

The local experience of Revolution: the Gobelins/Finistère Section in Paris

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Viewed from afar, the French Revolution falls easily into a series of binary oppositions: revolutionary and counter-revolutionary; conservative and radical; bourgeois and popular; Paris and provinces. Such opposites were the stuff of revolutionary rhetoric and provided ready ways of making sense of a complex reality. Yet, as every historian of the Revolution knows, on the ground things were much more complicated. In the provinces, revolutionary labels like “Jacobin” could cover a range of political views and were often ways of aligning one local faction with the group that was in power at the centre. This happened even in Paris itself.

Historians often use these oppositions in order to explain the Revolution to students and to general readers. Yet when the oppositions used are invested with moral qualities, or when alignments are made between different descriptive categories, binary oppositions betray the historical reality they claim to represent. An example is the correspondence often made between “radical” politics, the “popular movement,” and revolutionary violence. None of these terms is clear-cut. What was “radical” in 1789 was not necessarily so in 1793. Individuals and groups who expressed “radical” views at one moment did not always do so consistently, and nor were they necessarily “radical” on every issue. The way the term “popular movement” has commonly been used is also a problem, as recent studies of the post-1795 religious revival have demonstrated. Whereas dechristianization was long associated with the “popular movement,” particularly in Paris, and the re-opening of churches with counter-revolution, there is now ample evidence that the religious revival was more “popular” than dechristianization.¹ Similarly, recent writing has shown that hostility to women’s involvement in politics was by no means a monopoly of counter-revolutionaries or even of bourgeois moderates. In Paris, women were excluded from the revolutionary clubs not only in most of the more conservative sections in the west of the city but also in most of the city-centre sections, including the Gravilliers Section, one of the most radical of all. Women were also excluded in the Montreuil Section in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, although the faubourg was (and remains) almost

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¹ Olwen Hufton, *Women and the Limits of Citizenship in the French Revolution* (Toronto, 1992), chap. 3; Suzanne Desan, *Reclaiming the Sacred. Lay Religion and Popular Politics in Revolutionary France* (Ithaca and London, 1990), esp. 198-214; on Paris, David Garrioch, *The Formation of the Parisian Bourgeoisie* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996), 190-95.

synonymous with radical politics. Market women, who led the “popular” revolution in October 1789, seem to have been particularly hostile to the feminist claims of the Revolutionary Republican women.²

The alignment of different descriptive categories is even more problematical in relation to violence. For conservatives, the level of popular involvement is not only self-evidently linked to radicalism but also to violence.³ Yet the term “revolutionary violence” lumps together spontaneous crowd violence and insurrection, organized insurrection, and the institutional violence of arrest and imprisonment. To link all these forms of “revolutionary violence” with political radicalism and with the “popular movement” ignores the fact that some of the most extreme institutional violence took place after the Prairial risings (May 1795) and was directed against the former radicals.⁴ Furthermore, while there is a connection between insurrection and political radicalism, and to a lesser extent between crowd violence and “popular” participation in the Revolution, there is no necessary correlation between the areas of Paris where “radical” policies were supported and those where institutional violence was greatest. In the politically radical Gravilliers Section some 300 people were imprisoned during the Terror, whereas in the Finistère Section in the Faubourg Saint-Marcel, which was also one of the more consistently radical sections, at the peak of the Jacobin repression only thirty-two citizens were in prison and only a handful more were arrested subsequently.⁵

The term “popular movement,” connoting both a political stance and plebeian support, also needs to be used with care. In a broad-brush sense there is a connection between the socio-economic composition of each section and the strength of the “popular movement.” The wealthy areas on the Right Bank were on the whole moderate and were among the leaders of the conservative reaction of the later 1790s. Their bourgeois composition makes it hardly surprising that they should have sought to defend property and resist democratic change. The eastern faubourgs, on the other hand, much poorer, were fairly consistently radical throughout the revolutionary period. It has been suggested, therefore, that the faubourgs were radical because of the high percentage of poor people in the population and because the bourgeois were too few to retain control as the Revolution became more democratic.⁶

But the correlation between the socio-economic composition of the sections and their political stance is not always so clear. For example, in 1790 the Théâtre Français section was eleventh in the city in the proportion of active citizens in the population, falling between the Observatoire Section and the Gobelins Section. Yet the Gobelins area was to remain consistently radical, whereas the Théâtre Français,

² Dominique Godineau, *Citoyennes tricoteuses. Les femmes du peuple à Paris pendant la Révolution française* (Paris, 1988), 203, 266.

³ William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1989), esp. 271; and Jean Tulard, *Nouvelle histoire de Paris. La Révolution* (Paris, 1989), esp. 244-48.

⁴ Richard Cobb, “Note sur la répression contre le personnel sans-culotte de 1795 à 1801,” *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 26 (1954): 23-49.

⁵ On Gravilliers, Richard Andrews, “Paris of the Great Revolution, 1789-1796,” in *People and Communities in the Western World*, ed. Gene Brucker (Homewood, Illinois, 1979), 97; and Albert Soboul and Raymonde Monnier, *Répertoire du personnel sectionnaire parisien en l’an II* (Paris, 1985), 311; on Finistère, David Garrioch, “Revolutionary Violence and Terror in the Paris Sections,” in *The Sphinx in the Tuileries and Other Essays in Modern French History*, eds. Robert Aldrich and Martyn Lyons (Sydney, 1998). See also the figures given by Tulard, *Nouvelle histoire de Paris. La Révolution*, 330, which reveal the largest numbers of arrests during the Terror to have been in the central sections.

⁶ See for example Raymonde Monnier, *L’Espace public démocratique. Essai sur l’opinion à Paris de la Révolution au Directoire* (Paris, 1994), 132-33.

having been at the forefront of the popular movement from 1791 to 1793, in 1795 did not participate in the Prairial uprising and in the Year IV sided with the “counter-revolutionary” insurrection of Vendémiaire.⁷

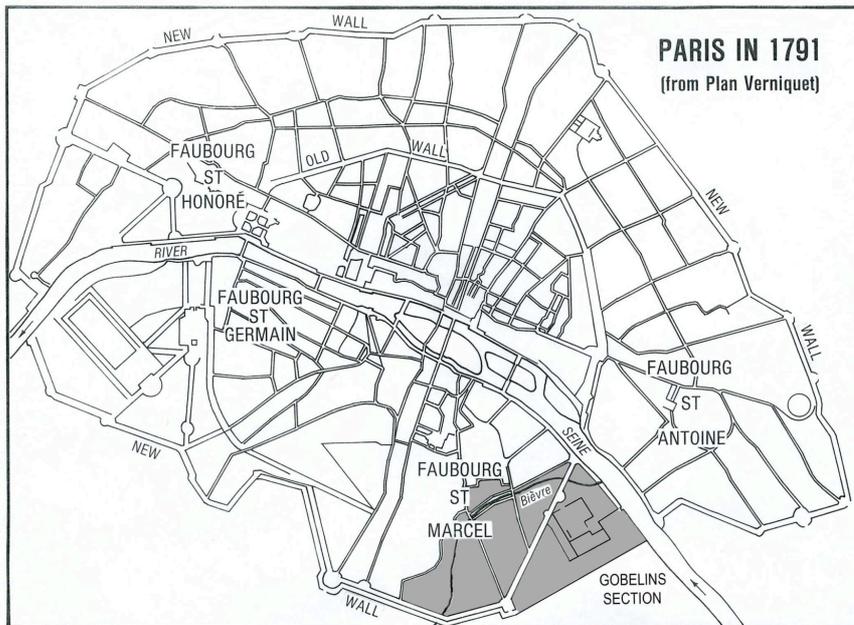
The explanation for this is partly, as Raymonde Monnier has pointed out, that the political position of particular sections depended not on the composition of the population as a whole but on that of the minority of militants and the support they could mobilize at each stage of the Revolution.⁸ Yet even this does not explain all the differences in the way the revolution was experienced in different parts of Paris. After the Prairial insurrection the repression of former militants was draconian in the Gravilliers Section but extraordinarily mild in the Gobelins/Finistère Section and in the adjoining Observatoire Section. The Jardin-des-Plantes/Sans-Culottes Section, the third section comprising the Faubourg Saint-Marcel, on the contrary saw many more arrests after Prairial. From the social composition of these sections or of their committees, one would not expect such differences.⁹ There were in fact many factors determining the revolutionary experience of each area, and its socio-economic character was only one variable. Geography and topography, traditions and loyalties inherited from the ancien régime, and the experience of the revolutionary years themselves were also important. I wish to illustrate this with the example of the Gobelins, later the Finistère, Section.

The Section initially took its name from the Gobelins Manufactory, which produced furniture and tapestries for the various royal palaces. It lay in the southeastern part of Paris, in the Faubourg Saint Marcel, renowned as one of the poorest areas of the city and, together with the Faubourg Saint Antoine, one of the areas that most consistently supported the “popular movement.” And indeed, from the beginning of the Parisian Revolution it was politically radical.

⁷ Monnier, *L'Espace public démocratique*, 123-24.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 126. Albert Soboul makes this distinction in some parts of his classic *Sans-culottes parisiens en l'an II. Mouvement populaire et gouvernement révolutionnaire, 2 juin 1793—9 Thermidor an II* (Paris, 1958), but not in others.

⁹ Garrioch, *Parisian Bourgeoisie*, 203; and Kåre D. Tonnesson, *La Défaite des Sans-culottes* (Oslo, 1978), 335. On Jardin-des-Plantes, George Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1959), 166.



Even before the creation of the sections, in November 1789, the Saint-Marcel district was the first to demand government control of grain prices and action against speculators. It was one of the first to admit “passive” citizens to its meetings. Subsequently the Gobelins Section played a key role in the insurrections of 20 June and 10 August 1792 and was among the minority of sections that admitted women both to the popular society and to the general assemblies.¹⁰ It was precocious in its social and economic demands, already in January 1792 condemning free trade and the “vile hoarders and foul capitalists” who profited from it at the expense of the poor.¹¹ Right through to the last popular uprising of the Revolution, in Prairial, *an III* (May 1795), it was one of the centers of revolt.

One of the key factors determining the political stance of the Gobelins Section was its geographical position and its topography. It was on the fringes of the city, and as Louis-Sébastien Mercier commented in 1782, “If one makes the journey into that country it is through curiosity; nothing obliges you to go there.”¹² It contained few tourist attractions, other than the Gobelins Manufactory itself, and its key industries—tanning, starch-making, brewing—made it even smellier than the rest of the city. The main reason why these industries were there, apart from the peripheral location, was the Bièvre River, a narrow, slow-running, and heavily polluted waterway that created

¹⁰ R.B. Rose, *The Making of the Sans-Culottes* (Manchester, 1983), 69; Bibliothèque historique de la Ville de Paris 10065, no. 163, extract from deliberations of District of Saint-Marcel, 7 Nov. 1789; Louis Mortimer-Ternaux, *Histoire de la Terreur*, 8 vols. (Paris, 1863-1881), 1: 136-37, 144; 2: 229, 439, 450; and Godineau, *Citoyennes tricoteuses*, 116, 202-3. The Faubourg Saint-Marcel has been studied in detail by Haim Burstin, from a social, economic and demographic perspective in his *Le faubourg Saint-Marcel à l'époque révolutionnaire* (Paris, 1983) and from a political perspective in *Une Révolution à l'oeuvre: le faubourg Saint-Marcel (1789-1794)* (Paris, 2005).

¹¹ Quoted in Marcel Reinhard, *La chute de la Royauté* (Paris, 1969), 510.

¹² Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, 12 vols. (Amsterdam: 1782-1788), 1: 269.

a significant physical barrier, since there were only three narrow bridges leading towards the city center. Physical distinctiveness was accentuated by a historical awareness of separate identity. The abbey church of “Saint-Marcel-lès-Paris” (Saint-Marcel near Paris) lay at the center of what had once been a settlement outside Paris. Even though the old city gate at the top of the rue Mouffetard had long disappeared, people still referred to it and talked about going “into Paris.”¹³ The *cahiers* of the Third Estate dealt not only with national and Parisian issues but mounted a vigorous defense of local interests, protesting against a plan to divert water from the Bièvre and against the extra tax that inhabitants of the faubourgs had to pay towards the cost of maintaining military barracks and requesting both urgent measures to relieve poverty and the construction of a new bridge over the Seine.¹⁴

The Faubourg Saint-Marcel was relatively distant from the centre of Paris, and while there were several possible routes none was straightforward. It took perhaps half an hour to walk through winding, crowded streets from the city centre, and this was normally the maximum pace at which news traveled. It was somewhat faster than the speed of rumor, which might be news but might not. Thus, at the dramatic moments of the Revolution, no-one was really sure what was happening elsewhere in the city. To receive confirmation of rumors or of orders might take an hour, two hours. At these times, individual and collective decisions had to be made in isolation. We can see this on a number of occasions during the 1790s. On 25 June, not long after the failed *journée* of 20 June in which the Gobelins Section had played a significant role, there were rumors that the National Guard units opposed to the Court were to be disarmed. Scouts reported that the Faubourg was surrounded by troops loyal to the Court and in response the local National Guardsmen barricaded themselves in the abbey cloister and posted sentries in the environs—the bridges over the Bièvre were an obvious point, as no-one could approach without coming across one of them.¹⁵ These actions were a clear reflection of the problems of communication within the city and the acute sense of isolation of the Faubourg Saint-Marcel.

Another example is the events of the night of 9-10 Thermidor. Once again, there were conflicting rumors about what was happening at the Hôtel-de-Ville and at the National Convention. The Sectional Assembly was in session all evening and opinions were divided on how to respond to the limited information available. Groups and individuals were sent off to the center of Paris to try to find out what was going on and a detachment of the National Guard went to the Hôtel-de-Ville. Once again, the National Guard was drawn up in battle order and sentries were posted on the bridge over the Bièvre. At 12.30 on the morning of 10 Thermidor a member of the rebel Commune, a local man named Antoine Gency, arrived with fifty National Guardsmen and arrested the Section’s Revolutionary Committee before going to the Sectional Assembly to demand that they give the order to march on the Convention in support of the Commune. It was sheer chance that he had failed to arrest two members of the Revolutionary Committee who had been to the Convention in search of orders and sheer chance that instead of going back to the headquarters of the Revolutionary Committee they had gone directly to the Sectional Assembly, arriving only minutes before Gency. Had they been delayed, or had he come earlier, there was every chance that the Finistère battalion of the National

¹³ Archives Nationales [henceforth AN] Y13290, 17 Aug. 1788.

¹⁴ AN Ba 64A, dossier 4, no. 23, “Cahier du Tiers Etat du District de Saint Victor” and no. 30, “Cahier du District de Saint Marcel.”

¹⁵ Jacques Godechot, “Fragments des mémoires de Charles-Alexis Alexandre sur les journées révolutionnaires de 1791 et 1792,” *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 24 (1952): 181-82.

Guard would have sided with the Commune, lending not only its guns but also its considerable moral authority.¹⁶ This may or may not have influenced the course of the Revolution, but it would certainly have had a dramatic impact on the local leadership!

If the decision to march or not to march was taken in isolation, it was nevertheless not taken entirely in ignorance. By 9 Thermidor the Revolution had been under way for five years, and the local leaders of the Revolution had a lot of experience behind them. They relied on their knowledge of what had happened in the past and of the likely consequences of each possible course of action. And they made educated guesses about how others would respond, drawing on knowledge about individuals and groups elsewhere in the city. These judgments were sometimes based on acquaintanceship or even familiarity, since many members of the political elites knew each other.¹⁷ Leading members of different sections met in delegations, sometimes as municipal representatives, through the National Guard, and in dealings between section committees. Some of the *sans-culotte* leaders from different parts of the city were already acquainted before the Revolution. The brewer Antoine-Joseph Santerre, for example, best known as commander of the Paris National Guard at the time of Louis XVI's execution, knew at least two of the leaders of the Gobelins Section, in addition to his own brother who lived there, as prominent members of the pre-revolutionary brewers' corporation. His brother-in-law, Joseph Etienne Panis, was a prominent member of the Arsenal Section.¹⁸ There were many familial and personal ties across the city.

Networks and levels of support within the section were also significant. On the night of 9-10 Thermidor the escape from arrest of two members of the local Revolutionary Committee was fortuitous, but it was by no means a foregone conclusion that they would be able to sway the Assembly against the formidable Antoine Gency. He was an intimidating figure who brought the added prestige of a Municipal sash. Yet in the end, his defeat was not simply a matter of chance. Gency was deeply unpopular in the Section, where he had behaved in an extraordinarily arrogant manner. He did not have a strong power base there, and while at first he was able to exploit the uncertainty of many citizens, once his opponents returned with news directly from the Convention there was little chance of him winning the night.

Within the sections, where at the most agitated and democratic moments of the 1790s up to 400 citizens attended meetings and voted, the small number of office-holders and local power-brokers were well known to each other. They knew whom they could rely on for support and often who would oppose them. They knew where their friends and enemies lived, what jobs they did. This has often been overlooked even in studies of the sectional movement, which often neglect not only pre-revolutionary connections but even family ties within the sections, and neighborhood and friendship are even less often studied.¹⁹ Yet the creation of a local power-base relied heavily upon

¹⁶ AN F7*2519, fols. 18 verso-32, enquiry into events of 9 Thermidor.

¹⁷ A point made forcibly by Gary Kates, commentary on Michael S. Lewis-Beck, Anne Hildreth, and Alan B. Spitzer, "Was There a Girondist Faction in the National Convention, 1792-1793?" *French Historical Studies* 15 (1988): 543-546.

¹⁸ Acloque and Hannen had both been officials of the brewers' corporation in 1780: France Weber, "La famille Santerre et la brasserie parisienne au XVIIIe siècle," *Le brasseur français* 704 (20 May 1905): 4; 706 (3 June 1905): 4; and Raymonde Monnier, *Un bourgeois sans-culotte. Le Général Santerre* (Paris, 1990), 32.

¹⁹ Richard Cobb and Richard Andrews have shown the importance of such factors. Cobb, *The Police and the People* (Oxford, 1970), 122, 198-200; and *Reactions to the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1972), 116-121; and Andrews, "Réflexions sur la conjuration des Egaux," *Annales: ESC* 29 (1974): 73-106

personal connections. Work ties too created nodes within individual sections, some of them quite powerful.²⁰ Nor should we overlook the role of female power-brokers, who were often active in charity work, were sometimes employers, and often able to wield influence through their own family and personal networks.²¹ Women revolutionaries were particularly important in the Gobelins/Finistère Section where they were sometimes present in significant numbers at sectional meetings. These different connections often provide the key to understanding the political stance of individuals and of collectivities within the city.

Many ties, of course, were formed during the Revolution itself, through work on committees and in the sectional assemblies. The importance of the National Guard has been little emphasized in studies of revolutionary Paris, yet for men National Guard service was one of the most significant bonding factors in the whole revolutionary experience. Working closely with a brigade, doing twenty-four hour shifts two or more times a month, occasionally under enormous pressure, was a remarkably testing activity in which a man's personal qualities quickly became known. Very strong loyalties were created between officers and men. It was this loyalty that made the men of Jean Vedrenne's brigade support him in 1795, even though he was clearly guilty of participation in the insurrection of Prairial, and despite the fact that some of those who spoke on his behalf were politically opposed to him.²²

In some instances, revolutionary institutions were partly shaped by a pre-existing culture. Each company of the Saint-Marcel battalion of the National Guard was based on a particular neighborhood, a violation of the 1789 regulations which stipulated that each company was to be drawn from across the whole area of the district. Thus the bonds between guardsmen were also those of neighborhood. Neighborhood ties also operated within the Revolutionary Committee of the Gobelins/Finistère Section in the *an II*: five of its twelve members lived in the same street and six of them were in the same National Guard unit.²³ Not surprisingly, there was a culture of familiarity in revolutionary politics that influenced the way people behaved, helping sometimes to build alliances and sometimes to create opposing factions.

I am not suggesting that the Gobelins/Finistère Section formed a "local community" in the sense in which I have used the term in my study of pre-revolutionary Paris.²⁴ The sections were artificial creations which cut across the boundaries of parishes and districts. They were too large and their population too diverse for them to form social communities of that sort. Each section did, nevertheless, come to form a political community. By the *an II*, the most politically active citizens within each section had

(esp. 88). See also Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley, 1984), 192-195.

²⁰ As Haim Burstin has shown in the case of the Gobelins manufactory: "Travail, entreprise et politique. La manufacture des Gobelins pendant la période révolutionnaire," *Revue du Nord* 5, spécial hors-série (1989): 369-79.

²¹ Godineau, *Citoyennes tricoteuses*, 213. On a number of occasions the Section named women as emissaries to the National Assembly, the Commune, and to other sections: for example, AN D III 256 (4), 25 Apr. 1792.

²² AN F7 4751, doss. Jouzeau. One of the few to study the National Guard has been Dale Lothrop Clifford, "The National Guard and the Parisian Community, 1789-1790," *French Historical Studies* 16 (1990): 849-878. See also Raymonde Monnier, "La garde citoyenne, élément de la démocratie parisienne, in *Paris et la Révolution*, ed. Michel Vovelle (Paris, 1989), 147-59; David Andress, *Massacre at the Champ de Mars* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2000), esp. chap. 3; and Garrioch, *Parisian Bourgeoisie*, 168-71.

²³ AN F7 4794, cartes de sûreté; Clifford, "National Guard," 856; Garrioch, *Parisian Bourgeoisie*, 68.

²⁴ David Garrioch, *Neighbourhood and Community in Paris, 1740-1790* (Cambridge, 1986).

formed loyalties and antagonisms that made all of them feel part of a single unit to which they felt an allegiance. I mention antagonisms as well as loyalties because both were important in the transformation of each section into a tiny polity. This sense of allegiance was demonstrated in the Finistère Section in June 1793 when the widow of a former member of the Paris Parlement, de Montulé, who ran a dyeing-works in the Gobelins quarter, was arrested by the Croix Rouge Section. Although she was an obvious suspect, not a conspicuous patriot nor linked to any of the revolutionary leadership, the Finistère Revolutionary Committee defended her on the grounds that her detention would cost the jobs of local people. This may have been true, but it seems a strange consideration to sway revolutionary zealots concerned to root out counter-revolution.²⁵ The affair seems to indicate a feeling that outsiders should not be allowed to interfere in the Section's affairs.

Rejection of interference from other sections was fairly common in revolutionary Paris. But as I have suggested elsewhere, in the Gobelins/Finistère Section there was a political culture, a set of unwritten rules for the conduct of local affairs, which was relatively benign. The example of the Widow Montulé, or later of Jean Vedrenne and others, and more generally the very low levels of violence and of imprisonment, bear this out. One might have expected an area with a very large indigent population and a small elite of wealthy merchants to have been riven with social tensions and to have experienced a considerable amount of violence and repression. And indeed this was the case in the neighbouring Jardin-des-Plantes Section, which was socially very similar. In the Gobelins/Finistère Section, on the other hand, it is conspicuous that those who suffered most during the Terror or in later reprisals were those who had themselves denounced or betrayed other local people.²⁶ One figure who conspicuously broke local solidarities was Antoine Gency, through his use of his municipal authority to intervene in sectional affairs and through his unforgiving persecution of individuals whose counter-revolutionary opinions were known, but who were keeping quiet and were therefore unmolested by the local militants. It was his unbending pursuit of his opponents which eventually led to his arrest. He was probably too deeply compromised, as a member of the rebel Commune, to have escaped execution, but would he have been arrested by the National Guard of his own Section if he had not forced them to choose, by attempting to arrest his enemies in the Sectional Assembly at the very height of the crisis?

One should not romanticize this political culture. It is not that everyone in the Section got on famously or that they all felt loyalty to each other. On the contrary, local disputes were bitter and denunciations were common. The Revolutionary Committee and the surveillance committee of the popular society, particularly in *an* II, were often ruthless in their pursuit of enemies of the Revolution, readily sacrificing individual justice to the cause of revolutionary patriotism. For this they were repaid in kind by the moderates who assumed control in *an* III. Nor should we underestimate the effect that two months in prison could have on the health and livelihood of an individual and his or her family.²⁷ Yet however much the leaders of the day felt that their enemies in the Section deserved punishment, there seems to have been pressure from local opinion to keep it within bounds.

This local culture, while providing limited protection for local people, ensured that outsiders and strangers enjoyed no such leniency. Not only were they more readily

²⁵ AN F7* 2517, fol. 15.

²⁶ Garrioch, "Revolutionary Violence."

²⁷ Raymonde Monnier, *Le Faubourg Saint-Antoine (1789-1815)* (Paris, 1981), 135, 145.

suspected, but if deemed guilty should be punished severely. When members of the Gobelins/Finistère Section declaimed against merchants they were not thinking of the large number of independent shopkeepers and even rich wholesale merchants in their own midst, although occasionally one of them might prove to be guilty. They were targeting other people's merchants. As one member of the Section explained, late in 1793, there were "the decent rich who owed their wealth to their work and to useful and legal speculation; and the guilty rich whose gold came from intrigues and criminal activity."²⁸ It was far more likely, in their view, to be in other sections that the hoarding and speculating was going on. It was in the surrounding villages that grain wagons destined for Paris were stopped and unloaded. The harshest punishments were called down, by men who were often far from poor themselves, upon the selfish rich of other parts of Paris or of France. This was by no means confined to the Gobelins/Finistère Section. It is noteworthy that a third of those arrested in the Gravilliers Section during the Terror were non-residents of the Section.²⁹

Yet such a culture was particularly unsurprising in the Faubourg Saint Marcel, given its sense of a separate identity. The political traditions of the area, as well as its geography, encouraged a sense of separateness. Because the Bièvre was so important to the local economy, until 1790 the maintenance of the river and its banks was overseen by three "syndics" elected by the local water users from among their own number. This local administration helped to reinforce a strong local identity, but on the eve of the Revolution it became politically significant when a proposal was made to divert water from the river to supplement the city's water supply. The syndics mobilized local opposition, printed a pamphlet, and presented their case to the Forests and Waters administration, the Parlement, and the Royal Council.³⁰ Even before 1789, dependence on the Bièvre had created a long tradition of co-operation between local employers, giving them experience of local government and of political action.

Another aspect of the pre-revolutionary political culture of the Faubourg Saint Marcel, which may have been important in fashioning its revolutionary experience, was its Jansenist religious tradition. The Jansenists favored giving the laity a far greater role in parish affairs and some had even suggested the election of priests by their congregations. The similarity of some of their prescriptions to those adopted in the Civil Constitution of the Clergy has often been pointed out, and although the new parish boundaries caused some discontent, the Constitutional Church met with no opposition from the population of the Faubourg Saint Marcel. When the parish clergy swore loyalty to the new Constitution early in 1791, their congregations were uniformly supportive of those who took the oath and wildly hostile to those who refused. This was a common enough pattern in Paris but particularly comprehensible in a quarter with a strong tradition of Jansenism. It was to re-surface in 1795 with the re-opening of the churches.³¹ Whereas congregations in many parts of France refused to have anything to do with the Constitutional clergy, in the Faubourg Saint Marcel they were welcomed back warmly. The one non-juror priest who obtained permission to run a church there under the Directory, Louis Bertier, also a bane of Jansenists, received less support from the locals in refurbishing the church than did the new constitutional *curé* of Saint Médard.³² The

²⁸ Quoted in Soboul, *Les Sans-culottes parisiens*, 506, note 5.

²⁹ Andrews, "Paris of the Great Revolution," 97. For further examples see Richard Cobb, "Some Aspects of the Revolutionary Mentality," in *New Perspectives on the French Revolution* ed. Jeffrey Kaplow (New York, 1965), 305-337 (esp. 320-321).

³⁰ Garrioch, *Parisian Bourgeoisie*, 56-61, 146.

³¹ *Ibid.*, chap. 8.

³² AN F19 4145, inventories of Saint Marcel, Year X and of Saint Médard, n.d. [c. Year X].

Jansenist tradition may have predisposed the local population to accept a Church which gave them a high degree of control over the clergy and over parish affairs, in defiance of a Papal authority which had long condemned their beliefs. Jansenist understandings of the parish as a community of souls may also have helped to fashion a communitarian understanding of popular sovereignty. Certainly, Jansenism promoted a more significant role for lay women than orthodox Catholicism, and the Gobelins/Finistère Section was one of the areas where women played a significant role both in the popular society and in the Sectional Assembly.³³

In a variety of ways, therefore, the pre-revolutionary political culture of the area may have shaped responses to the Revolution. But my primary concern is not with the ways in which this area of Paris was different. Rather, I have been pointing to the range of factors that influenced the way the Revolution was experienced in each part of the city. While the socio-economic characteristics of a section may have predisposed it to adopt a particular political stance on certain issues, we should not assume that it would be radical or conservative on every issue. Nor should we assume that political radicalism or the strength of support for the “popular movement” determined the level of violence experienced by the population. Geography and topography, the networks of family, trade and friendship, and the pre-revolutionary traditions and political culture of each area all played a role. Furthermore, the example of the Gobelins/Finistère Section illustrates the way in which reactions to successive revolutionary events were in part determined by the experience of earlier ones; by local memories of the key players and of their earlier behavior. The experience of this Section during the Terror, when relatively few people were imprisoned or executed, directly affected the response of the local elite to the later Prairial insurrection.³⁴ The trajectory of this and of other areas of Paris was not predictable in 1789, any more than the outcomes of the Revolution itself.

³³ Suzanne Desan has also emphasized the influence of Jansenism on the Revolution at the local level in the Yonne: *Reclaiming the Sacred*.

³⁴ Garrioch, “Revolutionary Violence.”