

We Can't Eat Gender Rolls: The Paradox of the *Citoyenne* During the French Revolution

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## Abstract

The *citoyennes* of the French Revolution were silenced by the Republic of France through codification of Rousseau's Natural sexes, and their contributions to the French Revolution remain largely unexplored by historians. Examination of arrest and execution records found at the National Archives in Paris revealed that women were arrested in conjunction with their husbands' crimes and were excused on the basis of the fairness of their sex.

Chapter 1 affirms Olwen Hufton's conclusion that women were motivated to public unrest by men's failures and adds that women were emboldened to act in a man's place, becoming active agents of change. Women navigated the political system and used crowds as a vehicle to enter the public, male sphere of influence, and in private, took charge of family planning methods. Chapter 2 identifies the paradox of the *citoyenne* and its resolution in disproportionate legal protections for women, the *femme defense*. These protections meant fewer than 400 women were executed during the Revolution, compared to 17,000 men. Additionally, Chapter 2 recognizes the life and works of Madame Roland, whose failed *femme defense* shows that the limits of the *femme defense* lie in a woman's political success. Chapter 3 outlines the contradictions implicit in execution of a *citoyenne* and discusses the *femme des lettres*, Olympe de Gouges, who argued in 1791 that "women have the right to take their places on the scaffold, they must also have the right to take their seats in government." This chapter concludes that the National Assembly executed women when they posed a threat to the foundations of the Jacobin agenda; becoming a *femme-homme* was a crime that demanded the *peine de mort*.

This study ultimately argues that there existed, among the revolutionary debates, an assault on what it meant to be male or female.

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## Foreword

This paper began in my French Revolution course taught by Dr. Karen Manna at UCO in the Winter of 2018. While learning about the different clubs, the Jacobins, Girondin, etc., I read a footnote that mentioned the existence of *les club des femmes*. I was curious about these women. I chose them as my topic for my semester end paper and presentation. I was enraged to find that little was detailed about these women; they had been left to the waste bin of history.

My curiosity led me to consume as much as I could surrounding women and the French Revolution; I even started a master's program. There just had to be more, and I could not accept that these women had been forgotten.

My persistence led me, Dr. Karen Manna, and Alaska Doolin to apply for UCO's Undergraduate Research Abroad Grant; we were awarded funds and were set to go in June of 2020. Our trip would be indefinitely postponed in light of the COVID 19 pandemic and so began a string of events that challenged my commitment to these women. Karen Manna would leave the University. My Master's program advisor Dr. Sarah Kyle would leave the University. I became pregnant with my son.

By the time Phillip was born, I had completed my course work and I had until December of 2022 to complete my thesis. Fearing that our trip would never come to pass, I considered abandoning the project as a thesis option. With the support of my husband, David Robinson, we ventured to the National Archives in Paris alone. I learned so much about the French Library system, myself, and my husband discovered that there is nothing better in life than a 1.90 euro chocolate éclair. On our last day in Paris, I received the email that our trip was finally approved, and I would return in June of 2022 with Dr. Cathy Webster and Alaska Doolin.

Unfortunately, the absence of the *club des femmes* reflected in history books does reflect the archival sources held at the National Archives in Paris. My project pivoted to examine the execution records from the *Comité de santé et sécurité*. I discovered that women evaded the guillotine based on their sex; what I call the femme defense. I also discovered that there were limits to this defense, as women were guillotined. Thus, the project was reinvigorated. Interestingly, the *citoyennes* all had ties to the foundations of the *club des femmes*. A full circle moment that satisfies, a bit, my curiosity.

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to Dr. Karen Manna: I find it difficult to summarize the impact you have had on my life. Truly, I would have been an English Major had it not been for our discussions. I would not have believed that I could be a Historian without your encouragement or pep talks. I would have believed that being a mother would compromise my ability to be a student, a teacher, to have a career. I am indebted to your mentorship, and I will pay it forward to the next class of French scholars.

Thank you, Dr. Cathy Webster, for your enthusiasm and belief for a project you initially knew little about. Thank you for taking me to the top of the *Arc de Triumph* at sunset; thank you for the songs.

Thank you to my husband. You supported me when I didn't think this project was possible, and it is likely that you have read this thesis more than I have.

Thank you, Phillip, for being a sweet baby.

## Background

### Le Salon

*Le salon* is a topos of French culture established well before the French Renaissance, an intimate space governed by women, fostering education, collaboration, and philosophical discussions throughout the 18th century. These female-run spaces became pivotal in educating men in the principles of respect and decorum, *l'honnêteté*. Furthermore, *la salonnière* socially exiled any man who did not conduct himself in a way she deemed respectable.

*Le salon* allowed noble and bourgeois women to extend their sphere of influence into political discussions from which they were otherwise excluded. Joan B. Landes, in her text *Women in the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*, describes the nuances of the public versus private sphere in France before the revolution. She says:

Noble and wealthy women could exert an influence on public opinion through the salons [...], attended by the leading thinkers of the age; salons such as those of Madame Du Deffand, Madame Geoffrin, the patroness of the Encyclopedia, the Princesse de Conti and the Duchesse de Choiseul. [...] Noblewomen and nuns even had some 'political space' in the right to be represented, albeit by men, in the Estates General, the French national parliament.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the fact women were barred from participating in state affairs outright, privileged women wielded their influence and were capable of achieving their own gains: for example, Madame de Pompadour, Louis XV's intellectually inclined mistress, managed to have Voltaire appointed Royal Historian at Versailles.<sup>2</sup> Oliver Blanc has reviewed original archives and manuscripts from public and private collections in order to quantify the extent of a woman's influence; he has systematically examined police and justice records, drawing an exhaustive list of the political salons of the first legislatures. Blanc concludes that *les salonnières* played an

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<sup>1</sup> Joan B Landes, *Women in the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*, (Ithaca and London, 1988),169.

<sup>2</sup> R. B. Rose. *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1995, 92.



important political role for liberalism as well as for royalist causes between 1789 and 1793. Blanc's analysis reveals that women went to great effort to ensure that their voices were represented.<sup>3 4</sup> For example, Madame Roland<sup>5</sup> contributed financially to the foundation of a newspaper known as *Le Républican*, responsible for publishing her own letters of protest [from Roland] to the King.<sup>6</sup> Later, her influence over her husband led him to attack Robespierre and Danton in front of *La Convention Nationale*. leading to Danton's alienation from the Girondins which widened the split between the Jacobin and Girondin factions. *Le salon* remained a tool for women to expand their sphere of influence while adhering to the gender constructs that limited them to the private sphere; however, this tool would remain at the disposal of the affluent exclusively, as popular women did not have access to these spaces.

### Les Clubs

During the French Revolution, French revolutionaries embodied the spirit of *les salons* by creating "*les clubs*" to discuss and influence policy for *la république française*, for example, *les jacobins*. Henri Carré explains that there were different types of *salons*, different in participants and subjects; for example, diplomatic *salon*, or also financial *salon*.<sup>7</sup> As *salons* became more topic-specific and therefore less concerned with *l'honnêteté*, they became known as *clubs*. Carré notes three crucial differences between *salons* and *clubs*. First, *clubs* take place in

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<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that the "representation" of women is indeed the representation of wealthy, white, women vis-à-vis their male friends who were representatives in *Les Etats Général*.

<sup>4</sup> Olivier Blanc, "Cercles Politiques Et « Salons » Du Début De La Révolution (1789-1793)." *Annales Historiques de la Révolution française*, No. 344, 2006, 63.

<sup>5</sup> Née Jeanne-Marie Phillipon, arrested June 2, 1793, executed Nov. 8, 1793, for conspiracy against the republic.

<sup>6</sup> Blanc, "Cercles Politiques Et « Salons »" 93.

<sup>7</sup> Henri Carré, *Histoire de France depuis les origines jusqu'à la Révolution. Le règne de Louis XVI (1774-1789)*. Vol. 9, (Paris, 1910), 306.

public spaces, such as cafés. Second, *clubs* made up of men with similar political aims who intend to discuss these issues.<sup>8</sup> Third, *clubs* have the intention to do something to advance their agendas; *le club des amériques* (created in 1785) and *la société des amis des noirs* (1786), both proposed both to emancipate the slaves.

The most notable of the *clubs* of the French Revolution are of course *les clubs de jacobin*. The Jacobin Club, as described by Michael L. Kennedy, begins as a meeting on April 30, 1789 – the day before the *États Généraux*. During the weeks that followed, the delegates met every evening in a café located near the chateaux. By June, their informal *salon* or "*club*" became a rallying point for reformist deputies such as Mirabeau, Barnave, Robespierre, Alexandre, and Charles de Lameth. As their popularity grew, so did their members. Soon their group was far larger than any café could accommodate. The men rented a room in a Jacobin convent on rue Saint-Honoré. At the end of January 1790, the group named themselves *La société des amis de la constitution*. However, the royalist pamphleteers had already baptized it "Jacobins", the name under which it lives in history. According to Kennedy, the Jacobin network was extensive and included many *clubs* all over France; their number reached 6,000 at the peak of *La Terreur*.<sup>9</sup> Success and proliferation in France can be attributed to their common purpose, ability to correspond and consult on matters of national importance. The Jacobins created and distributed their own constitution, often using it to create more clubs. In fact, the Jacobins often used the press to keep in touch with each other; they printed their meeting times and discussion topics in newspapers such as *L'ami du peuple* or *Journals des amis de la constitution*. They often

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<sup>8</sup> Carré, *Histoire De France*, 307.

<sup>9</sup>Michael L. Kennedy, "Les Clubs Des Jacobins Et La Presse Sous L'assemblee Nationale 1789-1791." *Revue Historique*, Vol. 264, No. 1, 1980, 50.

published their meetings, discussions, and even their participants the next day. These notices are notorious for misspellings and grammatical errors as writers hurried to the press.<sup>10</sup>

While these *clubs* were male dominated, there were also *clubs* created for and by women. Documentation of activism by the *club des femmes* is largely absent; thus, their involvement and motivations in the French Revolution remains disproportionately unexplored. Many women identified with the *sans-culottes* and the *Jacobins*, and even though they could not vote, they did several things to defend their causes. Dominique Godineau points out, “They made political denunciations to the revolutionary committees, signed petitions, verbally defended the politics of the *Jacobins* in the National Convention, and sought assistance from the popular societies.”<sup>11</sup>

While there is little documentation of their organization in newspapers, letters, or pamphlets, there are contemporary visual depictions of these women as well as one witness account of these meeting. The firsthand account is ultimately biased. It is clear the author, Pierre-Joseph-Alexis Roussel, was more concerned with humiliating the women than he was accurately recording their doings.<sup>12</sup> However, his account gives us a glimpse of what these women spoke about. Most notably, the women discussed courageous women of France, arguing in favor of the existence of the *citoyenne*:

[C]all your attention to the *citoyennes* of Lille, who, at this moment, are braving the rage of assailants and, while laughing, are defusing the bombs being cast into the city. What do all these examples prove, if not that women can form battalions, command armies,

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<sup>10</sup> Kennedy, “The Foundation of the Jacobin Clubs and the Development of the Jacobin Club Network, 1789-1791.” *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 51, no. 4, 1979, 701–733.

<sup>11</sup> Dominique Godineau, “Masculine and Feminine Political Practice during the French Revolution, 1793-Year III,” in *Women and politics in the age of the democratic revolution* edited by Harriet B. Applewhite and Darline G. Levy, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993) 61.

<sup>12</sup>“Account of a Session of the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women,” from *From Women in Revolutionary Paris, 1789–1795*, edited and translated by Darline Gay Levy, Harriet Branson Applewhite, and Mary Durham Johnson, (University of Illinois Press, 1979) 166 - 171.

battle, and conquer as well as men? [...]I do not know why I am burying myself in the dust of history to search for traces of the courage and sacrifice of women, since we have them in our revolution and right before our eyes. In 1788, during the siege of the Palace, women exposed themselves to the brutality of soldiers hired by the court, in order to hail stones down upon them. At the storming of the Bastille, women familiar only with fireworks exposed themselves to cannon and musket fire on the ramparts to bring ammunition to the assailants. It was a battalion of women, commanded by the brave Reine Audu, who went to seek the despot at Versailles and led him triumphantly back to Paris, after having battled the arms of the gardes-de-corps and made them put them down. In spite of the modesty of our president, I will say that on 10 August she marched valiantly against the chateau, at the head of a corps of Fédérés; she still bears the marks of that day. If women are suited for combat, they are no less suited for government. How many of them have governed with glory!

Roussel commented on the “comical” plans of these women who began suggesting raising an army of women to battle against their enemies. He recalled the attendance of Olympe de Gouges, whose propositions on women overseeing education occasioned bursts of laughter from the voyeurs. Olympe de Gouges would become a leader among women throughout the revolution until her execution in November of 1793, and her club activity would be used against her at trial to speak to her counterrevolutionary crimes.

A known example of a successful *club des femmes* was the *société republicans-revolutionaries*. This *club* was led by Claire Lacombe, an actress who arrived in Paris in 1792, and Pauline Leon, a former chocolate maker. Their professions show that one did not need prior status to lead a successful political club. This club was the most famous of the *club des femmes*, and they installed themselves in alliance with the Jacobin club. Their main goal was to ruin the efforts of enemies of the Republic. Their public participation in the streets is linked to the fall of the Girondins. Lacombe was a supporter of the right to bear arms and earned a reputation for being “meddlesome.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Yves Bessières and Patricia Niedzwiecki, “Women in the French Revolution (1789).” *The Insitut pour le development de l’espace cultural européen*. January, 1991, 8.

Art and illustrations give us further glimpses into the *club des femmes*. For example, *Un club patriotique de femme* (Figure 1) depicts a meeting like Roussel's witness statements in progress. Its inscription offers a vague account of the club and its activities: according to the artist, the club is exclusive to female patriots after the National Convention, and they read papers twice a week offering praise or criticism. There is a collection basket for relief for families of "good patriots." While the inscription does not give us an idea of what these women had to say, nor does it give us their names, it does give us an idea of the structure and organization of the *club*; these descriptions are supported by Roussel's account. The existence of positions of leadership (*Presidente* and Secretary) and biweekly meetings gives the impression that the members were committed to political efficacy.

### **Feminist Thoughts on the French Revolution**

The problem with examining the French Revolution through a feminist lens is one of perspective; if we look at the Revolution from the end of the adventure, that is the overthrow of Napoleon in 1815, there is the glaring fact that it [the revolution] did not give much to women. This fact is belabored among Marxist feminists, who choose to see the entire event that is the French Revolution as negative, arguing that the revolution actually worsened the condition of women in Europe.

R.B. Rose in the chapter "Feminism, Women, and the French Revolution" of her *Réflexions Historiques* in 1995, surveys the academic attitude surrounding the feminist efforts during the French Revolution. Rose comments, that Joan Landes' *Women in the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* appears to respond to a widespread need by feminists to reevaluate the Revolution by an almost total rejection. Rose uses the fact that Landes' work

had already gone through three reprints<sup>14</sup> to prove support. Landes asserts that “[*La Revolution Française*] was constructed against women, not just without them.”<sup>15</sup> “Montesquieu's dream of the domestication of women was enacted by the male leadership of the French Revolution, and their post-revolutionary successors. Indeed, the new symbolic order of nineteenth-century bourgeois society was predicated on the silence of public women.”<sup>16</sup> Finally, Landes fiercely denounces what she calls the Revolution's "phallic quality" – "a product of the way political legitimacy and individual rights were predicated on the entitlement of men alone.”<sup>17</sup>

Scholars like Landes perpetuate the silencing and erasures of *les révolutionnaires femmes* when their political contributions, their *clubs*, *salons*, or publications were made prohibited. This study aims to undo some of the silencing of revolutionary women by using historical examples of women’s public unrest to recognize that women were at the center of political victories as instigators and organizers. Chapter 1 affirms Olwen Hufton’s conclusion that women were motivated to public unrest by men’s failures and adds that women were emboldened to act in a man’s place to become active agents of change. In order to defend themselves, women wrote to their representatives, the King, they rioted, they threw eggs at police, they wore trousers. Chapter 2 identifies the disproportionate legal protections afforded to women, the *femme* defense. These protections meant fewer than 400 women were executed during the Revolution, compared to 17,000 men. Additionally, Chapter 2 recognizes the life and works of Madame Roland, who’s failed *femme* defense shows the limits of the *femme* defense lie in a woman’s political success. Chapter 3 explores the impacts of the eighteenth century’s Natural gender

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<sup>14</sup> As of June 2022, the book has seen 10 printings.

<sup>15</sup> Landes, *Women in the Public*, 12.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 38.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 158.

constraints by examining the works of a French *femme des lettres*, Olympe de Gouges, who argued in 1791 that “women have the right to take their places on the scaffold, they must also have the right to take their seats in government” and the subsequent paradox of executing women who were barred from political culpability.<sup>18</sup> This study concludes that 18th century gender roles not only denied women a place in government, but a woman’s natural sex denied her the privilege of dying for her political opinions: this conclusion is evidenced by the disproportionate legal protections in favor of women and their ability to evade the guillotine. Lastly, this study concludes that the National Assembly only executed women who posed a threat to the foundations of the Jacobin agenda; becoming a *femme-homme* was a crime that demanded the *peine de mort*.

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<sup>18</sup>Camille Naish, *Death comes to the maiden: Sex and Execution, 1431–1933*, Routledge. 1991 4.

## Chapter 1: Public Unrest and the Failed Woman

### The History of French Women and Feminine Unrest

Women were at the center of arguably the most notorious political victory during the French Revolution, the march on Versailles. In fact, their success often overshadows their efforts, most historians oversimplifying the events to “fish-wives, on the move.” A thorough retelling of the events shows women incredibly adept at organizing, rallying, and negotiating for political causes.

On the morning of Monday, October 5, 1789, a young woman began striking a drum and marching around a group of market-women who were infuriated at the chronic shortage and high price of bread. These women of *Faubourg Saint-Antoine* quarter of Paris began to march throughout the market, moving eastward, even forcing a nearby church to toll its bells.<sup>19</sup> They reached the *Hôtel de Ville* in central Paris as their numbers reached 6,000-7,000 and perhaps as many as 10,000.<sup>20</sup> Bearing kitchen blades and makeshift weapons, they began chanting “À Versailles !”<sup>21</sup> Little was done to stop the march; instead the Paris Municipal Government charged the Marquise de Lafayette to guide these women and ensure that they did not fall into complete anarchy.<sup>22</sup> The women lead the charge, and behind them the men, some even disguised as women.<sup>23</sup> The march took around six hours; they arrived, soaked in sweat, rain and covered in mud, drunk and shrieking threats about Marie Antionette.<sup>24</sup> Between 100 and 150 furies made

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<sup>19</sup> Christopher Hibbert, *The Days of the French Revolution*, New York, Morrow, 1980, 97.

<sup>20</sup> Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution*, Random House, 1989, 460.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Carlyle, “The French Revolution: A History” 1837, 258.

<sup>22</sup> Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of*, 462.

<sup>23</sup> Bessières, “Women in the French Revolution (1789).” 4.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 4.



history for their actions at Versailles: the women of *les Percherons* insulted bourgeois women, devout women and anyone who was coerced into joining the fight. There were even reports of the poor starving women capturing a rogue horse and immediately cutting him up for food.<sup>25</sup> About 700 women and men were armed with muskets, while the rest wielded pickaxes, hooks, and iron bars.<sup>26</sup> They demanded an audience with the King. Six women, led by Louise Chabry, (nominated by the crowd) were escorted to the King's apartment where they relayed the crowds' grievances. The King charmed and impressed the women, responded sympathetically, reportedly made one of them faint.<sup>27</sup> Louise asked for bread and provisions, while two of the other delegates, Louison and Rosalie, shrieked for Marie Antionette's head.<sup>28</sup> The King granted bread provisions to the crowd, along with the promise of more. Some of the crowd was satisfied and marched triumphantly back to Paris.<sup>29</sup> The rest of the crowd, however, was not satisfied as rumors circulated that the Queen would manipulate the King to break his promises. They stayed on the grounds of Versailles, the evening went on and rain began to fall. Parisian guardsmen, exhausted and confused (they believed the event was handled), mingled with the women, discussing their common distaste for the Queen. By morning, the national guard and the women were in alliance, and the crowd reinvigorated.<sup>30</sup> There was no stopping the crowd when they discovered an unguarded gate.<sup>31</sup> The rest of the day's story is well known: the women stormed

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>27</sup> Hibbert, *The Days of the French Revolution*, 99.

<sup>28</sup> Bessières, "Women in the French." 4.

<sup>29</sup> Hibbert, *The Days of the French Revolution*, 100.

<sup>30</sup> Carlyle, "The French Revolution: A History" 267.

<sup>31</sup> Hibbert, *The Days of the French Revolution*, 101.

the castle, killed guards, and mounted heads on pikes. They demanded that the King return to Paris, even though he signed the *Déclaration des droits de l'homme* the night before.<sup>32</sup>

David Garrioch calls out revisionist trends that diminish the indisputably gender-specific actions during October of 1789 (including the march at Versailles). Garrioch notes that Stanislas-Marie Maillard's account of the march reveals the intentions and thoughts of the women. Maillard recounts that as women congregated at the *Hôtel de Ville*, before they departed for Versailles, he was insistent that [the women] "did not want any men with them... [and] they [the women] repeated that the men were not strong enough to avenge themselves and they would show themselves to be better men."<sup>33</sup> Garrioch supports Maillard's details by pointing out that police agents reported similar declarations: "the men are holding back, the men are cowards...we [the women] will take over."<sup>34</sup> Wanting to keep the men out of their riots was arguably justified, as they saw men as a counterproductive addition to the equation: on June 20, 1791, after the King's flight, the women declare "Women were the ones who brought the King back to Paris, and men were the ones who let him escape!"<sup>35</sup>

Putting Garrioch's examples in conversation with Cynthia A. Bouton's work showcases a colorful history of women evicting men from their political demonstrations years before the march at Versailles.<sup>36</sup> Bouton compares male and female behavior to assess the logic that

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<sup>32</sup> Albert Soboul, *The French Revolution 1787–1799 From the Storming of the Bastille to Napoleon*. Vol. 220., Vintage books, 1975, 156.

<sup>33</sup> David Garrioch, "The Everyday Lives of Parisian Women and the October Days of 1789." *Social History* 24, no. 3, 1999, 232.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

<sup>35</sup> Bessières "Women in the French Revolution (1789)," 3.

<sup>36</sup> Bouton examines the gendered behavior differences in Subsistence Riots a.k.a *la guerre des farine* or The Flour War that erupted in the Parisian Basin in the Spring of 1775, for more reading see Cynthia A. Bouton. *The flour war: gender, class, and community in late Ancien Régime French society*. (Penn State Press, 1993).

underpinned their roles, concluding that participation of men in riots points to the deteriorating male status as men were concerned with the woes of their sisters, wives, and mothers.

Furthermore, men were prepared to face massive repression from authorities who saw them as “politically more dangerous” than the women in the same crowds. Male participation was viewed as an infringement into the woman’s space. For example, on May 8, 1775, a riot erupted at the marketplace of Nemours south of Paris. According to witnesses, "The popular riot was begun by several bands of women...[who] threw themselves on a large number of sacks of grain and pierced them with knives, while other women carried them away." One woman's husband joined the rioting women to assist them in confiscating the sacks of grain, but his wife pushed him away saying, "Go away, this is women's business."<sup>37</sup> Many historians have shown rioting or marching as the popular choice for women’s political activism was not new in 1789 but had a long tradition behind it in France.<sup>38</sup>

As we can see through these examples, women’s rioting raises questions of gender constructs and the role of women within these public demonstrations. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, a German philosopher of the time, discusses the juxtaposition of male and female as it relates to crowd and argues that a crowd, or mob, is a vehicle for women to enter public spheres. Borrowing from the old symbols of male and female, order and chaos, “the fickle mob is

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<sup>37</sup> Cynthia A. Bouton, “Gendered Behavior in Subsistence Riots: The French Flour War of 1775.” *Journal of Social History*, vol. 23, no. 4, 1990,736.

<sup>38</sup> Further reading on the cultural history of women’s food riots: R.B. Rose, "18th Century Price Riots, the French Revolution, and the Jacobin Maximum," *International Review of Social History* 3 (1959): 432-445; G. Rudé, *The Crowd in History* (New York, 1964), esp. Part 1, chap. 1 and 3; S.L. Kaplan, *Bread, Politics and Political Economy in the Reign of Louis XV* (The Hague, 1966), 2 vols.

identified as female; the ‘authorities’ like authority itself is male.”<sup>39</sup> Fichete makes these conclusions in order to further the expulsion of women from civic rights. This study builds off Fichete’s observations to argue that the crowd acts as a vehicle for the feminine to enter the public sphere. Further, a riot is the popular equivalent to the affluent woman’s *salon*. A riot provided a time and place for a popular woman to wield her influence in the interest of her own gains. Different from *salons*, rioting allows women to physically enter the public sphere while amplifying their voice. Crowds act as the vehicle for the feminine to enter the public sphere. Crowds, even when comprised of men, are described as having the feminine craving to “gaze upon hideous scenes, executions, operations, wounds and the like, and to listen to horrible tales of murder—things to which the less effeminate man responds with disgust.”<sup>40</sup>

Women are the crowd, riotous and unruled, while the men are the National Convention, seeking to establish order from the rubble of the old regime. Synthesizing Hufton’s explanation with Fichte’s observations of the crowd as feminine who draws the conclusion that a woman’s political power rested in her rejection of the traditional feminine (that is silence, passivity, and private sphere of influence), and transitioning into the masculine (loud, active, and public) because of the perceived failures of men. Thus, the problem with riotous women is not that they disturb, wear a man’s trousers, or openly carry sabers,<sup>41</sup> but it is that women are using the crowd to transition into men.

### **The Gender Question**

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<sup>39</sup> Suzanne Kord, “Why Executions Were a Gendered Affair” OpenDemocracy.net, September 25, 2012.

<sup>40</sup> Kord quoting Knigge, *On Human Interaction*, 1794

<sup>41</sup> “Interrogation of a Suspected Rioter, June 1795”, found in *Women in Revolutionary Paris, 1789–1795*, edited and translated by Darline Gay Levy, Harriet Branson Applewhite, and Mary Durham Johnson. University of Illinois Press 1979, 299–301.

Examination of laws and the events leading up to the dissolution and outlawing of political clubs, specifically the *clubs des femmes*, reveals an undercurrent of a debate surrounding the nature of the sexes. To begin to understand the underlying debate of a woman's place, we must first confront the myth that women were ignorant of the workings of government. *A Petition on behalf of Women of the Third Estate*<sup>42</sup> to the King dated 1 January 1789, illustrated that women were aware of and concerned with their economic opportunities. Women, “continual objects of the admiration and scorn of men,” lay out their grievances, respectfully, to the King. Instead of requesting representation in the Estates-General, they appeal directly to the King’s heart recounting the woes of women in the Third Estate.

[we] know too well how much favor will play a part in the election, and how easy it would be for those elected to impede the freedom of voting. Almost all [women]born without wealth;[...]education is very neglected or very defective;... [i]f nature has refused them beauty they get married, without a dowry, to unfortunate artisans; lead aimless, difficult lives stuck in the provinces; and give birth to children they are incapable of raising. If, on the contrary, they are born pretty, without breeding, without principles, with no idea of morals, they become the prey of the first seducer, commit a first sin, come to Paris to bury their shame, end by losing it altogether, and die victims of dissolute ways.<sup>43</sup>

In the Petition, the women state that they are “disdained by their parents” as girls and “if old age finds them spinsters, they spend it in tears and see themselves the object of the scorn of their nearest relatives.” Lastly, women are “obliged to throw themselves into cloisters where only a modest dowry is required or forced to become servants if they do not have enough courage, enough heroism, to share the generous devotion of the girls of Vincent de Paul.”

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<sup>42</sup> See Figure 2: *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers-État?* the third estate – the common people of France – constituted a complete nation within itself and had no need of the first or second estate (clergy and aristocracy).

<sup>43</sup> “Petition of Women of the Third Estate to the King” 1 January 1789.

After appealing to his heart with their abysmal options, they present solutions to better the lives of women. They carefully remind the King that they did not wish to overturn men's authority, but instead they wish to be better esteemed by them. They sought education and enlightenment to the ends of being better wives, women, and mothers. Specifically, they ask that men "not be allowed, under any pretext, to exercise trades that are the prerogative of women—whether as seamstress, embroiderer, millinery shopkeeper, etc., if we are left at least with the needle and the spindle, we promise never to handle the compass or the square." They argue that this is required to save them from a life of misfortune. They then move on to ask for free schools for girls so that they can learn "the virtues of our sex: gentleness, modesty, patience and charity." They move on to argue that this education is imperative for their children, to mold them into subjects worthy of being led by his Majesty. The King ultimately loses the ability to govern over these women, in part by the actions of women already discussed. However, the end of his reign does not mark the end of their fight to better the lives of themselves and their children.

Another example, Lisa DiCaprio in *Women Workers, State-Sponsored Work, and the Right to Subsistence during the French Revolution*, explains that flower sellers in Paris wrote their own letter for *Les Cahiers de Doléances de Tiers État*, asserting that the market for the sale of flowers was oversaturated, and not one flower seller could actually make a living wage.<sup>44</sup> Their *cahier* was in direct opposition to a proposed policy by men which removed the protections of the women's guilds, allowing men to become flower sellers (selling flowers having been a role reserved for women). This *cahier* was not unique: in fact, some 30 files were prepared by women for the Estates General, and this study consulted many of these files in

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<sup>44</sup> Lisa DiCaprio, "Women Workers, State-Sponsored Work, and the Right to Subsistence during the French Revolution." *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 71, no. 3, 1999, 523.

micro-film at the National Archives in Paris to find that women wrote to denounce the role of women, requested the right to vote, divorce, and the right to select their own representatives. Furthermore, the existence of these documents is impressive when considering that 80% of the population in Paris at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century were illiterate.<sup>45</sup>

The existence of these *cahiers* suggests that women understood civic politics. DiCaprio also notes a petition brought to the Mayor of Paris through a seamstress, highlighting how women were treated when they fought for their rights. The petition explains that wages (in the form of hemp seeds) were being reduced for all workers; “I pointed out to him that many mothers such as myself, responsible for two children, could not live [on the new amount]” after she said the mayor lost his temper, and treated her like a counterrevolutionary. When she demanded proof of this accusation, he removed her spinning wheel and deprived her of work.<sup>46</sup> It is important to note the disastrous consequences of being labeled a counter-revolutionary during the French Revolution. Coquet not only threatened this woman with starvation, but also threatened her very head.

### **Motivations**

Unlike their male counterparts, who were concerned with lofty philosophical questions of government, women were concerned with the health, wellness, and education of their children: as Yves Bessières says in her foreword of *Women in the French Revolution (1789)*, women are seen as demanding the rights that are specific to their persons, to their functions, and places they want to occupy in the new emerging society. The women of the Third Estate lived during a period marked with death, war, and unemployment; meaning that death of their husband, or the

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<sup>45</sup> Bessières, “Women in the French Revolution (1789).” 6.

<sup>46</sup> DiCaprio, “Women Workers, State-Sponsored,” 538.

birth of a third or fourth child could plunge a family into difficulties impossible to recover from.<sup>47</sup> Hunger was what motivated women to take to the streets. It is difficult to fully understand the extent of their hunger and poverty. In the pamphlet titled “La Lettre au Roi” reveals that hunger primarily attributed to the cost of bread; a loaf of bread would cost between 40-80% of a woman’s wages. French people ate three times less bread a year than the English, and their hunger resulted in more than 300 revolts throughout the country.<sup>48</sup>

Hufton writes a chapter on “Parent and Child” that illustrates the depth of their hunger and its effects on women who were mothers. Women were malnourished and found it impossible to feed their children; in certain areas in Brittany, mothers did not bother to toilet train their children, as their “life span was hardly likely to merit the trouble.” And women of the Auvergne in 1786 were known to hammer on doors of *dépôts de mendicité* during the winter months demanding to be arrested as beggars in order to avoid starvation.<sup>49</sup> The same chapter discusses that women often resorted to large doses of alcohol, sulfurous purgatives and rusty handles of a kitchen ladle in order to avoid carrying more children; they did so in vain, as thousands of children were born into starvation: the death rate in the foundling hospitals was reported as 60 percent a *year*.

Hufton concludes that the concern about bread supply was central to women’s motivations; such concerns brought them precisely at odds with the monarchy and their associations with grain trade. Suggesting that women stepped forward “in default of male action,” much like an insulted woman whose husband failed to defend her: she was quite entitled

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<sup>47</sup>Olwen Hufton, “Women and the Family Economy in Eighteenth-Century France.” *French Historical Studies* 9, no. 1, 197: 22.

<sup>48</sup> Bessières, “Women in the French Revolution (1789).” 5.

<sup>49</sup> Hufton. *The Poor of the Eighteenth Century France 1750-1789*, Clarendon Press, 1974. 331, 342.



to embark on her own action.<sup>50</sup> Believing that men had failed them as providers, women were empowered to defend and provide for themselves and their children. Police reports demonstrate that groups of women in the squares, streets, and in public places, even gathering at bakers' doors, were easily agitated. Reports state women were taunting the men, treating them as cowards. Many women wanted to rush into insurrection; even the majority appeared to be determined to attack the constituted authorities, and notably the government Committees.<sup>51</sup> Women in riotous crowds were not seen as anything more than a public nuisance, yet they accomplished many political goals. For example, in February of 1793, a riotous crowd of women appeared before municipal administrators to denounce hoarders and demand a decrease in bread prices. The riot resulted in the Municipality reserving the responsibility of procuring the necessary funds so that the payments for grain and bread do not rise,<sup>52</sup> supporting that woman had political successes when they organized beyond the March at Versailles.

While crowds acted as a vehicle for women to enter the public sphere to voice their grievances with politics, it was not the only tool in their arsenal. In fact, women went to great lengths to provide for their families in default of their husbands. An unintended consequence of the French Revolution was that women were empowered to extend their influence in marriage to family planning. R.B. Rose mentions in her *Historical Reflections* that there exist two major demographic events that coincided with the period of French Revolution (1789-1799): the

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<sup>50</sup> Hufton, *Women and the Limits of Citizenship in the French Revolution*, University of Toronto Press, Apr 14, 1999, 234.

<sup>51</sup> "Police Reports on Women's Discontent" found in *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History*, trans., by Lynn Hunt, 287–288.

<sup>52</sup> "A Deputation of Women Citizens Demands Action on Food Prices, 24 February 1793." found in *Women in Revolutionary Paris, 1789–1795*, edited and translated by Darline Gay Levy, Harriet Branson Applewhite, and Mary Durham Johnson, (University of Illinois Press, 1979), 125-126.

marriage rate went up and the birth rate went down. She pulls from L. Bergeron *L'épisode napoléonien: Aspect intérieurs, 1799-1815*, noting that while the population grew by millions, there was a 10% decrease in births between 1811 and 1815 than between 1782 and 1784. Rose argues the catalyst for these demographic events was the old regime changes that occurred in 1791. The rise in marriages is related to the abolition of the old regime guild system that barred men from being married during their apprenticeships/trainings. At the same time, they lowered the age of parental consent for marriage; thus, there were more bachelors and women to be married. Rose argues that the birth rate decrease can be attributed to the decline of influence from the Catholic Church leading to the widespread use of birth control in France.<sup>53</sup> A. McLaren discusses the use of abortions and birth control, stating that condoms were used by the wealthy, and prostitutes used crude tampons to prevent conception, the vast majority of families limited conception by the practice of *coitus interruptus*.<sup>54</sup> Rose guesses at whether or not women were in control of family planning, and resolves that regardless of motivations, one of the lasting legacies of the French Revolution, one often overlooked by feminist scholars, is that women had fewer pregnancies and smaller families. It is evident in Hufton's examples of women's dangerous actions to end unwanted pregnancies that women were in control of family planning. This study proposes that the motivation for women assuming control of family planning is the same as the motivation to riot, hunger.

This study has touched on several examples of women and their proposals to legislatures, the King, and their actions on behalf of, or against the Revolution. It is evident that women were

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<sup>53</sup> Rose, "Feminism, Women, and the" *Historical Reflections*, 203.

<sup>54</sup>See also H. Le Bras, "Coit interrompu, constante morale et héritage préférentiel" *Communications* (Paris) 44 (1986) 47-70 for work that draws attention to the correlation between regions of déchristianisation and regions where contraception control became widespread

active participants, using crowds to enter the public sphere and assume male gender roles.

Furthermore, women exercised family planning methods to protect their families from further starvation, acting as the head of the family when making these decisions.

## Chapter 2: the French Gender Revolution

### Nature's Sex[ist]

When the National Convention outlawed the *club des femmes* and popular societies in 1793, men invoked Rousseau's ideas of Natural rights in order to affirm the exclusion of women from political activity, thus sealing the "political death"<sup>55</sup> of women.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau lived from 1712 to 1778, and his writings on the rights of men held major influence on the intellectual thinking of the 18th century. As Gustave Rivet states, "Rousseau is the ancestor of all who participate in political and literary life. In the largest and grandest sense of the term he was one of the fathers of the Revolution."<sup>56</sup> His 1762 treatise titled *Émile, ou De L'éducation* "clearly conceived and expressed—a sort of memorandum of the griefs of childhood," and was originally banned by the faculty of theology and burned in Paris and Geneva.<sup>57</sup> Rousseau defined the public sphere as masculine. In his *Émile*, he argued that a man's education lies not in books, but in Nature.<sup>58</sup> Rousseau discussed the role of the woman in Book V of *Émile*. Rousseau named and described the ideal woman, Sophie (Émile's wife-to-be): Sophie is "passive and weak," she "put[s] up little resistance" and is "made specially to please man."<sup>59</sup> Rousseau had a special enthusiasm for breastfeeding mothers and used the relationship of mother and child to enforce the ideal revolutionary woman as a mother: "morals will reform

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<sup>55</sup> Bessières "Women in the French Revolution (1789)." 8.

<sup>56</sup>Gustave Rivet, "Introduction to" *J. Rousseau's Émile: or Treatise on education by Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, trans., William Harold Payne, (D. Appleton & Co., 1908), 318.

<sup>57</sup> E. Montin, "Introduction to" *J. Rousseau's Émile: or Treatise on education by Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, trans., William Harold Payne, (D. Appleton & Co., 1908), 316.

<sup>58</sup>Rousseau. *Emile, or On Education*. Trans. Allan Bloom. New York: Basic Books (1979). 46.

<sup>59</sup> Rousseau, *Émile: or Treatise on education by Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, trans. William Harold Payne, (D. Appleton & Co., 1908) 358.

themselves; nature's sentiments will be awakened in every heart; the state will be re-peopled.”<sup>60</sup>

Rousseau’s writings on the education and Natural role of women were met with criticisms; however, it is clear in the language of the speeches following the vote that the National Convention used Rousseau's ideas to inform their votes.

The National Convention met on November 17, 1793, to discuss the frequent disturbances in the street. The deputies were posed with three questions concerning women and their political life.

1. Should assemblies of women be allowed in Paris?
2. Should women be allowed to exercise political rights and take an active part in the affairs of State?
3. Should they be allowed to deliberate in the political associations or popular societies?<sup>61</sup>

Only one deputy voted against the outlawing of club des femmes, the rest gave a resounding no.

Before the vote, the representative of the Committee of General Security, André Amar, claimed that women do not have the right to meddle in the affairs of government, because doing so would obligate them to sacrifice the “more important cares to which nature calls them.”<sup>62</sup> Amar

invoked Rousseau’s Natural sexes when he argued that woman was the private sex; thus, what Nature ordained, law mirrors. Even more explicit in the articulation of the “natural facts” was Pierre- Gaspard Chaumette:

Since when is it permitted to give up one’s sex? Since when is it decent to see women abandoning the pious cares of their households, the cribs of their children, to come to

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<sup>60</sup> Rousseau. *Emile, or On Education*. Trans. Allan Bloom.46.

<sup>61</sup> Bessières, *Women in the French Revolution (1789)*.” 8.

<sup>62</sup>“ Discussion of Women’s Political Clubs—Amar,” October 29,1793. found in *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History*, 1996, 136–38.

public places, to harangues in the galleries, at the bar of the senate? It is to men that nature confined domestic cares? Has she given us breasts to feed our children? <sup>63</sup>

As Joan Wallach Scott notes in her *French Feminism and the rights of "Man,"* the Jacobin politicians built their new social order with Nature as its foundations; thus liberty, sexual difference, and views of political theory and medicine were constructed within Nature's limits. To the Jacobin, nature and body were synonymous, and one needed only to look upon the body to know, to see, all truths. Denise Riley in her *Am I that Name? Feminism and the category of Women in History* finds that the Jacobins' guiding principle was pulled from Rousseau's *Émile* and his notes on sexual difference. Riley states that the Jacobins, like Rousseau, believed women were thoroughly saturated by their sex.<sup>64</sup> Using the body to prove Natural facts, they believed that the location of genital organs (inside for the woman, outside for the man) determined the extent of their influence: "the internal influence continually recalls women to their sex... the male is only at certain moments, but the female is female throughout her life."<sup>65</sup>

Examining Constantins Volney's (also known as Constantin-François Chassebœuf; a representative for the Third Estate of Anjou) arguments at the meetings of the Estates General in 1788-9 allows modern historians to examine the depths of Rousseau's influence. Volney argues that Nature and the body were so intertwined that any illness visible was a direct reflection of one's inner adherence to the laws of Nature because virtue and vice were referable to the

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<sup>63</sup>“ Chaumette, Speech at City Hall Denouncing Women's Political Activism (17 November 1793).” Found in *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History*, 1996, 138–39.

<sup>64</sup> Denise Riley, *Am I that Name? Feminism and the category of Women in History*, 37.

<sup>65</sup> Scott, “French Feminists and the Rights of ‘Man’: Olympe de Gouges’s Declarations,” *History Workshop Journal*, 5.

destruction of the body.<sup>66</sup> Additionally, any misuse of the body, such as a mother's failure to breastfeed her infant, constituted a crime against Nature. Since Nature defined the State as well, the misuse of the body was also explicably an attack on the State. This scientific belief would have biased men to be seen as the more virtuous of the sexes; doctor's noted large numbers of medical disorders that ailed women and children were caused by "intense fear": there was also an increase in reported miscarriages.<sup>67</sup> These medical phenomena would further affirm the belief that men were fit to lead, and women and children to follow.

It is important to note that these policies were met with support from women. Indeed, there were women who believed the rioting and participation in politics was unbecoming of their sex, and they sought to distance themselves from these revolutionary women. In fact, on 29 October 1793, a group of women went to the National Convention to petition for the dissolution of the *clubs des femmes*, instigating the vote that would follow weeks later. Philippe Fabre d'Eglantine gave a speech in support of these women to the National convention and denounced all women's "coalitions."

There have already been troubles about the cockade [the tricolor ribbon decoration used to signify support of the Revolution]; you have decreed that women should wear it. Now they ask for the red cap [of liberty]. They will not rest there; they will soon demand a belt with pistols. These demands will coincide perfectly with the maneuvers behind the mobs clamoring for bread, and you will see lines of women going to get bread as if they were marching to the trenches. It is very adroit on the part of our enemies to attack the most powerful passion of women, that of their adornment, and on this pretext, arms will be put into their hands that they do not know how to use, but which bad subjects would be able to use all too well. This is not even the only source of division that is associated with this sex. Coalitions of women are forming under the name of revolutionary, fraternal, etc., institutions. I have already clearly observed that these societies are not at all composed of mothers, daughters, and sisters of families occupied with their younger brothers or sisters, but rather of adventuresses, female knights-errant, emancipated girls, and amazons. (Applause) I ask for two very urgent things because women in red caps are in the street. I

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<sup>66</sup> Ludmilla J. Jordonova, "Guarding the Body Politic: Volney's Catechism of 1793", in Francis Barker, et al. (eds), *1789: Reading, Writing Revolution*. University of Essex, 1982. 15.

<sup>67</sup> Yves Bessières and Patricia Niedzwiecki, "Women in the French Revolution (1789)." 6.

ask that you decree that no individual, under whatever pretext, and on pain of being prosecuted as a disturber of the public peace, can force any citizen to dress other than in the manner that he wishes. I ask next that the Committee of General Security make a report on women's clubs.<sup>68</sup>

As already stated, the vote would take place and only one delegate would vote against the oppression of the *club des femmes*. It did not take long for a group of women to react. A group of women proudly wearing their red caps, led by the “meddlesome” Claire Lacombe interrupted the meeting, requiring Pierre-Gaspard Chaumette to speak to them. He recognized the women but took this moment to double down on his opposition of *clubs des femmes*, as well as threaten the women by reminding them of women who had recently lost their head.

I demand a special mention in the proceedings for the murmuring that has just broken out; it is a homage to good morals. It is shocking, it is contrary to all the laws of nature for a woman to want to make herself a man. The Council should remember that some time ago these denatured women, these viragos [noisy, domineering women; amazons], wandered the markets with the red cap in order to soil this sign of liberty and wanted to force all the women to give up the modest coiffure that is suited to them. . . . Since when is it permitted to renounce one's sex? Since when is it decent to see women abandon the pious cares of their household, the cradle of their children, to come into public places, to the galleries to hear speeches, to the bar of the senate? . . .

Remember that haughty wife of a foolish and treacherous spouse, the Roland woman [Marie Jeanne Roland, wife of a minister in 1792], who thought herself suited to govern the republic and who raced to her death. Remember the shameless Olympe de Gouges, who was the first to set up women's clubs, who abandoned the cares of her household to involve herself in the republic, and whose head fell under the avenging blade of the laws. Is it for women to make motions? Is it for women to put themselves at the head of our armies?<sup>69</sup>

It is evident in Chaumette’s recorded speeches that he was against all political activism by women; indeed, he did not support royalist nor republican expressions from women. He justified his opinions by relying heavily on Rousseau’s opinions on the Natural sexes. Examination of

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<sup>68</sup> “Discussion of Women’s Political Clubs and Their Suppression, October 29–30, 1793” Found in *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History*. 135–36.

<sup>69</sup> “Chaumette, Speech at City Hall”



Chaumette's speech to the women uncovers the deep gender biases of the time and illustrates that the question surrounding women's rights was one of natural genders and the roles of men and women. After the vote, it would be seen that women who wore red caps or participated in *clubs* or mobs were seen as morally corrupted because they defied their natural sex.

### **The Femme Defense**

In the interest of abolishing the old regime, members of the First and Second Estate were captured and held accountable for their crimes against the Third Estate. Members of the First and Second Estate who fled the country were known as *Émigrés*. Since the French Revolutionaries were unable to hold escapees accountable, they made their families enemies of the State instead. An examination of the *Arrête Relatif à l'arrestation des Parens des Émigrés de la Lozère* shows that women had a disproportionate number of legal outs that were not afforded to men.<sup>70</sup> The law is concerned with the arresting of any *Parens des Émigrés*, or the parents of the emigrated. The *Arrête* decrees that *Parens des Émigrés* are "les ennemis de la révolution, contre la liberté" and outlines provisions for authorized arrests:

Arrête ce qui suit: auxmaris, femmes, pères, mères, enfants, frères et sœurs d'émigrée.

Stop all who follows: husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, children, brothers and sisters of emigrants. (Translation provided by Alixandrea Robinson)

The decree sets up surveillance committees and charges citizens of the municipality to put forth arrests, urging them against negligence.

Article IV.

Ne sont point exceptes de l'arrestation les Parens d'émigrés, non plus que les ci-devant nobles, précédemment réclus, et qui on obtenue leur liberté des autorités constituées, ou

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<sup>70</sup> *Arrête Relatif a l'arrestation des Parens des Émigrés de la Lozère*. 1 prairial, II l'Anne de la république. Discovery of this source document was made possible by the URA Grants. Thank you!

des repréentants du peuple, a l'appui de certificats et autres attestations civiques, ou d'un avis de mise en liberté, surprise à la complaisance ou à la religion des même autorités.  
Article V.

Les vieillards de plus de 70 ans, et les infirmes dont l'âge et l'infirmité seront constatés d'une manière légale, pourront être réunis dans des maisons particularités res de détention, séparément des autres détenue; et si la détention, d'après une vérification également bien constatée, devoir compromettre leur vie, ils pourront être laisses chez eux, sous la responsabilité d'une garde suffisante, et sous la servait à ce de municipalité.<sup>71</sup>

Parents of emigrants are not excepted from arrest, nor are ex-nobles, previously secluded, and who have obtained their freedom from the constituted authorities, or from the representatives of the people, in support of certificates and other civic attestations, or a notice of release, surprise at the complacency or religion of the same authorities. Old men over the age of 70, and the infirm whose age and infirmity will be certified in a legal manner, may be brought together in special detention houses, separately from the other prisoners; and if the detention, according to an equally well-founded verification, should compromise their life, they may be left at home, under the responsibility of sufficient custody, and under the service of the municipality. (Translation provided by Alixandrea Robinson)

While article IV and V explain that not even old age nor disability would relieve a man of imprisonment and surveillance, Article VI shows a softer hand of justice was dealt to women and children.

#### VI.

Sont exceptes des dispositions de l'article III,

1. Les enfans au-dessous de l'âge 15 ans;
2. Les femmes enceints depuis 7 moins;
3. Les femmes divorcées et remariées à des patriotes;
4. Les mères allaitant leurs enfans;
5. Les fonctionnaires publics dénommés dans l'article III;
6. Ceux qui depuis le 1ère mai 1789, jusques a aujourd'hui, ont constamment reste attaches a la cause de la révolution, et en offriront les preuves dans tableau de leur vie politique entre ces deux époques, lequel sera certifié pare le conseil général de la commune, par le comite de surveillance et la société populaire, s'il y en a, et enfin par le conseil du district. Faute du concours de ces attestations, ils seront reclus.

Those who are excepted from the provisions of article III,

1. Children under the age of 15;
2. Women/wives pregnant for 7 months;
3. Women divorced and remarried to patriots;

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<sup>71</sup> Spelling and grammatical structures from source document remain intact.

4. Mothers breastfeeding their children;
5. The public officials denounced in Article III;
6. Those who since May 1, 1789, until today, have constantly remained attached to the cause of the revolution, and will offer proof of this in a table of their political life between these two periods, which will be certified by the General Council of the commune, by the supervisory committee and the popular society, if there are any, and finally by the district council. Without the assistance of these certificates, they will be recluse.

The only stage of life that is not covered in the exceptions are unmarried women over the age of 15, women married to counterrevolutionaries, and unwed women without children. Further archival research is necessary to learn if these legally unprotected women were prosecuted; however, preliminary research concludes that women, overall, were not prosecuted.

Consider the *femme* of a counter-revolutionary, a group left un-exempt in this law. If a woman supports her husband, but he is a counterrevolutionary, is she held as a virtuous woman who lived according to her gender, or is she viewed as an enemy of the State? The National Convention did not attempt to answer this question with any real clarity; instead, they answer on a case-by-case basis. This study refers to the common defense employed by lawyers defending wives as the *femme* defense: women ought not be punished for their virtuous nature, even if their virtues lead them to be complacent to their counterrevolutionary husbands. Many women would suffer the trauma of being arrested and tried simply for their marital connections to their husbands. This is evidenced by the arrest records discovered: the phrase “Arrête M. \_\_\_\_\_ et sa femme” is littered throughout the boxes of legal records. Lack of explanation of the woman’s crimes indicates that the only crime committed was being the wife of a man who committed a crime. However, the *femme*’s sentences were seldom upheld. During *La Terreur*<sup>72</sup> at least

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<sup>72</sup>There is some disagreement among historians over the exact dates of “the Terror.” The consensus found, and consequently the dates found in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* is 5

300,000 suspects were arrested; 17,000 were officially executed, and an estimated 10,000 died in prison or without trial. Exactly 579 women were imprisoned at the Conciergerie, and 166 of those women were executed by guillotine.<sup>73</sup>

This study argues that Rousseau's themes on gender protected women from the guillotine; because women were understood to be the passive extension of their husband, legislators did not count them as *citoyen*. Because women would legally be unequal to men, it was understood that women ought not be punished equally. Camille Naish in her *Death Comes to the Maiden; Sex and Execution 1431-1933* discusses and compares the stories of the women executed and considers the effect that their deaths had on the executioner. Her findings support that gender bias protected the women from the *peine de mort*, even as they mounted the scaffold. Naish discussed the Samson family (best known family of executioners for Paris and Versailles from 1688 to 1847) diaries that suggest professional executioners had a difficult time executing women. Charles-Henri Samson recalls an 18-year-old seamstress who "looked as young and fragile as a child." Charles-Henri reported being so overcome with the sight of the girl that he became dizzy and had to leave the scaffold.<sup>74</sup> Other entries described execution aides protesting that "the guillotine was being dishonored" when a cartload of distraught women pulled up to the scaffold.

### **Madame Roland and her Failed Femme Defense**

Madame Roland unsuccessfully employed the *femme* defense during her trial; Madame Roland was one of the 166 women to die via guillotine in 1793. After the arrest of her husband,

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September 1793 to 27 July 1794; The Terror refers to the legislative reaction to enact harsh measures against those suspected against the Revolution.

<sup>73</sup> Bessières, "Women in the French Revolution (1789)." 2.

<sup>74</sup> Naish, *Death Comes to the*, 5.

she refused to flee or go into hiding. Consequently, June 1, 1793, she was arrested at home and transferred to the prison in the abbey of *Saint-Germain-des-Prés*. She was the first prominent Girondin to be incarcerated, and after a wave of arrests followed.<sup>75</sup> By October 31, 1793, twenty-one Girondin politicians were executed after a short trial; most of them were known to Madame Roland. The next day she was transferred to the Conciergerie. Roland would be questioned profusely, and she denied most accusations and argued that she was just a *femme*, therefore, she could not be held responsible for any political actions of her husband. After a short trial on November 8th, 1793, she was found guilty of conspiracy against the revolution and the death sentence was pronounced; the judge did not allow her to read a statement she had prepared.<sup>76</sup> Madame Roland's story shows that the *femme* defense is not a guaranteed success.

Madame Roland's memoirs were safe guarded from erasure and are a true gem for historians, because victims of the guillotine did not always have time to write their memoirs and their last letters did not always reach their destinations; even fewer of these victims were women.<sup>77</sup> Madame Roland wrote *Appel à l'impartiale postérité* during her five months imprisonment. The manuscript was smuggled out of prison in small packages, hidden by Bosc d'Antic during the Terror and is now in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.<sup>78</sup> Her *Mémoires historiques* defend her political actions in the years of 1791-1793. In her descriptions she upheld Rousseau's ideas of the ideal *femme* and argued that a *femme* was to be supportive and subservient to her husband. She wrote that her husband became the Minister of the Interior in 1792; as a dutiful wife, she controlled the content of his ministerial letters, memoranda, and

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<sup>75</sup> Ida M. Tarbell, "Madame Roland: A Biographical Study," 259-262.

<sup>76</sup> Sian Reynolds, *Marriage & revolution. Monsieur and Madame Roland*, (Oxford, England 2012), 284-285.

<sup>77</sup> Bessières, "Women in the French Revolution (1789)." 2.

<sup>78</sup> For more see., Unpublished Diary of Mme. Roland <http://ark.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb31237737f>.

speeches. In support of her husband's politics, she became involved in decisions about political appointments. It is unclear if she intentionally undermines her *femme* defense. In her descriptions it is revealed that her contributions were fundamental to Roland's ministry and her influence within the circle was much bigger than "just a wife" would imply.<sup>79</sup>

Furthermore, her writings contradict her *femme* defense as they revealed that she the craved political agency denied to her sex. She wanted to know liberty, intimately and individually.

En vérité, je suis bien ennuyée d'être une femme: il me fallait une autre âme, ou un autre sexe, ou un autre siècle. Je devais naître femme spartiate ou romaine, ou du moins homme français. [...] Mon esprit et mon cœur trouvent de toute part les entraves de l'opinion, les fers des préjugés, et toute ma force s'épuise à secouer vainement mes chaînes. O liberté, idole des âmes fortes, aliment des vertus, tu n'es pour moi qu'un nom!"<sup>80</sup>

[In truth, I am very bored of being a woman: I needed another soul, or another sex, or another century. I ought to be born a Spartan or Roman woman, or at least a French man. [...] My mind and my heart find everywhere the shackles of opinion, the irons of prejudice, and all my strength is exhausted in vainly shaking off my chains. O liberty, idol of strong souls, nourishment of virtues, you are only a name to me!]

Translation by Alixandrea Robinson

Madame Roland's political views were in line with Louise-Félicité de Kéralio (1758-1821); Kéralio (first French woman to be editor in chief of a journal) often used her journal, *Le Journal d'Etat et du Citoyen*, to comment on women and their role in the political sphere. Like Roland, Kéralio believed women should remain in the background; however, she notes that being a private agent does not equate to passivity:

Certainly, women and children are not employed. But is this the only way of actively influencing the polity? The discourses, the sentiments, the principles engraved on the souls of children from their earliest youth, which it is women's lot to take care of, the

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<sup>79</sup> Anne Coudreuse, "Les Mémoires de Madame Roland: être femme dans la tourmente de l'Histoire", *Itinéraires*, January, 2011, 29-43.

<sup>80</sup> Memoirs of Madame Roland - Jeanne-Marie or Manon Philippon (1754-1793)

influence which they transmit, in society, among their servants, their retainers, are these indifferent to the fatherland?<sup>81</sup>

Roland and Kéralio believe that women are to be passively in support of their husbands, yet they also believe that women have influence. Kéralio specifically points out that how a woman runs her house, her domain, influences the public directly. For Roland, historians can see her powerful influence via her letter writing, scheduling, viewing of political discussions. While Madame Roland never spoke out publicly for women's rights, in her later memoirs, she laments the restrictions placed upon women, and she found it difficult to stomach the role she played in collaboration with her husband.<sup>82</sup>

As mentioned previously, Madame Roland would be referenced by Chaumette at the National Convention meeting that outlaws women's political life. His comments reveal the real reason her *femme* defense failed. Chaumette states that Madame Roland "thought herself suited to govern the republic."<sup>83</sup> While his remarks are inflammatory, biased by his repulsion for women, we can gather that the *femme* defense was always going to fail for Roland because her actions as a devoted wife were perceived not as virtue but as perversion of her gender. According to Chaumette, Roland was becoming a male via political activism, and such crime against nature could only be punished by death.

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<sup>81</sup> Exert found in Green, Karen A *History of Women's Political Thought in Europe, 1700–1800*, 213.

<sup>82</sup> Coudreuse, "Les Mémoires de Madame Roland" 29-43.

<sup>83</sup> "Chaumette, Speech at City Hall"

## Chapter 3: Die Like a Citoyenne

### The Existence of *Citoyenne*

Reproductive and social order during the French Revolution were dependent on the union of the opposite elements of male and female,<sup>84</sup> the functional division of spheres and labor - to give Nature her due.<sup>85</sup> The revolution had male-dominated goals: liberty, sovereignty, moral choice informed by reason, etc. These goals are firmly male designated, defined by the contrasting female. The contrasting elements were:

Active	Passive
Liberty	Duty
Individual sovereignty	Dependency
Public	Private
Political	Domestic
Reason	Modesty
Speech	Silence
Education	Maternal nature
Universal	Particular
Male	Female <sup>86</sup>
Citoyen*	Citoyenne* <sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> While this fact was true for many, there were French contemporaries who believed the reunion of the sexes would lead to a prosperous France: Olympe de Gouges argued the opposition of the sexes was unnatural in her *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne*.

<sup>85</sup> Scott, "French Feminists and the Rights of 'Man': Olympe de Gouges's Déclarations" *History Workshop*, no. 28, 1989, p.4.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>87</sup> \* This study has added these elements to Scott's table.



The addition of *citoyen* and *citoyenne* supports Scott's conclusions and adds that there is a greater difference between the title than mere grammar. As francophones know, grammatically speaking, women, when grouped with men, are invisible; as it is taught, a room full of 99 women and 1 man will don masculine grammatical structures. Grammatical invisibility is not taken as absence; women would have grouped themselves in with the term *citoyen*, as they were used to the implications of a gendered language. For example, an official could call out to a group of people, mixed genders, "*Mes Copains!*" (masculine plural) and it is assumed that he is addressing the crowd entirely—not just the men.

*Citoyen*, however, cannot be assigned to a feminine crowd because Nature deems women cannot be *citoyen*, as that term was specific to a man's inherent gender identity. *Citoyen* meant man, sovereign, active, public. In the case of *citoyen*, the grammatical exclusion of women reflected the actual exclusion of women. As defined by the constitution of 1791, a *citoyen* of France was a man, over 25, who was independent, without domestic servants, who possessed measurable wealth (and therefore paid taxes). To borrow Scott's definition, before the fall of the monarchy, citizenship was granted by ownership of property - via wealth, land, and the self.<sup>88</sup> In 1792, after the fall of the monarchy, the prerequisites to citizenship were as follows: man, over 21, self-supporting. Using Scott's words, "the means test was dropped, leaving as the operative concept property in the self.[...] the active/passive distinction did not disappear,[...] it was employed to differentiate between the rights of those with and without autonomy or agency,[...] men and women."<sup>89</sup> As men were the only independently sovereign people in society, they were the only citizens; in fact, the traditional marriage dictated that *femme*<sup>90</sup> was a man's property

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Femme; meaning wife, and/or woman.

along with their children. Additionally, the use of *citoyenne* often referred to “imprudent women who want to become men.”<sup>91</sup>

Amy Freund writes on the portrayal of women and their portraiture during this time. In *The “Citoyenne” Tallien: Women, Politics, and Portraiture during the French Revolution* she finds the symbolism in portraiture of revolutionary women to argue that women desired and deserved a place in civic order; however, the only officially acceptable model for revolutionary femininity is that of the Republican *Femme* and Mother. Women ought to inspire their husbands and raise the citizens for the nation.<sup>92</sup> Through the portraiture of these *citoyennes* women reclaimed the title and asserted that *citoyenne* was patriotic, and feminine. Because their role as *femme* and mother meant they were directly responsible for next generation of patriots, they ought to claim some political recognition.

Freund draws from the life and works of Theresa Cabarrus (better known as Mme. Tallien) to show that not all women were convinced of Nature’s designation to the background. In an essay presented to the National Convention, Madame Cabarrus assures the crowd that she has no intentions of claiming political equality of the sexes (like the petition of women of the Third Estate to the King), yet women ought not be denied a place in civic order. She implies that women are barred from full citizenship not by Nature, but by those who speak in the name of Nature. By the time this essay was read to the National Convention in April of 1794, the government had already banned women’s political organizations, forbidden women from speaking in front of legislature, and explicitly excluded women from citizenship.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Amy Freund, “The “Citoyenne” Tallien: Women, Politics, and Portraiture during the French Revolution” *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 93, no. 3, 2011, 325.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 330.

## The Execution of *Citoyenne*

Susanne Kord looks at executions in the 18th and 19th century in her article *Why Executions Were a Gendered Affair* and argues that executions the 18th century were novel as the guillotine marked the end of gendered executions; female criminals achieved equality in death before they received equal status in civic, legal, social and political life. This study supports Kord's conclusions and adds that the use of the guillotine as an execution method for women demanded the legal recognition her rights and status as a *citoyenne*. If a woman can die like a *citoyen*, she is a *citoyenne*.

Prior to the dechristianization of France during the French Revolution, executions were intended to appease God and avert his wrath; consequently, the crimes often correlated with the punishment. In order to allow criminals the time to appease God, criminals were given time to recant, and were expected to show humility at the time of death. As execution was less about punishment and more about repentance, it became a performance of the condemned becoming a saint:

All efforts focused on making the criminal take it back, or—the next best thing—to make her (or him) say that s/he would if s/he could. Her 'willing' confession—defined as a confession not made under torture, although confessions offered immediately preceding, following or under threat of torture were deemed voluntary—provided not only the foundation for the death sentence, but also the first step on her journey from sinner to saint. Formerly a criminal, now a 'poor sinner,' she was expected to mount the scaffold exuding humility and grace. From there, she would meekly state that she deserved death for her crimes, beg forgiveness of those she had harmed, take leave of her family, thank the authorities for her mild sentence, admonish the audience not to follow her wicked example, kiss the staff that was broken over her or the sword about to behead her, and die, praying loudly until the final moment, a 'Christian' death... The role of the clergy was not to console the 'poor sinner' or to aid her psychologically, but to exhort her confession, forestall all temptations to retract it—even if her innocence was known or suspected—and ensure that her behavior on the scaffold conformed to the expectations of the authorities and her awaiting public.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Susanne Kord, "Why Executions Were a Gendered Affair." Paragraph 3.

Kord uses the account of the botched execution of a 20-year-old girl with the last name Koch in 1849 in Appenzell, Switzerland, to assert that public executions relied on the cooperation of the condemned and that public executions were primarily for the witnesses. Since the girl refused to play the part of a reformed sinner, her execution quickly became a grotesque horror show.

As the French Republic distanced themselves from the Church, public executions during the Reign of Terror had little concern to appease God. However, they did continue the traditions of performance, especially in the case of women. Kord draws from Naish's *Death Comes to the Maiden* and emphasizes the inequality of the treatment of female prisoners.

Yet some evidence, much of it perhaps too unsavoury to be considered by serious historians, militates against this presumed gender-equality of criminal punishment. The rape of women prisoners by their guards was widespread. During the French Revolution, incidents are documented involving 'judges in Brest [...] copulating with the bodies of decapitated girls in a dissecting theatre, in full view of the public' (Sylvia Naish, *Death Comes to the Maiden*, 1991). And the titillating quality of executions seems to have been considerably stronger when the person about to be executed was female. There are sordid stories of Charlotte Corday's breasts being ogled as she was drenched by a torrential downpour on her way to the guillotine, and even seedier ones of a delighted crowd looking up a hanged woman's skirts. None of this, however, is state-imposed, and thus such examples are of limited value in showing the gendered aspect of execution as a process planned and implemented by the State.<sup>95</sup>

The spectacle that is the *citoyenne* guillotined was a performance to affirm the authority of the state. As execution of a woman satisfies the men in the mob, who use the opportunity to defile and violate the *citoyenne*, so reflects subduing of the feminine crowd.

The mob observing a woman's execution, staring up her skirts and ogling her breasts, is always female, even if the crowd consists largely of men, and the execution, the spectacle that affirms the authority of the masculine State, becomes, in no small measure, an exercise in subduing the feminine mob... The fear expressed in these writings—some of which are now considered the philosophical foundations of European constitutions, legal systems, and ideas of society—was as much a fear of the unruly female as a fear of the unruly masses.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., Paragraph 2.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., Paragraph 9.

The treatment of the *citoyenne* subdues the feminine mob and simultaneously injects fear into women of the crowd who might have sympathized with the *citoyenne*'s ideas. In addition to the performative nature of female executions, these executions raise questions of women's rights.

### ***Cet Femme Homme, Olympe De Gouges***

The execution of Olympe de Gouges was a warning to those women who stepped outside of their natural sex. Chaumette reminded them that De Gouges "abandoned the cares of her household to get involved in politics and commit crimes. She died on the guillotine for having forgotten the virtues that suit her sex." For some time, De Gouges and her writings were lost to history. It wasn't until October of 2017 that she was recognized with a granite sculpture installed at the National Assembly in Paris. Ironically, her execution and erasure from history speak to the importance of her works.

De Gouges is known for her *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne* which she published in 1791. This work was not intended to replace the *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* that was adopted in 1789 by the National Assembly,<sup>97</sup> but instead was intended to be read and accepted in supplement.<sup>98</sup>

De Gouges situated her Declaration opposed to the Rousseau's themes of the Men's Declaration by mirroring the language found in the Men's Declaration, but she argued that all public misfortunes and governmental corruption can be traced back to the ignorance, neglect, and contempt for the rights of women. De Gouges' arguments were rooted in her foundational belief that Nature demands a reunion of the sexes in both public and private spheres of influence;

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<sup>97</sup> This study will refer to this document as the Men's Declaration for brevity and clarity.

<sup>98</sup> "Olympe de Gouges, The Declaration of the Rights of Woman (September 1791)," Found in *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History*, translated, edited, and with an introduction by Lynn Hunt (Boston/New York Bedford/St. Martin's, 1996), 124–129.

asserting women's rights is necessary to the aim of all political institutions so that women's and men's Natural powers may be fully respected.

Considering that ignorance, neglect or contempt for the rights of woman are the sole causes of public misfortunes and governmental corruption, they have resolved to set forth in a solemn declaration the natural, inalienable and sacred rights of woman: so that by being constantly present to all the members of the social body this declaration may always remind them of their rights and duties; so that by being liable at every moment to comparison with the aim of any and all political institutions the acts of women's and men's powers may be the more fully respected; and so that by being founded henceforward on simple and incontestable principles the demands of the citizenesses may always tend toward maintaining the constitution, good morals, and the general welfare. In consequence, the sex that is superior in beauty as in courage, needed in maternal sufferings, recognizes and declares, in the presence and under the auspices of the Supreme Being, the following rights of woman and the citizeness.<sup>99</sup>

De Gouges declares women are equal to men in rights, these rights are liberty, property, security, and especially resistance to oppression.<sup>100</sup>

Articles 4-10 deal with the treatment of the *citoyenne* in order to confront the paradox that the Men's Declaration created when they intentionally denied citizen status to women. First, De Gouges confronts their assertion that women do not have citizenship. She argues that denial of the *citoyenne* is contrary to justice, liberty, and Nature.

4. Liberty and justice consist in restoring all that belongs to another; hence the exercise of the natural rights of woman has no other limits than those that the perpetual tyranny of man opposes to them; these limits must be reformed according to the laws of nature and reason.

5. The laws of nature and reason prohibit all actions which are injurious to society. No hindrance should be put in the way of anything not prohibited by these wise and divine laws, nor may anyone be forced to do what they do not require.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup>Ibid., Preamble.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., Article 1-2.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., Article 4-5.

De Gouges attacked the validity of the Man's Declaration, stating that the law should reflect the general will of the people— both the *citoyenne* and *citoyen* and that constitutions decided on without the input of the majority of citizens are null and void.

6. The law should be the expression of the general will. All citizenesses and citizens should take part, in person or by their representatives, in its formation. It must be the same for everyone. All citizenesses and citizens, being equal in its eyes, should be equally admissible to all public dignities, offices and employments, according to their ability, and with no other distinction than that of their virtues and talents.<sup>102</sup>

De Gouges avoided being hypocritical with respect to the legal treatment of female criminals and argued for a dissolution of the *femme* defense. She confronted the notion that women cannot be held accountable for any crimes they commit. “No woman is exempted; she is indicted, arrested, and detained in the cases determined by the law. Women like men obey this rigorous law.”<sup>103</sup> She then doubled down by adding the right to be prosecuted and punished to the full extent of the law.<sup>104</sup> The right to be a political agent carries with it the right to be prosecuted as a counterrevolutionary. Indeed, De Gouges argued that women have the right to be guillotined in the name of equality of the sexes: “woman has the right to mount the scaffold, so she should have the right equally to mount the rostrum, provided that these manifestations do not trouble public order as established by law.”<sup>105</sup> She argued the right to prosecution hinges on a woman's right to hold their own thoughts and opinions. According to De Gouges, women have the right to die, be taxed, to hold public agents accountable, and the right to property (of self, and property).

She then included a postscript that addresses women specifically:

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., Article 6.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., Article 7.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., Article 8.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., Article 9.

Women, wake up; [...] recognize your rights. The powerful empire of nature is no longer surrounded by prejudice, fanaticism, superstition, and lies. The torch of truth has dispersed all the clouds of folly and usurpation. Enslaved man has multiplied his force and needs yours to break his chains. Having become free, he has become unjust toward his companion. Oh women! Women, when will you cease to be blind? What advantages have you gathered in the Revolution? A scorn more marked, a disdain more conspicuous. During the centuries of corruption, you only reigned over the weakness of men. Your empire is destroyed; what is left to you then? Firm belief in the injustices of men. The reclaiming of your patrimony founded on the wise decrees of nature; why should you fear such a beautiful enterprise? . . . Whatever the barriers set up against you, it is in your power to overcome them; you only have to want it.<sup>106</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the National Convention decidedly did not accept her Constitution. Instead, she was marked as an enemy of the state. De Gouges was charged with “having composed a work contrary to the expressed desire of the entire nation, and directed against whoever might propose a form of government other than that of a republic, one and indivisible.”<sup>107</sup> What is interesting about this statement is that her “work” they are referring to is not the Declaration, but instead a series of posters titled *Les Trois urnes, ou le salut de la patrie par un voyageur aérien*<sup>108</sup> and a play titled *La France sauvée ou le tyran détroné*.<sup>109</sup> Prosecutors argued that these works embolden citizens to take up arms against each other, leading to civil war and the desolation of liberty. Her defense against this claim was that men “for the past four years have not stopped making the greatest sacrifices for liberty.”<sup>110</sup> It is at this point that the court reporter becomes rather creative in his descriptions of Olympe de Gouges:

There can be no mistaking the perfidious intentions of this criminal woman, and her hidden motives, when one observes her in all the works to which, at the very least, she

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., Postscript.

<sup>107</sup> Records of her trial can be read in their entirety *Women in Revolutionary Paris, 1789–1795*, 254–259.

<sup>108</sup> In English, *The Three Urns, or the Salvation of the Fatherland, by an Aerial Traveler*.

<sup>109</sup> In English, *France Preserved, or The Tyrant Dethroned*.

<sup>110</sup> “The Trial of Olympe de Gouges” *Women in Revolutionary Paris, 1789–1795*, edited and translated by Darline Gay Levy, Harriet Branson Applewhite, and Mary Durham Johnson. 254.



lends her name, calumniating and spewing out bile in large doses against the warmest friends of the people, their most intrepid defender.<sup>111</sup>

De Gouges openly denied claims of sedition, stating that she was motivated by the unrest in Bordeaux, Lyons, etc., and her ideas were intended to “bring all parties together by leaving them all free in the choice of the kind of government which would be most suitable for them; that furthermore, her intentions had proven that she had in view only the happiness of her country.”<sup>112</sup> No doubt, the “them” she spoke of included the disenfranchised women who make up the crowds. De Gouges was then questioned about her patriotism and was accused of supporting the Old Regime. She countered this questioning by stating that she voted for the republican government, and she had “for a long while professed only republican sentiments, as the jurors would be able to convince themselves from her work entitled *De l’esclavage des noirs*.”<sup>113</sup> It is interesting that she chose a play that denounced slavery of French colonies and raised questions about “liberty” that demands the slavery of others. Even in her defense, De Gouges held a mirror to the tyrannical hypocrisy of the Republic.<sup>114</sup> De Gouges defended herself to the jury by stating that she holds a great love for liberty and a hatred of *every kind* of tyranny.

Throughout the rest of her questioning De Gouges responded that she “had always been a good *citoyenne*,” and she had “ruined herself in order to propagate the principles of the

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> For further readings concerning this play: Gregory Brown, " The Self-Fashionings of Olympe de Gouges, 1784-1789 “, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 34.2001, p. 383-401: Audrey Viguier, « Paratopie humaniste et Variantes sémantiques d’Olympe de Gouges dans *Zamore et Mirza* ou *l’Esclave des Noirs* », *Nottingham French Studies*, vol. 53, 2014, p. 314-328

Revolution and that she was the founder of popular societies of her sex, etc.” Her court decorum was reportedly expressive, and even performative:

During the resume of the charge brought by the public prosecutor, the accused, with respect to the facts she was hearing articulated against her, never stopped her smirking. Sometimes she shrugged her shoulders; then she clasped her hands and raised her eyes towards the ceiling of the room; then, suddenly, she moved on to an expressive gesture, showing astonishment; then gazing next at the court, she smiled at the spectators, etc.

She was found guilty, with a unanimous jury declaration that:

(1) it is a fact that there exist in the case writings tending towards the reestablishment of a power attacking the sovereignty of the people; [and] (2) that Marie Olympe de Gouges is proven guilty of being the author of these writings, and admitting the conclusions of the public prosecutor, condemns the aforementioned Marie Olympe de Gouges to the punishment of death in conformity with Article One of the law of last March 29th, which was read, which is conceived as follows: "Whoever is convicted of having composed or printed works or writings which provoke the dissolution of the national representation, the reestablishment of royalty, or of any other power attacking the sovereignty of the people, will be brought before the Revolutionary Tribunal and punished by death,"

When asked to recant her works and statements that criticize the “faithful representatives” of the people, most famously Robespierre, she simply replied that her thoughts had not changed. This study argues that the refused recantation of her insults expedited her execution as Robespierre was insulted by De Gouges. De Gouges declared her pregnancy before trial and again before sentencing: “My enemies will not have the glory of seeing my blood flow. I am pregnant and will bear a citizen or *citoyenne* for the Republic.”<sup>115</sup> As the law postponed executions of pregnant women until after delivery, the Tribunal sent sworn surgeons, doctors, and matrons to examine her on the morning of her trial. Official reports stated that it was too early to tell, but she had been imprisoned for 5 months.<sup>116</sup> Rather than postpone her execution until her pregnancy was

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> M. Dumont, “La fécondité malheureuse de la première féministe française, Olympe de Gouges.” *Revue française de gynécologie et d'obstetricie* vol. 84, January 1, 1989. 63.

verified or falsified, as only time would tell, the health officer testified that her declaration was false. The health officer was elected by Robespierre, and his denial was based on an overemphasis of her age, 45, making pregnancy to be unlikely.<sup>117</sup> She was guillotined at 4pm the next day.

Belief that De Gouges made false statements about pregnancy to evade the guillotine reflects a lack of familiarity with her works. Evading the guillotine does not reflect her character or her works. De Gouges did not deny any charges, merely defended that they were being viewed through the glasses of overambitious representatives. Moreover, she argued that women had the right to die for their opinions, meaning she would have believed the pregnancy to only delay her execution, not absolve her from it. The question of her pregnancy and rushed execution will remain unanswered, as mass graves were the standard practice, and autopsies were not performed. However, the rushed nature of her public execution stands to support that execution was more about appeasing the crowd, nursing the representatives' egos, and making an example of women. Additionally, when we compare her story to that of Marie-Jeanne Trumeau, we can see that they were especially harsh with the sentencing of De Gouges. Trumeau was sentenced to hang at the Place de la Grève because she was a leader of the Réveillon Affairs the riot on April 28, 1789, which left anywhere from 25 to 900 dead, but she was completely pardoned due to her pregnancy.<sup>118</sup> Lastly, Chaumette made an example out of De Gouges at the city hall held on November 17th, 1793. Chaumette's attitude and comments reveal that her true crime was being a "shameless" woman, who set up the *club des femmes*. In doing so she "abandoned the cares of

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<sup>117</sup> Dumont, "La fécondité malheureuse de," 63.

<sup>118</sup> Bessières "Women in the French." 6.

her household to involve herself in the republic” preventing her natural sex to become “*cet femme-homme*”<sup>119</sup>

## Conclusion

Those who choose to see the entire event that is the French Revolution as negative for women and argue that the revolution worsened the condition of women in Europe, discount the achievement and struggle women of the time went through because they did not have lasting historical significance. Instead of focusing on the lasting changes that did not happen, this study argues that there were political and social achievements of women during the French Revolution. In recognizing these efforts, we begin to undo the erasure of these women. Furthermore, this study identifies that the silencing of the *club des femmes* and the exclusion of women from politics is rooted in the perceived Natural differences of the sexes. Thus, the political demonstrations of women are not merely an attack on officials, they were an attack on the legislated spheres of the sexes. The complexities of the gender war impacted the level of culpability assigned to women. For most women, rioters and revolutionaries were merely hysterical women who needed to be controlled but were seen as no more than a public nuisance. For those women who stepped too far out of their gender, like Madame Roland or Olympe de Gouges, they would pay with their head. The assault in favor of Natural sexual difference is supported by archival evidence found at the National Archives in Paris; there existed a disproportionate number of legal protections for women. This gender bias paid dividends to women by allowing them to participate (illegally) in politics without suffering the *peine de mort* – 166 women compared to 17,000 men guillotined before the Revolution was concluded.

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<sup>119</sup> “Chaumette, Speech at City Hall”

Ultimately a woman would need to explicitly deny her female status, like Madame Roland, or openly contradict Rousseau's Natural Rights, like De Gouges, become a man (a *femme-homme*) in order to achieve any political recognition, and be deemed a threat worth prosecuting.

## Further Research Prospectus

Additional trips to the National Archives in Paris as well as their Pierrette-sur-seine location is needed catalogue the women who were arrested, had trials and determine which resulted in the dismissal of charges or condemned to *peine de mort*. Identifying to what extent women were arrested as an accomplice to their husband's crimes, versus women, unmarried, divorced, widowed, who were arrested outside of a man's influence would provide further framework for the femme defense. As the previous trips have identified women being arrested as *Parens des Émigrés*, further identification, examination, and categorization of arrest records would reveal other crimes alleged against women, as well as quantitative evidence that would define political activism expressed by revolutionary women.

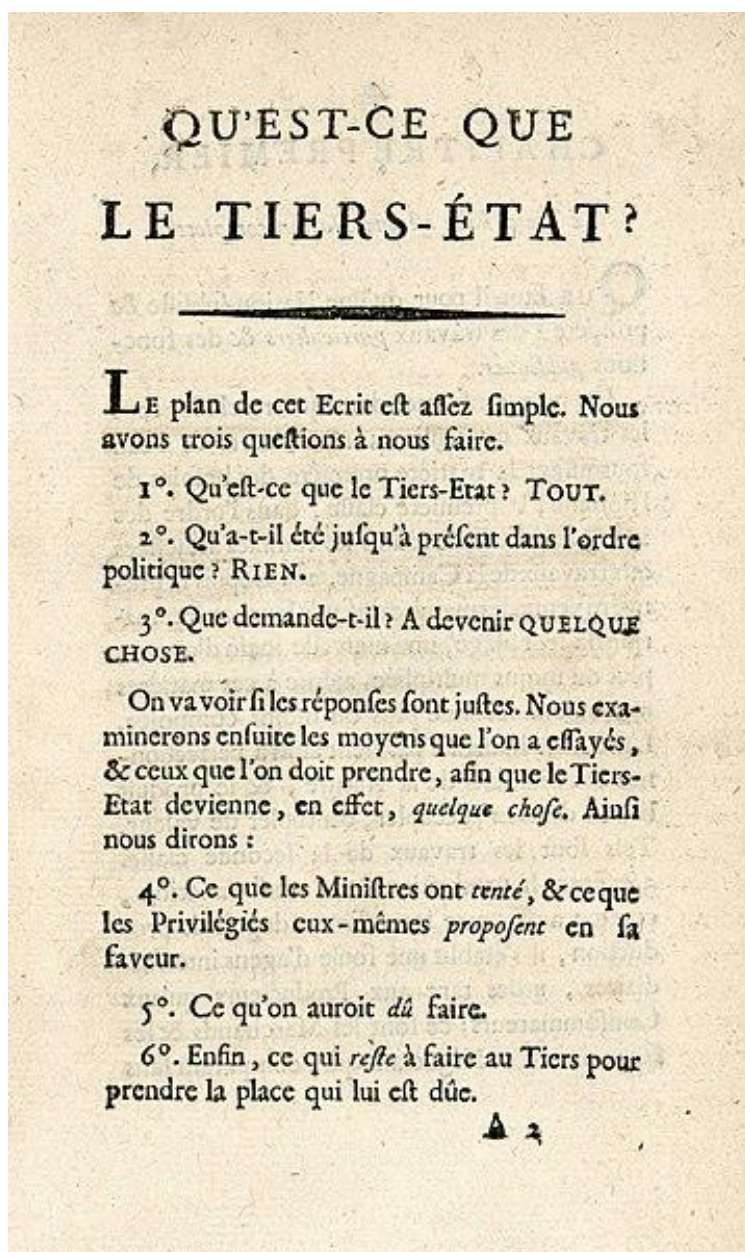
## Appendix

Figure 1. Club Patriotique de Femmes. Lesueur, Jean-Baptiste, Dessinateur Entre 1789 et 1795 Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris



Translation of inscription in Ink: Women's Patriotic Club. / Women Patriots had formed [sic] a club in which no other [sic] was admitted; / They had their President and secretaries [sic]; we assembled twice a week, the President / did the Reading of the Sessions of the national convention [sic], we approved or criticized her Decrees. / These Ladies animated by the zeal of Benevolence made among themselves [sic] a collection which was distributed to / families of good Patriots who need [sic] relief."

Figure 2. *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers-État?* January 1789, Abbé Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès (1748–1836)



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