrant's attacks. She did not explain how she and Ferrant knew one another,[55] though her complaint suggests she was able to identify her assailant during their various encounters and when she spoke to the police.[56] The women lived on the same street and were both merchants, though they sold different goods. While it is possible the women only knew one another as informal acquaintances working and living in the same neighborhood, it is clear that Ferrant recognized and took issue with Thévenot. She attacked Thévenot twice in a single day, allegedly with no forewarning or provocation, and then, the following morning, had enough information and motivation to locate Thévenot's home and confront her there.

Thévenot's statement also omits any description of her response during the encounters. The focus on Ferrant's persistent violence and the bystanders' repeated intercession positions

[54] Ibid.

[55] Alternatively, it is possible the police commissioner or clerk did not find the information significant enough to include in the written complaint.

[56] In similar cases where the aggressor was previously unknown to the complainant, the record typically describes the individual as a stranger ("un/e particulier/ère") in the context of the encounter and elsewhere details that the complainant later discovered the identity of the accused.

Thévenot as a blameless victim without the means to defend herself, much less inflict injury in return. Thévenot described the widow Ferrant as "*une furieuse,*" a madwoman driven by an insatiable fury. By framing her aggressor as impetuous, Thévenot highlighted her own innocence and inaction, portraying herself as the unwitting target of a woman who attacked without cause or inhibition. In doing so, she attempted to absolve herself of any responsibility and to refute any personal misconduct that Ferrant's actions might suggest or her chosen insults would insinuate.[57]

The public nature of these insults is an essential component of unmarried women's complaints. The audience to the injurious speech was as important as the insults they witnessed. These complaints reveal that defamatory accusations were less concerning when communicated directly and privately to the subject of the remarks. While singlewomen in these cases specified the insults hurled against them, the impetus for legal action was not the language used in the encounters but the public nature of the offenses. Most complaints offer narratives that outline how the disputes transitioned from private altercations to public affronts. Commonly found in these accounts are references to the audience witnessing the encounter or the public site where the claims were made, such as: "*à plusieurs personnes* [to several people],[58] "*dans leur quartier* [in their quarter],"[59] "*le voisinage* [the neighborhood],"[60] or simply "*disant entr'autres* [spoken among others]."[61] These descriptions were important components of singlewomen's claims of injury, as the inclusion of the audience offered the ability to prove both that the incident actually occurred and that, by being witnessed, it had damaging potential.

[57] AN Y 10990A, 18 August 1746.

[58] AN Y 10990A, 21 June 1746.

[59] AN Y 11720, 29 July 1782.

[60] AN Y 13124B, 26 July 1772.

[61] AN Y 11037, 4 December 1771.

In her complaint against Ferrant, for example, Thévenot not only mentions the bystanders who witnessed and interceded in the violent encounters, but also highlights the public nature of Ferrant's insults. When describing how Ferrant communicated the injurious claims, Thévenot utilizes the verb *répandre*, meaning "to spread," and identifies the audience as being "*tout le monde*," or "everyone." While *tout le monde* could refer to everyone present during the encounter—specifically, Thévenot's neighbors—this linguistic choice also emphasizes the inevitable and uncontrollable publicity of such information. These damaging claims would not be contained to the small group of individuals who witnessed the encounter. Instead, the allegations would likely spread from Thévenot's apartment building to her quarter, making their way through the links between local associates, harming her reputation and social standing within the community. [62]

The geographic and social proximity of the witnesses incentivized unmarried women to file formal complaints against their accusers and aggressors. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, one's immediate neighbors were important sources of sociability, aid, and intervention for singlewomen. To lose the support and respect of these individuals would be to cut off avenues of assistance and to open oneself up to severe risks. The timing of Thévenot's complaint demonstrates the direct correlation between public opinion and residential proximity: the closer one was to home, the more important one's reputation was. While she had two violent encounters with Ferrant while in her neighborhood, Thévenot did not file her complaint until Ferrant came to her apartment building and made the insults in front of her immediate neighbors. It is possible that, after realizing Ferrant knew where she lived, Thévenot decided to involve police because she feared she might be attacked precipitously or repeatedly. Yet, the audience to their last encounter, Thévenot's closest neighbors, would be an important enough incentive for

[62] AN Y 10990A, 18 August 1746.

her to publicly file a complaint against Ferrant. By undermining Thévenot's sexual honor in front of her most proximate interlocutors, Ferrant jeopardized her social credit. Ultimately, the greatest injury Ferrant inflicted upon Thévenot was not her bloodied lip, her scratched face, or her broken eggs but her damaged reputation among her immediate neighbors. If Ferrant's repeated acts of violence endangered Thévenot's life, the public allegations of sexual dishonor threatened an equally terrifying demise: Thévenot's social death.[63]

In order to restore one's reputation and to prompt police intervention, unmarried women needed to present themselves as honorably and innocuously as possible in their case statements. As in Thévenot's case, this resulted in narratives framed by complainants' motivations. However, the prevalence of one-sided accounts also stems from the fact that very few complaints resulted in formal investigations and even fewer cases proceeded to trial. As a result, the existing records are typically limited to the complainants' perspectives and skewed heavily in their favor. In Thévenot's case, for example, there is no surviving documentation of Ferrant's response to the complaint or even any evidence that the police approached her with the charges. As a result, it is impossible to know what motivated her to confront Thévenot, what dynamics existed between the women before these encounters, or if the conflict continued after Thévenot involved police officials. Therefore, the aim in examining these complaints is not to unquestioningly accept singlewomen's accounts or to unequivocally portray them as victims of baseless attacks and false accusations. Instead, the interest is in the impact allegations of sexual impropriety could have on an unmarried woman's social relations and material survival. This inquiry is far more important than whether or not the claims were true.

Furthermore, determining whether an unmarried women's behavior rose to the level of "sexual dishonor" requires one to engage with highly subjective moral standards that varied from

[63] Ibid.

case to case. These valuations of respectability depended on the individuals involved, how a community could be impacted, and whether or not certain factors could be viewed as mitigating circumstances in the minds of contemporaries, such as the age or socioeconomic status of participants, the use of coercive tactics such as seduction or violence, and the reputations of the parties and their families. Finally, the frequent invocation of sexual language in female insults means that the use of certain invectives during disputes, such as calling a woman a "*putain,*" does not always indicate that the conflict involved an accusation of sexual impropriety. Ferrant, for example may have been motivated in her attacks on Thévenot by an economic disagreement or trade competition. When directed against unmarried women, however, insults with sexual connotations incited preexisting public fears and suspicions about singlewomen's immorality. With such insinuations in the forefront of their minds, individuals who witnessed or learned that a singlewoman had been described using this language could readily interpret such invectives as accusations of sexual dishonor, even when the speakers used them as general pronouncements of personal discord.

This easy slippage between inference and intention made these insults more damaging to singlewomen than to any other social group. While sexual propriety formed the basis of female honor for all woman and these invectives were used irrespective one's marital status, charges of immorality seemed especially credible when made against unmarried women. Singlewomen appear as complainants in these cases far more often than widows, wives, or men of any status, which suggests that they faced allegations of sexual dishonor more frequently and, likely, experienced more severe consequences as a result of these charges. This predominance also illustrates that unmarried women recognized these accusations and even insinuations of immorality as serious threats that required adamant, public refutation. By pursuing police

intervention and judicial condemnation against their detractors, unmarried women attempted both to prevent further instances of defamatory malignment and to repudiate these charges within their communities. Only through such public demonstrations could singlewomen reaffirm their commitment to the social codes that defined honest behavior and governed public respectability.

Unfortunately, however, they were not the only individuals who understood that sexual dishonor was both a credible allegation and a serious threat when made against unmarried women. As the aforementioned cases of Veignet and Hanon illustrate and as the following example of the Chastelains will demonstrate, singlewomen's adversaries intentionally employed sexual charges against unmarried women because they knew these allegations would be the most convincing and detrimental attacks against members of this particular social group.

Mobilizing Community Allies to Protect Sexual Honor: The Case of the Chastelain Sisters

While most complaints only highlight the damaging potential or demonstrable impact of such accusations, the case of the Chastelain sisters illustrates how positive affirmations of sexual honor helped singlewomen accrue social capital and mobilize community alliances when faced with allegations of immorality.[64] Marie Louise Chastelain and Marie Marguerite Chastelain were unmarried sisters who lived together in a first floor apartment on the corner of Rue Quincampoix and Rue Aubry-le-Boucher in Paris. Their rented residence functioned as both a living space and a workshop where the women created gold and silver buttons, sword knots, and cords. In 1740, their home, livelihood, and freedom faced a sudden and perilous threat. After having lived in the apartment for fifteen months, their proprietor filed a police complaint alleging that the sisters were prostitutes.

[64] AN Y 9441B, 14 September 1740; AN Y 9649A, 9 September 1740; AN Y 13638, 3 September 1740; AN Y 13638, 30 September 1740.

As in other cases, this accusation appeared to be an act of retribution within a much longer dispute. According to both the Chastelain sisters and their neighbors, this discord started two months before this complaint when the proprietor, Sieur Bazin, asked the sisters for a loan of two hundred *livres*. The sisters informed him that they were not financially able to lend him this sum. It is likely that Bazin saw the precious materials in the women's apartment, including the gold and silver they used in their work, and believed the sisters were lying to him. Indeed, many neighbors were unable to make such large loans; in this case, however, Bazin viewed their denial of financial aid as a personal insult. After this refusal, Bazin and his wife treated the sisters with contempt and disdain. Neighbors observed that they "summarily insulted [the sisters] for no reason, treating them like whores."[65] When the contentious situation between the two parties escalated to an incident wherein Bazin's wife violently attacked the sisters and even destroyed their property, Marie Louise and Marie Marguerite Chastelain filed a complaint against them.

As in previously mentioned cases, the involvement of police did not allay the discord, but only angered the proprietor and his wife even further. Sieur Bazin told the residents of the building that the women were prostitutes and encouraged them to join him reporting this information to the police. Almost all refused this proposition, "saying that they had never seen anything of the sort nor had they heard anything negative spoken about the women."[66] Nonetheless, Bazin proceeded to submit these charges and, according to some neighbors, bribed a few of his friends and employees to support his assertion that the women were prostitutes.

In the wake of this complaint, the Parisian police rendered a sentence ordering the sisters to vacate the premises within twenty-four hours "or have their belongings thrown into the

[65] AN Y 14955, 11 October 1740.

[66] Ibid.

street."[67] The women, "teary-eyed"[68] and shocked, pleaded with their neighbors to help them. At this point, however, the sentence had already been rendered. The sisters were forced to leave their apartment without the time or space necessary to move their belongings. As a result, they had to leave them behind, an act which, technically, ceded the possessions to Bazin and the police. However, they filed a counter-complaint against Bazin, his wife, and "their accomplices," to delay the removal of their property from the apartment. Despite strict orders that no one enter the apartment, neighbors saw Bazin and his wife inside after the police commissioner left. According to one neighbor, Bazin stated he planned to take the women's belongings, pile them onto a cart, and "set it on fire." In response to this information, the sisters made an additional request that led the police commissioner to make a description of all the goods that they had been forced to leave behind.[69]

The situation for the sisters seemed dire: a formal complaint had been filed with the police accusing them of being prostitutes, they were turned out of their home, and they risked losing any belongings they had not been able to carry with them. While the sisters testified that the ordeal caused them "the most profound pain," they were determined to not let the complaint and police sentence define them. Removed from their home and property, the women felt "the only thing they had left was the honor and education that their father and mother had given them." The sisters described their parents, who were presumably deceased, as "master button makers and merchants" of "recognized integrity."[70] In Paris, button-makers and lace-makers shared a guild and enjoyed corporate privileges. The guild was similar to many others in the city,

[67] AN Y 13638, 29 September 1740.

[68] AN Y 9649 A, 9 September 1740.

[69] AN Y 14955, 11 October 1740.

[70] AN Y 9649A, 9 September 1740.

having elected officials, an associated confraternity, and a predominantly male membership. According to their 1653 statutes, the only women authorized to work within the guild were the daughters and wives of master button-makers or lace-makers.[71] The sisters' references to their parents situated them within a respectable family lineage while also justifying their employment and membership within their guild. Furthermore, the sisters stated that they had "fulfilled all of the requirements of their community,"[72] which would include five years of apprenticeship and then four years of mentorship under a guild master.[73] Their association with the guild bolstered the women's social status and offered verification of their employment. This would, in turn, help them undermine the allegations of prostitution by highlighting how their financial state would not require them to engage in sexual commerce.

These statements also indicate that the Chastelain sisters took great pride in their professional status and their craft. After describing their parents and their own employment history within their guild, the women avowed: "they are determined to sacrifice everything to reestablish their honor and reputation" and "to pursue by extraordinary means" those who filed the complaint against them.[74] By situating these proclamations within a discussion of their professional status and lineage, the Chastelain sisters associated their honor with both their craft and its associated community. In this way, they blended contemporary notion of female and male honor, suggesting that the reputations they aimed to restore through this process were not only sexual but professional as well.

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[71] *Statuts des passementiers-boutonniers en 44 articles, et lettres patentes de Louis XIV confirmatives* (1653), quoted in René de Lespinasse, *Les métiers et corporations de la ville de Paris : XIVe-XVIIIe siècles* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1892), 154-155.

[72] AN Y 9649A, 9 September 1740.

[73] *Statuts des passementiers-boutonniers,* quoted in René de Lespinasse, *Les métiers et corporations de la ville de Paris,* 154.

[74] AN Y 9649A, 9 September 1740.

The sisters' continual emphasis on their profession throughout their legal filings illustrates how highly they valued their craft and identified with their *métier*. When they stated that, "the only thing they had left was the honor and education that their father and mother had given them," they framed these attributes as forms of immutable property. Characterizing "honor" and "education" as transmissible between parent and child suggests the sisters saw these privileges as inheritable. To them, their métier was their patrimony. Their trade appeared to be essential to their identities, both as individuals and as members of a family lineage. As a result, they invoked family honor to both support their claims and to demonstrate how injurious these allegations were, even in the absence of their relatives.

Furthermore, the sisters feared Bazin's claims would impact their guild membership and trade success. The Chastelain sisters were concerned with both their financial viability and their professional status. Guilds had governing officials and regulations that might retract the sisters' membership and bar them from future employment if they were charged with prostitution. As a result, their "honor" takes on more complex meanings. It was not simply gendered, sexual, and innate; its implications were not merely personal, familial, or communal. Instead, the sisters framed their honor as something innate—a virtue which they had inherited from their parents and protected since birth—as well as something earned—a status they achieved over a long period of applied study and labor.

The Chastelains were not defining their honor simply around feminine ideals and sexual morals. Further support for this can be found in their lack of attention to how these charges would impact their future success as *women* specifically. Indeed, they did not foreground any concerns about how Bazin's claims would impact one sister's engagement. They did not even disclose news of this impending marriage until they learned from neighbors that Bazin and his

wife furtively entered their unoccupied but far-from-barren apartment. According to their statements, Marie Marguerite Chastelain was "on the point of marrying" Sieur Poulet, a surgeon's valet who was in Rome at the time of the allegations and initial legal proceedings.[75] The sisters noted that the couple's marriage banns had already been published at the parishes of Saint Josse and Saint-Leu, a fact the police commissioners would be able to easily confirm through informal inquiries. Yet, the sisters did not divulge this information to support their charges of injury, as other singlewomen did in similar cases.[76] Instead, they mentioned the marriage only tangentially to support their request that the police conduct an inventory of their belongings. The sisters created a list of the property they wanted police to verify was still in the apartment after the covert visit of the Bazins. Among the various possessions the sisters included in this list were a dozen men's shirts they purchased for Marie Marguerite Chastelain's future husband and a silver coin she planned to use as her *pièce de mariage*.[77] At no point did they indicate their concerns about the damage Bazin's allegations might have on this marriage, nor did they include this subject in their requests for financial reparations. This silence may suggest that they were not concerned that the accusations would impact Sieur Poulet's desire to marry Marie Marguerite Chastelain. Alternatively, the sisters may have hoped to resolve the issue before Poulet received news of the charges in Rome or before he returned to Paris. It appears,

[75] AN Y 9649A, 11 October 1740.

[76] See, for example, AN Y 11236 A, 27 January 1749.

[77] The latter was a token, usually a piece of jewelry, a coin, or an emblazoned medallion given to one's spouse in a custom typically reserved for upper-class and wealthy families. However, as the Chastelain sisters worked with gold and silver, Marie Marguerite may have decided to follow this tradition because she had access to the necessary materials or because it was common among artisans in their trade.

however, that the marriage did not take place in the two years of legal proceedings related to this case. As late as January 1742, Marie Marguerite was still listed as a *fille* in all case records.[78]

Throughout the proceedings, the sisters focused on recovering their property, restoring their reputations, and recuperating the income they lost when barred from their apartment and separated from their tools. It is clear that their craft, not an impending marriage, was their chief source of financial security and their primary concern as they attempted to recover their honor. While labor would naturally provide more immediate capital than a future marriage, they had grounds to request damages if Poulet ended the engagement as a result of Bazin's accusations. The fact that the sisters never mention this prospect, even to support their claims of injury or to lay the foundation for future filings, offers significant evidence that their goal was to repair their reputations in order to protect their professional status, not their marriage prospects.

With this goal in mind, the sisters hired a lawyer, appealed the police sentence, and initiated counter proceedings against their legal opponents. Their filings demonstrate that the women had strong support system, which included both personal and professional associates. Their appeal included the statements of sixteen witnesses, most of who lived in and in close proximity to the Chastelain sisters' building. These neighbors had frequent, if not daily, opportunities to interact with and observe the women. All sixteen deponents refuted the charges that the sisters were prostitutes or debauched women. These witnesses utilized the lack of neighborhood gossip as proof of the Chastelain sisters' good character, remaking that they "had never heard anything bad spoken about the women." Furthermore, the neighbors offered testimony that the women had positive reputations in their quarter and were known to be "very honest women." Rather than attest to specific acts that exemplified the women's sexual propriety, most witnesses cited the sisters' work habits and professional reputations as evidence

[78] AN Y 13638, 9 January 1742.

that the allegations against them were false. Several neighbors claimed they witnessed the women "taking great pain to work all day and night." Another deponent supported the women's professional efforts and achievements, stating that the women "took great pain to work at their craft" and noting that their clients included "many merchants from Paris as well as the Provinces." These declarations depicted the women as honest and hardworking, incapable of the conduct they were accused of and certainly not in a financial state that would require them to engaged in commercial sex.[79]

The visibility of their workspace was an important aspect of the sisters' defense. While Bazin's complaint included testimony that the women solicited passing pedestrians from their open first-floor window, witnesses framed their apartment's proximity to the street more favorably. Neighbors claimed the sisters' open windows allowed them to see inside of the apartment, where they consistently witnessed the women hard at work.[80] The Chastelain sisters also cited this defense in their appeal, stating that one of the reasons they couldn't believe Bazin succeeded in finding others to testify against them was because "their windows on the first floor were in the view of others and were always open."[81] Those who passed their apartment daily included the vicar and priest of the adjacent Saint Josse Parish. Rather than infringe upon their privacy or invite unwelcome neighborhood surveillance, the sisters' visibility offered them supporting evidence of their work habits and propriety. Ultimately, the ability to see directly into their apartment helped protect them from statements that contradicted public knowledge of their activities, visitors, and lodgings.

[79] AN Y 14955, 11 October 1740.

[80] Ibid.

[81] AN Y 9649A, 9 September 1740.

The sisters even invited further probing into their private affairs to prove their innocence. In their counter complaint, the Chastelains provided information on their prior residences and included supportive statements from their former proprietors. Furthermore, while stating that it would be "of infinite cost to maidens of honor and integrity," the sisters volunteered that they would even "suffer to be visited by matrons."[82] This was a process in which a tribunal of midwives would physically inspect them to prove they were still virgins. This process ultimately highlights the conflicting standards of female honor: a public woman was associated with sexual misconduct but an honest woman had to publicize her sexual virtue.

Rather than impacting the women's reputations and social standing, the incident instead reflected poorly on their accuser, Bazin. His false claims against the women appeared to violate the code of conduct in this working-class community, as several witnesses asserted his actions demonstrated bad character, temerity, and dishonesty. Their anger toward Bazin appeared to stem not only from his false accusations against the women but also from his attempts to engage others in his scheme. Many neighbors alleged that Bazin approached them before filing his initial complaint and asked them to support his statements against the women. Some claimed he tried to intimidate them into falsely testifying against the Chastelain sisters. Another deponent testified that Bazin tried to bribe him with wine to submit a statement against the sisters.

While the majority of these witnesses resisted collusion with Bazin, even under pressure and inducement, one admitted to being deceived by him. This neighbor participated in Bazin's initial complaint against the sisters but later testified in support of their appeal and counter complaint. The witness explained that he only made his earlier statement because Bazin claimed that the local vicar wrote a letter to the police about the women's misconduct. There is no evidence that the vicar wrote a letter or submitted any statement against the women and the

[82] Ibid.

witness seems to substantiate that this never occurred. Instead, he asserted that Bazin constructed this lie to manipulate him and admitted to the police that, "he wrote more than he knew and that he had been made to say things of which he had no knowledge." He retracted his former statement and, instead, supported the testimony of the other deponents, claiming that in the fifteenth months he lived in the same building as the women, "he had never seen them conduct themselves poorly."[83]

The witnesses who testified in support of the Chastelain sisters illustrated a communal condemnation of Bazin. One stated that, "Bazin's neighbors strongly blame him for having acted against the said Demoiselles Chastelain" and believed "he should pay a price" for his actions. Another concurred with these assertions, telling the police that, "the neighbors were angry with Bazin" and felt "he deserved to be punished." The witnesses described how Bazin "dishonored" the "honest women/maidens,"[84] utilizing the language of morality to juxtapose the two parties and to illustrate the ramifications of the proprietor's actions. In this way, the witnesses depicted a widespread, concerted effort by neighbors and members of their quarter to refute Bazin's claims, expose his deception, and restore the women's honor.

The legal proceedings in this case were arduous, costly, and lasted almost two years. According to witnesses, Bazin believed his claim would result in the sisters' swift arrest and removal from his building. This would have allowed him to exact retribution upon his adversaries while financially benefitting from any property they left behind. Bazin certainly did not anticipate the lengthy and expensive legal process that would follow. This was a logical assumption, as women were arrested every day under suspicion of prostitution and were almost

[83] AN Y 14955, 11 October 1740

[84] The language in the statement is "*honnêtes filles*." While "*filles*" could be simply translated as "women" in other instances, the implication of sexual immorality in this case makes this specific choice of language more significant, as *fille* implies sexual purity. As a result, I am including both "women" and "maidens" as potential translations.

always arrested and imprisoned. The inherent suspicion of unmarried women formed a strong foundation for allegations of immorality, ultimately bolstering complaints while obviating investigations. Bazin's strategy suggests he recognized that the Chastelains' singleness made them vulnerable to accusations of debauchery and prostitution. If Bazin knowingly submitted a fraudulent complaint against the sisters, as the evidence suggests, the accusation he chose to pursue is significant. He did not make claims of drunkenness, destruction of property, failure to pay rent, theft, or other charges that might have the same results. Instead, he chose the allegation he believed would be the path of least resistance, the most believable claim one could make against unmarried women who lived apart from their families, and the accusation that would be most injurious to these specific adversaries. Bazin called into question the Chastelain sisters' sexual honor.

What Bazin did not anticipate, however, was the community's strong support of the women and the difference this would make to the outcome of this case. The sisters' social capital and honest reputations allowed them to mobilize their networks of allies to fend off this attack. In the end, the Chastelain sisters had to pay Bazin the back-rent from the period of the legal proceedings, a substantial fee of 217 *livres* 40 *sous* 4 *deniers*.[85] However, the case's resolution ultimately seems akin to a settlement, as the court also ordered Bazin to return all of the sisters' goods, thereby overturning the original proclamation that the sisters would relinquish any property remaining in the apartment. The success of their appeal is therefore apparent in the return of all of their possessions, including those that Bazin attempted to conceal in his lodgings.

The Chastelain sisters' persistent pursuit of justice, coupled with the efforts of their neighbors, allowed them to effectively anticipate and prevent any further wrongdoing by Bazin. The neighbors not only supported the sisters in their statements but also vigilantly watched their

[85] AN Y 13638, 18 April 1741.

apartment and alerted them when they witnessed Bazin and his wife enter their lodgings against the police's instructions. The subsequent declarations made by the Chastelain sisters and the neighbors led the police to make a detailed inventory of their belongings during the legal proceedings. This step was instrumental in the protection and return of their property. Ultimately, despite Bazin's efforts to discredit the women and seize their property, he failed in both respects. While the sisters left his building, they did so with their property and their reputations intact.

The fate of the Chastelain sisters is an important example of the difference a strong support network could make for unmarried women when facing such ruinous charges. Singlewomen who lacked similar social resources encountered very different fates. Only five days before Bazin filed his complaint against the sisters, a neighboring proprietor reported to the same police commissioner that he suspected two of his occupants were prostitutes. This complainant, like Bazin, wanted the women ejected from his building. The defendants were also similar, as the accused in this case were two unmarried women who lived together and had confirmed occupations. When the commissioner made his inquiries in this case, however, no one defended the women.[86] Without the allies and resources necessary to refute these accusations, they were immediately arrested as prostitutes, transported to Saint Martin for sentencing, and then imprisoned in the Salpêtrière hospital.[87]

The case of the Chastelain sisters followed a different process and yielded a more favorable outcome because they had a great deal of support within their community. Their allies helped them in this moment of crisis: friends housed them after their eviction, neighbors attempted to protect their property, and their supporters made statements to the police defending the women against these ruinous claims. In the end, the sisters were never arrested as prostitutes,

[86] AN Y 13638, 29 August 1740; AN Y 9441B, 14 September 1740.

[87] AN Y 9441B, 14 September 1740.

they did not spend any time incarcerated, their proprietor was forced to return their property, and they managed to achieve their primary goal of restoring their reputations. Their network, which included no family members and only those whom they met in their community during the course of their daily lives, provided a safety net in a period of extreme adversity.

Sexual Honor and Social Status in the Lives of Singlewomen

Singlewomen's complaints of insult and injury demonstrate how damaging allegations of immorality could be when one's social standing and financial wellbeing depended on one's sexual reputation. While some cases, like that of the Chastelain sisters, reveal how one's support network could be mobilized to counter personal attacks, most highlight the fragile foundation of singlewomen's social status and public credibility. While this stemmed, in part, from the prevalence of voluntary bonds in singlewomen's support networks, it was also a result of widespread discourse that highlighted unmarried women's susceptibility to sexual dishonor and the threats their immorality posed to public order. In this way, the significance of singlewomen's sexual honor extended far beyond their virginity. As singlewoman demonstrated in their complaints to the Parisian police, it also encompassed public evaluations of how their adherence to moral codes should relate to their social membership. Unlike the village maiden in *Nouvelle Moralité,* singlewomen in eighteenth-century Paris who wished to protect their sexual honor had to do more than just refuse a would-be seducer's promises or resist a rapist's violence; they also had to defend their reputations in the face of the public's mistrust, neighbors' gossip, and the rejected suitor's conscious malignment.

As their sexual reputations were fundamental to their accumulation of social credit and formation of reliable relationships, singlewomen needed to publicly demonstrate their adherence to the gendered and sexual ideals that defined popular conceptions of honesty. Public accusations

of immorality therefore required public rebuttals of the damaging charges. In this way, filing a complaint with the police served to both reaffirm one's honor on the public stage and to defend oneself from further injury.

The police compliant was also an avenue through which singlewomen could actively participate in a social system designed to control them. By filing complaints against those who sought to defame them, singlewomen asserted that if their sexual honor warranted public regulation, it also deserved legal protection. Therefore, it is possible to read these complaints of insult and injury as forms of resistance. Indeed, if gossip was a method of social control and the sexual insult was a way to capitalize on unmarried women's greatest vulnerability, the singlewoman's complaint was an attempt to resist these efforts at enforced subjugation and marginalization. This did not mean, however, that singlewomen who filed complaints necessarily contested the policing of their sexualities. Instead, they recognized and even reinforced these systems of public valuation that linked their sexual honor to their social status. Female honor was not only characterized by personal chastity but also by public recognition of sexual propriety. The evaluation of singlewomen's virtue could be harnessed even as it harmed, and thus the heightened supervision of their sexual activities formed the basis of attacks against them but also played important roles in their defenses.

Instead, singlewomen who filed these complaints fought back against individuals who attempted to exert power over them by exploiting contemporary fears of unbridled female sexuality. Their complaints were attempts to shape the public discourse surrounding their sexual virtue, to assert control over the narratives of their individual lives, and to disrupt the presumptions attached to singlewomen in general. In this way, unmarried women in eighteenth-century Paris utilized the same resources many believed could be wielded against them:

community mobilization, public visibility, and legal action. In doing so, singlewomen resisted marginalization and even imprisonment to claim their access to social membership and judicial rights. Rather than portraying female honor as a personal virtue that could not be recovered, singlewomen filing these complaints claimed it was a public quality that could be effectively defended both discursively and litigiously. As a result, they reframed the meaning of women's sexual honor itself, offering professional reputations and personal relationships as formative parts of their identities and lived experiences.

CHAPTER FOUR

Single but Not Solitary:

Unmarried Women's Bonds of Voluntary Kinship

From the family to the community, from social capital to sexual honor, singlewomen navigated and negotiated institutions, relationships, and standards that were often antithetical or even hostile to members of their social category. Rather than promoting disorder, singlewomen often strengthened traditional structures from roles hitherto believed to be marginal or insignificant. Even when resisting moral exclusion individually, many singlewomen reinforced the mechanisms of social discipline designed to control them collectively. While prescriptive sociocultural ideals and political agendas highlighted the aberration of unmarried women in France during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, these findings suggest that singlewomen were socially-connected insiders who supported the systems of public order far more than they undermined them. Although their status as unmarried women distinguished them from others in their communities and incited specific obstacles, their participation and even prominence in traditional institutions wove them into the fabric of Old Regime French society.

At the same time, sociocultural norms, gender prescriptions, and practical needs led unmarried women to form distinctive homosocial bonds that lacked familial ties but resembled kinship in form, function, and significance.[1] These "family-like" relationships offered singlewomen the emotional companionship and reciprocal fidelity believed to be found foremost,

[1] On homosociality, see: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia UP, 1985).

if not exclusively, in kinship.[2] Ideologically, the family formed a support network tied together by an affirmed sense of collectivity. Singlewomen's non-kin alliances, however, could replicate, reenact, or simulate these aspects of familial relationships. In fact, the most significant difference between these relationships and traditional, denotative kinship was that singlewomen independently *chose* to form, continually maintain, and even prioritize these bonds over the others in their lives.

Historically, these types of relationships have often been overlooked as insignificant, minimized as friendship, or misunderstood as "weak ties" in studies of social relations.[3] The study of singlewomen's lives in Old Regime France reveals that these bonds should, instead, be identified and understood as forms of "voluntary kinship." As this chapter will demonstrate, these relationships resembled familial ties in many ways: they often included the establishment of joint households; they provided reliable, long-term support; in some cases, they took the form of surrogate mother-daughter relations. However, the most evident kin-like features of these elective associations arise from unmarried women's representations of these relationships. Singlewomen actively highlighted the parallels between these bonds and kinship by employing discourse, domestic practices, and inheritance strategies that were typically reserved for family members. Through these methods, unmarried women aimed to translate the significance of these elective bonds to outsiders and extend to them special protections and privileges. By blurring the boundaries between family bonds and voluntary alliances, unmarried women not only contested

[2] The notion of singlewomen's "family-like" bonds in the early modern period was first mentioned by Scott and Tilly in their discussion of unmarried women and the "family economy." Specifically, they state that, while unmarried women could not achieve full independence, certain professions could offer them "a family-like dependency." In this usage, "family-like" represented continued dependence and protection, rather than the autonomy I suggest singlewomen exhibited in their relationships of voluntary kinship. See: Louise A. Tilly and Joan W. Scott, *Women, Work, and Family* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 32.

[3] Mark Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties," *American Journal of Sociology* 78, no. 6 (May 1973): 1360-1380; Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited," *Sociological Theory* 1 (1983): 201–33.

the strict definition of "kinship" but reimagined how this institution could be adapted to suit their own relationships and circumstances.

Examining these bonds through the lens of kinship reveals how singlewomen successfully negotiated, challenged, and redefined sociocultural norms to establish new forms of partnership, configurations of family, and practices of individualism. The family was not designed to privilege the unmarried. Nevertheless, singlewomen strategically employed traditions and systems from this social institution to legitimize relationships and practices that were voluntary in nature. By imbuing these relationships with familial qualities and rights, singlewomen establish independent social units and identities that were not predicated on kinship. Furthermore, a woman's status was continuously defined by her relationships with men, voluntary kinship offered a novel notion of female identity, wherein freely constructed, homosocial bonds provided the reflective framework of self-definition.

Finally, these relationships demonstrate that women did not have to marry, live with kin, or have children in order to form long-term partnerships, establish domestic social units, and even perform roles akin to motherhood. Voluntary kinship therefore offers new perspectives on unmarried women's positions within the highly patriarchal, family-oriented society of early modern France. Particularly in the eighteenth century, as Enlightenment thinkers, political officials, and legal authorities increasingly emphasized the importance of the nuclear family and women's roles within it, bonds of voluntary kinship offered singlewomen alternate routes for mediating their independent status and constructing their social identities.

Definitions and Typologies of Singlewomen's Non-Kin Families

The distinctive nature of singlewomen's non-kin relationships stem, in part, from their comparison to the increasingly exclusive and exclusionary definition of "the family" in early

modern France. As discussed in chapter one, over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the definition of "the family" became more limited in membership and nuclear in structure. This had a significant impact on the familial status of unmarried women in particular. Whereas singlewomen of various ages and positions were readily accepted within the broad familial configurations that existed at the beginning of the early modern period, they were only limitedly included as unmarried daughters in the nuclear family structure. The close bonds singlewomen formed with non-kin therefore helped balance their increasing exclusion from the nuclear family framework while also recalling the broader "household family" structure, which defined kinship in relation to cohabitation and collaboration.

These relationships embodied characteristics believed to be found foremost, if not exclusively, in familial bonds, including reciprocity, collectivity, and immutability. However, these bonds were freely constituted between individuals who had no obligation or innate allegiance to one another. Social scientists employ a number of different terms to denote these types of relationships, including "fictive kinship," "chosen family," and the aforementioned "voluntary kinship."[4] These social typologies bridge the gap between "family" and "friendship" by highlighting performativity as a central aspect of kinship. In doing so, they point to the discursive nature of filiation, as those recognized as "kin" in name are not always those who serve as "family" in practice.

This framing is particularly well suited for discussing singlewomen's close relationships in early modern France. While scholars often link the dangers women faced when unmarried to a paucity or restriction of familial ties, a broader, more fluid understanding of kinship reconsiders these absences and, as a result, their consequences. As the concept of the nuclear family was

[4] See Margaret K. Nelson, "Fictive Kin, Families We Choose, and Voluntary Kin: What Does the Discourse Tell Us?," *Journal of Family Theory & Review* no. 5 (December 2013): 259-281.

predominantly antithetical to their circumstances, singlewomen actively redefined kinship to suit their own lives and relationships. By highlighting the family-like nature of their relationships in statements and legal acts, unmarried women suggested that the boundaries of kinship should be broadened beyond consanguineal and affinal bonds. When historians employ this framework, it becomes clear that singlewomen's familial positions were not vacant; they were just filled by less traditional figures.

Singlewomen formed these relationships as strategies of survival and as a result of companionate connections. These manifestations of voluntary kinship typically took the form of a pair bond between non-married women, with the most common arrangement being two unmarried women who were tied by domestic arrangements, collaborative practices, and, in some cases, even legal bonds. The dynamic could also extend to included tangential affiliates, such as relatives or friends of the two primary participants. In many cases, the women resided together or engaged in what will be discussed below as practices of "communal living." The defining characteristic of these relationships was a joint commitment to mutual support, a sentiment arising from chosen, exchanged collectivity rather than obligatory, innate connection.

While there are cases of close bonds between singlewomen and married women, these kin-like relationships primarily existed between two singlewomen or, occasionally, between an unmarried woman and a widow. A defining characteristic of these bonds appears to be a shared understanding and experience of the instability women faced outside of marriage. In theory, married women had husbands and children to care for and to support them; they may have placed less emphasis on their relationships with other women because they had alternate social priorities and resources. Married women did not need to form or depend as much on "family-like" bonds because they *had* families. For non-married women, especially singlewomen, the need to fill

these gaps and form relationships of mutual support was central to both the development and strength of these "family-like" ties.

In many cases, voluntary kin relations were formed in household settings between female co-residents who depended on one another for daily support and long-term financial, social, and emotional viability. These individuals not only shared a living space but also a life. Once constituted and solidified, these bonds typically persisted for long periods, during which the women would communally practice social rituals such as dining together, hosting visitors, and blending their individual social networks to form joint support systems. Living communally often involved blending property as well, either as a matter of happenstance or through official notarial acts that recognized the pair's joint estate.

The importance of reciprocity makes these types of relationships similar to those found in the self-help networks discussed in chapter two. However, "family-like" bonds differ from community alliances as a result of their exclusivity, strength, descriptions, and, in some cases, formal recognition. Whereas in neighborhood relations one's access to aid was contingent upon one's accumulation of social capital, assistance was easier to anticipate in voluntary kinship due to a sense of collective identity and communal fate. Most often, the community operated as a support network, while a "family-like" relationship functioned as a collaborative partnership. Indeed, the shared experience of facing similar challenges and working toward common goals fostered a sense of mutual interest. Prolonged engagement in such a relationship could lead to the development of a relational self-identity and a sense of what social anthropologist Gerd Baumann calls "axiomatic certainty."[5] In these relationships, it was not essential to consider one's own welfare when deciding whether or not to offer aid to one's counterpart. Instead, as in

[5] Gerd Baumann, "Managing a Polyethnic Milieu: Kinship and Interaction in a London Suburb," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 1, no. 4 (December 1995): 736.

ideological understandings and idealized practices of kinship, one's willingness to provide assistance stemmed from a concrete sense of alliance and allegiance.

These voluntary alliances crossed the boundaries of lineage differences and, in some cases, other divisive identity categories, such as profession, class, and rank. While these relationships could contain power dynamics, such as those between mistresses and servants or co-residents with different financial resources, reciprocal fidelity trumped relational inequity. The joint recognition of emotional bonds, shared strategies, common challenges, and mutual support could overcome the lack of familial relation and even other differences in identity to replicate the affection, commitment, and communality believed to be found foremost in kinship. In many cases, bonds of voluntary kinship, freely formed and continuously reaffirmed, could surpass filial association in both practical importance and emotional strength.

While the bonds of voluntary kinship mirrored familial relationships, these connections were loosely defined and thus not always translatable or defendable to outsiders. Singlewomen proactively employed familial language and privileges legitimize and protect these voluntary connections. These relationships were not only constructed and maintained on a personal level but were formalized publically through discursive choices and even notarial contracts. Ethnologist Cristian Alvarado Leyton explains that choosing and establishing fictive kin involves signaling the "social importance" of the bond through a process of "reenacting and assuring existing kin relations."[6] Perhaps the most important differentiator between familial ties, voluntary kinship, and other social relations, however, is that "all practices of fictive kinship are discernible as kinship only because people understand them as such."[7]

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[6] Cristian Alvarado Leyton , "Fictive Kinship" in *Encyclopedia of Human Relationships,* ed. Harry T. Reis & Susan Sprecher (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2009), 683-684.

[7] Leyton, "Fictive Kinship" in *Encyclopedia of Human Relationships,* 683.

Singlewomen's desire to highlight the family-like nature of these relationships seems to have been to recognize or protect the privileges of members against the outsiders, who either did not understand the bonds or wished to dismiss them in order to prioritize their own rights. Descriptions and identifications of these relationships appear most frequently in death-related records, including wills and police reports. These records contain descriptions of the shared property, domestic arrangements, legal privileges, identifications of relationships, and expressions of affection, all of which offer evidence as to how participants formed these connections, performed within them, and understood their importance. Through such evidence, it also becomes clear that singlewomen intentionally distinguished these relationships from others in their lives. What is even more remarkable than unmarried women's desire to make these bonds distinct, however, is their success in doing so. In many ways, the inclusion of these associations within official records indicates the triumph over obstacles of chance and evaluations of relevancy. If police officials or scribes deemed descriptions of such relationships to be immaterial or irrelevant, they would be lost to history. However, unmarried women framed these bonds in ways that made them striking to the contemporary observer and the present-day scholar. By insisting that voluntary kinship was as important as the family, they made it true.

Recognizing these bonds as forms of "voluntary kinship" offers new insight into the lives of unmarried women in early modern France. First, identifying the parallels between these relationships and kinship highlights how these connections could supplement, substitute, or even fill the familial roles presumed to be under-performed or absent in the lives of singlewomen. As the cases below will demonstrate, the existence of "family-like" bonds did not necessarily negate or replace existing kinship ties. Some women enjoyed these types of relationships while still maintaining connections with traditional family members. Others sought to prioritize these bonds

over existing kinship relations by discursively indicating or formally recognizing that these "family-like" connections warranted special consideration. In doing so, they suggested that these associates should be privileged over existing kin.

Ultimately, the ways singlewomen described these bonds allowed them to recreate, reimagine, or restructure kinship within a society that employed increasingly narrow definitions of what and who constituted "family." While the application of socio-anthropological terminology such as "family-like," "fictive kinship," or "voluntary kinship" help identify these types of relationships, it is ultimately singlewomen's own statements and actions that allow these bonds to be understood as "discourse-created families."[8] Any insight into how these relationships resembled, simulated, or replaced family comes directly from singlewomen's efforts to distinguish these specific bonds as unique and significant. In this way, the study of these relationships highlights the voices of singlewomen who would otherwise remain silent and, in doing so, seeks to legitimize the social, domestic, and emotional lives of unmarried women in early modern France.

Voluntary Kinship and Domestic Arrangements: From Household-Families to Communal Living

Many unmarried women opted for cohabitation or clustered in female-exclusive residences. Depending on their socioeconomic status, financial resources, or immediate needs, singlewomen chose to reside with other women to reduce living expenses, share domestic responsibilities, provide or receive necessary care, or enjoy daily companionship. Members of these households could evolve over time, offering different or all of these aspects of support and exchange as the needs, circumstances, and relationships of the co-residents changed. The

[8] Dawn O. Braithwaite, Betsy Wackernagel Bach, Leslie A. Baxter, Rebecca DiVerniero, Joshua R. Hammonds, Angela M. Hosek, Erin K. Willer, and Bianca M. Wolf, "Constructing Family: A Typology of Voluntary Kin," *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 27, no. 3 (May 2010): 392.

intimacy of the home, especially in the close quarters of Parisian apartments, could foster a sense of solidarity akin to that of a shared identity. While the definition of the "household" was elsewhere narrowing to only represent the simple family and, as a result, to exclude non-kin residents such as friends, servants, or other residents, female-exclusive domestic arrangements did not reflect such ideological or practical changes.

Instead, these co-residential bonds resembled what Tadmor describes as the "household-family,"[9] a structure in which the spatial limits of the home defines family membership. Those who live in the home are considered family, even when they lack kinship ties. As Tadmor writes, "The boundaries of these household-families are not those of blood and marriage; they are the boundaries of authority and of household management."[10] According to Tadmor, the most common organization of the "household-family" structure is a "single person's famil[y]," in which there is one, non-married head who has authority over the other, dependent residents.[11]

The "household-family" offers a perfect description for the many cases in which unmarried women lived with female servants. While Brunelle suggests that servants and mistresses could share relationships of "contractual kin[ship]" in sixteenth-century Nantes, the rarity of long-term or formal service agreements in eighteenth-century Paris meant that such bonds were less voluntary than compulsory.[12] These connections, undoubtedly, still maintained power dynamics and class differences that should not and cannot be ignored in any relationship analysis. However, the labor market in Paris during the eighteenth century allowed for mobility

[9] Naomi Tadmor, "The Concept of the Household-Family in Eighteenth-Century England," *Past & Present*, no. 151 (May, 1996): 116.

[10] Tadmor, "The Concept of the Household-Family," 120.

[11] Ibid., 119.

[12] Gayle K. Brunelle, "Contractual Kin: Servants and their Mistresses in Sixteenth-Century Nantes," *Journal of Early Modern History* 2, no. 4 (January 1998): 374-294.

of domestic servants from one household to another and the lack of contract agreements meant that commitment was neither enforceable nor obligatory. Indeed, some singlewomen had long lasting relationships with their live-in domestics, which could take on familial features in both function and affection. One example of this is Marie Louise Françoise De Sales, who had very close relationships with her two servants Marie Marguerite Chéron and Catherine LeDrain. At the time of her death in April of 1774, all three singlewomen lived in an apartment in the Convent of the Feuillants in Paris, where De Sales was a pensioner.[13] Before she died, De Sales handwrote twenty-three pages documenting her final requests and intended bequests. In this will, which she addressed to, "my *parents* [kin] or generally those who have the goodness to interest themselves in me," De Sales repeatedly asks for those executing her succession to take care of her two servants, "especially Chéron." In a particularly interesting, but also long and winding statement, De Sales repeatedly shifts between recognizing her family's goodness to then requesting they concede to her wishes. Her statement evokes a stream-of-consciousness structure wherein she appears to frame her requests under the guise of affectionate submission. In reality, however, it appears that she is employing a conscious strategy though which she endeavors to bring about the successful execution of her bequests. Therefore, while her frequent vacillations do, undoubtedly, impede the statement's readability, her writing warrants direct quotation:

> I request that, above else and by any means, for my dear relatives—by the goodness and affection that they have always shown me and wish to show me in the end—to, first, believe that only death itself could break the bonds which tie me so tenderly to them and, additionally*, to not abandon the two women who currently serve me*. I am infinitely obliged to them for their ceaseless care for me and for my health. Please give me the comfort of knowing you will embrace them, as these two women have been so faithful to me and I am incredibly attached to them, especially Chéron, who has been with me since I entered this world and who I know raised me. I ask then, my dear relatives, to fulfill this favor out of the tenderness you have for me: please recognize all of the care and affection [Chéron] has for me and the misfortune she had, I think, in my childhood, by

[13] AN Y 13788, 2 April 1774.

> constituting [in her name] a *rente viagère* of four hundred *livres* on a total of four thousand *livres,* to be taken from the sale of the goods given to me by my godmother. [Chéron] is not young enough to begin a new service position and she has become ill. I took her in with me under the presumption that she would pass the rest of her days with me. I ask you then, appealing to the good hearts of my dear cousins and all others, to give me the comfort and peace of knowing that you will not refuse me this request."[14]

Through these frequent invocations of her kin's goodness, De Sales demonstrates that she believes certain family members will challenge her succession and, in particular, the bequests she wishes to make to Chéron. By appealing to her relatives' good nature and reminding them of her long history with Chéron, De Sales attempts to assuage any inclination toward opposition that they might feel. Her repeated assurances, wherein she states that she knows her kin will carry out these requests, feel hollow and insecure. In fact, it appears that De Sales fears her family will reject her final wishes; she therefore attempts to induce their acquiescence by justifying Chéron's value and, perhaps, by provoking their own guilt.[15]

Demoiselle Louise Perette Jourdet had few living relatives to contest her succession. However, she also intentionally privileged her domestic servant when she died in October of 1782. She was seventy-nine years old and had been suffering from an illness that confined her to her bed long before it would finally release her from its grasp. Having languished in sickness for at least a year, Jourdet not only anticipated her death, but thoroughly prepared for it. She received spiritual and temporal counsel, determined how she wished to divide her property, drew up a will, and then waited for death to come. She did not, however, have to wait alone. Instead, she was accompanied throughout this period by her domestic servant, Marie Genevieve Gillot, a widow also known by her late husband's name, Buot. The period of Buot's service did not commence around the time of Jourdet's illness but, instead, dated back over thirty years. During

[14] AN MC Étude LXXVI 450, 3 April 1774.

[15] Ibid.

this time, the women developed a relationship that exceeded mere employment, which typically tied mistresses and servants together while maintaining fixed boundaries between them.[16]

Over the course of their thirty-year relationship, however, the differences that separated mistress and servant appeared less divisive and their circumstances increasingly merged. Jourdet's will represents an attempt to collapse the remaining distinctions between the two women. Her decision to privilege Buot in her will highlights a sense of mutual interest and offers evidence of their strong bond. She designated Buot as the primary beneficiary of her *meubles* or her "movable property." Parisian legal customs designated *meubles* as the personal possessions one owned independently of one's family. One could bequeath this property to anyone, regardless of the existence of consanguineal or affinal ties, because it did not pass through or belong to one's familial patrimony. Under succession law, Jourdet could not bequeath any possessions or funds considered to be part of the family estate, which were considered to be *immeubles* or "unmovable property." When designating an heir, also known as a universal legatee [*légataire universel*], one had to choose an individual who had a right to inherit *immeubles*.[17] As a result, Jourdet had to identify a traditional relative as her heir and she chose one of her cousins for this position. She also made a few additional bequests to distant kin, friends, and religious officials who oversaw her spiritual wellbeing. [18]

The remainder of her will was dedicated to identifying what Buot should receive from her succession. Jourdet repeatedly stressed her desire to benefit Buot "in recognition of the care she has offered me and my household [*ménage*]." This statement would have been as much a

[16] AN Y 11098, 29 October 1782.

[17] Ralph E. Giesey, "Rules of Inheritance and Strategies of Mobility in Prerevolutionary France" *The American Historical Review* 82, no. 2 (1977): 271–89.

[18] AN MC Étude LXXXIX 763, 6 November 1781.

demonstration of her gratitude for Buot as it was a justification to her other potential heirs, one which addressed why Jourdet privileged her servant over her kin in her succession. She addressed this latter group more pointedly, however, when she stated that her bequests should carried out "without any difficulty, knowing their exact probity." It is clear that the "difficulty" Jourdet wished to avoid was any action, process, or opposition to her succession that would place any undue stress, financial burden, or practical challenge on Buot. Jourdet's desire to provide for Buot, who would no longer have employment after her death, as well as her conscious interest in her servant's wellbeing, indicates the strength of their bond.[19]

Not all examples of singlewomen's "household-families" include employment-based relationships. Instead, some involve non-laboring dependents who were typically younger, less financially secure singlewomen that resided as "guests" of the unmarried head of household. These dependents could perform certain services but were not in positions that obliged their labor and they were not paid wages for their work. Instead, their primary responsibilities were to offer companionship and practical assistance to the primary resident. This arrangement was flexible and could take various forms, including singlewomen who housed friends, acquaintances, or community members on either a short-term or long-term basis.

For example, Suzanne Madeleine Douau was the *principal locataire* of a building in which another singlewoman named Genevieve Suzanne Bernard also lived. In her June 1780 will, Douau made special bequests to Bernard and included specific requests to her successors in relation to these donations. Douau first designated that her *rente viagère* of three hundred *livres* be given to Bernard along with her *hardes* and linens. Douau then made the express request that none of her descendants seek financial restitution from Bernard "for the rent or sustenance [provided] during the time she lived and will live in this house and ate and will eat in my

[19] Ibid.

lodgings." Douau specifies that the financial costs of these "as well as anything else Bernard needs" should be treated as donations and bequests, rather than loans. Douau additionally instructs that Bernard should to be appointed as the guardian of her *scellés* after her death, demonstrating she trusted Bernard most with her property. When Douau died in late November of 1781, it appears her heritors respected these wishes.[20]

While Douau's testament includes her views on the women's companionate and collaborative relationship, the police records in relation to her death offer Bernard's own descriptions of their mutual devotion. Bernard tells the police that she "resides [*demeurant*] in the building and normally lives [*vivant*] with the deceased, especially during the course of [Douau's recent] illness."[21] While Douau had more financial capital than Bernard, the care and services Bernard rendered to her made their relationship appear equitable in nature. The social value of a committed ally who offered daily companionship and situational care could even match the strength of kinship ties. These factors allowed Douau and Bernard's relationship to overcome familial and socioeconomic differences to resemble and function as a collaborative partnership between equals.

Another interesting aspect in this example of voluntary kinship is the distinction Bernard makes between the act of residing [*demeurer*] together and the practices of living [*vivre*] communally. While the women lived in the same building, they rented separate apartments. This is clear in Douau's will when she differentiates between the costs associated with Bernard living in the house ["*la maison"*] and those accrued by her eating at Douau's residence ["*chez moi"*]. The distinction Douau and Bernard make in their statements between shared residential spaces and communal social practices suggests a domestic dynamic in which two individuals share a life

[20] AN MC Étude XXIII 771, 4 June 1780; AN MC Étude XXIII 781, 12 December 1781.

[21] AN Y 11598C, 22 November 1781.

but not a home. This arrangement, which can be referred to as the practices or patterns of "communal living," offers a more flexible understanding of the "household-family," one in which the spatial reality of the "household" and the traditional affiliations of the "family" can be adapted to an array of relationships and circumstances.[22]

Identifying practices of "communal living" can fill the linguistic void that seems to exist between individuals who are either not related by traditional familial ties or not bound by common household membership. Indeed, this is the dynamic presented in the case Douau and Bernard, who "live" together but do not share a primary residence. These circumstances seem to exclude them from being considered "roommates" or part of the same "household-family." By using the framework of "communal living," one is able to offer a meaningful designation that defines their domestically-oriented, family-like relationship by *practices* rather than *spaces.*

The concept of "communal living" is therefore important for several reasons. First, this system was practiced regularly in the early modern period, particularly within small villages, joint households, and urban apartment buildings. As discussed in chapter two, the Parisian apartment building, particularly for working-class occupants, had several separate but tightly packed lodgings that shared specific areas, such as the stairway, courtyard, and ground-floor kitchen. The immediate proximity of individual apartments and existence of shared spaces fostered systems of communal living, in which neighbors interacted frequently. Some even lived jointly, simply using their separate quarters to store their belongings and sleep. In this way, the idea of communal living reflects lifestyle choices, survival strategies, and social practices that existed throughout early modern French society.

In addition, the concept of "communal living" offers interpersonal relationships the fluidity that existed in kin-based households during this period, where one might find simple

[22] Ibid.

families, stem families, conjugal but unmarried partners who may or may not have children, and families with auxiliary members, such as widowed parents, single siblings, or orphaned kin. In addition, communal living practices reflect the various marital designations in early modern France, which distinguished between spouses with joint estates and those who legally separated their property. There were three different legal designations for married spouses, which included spouses with joint residences and estates [*en commun*], those who lived together but had separate property rights [*séparation de biens*], and married individuals who maintained separate residences and did not share property rights [*séparation de personne et de biens*]. In this way, "communal living" offers a way to understand how individuals related to one another and collaborated on a daily basis in ways that could be practiced by kin, neighbors, or friends, but is not specific to any of these individual groups.

Finally, communal living reflects not only a system practiced by singlewomen but a common necessity arising from the conditions of unmarried life. Women who lacked the ability to care for or support themselves, either due to financial circumstances or physical limitations, frequently found relief through interpersonal collaboration. By joining forces and pooling resources, individuals engaged in reciprocal aid processes themselves If a woman lacked the resources necessary or the ability to care for herself, she needed to find a method for either collaborating with someone in a similar situation or bringing together those who had resources the other party, such as financial support or lodging exchanged for services such as household management or personal care. While this latter example appears similar to wage-based service as performed by domestics, live-in nurses [*gardes malades*], or governesses, these are many examples in which this sort of exchange was unofficial, unpaid, and informal in nature, which allowed the participating individuals to recognize one another as equals. Other examples

demonstrate that immediate reciprocity was not necessary for those who already had strong ties and, in particular, "family-like" bonds. In these instances, communal living was a continuation of the practices of mutual aid and reciprocal investment and thus did not require equal exchanges on a consistent basis.

Communal living could also encompass practices of offering lodging and personal care to sick or elderly individuals. While singlewomen are typically associated with financial instability and even destitution, virtual kinship offered a sense of solidarity that meant one did not consider one's own prospects before offering care to an established ally. These interpersonal relationships were alternate forms of reliable support believed to be found in kinship, wherein an individual was expected to aid a relative, even when it was costly to one's self, due to a sense of collective identity and mutual interest. As in familial relations, singlewomen who shared close, long-term bonds viewed one another as important sources of reciprocal assistance because they recognized the limited resources that could arise from being unmarried and female in a society where such characteristics were handicaps to survival and success.

This reciprocity and solidarity was evident in the bond between Marguerite Laurent and Marie Louise Desforges. While they maintained separate households, they had a close bond of over twenty years and viewed their lives as intertwined. The length of their relationship, reciprocal interest in each other's welfare, and frequent interactions not only rendered their bond akin to voluntary kinship but also fostered practices of communal living. According to Desforges, Laurent "resided [*demeurait*] on rue Saint Jean Delatran but ordinarily lived [*vivait*]" with Desforges.[23] When Laurent fell ill at the age of seventy-three, the fifty year old Desforges brought Laurent to sleep at her home "due to her infirmities, her advanced age, and because she

[23] AN Y 11479, 23 October 1760.

found herself without company or service in her usual residence."[24] Desforges assumed care of her unwell friend, providing her with the sustenance, care, and company Laurent lacked in her solitary residence. On the day of Laurent's death, Desforges helped her get up around nine o'clock in the morning, "after having supped well the night before." While in the process of helping Laurent change her clothes, Desforges saw her suddenly weaken and fall forward. Desforges caught Laurent in her arms, preventing her from crashing to the floor. However, it was too late. After emitting two or three final hiccoughs while lying in Desforges' arms, Laurent died of a stroke.[25] After twenty years of friendship, a bond marked by mutual affection in daily life and by dedicated care in times of need, Laurent left the world unmarried but not alone, not surrounded by kin but enfolded in the arms someone who cared for her as equally.

Representing and Legitimizing Bonds of Voluntary Kinship

While some singlewomen, such as those in the above-reference cases, highlight the kin-like nature of their voluntary bonds through communal social practices and mutual interpersonal commitments, others sought to collapse the boundaries of distinction between kin and non-kin. Singlewomen accomplished this by employing linguistic and legal strategies to offer familial characteristics to non-kin relationships. Through these processes, singlewomen sought to highlight and translate the nature of these relationships to those who would not recognize or appreciate their significance. For some, the use of familial language was an effective tool for describing the importance of these connections in both sentiment and functionality. Other singlewomen employed notarial acts to have their bonds formally recognized. In doing so, they sought to legitimize their own conception of communality and thereby protect their joint

[24] AN Y 11479, 18 October 1760.

[25] AN Y 11479, 23 October 1760.

privileges from those who might seek to undermine or devalue their relationships. Through these discursive representations and official processes, singlewomen consciously and strategically attempted to authenticate the immutability of their relationships, indicating their desire to have them recognizes as "legitimate" bonds rather than "personal" alliances.

One of the ways singlewomen formed, strengthened, or represented their bonds with other women was through the use of familial language. Scholars in the field of family communication highlight the central role of discourse in constituting voluntary kin relationships. As Braithwaite et al. observe:

> "Families that somehow depart from the normative standards of what constitutes a 'real' family bear a special discursive burden to present themselves as understandable and legitimate. Because voluntary kin relationships are not based on the traditional criteria of association by blood or law, members of those fictive relationships experience them as potentially problematic, requiring discursive work to render them sensical [*sic.*] and legitimate to others."[26]

The "discursive work" of linguistic kinship therefore aimed to translate one's personal interpretation a bond to those who would not otherwise understand or recognize its significance.

By employing linguistic patterns that framed certain associates as family, unmarried women effectively articulated their affection and investment in one another. This was the case for two unmarried women named Marie Elisabeth Catherine Bonnin and Catherine Mallard. In 1760, the women were living in the same building but were employed and resided in separate apartments. Bonnin moved to the building first, upon securing employment as a domestic servant for one of the residents. After seven months, she found Mallard a service position with a widow who lived in a different apartment, prompting Mallard's move to the building. This offered the women immediate and frequent access to one another as they undertook their daily tasks and social rituals. After enjoying this arrangement and one another's company for approximately one

[26] Braithwaite et al., "Constructing Family," 403.

month, Bonnin filed a complaint with the police asserting that a group of neighbors threatened and insulted both herself and Mallard. In the police records, Bonnin identifies Mallard as her "goddaughter." The witnesses deposed in the case, who were the women's employers and other neighbors, also described the women as being *marraine* (godmother) and *filleule* (goddaughter) to one another. In her statement to the police, however, Mallard clarified that the women were not related by "kinship or formal alliance." Instead, she explained, they called one another godmother and goddaughter "due to the affection between them [*par amitié entre elles*]."[27]

Mallard's distinction between kinship [*parenté*] and affection [*amitié*] when describing her relationship with Bonnin appears to be a distinction of the kind, rather than degree. *Amitié* was a term with multiple meanings in the early modern period. As Nancy Locklin notes, "The word seems to have covered everything from passion and affection to basic civility."[28] While not antithetical to kinship, it was a form of affection more akin to "friendship." Central to the meaning of *amitié,* however, was an expression of fidelity, one which could be used between social equals as well as in patronage relationships. As Arthur Herman explains, the term *amitié* had "connotations of public as well as private responsibilities and of more equal dealings than other, conventional terms such as 'servant' or 'creature.'"[29] Whether used in brokerage, clientage, or social relationships*, amitié* typically signified as sentiment of mutuality that was both privately recognized and publicly performed.

Family members also employed the term "*amitié*" when expressing special affection for one another. This is clear in its frequent use between spouses in companionate marriages, who

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[27] AN Y 9653, 2 June 1760.

[28] Nancy Locklin, "Women and Gift-Giving in Eighteenth-Century Brittany: Wills and Donations," in *"For the Salvation of my Soul": Women and Wills in Medieval and Early Modern France*, ed. Joëlle Rollo-Koster and Kathryn L. Reyerson (Centre for French History and Culture of the University of St Andrews, 2012), 92.

[29] Arthur L. Herman, Jr., "The Language of Fidelity in Early Modern France," *The Journal of Modern History* 67, no. 1 (March 1995): 22.

employed the term to emphasize that reciprocal affection and mutual respect formed the foundation of their marital union. Family members also used the term to distinguish particularly strong or harmonious relationships they enjoyed with specific relatives. While the bonds of kinship were invariable, the additional element of friendly affection was both elective and subject to cultivation. Marie Anne Delaporte, for example, was an unmarried laundress who lived with her unmarried cousin, Edmée Lebeuf, for eighteen years. In her 1763 will, Delaporte describes Lebeuf as "my relative and my friend [*ma parante et mon amie*]." This is the only individual—kin and non-kin—that Delaporte identifies as a "friend [*amie*]" and the only family member whom she describes using the vague term "relative [*parante*]." In this way, her portrayal of Lebeuf highlights their emotional bond while deemphasizing their familial connection.[30] *Amitié* was therefore a flexible term that did not preclude familial affection.

In fact, *amitié* indicated a bond of reciprocity and regard that could exceed the obligatory communality found in familial ties. As Jonathan Dewald describes, the elective constitution of *amitié* meant it could be a stronger expression of reciprocity and regard. Friendship, as he notes, "offered emotional attachments based on choice and little affected by family demands."[31] The seventeenth-century writer the Marquise de Sablé also highlights the element of choice in relationships of *amitié,* writing, "Friendship is a type of Virtue that can only be built on the esteem of the people one loves, that is to say, on the qualities of the soul, such as faithfulness, generosity, and discretion, and on the good qualities of the mind."[32] According to Sablé, bonds of friendship involve a process of evaluation, in which one considers the virtues and vices of an

[30] MC Étude XLVII 192, 30 August 1763; Y 11486 A, 8 February 1767.

[31] Jonathan DeWald, *Aristocratic Experience and the Origins of Modern Culture: France, 1570-1715* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 104.

[32] Madeleine de Souvré marquise de Sablé, "De l'Amitié," in *Men and Women Making Friends in early Modern France*, ed. Lewis C. Seifert and Rebecca M. Wilkin (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), 228.

individual. The foundation of a friendship is therefore the mutual recognition of one another's positive attributes. A continual appreciation for these attributes serves to develop, solidify, and maintain the bond. As Sablé argues, "The bonds of virtue must be stronger than those of blood, a man of goodness being closer to a man of goodness by the similarity of their morals than the son is to the father by the similarity of faces."[33] In this way, *amitité* not only signified one's respect for another, but the recognition of one's self in that person. This perception of communality made friendship a different, if not stronger, connection than innate kinship. While "family" represented a bond of lineage, "friendship" represented a union of souls.

Therefore, Mallard's use of *amitié* to describe her relationship with Bonnin does not represent a devaluation of their bond. At no point does either woman refer to the other as her "friend" [*amie*]. Instead, the women continuously employ familial language, signifying that they felt "friendship" could not adequately capture the nature of their bond. Mallard's clarification thus represents an act of translation. As Bonnin and Mallard *electively* assumed the roles of godmother and goddaughter, their bond was affective rather than official. Mallard thereby performs discursive work to make their bonds legible to the police. It is likely that Mallard's choice to make this clarification stems from the official nature of her statement—a witness testimony—and the circumstances in which it is made—a police investigation. It does not appear that the women have ever made this distinction to their immediate interlocutors, as their neighbors and even employers refer to them as godmother and goddaughter in their own statements to the police. In this way, Mallard and Bonnin use discursive tactics to represent their bond as one that represents kinship—if not in principle, certainly in practice and affection.[34]

The primary way in which unmarried women imbued voluntary bonds with kin-like

[33] Ibid., 230.

[34] AN Y 9653, 2 June 1760.

features, however, was through their inheritance choices and practices. Through an array of strategies, singlewomen attempted to overcome the legal restrictions inherent in early modern succession law, which hindered their ability to pass on property in ways that accorded with their own wishes and relationships. In the cases above, the singlewomen aligned their bequests with inheritance law in early modern France, which prohibited them from passing on patrimonial property to anyone who did not share traditional, recognized kinship ties to that lineage.

As the previously referenced cases indicate, however, unmarried women anticipated opposition from relatives when they made bequests of this kind to non-kin. De Sales, Jourdet, and Douau all used their wills to make repeated entreaties to their kin to respect their bequests, which demonstrates that these women knew they were acting outside of standard inheritance practices. They justified their choices and requested their kin understand why they prioritized these individuals over their relatives. Other singlewomen, however, deviated from the norms of succession entirely and attempted to extend familial privileges to their voluntary kin without asking for their relatives' consent or support.

In some cases, it appears that unmarried women made these choices consciously, either due to their lack of legal knowledge regarding succession or because they hoped their bequests may still be successful in spite of these restrictions. Catherine Thillière, for example, attempted to appoint another *fille majeure* with whom she lived, Marie Elizabeth Geré, as her universal legatee. Thillière actively made this choice despite the fact that she had several nieces and nephews who were legally entitled to her immovable property and, therefore, the privileges offered by this designation. This may have been a calculated risk by Thillière, as her will offers irrefutable evidence that she understood this would not be allowed under succession law. The evidence for this knowledge can be found in the lines she crossed out in her testament. One of

the crossed out sections reads: "I give and bequeath to those whom the law calls to my succession a collective sum of fifty *livres.*" Furthermore, her will includes a different designation of her universal legatee, which was crossed out before Geré was named instead. The initial appointment reads, "I name and institute for my universal legatee my nephew Vernère and other whom the law can…" She left this line unfinished before she crossed it out and substituted Geré. Thillière's invocations of the law suggest her reluctant acquiescence to the limitations imposed in succession practices. However, she consciously refuted these legal restrictions and appointed the individual whose rights were not accorded by the law but by Thilllière herself.[35]

Ultimately, Thillière's nieces and nephews contested this deviation from succession law but, interestingly, it does not appear Geré attempted to challenge their opposition. Instead, she conceded that she would turn over to them all of Thellière's patrimonial property while she would retain the rights to all of the deceased's personal possessions.[36] It is possible that the women discussed this strategy before Thillière drew up her will and, in doing so, determined that this course of action would most be most effective in strengthening Geré's property claims and her position within the succession negotiations. If so, this was a very successful strategy, as it allowed Geré to inherit all of the property she would be legally eligible to receive from Thillière's estate.

In contrast to Thillière, who had direct knowledge of her relatives and still chose to frame her will in a way that refuted their privileges, Anne Catherine Hallet dite Jouhanelle was not in contact with her kin. At the time of her death in 1760, Jouhanelle had been living with her domestic servant, Victoire, for ten years. When speaking to the police, Victoire relayed that in this entire period, she never saw or met any of her mistress' kin. As family members did not

[35] AN Y 10808 B, 17 November 1787; AN MC Étude LXXXV 708, 29 October 1787.

[36] AN MC Étude LXXXV 708, 29 October 1787; AN MC Étude LXXXV 708, 24 November 1787.

appear to play active roles in Jouhanelle's life, at least in the ten years before her death, it seems that Jouhanelle instead formed a kin-like relationship with Victoire. This is evidenced not only by the fact that Jouhanelle makes Victoire a generous bequest in her will, leaving her five years of wages as well as an additional five hundred *livres,* but also by her designation of Victoire's daughter, Marie Barbe Risset, as her universal heir. Through this act in particular, Jouhanelle recognized the family-like bonds between herself and Victoire, which allowed her to co-opt Victoire's descendants and create a pseudo-lineage between the two women that both resembled and reimagined kinship outside the boundaries of blood ties. This voluntary kin would have appeared to be Jouhanelle's family both in form and function. She never even mentioned any other relatives in her will. After Jouhanelle's death, however, several of her cousins made claims upon her estate and Risset had to give up her position as her universal legatee. The entire process would have been difficult for Risset, as her mother, Victoire, died while the succession was still being settled. Ultimately, Jouhanelle's attempt to exert full authority over her succession failed.[37]

Some unmarried women recognized the impossibility of harnessing succession laws to their needs and desires. Marie Jolly pointedly mentioned in her 1761 will how the law limited her ability to accord her property as she wished to Françoise Pilorge, an unmarried woman with whom she lived for fifteen years. Jolly wrote, "To Mademoiselle Françoise Pilorge, I give her all of my movable property and generally everything that the law and customs will permit me to give and offer to her, wishing still that I had the power to give her more in recognition of affection [*amitié*] she has always had for me and I for her." It appears, however, that Jolly understood the restrictions of succession law and designated her nieces as her heirs instead. [38]

Catherine Marsignet and Françoise Perrette Batillot Delabarre shared not only an

[37] AN MC Étude CXIII 404, 29 March 1760; AN Y 11341, 30 March 1760.

[38] AN Y 15459, 29 June 1761.

apartment, but also many commercial ventures. Both women were postmistresses in Paris and had jointly authorized many notarial documents in this capacity. The shared nature of their work, home, and lives created some difficulties for Marsignet when Delbarre died in 1787. Marsignet explained to the police that two had occupied their apartment "jointly [*conjointement*]" for more than twenty years. As a result, their lives were highly interconnected, which made any distinct division of property, business, or personal affairs very difficult. Marsignet explained that "there is confusion of belongings, linens, and personal effects" in their shared apartment. In addition, because they directed "the city's revenue and expenditure jointly," their professional responsibilities were also shared.[39]

However, Delabarre and Marsignet's professions afforded them intricate knowledge of succession law and notarial practices. Delabarre, who appears to have recognized that her death was imminent, used this information to proactively protect Marsignet's rights. Before her death, Delabarre initiated an act of "substitution" before Parisian notaries, in which she granted Marsignet legal authority over all of her affairs.[40] While other notarial actions could have legitimized the women's joint rights over their funds and property, the act of substitution went a step further, figuratively replacing Delabarre with Marsignet in all affairs and ceding all communal belongings and finances to the latter.[41] As a result of this act, Delabarre was able to not only able to appoint Marsignet as the full owner of her belongings, but she could also appoint Marsignet as her heir, even though the women were not related.[42] This is what Delabarre did in her will, which she submitted to Parisian notaries just five days before her death. In her will,

[39] AN Y 13696 A, 4 February 1787.

[40] AN MC Étude C 903, 1 February 1787.

[41] Guyot, "Substitution" in *Répertoire universel et raisonné de jurisprudence,* 16:453-546.

[42] Ibid., 15: 503.

Delabarre recognized Marsignet's privilege in all forms, appointing her as her heir and as the executor of her estate. She made a few small bequests and then left all of her remaining property to "Mademoiselle Catherine Marsignet, *fille majeure*, who has lived with me for twenty one years, in recognition of the services she has rendered to me and of the attachment she has for me."[43] While Delabarre's nephew would oppose her testament and others would make their own claims upon her estate, Marsignet's rights were successfully protected and upheld.[44]

This was only one of various strategies unmarried women employed to imbue their voluntary kin with familial privileges. As *rentes* allowed one to take funds considered to be part of the patrimonial estate and transform them into movable property, unmarried women invested funds in life annuities for themselves and those who they wished to pass their financial holdings onto in their successions.[45] Anne Catherine Brigeon constituted a *rente viagère* on behalf of Margueritte Charlotte Garnier in 1784.[46] Jeanne Mathieu and Anne Belin employed the method common among married couples and unmarried relatives discussed in chapter one, the *donation entre vifs*. In 1758, these two singlewomen made a mutual donation to one another, joining their property by situating all their separate holdings within a joint estate.[47] Margueritte Nicolle Aubry, a widow, ensured that her unwed friend and co-resident of over thirty years, Anne Margueritte Gatine, would receive all of her property when she died by submitting a notarial act "abandoning her belongings" to Gatine in 1787.[48]

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[43] AN MC Étude C 902, 31 January 1787.

[44] AN MC Étude C 903, 11 February 1787.

[45] Giesey, "Rules of Inheritance," 271–89.

[46] AN MC Étude C 871, 15 May 1784.

[47] AN Y 390, 11 November 1758.

[48] AN MC Étude X 769, 7 August 1787.

Jeanne Margueritte Paillet and Jeanne Renault were thorough in their attempts to imbue one another with these rights. In October of 1763, Renault constituted a *rente* in Paillet's name.[49] A month later, the women made a mutual donation to one another through a *donation entre vifs*.[50] In January of the following year, they constituted a *rente viagère* in both of their names.[51] Finally, in Paillet's 1764 testament, she privileged Renault's rights in all forms. She wrote, "I would like it known that I advance" the rights of "Jeanne Renault, my friend with whom I have lived for nearly twenty-two years" over all others. Paillet asked that her heirs "return all property to her . . . and do so without causing any difficulty." In exchange, Paillet noted that Renault would sell the property and would make subsequent donations to these relatives. To carry out her succession, Paillet also made Renault the executor of her estate. Paillet implies in her will that her family members should understand the bond between the women and should respect Renault's rights as result. It is unclear if they followed these instructions. However, the women had already instituted enough protections that Renualt would have had strong rights within Paillet's succession.[52] As the early modern family was defined not only by blood and marital ties but also by shared patrimony, unmarried women like Paillet and Renault who sought out inheritance rights for their non-kin negotiated this institution and recreated it in their own vision.

Performing Single Motherhood Through Informal Fosterage and Adoption

Remaining single, whether by choice or by circumstance, did not necessarily mean one remained childless. As demonstrated in the previous chapters, unmarried women gave birth to illegitimate children and even served as surrogate mothers for younger kin, such as nieces and

[49] AN MC Étude XVI 759, 22 October 1763.

[50] AN MC Étude XVI 759, 23 November 1763.

[51] AN MC Étude XVI 760, 18 January 1764.

[52] AN MC ET XVI 763, 20 August 1764.

nephews. In addition, singlewomen performed non-biological motherhood through the adoption and fosterage of children within their communities and social networks. By raising orphaned daughters, singlewomen constructed alternate family structures based on voluntary forms of matrilineal kinship.[53] While the early modern family was oriented around the presence of a paternal figure and the exercise of patriarchal power, singlewomen who served as guardians for non-kin challenged sociocultural norms while still upholding the gender ideals that associated full womanhood with motherhood.[54] In many ways, these unmarried women held unique and somewhat contradictory positions. They contributed to civil welfare by supporting children in need who might otherwise be placed in charitable institutions or left in destitution. Yet, in performing guardianship independently—apart from men and often without formal authorization—singlewomen challenged the social structures and systems of power that formed the basis of public order.

Adoption and fosterage took various forms in early modern France. Most arrangements took place within extended kin groups, although they sometimes involved non-kin allies, community members, or institutional support. In her study of adoption in early modern Paris, Kristen Gager observes that the practice took two official forms during the sixteen and seventeenth centuries: as public adoptions undertaken through charitable institutions that supported foundlings and impoverished children and as private adoption between and within

[53] All of the examples located in my research on singlewomen's guardianship of non-kin children fit the pattern of unmarried women caring for girls. I did not find a single case in which a singlewoman had custodial responsibilities over a boy who was not a member of her family, such as her nephew.

[54] See Kristin E. Gager, *Blood Ties and Fictive Ties: Adoption and Family Life in Early Modern France* (Princeton UP, 1996) and Kristen E Gager, "Women, Adoption, and Family Life in Early Modern Paris," *Journal of Family History* 22, no. 1 (January 1997): 5-25.

families.[55] These types of adoption were officially recorded by the participating institution or through notarized contracts. In many cases, these adoptions involved two steps: first, a pledge of guardianship, which would include promises to feed, clothe, educate, and treat the adoptee fairly or, even, "like their own child."[56] Depending on the age of the adoptee, there might also be a counter-agreement by the child to follow the rule of their new guardian(s). As Parisian customary law did not grant inheritance rights to adopted kin, if a family wished to grant patrimonial benefits to an adopted child, they needed to engage in an additional notarial process, which typically took the form of a mutual donation [*donation entre vifs*].

Children held in Parisian institutions fell into two categories: *pauvre orphelins* and *enfants trouvés*. The first group, designated "poor orphans," constituted children presumed to be born in legitimate marriages and abandoned with regret due to familial misfortune, which made them worthy of pity and thus public support. "Foundlings," conversely, were assumed to be the abandoned children of unmarried individuals, unwanted and unintended bastards who were tainted by their parents' vice.[57] At the beginning of the eighteenth century there were three primary institutions for orphaned or abandoned children in Paris: La Trinité, which housed legitimate children; l'Hôpital des Enfants Trouvés, also known as "*La Couche*," which admitted illegitimate children and often sent them to wet-nurses and foster families outside of the city; and l'Hôpital des Enfants Rouges, which housed children whose parents died in the city's primary hospital, the Hôtel Dieu. During the eighteenth century, all three institutions expanded and another, the Maison du Faubourg St. Antoine, was added to accommodate the rapidly rising

[55] Gager, *Blood Ties and Fictive Ties*, 9-10.

[56] Ibid., 71.

[57] Fuchs, *Abandoned Children*, 4.

numbers of needy, abandoned, and orphaned children in the French capital.[58] In *La Couche* alone, the number of admitted infants rose from 312 in 1670 to 7,676 in 1772.[59] Spikes in this steady incline appear during periods of instability, such as in the economic crisis and widespread famine of 1709.[60] However, the rates increased exponentially overall in the eighteenth century, as the number of abandoned children in Paris doubled between 1711-1777.[61]

Widespread economic decline, rising rates of illegitimacy, and increased migration to the French capital all contributed to the expansion of networks which allowed individuals in the French provinces and even international cities such as Brussels to send unwanted children to Paris for institutional admittance.[62] Singlewomen's engagement in formal adoptions during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as well as their participation in unofficial adoption and fosterage practices during this period and throughout the eighteenth century, demonstrate that unmarried motherhood was not a blight to public order but a benefit to French society.

Gager observes that thirty percent of the adoption contracts dating from 1540-1690 involved "independent women," a category which includes widows, legally-separated wives, and unmarried women.[63] Notably, all of women in this group enjoyed independent property rights and were childless at the time of the contracts, suggesting that they may have been motivated to

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[58] Ibid., 9.

[59] Claude Delasselle, "Abandoned Children in Eighteenth-Century Paris," in *Deviants and the Abandoned in French Society*, ed. Robert Forster and Orest Ranum, trans. Elborg Forster and Patricia M. Ranum (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978), 49.

[60] Delasselle, "Abandoned Children," 49.

[61] Fuchs, *Abandoned Children,* 9.

[62] Delasselle, "Abandoned Children," 47-82; Fuchs, *Abandoned Children,* 9-10; Cissie Fairchilds, "Female Sexual Attitudes and the Rise of Illegitimacy: A Case Study," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 8, no. 4 (1978): 627-67; Fuchs, *Abandoned Children,* 10; Anne Winter, "Abandoned in Brussels, Delivered in Paris: Long-Distance Transports of Unwanted Children in the Eighteenth-Century," *Journal of Family History* 35, no. 3 (2010): 232-248.

[63] Gager, "Women, Adoption, and Family Life," 20.

adopt by a desire to constitute an heir.[64] As Gager notes, "'adoptive reproduction' offered women who could not marry, or did not want to, an alternative avenue to creating a family and ensuring the passage of their property into the next generation."[65]

However, as seen elsewhere in this study, singlewomen utilized diverse estate-planning strategies and appointed a variety of individuals as heirs. Nieces and nephews often served as their universal legatees, as did other family members, servants, friends, neighbors, and charitable institutions. Finding a non-kin child to raise and appoint as one's heir was therefore not a necessary step in their process of estate planning. Instead, singlewomen's engagement in intergenerational voluntary kinship likely stemmed from charitable inclinations, labor needs, strategies for ensuring elder care, or the desire to perform the socially-emphasized role of mother. While singlewomen who became mothers biologically were typically associated with licentiousness, dishonor, and ruin, those who assumed maternal positions through adoption or fosterage may not have faced such criticism, particularly if they could financially support children and chose to do so out of benevolence. Engaging in "social maternity"[66] through adoption or fosterage allowed singlewomen to publicly fulfill feminine ideals and lifecycle norms while still adhering to the virtues that governed sexual mores and female honor.

In addition, while Gager's concept of "adoptive reproduction" emphasizes the centrality of performative care in non-kin adoption by independent women, it also hinges on the existence of a legal contract between the participating parties. "The model of filiation," Gager writes, "was defined not by ties of flesh and blood sanctioned by marriage, but rather by a legal agreement

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[64] Gager, *Blood Ties and Fictive Ties*, 99.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Mona Etienne, "The Case for Social Maternity: Adoption of Children by Urban Baule Women," *Dialectical Anthropology* 4 (1979): 237-42 cited in Gager, "Women, Adoption, and Family Life," 14.

that created enduring bonds between independent women and the children they brought into their home."[67] In narrowing from "independent women" to specifically unmarried women, one finds that practices of guardianship were typically informal in nature and arranged outside formal contracts. While there are examples of singlewomen formally adopting children during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, these cases are rare and exceptional. For singlewomen, the process of assuming responsibility for a child was typically informal in nature because, as seen in instances of avuncular guardianship, they were unlikely to be appointed as tutors or recognized as sole guardians in contractual agreements involving minors. In addition, the practice contractual adoption essentially disappeared in most of France during the eighteenth century, making it difficult to find any cases of "adoptive reproduction" from this period. Absence of evidence, however, is not evidence of absence: it is clear that singlewomen engaged in unofficial adoption practices throughout this period and that many social groups continued informal adoption arrangements during the eighteenth century.

As a result, a more flexible definition of adoption offers better insight into non-kin guardianship in the early modern period, especially in relation to singlewomen. Rather than examining "adoptive reproduction" through formal guardianship contracts and *donations entre vifs*, one can instead find these arrangements by studying practices of long-term child rearing, notarial records suggesting intergenerational bonds between non-kin, and wills that privilege the rights of surrogate children. In most cases, the arrangements involving singlewomen as guardianship resemble fosterage more than adoption. As opposed to adoption, instances of fosterage often went unrecorded. These arrangements were flexible in nature and sometimes even by design. Responsibility for non-kin children could assume a number of different forms, including those prompting an exchange of funds in return for child care, which might be

[67] Gager, "Women, Adoption, and Family Life," 7.

recorded, as well as those which stemmed from immediate need or interventional aid. For some, sending a child to live with a different family could even be an opportunity for social mobility. As Tracy Adams demonstrates in her study of elite female fosterage, aristocratic families exchanged daughters in order to solidify patronage bonds or other alliances.[68] Among the non-elite, fosterage typically took place between family members, as has been seen in the cases of unmarried aunts. However, these arrangements could also occur when neighbors or friends assumed guardianship for as a result of family death, destitution, distance, or because they could prove the child with means or opportunities that its parents could not, such as education, employment, or specialized training.[69]

One of the institutions that resembled fosterage was apprenticeship, when singlewomen would provide labor training and general supervision for young women and girls. During the period of apprenticeship, which typically exceeded one year, a mistress would oversee the welfare and growth of an apprentice within her household. In her study of the Parisian seamstress guild, Clare Crowston notes how the responsibilities mistresses undertook toward their apprentices resembled those typically performed by parents toward their children. In particular, mistresses supervised their apprentices' conduct and morals, promoted their religious observance, protected their sexual virtue, and help facilitate their future stability and success through education (for mistresses, this took the form of professional training) and networking (specifically, within trade and guild communities).[70] Therefore, while apprenticeship was not

[68] Tracy Adams, "Fostering Girls in Early Modern France" in *Emotions in the Household, 1200-1900,* ed. Susan Broomhall (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 103-118.

[69] For more information on the various forms of fosterage in early modern France, see Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux, "Beyond adoption: Orphans and Family Strategies in Pre-Industrial France," *The History of the Family* 1, no. 1 (1996): 1-13.

[70] Clare Haru Crowston, *Fabricating Women: The Seamstresses of Old Regime France, 1675–1791* (Durham: Duke UP, 2001), p. 310-312.

fosterage per se, it resembled this system in practice and offers additional examples of singlewomen who helped raise young women who were not their own daughters.

For children and young adolescents, the period of apprenticeship typically corresponded with several important life transitions. As most apprentices lived with their masters or mistresses, they therefore experienced changes while under the tutelage of these pseudo-guardians, rather than their family members. In his study of apprenticeship in eighteenth-century Paris, Stephen Kaplan notes that this dislocation from one's kin group during this period facilitated a child's institutional transition from the "biological family" found in one's birth home to the "social family" one joined in the workshop/ guild.[71] Many apprentices undertook their training during crucial period of growth and maturation. They therefore learned how to be adults through the example of their masters or mistresses. Crowston notes that apprenticeship in the Parisian seamstress guild typically coincided with the onset of puberty. As a result, mistresses and their other employees or household members would have been the primary sources of information for apprentices as they experienced physiological maturation and learned about female biology. "The most explicit lessons these adolescents received about menstruation and sexuality," Crowston writes, "may have come from their mistresses or older workers, rather than their own mothers or sisters."[72] Singlewomen working and living with young servants or apprentices would not only be training them to be laborers, but also showing them how to be women. This would require a mixture of firm instruction, practical guidance, and compassionate support. Several apprenticeship contracts from this period refer to the emotional care expected of the mistress-

[71] Steven L. Kaplan, "L'apprentissage au XVIIIe siècle: le cas de Paris," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 40, no. 33 (July-September 1993): 448.

[72] Crowston, *Fabricating Women,* 310.

guardian, her obligation to treat the apprentice "warmly and humanely."[73]

In this way, singlewomen who welcomed apprentices into their workshops and homes played important roles as educators, protectors, and models of womanhood. When a girl lacked familial support during apprenticeship, her mistress became her primary guardian. This included, for example, orphaned apprentices, those whose families did not live in the cities where they learned their trades, or those whose parents left them in the care of charitable institutions. As Crowston notes, "For young girls, apprenticeship offered not only trade skills but a form of foster care in families broken by death, dislocation, or poverty."[74] By integrating apprentices with a weak or non-operative kin network into their homes, workshops, and household economies, unmarried women created new familial units based on the type of contractual commitment and mutual obligations Gager describes in her discussion of "adoptive reproduction."[75] For unmarried women without children and girls without active parents, apprenticeship could resemble fosterage or even family-like surrogacy.

In March of 1783, Marie Madeleine Hélène Charlotte Dubreuil became an apprentice in the home and workshop of an unmarried mistress seamstress named Madeleine Thenadey. Dubreuil's father was a cavalry lieutenant and the commander of the local guard in the city of Maule. It is unclear why Dubreuil's apprenticeship took place with Thenadey in Paris, rather with than a local associate in Maule. The result, however, was that her father would not be immediately accessible during the two-year period of her apprenticeship. As such, Thenadey would be Dubreuil's principal guardian in the French capital. As the custodian of Dubreuil's

[73] AN MC Étude CVII 496, 18 July 1761; AN MC Étude CVII 496, 20 July 1761; AN MC Étude XVI 759, 19 December 1763; AN MC Étude XXIII 766, 21 June 1779; AN MC Étude XLV 581, 8 March 1783.

[74] In *Women's Networks in Medieval France,* Kathryn Reyerson notes that a master's household could be constitute a "surrogate family" for an apprentice, especially when their own family was absent. Kathryn L. Reyerson, *Women's Networks in Medieval France: Gender and Community in Montpellier, 1300-1350* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 68.

[75] Gager, "Women, Adoption, and Family Life," 7.

daily care, her main resource in cases of emergency, and her conduit for social and professional networking, Thenadey's role as mistress in this case would require more responsibility and attention than would be required for an apprentice whose family lived locally. [76]

The same would have been true for nineteen-year-old Gabrielle Cocquerelle, who moved to Paris to enter into a four-year apprenticeship with an unmarried mistress linen seller named Antoinette Garisson. As Cocquerelle's family lived in Montdidier, a commune in northern France, Garisson's responsibilities would encompass both instruction in the linen trade and primary custodianship. Garrison agreed to house Cocquerelle, provide her with material necessities and daily sustenance, supervise her social activities, and oversee her moral and religious wellbeing.[77] Cocquerelle's apprenticeship contract indicated that after four years of training under Garisson, her goal would be to next secure a two-year position in a linen store in Paris. Garisson would therefore continue to be an important resource for Cocquerelle after their apprenticeship ended, as she would be the likely candidate for facilitating her protégée's professional advancement and long-term establishment in the Parisian linen trade. In this way, engaging an apprentice who would be geographically removed from her family could require a mistress to undertake more holistic guardianship responsibilities.

While familial dislocation could require short-term parental surrogacy for apprentices, the death of one or both parents made apprenticeship fundamentally akin to fosterage. In cases of an orphaned apprentice, an unmarried mistress's role would blend professional instruction with broader custodial care. These arrangements could arise if an unmarried woman engaged an apprentice from one of the Parisian institutions for orphans and abandoned children. On July 8, 1672, for example, a *fille majeure* named Marie Viard made the journey across the Seine from

[76] AN MC Étude XLV 581, 8 March 1783.

[77] AN MC Étude XVI 759, 19 December 1763.

her apartment in Faubourg Saint Germain to the Hôpital des Enfants-Trouvés. Once there, she asked to be granted guardianship over an eight-year old resident named Anne Duchemin, a request which was supported by her local ecclesiastics at the Parish of Saint-Suplice. [78] It was unclear if Viard already knew Duchemin and requested her specifically or if the hospital administrators chose this orphan they believed she would be best suited for Viard's request.

In particular, Viard stated that she intended teach the child "her trade of *passementerie*," which included making and applying fringe and tassels adornments to clothing, military uniforms, and curtains, and other furnishings. Viard noted that this training "had been accorded to her and she felt an obligation to pass it on in the accustomed way."[79] This statement suggests that Viard saw her own trade instruction as a valuable endowment. Perhaps her training had been undertaken as an act of charity when she was facing her own difficulties and now, as an adult and in a stable enough position to do so, she wished to reciprocate this altruism. Alternatively, Viard may have come from a family who worked in the *passementerie* industry and she wanted to reinforce their professional legacy and engaged in a familial tradition by passing this knowledge on to the next generation. It is also conceivable that Viard had little to no help in her current employment and recognized that the hospital could provide low-cost and long-term labor in the form of young orphans. Regardless of her motives, by bringing Duchemin into her home, workshop, and life, Viard could engage in socially productive and, potentially, personally fulfilling forms of charitable guardianship that would bolster her social capital and strengthen her community alliances. Ultimately, Viard's stated intention demonstrates a desire for continuity

[78] This case first came to my attention through Kristen Gager's work on independent women's adoption practices in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France. Building off of her compelling research and using the notarial contract she cited (AN MC Étude LXIX 70, 8 July 1672), I was able uncover additional documents and information related to this case: AN MC Répetoire LXIX , 8 July 1672; AH-HP, Fonds de l'Hôpital des Enfants-Trouvés, Liasse 9, "Registre des délibérations de Messieurs les directeurs des Enfants-Trouvés en France," 8 July 1672.

[79] AH-HP, Fonds de l'Hôpital des Enfants-Trouvés, Liasse 9, "Registre des délibérations de Messieurs les directeurs des Enfants-Trouvés en France," 8 July 1672.

and legacy that cannot be dissociated from voluntary kinship. By assuming the role of Duchemin's surrogate parent, Viard constructed lineages of trade knowledge, professional identity, and even familial practices that likely appeared to be impossible as an unmarried, childless woman.

After registering the arrangement with the Hôpital des Enfants-Trouvés, Viard, Duchemin, and the institution's governess, Nicolle Haran, formalized its conditions in a notarized contract. As in the hospital's records, this contract noted that Viard's primary goal would be to offer Duchemin professional training. This iteration of the agreement, however, added a more specific goal: that these trade skills would allow Duchemin to "earn her own living." This outcome would, presumably, would be beneficial to all parties: it would allow the hospital to reallocate resources their resources to other children, would relieve Viard of her financial and custodial obligations toward Duchemin, and would provide this orphaned child with the skills, resources, and professional associations to achieve economic independence.[80]

As the design and purpose of the arrangement related to professional instruction, the stipulations Viard agreed to fulfill were similar to those found in apprenticeship contracts. In particular, she consented "to feed [Duchemin], to house her, to care for her in health and illness, and to instruct her in Apostolic and Roman Catholic faith and religion." However, the contract contained a final "promise" that was rarely found in apprenticeship agreements but commonly in tutorship, fosterage, or adoption arrangements: Viard agreed to "to make it her duty to educate [Duchemin] *as her own child.*"[81] This language encouraged one to imagine kinship where none existed, at least not by early modern definitions. In this way, the contract created a familial bond between Viard and Duchemin, one characterized by the presumption of axiomatic care despite its

[80] AN, MC Étude LXIX 70, 8 July 1672

[81] Ibid. Emphasis added.

origin in elective guardianship. Furthermore, the contract specified that Viard should agree to all terms, including the aforementioned stipulation that she treat Duchemin "as her own child," "by a motive of pure charity." Unlike in apprenticeship or even fosterage arrangements, she would receive no compensation or financial support for serving as Duchemin's professional mentor and caretaker. Finally, the contract did not define the terms of agreement in relation to any fixed dates; this absence was not intended to suggest that the stipulations were conditional or ambiguous but, instead, highlighted the perpetual nature of the relationship created by the agreement. As in familial bonds, the ties of surrogate parenthood were continuously present, even if custodial responsibilities were not actively performed once a child reached the age of legal majority. As a result, there was no need to specify a determinate end to Viard's guardianship of Duchemin. As Viard's role was to treat Duchemin "as her own child," "by a motive of pure charity," the two would be bound by a flexible form of filiation that the contract itself presented as voluntary kinship.[82]

Not all institutionally endorsed forms of guardianship offered singlewomen such breadth in their care for orphans. In 1678, for example, unmarried mistress seamstress Marie Meusnier agreed to take twelve-year old Catherine Moreau as an apprentice in her workshop. Moreau was an illegitimate child whose father relinquished her to the care of the Hôpital des Enfants-Trouvés after her mother's death.[83] In this case, the administrators at the Hôtel-Dieu sponsored and paid for Moreau's apprenticeship. The apprenticeship of female orphans remained a popular form of

[82] Ibid.

[83] AH-HP, Fonds de l'Hôtel Dieu 148, Liasse 877, C 4216, "Actes par lesquels diverses personnes s'engagent à soigner et à élever comme leurs propres enfants des enfants né à l'Hôpital Dieu." Meusnier later transferred Moreau's apprenticeship to another mistress seamstress. It is unclear what prompted this change but the records note that Meusnier already had an apprentice, which may have hindered her ability to appropriately train and supervise Moreau. As the Parisian seamstress guild limited mistresses to one apprentice at a time during the first three years they held this status, it is also possible that Meusnier only recently graduated to the rank of mistress and was, therefore, not allowed to have more than one apprentice. See Judith G. Coffin, "Gender and the Guild Order: The Garment Trades in Eighteenth-Century Paris," *The Journal of Economic History* 54, no. 4 (December 1994): 779.

charitable assistance in Paris through the end of the eighteenth century and, in many ways, constituted an alternative to adoption during a period when this process was declining in practice.[84]

Community members or surviving relatives could also represent orphans in their apprenticeship contracts. As the sponsoring adult did not need to be a legal guardian in apprenticeship contracts, these documents offer evidence of informal guardianship by singlewomen that would not otherwise be recorded. In some cases, singlewomen facilitated orphan apprenticeship as both representative parties and mistress employers. This occurred in the April 1768 apprenticeship contract of a twelve-year old orphan named Marie Marthe Duchemin. Two unmarried mistress seamstresses appear in Duchemin's contract: Marie Louise Aubert, who represented the orphan, and Elizabeth Destouches, who apprenticed her. The connection between Duchemin and Aubert relationship is unclear, as the contract does not indicate their relationship. As bonds of kinship were typically included in such records, they were most likely connected through social ties, rather than familial connections. However, the obligations outlined in the contract indicate that Aubert was committed to sustaining Duchemin in ways that would typically be performed by an apprentice's parents or legal guardians. Aubert not only paid for Duchemin's apprenticeship fees, but she also agreed to provide ongoing financial and material support for Duchemin during the three years she would train under Destouches. While Destouches would offer her apprentice lodging, food, household necessities, and religious instruction, Aubert would supply Duchemin's linens, clothing, and personal goods. In addition, Aubert would be accountable for searching the city for Duchemin and returning her if she ran

[84] Crowston and Lemercier, "Surviving the End of Guilds," 282-308; Anna Bellevitis, "Learning at Home and on the Shop Floor," in Women's Work and Rights in Early Modern Urban Europe (Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 171-182; Rachel Ginnis Fuchs, Abandoned Children: Foundlings and Child Welfare in Nineteenth-Century France (Albany: SUNY Press, 1-18); Juliane Jacobi, "Between Charity and Education: Orphans and Orphanages in Early Modern Times," *Paedagogica Historica* 45, no. 1-2 (February-April 2009): 51-66.

away from her mistress' household. As these are the responsibilities that biological parents agreed to in similar apprenticeship contracts, Aubert appeared to be standing in for Duchemin's deceased mother and father.[85] Therefore, by placing Duchemin in apprenticeship with Destouches, Aubert was not evading or offloading her own obligations of guardianship. Instead, she facilitated a form of cooperative custodianship undertaken for Duchemin's benefit. While Destouches would undertake the charges of daily supervision and tutelage, Aubert would continue contributing to Duchemin's material sustenance and personal wellbeing.[86] This collaboration between Aubert and Destouches to raise, provide for, and train the orphaned Duchemin demonstrates the multifaceted form of custodianship singlewomen could engage in without having their own biological children.

The Bonnet sisters represent another instance of singlewomen sharing guardianship for a non-kin orphan. Marie and Margueritte Bonnet assumed parental responsibilities for an orphan upon the death of Elisabeth Varnard Chardon in December of 1763. Chardon, a widow, and her adopted daughter, Elisabeth Dupont, lived with the Bonnet sisters in their Parisian apartment for two years. During that time, the Bonnets not only provided the two with rent-free lodgings, but they also financially supported theirs other needs. In addition, they the practical care and fees associated with Chardon's final illness. When Chardon died, she entrusted the two unmarried sisters with the tasks of raising, protecting, and providing for her adopted daughter, who was only fourteen years old at that time. In this way, Chardon 's death was not the culmination of the Bonnets' support of Dupont, but the beginning of their roles as her primary guardians.[87]

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[85] As an example, one can compare Aubret's responsibilities in this case with those promised by Marie Anne Pipard's mother and father in her apprenticeship contract. See AN MC Étude CXVII 407, 3 January 1736.

[86] AN MC Étude LXXIX 149, 6 April 1768.

[87] AN Y 11004 B, 24 December 1763.

To understand the unofficial custodianship of Dupont by the Bonnet sisters, one must first address the informal nature of her adoption by Chardon. In her 1736 will, Chardon describes her relationship to Dupont and the circumstances under which they met in approximately 1752. Chardon recounts, "I found her at the age of three months old while crossing the Pont [bridge] de Bourgneuf in Saint-Clément de Mâcon," a village located in the Burgundy region of east-central France.[88] Chardon lived in Mâcon with her late husband, whose death in September of 1762 preceded the mother-daughter pair's move to Paris by only a few months.[89] Chardon's narrative of discovering Dupont depicts a fortuitous encounter, wherein a married woman with no other children finds an abandoned infant on a bridge and decides to care and raise the child without prescience or obligation. While perhaps a romantically benevolent account, its validity is implied in Chardon's choice to name the child "Dupont" or "of the bridge." "I named her Dupont," Chardon recounts in her will, "after the place I saw her for the first time."[90]

Chardon's guardianship of Dupont did not stem from a formal process of contractual adoption but, as in the cases of unmarried women, represented a form of voluntary kinship solidified through elective custody and continuous practices of care. Chardon solidified her relationship to Dupont during the child's baptism, which encapsulated an act ritual kinship and a form of discursive kinship within a single religious sacrament. While it does not appear Chardon legally adopted Dupont, her account of their relationship suggests that she did receive permission from authorities, likely her parish's religious leaders, to become the baby's guardian. As Chardon recounts in her will, "I had her baptized under the condition[s] that she had not already been [baptized] and that I would raise her." It therefore appears that Chardon had to receive a

[88] AN MC Étude LXXIX 149, 6 April 1768.

[89] AN Y 11004 B, 24 December 1763.

[90] AN MC Étude LXXIX 149, 6 April 1768.

special dispensation to induce this sacrament and to act as the child's representative during a process that would normally be undertaken by the child's biological kin and/or preselected godparents. As Marie Bonnet later identifies Dupont as Chardon 's goddaughter, it seems that Chardon appointed herself to this position.[91] While Chardon did not use this identifier when describing her relationship to Dupont, she does employ this title in relation to her great niece, who was also her goddaughter. The exclusion of this—or any label—for Dupont suggests Varnard encountered a lack of kinship language available to describe their relationship. In the absence of a term that would capture their bond, Chardon instead highlights the history of their association and her own performance as Dupont's caregiver. Nonetheless, Chardon used the baptismal ceremony to formalize her relationship to Dupont by recording their spiritual kinship. In addition, Chardon gave Dupont her own first name, Elisabeth, during the baptism. In doing so, she employed a strategy of discursive kinship that would connect the surrogate mother and daughter through a publicly recognizable identity.[92]

The Bonnets' guardianship of Dupont, while more akin to fosterage, was equally informal. Chardon did not legally appoint the sisters as Dupont's tutors before her death. It is possible Chardon knew such an attempt would be ineffective due to the general exclusion of singlewomen from these positions. In addition, the unofficial nature of her own relationship to Dupont may have rendered this step impossible or unnecessary. In her will, however, Chardon does indicate that the sisters to take over as Dupont's caregivers, suggesting the three women made these arrangements amongst themselves. While Chardon's illness may have promoted or hastened their plans for Dupont's continued care, the Bonnets' eventual assumption of these responsibilities seems to represent a natural extension of their care for Chardon while she was ill

[91] AN Y 11006 A, 24 February 1765.

[92] AN MC Étude XVI 759, 20 December 1763.

and the household they built with her and Dupont in the two years before Chardon's death. The will indicates that Dupont lives with the Bonnets and makes no request to change this arrangement. Chardon also left both of the sisters substantial financial bequests, consisting of a sum of three thousand *livres* to repay them for the costs incurred during her eighteen-month residence in their apartment with Dupont, as well as a gift of two thousand *livres* to each of the sisters. Chardon also gave Dupont a financial bequest of four thousand *livres*, however, she specifies that these funds will only be available upon Dupont's marriage or religious profession. In the meantime, Chardon notes that the Bonnets "will undertake the responsibility of finding her employment so that she may have a revenue." Chardon did not allocate additional funds for this undertaking, as would be required for apprentice positions, or financial support for Dupont's sustenance or material necessities. While it is possible she believed Dupont could support herself through her wages, it is equally likely that the donations she made to the Bonnets were intended to also cover those associated costs.[93]

While Chardon made additional bequests to relatives, she employed two strategies to privilege Dupont and the Bonnets in her succession. First, Chardon requested that the initial step during the execution of her succession should be the repayment of the Bonnets and the endowment of their donations. Through this process Chardon could ensure that the sisters and her adopted daughter would not be impacted by any of her debts or oppositions to her estate. Second, Chardon appointed Margueritte Bonnet as the executor of her will, which would grant her the authority to quell any oppositions and to divide the estate according to the deceased's final wishes and intentions.[94] Whether a premeditated defense or a cautionary step, these decisions undoubtedly aimed to protect the rights of these non-kin against the inheritance claims

[93] AN MC Étude XVI 759, 20 December 1763.

[94] Ibid.

of Chardon's family members. This included her only brother, Alexis Varnard, a Parisian wigmaker who protested the will but was eventually forced to accept its allocations.[95]

It appears that parties resolved the differences arising from the succession, as the Bonnets and Chardon's brother Varnard collaborated on future issues involving Dupont. This included fulfilling the request Chardon made in her will for the Bonnets to find employment for Dupont. Two months after Chardon's death, on February 21, 1764, Marie Bonnet, Alexis Varnard, and Elisabeth Dupont appeared with a tailor named Guillaume Dubuisson before Parisian notary Gaspard Momet. Together, they drew up an *allouage* contract, which facilitated vocational training for a novice with a trade professional.[96] While similar to apprenticeship in practice, one could not gain trade credentials or guild membership through *allouage*. Instead, the intended outcome of the training was the development of skills and the formulation of social connections.[97] In this case, Dupont would not have been able to advance professionally in the tailor trade through her work with Dubuisson because the guild restricted female membership to the wives, widows, and daughters of masters. However, as Chardon's will stated Dupont should find a position that would allow her to financially support herself until she married or took religious vows, at which point she would receive her financial bequest of four thousand *livres*, professional establishment may not have been the priority in arranging Dupont's training. Instead, she would gain practical sewing skills that would serve her future as a wife or a nun.[98]

Unfortunately, Dupont's training with Dubuisson was neither positive nor productive. According to a complaint Marie Bonnet filed with the police in February of 1765, Dubuisson

[95] AN MC Étude XVI 760, 5 March 1764.

[96] AN MC Étude XVI 760, 21 February 1764.

[97] Crowston and Lemercier, "Surviving the End of Guilds," 293.

[98] AN MC Étude XVI 759, 20 December 1763.

attempted to seduce Dupont within the first six months of her training. Police records from this period highlight how unfortunately common this occurrence was and how damaging the outcome could be. Dupont, however, had guardians who protected her from the fate so many others endured. The Bonnets specified in the *allouage* contract with Dubuisson that Dupont would continue to live with them, an act that would have limited the contact between the tailor and his apprentice. When Dupont disclosed what was occurring to her guardians, they immediately pulled her from her training with Dubuisson. They even agreed to allow Dubuisson to keep the funds they provided for Dupont's training, which would have allowed them to avoid involving the authorities or attracting too much public attention to the situation. The Bonnets then placed Dupont in alternate trade training—this time, with a woman. Dubuisson, however, continued to seek out Dupont and to harass her. When the Bonnets told him to leave him alone, he threatened to attack the sisters. For these reasons, the Bonnets determined police intervention was necessary, and they asked the local commissioner to help bring Dubuisson's behavior to an end. The Bonnets took their roles as Dupont's guardians very seriously. Marie Bonnet told the police commissioner, "when she was dying, the late Chardon entrusted [Dupont] to her." The sisters assured Chardon that they would care for Dupont and this was a promise they intended to keep.[99]

Jeanne Geffrier also agreed to care for a child, Louise Dalisse, from a young age. This guardianship arrangement demonstrates that "official" nature that distinguished fosterage and adoption in theory may have been less distinct in practice. When Dalisse died in 1759, Mademoiselle Geffrier indicated to the police that the late woman had been "like an adopted daughter." Geffrier explained that she had assumed parental responsibility of Louise Dalisse informally and through personal connections. While she did not name Dalisse's birth parents, Geffrier noted that Dalisse had been born outside of wedlock and indicated that some of her

[99] Y 11006 A, 24 February 1765.

long-term associates had asked her "to receive [Dalisse] in her home and to treat [Dalisse] as her adopted daughter." Geffrier does not specify who made this request or if these individuals were Dalisse's natural parents. Instead, she focuses on her own relationship with Dalisse, telling the police commissioner that she gave Dalisse "access to everything she would have had as a legitimate daughter in the house of her father and mother."[100]

In addition, Geffrier informs the police that Dalisse had an illegitimate child with the Comte du Praël, a daughter named Adélaïde who was born just sixteen months prior to Dalisse's death. Dalisse, her daughter, and the baby's nurse all lived with Geffrier, who financially supported them. She indicated to the police that she would continue to raise Adélaïde and pay for her needs after Dalisse's death.[101] When Geffrier died six years later in February of 1766, Adélaïde was still in her care. Geffrier had been Adélaïde's guardian since Dalisse's death, even arranging and paying for the child's education.[102] She also made Adélaïde her heir.[103] These practices of pseudo-adoption and bonds of voluntary kinship therefore spanned two generations, creating a matrilineal lineage between the Geffrier, Dalisse, and Dalisse's daughter Adélaïde.

In fact, it appears that Geffrier's final act was to eradicate the distinction between their elective bonds and a familial lineage. In her will, she identifies Adélaïde as "the natural daughter . . . of my natural daughter."[104] It is possible Geffrier was Dalisse's biological mother and, to avoid the public condemnation often associated with having an illegitimate child, she simply decided not to admit this until just before her death. However, Geffrier may have intentionally

[100] AN Y 11341, 29 December 1759.

[101] Ibid.

[102] AN Y 11485, 22 February 1766.

[103] AN MC Étude XXXVI 518, 16 February 1766.

[104] Ibid.

represented Dalisse as her daughter because it would strengthen Adélaïde's claims to her estate. Evidence for this theory can be found in documents relating to the postmortem division of Dalisse's estate. Geffrier specifically mentioned to the police that she had primary claims to Dalisse's property because she had purchased most of the belongings and had financially supported her throughout her life. She does not indicate her property rights stem from patrimonial inheritance privileges.[105] Even when another individual sought to assert her rights to Dalisse's estate, Geffrier only disputes these claims by demonstrating that Dalisse's debts were far greater than any sum that would be acquired by selling her belongings.[106] Finally, in making Adélaide her sole heir—the only legatee she mentions in her will—Geffrier would have been diverging from customary inheritance practices and prioritizing her over any other kin. By identifying Adélaïde as her legitimate kin, Geffrier may have been proactively protecting her rights against anticipated familial claims. If so, this would have been an accurate prediction, as Geffrier's sister did contest her will. While Geffrier's sister later renounced these claims, her original opposition to the will includes evidence of prior conflict between the relatives.[107] Specifically, Geffrier's sister informed the police that the deceased "inappropriately [*mal à propos*] called herself and signed her name 'Chevrier' in lieu of her real last name 'Geffrier.'"[108]

While the disuse of "Geffrier" appeared to bother the sister, the name "Chevrier" was an important unifying characteristic between the three generations of women: Jeanne Geffrier, Louise Dalisse, and Adélaïde de Prael. Like Geffrier, Dalisse also used the name "Chevrier" in lieu of her own last name. Dalisse was a dancer in the *académie royale de musique*, where she

[105] AN Y 11341, 29 December 1759.

[106] AN MC Étude XXXV 709, 6 July 1761.

[107] AN MC Répetoire XXXVI 5, 12 May 1766.

[108] AN Y 11485, 22 February 1766.

was known as "Demoiselle Chevrier." While it is unclear which last name was used at the time of her baptism, Adélaïde's last name is consistently cited as "Chevrier."[109] By choosing to use a common last name in lieu of their individual ones, the women created and publically represented a collective identity akin to familial lineage.[110] Ultimately, whether they were bound by biological ties or elective associations, these women solidified and represented their relationships through the performative, discursive, and legitimizing strategies that defined voluntary kinship.

In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France, motherhood appeared to be a status and experience that could only be successfully achieved within marriage and through biological reproduction. Contemporary authorities and Enlightenment thinkers increasingly highlighted this form of motherhood as women's path to social productivity, familial contribution, and personal fulfillment. In doing so, they increasingly excluded singlewomen from idealizations of motherhood and even from legal guardianship. Singlewomen who undertook the care of children, especially those who were not their kin, contested the notion that maternity could only be defined, performed, and recognized through biological ties, nuclear family structures, and reproductive means. By caring for children as informal guardians and even surrogate mothers, unmarried women constructed alternate, matrilineal families. These mother-daughter bonds were not defined by traditional kinship or even by contractual obligation, but were solidified through voluntary practices of care and custodianship. Within workshops, shared households, and public spaces, singlewomen demonstrated that maternity could be socially performed rather than biologically conceived.

While some singlewomen assumed these roles and responsibilities through their

[109] It appears Adélaïde would use her father's title "de Praël" in her marriage contract and post-marriage documentation, which would have bolstered her status when making her advantageous match with Jean-Frédéric Perregaux, a wealthy Swiss banker.

[110] AN Y 11341, 5 January 1760.

professional positions and social alliances, continuous practices of care demonstrate the voluntary engagement of singlewomen in arrangements that resembled adoption or fosterage. For many, undertaking motherhood in its traditional milieu may have represented too great a concession. Marriage would not only limit their individual autonomy and agency, but also their maternal authority. Through adoption and fosterage, however, singlewomen adhered to sociocultural and gendered norms without being defined or excluded by them.

Independent Lineages and Legacies of Voluntary Kinship: Prioritizing Non-Kin and Negotiating Familial Claims in Inheritance Practices

The belief that adult singlewomen were excluded from both the practical structure and ideological construct of the family stems primarily from the narrow definition of kinship employed by historians and increasingly insisted on by French officials in the eighteenth century. The study of singlewomen not only offers the opportunity to envision kinship beyond consanguinity and marital bonds but also demonstrates how singlewomen themselves imagined and negotiated their own relationships with the social institution of the family. By disrupting normative inheritance practices to prioritize their emotional relationships with non-kin, singlewomen contested familial customs and utilized legal processes to recognize service over filiation. In doing so, unmarried women negotiated the customary laws and sociocultural norms of succession to suit their identities, lifestyles, and relationships. Rather than accept the legal framework of familial exclusion, singlewomen instead insisted on being recognized as individuals whose estates were formed by personal earnings rather than by patrimony. While their beneficiaries might—and often did—include family members, unmarried women refused to limit their inheritance to kin and actively strategized how their bequests could promote and reflect their ties with non-kin. In many ways, singlewomen's inheritance practices reflect a

conceptualization of individual property rights that would not be formalized legally until the post-revolutionary Civil Code of 1804.[111]

However, unlike the revolutionaries who utilized the concepts of "natural right, individual liberty, and equality" to support a family-oriented argument that linked inheritance reform and social reform,[112] singlewomen used iterations of these same concepts to argue for inheritance practices that were detached from the family. The choices singlewomen made in the distribution of their property, as well as the reasons they site in justification of these decisions, demonstrate their attempts to renegotiate the boundaries between kin and non-kin in order to make space for a third, intermediary category. This group, discussed here as "virtual kin," bridged the gap between these groups through mutual devotion and acts of service. By recognizing and prioritizing these personal relationships in their inheritance strategies and in the practices of communal living, singlewomen demonstrated the flexibility of filiation, which could conceivably be stretched to include those who resembled kin in practice even if they lacked the blood ties necessary to fit that definition in theory.

The bonds of "fictive kinship" signified singlewomen's conscious efforts to represent the "family-like" qualities of non-kin relationships. By employing the language of kinship, unmarried women utilized the strongest terms in the early modern lexicon to demonstrate their mutual dedication in ways that both solidified the ties between individuals and publically represented the immutability of their bonds. These efforts, along with the active assumption of mother-like roles, represented singlewomen's attempts to negotiate evolving definitions of families in ways that offered them entry into an ideological discourse and social structure that

[111] Giesey, "Rules of Inheritance," 286.

[112] Margaret Darrow, *Revolution in the House: Family, Class, and Inheritance in Southern France, 1775-1825* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1989), 7.

would typically exclude them. Rather than subscribing to these norms, which would mean either leaning into their own marginalization or pursuing familial relations in traditionally-accepted forms, unmarried women instead coopted those values to legitimize their non-familial relationships and to suit their own lifestyles. In doing so, singlewomen contested the exclusionary model of the family by creating their own alternative forms of kinship.

Conclusion

For all French subjects, the Revolution and establishment of the new sociopolitical order represented a fundamental shift that permeated nearly all aspects of life. At the same time, however, for singlewomen, what the New Regime promised was, in many ways, the continuation of a project that was already in place. The primary difference wrought by the Revolution in relation to unmarried women was not a transformation of goals but a shift in strategies. While Old Regime authorities aimed to contain and condemn female singleness in order to reduce the prospect of harm to the public, the leaders of the new French nation advocated for an approach that limited the available options in order to better control the possible outcomes. By winnowing down the forms of female celibacy, they attempted to create a conduit to adult womanhood, one whose narrowness not only facilitated efficiency but equated success. The intention was to allow for better management and continuous supervision of women, the majority of whom could be easily funneled toward the desired outcome of marriage and motherhood.

Authorities continued to promote marriage, even among recently defrocked nuns and priests, with the aim of increasing the population. In the 1792 French Almanac, an engraving by Edme Bovinet shares a populationist and pronatalist message with readers. The image portrays a rural scene wherein the text's author, "Père" Michel Gérard, engages with several villagers. In the foreground of the image is a woman, her back to the viewer, the light falling on her face. She listens to the Père Gérard as he tells the group, "Prosperity exists when the population is abundant and still growing." However, she isn't looking at him, instead she gazes down upon the infant who rests upon her hip. At her feet are two more small children, eating food from a full basket. To her left, one sees a man and woman with another child, a happy family approaching the group. Appearing entirely within the space between the woman's head and that of the man

next to her, who is presumably her husband, are two other, younger women. One sees their faces only slightly, as they are the furthest in the background and remain partially obscured by shadows. They do not stray from the confines of the space created between the woman and man—not a dress hem, wisp of hair, a foot, or a finger escapes this confined and defined area. In response to Père Gérard's message, "all the women" in the scene respond to him, "Well, there's a good indication that's the case, père Gérard."[1] The insinuation in their message is that the women are doing their part to support the prosperity of the French nation. Even the two younger women, presumably single, remain committed to social prescriptions and their designated fates. They are safety nestled in familial harmony between their presumed mother and father. They show no signs of deviation and offer no hints of future aberration. They, too, will grow up and do their part, the image seems to promise.

In many ways, the scene evokes the narrative told in *Nouvelle Moralité*, the play referenced at the beginning of chapter three. While the text celebrates the titular character's sexual honor, its republication in the nascent years of the French nation also represented an invitation to singlewomen, a social group that appeared increasingly degraded during the last century of the Old Regime. The play proposed a return to the fold, putting forth the virtuous daughter as an example unmarried women could follow as they traced their steps back from the city, away from the scandals educed by their independence, and finally to the family home, where they could resume lives of gender order, patriarchal submission, and moral virtue. The narrative begins by presenting the daughter as a vision of domestic assiduity.

The play offers further evidence of the daughter's virtue in her immediate and unwavering rejection of the lord's proposition. Her commitment to her family's honor, however,

[1] Edme Bovinet and Jean Baptiste Charpentier, *De la prospérité publique,* in *L'Almanach du Père Gérard* (Paris, 1792), 88. Gallica, Bibliothèque Nationale de France. http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b52504670w.

involves her submission to her patriarch and is emphasized even more forcibly. As the text demonstrates, the daughter would sooner have her father bring the sharp blade of his sword down upon the still untouched skin of her neck before she would ever engender their collective disgrace. While the play was written in the sixteenth century, readers of its second edition would have recognized many features of their own post-revolutionary society. The daughter's proposed form of death may have even educed recent memories of the guillotine and, in particular, the punishment it rendered to women deemed sexually deviant or politically insubordinate. While the Revolution rid French society of the bad mother, however, the narrative spares the virtuous daughter of this fate.[2] More specifically, the father does. Among its new readers, the narrative may have evoked lingering fears, even as it encouraged this important reminder: one was fortunate to have such a kind father.

These sociocultural prescriptions were reinforced by new political measures. Some of these policies were presented as beneficial to unmarried women. Yet, they were really attempts to instill a specific vision of order. One example of this is the eradication of *déclarations des grossesses* after the French Revolution. This measure was proposed by the *Comité de Mendicité*, a coalition formed in 1790 to investigate the causes of indecency during the Old Regime and to propose solutions for its remediation under the new government. Requiring unmarried women and widows to legally declare their pregnancies, they argued, encouraged the stigmatization of unwed mothers and their children and as a result, promoted women's humiliation, misery, desperation, and finally, the choice to abandon babies they would otherwise keep and raise themselves. [3]

[2] On Marie-Antoinette's role, representation, and execution as the "bad mother," see: Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1992), 89-123.
[3] Fuchs, Abandoned Children, 19-25.

While the argument for removing these registers highlighted how it would protect women from the consequences of public condemnation, the real goals were populationist and economic in nature. Lower rates of child abandonment would reduce the government and charitable funds required to support these programs and institutions of public assistance, such as the foundling hospitals. This would also, they reasoned, decrease instances of infanticide while increasing the health and life expectancy of illegitimate children, both of which would encourage population growth.[4] Removing the stigma of pregnancy outside wedlock was therefore another attempt to emphasize women's identities as *mothers* as opposed to their status as *single*. In this way, unmarried women could be forced into the mold of gender norms, even if the fit was imperfect.

These endeavors to wrangle the singlewoman into submission and categorization aimed to reduce how multifaceted of a threat she could present to French society. She would stop being a shapeshifter who could take the form of a nun as easily as a sex worker, one who could pass from her father's home to her husband's bed without interruption but very well might wreck such havoc during that transition that the results would be irrevocably damaging for all involved.

Nonetheless, the new sociopolitical order was one made in her vision. In many ways, it reflected the lived experiences of non-elite women during the Old Regime. It highlighted mobility, constructed alliances, and elective inheritance over fixed lineage. Even as it gendered citizenship male, it promoted voluntary kinship in its deployment of "*fraternité*." While authorities hoped to restrict the singlewoman her position as the daughter and her fate as a mother, she resisted such confinement. Negotiating the chaos and change, she would show her skill at adaptation once more, to be reborn as a popular form that has endured to this very day: *la Marianne.*

[4] Ibid.

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