

Dirty Laundry: Public Hygiene and Public Space in Nineteenth-Century Paris

by

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ABSTRACT

In nineteenth-century France, in rural areas, women washed laundry in the nearest streams or in the sea and hung the linens where they could, on lavender bushes, rocks and grass fields, where it had a quaint, if not artistic quality. In villages, laundresses washed linens in fountains, or other water sources, which were often found at or near the center of town. In either case, laundresses operated in public spaces without problem. I argue that, in Paris, changing ideas about the functioning of city space, the management of public hygiene and decisions about the use of public space, made laundresses and laundry operations matter out of place in the city. This study will demonstrate the changes laundering and laundresses underwent during the nineteenth century in Paris, making them out of place. City administrators and public health officials changed the occupation and places where laundry could be done as they sought to render laundry and laundresses invisible within Paris. In the early nineteenth century the *Préfet de la Seine* forbade women from using the river banks. In the mid-nineteenth century complaints about the disgraceful aspect of women laundering on the river prompted the *Préfet* to try to eliminate *bateaux-lavoirs*. In the late nineteenth century the discovery of microbes focused attention on laundry and laundresses and their potential to transmit diseases prompting another wave of hygiene regulations and questions about closing *bateaux-lavoirs* and *lavoirs*. The *Préfet* and *Conseil d'Hygiène's* struggle to make them invisible by moving them into approved facilities continued until the end of the nineteenth century. Studying laundresses and laundry sheds light on how the shifts in politics, changes in

acceptable uses of public space and public hygiene affected working women. It illustrates the manner in which public hygiene- the *Conseil de Salubrité* and later the *Conseil d'Hygiène*, functioned and to what degree they could demand changes to the city in the name of hygiene. Through identifying subtle policy shifts, historians may learn how laundry demonstrates policies on the use of urban space, public hygiene or issues about work.

DEDICATION

For Christophe

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Washing laundry has been a visible activity. In rural areas, women washed laundry in the nearest streams or in the sea and hung the linens where they could, on lavender bushes, rocks and grass fields, where it had a quaint, if not artistic quality. In villages, laundresses washed linens in fountains, or other water sources, which were often found at or near the center of town. In either case, laundresses operated in public spaces without problem.¹ The laundresses' presence in many novels, paintings and postcards attested to their visibility.²

Studying laundresses and laundry sheds light on how the shifts in politics, changes in acceptable uses of public space and public hygiene affected working women, specifically those doing laundry in public, on *bateaux-lavoirs* and in public facilities, *lavoirs*. Furthermore, it illustrates the manner in which public hygiene, the *Conseil de Salubrité* and later the *Conseil d'Hygiène*, functioned and to what degree the officials could demand changes to the city in the name of hygiene. It shows how politicians, the *Conseil de Salubrité*, and the *Conseil d'Hygiène*, with their prejudices about poor women in public space, sought to render laundresses *persona non grata* in Paris. In addition, an examination of laundresses and laundry in Paris is significant, as it reveals how new ideas about

¹ Françoise Wasserman, *Blanchisseuse, laveuse, repasseuse: La Femme, le linge et l'eau* (Fresnes: Écomusée de Fresnes, 1986), 1-5.

² Émile Zola, *L'Assommoir*, Trans. Margaret Mauldon, 1877, reprint (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). Paintings of Edgard Degas: *Blanchisseuse souffrant des dents 1872, Les Blanchisseuses 1874, Les Repasseuses 1884*. Painting of Honoré Daumier : *La blanchisseuse, 1860-1861*.

public space changed the acceptable uses of the river Seine – a natural resource within the city – and greatly reduced access for people that depended on it. Closing free access to a natural resource like water cut off the poorest who could not afford to pay for it when city administrators privileged corporate use. Once the *Préfet de la Seine* – prefect appointed by the head of state who was in charge of the administration of the Seine department – eliminated free places to wash, the city did not provide alternatives and had to contend with women in illegal places. Studying laundry from written historical sources necessitated the study of public policy. It is only from identifying subtle policy shifts that historians may learn how laundry illustrates policies on the use of urban space, public hygiene or issues about work.

I argue that changing ideas about the functioning of city space, the management of public hygiene and decisions about the use public space, made laundresses and laundry operations matter out of place in the city.³ This study will demonstrate the changes laundering and laundresses underwent during the nineteenth century in Paris, making them out of place. City administrators and public health officials changed the occupation and places where laundry could be done as they sought to render laundry – a traditionally visible activity carried out in public space – and laundresses invisible within Paris through various means. In

³ The term city administrators refers to the *Préfet de la Seine*, *Préfet de Police*, public hygienists and engineers who oversaw and regulated Paris. Mary Douglas articulated the concept of “matter out of place” in anthropological terms in *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966, 2001).

the early nineteenth century the *Préfet de la Seine* forbade women from using the river banks. In the mid-nineteenth century complaints about the disgraceful aspect of women doing laundry outside in the river prompted the *Préfet* to study the question of eliminating *bateaux-lavoirs* – laundry boats that resembled a barge that was connected to the river bank by a stairway or system of pontoons and lashed to the banks on the river Seine.⁴ The solution to the problem laundresses and their occupation in public space raised consisted in moving the operation indoors and into private space. The city administrators sought to construct a different meaning – and thus use – for the space directly connected with the river Seine. Making laundry operations forbidden in public space affected laundresses themselves in different ways, primarily by limiting their choices and driving them into uncomfortable and unsafe places for laundering. In the late nineteenth century the discovery of microbes focused attention on laundresses and their potential to transmit diseases. The *Préfet* and *Conseil d'Hygiène*'s struggle to make them invisible by moving them into approved facilities continued until the end of the nineteenth century.

The acceptance of laundry in public spaces changed in the nineteenth century in urban locations as poor women in the city faced challenges in laundering that women in rural areas did not have to contend with. Paris is an ideal city to study changes in the use of public space that affected the laundresses so much. As Donald Olsen points out, Paris was “a deliberate artistic creation

⁴ All translations in this dissertation are my own. The technical aspects of the laundering process are discussed at the beginning of chapter one.

intended not merely to give pleasure but to contain ideas, inculcate values, and serve as tangible expressions of systems of thought and morality.”⁵ France is also a centralized state; Paris serves as an example and a leader for the rest of the nation. Paris was also different from other cities in France during the nineteenth century. Its system of administration made it, according to David Jordan, “a state within a state” with its own Prefecture and administration separate from the bureaucratic structure of other cities and departments.⁶ Therefore, Paris lends itself as a city that may be studied on its own terms separate from other governmental structures and as a leader of innovations for the nation. This dissertation will examine the different and complicated processes of laundry and the unique obstacles that arose while doing laundry in an urban environment, specifically Paris.

Beginning in the Napoleonic era through the Third Republic, 1800-1914, laundry and laundresses represented a problem in Paris. Executed in various locales with a focus on the river Seine, the laundry process raised several issues about the use of public space, associated with urbanization. Each time period produced different strategies to resolve the problems raised by laundry in public space. First, city administrators in the Napoleonic era connected laundry hanging on the banks of the river and buildings and women using the river with poverty. *An ordonnance* from the *Préfet de la Seine* in 1805 made laundering on the river

⁵ Donald Olsen, *The city as a work of art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 4.

⁶ David Jordan, *Transforming Paris: The Life and Labors of Baron Haussmann*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) 25.

banks illegal in view of the increasing river traffic.⁷ From the early nineteenth century, making traffic on the river more fluid reflected the new political goals of the city to make commerce more efficient in the industrial age. City Administrators supported private businesses using the Seine and wished to limit the women's free use of the river. Then, during the Second Empire, Baron Georges Eugène Haussmann, as *Préfet de la Seine*, sought to create the river as a thoroughfare for commercial traffic, not a static place with businesses parked on the banks; he enlisted the help of mayors of the *arrondissements*, engineers, and the *Conseil de Salubrité*. Later, in the 1880s, the *Conseil d'Hygiène* wanted to relocate the women for reasons of public health. Moving the laundresses indoors and eventually eliminating small *lavoirs*, would only leave industrial *blanchisseries* that could integrate all the prescriptions *Conseil de Salubrité* proposed to protect public health against cholera outbreaks⁸. Further, as Victoria Thompson has shown, ideas about gender made women out of place in public spaces.⁹ Influenced by gendered notions which disapproved of women occupying public space, social commentators and the artistic discourse about the laundresses' visibility placed them discursively little above a prostitute.

⁷ APP, DA 336 Navigation, Ordonnance du 19 floréal An XIII (9 mai 1805).

⁸ The *lavoirs* were small sheltered laundry facilities on the ground, which were open to the public and did not have machines. The *blanchisseries* were the facilities the more affluent clients used; they were the largest facilities, housed every process under one roof, and included some machinery like spinning machines to help dry the clothes; these facilities primarily employed women – the *blanchisseuses*. The *buanderies* were laundry facilities using steam (from the word *buée* – condensation).

⁹ Victoria Thompson, *The Virtuous Marketplace: Women and Men, Money and Politics in Paris, 1830-1870* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), 5.

Consequently, city officials from the Napoleonic era to the end of the nineteenth century no longer found it acceptable for laundry to be done publicly in Paris and sought diverse methods to solve the problem.

This study will incorporate different methodologies, including anthropology and social history, to examine laundresses and the laundry business in nineteenth-century Paris. The anthropologist Mary Douglas argued that in a society the label of polluter was synonymous with something that no longer fit into the accepted social schema and was “matter out of place”.¹⁰ Douglas underlined that ideas about pollution and social taboo are influenced by a given cultural and social context and thus are constantly changing. New considerations in nineteenth-century Paris rendered laundry and laundresses literally “matter out of place...as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements”.¹¹ Cultures signify elements that are out of place as polluters of space. Douglas used examples of things occupying spaces different to which they belonged, which illustrated the phenomenon, i.e., “bedroom things in the living room and outdoors things indoors”.¹² When city administrators attempted to make laundry and laundresses invisible, beginning in the early nineteenth century, because they were matter out of place, they used the idea that the laundresses and laundering were polluting Paris. From the Napoleonic era through the Third Republic, 1800-1914 city administrators were attempting to create new meanings for public

¹⁰ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 36.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 37.

spaces around the Seine; however, the laundresses continued to use that space. Laundresses also opened what the *Conseil d'Hygiène* termed as clandestine laundry boutiques that were nearly impossible for the *Conseil* to regulate. These situations exemplify Michel de Certeau's premise, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, that there were practices outside the ability of city administrators to regulate; thus, they could not control all uses and meanings of space in a city.¹³ The quest to forbid the use of public space to hang laundry continues to the present day.¹⁴ Of course, when the *Préfet de la Seine* closed a *bateau-lavoir* there was little the women could do, although what the *Conseil d'Hygiène* termed clandestine laundry boutiques began opening in the 1870s when controls on *lavoirs* made them difficult to open within Paris which illustrates de Certeau's point that people will use space in ways that suit their needs.

Further, this study is influenced by social history, which focuses on ordinary people and their experiences. Laundry was a visible symbol of women's presence in the city. I will use the tools of social history, taking into account economics and social class to uncover the forces driving the administrators who

¹³ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. trans Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 95.

¹⁴ L'étendage de linge interdit à Reillanne. Retrieved on 03.23.2011. <http://www.ladepeche.fr/article/2010/12/03/962272-Bouches-du-Rhone-L-etendage-de-linge-interdit-a-Reillanne.html>

It has been forbidden to hang laundry out since the nineteenth century, now people wish to hang laundry out for economic or ecological reasons and it is illegal according to the appeals court. « Depuis le 1^e décembre 2010, il est interdit d'étendre son linge dans le village de Reillanne. Le tribunal administratif de Marseille a décidé de rejeter le recours déposé par un habitant contre un arrêté municipal interdisant l'étendage du linge dans l'espace public. »

changed the occupation over the nineteenth century and the responses to those changes. Women's history is influenced by the history of everyday life, which in many cases is the only method to uncover women's participation in history. For example Rachel Fuchs, in *Poor and Pregnant in Paris: Strategies for Survival in the Nineteenth Century*, brought to light poor women's influence on the political policies and practices of the Third Republic.¹⁵ Sonya Rose, in *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England*, uncovered the ways ideas about gender roles had kept women in the lowest skilled and lowest paid work.¹⁶

Additionally, the incorporation of cultural history methodology, the study of how meaning is constructed, is crucial in examining language and actions to identify power structures and attitudes regarding the laundresses and laundry. Laundresses and laundry were at the center of debates about the meaning and use of Parisian space and changing notions of hygiene. They were also the subject of novels, paintings and social commentaries associating them with a less acceptable moral code than that of bourgeois women. Robert Nye in *Crime, Madness, and Politics in Modern France: The Medical Concept of National Decline* studied the discourse of social commentators which focused on national decline and their explanation of the supposed decline in medical terms.¹⁷ Judith Walkowitz in *City*

¹⁵ Rachel Fuchs, *Poor and Pregnant in Paris: Strategies for Survival in the Nineteenth Century* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 1-10.

¹⁶ Sonya Rose, *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 4, 22.

of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London, uncovered the ways in which different social actors, including women, constructed narratives about the streets of London and sexuality.¹⁸ She uncovered the power of language in constructing ideas about women occupying public space. Nye's examination of the medicalized language about degeneration is useful in analyzing how the *Conseil d'Hygiène* and *Annales d'Hygiène* medicalized issues surrounding laundry. They first targeted the waste water from laundry the establishments as a potential source of disease and later focused on the laundering process and laundresses as transmitters of dangerous microbes. Walkowitz's study is useful in analyzing similar commentaries on laundresses in public space, which accused the women of being engaged in casual prostitution because they waited in certain public areas for day work.

The sources for this study of laundry and laundresses in nineteenth-century Paris are primarily archival; they shed light on the inner workings of governing offices and uncover the political goals and conflicts that, in part, decided the fate of laundry and laundresses. My sources come primarily from the *Archives de la Ville de Paris*, the *Archives de la Préfecture de Police*, and the *Archives Nationales*. The *Archives de Paris* contain the records of correspondence and requests in relation to any laundering facilities on the ground; these records illustrate the goals, and sometimes the wishes, of the city administrators. The

¹⁷ Robert Nye, *Crime, Madness and Politics in Modern France: The Medical Concept of National Decline* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 4-11.

¹⁸ Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 1-14.

Archives de Police hold the records and correspondence for all of the *bateaux-lavoirs* in the department of the Seine, demonstrating the difference between the public policies and the direction that the *Conseil de Salubrité* and other technocrats wanted to take. The *Archives Nationales* keep the records for governmental investigations into the implementation of labor laws in the department of the Seine; these records indicate that the women appreciated the laws, but the owners of industrial laundries rarely followed these laws.

The historical context of laundry in the nineteenth century evolved. Two things changed to make laundresses more important in people's daily lives. One, during the nineteenth century people had more clothing. The industrial revolution enabled the acquisition of linen.¹⁹ People across classes owned more clothing as a result of industrial manufacturing and less costly textiles, such as cotton.²⁰ Two, standards of bodily hygiene became stricter for everyone, and it became necessary to clean clothes more than two or three times a year as was the tradition in rural areas.²¹ The plethora of linen and its commonplace usage became closely linked to ideas about hygiene; washing soon became a problem of social order, which *Préfets* and urbanists attempted to solve.²²

¹⁹ Quynh Delaunay, *La machine à laver en France: Un objet technique qui parle des femmes* (Paris : L'Harmattan, 2003), 13.

²⁰ Michael Miller, *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store 1869-1920* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 4.

²¹ Pierre-Jakez Hélias, *The Horse of Pride: Life in a Breton Village*, trans. June Guicharnaud (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 52.

²² Delaunay, *La machine à laver en France*, 14.

The greater need for clothing in society meant a greater need for and presence of laundresses who occupied an increasingly important social function during the nineteenth century in order to meet the population's needs. Alain Corbin investigated the accumulation of linen by women and its effects on French society. In *Time, Desire and Horror: Towards a History of the Senses*, Corbin briefly examined the changing relationship with textiles and indicated that, due to increased and cheaper textile production, the working class was able to afford ready-to-wear store-bought clothing.²³ Thus, cleaning laundry became an increasingly large part of life from the mid-nineteenth century. Similarly, in his influential study of clothing, *Dessus et les dessous de la bourgeoisie : Une histoire de vêtements au XIXème siècle*, Philippe Perrot underlined the symbolic importance of clothing in Paris. Perrot argues that because industrialization had made different types of clothing widely available, the bourgeoisie had to constantly differentiate themselves with more complicated or expensive styles. Beginning in the 1830s and especially during the Second Empire, a wider range of people could afford to buy ready-to-wear clothing.²⁴ Further, in his influential work on manners, *The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners*, Norbet Elias identified that socially-set standards of cleanliness have evolved throughout the centuries, and that by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the upper classes

²³ Alain Corbin, *Time, Desire and Horror: Towards a History of the Senses*. trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 55.

²⁴ Philippe Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie: A History of Clothing in the Nineteenth Century*. trans. Richard Bienvenu (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 25.

were socially obligated to present themselves with a tidy appearance.²⁵ Being considered clean also depended on wearing clothing free from stains and smells. According to Quynh Delaunay's study of the washing machine in France, "the maintenance of clothing and linen was directly linked to the perceptions of notions of cleanliness. It evolved with them and testified of the permanent tension from the weight of norms of cleanliness onto social categories... The renewal of linen became a social obligation... Clothes carried the values of which cleanliness was more a preoccupation of conventions than a precise assessment of the absence of dirt... [The importance was] to belong to the norm makers' world."²⁶

These changes in standards of cleanliness also applied to how clothing and the body smelled. Alain Corbin identified the shifting social standards relating to smell. Corbin's study is a valuable source in analyzing and identifying the increasingly important function of laundry and laundresses during the nineteenth century. The bourgeois sought to deodorize their body in a quest to differentiate themselves from the poor who they accused of being foul smelling.²⁷ These changes dictated that clothing not only appear clean but also not smell. Paradoxically, the laundresses' place became drastically limited in the city.

In addition, the historical context around ideas about gender led city administrators to question the appropriateness of women in public space and

²⁵Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners* (New York: Urizen books 1978), 81.

²⁶ Delaunay, *La machine à laver en France*, 15-16.

²⁷ Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination*, trans. Miriam Kochan (Leamington Spa, NY: Berg, 1986), 145.

administrators' actions to push laundresses indoors and away from public sight, which created another link to the idea that laundresses and laundry were out of place in Paris. I will attempt to uncover what Joan Scott labeled as the "operations of gender...that are present and defining forces in the organization of most societies."²⁸ During the nineteenth century, gendered notions about women and their role in society evolved. While the male-breadwinner model was less pertinent for France than England, the idea that women should be subordinate to a patriarchal structure at work and at home was a current for French social commentators.²⁹ Scott highlighted that the studies of women and work like *La Statistique de l'Industrie à Paris* emphasized that conditions of work outside the home could erode or engender good morals, which was the cornerstone of representations of proper gender relations.³⁰ Ideas about working conditions put laundresses outside of the acceptable moral and gender order. Scott revealed the prejudices in the *Statistique* that mediums with which workers toiled created in them certain appetites or wants, working with gold and silver created an appetite for luxury goods in the jewelry workers "as water stimulated in those who worked with it – washerwomen and tanners, for example – an unfortunate and excessive thirst for alcoholic drink."³¹ Social commentators identified that the working

²⁸ Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988, 1999), 27.

²⁹ Rachel Fuchs, *Gender and Poverty in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 110.

³⁰ Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, 132.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 130.

conditions for laundresses engendered bad morals; many laundresses were hired for the day and thus went to the usual places for day laborers to be hired, namely the *Place de Grève*. The overtones of the commentary connected the waiting outside for work with prostitutes waiting in the streets for work. While waiting for work, laundresses would be subject to indecent proposals and were possibly tempted to work as casual prostitutes.³² These working conditions made them outside the acceptable gendered codes of conduct. The structure of the business of laundering also placed laundresses in a precarious position in relation to the acceptable gender order. Their morality was compromised because they were not subject to a defined patriarchal model at work.³³ The laundresses who worked as day laborers or those who ran their own businesses washing others' laundry were at the top of their own female-lead hierarchy. They could make their own rules of conduct without reference to a male *patron* (boss). There were no steadfast rules of apprenticeship; there was no master to answer to. It was a trade open to anyone with rudimentary skills. Working without male supervision and being out in public with no master represented a tenuous situation in the eyes of social commentators who worried about women's morality. Laundresses were not subject to patriarchal family settings and were thus free to have "subversive independence."³⁴ It was only later – at the end of the nineteenth century when the

³² Ibid., 131.

³³ Ibid., 132.

³⁴ Ibid., 149.

Parisian administration succeeded in sweeping the *bateaux-lavoirs* from the Seine and when the *lavoirs* were used mostly by *ménagères* – that laundresses could possibly fit back into the gendered order.³⁵ In the industrial *blanchisseries*, they were hired wage-workers who answered to a male boss and were thus subjected to a patriarchal work environment that would, ideally, keep their morality intact; practically, this gender-appropriate setting often generated sexual harassment and sexual abuse by male *patrons*.³⁶

The *Préfet de la Seine* and other commentators underlined the drawbacks of having laundresses and laundry in public space. The laundresses sought to protect their own interests in the midst of change. When possible, they made their voices heard when proposals occurred to move or change the laundry facilities they used. Moreover, laundresses continued to use river placements to wash after the *Préfet de la Seine* outlawed it in 1805.

Survey of Gender and Public Space

The discourse on gender made women out of place in the city. This shift in ideas about gender roles affected laundresses. In *The Women of Paris and Their French Revolution*, Dominique Godineau showed that after the Revolution women who visibly occupied public spaces were identified with disorder and

³⁵ *Ménagères* were housewives responsible for preparing food, sewing clothes, house cleaning, raising children, and washing clothes for their household.

³⁶ Yannick Ripa, *Les femmes, actrices de l'Histoire: France, 1789-1945* (Paris : Armand Colin, 2002, 2004), 66.

danger.³⁷ For example, laundresses and laundry in public space brought other connotations with their presence, ideas about poverty and disease, which also threatened the social order. In *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*, Joan Landes showed how political commentators and officials connected the excesses of the revolution with the participation of women and the excesses of the Old Regime with the power of aristocratic women.³⁸ Landes' study showed how the revolutionaries created new notions about who had the right to occupy public space that excluded women, which is helpful in examining how and why successive nineteenth-century governments sought to limit laundresses use of public space. Victoria Thompson studied the effects of women in the free market economy emerging in the 1830s in France.³⁹ Thompson focused on the pushcart vendors around Paris and the women speculators around the stock exchange to illustrate the construction of a virtuous marketplace and the destruction of the vendors who were a staple of Parisian working-class life in the mid nineteenth century. The women push cart vendors and stock speculators made up an important part of the commerce in Paris, as evidenced by the legislation enacted to eliminate women vendors from public space and to stop women from speculating in the stock market. These actions to remove women from the public

³⁷ Dominique Godineau, *The Women of Paris and Their French Revolution*, trans. Katherine Streip (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 316-369.

³⁸ Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (University of Cornell: NY, 1988), 5-6.

³⁹ Victoria Thompson, *The Virtuous Marketplace: Women and Men, Money and Politics in Paris, 1830—1870* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 86-118.

space of the city and the civil society of the financial trading center of France mirrored the goals of city administrators in removing laundresses and laundry from public space and into acceptable spaces dedicated only to laundry, outside of the city. The advent of the industrial *blanchisseries* coupled with the closing of the *bateaux-lavoirs* drove laundresses out of public spaces and met the ideals of the social commentators and the *Conseil de Salubrité*.

Survey of City Planning and Uses of Urban Space

The historical context of ideas about urban spaces changed during the nineteenth century, making laundresses out of place. Napoléon began the first urban renovation project when he cut through part of central Paris in an attempt to create a grand boulevard along Les Tuilleries through Paris to La Place de la Bastille. He was not the first with the impetus to reorganize the streets of Paris, but he was the first to want to promote the grandeur of France through the ornamentation and amelioration of the city.⁴⁰ He thought of Paris through monuments to his various military victories. Laundresses in public interfered with the image of grandeur the monuments were supposed to project. It was only the coup driving him out of France that stopped his urban renovation projects. Concern with the circulation of the river Seine began with Stéphane Flachet in the 1820s, who was later part of the St. Simonians, which, as Nicholas Papayanis argued, were very influential in the conceptualization of city planning. Flachet noted that, besides laundry boats, others occupations impeded the flow of the

⁴⁰ David Jordan, *Transforming Paris: The Life and Labors of Baron Haussmann* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 38.

river, such as water sellers, millers and dyers, just to name a few.⁴¹ According to Papayanis, Flachet's attention to the river represented one of the main preoccupations of early city planning, the circulation of water, air and commerce. His successors followed his ideas in representing the strength of France through Paris. However, it was during the July Monarchy that the *Préfet de la Seine* Claude-Philibert Barthelot de Rambuteau drew up more extensive urban renovation plans. The waves of migration from the periphery of Paris and northern departments had created a crisis of organization in Paris.⁴² The streets were overcrowded and merchandise could not pass through the city easily. The more affluent residents of central Paris were leaving to inhabit the less populated western parts of the city. Rambuteau wanted to change the usages of the streets and rivers which had consequences for laundresses in Paris. He wanted the streets to be dedicated to traffic, not dumping grounds for waste, places to conduct business or social meetings.⁴³ Laundries around Paris had used the streets for washing and draining water. The river Seine was another space whose use Rambuteau wanted to re-conceptualize, which would directly impact laundresses. Haussmann carried on Rambuteau's ideas about making the river a focal point for

⁴¹ Nicholas Papayanis, *Planning Paris before Haussmann* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 151.

⁴² Louis Chevalier, *La Formation de la Population Parisienne au XIX^e Siècle* (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France 1950), 54.

⁴³ Douglas Klahr, « Le Développement des rues parisiennes pendant la monarchie de juillet, » *La Modernité avant Haussmann : Formes de l'espace urbain à Paris 1801-1853*, ed. Karen Bowie (Paris : Editions Recherches, 2001), 217.

Paris, as it once had been during its medieval period.⁴⁴ He wanted to change the character of the river from one that nurtured various *métiers* and commercial activities that were essentially static to an artery specifically used for navigation.⁴⁵

During the Second Empire, the growth in river traffic accelerated in response to the new demands of industrialization and urbanization. Consequently, increased navigation made the laundresses' presence in the river problematic in the eyes of city administrators, not merely for evoking scenes of poverty in the center of Paris, but because laundry hanging out to dry became a physical obstacle for boats on the Seine as well, which contributed another element to the idea that they did not fit in the public spaces of Paris. In order to do the washing, laundresses needed to find a place in the river which had a swift current and at least half a meter deep. This meant the women usually had to wade out into the river away from the bank and get in the way of the navigating vessels. According to the administrators, the solution was to force the women off of the banks of the Seine and into *bateaux-lavoirs*. In 1862, to continue the changes to the river space and support the idea that the river should be the main artery of circulation for Paris, the *Préfet de la Seine* proposed a public transport service to carry passengers. The increase in traffic made the *bateaux-lavoirs* obstacles to circulation and to the re-conceptualization of the river space. Transportation of people around the city preoccupied city planners who proposed major changes for

⁴⁴ Isabelle Backouche, "Projets urbains et mémoire du fleuve" *La Modernité avant Haussmann : Formes de l'espace urbain à Paris 1801-1853*, ed. Karen Bowie (Paris : Editions Recherches, 2001), 110.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 113.

laundresses to access laundry facilities on the Seine. Haussmann continued to focus on circulation around the city. In terms of city planning, the *bateaux-lavoirs* presented an immediate obstacle to navigating the river Seine, and Haussmann began a campaign to phase them out of existence in the city.⁴⁶ By the 1880s, many owners of *bateaux-lavoirs* requested to move locations. The responses from the prefects reflected the new attention to city traffic and organization that Haussmann had begun. The new attention placed on city management characterizes the period of Haussmannization

The authors of studies on the reconstruction of Paris and the re-conceptualization and uses of urban public space agree that the ideas reflected in Haussmann's work were in preparation long before he came to power. As Papayanis in *Planning Paris Before Haussmann* and Karen Bowie in *La Modernité avant Haussmann* demonstrated, city planning began well before Haussmann in 1853.⁴⁷ It was only during the Second Empire that the resources and political will united to accomplish the major work that Paris needed to undergo to make it the capital of a modern nation. David Pinkney indicated that the rebuilding of Paris was a response to problems engendered by migration to the city.⁴⁸ The flood of people to Paris in the 1840s had shown that Paris had

⁴⁶ Wasserman, *Blanchisseuse, laveuse, repasseuse*, 65.

⁴⁷ Papayanis, *Planning Paris before Haussmann*, 5. Karen Bowie, ed. *La Modernité avant Haussmann : Formes de l'espace urbain à Paris 1801-1853* (Paris : Editions Recherches, 2001), 7.

⁴⁸ David Pinkney, *Napoleon III and the Rebuilding of Paris* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 13.

antiquated systems of transport and not enough resources like water and space for people and commerce to be able to comfortably coexist. These authors all highlighted that the main preoccupations of city planning was the circulation of water, air and commerce.

Napoleon III also meant for the rebuilding of Paris to show the prosperity and power of Paris as the capital of France, to demonstrate that France was a power to be contended with on the geopolitical stage. That meant that urban space needed, at all times, to reflect progress and wealth, which meant hiding any signs of poverty, such as women doing laundry on the river. Napoleon III wanted Paris to be a model for all cities of the world.⁴⁹ Donald Olsen argues that “Imperial Paris was a conscious expression of national glory and thus city building was too important a task to be left to private citizens.”⁵⁰ It would take a government with the foresight and ability to build the boulevards and monuments required to project that glory. To project glory, poverty needed to be hidden. In *Visions of the Modern City*, William Sharpe argues that the changes to Paris represented a gentrification of the city where the poor no longer fit and that Haussmann wanted to conceal the poor that the impressionists sought out.⁵¹ These studies of urban development and ideas about urban space reflect the changes that the laundresses endured through the nineteenth century. As urban spaces changed, the laundresses

⁴⁹ Pinkney, *Napoleon III and the Rebuilding of Paris*, 3.

⁵⁰ Olsen, *The City as a Work of Art*, 4.

⁵¹ William Sharpe “Manet and the Paris of Haussmann,” *Visions of the Modern City: Essays in Art, History and Literature*, William Sharpe and Leonard Wollock ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 170.

became reminders of poverty and dirt in a city that wanted to eschew those realities of life. As the city was supposed to represent power and prestige laundresses were out of place.

Survey of Public Hygiene and Laundry

In 1800, the Napoleonic administration created the *Conseil de Salubrité* to deal with health crises and give the *Préfet de Police* methods for handling quarantines and sequestration. The development of the governmental structures was intended to stop epidemics and contain outbreaks of disease to protect the city. The creation of the *Conseil de Salubrité* marked the beginning of public hygiene as a governmental entity and advised the *Préfet de Police* on new regulations for laundering. The *Conseil de Salubrité* was responsible for the surveillance of businesses that could have a negative effect on the health of Parisian residents. Their mandate was primarily to inspect all classified businesses, and in times of need, to study and suggest solutions to epidemics after the law on the classification of businesses in 1810. Composed of physicians, architects and engineers, the *Conseil de Salubrité* played an advisory role to the *Préfet de la Seine* and *Préfet de Police* in any public health matter. Then, in 1848, after the second cholera epidemic the *Conseil de Salubrité* became the *Conseil d'Hygiène* with the members of the *Conseil* being appointed from the *Préfet de Police*, which integrated the *Conseil* even more into the city administration.

The context of the public hygiene movement that developed outside the government is also important in understanding the changes that took place to the industry of laundry and to the attitudes towards laundry and laundresses. Public

hygiene affected city planning which is evidenced through regulations on laundry. In 1829, the pioneering public hygienist Louis-René Villermé started *Les Annales d'Hygiène Publique et de Médecine Légale* – then, France's only professional journal dedicated to questions of public health – which united studies from across the country and attempted to standardize public hygiene policy in France. His first major study focused on water and drainage, which, as already discussed, was a major problem in Paris and directly affected the treatment of *lavoirs* in Paris. He argued that it was the city's cesspool system which created foul odors and made those predisposed to disease sick. He linked habits and morality to being predisposing factors for contracting illnesses.⁵² As the century progressed, public hygiene reflected the major political and medical preoccupations of the time. In 1832, as the cholera epidemic raged, the prominent figures in public hygiene studied the disease and sought ways to stop the epidemic and answer leading questions as to why the poor seemed disproportionately affected by the disease. Those writing about medical questions also projected their ideas and preconceptions. In the 1850s, industrial growth sparked debates about the effects of industry on the health of the population and the changes it brought to the social order of cities. Villermé was also interested in the creation and health of a large working class and wrote influential studies on the subject like *Tableau de l'état physique et moral des ouvriers employés dans les manufactures de coton, de laine et de soie*. He studied the health problems the people within the class had

⁵² Louis-René Villermé, *De la mortalité dans les divers quartiers de la ville de Paris* (Paris : chez l'auteur, 1830), xx.

developed as a result of working in the industry, as well as changes the industry brought to the morality of workers which he connected to their overall health. Before the acceptance of Pasteur's germ theory in the decades after his discovery in 1867, influential public hygienists like Villermé and Alexandre Parent-Duchâtélet posited that the physical environment shaped the morality and thus the health of the population.⁵³ Therefore, controlling the uses of public space was essential to maintaining public health. The hygienist's range was far reaching; they practiced what Anne LaBerge termed "...[a] hygienism, a kind of medical imperialism incorporating both the medicalization and moralization of society..."⁵⁴ Thus, they envisioned a double task of regulating the physical and moral environment. The hygienists on the *Conseil de Salubrité* also created new rules for the laundry establishments – the *lavoirs publics* – that the poor women of Paris used if they were not near a river. Examining the *bateaux-lavoirs* also sheds light on the relationship between the city and the river, and the connections with laundry and public hygiene. The changing needs of city administrators created a niche for the public hygiene movement to collaborate with the government. The *Conseil de Salubrité* contributed to the idea that laundresses and laundry did not

⁵³ « Prospectus et Introduction » *Annales d'hygiène publique et médecine légale*, série première, tome 1. Juillet 1828 : 1-30.

⁵⁴ Anne LaBerge, *Mission and Method: The Early Nineteenth-Century French Public Health Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Her work is the most comprehensive study of the public health movement in France from 1815-1848, concentrating on the ideas and methods driving the first official group of public hygienists.

fit in the city and moreover that the process was dangerous to the health of the city.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the reasons laundry and laundresses were dangerous for public health changed with the different notions of cleanliness and dirt. From 1820-1860 the concern about the *lavoirs* focused on the accepted theory of disease transmission through miasma. Once the medical community accepted Pasteur's germ theory in the 1870s, the *Conseil d'Hygiène* was concerned with the *lavoirs* and *bateaux-lavoirs* as potential transmitters of disease-causing microbes. The acceptance of the germ theory was not something that happened at the same time across the medical profession. While Pasteur had proven that heat killed microorganisms that made beer and wine putrefy in 1862, it was only after other microbe-studying scientists and physicians proved that small organisms not only visible with a microscope actually caused diseases in animals and humans. Robert Koch's experiments with anthrax supported Pasteur's original hypothesis. Once Koch discovered the tuberculosis bacillus in 1876, more physicians and public health professionals eschewed other explanations of contracting diseases.⁵⁵ Once public officials began to scrutinize and regulate laundering, they made this indispensable work more difficult to do.

The needs of laundering were not easy to meet: women needed an ample supply of clean water, easy drainage, and enough space and air to dry the linens. These exigencies did not match the conditions within Paris. Water was difficult to

⁵⁵ Nancy Tomes and John Warner, "Introduction to Special Issue on Rethinking the Reception of the Germ Theory of Disease: Comparative Perspectives," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 52 (1997): 5.

obtain if not taken directly from the Seine. Until the 1860s, wealthy people paid water porters, who obtained water from the Seine, to supply their house with water.⁵⁶ Drainage posed many problems since there was not a complete sewer system until the Third Republic; stagnant water froze in the winter and became fetid in the warmer months producing odors perceived to be dangerous. These problems occupied the *Conseil de Salubrité*. Added to the problems associated with water, space and air flow were also lacking in the cramped spaces laundresses used to dry the laundry, which in turn created a humid environment in their rooms and caused damages to the building and, according to the *Conseil de Salubrité*, the health of the tenants. Ideas of contamination changed; however, the danger from laundry remained and grew more problematic. Germ theory led to the conclusion that clothing and the waste water from laundry could start an epidemic. For the city administrators and public hygiene officials, the first choice was to export the activity to the outskirts of Paris. However, this solution was not acceptable for the poor residents of the city who depended on facilities within walking distance. Public health strategies to ensure the health of the residents made laundry a threat.

As historians have illustrated, the concerns of public hygienists were driven by political considerations as well as medical concerns.⁵⁷ The laundresses of Paris represented a group of poor women who threatened the city's health by

⁵⁶ Jordan, *Transforming Paris*, 269.

⁵⁷ LaBerge, *Mission and Method*. William Coleman, *Death is a Social Disease: Public Health and Political Economy in Early Industrial France* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982).

their occupation and behavior. However, no one who has studied the hygiene movement has investigated the impact of the hygienists' ideas on the *Conseil de Salubrité* on laundresses and laundry facilities. The public hygiene movement focused specifically on the poor and the dangers and contagions they engendered by their lifestyles, which were different than the bourgeoisie. The shifting ideas of what constituted dangers to the health of the population reflected political ideas of the era. François Delaporte and other cultural historians, such as Catherine Kudlick and Andrew Aisenberg, view the responses as a general cultural response to modernization; yet, their studies did not include anything on the role of laundresses and laundry in the ideas of the public hygienists. The cholera epidemic of 1830 heralded a new ideology about disease and the government's role in society to help combat it. The cholera epidemic produced a discourse about the danger of the working-class, whose members transmitted immorality, crime and disease, with the perception they were the source of the national degeneration of France and England. This dissertation shows the impact of the public hygiene movement on an occupation of poor women in Paris. New concerns for hygiene in the city made laundering a target for regulation and scrutiny from the beginning of the nineteenth century when it was classed as dangerous or a nuisance to the health of city residents.

Aisenberg focused on bourgeois responses to the cholera epidemic in the 1830s.⁵⁸ According to Aisenberg, in France ‘disorder’ was the term the investigators used to articulate the need to find the cause of contagion and quash the worker riots that had plagued the city since the cholera outbreak. He indicated that physicians thought disease was a result of vices. Alcohol made cholera a poverty issue, which social reformers explained in moral terms. However, Aisenberg did not include an examination of laundry and ideas of disease transmission through contaminated clothes. As this dissertation explains, the new responsibility to regulate all activities in the city also led to scrutiny of laundresses’ morality, living conditions, where and even how they performed their occupation.

Similarly, Kudlick examined the public hygiene movement in cultural terms. She demonstrated that, in the midst of panic, the bourgeoisie consolidated their dominant position in the social hierarchy through its role as information holders and givers. Public hygienists and political officials manipulated information about threat levels and sources according to the political climate. Kudlick wrote that, “...through information management, officials established an image of themselves as in control of the crisis.”⁵⁹ Public hygienists linked the outbreak of cholera with social unrest. After the revolutions of 1830 and 1848

⁵⁸ Andrew Aisenberg, *Contagion: Disease, Government, and the “Social Questions” in Nineteenth Century France*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 10

⁵⁹ Catherine Kudlick, *Cholera in Post-Revolutionary Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 138.

there were severe epidemics of cholera. In defense of the nation, health professionals searched for a cause for the outbreak and a way to control it.

Although Kudlick did not examine laundry, public hygienists of Paris also framed the debate on the location of laundry spaces with the reigning ideas of the era that the health of Paris depended on the regulation of the laundresses because their occupation carried the risk of transmitting diseases.

The advance of social investigators into certain sections of the city never visited before mirrored the changes in garbage collection that came about because of the epidemic. Garbage men, rather than the neighborhood residents, started to collect the trash.⁶⁰ The working-class was wary of this intervention and was upset, since they viewed the rationalization of garbage collection as an infringement on their ability to earn a living. The health professionals threatened laundresses in the same way. As public health became a focus in Paris, public health officials ventured into the laundresses' workspace and created regulations, which threatened their livelihood by endorsing the closure of small laundry *ateliers* (workshops). Public hygienists focused on managing the roads to keep public access open and the drainage of used water. After acceptance of the microbe theory, the *bateaux-lavoirs* also came under scrutiny as they occupied public spaces. However, the places that caused the most problems in the eyes of hygienists were small *ateliers* in the courts of apartment buildings. While the women were not in public view, they were a threat to public health, potentially

⁶⁰ Ibid., 179.

transmitting diseases. According to the *Conseil d'Hygiène* the optimal place for laundresses was in blanchisseries which could be regulated.

Similar attitudes towards the relationship between public hygiene and the working class existed in both England and France. Frank Mort's work, *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-Moral Politics in England since 1830*, examined the discourse surrounding the spread of disease and the role of physicians in society after the cholera outbreak. In England, as in France, the medical profession did not often view the working class as moral and upstanding constituents of the community; however, physicians did not target them until the outbreak of cholera.⁶¹ According to physicians, the disease originated from vicious habits.⁶² Mort argued that, "the logic which entwined poverty and immorality with contagion was made through a specific language – the discourse of early social medicine – and was circulated at key institutional sites within the central and local state. The intentions were clear: greater surveillance and regulation of the poor." Mort explained how this discourse affected the urban poor in their daily lives, "...[by] isolat[ing] the human sources of infection, subjecting them to a regime of compulsory inspection and detention, combined with the propaganda to educate the poor into a regime of cleanliness and morality."⁶³ Similarly, in Paris, politicians and public hygienists made the connection between laundresses using

⁶¹ Frank Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-Moral Politics in England Since 1830* (NY: Routledge, 1997), 12.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 30.

the river and the spread of diseases and immorality; they advanced a multitude of reasons to target the laundresses to remove them from the river and public space. From 1820 with the first appearance of a mechanized *blanchisserie* on land with proper drainage, the public hygienists sought to force laundresses into these establishments and out of the small *ateliers* and *bateaux-lavoirs* through advocating restrictive legislation.

The cholera epidemic ushered in the professionalization of doctors in French and English societies, although physicians were never integrated into the government in England as they were in France.⁶⁴ The government sought help from doctors during this time of crisis, thus legitimizing their position of authority. According to Frank Mort, “the Medical profession acted as powerful ideologues for the professional gentry and sections of the industrial bourgeoisie, laying claim to a middle-class monopoly over the issues of health and hygiene.”⁶⁵ Social reformers linked the advancement in medicine and the control of the working class with the improvement of the nation. As a British physician of the 1830s asserted “...the health of individuals (promoted by the medical practitioner) and the vitality of the general population (the domain of public health administration) were interlinked.”⁶⁶ Similar attitudes were present among the French hygienists as revealed by LaBerge, Delaport, Aisenberg, and Kudlick in their studies. The *Conseil de Salubrité* and *Annales d’Hygiène* proposed and

⁶⁴ Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities* ; LaBerge, *Mission and Method*, 11.

⁶⁵ Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities*, 33.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.

influenced legislation regulating *lavoirs* and attempted to close small workshops that employed many laundresses inside of Paris. This study illustrates that the scrutiny of laundry changed as politics influenced the *Conseil*. While the public hygienists were powerful, it was only in conjunction with political will that laundresses and laundry became out of place inside of Paris.

Politicians and social commentators also used public health and medical issues to answer questions about France's political position in regards to its European neighbors. In *Crime, Madness, and Politics in Modern France: The Medical Concept of National Decline*, Nye argues that a medical conceptualization provides a lens through which to understand the notion that France was in decline and ways to stop it.⁶⁷ The Pasteurian revolution contributed to the professionalization and power of physicians. By the 1870s, the public hygienists were using germ theory to again target the laundresses of Paris as conveyors of disease with the possibility to contaminate Paris. Matching the political goals of the time, the medical concept of decline, meaning that the health and strength of the population were in decline resulting in France's weakness on the wider European political stage provided another argument to render laundry and laundresses invisible in the city.

Some historians have used a Foucauldian rubric to analyze the actions of public hygienists.⁶⁸ Their contention, that the professionalization of hygienists –

⁶⁷ Nye, *Crime, Madness and Politics in Modern France*, 4-11.

through their connection to the government – made them more powerful as information holders who were able to shape ideas about, and political actions towards the urban poor, is valid. However, this dissertation will illustrate that, although they were in the government in France, the hygienists on the *Conseil d'Hygiène* were not always heeded; the decision-making power in regard to *lavoirs* and *bateaux-lavoirs* ultimately rested with the *Préfet de la Seine*. In short, politicians used the public hygienists' ideas and advice when it was expedient for them. In light of the historiography of hygiene and its focus on its discourse and methods, an investigation of how its policies shaped the lives of poor and working-class women will broaden the understanding of how it functioned and changed people's everyday lives.

As a group of poor working women, the laundresses shared many characteristics in terms of regulations with the sweated labor of nineteenth-century Paris. Judith Coffin studied women's work in the needle trades, which occurred inside the home where labor regulations were absent.⁶⁹ She found that the sweated labor was as dangerous to women's health as working in a factory, but did not receive the same attention as women working outside of the home. The women fit into the economic and gender structure of Paris so well that they garnered little attention. Instead, because the women were working in their homes in a gender-acceptable trade, social commentators romanticized the

⁶⁸ Ibid. Kudlick, *Cholera in Post-Revolutionary Paris*, 104. Both Nye and Kudlick use Foucauldian analysis to elucidate how the government adopted medical discourse and used it as political ideas and actions.

⁶⁹ Judith Coffin, *The Politics of Women's Work: The Paris Garment Trades, 1750-1915*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996.), vi-xvi.

women, who many times suffered from malnutrition as they could not afford to feed themselves. However, laundresses also worked in a 'sweated' industry that was uncomfortably public for social commentators. As discussed earlier in terms of gender norms, while at work, laundresses were not subject to any patriarchal structure which, for social reformers, made them a group of women who were of questionable morality because they were outside proper gender roles. Their occupation was a problem because it had the ability to contaminate Paris. It was preferable to have them inside a regulated industry like the industrial *blanchisseries* rather than working for themselves in the *lavoirs* or on *bateaux-lavoirs* polluting Paris.

Historians interested in uncovering women's lived experiences have investigated certain aspects of laundresses' lives and work. Michelle Perrot was the first historian to focus a small article on the *blanchisseuses*.⁷⁰ She briefly examined the occupation, showing its ancient origins and illustrating why the laundress was crucial to the village. According to Perrot, the laundresses who worked in a *lavoir* comprised a support network that allowed a mother to bring her child to work. If a single mother had trouble supporting herself, or a colleague could not work, the *lavoir* would take a collection for her. The *lavoir* was also the center of intense information exchange. While their hands were busy, the women were free to talk. The position of transmitting knowledge was a powerful element, which contributed to the unease with which society generally regarded them. In the village or neighborhood, gossip could make or break a reputation. The women

⁷⁰ Michelle Perrot, "Femmes au lavoir," *Sorcières*, no.19 (1980) : 128-133.

also exchanged healthcare tips and remedies, which according to Perrot led to their accusation of being abortionists. Her work recreates the society of the *lavoir* constructed by female solidarity, while demonstrating that the village or neighborhood associated laundresses with power because they held and distributed information, which was disturbing to those who were concerned about maintaining social order since ideas about proper gender roles maintained that women were supposed to be in a dependent position in society within the patriarchal model of family and social ties. Perrot illustrates the uneasy relationship some had with laundresses, even in rural communities where space was less a premium. Additionally, Françoise Wasserman conducted a study of *blanchisseuses* in nineteenth-century France, which included information regarding their sociability, the processes of washing, and some perceptions of the women in contemporary accounts. Her study is a collection of anecdotal primary accounts of the *blanchisseuses* meant to serve as an ethnographical accounting of a lost occupation and contained little historical analysis.⁷¹ This present examination of laundresses and laundering focuses on the political and medical shift that made the occupation and women out of place in Paris and seeks to place that shift in the historical context of larger changes occurring in the nineteenth century.

Gender, public policy and public hygiene all contributed to making laundry and laundresses threats to the growth and prosperity of Paris through the discourse of contamination or as a navigation obstacle. Laundry and laundresses

⁷¹ Wasserman, *Blanchisseuse, laveuse, repasseuse*, x-xii.

did not fit with the new vision of Paris. City administrators and public health officials wanted the poor – who were the main group using the facilities inside of the city – to follow the example of the more affluent and send their laundry out of the city to large establishments called *blanchisseries* that were able to follow all the laws and public health prescriptions set out during the nineteenth century, and that were out of sight and not causing any circulation obstacles in the city.

Laundering was often connected with the working class, since the bourgeoisie did not have to do their own laundry. Unlike the poor who hung laundry around their home, wealthier people could afford to have it dried at the laundry facility, or the laundresses' own apartments, because they had enough clothes to replace those that were out being laundered. For example, in Emile Zola's novel *L'Assommoir*, he described a scene in which Gervaise's husband compares their room to paradise because *chemises* and other women's underclothes were hanging about.⁷² Women would wash many different items in the laundry establishments, which Zola enumerated: "men's shirts, petticoats, sheets, drawers, tablecloths, chemises, handkerchiefs, socks, dish cloths, baby's diapers, men's pants, skirts, and lace collars."⁷³ The bourgeoisie did not have to directly associate with dirt in cleaning their own house or the dirt of others.⁷⁴ Laundering outside the home visibly connected the *classes populaires* to the dirt they were washing away. Whether it was their own family's laundry that

⁷² Zola, *L'Assommoir*, 130.

⁷³ Zola, *L'Assommoir*, 140.

⁷⁴ Ripa, *Les femmes, actrices de l'Histoire*, 47.

working-class women did as part of household chores or as a professional laundresses, they were the ones who touched the dirty laundry. Depending on their marital status, the type of work of their husband, and the number of children they had, professional laundresses hovered between destitution and simply being poor. It was the working-class women who did laundry outside of their home in visible places, and who needed the resources of the *bateaux-lavoirs* or *lavoirs* such as hot water and space.

Because inexpensive urban housing did not have convenient water sources for laundry, it was necessary for poor women to go outside of their home to accomplish the many steps laundering involved.⁷⁵ Some neighborhoods had a well in the courtyard, though others only had one fountain to meet the residents' water needs; up to fifty people used the same neighborhood fountain for drinking, cooking and washing before the city constructed a reliable water supply system in the 1860s.⁷⁶ Certain neighborhoods had a concentration of small laundry *ateliers* dedicated to laundering which were located in the basements of apartment buildings; however, many women in the city depended on the *bateaux-lavoirs*. Laundry facilities were not evenly spread throughout the neighborhoods of Paris, they were on the periphery of the city leaving only the *bateaux-lavoirs* to serve the poor and working-class women in central Paris. Beginning in the early nineteenth century, large *blanchisseries* relocated to the outskirts of Paris to ease

⁷⁵ Ann-Louise Shapiro, *Housing the Poor of Paris, 1850–1902* (Madison:University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 35.

⁷⁶ Jordan, *Transforming Paris*, 96.

their access to water and drainage. By the end of the 1850s, laundresses working for others and women doing their family's laundry had an increasingly difficult time accessing places to do laundry in the city. Lavoirs could only obtain permission to build on the periphery, yet not all poor and working-class housing was in the outskirts. There were sizeable less-affluent neighborhoods in the fifth and tenth *arrondissements* as well.⁷⁷

The women who used the laundry facilities that were open to the public were the urban poor. There were several types of women using the public facilities. Some used these establishments for their own family and could not afford to have someone else do their laundry. In contrast, there were women who took others' laundry to the public facilities to make a profit; there were two distinct groups of women who could earn money for washing clothes: the *ménagères* – often called *pièçardes* when they earned a few *pièces* washing others' clothes – and the *blanchisseuses* or *lessiveuses* who washed laundry as a profession. However, the women had to make ends meet through a number of different odd jobs because laundry paid so little. Laundry was a vital source of income for women who had children and no particular skill. They could take in laundry while caring for their children at home.⁷⁸ The *lavoirs publics* and *bateaux-lavoirs* catered to all three categories of women. On the other hand, there

⁷⁷ Shapiro, *Housing the Poor of Paris*, 85.

⁷⁸ APP, Maurice Bezonçon, « Rapport : Les causes d'insalubrité dans les lavoirs du Paris » *Compte rendu des séances 1909, Rapport général sur les travaux du conseil d'hygiène publique et de salubrité* (Paris : Imprimerie Chaix, 1910), 115.

were the women who worked in industrial *blanchisseries*, which were closed to the public. These women were employees of the *blanchisserie*.

In the laundry-work continuum, one end had skilled workers, *les blanchisseuses de fins* who washed the fine items of the bourgeoisie, such as lace additions to sleeves, collars and the under clothes that also had lace.⁷⁹ However, that does not exclude laundresses who took in all types of laundry, who were also skilled at washing lace and collars. At the other end of the spectrum were the women who washed their own laundry or that of other working-class families at the river or at the *lavoir*. A laundress as a business owner represents a grey area. There were different levels of ownership. The archives did not reveal that women owned a *lavoir*, or that the named applicant to open a laundry facility was a woman. *Lavoirs* owners were referred to as *blanchisseurs*, indicating that men owned or managed legally-operated *lavoirs*; women washed the laundry but did not own the business.⁸⁰ However, the occupation of laundress, the one physically washing the laundry, was always a woman. She could use a *lavoir* to wash her and her customers' laundry. Hence, she was her own boss, but did not own the space where she laundered. Since Paris did not have an efficient water delivery system, *lavoirs* would employ water carriers, who were boys and young men. The managers of the *lavoirs publics* were also men. Owners of a laundry establishment or its managers never washed a piece of laundry. The manager' or

⁷⁹ Jacques-Antoine Delarue, *Histoire physique, civile et morale de Paris depuis les premiers temps* (Paris: D-H Krabbe, 1854), 57.

⁸⁰ APP, DB 226, Correspondance du Préfet de Police aux Maires des communes du département de la Seine, 29 août 1842.

owners' presence was primarily to oversee operations. The archives reveal only one *bateau-lavoir* – out of ten – which was owned by a woman within Paris during the early decades of the nineteenth century and none later in the century.⁸¹ However, she was a widow and inherited the business from her husband. There is no record of a woman owning a *bateau-lavoir* after purchasing it herself. This is not to negate the fact that a woman ran and owned a business, but it underscores that women were not in charge of laundry businesses per se, even if the physical act of laundering was a feminized occupation.

Representations of Laundresses

From the 1800 to the turn of the century the working class of Paris regularly observed the *mi-carême*, a break from the rigors of lent. The *lavoirs* of the neighborhood held the most popular celebrations and would produce the queen of *mi-carême* who the laundresses elected from their ranks.⁸² The laundresses would hold a parade in their neighborhood, often joining with other near-by *lavoirs* to have more people and thus more contributions for a grander celebration. The parade and party of the laundresses during the *mi-carême* garnered attention from a host of social critics who criticized the laundresses behavior during this celebration. Each *lavoire* represented itself in a parade with banners and flags mimicking the royal family. In a newspaper article the author complained that the laundresses left their work and the needs of their clientele

⁸¹ APP, DA 336 Navigation. Correspondance de l'Inspecteur Général de la navigation et des ports au Préfet de Police, 3 juin 1826.

⁸² Alain Faure, *Paris carême-prenant: Du Carnaval à Paris au XIX siècle 1800-1914* (Paris : Hachette, 1978), 134.

behind to celebrate irresponsibly; the women dared to wear the clothes of their social superiors. The author described the scene “seeing them parade so richly dressed and to think that it is us who pay the bill of the party without knowing it. Yes my friends, it is our linen that dances; it is our finest shirts that decorate the breast of the laundresses; it is your embroidered underskirts, your lace collars that highlight of veil the graces of the robust *vénus du battoir*.”⁸³ Other social commentators asserted that the compliments they received tempted them to eschew the social hierarchy.⁸⁴

The most well-known laundress of the nineteenth century was the creation of the naturalist novelist Emile Zola. In *L'Assommoir* published in 1877, he sought to create a prototypical working-class family; Gervaise, the woman of the family working as a laundress represented a typical occupation of poor women in Paris. Zola developed a character that would exemplify his idea of social and moral determinism. Despite Gervaise's hard work in building a laundry business, her fatal moral flaws owing to her physical environment and family background could only make her outside the acceptable gender order; her unwise spending and her alcoholism were – in Zola's view – circumstances that precluded her success. She lost her business and died of starvation. Zola's ideas about natural law and heredity played an unmistakable role. Gervaise was, because of her lineage, predestined to be a failure in her business and her family. One can see Zola's argument about heredity at play as her daughter Nana grew up to be a

⁸³ *L'Éclair*, mars 1885.

⁸⁴ *Actualités*, no. 89, press release, 26 mars 1870.

courtesan. His story line also mirrored what social commentators of the day thought about the medium in which laundresses worked: because they were not subject to a patriarchal working structure, they had loose morals. His novel was a huge commercial success, confirming its resonance with received ideas about working-class women at the time; he agreed to have it serialized in *Le Bien publique* and later in *La République des Lettres*.⁸⁵ Its serialization made it more accessible to readers coming from a wide variety of classes. It illustrated that those who believed in social determinism still thought of the working class as being poor because they were immoral. Zola did not explicitly blame the political or economic policies of the time for shaping the opportunities available for a woman like Gervaise. However, the methods he utilized – the most important being observation – served to initiate the reader into the life of a laundress, especially her work and behavior at work. He underscored the enormous physical burden of doing laundry and the circumstances that contributed to a laundress' reputation for being bawdy and sexually available. The idea that laundresses were bawdy also mirrored the notions of gender and work at the time; if women undertook indelicate labor that required strength they were going against their nature and were outside of the gender norms.⁸⁶

Edgar Degas represented laundresses in an urban environment in his paintings. In contrast to the more idealized images of laundresses in the countryside, washing clothes beside a river or the ocean, these laundresses were

⁸⁵ Zola, *L'Assommoir*, xv.

⁸⁶ Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, 155.

always depicted in groups preserving their respectability. Degas' images held erotic overtones. Often he depicted laundresses alone; they were open to the male viewer's gaze and possible advances. He also painted them drinking which also represented vulnerability. Judith Hannah noted that the middle and upper class men looked at working women as a way to entertain themselves.⁸⁷ Both Zola and Degas were middle-class men who were titillated by the idea of laundresses and their milieu. Yet, the representations of laundresses as being outside of the social order and eschewing rules of gender propriety did not affect the ideas or motives regarding the regulation of the laundry business. This dissertation will show that instead, ideas about modernizing Paris and regulating the use of public space motivated the *Préfets de la Seine* to control the laundry industry, while the desire to control diseases drove the reforms suggested by the *Conseil de Salubrité* and *Conseil d'Hygiène*.

This study will take a chronological approach in examining shifts for the work of laundresses and the laundry business in Paris, as well as the attempt to make the occupation invisible which was crucial for implementing the precepts of hygiene becoming so important. The various political regimes and *Préfets de la Seine* wanted all references to poverty washed away. This included all visible signs of laundry, clothes on the river banks, *bateaux-lavoirs* on the river and laundresses in the city. They wanted all laundry, regulated and behind closed doors. No one wanted to see how they cleaned clothes, the dirt and the physical

⁸⁷ Judith Hanna, *Dance, Sex and Gender: Signs of Identity, Dominance, Defiance and Desire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) 120.

effort; they only wanted their product. Similar to the relegation of emptying cesspools to the night, no one wanted to see or smell the filth they had produced, they only wanted the result.

The first chapter will investigate the beginning of the relationship between politics and laundry that limited laundresses' access to resources in Paris. It begins with a series of regulations in the first decade of the nineteenth century that, for the first time, regulated the laundry industry in Paris and had repercussions for laundresses. The regulations of city administrators attempted to cut off laundresses' free access to the river Seine within Paris and force the women to use only the *bateaux-lavoirs*. In addition, small laundry establishments began to come under the scrutiny of administrators and public hygienists. The government set forth a rubric for regulating hazardous businesses in Paris that presented a health risk. The classification of hazardous businesses concerned laundry facilities for two reasons: the business drained used and fetid water, thus potentially producing so-called miasmas; it also created an obstacle by draining water on the public way. The law on classification of 1815 obligated potential owners of laundry establishments to obtain permission before the business could open legally. In addition, the law on classified businesses created a direct link to the burgeoning public hygiene commission, which linked medical concerns with the occupation of laundering and the potential hazards of laundry. The law created problems opening business in certain neighborhoods and made finding places to launder more difficult. This chapter will investigate the consequences of the new legislation from 1805 to 1840 on the laundry occupation and laundresses. The

advent of regulations for laundry in Paris coupled with rising rents made moving out of the city attractive for business owners and deprived laundresses of places near to them.

Chapter two will investigate the growth of terrestrial laundering facilities in conjunction with the public hygiene movement in Paris from 1840 to 1860. The chapter will also examine the *Préfets*' inconsistent treatment of *lavoirs* in the *banlieue* and in Paris and explore the exceptional political support that terrestrial laundry facilities enjoyed during the Second Empire, exemplified by the building of the *Lavoir Napoléon*. The expansion of laundering facilities demonstrated that the continued growth of the Parisian population necessitated more places to launder linens for both the bourgeoisie and the poor. The *Conseil d'Hygiène* required laundry establishments to conform to its suggestions for drainage of used water. The hygienists' requirements made it difficult to open laundry facilities because the businesses were responsible for solving their drainage issues without sewers. The facilities available to poor women continued to diminish within the city, essentially leaving the *bateaux-lavoirs* on the Seine to meet the laundering needs of the poor in the center of Paris. Since laundry facilities on the ground were complicated and expensive to establish, the *bateaux-lavoirs* experienced a renaissance. The owners of the *blanchisseries* had already begun moving out of the city to build from scratch, where land near the Seine in the *banlieue* was inexpensive, and where they could obtain all the required water, plus easy drainage into the river. The outskirts of Paris represented the only places where the *blanchisseries* could find land inexpensive enough for their business to be

profitable while also fulfilling the requirements that the public hygienists set forth.

Chapter three will examine the *bateaux-lavoirs* and the campaign against them beginning in 1865 and ending in the 1880s with the final orders on when each boat was to be destroyed or moved, although it was a staggered process so the very last boats did not disappear until 1910. The acceptability of *bateaux-lavoirs* in the center of Paris underwent a similar evolution as the laundresses. As ideas about health and the city changed, the *bateaux* also found themselves out of place in Paris during the 1850s and 60s. Requests to construct or repair *bateaux-lavoirs* grew while property became even more expensive within Paris because of Haussmannization. The *bateaux* represented the perfect solution to problems that plagued facilities on the ground. Water was free, the lack of a sewer system for drainage posed no problem, and they required minimal fees to be stationed on the Seine, as opposed to skyrocketing rents in Paris and in the center of the city; they were the only choice for laundresses. Most of the *bateaux-lavoirs* had an enclosed chassis made of glass, which also served the purpose of canalizing laundresses out of sight. They were also the facilities laundresses preferred because they were larger than operations on the ground, had more airflow and light, and importantly, were less expensive since water taken from the river was free. The *bateaux* solved laundry problems for the poor in the center of Paris; however, they also presented many problems to the city administrators as the city changed. When the *Conseil d'Hygiène* accepted Pasteur's germ theory in the early Third Republic, the *bateaux* came under scrutiny for their potential to spread microbes through

contaminated laundry water. Even before microbes, they were out of place because Haussmann had a different vision for the use of the river as it traversed Paris. He envisioned the Seine as an important thoroughfare to move goods and people through the city, and the *bateaux-lavoirs* were obstacles to enacting his plans. In 1867, by order of Haussmann in his function as *Préfet de la Seine*, no one could establish a new *bateau-lavoir* or make unauthorized repairs; moreover, the city would not accept any requests for repair that was meant to extend the life of the *bateau*. He wanted the laundresses and the *bateaux-lavoirs* to disappear and for terrestrial facilities to be the only choice for laundry. However, attesting to the importance of the *bateaux-lavoirs* for the inhabitants of Paris, they had an informal stay of execution until 1905 when the city towed the last one out of Paris for destruction.

The public hygienists were significant antagonists toward the small laundry facilities that served the poor in Paris. Chapter four spans the decades from 1880-1910 and will investigate the effects of public hygienists on laundry and laundresses in Paris after the medical and public acceptance of scientific ideas about the danger of microorganisms. It will also examine the growing power the hygienists enjoyed because they could pinpoint the source of some infectious diseases that threatened the Parisian population. Both the *lavoirs publics* and *bateaux-lavoirs* – while they existed – presented a risk of contamination. This represented a change from the tacit acceptance enjoyed by the *bateaux-lavoir* until 1885. Public hygiene focused on small and clandestine laundry facilities since they rarely adopted the measures hygienists set forth to stop the spread of

disease. In Paris, it was difficult to operate large *lavoirs publics*; thus, it was mainly the small facilities that remained in the city. The hygienists favored the larger facilities that could integrate all the hygiene regulations. Poor women faced a difficult situation; as the administrators phased out the *bateaux*, they had fewer choices and frequented the clandestine facilities that had no safeguards for their or the publics' health. The hygienists' influence produced more mechanization in the *blanchisseries*, which the small facilities could not imitate. The law of 1905 on the manipulation of dirty linen made the facilities and laundresses criminals because they went against the law and threatened the health of Paris by not following hygienists' prescriptions. The owners established legal facilities on the outskirts of Paris, not in its center. As knowledge of the germ theory progressed, public hygienists pointed at laundresses as actual contributors to the transmission of disease, not only the facilities. The 1905 law on the manipulation of used linen written by public hygienists targeted laundresses as possible incubators for the contagious diseases of their clients which they could then transmit to their family such as diphtheria, measles, and tuberculosis. The goal for hygienists was to completely mechanize the process of laundry so that laundresses were not in control of the occupation and the cleaning process, but a machine approved by the hygienists, which illustrates the process that rendered laundresses, not only out of place in the city of Paris, but even potentially dangerous to the city's health.

Chapter five investigates the *blanchisseries* surrounding Paris that seemed to provide the answer to several problems. Laundresses would be out of sight, hanging laundry would no longer conjure images of poverty and pollution, and

the businesses would be able to incorporate the latest developments in public hygiene. Hygienists in particular championed the improved health and hygiene standards of the industrial establishments. They touted the *blanchisseries* as the answer to the city's problems with laundry businesses; the problems with pollution of the Seine by *bateaux-lavoirs* and the possibility of epidemics coming from the small laundry boutiques that could not adhere to prescriptions on manipulating dirty laundry. However, the *blanchisseries* presented new problems. The chapter examines the investigations on the adherence to the law of 1905, regulating the manipulation of dirty laundry in view of contagious diseases like tuberculosis, typhoid and diphtheria. The investigation revealed that the *blanchisseries* were not havens of cleanliness as the hygienists had argued when trying to close the *bateaux-lavoirs*. Dirty clothes were still being sorted in rooms with clean clothes and workers were still exposed to dangerous contagious diseases. The investigations on the adherence to the 1906 law requiring a rest day on Sunday revealed that the owners of the *blanchisseries* did not necessarily follow the law. The work structure of the industrial *blanchisseries*, in which women were simply employees with no personal stake in the business except that of wage worker, meant that they conceived themselves as workers with rights to be fought for. In this chapter their agency is revealed through the historical record in ways that was not possible when studying other types of historical sources for the other chapters. The working conditions were different from the *lavoirs* and *bateaux-lavoirs* and were not safer as the owners of the establishments introduced more industrial machinery. These changes allowed the laundresses to conceive of

themselves as workers with rights; sources like socialist newspapers show that they went on strike to fight for their rights. The chapter illustrates that the hygienists' ideas about the qualities of the *blanchisseries* stemmed more from the public policy of making them invisible and sweeping them out of public spaces than any health improvements for the city or the laundresses.

Chapter 2

THE BEGINING OF LAUNDRY REGULATIONS IN PARIS: 1800-1840

Burgeoning during the Consulate period, the regulations concerning laundry and the physical environment of Paris reflected the emerging ideas about the uses of public space and inextricably linked public hygiene to laundry in the city. The city administrators sought to reorganize the uses of public space, i.e., roads and the Seine, to enable the circulation of people and goods around the capital. The public hygiene movement targeted laundresses as transmitters of disease who presented a danger to the health of Paris' residents. As Mary Douglas has argued, being associated with pollution and disease signified a transgression of societal norms. In order to correct the transgression, the society in question needed to eliminate the dirt or transgressor –laundresses and laundry – from their midst to purify and reestablish equilibrium.⁸⁸ Searching for a new balance in Paris, the city administration attempted to sweep the obstacles and pollution out of public city space. Examining laundresses and the regulation of their occupation sheds light on how and why the administrators of Paris changed the uses of city space and how that change negatively affected poor women in the city.

Beginning in 1800, the reorganization of the chief of police's duties to include the safety of public thoroughfares and cleanliness of the city prompted more regulations regarding laundry in Paris. Increased concern for the city environment led to the public hygiene movement. One can trace the advent of an

⁸⁸ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, (London: Routledge, 1966, 2001), 35.

organized community of physicians, scientists, architects and social commentators with the appearance of the *Annales d'Hygiène publique et de médecine légale* started by the leader of the movement, Louis-René Villermé in 1829.⁸⁹ It also contributed ideas that the *Conseil de Salubrité* used to create a series of regulations limiting the use of the river and the building of laundry facilities within and surrounding Paris, which negatively affected laundresses. By 1830, public health officials and city administrators began a campaign to clean the laundresses out of city space.

The early connection between health and the reorganization of the urban environment affected Parisian laundresses in multiple ways. At the beginning of the July Monarchy as *Préfet de la Seine*, Claude-Philibert Barthelot de Rambuteau sought to improve the functioning of Paris. City administrators connected laundering with health dangers like stagnant water creating so-called miasmas which was the *Conseil de Salubrité's* primary preoccupation.⁹⁰ Examining laundresses and the legislation which sought to control them in the first half of the nineteenth century illustrates the development of the public hygiene movement and its adverse effects on an occupation done by poor women.

⁸⁹ Anne LaBerge, *Mission and Method: The Early Nineteenth-Century Public Health Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 25.

⁹⁰ The idea of miasma, a foul odor emanating from death or decay which could cause disease, was the product of a school of thought supported by a large proportion of physicians in France that held the transmission of disease was infectious, coming directly from a disease source as opposed to the contagion theory of diseases being transmitted by more or less healthy beings. See Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination*. trans. Miriam Kochan (Leamington Spa, NY: Berg, 1986), or any monograph investigating public health in nineteenth-century France.

The Laundering Process

Whether they were professional laundresses or women doing their household chores, most women – if they lived near the Seine – used the river to wash laundry. They used the river banks to hang their laundry and waded into deeper sections of the river, taking stones to create pools for washing. In the summer months, when the river was low, boat captains could see the stones, but they were still obstacles. However, during the times when the river was higher, the stones became dangerous because the river submerged them. In any case the stones reduced the navigability of the main water way through Paris. In 1805, an ordinance prohibited women from using the river for washing or hanging clothes on the banks and required that they only use *bateaux-lavoirs*.⁹¹ The use of the Seine and its banks for laundering purposes presented an obstacle to those wanting to navigate the river; in 1813 an order from the *Préfet de Police* made this practice illegal and required *bateaux-lavoirs* owners to prevent women from using and altering river banks.⁹²

Urban laundering was a complicated process due to lack of access to space and water, particularly after the 1805 ordinance and the *Préfet de Police*'s order in 1813. Each process in a non-mechanized facility took at a least one day, if not

⁹¹ Archives Préfecture de Police de Paris, hereafter cited as APP, DB 336, Navigation, Ordonnance : Interdictions d'étendre linge ou de placer ustensiles sur les berges. Aucune femme ne peut venir laver du linge sur le bord de la rivière, 9 mai 1805.

⁹² APP DA 336, Navigation. Ordre émanant de la Préfecture de Police chargeant les propriétaires de bateaux à lessive de s'opposer à ce qu'aucune femme ne vienne laver du linge sur le bord de la rivière et qu'elle y apporte des pierres 17 mai 1813.

multiple days. First the laundress passed the clothes through a pre-soak in tepid water without any cleaners for twenty-four hours to forty-eight hours. Although the laundress could leave the laundry soaking at the *bateau-lavoir* or *lavoir*, the soaking step could take place virtually anywhere, including her apartment, if space allowed. This operation created the most problems and was usually done at the laundresses' home to save money; they would then bring the soaked clothes to the boats or the terrestrial *lavoir*.⁹³ The linens became very heavy once wet, so women sometimes skipped this process. Further, the pre-soaking process was not always practiced because it was too indiscreet to soak the clothes in public establishments. It was indiscreet because this was the only process where the stains could be easily seen. The laundresses would be working on lifting the stains or the laundry was boiling in a cauldron. Only women who had facilities at home still practiced the pre-soaking step. Women's habits changed as they adapted to washing with strangers. If the *lavoir* had a private room to soak, women would use it; otherwise the practice was obsolete.⁹⁴ After the soaking, the next step was soaping and scrubbing the laundry. The laundress would combine the soaping, scrubbing and rinsing by taking the laundry to a facility where there was space to lay the laundry flat to clean it and then enough water available to do the rinsing. Then, she placed the laundry into a boiling vat before going to the bleaching or azure processes, which she used to make dark-colored clothes retain their color.

⁹³ APP, DA 337 Navigation, Rapport par Dr. Gerardin, L'altération des eaux de la Seine par les bateaux-lavoirs établis dans la traversée de Paris, 4 Décembre 1885, 38.

⁹⁴ APP, DA 336 Navigation, Gilbert Pouchet « Réponse au rapport de M. Jungfleisch » 1886, 1.

After completing the water processes, she could then take the laundry back to her home to dry it in multiple trips if there were large quantities or, if available, she could use a dedicated drying area at the facility which was included in the price.⁹⁵

Laundering involved various evolving locales in Paris. The terms *buanderies* and *lavoirs* are used interchangeably in archival documents to mean terrestrial laundry establishments. The *buanderie* was the place laundresses used specifically and uniquely to boil laundry; the soaking, washing, bleaching and drying processes would be done somewhere else. This study will use the term *lavoir* which was a more general facility where the soaking, boiling, and washing could be done. If the *lavoir* used anything mechanized, the most common machine was the *chaudière à vapeur* (steam engine) that burned coal to produce both hot water to wash and pressure to run a mechanized arm – that turned laundry while it was boiling – or a spinning machine to spin excess water out of the clothes and enable them to dry faster. These mechanized facilities generally had a man who oversaw operations and checked on the steam engines that many facilities used to heat the water, to pump water from underground wells, and to power the spinning machines that were in common use after 1830.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ I have compiled a description of the complete laundering process from the following reports studying the pollution of water by laundry facilities. APP, DA 337 Navigation, Rapport par Dr. Gerardin, L'altération des eaux de la Seine par les bateaux-lavoirs établis dans la traversée de Paris, 4 Décembre 1885, 38. APP, DA 336 Navigation, Gilbert Pouchet « Réponse au rapport de M. Jungfleisch » 1886, 1.

⁹⁶ One can determine the usage of mechanized facilities by what classification the inspectors for the Préfet de Police put the *lavoir* in. The files in section DO9 in the ADS on établissements insalubres provide this information.

In the small *ateliers*, the situation was more complicated because limited space and air flow led to a longer drying time. The small *ateliers* had a – justified – reputation among public health officials for having no ventilation and very humid conditions, which they estimated were dangerous breeding grounds of illnesses.⁹⁷ Spinning machines only came into use in the mid-nineteenth century, so the clothes would be dripping wet. There were also problems created when women took their customers' laundry to their own apartments to dry. They would hang them outside where the laundry would rest against the buildings causing water to leak into the apartments below or seep into the façade of the building.⁹⁸ Women who were professional laundresses and women who did their own laundry faced new challenges when trying to do laundry in the city. The lack of acceptable space to carry out the activity, especially the drying, was a major obstacle.

Until 1870 when Haussmann had built the majority of the sewers, there were few laundry establishments that did not take water from, and drain into, the Seine. Most laundry was done outdoors on the banks of the Seine. Laundresses who took stones out into the river to create pools for soaking and rinsing exasperated the city administrators who preferred the Seine free of obstacles to ensure the navigation on the river. The women soaped and beat the linen to dislodge the most stubborn dirt on the river banks where they had small wooden

⁹⁷ APP, DB 226 Blanchisseries. Henri Bunel « Rapport au Conseil de Salubrité: L'espace à réserver aux laveuses dans les lavoirs », 5 août 1886.

⁹⁸ L.M. Lefort, *Buanderies publiques pour remplacer tous les bateaux à lessives* (Paris: chez l'auteur, 1823), 10.

boxes with a rounded end to make kneeling more comfortable and protect their clothes from the water and mud. However, working in the water with wet linens made it almost impossible to stay dry. Laundresses were outside in wet clothing, subjecting themselves to arthritis, rheumatism, and skin diseases, but also making them tantalizing objects of an eroticized discourse.⁹⁹ In addition, they would get cold and sometimes develop pneumonia. By good weather, they could hang the clothes along the river banks, until the administration forbade it 1805.

Although they were subject to all types of inclement weather, *bateaux-lavoirs*, which came into use in the early seventeenth century, provided places for laundresses that were more comfortable than kneeling at the river bank; laundresses were not obliged to enter into the water to access the pools they constructed for soaking and rinsing. In the 1820s, the *bateaux-lavoirs* owners began building wooden frames on the boats to protect the laundresses and laundry from the weather, making the boats more comfortable and efficient for drying clothes, which attracted more business. The *bateaux-lavoirs* with a chassis could have up to four levels, with the manager's apartment on one and rooms for drying on the top, which were ventilated for maximum air flow. The *bateau-lavoir* had to be far enough in the river to take advantage of its current to take in water and to flush away the used water. This system necessitated that the *bateaux-lavoirs* could float since they were, at times, away from the banks of the river. There were

⁹⁹ Émile Zola. *L'Assommoir*. Trans. Margaret Mauldon. 1877, reprint (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) ; Jaimee Grüring, 2003. *Dirty and Dangerous : French Laundresses in the Discourse of Order and Disorder, 1850-1910*. Arizona State University. MA Thesis. 43-66.

various occasions when the *bateau* came away from its moorings and floated into other property on the river, or when the *bateau* was not kept in good condition and sank, or was destroyed by ice or flooding. Laundresses also had to pay for a place on the boat. The *bateaux-lavoirs* were on city property, and the owner paid a small rent fee for their mooring place. Being on city property made the *bateaux-lavoirs*, like the laundresses on the riverbanks, vulnerable to any changes to usages of city space. Women would carry their customers' laundry to the *bateaux-lavoirs* – after having retrieved it from them as part of the regular service of a laundress – or brought their own laundry to wash. This meant the *bateaux-lavoirs* were used by women in the neighborhoods close to the river; before Haussmann rebuilt the city, l'Ile de la Cité and the left bank included housing for the poor.¹⁰⁰ Laundresses brought everything they had to wash to the *bateaux-lavoirs*.

There were very few terrestrial *lavoirs* between 1800 and 1840. Owing to drainage problems and river-front property being more costly, small *ateliers* could not obtain permission from the *Conseil de Salubrité* to construct away from a water source. In addition, drying space was at a premium in every laundry facility including *bateaux-lavoirs*. Since the facilities were not large within Paris, there was rarely enough space for all who wanted to wash at their neighborhood facility, especially since the *bateaux-lavoirs* served both professional laundresses and women doing their own laundry. Customers who gave their clothing to a laundress using a small *lavoir* or *bateau-lavoir* could expect a delay of six to eight

¹⁰⁰ David Jordan, *Transforming Paris: The life and Labors of Baron Haussmann* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 187.

weeks in the winter, and three to four weeks in the summer. The washing processes could take up to a week, while drying time was also a large factor in the delay.¹⁰¹ Laundresses would keep the laundry in their rooms until there was space in the facility.¹⁰²

This short examination of the laundering process in Paris underscores the lack of space and resources necessary for the task; even without the regulations and limitations the city administration added the occupation was difficult and costly.

Historical Antecedents to Laundering in the Nineteenth Century

Laundresses and other working women occupied city spaces in the Old Regime.¹⁰³ Since water was difficult to obtain in dwellings and other establishments not connected to a natural water source, laundresses were a fixture of any space that had access to water near fountains or on a river.¹⁰⁴ However, the city administrators gradually began to limit the physical spaces available to laundresses, though before the Revolution, there was only one piece of legislation

¹⁰¹ L.M. Lefort, *Buanderies publiques pour remplacer tous les bateaux à lessives* (Paris: chez l'auteur, 1823), 5.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁰³ For a discussion of women and their presence in Paris see Dominique Godineau, *The Women of Paris and Their French Revolution* trans. Katherine Streip (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) 52-96.

¹⁰⁴ For an examination of the availability of water in Paris before 1848, see Anne LaBerge, *Mission and Method, The Early Nineteenth-Century Public Health Movement*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 190-194. Shapiro, *Housing the poor of Paris*, 10. Donald Reid, *Paris Sewers and Sewermen: Realities and Representations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 25-27.

concerning laundresses and their presence on the Parisian waterways. The *Arrêté* of 1763 instructed laundresses not to bring rocks to create pools to wash in, or to place *tonneaux* along the banks or in the river without permission; the *tonneaux* were barrels set into the river bank used for collecting water and washing laundry.¹⁰⁵ At that time, the regulations did not forbid access to the waters, but limited how laundresses used the surrounding space like the 1805 regulation. Laundresses continued to use the river for laundering. Yet, there was already a tension developing between city administrators and the women's use of space.

In 1792, reacting from boat captains' grievances during the Revolution, the *Administrateur des Subsistances et Approvisionnements* complained to the *Préfet de la Seine* that laundresses presented a danger to themselves and those who navigated the *Seine*.¹⁰⁶ Laundresses would wade into deeper parts of the river where the current was faster and take stones into the river to create pools to wash in. The boat captains were worried about hitting the stones that would become submerged when the water level rose or become obstacles when the water levels dropped. The organization and use of public space was already a concern which restricted the laundresses' use of the river banks.

¹⁰⁵ APP DA 336 Navigation, 23 décembre 1763 Arrêté : No blanchisseuse, or any other person, can wash on the banks of the Seine inside Paris, they cannot place rocks, or *tonneaux* without the permission of the Administrateurs des Subsistances at approvisionnementens.

¹⁰⁶ Archives de la Préfecture de Police, hereafter cited as APP, Navigation, DA 336-337(cartons). Arrêté concernant les Blanchisseuses à tonneaux ou sans tonneaux sur les bords de la Rivière. Extrait du Registre des Délibérations du Bureau Municipal du Mardi 15 Mai 1792, l'an 4ième de la Liberté.

Distinct factors contributed to the growing river traffic reported by the *Administrateur des Subsistances et Approvisionnements* in 1792: increased food shipments associated with the severe food shortages occurring in Paris; France's declaration war on Holland and Britain necessitated food and weapons for troops leaving the capital. As the government wanted to change the usage of the Seine to a thoroughfare for the movement of goods and people, the laundresses saw their access to the river restricted because they were obstacles to navigating the Seine. However, it was only in the beginning of the nineteenth century that there was a concerted effort to remove the women completely from using the space around the Seine in Paris and move them inside laundry establishments.

Legislating Laundry: The Early Stages

As the Napoleonic Consulate came to power in 1799 and began re-ordering France, the bureaucracy of the city grew. After the tumult of the Revolution, the Consulate turned its attention to bringing in more tax revenue and re-ordering Paris. The Consulate created a series of prefects to head the various departments beginning with the *Arrêté* of 1 juillet 1800, which outlined the *Préfet de Police's* duties. He was to ensure the safety of the public thoroughfares and the cleanliness of the city. His duties also extended to regulating any businesses on the waters of the department de la Seine, in addition to possessing the authority to require repairs of the businesses, the ports, or quais. This regulation formally placed the laundresses – and anything relating to laundry – under the control and surveillance of the *Préfet de Police*. However, the system required he also

communicate any decisions to the *Préfet de la Seine*; if there was any dispute in the decision, the *Préfet de la Seine* had the veto power.

Starting in 1800, a year after the Consulate came to power; the functionaries turned their attention to the use of public space, which included rivers. Laundresses in the center of Paris who did not have other means of accessing water used the river Seine and the smaller river Bièvre, located to the south, in what is now the 13th *arrondissement*. The southern communes surrounding Paris consisted of working-class neighborhoods where many laundresses lived.¹⁰⁷ Numerous leather-tanning establishments, cloth dyers, as well as laundresses used the Bièvre, which had a reputation for foul odors and for being essentially a stream where manufacturers dumped their waste products. However, with the increased attention to the Parisian rivers, the acceptability of laundresses using the Seine and the Bièvre inside of Paris began to shift, reflecting the new government's impetus to reorganize France and its capital. In 1801 the Napoleonic consulate introduced a new set of regulations that focused on laundresses using the river Seine and the Bièvre.

In July of 1801, Louis Nicolas Dubois, the newly created *Préfet de Police*, in charge of regulating everything connected to the river and ports, developed specific regulations on *tonneaux*; no one could install a *tonneau* without permission, which the owner had to renew every year.¹⁰⁸ Before this regulation,

¹⁰⁷ Godineau, *The Women of Paris and their French Revolution*, 57.

¹⁰⁸ APP, DB 226 Blanchisseries. Ordonnance du 19 messidor An IX, concernant la rivière Bièvre, les ruisseaux, sources, fontaines et boires qui y affluent. Aucun

the Bièvre was open to all who wished to establish *tonneaux*, at no charge. On the river Bièvre, one could put a *tonneau* permanently in the bank and own a bit of space for laundering. Since the *Bièvre* ran through predominantly working class neighborhoods, it was a vital source to poor women for free laundering. The 1801 regulations also meant that the women who wanted to establish new *tonneaux* would need to be able to read and write to make an application, or pay someone to write the application for them, thus creating circumstances where it would be much more difficult for women to build their own washing facilities while the administration closed other previously free and available places such as the Seine.¹⁰⁹ Then, in 1803, the Napoleonic regime taxed the *tonneaux* already installed and created a legal framework for pursuing those who did not pay their taxes on time on their *tonneaux*.¹¹⁰ Now, the laundresses who used them were under a financial obligation. The taxes made it possible for the government to take

tonneau ne doit être placé sur la rivière Bièvre sans une permission qui doit être renouvelée tous les ans. Tonneau were barrels set into the river bank that could be used for washing.

¹⁰⁹ Historians base the rates of literacy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century on marriage registers. There were great regional differences between the north-west (lower rates), north-east (higher rates), and the south of France (lower rates). In general, women lagged behind men. In the period from 1690-1790, the literacy rate went from fourteen percent to twenty-seven percent among women. The numbers do not reveal the literacy rates specifically for poor women in Paris; however, from these statistics, the literacy rates were not high among poor women until the advent of compulsory primary school in the Third Republic. Istaván György Tóth, *Literacy and Written Culture in early-modern Central Europe*, trans. Tünde Vadja and Miklós Bodóczy (New York: Central European University Press, 2000), 204.

¹¹⁰ APP, DB 226 Blanchisseries. Ordonnance du 30 messidor An XI : Redevances tonneaux à lessive. Détermine la forme des poursuites à diriger contre les redevables de la Bièvre en retard de payer.

ownership of the *tonneaux*. These barrels provided crucial access to water for laundering to poor women; the government was limiting the free places to wash laundry in Paris in its quest to bring all areas of the city under regulation and augment its revenues with new taxes.

The Parisian *bateaux-lavoirs* were the next laundry facilities to come under the scrutiny and regulation of the *Préfet de Police* as part of his mandate to regulate matters on the rivers. The *Ordonnance* of 9 May 1805 set new terms for using city space for laundering. For the first time, the law required a prospective *bateau-lavoir* owner to obtain permission from the *Préfet de Police* to establish their business and place a boat on the river. Under the Old Regime, one had petitioned the king to establish commerce on the Seine.¹¹¹ The law on *bateaux-lavoirs* of May 1805 stated, for the first time, that it was illegal to hang linens on the river banks. It also reiterated that any implements the laundresses used to launder in the river - boards, rocks, and perches - were illegal, and river inspectors would take them away. The law also obliged the boat owners to provide places for indigents with cards from the mayor of their *arrondissement*.¹¹² In requiring the *bateaux-lavoirs* owners to provide places for the indigent, the law recognized that restricting access to the river would limit the poor women's ability to wash laundry.

¹¹¹ APP, DA 336 Navigation, *Mémoire pour les propriétaires des bateaux-lavoirs établis sur la seine*. C.H. Mazeau, avocat au Conseil d'État, 1868.

¹¹² APP, DA 336 Navigation, *Ordonnance du 19 floréal An XIII (9 mai 1805)*.

Terrestrial based laundering in Paris was a complicated process because there was little water-based infrastructure such as sewers and water distribution points. Hence, there were few terrestrial laundry establishments. For the first time, in the winter of 1810, terrestrial laundry facilities attracted the attention of city bureaucracy due to drainage problems. This wave of attention from administrators began with the classification of dangerous businesses targeting laundry facilities on the ground. Even if there were few of them, they were noticeable by the inconveniences they produced and governmental scrutiny and regulations added another set of obstacles to those that existed. These facilities caused problems when they drained dirty water into the roadway; it froze in the winter and, in the summer, it stagnated and began to give off foul odors.

In 1810, Paris had a very rudimentary system of underground water conduits, which emptied into the nearest river, canal or underground tank.¹¹³ The lack of available sewers complicated the laundering process on the ground with the need to drain large amounts of water. Many laundry facilities resorted to draining their laundry basins into the street. Various citizens, mostly business owners, wrote to the *Préfet de Police* and *Préfet de la Seine*, complaining that the *lavoirs* were impeding traffic because they dumped waste water on the roads, which discouraged customers from using their businesses because the road was thick with ice.¹¹⁴ The *Préfet de la Seine* commissioned a report to study the worst

¹¹³ LaBerge, *Mission and Method*, 194.

¹¹⁴ APP, DB 226 Blanchisseries. Correspondance du chef du 1^{er} bureau de la 3^{ème} division du Préfet de Police concernant le problème lié aux établissements employant beaucoup d'eau en hiver et qui sont dangereux, 11 février 1810.

cases and reiterated that it was the responsibility of the laundry owner to channel its drainage to the rivers.¹¹⁵ The *Préfet de la Seine* asked that the *Préfet de Police* investigate the worst offenders and report back to him. If the transgressors did not change their practice, they could be fined.¹¹⁶ The action taken by the *Préfet de Police* assisted in meeting the goal of reorganizing public roads to improve circulation of goods and people. In the following decade, *lavoirs* and *blanchisseries* would move outside the city to take advantage of still-inexpensive land by the Seine to take care of their water and drainage needs and build larger facilities. The affluent chose to send their clothing to *blanchisseries*. These were the largest establishments with the most modern equipment and practices. Laundresses could not use *blanchisseries* unless they were employed by the establishment.

In response to the complaints engendered by the drainage issues of *lavoirs*, and as part of a general series of reforms, the government appointed the *Préfet de Police* to regulate businesses within Paris. As part of regulating businesses in Paris, an *ordonnance* in 1815 placed *lavoirs* in a classification of businesses considered dangerous, harmful, or a public nuisance.¹¹⁷ The complaints regarding

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ ADS, DO9 5 Ordonnance 14 janvier 1815 : Ranger les établissements insalubres ou incommodes. 2^{ème} classe : buanderies/lavoirs sans écoulement constant des eaux ; 3^{ème} classe : buanderies/lavoirs pourvus d'écoulement constant des eaux.

the laundry businesses up to that time focused on redirecting drainage off the public thoroughfare.

To better regulate businesses in the city and encourage the desired uses of public space- reserving roads and the river for circulation- the new regulation obligated the owner of a classified business, including laundries, to apply for a permit from the *Préfet de Police*. The application required a study of the impact of the business on public hygiene and any inherent problems the physical emplacement contained. The rubric of the study also requested the investigator to question the neighbors of the proposed facility and to report any known problems to the *Préfet de Police*.¹¹⁸ If the business did not have permission to open, the *Préfet de Police* could close it. In the poorer neighborhoods, laundry facilities could appear and disappear quickly when residents tried to create their own business. Many had no authorization from the *Préfet de Police* with the requisite studies. Problems could arise, like water draining into the foundation of a building, making it unstable or the street becoming muddy and impassable. These were some of the problems the inspectors for the *Préfet de Police* reported.¹¹⁹ By 1815, all the laundering spaces within Paris - *tonneaux*, *bateaux*, the river banks, and *lavoirs* - were under the control and surveillance of the *Préfet de Police*.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. The rubric for the investigating the application to open a classified business was included with the regulations.

¹¹⁹ APP DB 226 Blanchisseries. Circulaire du Préfet de Police aux inspecteurs du service, 7 mars 1815.

Attempts to Change the Usage of the Seine

In 1823, Louis XVIII awarded L.M. Lefort a patent for his idea of a public *lavoir* that would move the women inside, out of the public regard, and rid the city of the *bateaux-lavoirs*. Lefort proposed the king invest in a series of public *lavoirs* that his business would then construct and administer throughout Paris. He proposed building public establishments that would bring together all the steps of laundering in one place. In fact, the *bateaux-lavoirs* were the least expensive way to do the soaking and boiling steps in Paris for poor women. Yet, throughout the pamphlet Lefort described the sight of the *bateaux-lavoirs* and laundresses as the most troublesome aspect of laundry in Paris and used polemical terms to convince the city of the need to build his public *lavoirs*, as a way to remedy the problem. His idea to rid the Seine of *bateaux-lavoirs* coincided with ideas about changing the uses of urban space. To draw a contrast with what Lefort called the “disgraceful” *bateaux-lavoirs*, he highlighted the monuments of Paris such as the Louvre, the bridges over the Seine, and the architecture, which he identified as “grand and elegant.”¹²⁰ He expanded upon the artistic values of the city which, in his words, were the envy of the world. The only part of the scene that did not fit the sumptuous and important surroundings, in his estimation, were the *bateaux-lavoirs* and the laundresses. He argued that seeing these women was not acceptable because they were contrary to the beautification of the capital. Describing how they would disgust the traveler with their scenes of poverty,

¹²⁰ APP DA 336 Navigation, Lefort, *Buanderies publiques pour remplacer tous les bateaux à lessives actuellement établis sur la Seine qui gênent la navigation*. (Paris : Chez l’Auteur Rue des Prouvaires 10, 1823) 15.

Lefort exclaimed that the *bateaux* in fact defaced Paris of its culture and beauty: “when visitors crossed these floating rags they must doubt that they are in the capital of civilization.”¹²¹ Being out of sight, “the streets and river banks would no longer offer an undignified spectacle in the majesty of the capital.”¹²² Lefort emphasized that to provide the laundresses with better conditions was not a philanthropic enterprise but a means to clear out the “disgusting” *bateaux-lavoirs*.¹²³ This was an example of modernizing impulses happening much before Haussmann. As Nicholas Papayanis described, the river was already a focal point in the 1820s for those who would re-conceptualize Parisian space.¹²⁴ The visible laundresses were *personae non gratae*; Lefort described them as “unhappy women who wash laundry themselves at the river” and that the women “bring back the laundry more soiled than they got it, washing near the outlets of sewers.”¹²⁵ His discourse about laundresses was characterized by scenes of poverty and ignorance. He accused the *bateaux-lavoirs* of impeding the navigation of the river by commercial boats that would, in his words, “make much better use of the main artery of the capital of France.”¹²⁶ He implied that the women were ignorant of

¹²¹ Ibid., 10.

¹²² Ibid, 12.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Nicholas Papayanis, *Planning Paris before Haussmann* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 151.

¹²⁵ Lefort, *Buanderies publiques pour remplacer tous les bateaux à lessives*, 10.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 12.

the difference between clean and dirty. The laundresses used dirty water to launder and, in turn, “polluted the waters around the most beautiful monuments in the world like the cathedral of Notre Dame.”¹²⁷ In his view, laundresses were just poor women fouling Paris blocking better uses of the Seine. Moreover, they were not even really cleaning the clothes they washed. Laundresses were out of place among the monuments to triumph and culture in Paris.

Lefort used the three arguments that made the laundresses, and laundry facilities in Paris matter out of place for the duration of the nineteenth century: they exposed the poverty in Paris; they impeded navigation on the river Seine; and they soiled the waters of the river. Lefort’s proposal, which the office of the *Préfet de Police* reviewed, outlined the places and facilities the business would construct. He proposed to build *lavoirs* in four areas, all close to the Seine, for drainage and water needs. He argued that while the buildings would be open to both laundresses by trade and women who did their own laundry, the two distinct users would not cross paths thus preserving the women from the laundresses “indecent language.”¹²⁸ The attitude that the *ménagères* needed to be protected from those whose occupation was that of a laundress illustrated the paid laundresses’ general low social status. Lefort reported that the residents of Paris had all been favorable to the project. However, Louis XVIII did not implement Lefort’s idea, possibly due to his declining health beginning in 1823 and his death in 1824. Moreover, Gaspard de Chabrol, *Préfet de la Seine*, was also preoccupied

¹²⁷ Ibid., 14.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 10.

with other public works like building the canal Saint-Martin and Saint-Denis and finishing l'Ourcq, paving roads and building the beginnings of the Parisian sewer system.¹²⁹ These projects required considerable funds, and Louis XVIII gave him a patent for his idea but not the required money.

Louis XVIII's death left Lefort bereft of royal support, so he concentrated on stockholders to fund his venture into public *lavoirs*. Two years later, in 1826, in order to advertise his company for individuals to buy stock in it, Lefort reprinted the sections of his pamphlet in the daily newspaper the *Journal de Paris*, which was interested in public health matters, as well as other topics that underlined the problems the bateaux-lavoirs created for navigation and the negative images the of the bateaux compared with the grandeur of Paris.¹³⁰ Lefort planned to build the first facility in the St. Michel neighborhood (current 5th *arrondissement*) in what was, and still is, a working-class and student neighborhood in central Paris. Lefort's proposal thus recognized the needs of poorer areas of the city to have access to facilities where women could wash laundry for themselves or customers. The same article also appeared in the *Moniteur Universel*.¹³¹ However, he was not able to draw private investment and

¹²⁹Donald Reid, *Paris Sewers and Sewermen: Realities and Representations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 30.

¹³⁰L.M. Lefort « Remplacer les bateaux à blanchisseuses » *Journal de Paris*, 5 septembre 1826.

¹³¹L.M. Lefort « Remplacer les bateaux à blanchisseuses » *Le Moniteur Universel*, 5 septembre 1826.

there was no discernable government reaction to his attempts to attract attention, and his businesses never opened.

Despite Lefort's pamphlet¹³² underlining the many faults of *bateaux-lavoirs*, primarily their appearance in the center of Paris, the *Préfet de Police* still permitted the boats to make repairs and in one case, to entirely replace a boat that had rotted.¹³³ For example, a port inspector brought to the attention of the *Préfet de Police* one boat that was in an unstable state upstream of the Louvier island- which was just east of the Ile St-Louis.¹³⁴ An inspector visited the establishment and recommended that it close.¹³⁵ After this recommendation, a relative of the owner wrote to the *Préfet de Police* to fight the decision, underlining that the owner was eighty years old, and had already finished a round of work to make it ready for laundresses. The *Préfet de Police* contacted the *Préfet de la Seine* to advise him of the decision. In this case, the *Préfet de Police* left the final say to the *Préfet de la Seine* since there was reclamation against the original ruling. The *Préfet de la Seine* upheld the original decision, but allowed the boat to be sold to a Monsieur Petit who owned another *bateaux-lavoir*, proposed to enlarge his

¹³² Lefort, *Buanderies publiques pour remplacer tous les bateaux à lessives*.

¹³³ APP, DA 336 Navigation. L'Inspecteur Général de la navigation et des ports au Préfet de Police, 3 juin 1826.

¹³⁴ The city filled in the space between the banks and the island in 1847, now located between quai Henri IV and avenue Morland.

¹³⁵ APP, DA 336 Navigation. L'Inspecteur Général de la navigation et des ports au Préfet de Police, 3 juin 1826.

business, and was able to carry out the necessary repairs.¹³⁶ This case illustrates that the *bateaux-lavoirs* were still welcomed in Paris and that the *Préfet de la Seine* could overrule decisions over the wishes of the *Préfet de Police*, the navigation engineers and the *Conseil de Salubrité*. Another *bateau-lavoir* near the St. Bernard port, located in the 5th arrondissement upstream of *Pont de Sully*, highlights the goals of city administrators. This boat was able to make extensive repairs with the enthusiastic approval of the inspector for the *Préfet de Police*. The owner wanted to refurbish the boat completely, replace the bottom and install a frame over the boat so that it would be enclosed with a wood framework and glass. This improvement would allow for more comfortable washing since the laundresses would be protected from the weather. Moreover, the frame had three levels which comprised a residence for the manager of the boat, but also included a covered drying space to dry the clothes more quickly and keep the clothes clean and away from any soot or smoke coming from the steam engine that pumped water and powered the clothes-spinning machines. The inspector for the office of the *Préfet de Police* supported the changes the owner applied for in a report to his superiors because “the new model perfectly hides the laundresses from public view.”¹³⁷ This instance confirms the new aesthetic ideology which focused on the uniformity of public space where city administrators attempted to reorder what was becoming out of place in Paris. The office of navigation did not have any

¹³⁶ APP, DA 336 Navigation. Préfet de Police à l’Inspecteur Général de la navigation et des ports, 1 octobre 1826.

¹³⁷ APP, Navigation, DA 336 Blanchisseries, Circulaire du Préfet de Police au Conseil de Salubrité et Inspecteurs du service, 7 mars 1828.

problems with the owner replacing and adding a few meters onto the length of his new boat. The concern was not for clearing the river yet, but making the public space reflect an image of uniformity by supporting new boats, and even better, ones with a chassis, hiding anything that was not in keeping with its surroundings.

Public Hygiene and Water issues: Access, Drainage and Sewers

In 1828 the office of the *Préfet de Police* investigated the first complaint that a *lavoir* was the source of a large amount of stagnant water that gave off foul odors which were not conducive to public health. Neighbors often denounced the clandestine laundry facilities because of drainage problems. The used water would become fetid with the soluble matters washed from the laundry stagnating in the court.¹³⁸ Alain Corbin found that the sensitivity to foul odors inspired the administration to engage in a “topographical toilette” to rid the city of noxious odors that, since the 1740s, were no longer acceptable to urban dwellers: disinfection was deodorization.¹³⁹ As Donald Olsen described, “domestic piped water came late to Paris...which lacked the luxury even of defective sewer of [English Victorian towns]. It is a measure of the foulness of its streets and dwellings that English visitors, their expectations lowered and their sensibilities coarsened by the sanitary conditions of their own towns, were invariably horrified by the stench and filth of Paris.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ APP DB 226, Inspecteur de Préfet de Police 10 avril 1828.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 89.

¹⁴⁰ Donald J. Olsen, *The City as a Work of Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 37.

The Parisian drainage systems were varied. Yet, none dealt effectively with the waste water of Paris without the concurrent inconveniences for the *Conseil de Salubrité*. There were three types of drainage systems: the first involved cesspools, which were sealed or draining pits; the second type were canals in the middle of the streets or on the sides that directed waters either to cesspools or underground canals which eventually emptied into the Seine; and the third type consisted of underground cesspools.¹⁴¹ A leading medical theory posited that foul smells, especially those coming from excrement, carried disease that could infect anyone who breathed in the foul odor.¹⁴² In fact, fecal matters stored in cesspools emptied – directly or indirectly – into gutters, whose water the poor scooped for personal use.¹⁴³ Thus, the scarcity of water distribution points in Paris and the unavailability of sewers greatly related to disease and mortality. The inattention to the project of building *lavoirs publics* may also have stemmed from the inadequacy of the sewer system in Paris.¹⁴⁴ Louis-René Villermé began his career as a public hygienist with his extensive study on drainage and miasma and the connections to death.¹⁴⁵ Yet, the *Conseil de Salubrité* could do nothing else but suggest improvements since the sewers were under the management of

¹⁴¹ LaBerge, *Mission and Method*, 194.

¹⁴² Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant*, 5.

¹⁴³ Olsen, *The City as a Work of Art*, 37.

¹⁴⁴ Donald Reid, *Paris Sewers and Sewermen: Realities and Representations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 170. He mapped the state of the sewer system at various times in the nineteenth century.

¹⁴⁵ Louis-René Villermé, *De la mortalité dans les divers quartiers de la ville de Paris* (Paris : chez l'auteur, 1830), xx.

the *Préfet de la Seine*, not the *Préfet de Police*, to whom the *Conseil* reported.¹⁴⁶ Haussmann completed nearly the entire sewer system by 1867, although there were areas like Belleville that had to wait until the Third Republic to have a completed sewer system in their neighborhood.¹⁴⁷ The process of building a complete sewer system for Paris was not completed until the twentieth century.¹⁴⁸ Every *Préfet de la Seine* until Haussmann had his own project to ameliorate the waste disposal sewers. However, despite the personal projects of the *Préfets de la Seine*, the water delivery system was not able to meet the demand from a constantly growing city. Water in general was difficult to manage for the antiquated Parisian system.¹⁴⁹ The laundry business and laundresses were caught between the *Conseil de Salubrité's* quest to control the drainage of waste water and the inadequacy of the infrastructure to supply and drain the necessary amounts of water.

Despite the critique leveled at the *bateaux-lavoirs*, and the women who worked in them, for allegedly ruining the appearance of Paris, the laundry facilities for public use on land presented other types of problems that the *Conseil de Salubrité* were more concerned about. In March of 1828, the *Préfet de Police*

¹⁴⁶ LaBerge, *Mission and Method*, 10.

¹⁴⁷ Jordan, *Transforming Paris*, 289.

¹⁴⁸ Donald Reid, *Paris Sewers and Sewermen: Realities and Representations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 170. Pierre Pinon, *Atlas du Paris haussmannien: La ville en héritage du Second Empire à nos jours*. Paris : Editions Parigramme, 2002) for a detailed description and illustrations of the evolution of the Parisian sewers.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 198.

sent out a memorandum to all the mayors of the arrondissements of Paris and surrounding communes of the *Departement de la Seine* about granting permission to establish public or private laundry facilities.¹⁵⁰ The main problem the *Préfet de Police* outlined was water drainage. Since there were very limited sewers in place within Paris and almost none in the surrounding communes at this time, the laundry business was responsible for building the pits or tanks to drain water into. However, if the owners left the water to stagnate and it did not drain, the water would develop a strong, unpleasant odor, which in his view “happened more often than not if one saw all of the complaints my office received.”¹⁵¹ Gaspard de Chabrol, The *Préfet de la Seine* at the time, first reminded the *Conseil de Salubrité* that all laundry establishments needed to be approved by the office of the *Préfet de Police* since Napoleon’s ordinance classed them as dangerous or insalubrious establishments. According to the *Préfet de Police*, the solution to all of the problems the terrestrial laundries presented was to only allow them to build on or near the river, so they could drain their water directly into it. The inter-office memorandum suggested he would not consider any request that was not near the river.¹⁵² Building next to the river was also preferable because the water delivery systems in the city were rudimentary and never met the needs of laundry establishments alone. In Paris, building or opening a *lavoir* with easy drainage

¹⁵⁰ APP, DB 226 Blanchisseries, Circulaire du Préfet de Police au Conseil de salubrité et Inspecteurs du service, 7 mars 1828.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² APP, DB 226 Blanchisseries, Circulaire du Préfet de Police au Conseil de salubrité et Inspecteurs du service, 7 mars 1828.

next to the river was nearly impossible since the laundry business was not very profitable. High rents would make the business untenable. In 1828, the same year that the *Préfet de la Seine* circulated the memorandum, two laundry establishments – which had had problems with the public hygiene inspectors the year before because of their drainage systems – were inadequate, and neighbors had complained about the odors emanating from their drainage pits in the Quartier des Invalides. The *lavoir* owners then petitioned the mayor of Grenelle to move it just outside the limits of Paris and to construct a new state-of-the-art *blanchisserie*.¹⁵³ Drainage would not be a problem because the facility could be built next to the river, away from the center, where property was not as expensive. Moving out of Paris into the surrounding communes would become a trend for the larger establishments looking for more space to build large facilities that could fill the laundry needs for hundreds of customers in Paris, as opposed to the smaller establishments in basements or courtyards of apartment buildings that characterized the facilities within the city limits. Laundry pick-up and delivery was one of the functions provided by professional laundresses. The larger establishments had their own horse-drawn carriages to make delivery even faster.¹⁵⁴ The mayor of Grenelle also received an application for a dual-purpose private and public *lavoir* of grand proportions, a reservoir of forty meters with a

¹⁵³ ADS DO9 23 Etablissements insalubres, Sous Préfet de l'arrondissement de Sceaux au Préfet de Police, Grenelle, 17 novembre 1828.

¹⁵⁴ Théophile Lavallée, *Histoire de Paris depuis le temps des Gaulois jusqu'à nos jours*, vol. II (Paris: D-H Krabbe 1857), 8

lavoir public around the reservoir with a steam pump feeding the reservoir from the Seine, for a total of one hundred and sixty meters of *lavoirs publics* and another building to take in customers' laundry. The owner was moving his business from the Quartier des Invalides in central Paris to a large property on the Plaine de Grenelle where there was room to build pits to drain water into.¹⁵⁵

These *lavoirs publics* moving out of Paris expose the problems businesses had operating within the constraints of the city. The migration of laundry facilities towards the *banlieue* again limited the places a laundress could do her occupation. The mayor of Grenelle granted all of the requests to establish laundry facilities with no opposition presented. These cases illustrate the problems that laundry facilities encountered trying to operate in the city and the ease with which they could move out of the city and find a location with easier operating conditions. In the long term, the facilities that moved out of Paris in the 1820s became part of Paris in the 1860s. Yet, there were still laundresses and other women who needed the facilities who lived in the central arrondissements. With the message from the *Préfet de Police* discriminating against any laundry establishment that could not drain into the river, going outside of Paris was attractive for owners. As more *lavoirs* left Paris, laundresses had to rely on clandestine businesses that had not obtained permission to open from the *Préfet de Police*.

¹⁵⁵ ADS DO9 23 Etablissements insalubres, Mairie de Grenelle au Préfet de Police, 4 juin 1828.

To have a clearer idea of the state of washing facilities and the need for government intervention, the *Préfet de la Seine* sent a request for information on their *lavoirs* to the communes of the *arrondissement* of Sceaux which was the largest *arrondissement* outside of Paris and contained forty-two communes, many of which made up the banlieue of the south and east of the city such as Vaugirard, Montrouge, Gentilly, Ivry, Bercy, and Saint-Mandé. The information was to elucidate how other near-by communes had resolved laundry issues Paris was also grappling with.¹⁵⁶ The rubric for the responses from the mayors was to include the amount, the location, how they were supplied with water, if they were the official communal *lavoirs*, and if the commune had ever made a profit from them. Most of the communes replied negatively; only the communes of Bagneux, Bry-sur-Marne, Châtenay, Clamart, Issy, Orly, St. Maur, Sceaux, Vanves and Vitry replied in the positive. These communes all had natural water and drainage sources feeding their *lavoirs*, either in the form of rivers, creeks or springs, and significant working-class populations. The mayors who responded describe the usefulness of the *lavoirs* to the poorer residents of their communes.¹⁵⁷

Geography and economics were significant variables associated with the presence of *lavoirs*. Archival information is richer with respect to the reasons why communes did *not* build or own a *lavoir public* than to the reasons why the communes decided to provide a *lavoir public* to their population. Some of the mayors answered that their inhabitants had no need for it because they were

¹⁵⁶ ADS DM5/5 dossier 11, Enquête sur les lavoirs des communes de l'arrondissement de Sceaux, 1828.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

located next to a river, creek, or some other natural source, or that there was already a privately owned *lavoir* in place. A natural water source always fed any laundry establishment, whether privately owned or owned by the commune, underlining the difficulty in procuring water by any other means inside or outside of urban centers. Geography often explains the location of communally-owned *lavoirs*. The communes of Vanves, Clamart, Châtenay, Bagneux, and Sceaux did not have a river within or bordering their territory. Being deprived of a large water source like the Seine or Marne may have propelled the government to provide other facilities. However, this does not explain why the communes of Vitry and Orly, bordering the Seine, or Saint Maur bordering the Marne, invested in a communal *lavoir*. The availability of public funds in the communes or another private facility may have also tamped down the appetite for building a communal *lavoir*. There might be another reason for not investing communal money: Those *lavoirs* that were part of the communal government had never made a profit. Completed in 1828, this investigation illustrated a few elements: the government was interested in how the *lavoirs* worked, where most of them were built since there were rudimentary water delivery systems, and if the government could make money from the business. In the conclusion of the investigation, the *Préfet de la Seine* commented that government-run *lavoirs* offered an answer to the problem of laundresses using public space and the *bateaux-lavoirs*. The laundresses could be removed from the river, and the *bateaux-lavoirs* spoiling the city could be done away with as well. However, it quickly became apparent that there was little money in running a *lavoir public*

since every mayor in Sceaux answered that there was no revenue coming from such facility. Hence, the government would be responsible for its financial upkeep, and having a facility in the center of Paris would only be a drain on the city's coffers.

Despite the financial burden it represented, there was nonetheless great public utility in establishing a *lavoir*. The term *utilité publique* denoted a public service that was provided by the government or a private establishment that was not-for-profit. The mayor of Charenton-Le-Pont – a commune outside the city that Haussmann later annexed – described the building of the *lavoir public* in his commune as a charitable event in which the local business people pooled their money out of concern for the women washing at the river in all weather and deprived of a place when the river froze or was too high, and therefore dangerous to use.¹⁵⁸ The mayor of Bercy, - another commune that Haussmann would annex - used the opportunity to complain about the privately-owned *lavoir* in his commune and the problems they had had to contend with because the *lavoir* drained its water on the road, impeding traffic.¹⁵⁹ This echoed the complaints about lavoirs within Paris that they obstructed traffic and thus the organization of the city with their improper drainage. The Bercy *lavoir* demonstrated the same

¹⁵⁸ ADS DM5/5 dossier 11, Enquête sur les lavoirs des communes de l'Arrondissement de Sceaux, 1828. Mairie de Charenton-le-pont au Préfet de la Seine, 10 juin 1828.

¹⁵⁹ ADS DM5/5 dossier 11, Enquête sur les lavoirs des communes de l'Arrondissement de Sceaux, 1828. Mairie de Bercy au Préfet de la Seine, 3 juin 1828.

problem that dogged the establishments in Paris. If the *lavoir* was not built on the river, there was no perfect solution for drainage. Although the Seine borders the communes of Bercy and Charenton-le-pont, not all establishments were able to build on the riverfront and had to contend with the lack of drainage possibilities just as those within Paris. The investigation on *lavoirs* also illustrated that the laundry establishments were not used frequently in the less populated areas outside of Paris because laundresses preferred using the rivers or springs. Only fifteen communes had one or more *lavoirs*, and these were never far from a natural water source, underscoring the problem with building one in Paris. A *lavoir* would have to be built on valuable, water-front property, and yet was never going to be profitable. After the investigation, the subject of government-run *lavoirs* around Paris was not brought forth again until Napoleon III. Even if the government were interested in building *lavoirs* in Paris, it did not have time to do so, as the reign of Charles X came to an end and that of the *Préfet de la Seine*, Gaspard de Chabrol who had served both Louis XVIII and Charles X. The 1830 revolution ushered in a new king.

The Role of the Restructured Conseil de Salubrité

Meanwhile, cholera was also progressing towards France. Influencing health issues of the city and its surrounding communes, the development of the public hygiene movement during the 1820s completed its integration with the government during the cholera epidemic. In 1831, the *Préfet de Police*, in his responsibility for maintaining the public health, gave the *Conseil de Salubrité* new investigative powers in every neighborhood "...in an effort to obtain an

assainissement of the localities when a serious epidemic threatens.”¹⁶⁰ Before, the *Conseil de Salubrité* operated exclusively under the rubric of the inspection of classified establishments however in 1831 the *Conseil* could take up any investigations that concerned public health and disease. The idea was to gather a group of experts in chemistry, biology, medicine, and businessmen to give suggestions to the government in how to manage and control public health problems in each neighborhood. These groups answered to a central group for each *arrondissement*, and then answering to the commission appointed by the *Préfet de Police*.¹⁶¹ He further explained that in the past, there had not been enough local surveillance in the neighborhoods. The creation of the *Conseil de Salubrité* meant a much more organized approach to public health in the face of the coming epidemic.¹⁶² The new organization also meant that there would be much more scrutiny of laundry establishments. The laundry facilities were a part of the third class of potentially hazardous businesses which opened the door for the *Conseil de Salubrité* to target the *lavoirs* within Paris.

The growth of the importance of public hygiene following the cholera epidemic also meant more scrutiny and critique from the *Conseil de Salubrité* regarding water and laundry in the city, contributing to the idea that laundry had to be contained and regulated because it was dangerous to the resident’s health.

¹⁶⁰ ADS VD6/3 Dossier 9, Instructions pour le Conseil de Salubrité, 20 septembre 1831.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

Beginning in late 1831, the *Conseil de Salubrité* turned their attention to the coming cholera epidemic and watched the disease progress from Asia towards the West. In 1833, possibly in response to the cholera epidemic, the *Conseil de Salubrité* sought to bring the Parisian *lavoirs* under compliance. Under a general hygiene plan, they intended to stop the “odors that were so inconvenient to the health of the dwellings in the neighborhood of the *lavoirs*” and the *Conseil de Salubrité* organized expeditions searching for businesses out of compliance in and around Paris.¹⁶³ *Lavoirs* in Paris and in the surrounding communes were some of the most visible sources of stagnant water which, to the *Conseil de Salubrité*, had the possibility of creating another epidemic. The *Conseil de Salubrité* complained that the open pits the *lavoirs* drained waste water into did not properly drain and gave off odors. The laundry establishments not located on the river became a target for the *assainissement* program that began in hopes of stopping the cholera epidemic.

The *Préfet de Police* had not invested in a system of inspectors for every neighborhood until he commissioned the *Conseil de Salubrité* in 1831, which was in response to the threat of cholera. The lack of inspectors made it easy to open clandestine establishments that had not been investigated for health threats. Gaining the appropriate permission to build a *lavoir* was the responsibility of the owner. In 1833, with the epidemic fresh in the minds of the *Conseil de Salubrité*, the inspectors of the neighborhoods found many establishments that had been

¹⁶³ ADS, DO9 Dossier 34, Etablissements insalubres, Préfet de Police à la Mairie d’Auteuil, l’envoi des expéditions de salubrité, 11 octobre 1833.

operating without the proper permit.¹⁶⁴ Since there were no sewers to remedy the major problems like open pits and drainage into the streets, the inspectors recommended granting permission to continue operating in circumstances where the neighbors were favorable to it. However, even in the cases where the neighbors were favorable, the inspectors were still wary. In his report to the *Conseil de Salubrité*, one inspector recalls that, although there were no complaints about the business, the neighbors were all in the laundry professions themselves and would not bring a complaint against one of their own to protect themselves in case they would go through the same investigation.¹⁶⁵ The inspector continued with his own observations on the general state of *lavoirs*: the situation was much the same all over the city, but the suppression of the establishments would be disastrous for the families who had used them for years in security.¹⁶⁶ The *lavoirs* concerned were located mostly in the southern part of the city, near the Bièvre, which was a working-class section. The inspectors' reports reflected the limits to which they could request changes and deny someone the use of their business. Many were provisional permissions with the caveat that, as soon as the city built proper sewers, the businesses needed to start using them.¹⁶⁷ The *Conseil de*

¹⁶⁴ ADS, DO9 Dossier 34, Etablissements insalubres. Mairie d'Auteuil au Préfet de Police, lavoir de Visbec et Noblet, l'envoi des expéditions de salubrité, 11 juillet 1833.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ ADS, DO9 Dossier 34, Etablissements insalubres. Préfet de Police à la Mairie d'Auteuil, lavoir Boisseu, l'envoi des expéditions de salubrité, 11 octobre 1833.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

Salubrité requested plans for proposed sewers and made notes where they would go back in order to ensure the businesses followed the rules.¹⁶⁸ However, the *Conseil de Salubrité* admitted that the tolerances were indefinite since they could not predict exactly when underground sewers would be built in any neighborhood.¹⁶⁹ If the *lavoir* owners could not comply they could have their businesses closed by the *Conseil de Salubrité* at any time, and the women of the neighborhood would lose a resource. For the remainder of the decade of the 1830s, the *Conseil* sought to find the cause – and control the effects – of such a large outbreak of cholera, and attributed part of the blame on the laundresses.

In 1840, the *Conseil de Salubrité* produced a scathing report on the dangers of laundry facilities in Paris.¹⁷⁰ They compared the waste waters from laundering to the *féculairies* (businesses that turned human and animal waste into fertilizer) which they considered dangerous to the health of those who lived and worked around the businesses for their ability to produce foul odors that could cause disease.¹⁷¹ The solutions to the lack of underground sewers did not satisfy the *Conseil de Salubrité*. They complained about the open pits that were supposed to act as a filter and drain the waters while leaving the foreign bodies from the

¹⁶⁸ ADS, DO9 Dossier 34. Etablissements insalubres, Mairie d'Auteuil au Préfet de Police, lavoir de Pitrou, l'envoi des expéditions de salubrité, 15 août 1833.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ ADS, VD6/4 Dossier 14, « Rapport général sur les travaux du Conseil de Salubrité 1825-1839 » *Annales d'Hygiène Publique et de Médecine Légale*, série première, tome 8. Juillet 1840 : 102-110.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

soiled linens to decompose in the dirt. However, the bottom of the open pits often became impermeable from the different soaps and oils that accumulated on linens being washed, which according to the *Conseil de Salubrité* “would let infection spread throughout the neighborhood.”¹⁷² Streets and gutters would direct the water towards open pits. This was the only long-term solution the *Conseil de Salubrité* had. They discussed how to treat the water with various mixes of clay and plasters to form a type of lime that degraded and did not cause insolubility. They also suggested laundry water be mixed with lime which clarified the water and then, in their opinion, could be used for another round of laundering.¹⁷³ The article commented that the hygiene council was preoccupied with *lavoirs* and water drainage so that the businesses could stay open, intimating that without their intervention the city would drown under the waste water. Yet, they could not influence building new sewers but confined themselves to making suggestions on how to contend with open sewers. The article concluded by explaining the different, sometimes complicated and costly measures *lavoir* owners had to undertake in order to remain in compliance, but without the help of sewers. One owner constructed an underground holding tank so he did not have to use the gutters in the road, which in the winter created lakes of ice on the thoroughfares and impeded traffic. Another owner dug an underground canal three kilometers, sloping with the contour of the Parisian basin to eventually drain down to the *Bièvre*. Twice in the article the *Conseil de Salubrité* underlined that it was willing

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

to approve diverse measures so as not to impede the industry. However, these measures were costly and in some cases fairly difficult to execute. Not every *lavoir* owner could make their own infrastructure; yet the residents of the city needed laundry facilities. The only facilities that the *Conseil de Salubrité* approved of were the *blanchisseries* that could afford to build their own drainage canals. This impasse between the needs of the residents and the regulations and ideas coming from the *Conseil* would last until the end of the nineteenth century when the sewer system was in place.

Conclusion

Laundering in early-nineteenth-century Paris became increasingly difficult as the city administrators began to exclude laundresses from operating in public space, and the *Conseil de Salubrité* created more regulations to safeguard public health. In many instances, the *Conseil de Salubrité* was unrealistic, demanding drainage and water treatments that the city was not equipped to support and business owners could not afford, especially from laundry businesses which the government noted to be unprofitable in their earlier investigation. In discourses about the visual appeal of the city and the proclamations about safeguarding the public's health, laundresses and laundry were increasingly out of place in a city trying to deodorize space and put dirt out of the public view. The concern with rubbish and dirt in public space reflects Alain Corbin's findings that by 1827 "there was heightened anxiety about filth and waste in urban space."¹⁷⁴ The

¹⁷⁴ Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination*, trans. Miriam Kochan (Leamington Spa, NY: Berg, 1986), 115.

myopia of the *Conseil de Salubrité* and *Préfet de Police* regarding the needs of laundresses and other women illustrates that the city administrators thought the women were of little consequence compared to their desires regarding city space which resulted in making laundering much more difficult. The negative assumptions about their morality only increased in the second half of the nineteenth century when there were greater numbers of laundresses making them even more visible. However, the *Préfet de Police* and *Préfet de la Seine* created regulations based on their efforts to reorganize the use of urban space and not based on representations of laundresses. In the first half of the nineteenth century the administrators virtually ignored laundresses and concentrated on the hazardous waste from their professional activity and their unappealing aesthetic presence. Laundresses had no ability to represent or protect themselves in the face of these changes until at the turn of the century when their profession became organized.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁵ There were no petitions against any of the new regulations of their occupation in the Police archives.

Chapter 3

CHANGING USES OF URBAN SPACE AND HOW THOSE CHANGES AFFECTED THE LOCATION OF LAUNDRY FACILITIES: 1840-1860

Chapter two reviewed how laundering and laundresses became matter out of place within Paris, as evidenced by the new regulations restricting access and use of the river Seine and its banks within the city. The regulations fit the new political exigencies of the Napoleonic regime and his quest to reorder the administration of Paris. Additionally the cholera epidemic of 1832 focused attention on classified businesses and the control of anything that could be a health threat. Parisian administrators applied new regulations to change the uses of the river. The regulations rendered laundering within Paris much more difficult and necessitated the construction of other establishments to meet the needs of the poor women. The regulations – meant to maintain cleanliness in the urban environment – created obstacles for the owners to open or maintain *lavoirs*, which resulted in fewer establishments being available within Paris to meet the laundering needs of laundresses and poor women. They were the only places that poor women could go to do their laundry inexpensively if they did not have the means to heat water in their own home or lived close to the Seine and a *bateau-lavoir*. From 1810 to 1830, the hygienic discourse focused on the danger of *lavoirs* and *buanderies* to the health of Parisians and the functioning of the city, paying no attention to the health of the laundresses themselves. Concerned by the drainage of used water, the *Conseil de Salubrité* was anxious to bring the existing establishments into compliance with the regulations associated with the

classification of dangerous businesses. In 1833, the *Préfet de Police* launched a series of expeditions to enforce the regulations relating to *lavoirs* and *buanderies*.¹⁷⁶

Beginning in the 1830s, shifts in governmental policies reflected the changes in the meaning and purpose of the urban public space: from stationary activity – the narrow, saturated and multi-functional streets enabling multiple users (street vendors, street performers, narrow *ateliers*, animal convoys, etc.) – to flux, movement/circulation of people to facilitate economic growth and enable traffic and improve hygiene. This shift constitutes the preparatory phase of Haussmannian work.¹⁷⁷

Organized in a chronological order, this chapter will describe multiple examples of the city administrators' shifting position – their attitude, discourse and actions – in the treatment of the applications to open laundry facilities, whether in the *banlieue* or in the center of Paris, as well as exceptional interventions into the lives of the poor under Napoléon III. The decisions from the administration and the *Conseil de Salubrité* revealed a differential tolerance of the

¹⁷⁶ ADS, DO9 Dossier 34, Etablissements insalubres, Préfet de Police à la Mairie d'Auteuil, l'envoi des expéditions de salubrité, 11 octobre 1833. ADS, DO9 Dossier 34, Etablissements insalubres, Mairie d'Auteuil au Préfet de Police, lavoir de Visbec et Noblet, l'envoi des expéditions de salubrité, 11 juillet 1833. ADS, DO9 Dossier 34, Etablissements insalubres, Préfet de Police à la Mairie d'Auteuil, lavoir Boisseu, l'envoi des expéditions de salubrité, 11 octobre 1833. Etc.

¹⁷⁷ Sabine Barles, « La voie publique est spécialement affectée à la circulation: La gestion de la circulation et du réseau viaire à Paris au cours du premier XIX^e siècle. » in *La modernité avant Haussmann : Formes de l'espace urbain à Paris 1801-1853*, ed. Karen Bowie (Paris : Editions Recherches, 2001), 191-202.

lavoirs based on their location. Anxiety about controlling *lavoirs* in the center Paris led to permissiveness toward *lavoirs* established in the *banlieue*. These shifts in governmental attitude clearly affected laundry practices. From an economic perspective, it was sensible to export the *lavoirs* into available and inexpensive areas. From a political standpoint, facilitating the exile of laundry facilities and laundresses outside the center of Paris suited the goals of the city administrators including the *Conseil de Salubrité* – pushing the *lavoirs* into the *banlieue* near accessible drainage systems – while matching the cultural vision of the city. Moreover, reducing the availability of laundry establishments illustrated the prevailing political attitudes of the time: keeping the government small and limiting social expenditures.¹⁷⁸

This chapter argues that shifting attitudes from the July Monarchy to the Second Empire affected the treatment of *lavoirs* within Paris and the *banlieue* and that exporting the dirt out of Paris served to exile what was matter out of place. Under the July Monarchy, with the reigning idea of political economy the government was not willing to intervene in the lives of the poor as Napoléon III was to do. In order to establish a cleaner city, the *Conseil de Salubrité* was only interested in moving the dirt, disease and poverty associated with laundering and laundresses outside of the center of Paris into the *banlieue*. While, under the Second Empire, changing attitudes towards the poor as reflected in Social

¹⁷⁸ William Coleman, *Death Is a Social Disease: Public Health and Political Economy in Early Industrial France* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), 8.

Catholicism, and the example of Napoléon's *lavoir* along with technological advances enabled the *Conseil d'Hygiène* to accept *lavoirs* within Paris.

Paris: Lavoirs and Drainage in the 1840s

While Claude-Philibert de Rambuteau as *Préfet de la Seine* did increase the sewers during the 1840s, they still did not adequately meet the drainage needs of the laundry facilities in Paris. The *Conseil de Salubrité*, which was responsible for inspecting classified businesses and approving their establishment, required owners to provide for the drainage of their *buanderie*.¹⁷⁹ Building canals to the river or sewer meant extensive building and proximity to the river or sewers. The problem was that land was too expensive near the Seine and that the city's sewer system was inconsistent and limited until 1910. The *Conseil* rejected many requests to open *lavoirs publics* and *buanderies* in the neighborhoods without sewers, which was a considerable portion of the city.¹⁸⁰ In 1832 -1833, in response to the cholera epidemic, *Préfet de la Seine* Pierre de Bondy oversaw the installation of 14 kilometers (8.7 miles) of sewers in central Paris.¹⁸¹ By 1853

¹⁷⁹ Hygiene inspectors were mandated by, and received their instructions from, the *Conseil de Salubrité*; they were not medical professionals or prominent citizens like those on the *Conseil*.

¹⁸⁰ The Archives du Département de la Seine, series DO9 20-40, contain the records for the classified établissements insalubres, which included lavoirs. For the state of the sewer system in Paris over the nineteenth century please see Donald Reid, *Paris Sewers and Sewermen: Realities and Representations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991) 18-37. Anne Louise Shapiro, *Housing the Poor of Paris, 1850-1902* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 55-65; Pierre Pinon, *Atlas du Paris haussmannien: La ville en héritage du Second Empire à nos jours* (Paris : Editions Parigramme, 2002). They give an overview of the conditions for working-class housing and the drainage and water issues associated with the dilapidated buildings.

¹⁸¹ Reid, *Paris Sewers and Sewermen*, 26.

there were fewer than 100 miles of sewers compared to 260 miles of streets and were located in central Paris around the Seine. The collectors for the drains were small and often were clogged and overflowed when there was a heavy rain.¹⁸² In 1854 Haussmann started making plans for the sewer system. By 1870, Haussmann had completed 348 miles of sewers, but could not accomplish his goal of drainage for every street. With annexed communes, the total mileage of Paris' streets added up to 500 miles. The poorer neighborhoods of the annexed zones remained unserved.¹⁸³ The Third Republic, by 1910, finished the main sewer lines in the previously unserved areas adding 406 miles of sewers. The sewers totaled 1,214 kilometers (754 miles) by 1911, which eliminated the drainage problems posed by laundry facilities.¹⁸⁴

There were two concurrent reasons why the *Conseil* – with the consent of the *Préfet de la Seine* – tried to push *lavoirs* out of Paris in the 1840s: First, the *Conseil* followed the directives of the *Préfet* to order the city space with regard to hygiene and appearance. The second reason was practicality; Paris had very limited space on the river banks, and *lavoirs*' owners could not afford to build their business next to the water – since the Seine was still the only efficacious drainage system before the extension of sewers.

Several elements contributed to an evolving situation for laundry establishments in Paris. The *Préfet de la Seine*, Rambuteau, concentrated on

¹⁸² David Pinkney, *Napoleon III and the Rebuilding of Paris* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 129.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁸⁴ Reid, *Paris Sewers and Sewermen*, 35.

building fountains to provide clean water to residents throughout the city. However he neglected drainage systems. Building fountains only responded to one part of the needs of the growing population of Paris. Meeting the hygienic needs of the population and providing laundresses with places to work required laundry facilities which, in turn, made the development of a sewer system essential. However, the drainage and water delivery systems were only in limited areas; otherwise, residents relied on rivers for water and drainage.¹⁸⁵ Indeed, part of the delay in building a comprehensive sewer system rested with the cultural notion that open sewers were preferable to enclosing them – due to the perceived risks associated with confluent fumes, as opposed to open sewers that could be cleaned and maintained more easily.¹⁸⁶ Then, coupled with the scrutiny of laundry businesses and the enforcement of regulations from the *Conseil de Salubrité* on the drainage of water, the reluctance to build sewers in areas other than the center of the city succeeded in pushing any new *lavoirs* into the *banlieue* through which flowed natural drainages such as the rivers Seine and Bièvre.

The poor were in a predicament; to be part of society they could not stink. As Alain Corbin has pointed out, in the 1840s the mores of society had changed to value cleanliness and sweet smells.¹⁸⁷ Yet, the establishments to launder were scarce in the city. The women who did not have the means to send their laundry to

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 26.

¹⁸⁶ Anne La Berge, *Mission and Method: The Early Nineteenth-Century Public Health Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 195.

¹⁸⁷ Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination*. trans. Miriam Kochan (Leamington Spa, NY: Berg, 1986), 5.

the *blanchisseries* outside of Paris, and did not have enough clothes to send them to a local laundress when they had to wait six to eight weeks to have them returned, greatly needed public *lavoirs*. Laundresses resorted to washing in buckets in the only room the family had. For the *Conseil de Salubrité*, this practice was unhealthy because the women heated the washing water, making steam which dampened the walls and the drainage of the water was not regulated.¹⁸⁸

At the beginning of 1841, the general work report published by the *Conseil de Salubrité* illustrated the growth in the laundry business. The report examined permissions given to classified businesses as well as persistent public hygiene problems; the most popular classified businesses to open were laundry establishments.¹⁸⁹ The *Préfet de Police* gave a total of ninety-two permissions to open *buanderies*, yet only six were to be within the limits of Paris.¹⁹⁰ Those six facilities were concentrated around the Bièvre. The state of the sewers and the *Conseil de Salubrité's* concerns about drainage necessitated having many *lavoirs*

¹⁸⁸ APP, M. Lasnier, ed. *Rapport général sur les travaux du Conseil de Salubrité de Paris 1843-1846* (Paris : Boucquin Imprimeur de la Préfecture de Police, 1850), 256.

¹⁸⁹ ADS, VD6/4 Dossier 16 , « Rapport général sur les travaux du Conseil de Salubrité 1840-1843 » *Annales d'Hygiène Publique et Médecine Légale*, série première, tome 10. Juillet 1847 : 18. The second largest number of applications to open a classified business came from tanning businesses with thirty two applications. A classified business was one that fell into one of three classes based on danger to the public. *Lavoirs* were in the third and least dangerous classification which meant that the owner had to apply for permission to open the business from the *Préfet de Police*.

¹⁹⁰ As mentioned earlier, archival documents used the term *lavoir* and *buanderies* interchangeably, though the term *buanderie* implies the utilization of steam.

grouped where the Seine flowed outside of Paris and around the Bièvre, which until 1860 was outside of Paris, although these areas were not the only places where the poor lived; indeed, poor neighborhoods were scattered throughout Paris.¹⁹¹ The report from 1842 illustrated the same trend: there was one *lavoir* opened legally in Paris against twenty-eight in the *banlieue*.¹⁹² In 1843, one *lavoir* opened in Paris versus eleven in the *banlieue*.¹⁹³ The *Conseil de Salubrité* noted that *lavoirs* of all sizes had been constructed in the *banlieue* but the business had not taken hold in Paris.¹⁹⁴ Evidently, the *lavoir* and *buanderie* owners found a more hospitable environment for their businesses in the suburbs, to the detriment of the poor women who still lived inside Paris.

Despite the obstacles they were facing in the city centre, the poor women in neighborhoods far from available laundry facilities were resourceful and found different methods for washing. One particular method caught the attention of the *Conseil de Salubrité* and sparked their intervention. In the work report of 1841, the *Conseil de Salubrité* highlighted the problems linked to the use of machines run by steam pressure. Businesses using steam-powered machines were required

¹⁹¹ Shapiro, *Housing the Poor of Paris*, 8. The socio-economic geography was more fluid before Haussmannization.

¹⁹² ADS, VD6/4 Dossier 16, « Rapport général sur les travaux du Conseil de Salubrité 1840-1843 » *Annales d'Hygiène Publique et Médecine Légale*, série première, tome 10. Juillet 1847 : 150.

¹⁹³ APP, Lasnier, *Rapport général*, 250.

¹⁹⁴ ADS, VD6/4 Dossier 16, « Rapport général sur les travaux du Conseil de Salubrité 1840-1843 » *Annales d'Hygiène Publique et Médecine Légale*, série première, tome 10. Juillet 1847: 150.

to drain the excess hot water and redirect the steam the process produced.

However, many business owners who employed steam driven engines used the streets for their draining ground and aired the steam without building chimneys to direct the hot air up and away from other buildings. The *Conseil de Salubrité* received complaints from boutique owners in the central area of Paris because steam was entering their shops and damaging their merchandise. The drainage issue caused a different problem: the streets in central Paris that had paving stones were especially prone to be used as impromptu *lavoirs publics*, as the hot water drained from the steam machines and conveniently flowed down the gutters, which poor women readily used to do their own laundry.¹⁹⁵ Consequently, the *Conseil de Salubrité* signaled that it was necessary to require the businesses to cool the water before they drain it to prevent these women from using the hot water.¹⁹⁶ While the *Conseil de Salubrité* were concerned with soapy water in the public thoroughfares stagnating, there was no recognition that the women used the water out of necessity because there was no way to get enough water to their homes and then heat it, and that having laundry facilities nearer to their neighborhoods would have improved the hygiene of the poor and stopped this practice. The *Conseil* seemed more concerned with hiding the poverty in Paris than addressing the women's needs which would have done more to promote hygiene. This solution would have necessitated government intervention.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

However, the prevailing political discourse of social economy argued against this option because it required government intervention.

Problems from steam-powered machines preoccupied the *Conseil de Salubrité* during the early 1840s, which contributed to moving laundry establishments to the *banlieue*. Moving laundry establishments to the *banlieue* was an easier solution to the drainage problems creating hygienic concerns in the Paris than building an extensive sewer system. Consequently, moving to the *banlieue* also moved laundry establishments away from laundresses and the poor in the city. Steam-powered machines were smaller and less expensive than those used at the beginning of the century and filled a vital function for *lavoirs*; the machines heated water and were able to pump water from wells because the water delivery system, where it existed, could not produce enough water for the needs of a *lavoir*.¹⁹⁷ The fuel the owners used in the machines represented a chief concern because of the smoke the machines produced. The 1841 work report from the *Conseil de Salubrité* underlined the complaints engendered by the machines used by *lavoirs*.¹⁹⁸ Those using oil in their steam machines produced thick smoke that would disturb other neighborhood residents or other *lavoirs* that had hung their laundry to dry. They would have to rewash the laundry because of the black

¹⁹⁷ Richard Hills, *Power from Steam: A History of the Stationary Steam Engine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 53.

¹⁹⁸ ADS, VD6/4 Dossier 16 , « Rapport général sur les travaux du Conseil de Salubrité 1840-1843 » *Annales d'Hygiène Publique et Médecine Légale*, série première, tome 10. Juillet 1847 : 152.

marks left by the smoke.¹⁹⁹ For hygienic as well as practical reasons, the *Conseil de Salubrité* prohibited everything but the use of *houille de Ham-sur-Sambre* in Paris, but had not yet prohibited the use of other combustibles outside of Paris.²⁰⁰ They remarked that there had been no new complaints after the imposition of the new rule on combustibles.²⁰¹ However, the other oils that produced more smoke were less expensive than the *houille*. Since there was no regulation on combustibles to run the steam engine in the *banlieue*, the smoke and soot was much worse where the greatest concentration of laundresses existed. Although the new regulation about steam machines intended to make employees and residents healthier and laundry cleaner, it also made it more expensive to operate a *lavoir* because the required combustibles were more expensive. Effectively, it contributed to the scarcity of laundry resources for poor women.

In 1842, the *Préfet de Police* established regulations for steam machines used in *lavoirs*.²⁰² The machines using steam at high or low pressure necessitated an inspection of the condition of the machine accompanied by a map indicating the proximity of other residences and the possible danger the machine could

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Type of coal originating from Belgian mines, which was used as combustible fuel.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 153.

²⁰² APP, DB 226, Correspondance du Préfet de Police aux Maires des communes du département de la Seine, 29 août 1842.

create. The *Préfet de Police* also communicated his wish that all *lavoir* owners be tested on their competence in running steam machines.²⁰³

Drainage was still imperfect within and around Paris with sewers appearing only sporadically and not connected to any type of filtering system so water would return directly to the Seine.²⁰⁴ Knowing that the drainage issues would persist because of the undeveloped state of the sewer system, the *Conseil de Salubrité* refused most applications to build *lavoirs* within Paris with the only exceptions being owners who were willing to build their own underground drainage systems, which most could not afford. While this equation nearly excluded building a *lavoir* within Paris, the *Conseil de Salubrité* was willing to tolerate diverse means of drainage in the *banlieue*. In every report, the *Conseil de Salubrité* admitted that the current sewer system of Paris did not allow for drainage and that it was the owner's responsibility to create either a pit to drain water or a canal to the nearest natural drainage.²⁰⁵ As the *Mairies* of the *banlieue* paved streets, the *Conseil de Salubrité* allowed *lavoir* owners to direct used water to the street gutters which would then drain into a river or stream, which they would not tolerate in Paris.²⁰⁶ When the facilities were in the communes of the

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Reid, *Sewers and Sewermen*, 52.

²⁰⁵ ADS, VD6/4 Dossier 16 , « Rapport général sur les travaux du Conseil de Salubrité 1840-1843 » *Annales d'Hygiène Publique et Médecine Légale*, série première, tome 10. Juillet 1847 : 155.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

banlieue, the discourse about *lavoirs* became less anxiety-laden, and the *Conseil de Salubrité* treated the applications in a less detailed manner, which illustrated that their concern was for Paris. David Jordan argues that the bourgeoisie's conception of Paris was limited and parochial.²⁰⁷ This narrow vision contributed to the sense that sending an inconvenient business outside of Paris was a solution to the problem. Added to that were the new walls surrounding Paris that Adolphe Thiers supported in 1840 to protect Paris. Jordan points out that "the walls also became a tax-exempt haven for the poor...and a socially threatening band of poverty was penned outside of Paris."²⁰⁸

In 1843, the approval of a *lavoir* on Rue de la Glacière just outside of the then 12th *arrondissement* illustrated the difference in the attitude of the *Conseil de Salubrité* towards projects outside of Paris. The owner proposed to use a *puisard*, an individual pit designed to channel and drain water, which was already located on his property. Although the inspector who checked the drainage area deemed it insufficient, he allowed the *lavoir* to open and to let its owner decide to dig another pit if the first one did not meet his needs.²⁰⁹ The inspector visited the site six months later and noted that the owner was emptying his used water into the street. The inspector simply reminded him not to drain water into the street until it was paved.²¹⁰ This tone differed drastically from the earlier report

²⁰⁷ Jordan, *Transforming Paris*, 101.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ ADS, DO9 dossier 31, Etablissements dangereux, insalubres ou incommodes. Lavoir Leroy, 20 octobre 1843.

concerning Parisian *lavoirs* draining their water left from the steam-powered machines into the paved street. The report supported the complaints of the boutique owners and criticized the women washing in the street. The *Conseil*, as soon as the practice had come to their attention, had demanded it stop immediately. The *Conseil* used so-called health concerns to stop a practice that was actually improving the hygiene of the poor because such a sight in the center of Paris was out of place and thus forbidden. The *Conseil de Salubrité* was more interested in keeping up appearances, hiding poverty and maintaining order in Paris while anything went in the *banlieue*. Maintaining order in Paris was the priority after the 1832 revolution. Bourgeois property owners were not necessarily interested in making living conditions better for the poor but in preserving property values and keeping the social order in tact.²¹¹

The permissiveness associated with certain laundry practices in the *banlieue* drastically contrasted with the discrimination of the same practices occurring in the center of Paris, though both were ostensibly for the sake of hygiene. The following example highlights this hypocrisy. In Passy, close to the city limit, two men sought permission to open *lavoirs*.²¹² The owners were to construct a small paved canal - a gutter - in the dirt street and let possibly hot, and definitely dirty, water drain into the street to the nearest stream or larger paved

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Jordan, *Transforming Paris*, 103.

²¹² ADS, DO9 dossier 31, Etablissements dangereux, insalubres ou incommodes, lavoirs Manu et Pichot, 23 octobre 1843.

street that also had a gutter. From the hygiene inspectors' standpoint there was no problem, in the *banlieue*, letting used water drain into the street because the administration was neither trying to control how the space looked, nor who occupied it. Up to this point, the *Conseil de Salubrité* had not acknowledged that the *lavoirs* filled a vital service for meeting personal hygiene needs of the poor. They were more concerned with keeping the city in working order and protecting bourgeois property interests by limiting more open drainage pits that could diminish property values. Paradoxically, on the one hand, doing laundry was hygienic because people had clean clothes and linens; on the other hand, certain laundry practices were fraught with unhygienic methods, and laundry facilities were removed from areas close to poor women. The *Conseil de Salubrité* had concentrated on the inconveniences *lavoirs* caused instead of supporting the owners and calling for an improvement of the sewer system. Moreover, their lack of attempts to push the *Préfet de la Seine* into specific actions to ameliorate the sewer system confirms that political considerations trumped hygiene needs. They were more interested in following the lead of the *Préfet de Police* than striking out and exposing his failings in terms of advancements in hygiene.

By the mid-nineteenth century, people in search of work migrated from rural areas of France to Paris, making city housing overcrowded.²¹³ This growing indigent population moved to the city after the economic depression of the 1840s when failing harvests drove them into Paris for work. Overcrowding drove rental prices up in the city and made it very difficult to profitably operate a *buanderie* or

²¹³ Shapiro, *Housing the Poor of Paris*, 50.

lavoir in the central parts of the city. Without governmental help, the *lavoirs* were closing within Paris. The *Conseil de Salubrité*'s minimal support for a business that facilitated hygiene for the urban poor continued. The *Conseil d'Hygiène* lamented the lack of available laundry facilities in the city to address the needs of the poor, and yet made it almost impossible for someone to open a laundry facility by requiring them to construct their own sewer. While women met their laundry needs by various methods like capturing hot water running down the street or not doing laundry for extended periods of time.

The *Conseil de Salubrité* pointed out that the numbers of *lavoirs* increased as a consequence of the growth of the population. The *Conseil*'s discourse highlighted ideas that the migrants were making the city unsafe because they instigated the building of laundry establishments. However, the facilities were approved in the areas outside of the city that the affluent residents of Paris used. The *Conseil* was not prepared to make allowances for the hygiene of the migrants – coming in from the rural departments – who were attracted by the higher salaries and the demand for artisanal work to supplement the consumer economy of Paris.²¹⁴ The 1844 general work report, detailing the actions and decisions taken by the *Conseil de Salubrité*, showed that complaints about, laundry businesses had given rise to the largest number of reports handled by the *Conseil*. The *Conseil* declared that, “while others applauded the gathering of all the

²¹⁴ Louis Chevalier, *La Formation de la population Parisian au XIX siècle* (Paris : Institut National d'Etudes Démographiques/ Travaux et Documents cahier 10, 1951), 11-14.

laundry processes under one roof; it was the *Conseil de Salubrité* that previewed the problems the businesses created.”²¹⁵ They questioned whether any *lavoirs* in Paris was a good idea in light of the state of the Parisian sewer system. The report proposed that, every time there was a question about drainage, the *lavoir* in question should be obligated to construct an underground *conduite*, or draining pipes, until the existence of a sewer.²¹⁶

The general work report for 1846 reflected the disconnect between the discourse of the *Conseil de Salubrité* presenting the idea of *lavoirs* as a public utility juxtaposed with the negative discourse about fitting the actual facilities into the urban landscape. There were thirty-two applications to open *lavoirs*, of which twenty-four were barely within the limits of Paris, again grouped around the Bièvre at the edge of the city.²¹⁷ They were large facilities that allowed up to fifty women to launder. The report described how the water seeped into the floor boards and walls, rendering the building *insalubre*.²¹⁸ Another way for poor women to do laundry was to walk to the *bateaux-lavoirs* but, the walk to the *bateaux* would have been difficult with water-logged laundry. The *Conseil de Salubrité* admitted that “the *lavoir* introduced incontestable advances in the hygiene of the working class and laundresses.”²¹⁹ Yet, they presented so many

²¹⁵ APP, Lasnier, *Rapport général*, 255.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 256.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

problems for the city that the gains in working-class health and cleanliness were not worth the sacrifice. Regulation of *lavoirs* remained a problem, as clandestine workshops continued to open without the hygiene inspectors' control; the drainage was not assured, and women brought wet laundry back to dry in their room because the *lavoirs* only had space outside to dry which only functioned in warm, dry weather. Yet, the article concluded with the idea that the *Conseil de Salubrité* should encourage *lavoirs*, which had been the prevailing discourse the whole time, yet in practice they were hesitant to let any open in Paris.²²⁰ The discourse about the utility of *lavoirs* for the poor did not prompt the *Conseil de Salubrité* to try to reconcile drainage with the needs of the poor residents. The *Conseil* did not put these ideas into practice before 1846 unless the *lavoirs* were outside of Paris. Poor women's only options were to go without laundering or to pool resources and launder in a group. The primary obstacle to laundering was space and materials, i.e., water, large cauldrons and enough heating material to boil water for two to three hours.

In 1846, the Parisian population of Paris, reached one million, accounting for the growing demand for washing facilities. The applications to build *bateaux-lavoirs* also increased in 1846, as space became less available for terrestrial *lavoirs*, owing to migrants and new commerce.²²¹ There had not been an application to open or repair a *bateau-lavoir* since 1830. In 1846, in response to

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid

²²¹ Ibid.

the increased demands from the residents of the banlieue of Paris, there were four applications to build *bateaux-lavoirs* just outside of Paris in the communes of Bercy and Passy on the river Seine. The mayor of Bercy commented that his commune was in need of more facilities to accommodate the waves of migrants moving to the area. Outside of Paris, the navigation authorities approved of the *bateaux-lavoirs*, so the office of the *Préfet de Police* allowed the installation.²²² According to the *Conseil de Salubrité*, they were irreproachable because they had the most efficient water drainage. These were not small facilities; the two in Bercy were twenty-five and thirty meters long respectively. Although they were working outside – in plain view – laundresses did not evoke concern outside of Paris. The *bateaux-lavoirs* did not present the drainage issues that the *lavoirs* did because they could drain the dirty water from laundering into the river. The *Conseil* was willing to give the *bateaux-lavoirs* permission when they would not allow the same for land-based *lavoirs*. The navigation engineers reported no opposition from businesses who could have been affected by the presence of the *bateaux*.

The increased demand for washing facilities also extended to the *tonneaux à lessive*, on the Bièvre within Paris. These had not been the subject of new applications until 1847 when the office of the *Préfet de Police* received one

²²² APP, DA 336 Navigation, dossier Pesqueur, 27 novembre 1846. APP, DA 336 Navigation dossier Peigné, 23 février 1846. APP, DA 336, dossier Vinçard, 12 mars 1846.

hundred ninety.²²³ The new owners of *tonneaux* complained to the *Préfet* that the price of notary stamps that signaled the permission to build a *tonneau* rose in the last year, making the permission too expensive to obtain.²²⁴ In the economic depression of 1846-1848, the administration conceded to the reclamations and made a special provision: it would be sufficient if one paid the tax on the placement; the payment for the permission itself was not mandatory. The permission also highlighted that those who were using the *tonneaux* to run a laundry business were not making much income if the owners were having trouble paying a two-franc *timbre* indicating permission. However, the *Préfet de Police* was not willing to forgo all payments because the tax on the right of placement was “in the interest of order and conservation of the Bièvre.”²²⁵ The *tonneaux* did not present any complicated construction for water drainage since they were located on a water source, unlike the *lavoirs*; therefore, the administration was willing to make allowances. Moreover, there was no commentary from the *Conseil de Salubrité* on the dangers that using the polluted Bièvre posed for laundering because the *tonneaux* were for private use so the possible dangers of using waste water from tanneries mixed with the stream were limited to those poor and working-class families who used the *tonneaux*. As the

²²³ The last prior reference to *tonneaux à lessive* was during the Napoleonic Consulate when that government reformed the tax rates and regulations for their placement in 1801. See chapter one.

²²⁴ APP, DB 109 Bièvre, Rapport du Secrétaire général au Préfet de Police: *tonneaux à lessive*, 31 mars 1847.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

tanning industry in Paris grew to meet consumer demands in the 1840s and 50s the problems with water pollution in the Bièvre became more pressing. It was only in the second decade of Third Republic that the *Préfet de la Seine* closed the Bièvre for laundry and made it a drainage canal. The individuals still using the Bièvre to launder were only hurting themselves. The *tonneaux* were not large enough to enable multiple families to use them and they only had cold water which was only part of the washing process. The boiling step would still have to be finished elsewhere. In contrast, for the *Conseil de Salubrité*, the *lavoirs* presented problems for the entire population.

Governmental Policy Shifts during the Second Republic

The February 1848 revolution produced a change in attitudes towards government intervention in the living conditions of the poor. The economic depression of the 1840s resulted in workers – skilled and unskilled – losing work. For the first time, in April 1848, the Provisional Government made allowances for the poor to receive assistance to wash their laundry.²²⁶ The city administration planned to buy coupons from the *lavoirs* in Paris to distribute to the indigent. The coupons were good for one package which amounted to five shirts. During the economic downturn, more women were using the *bateaux-lavoirs* on the Seine within Paris to wash their family's laundry, and did not give it to laundresses or laundry establishments to wash. While the Provisional Government was concerned with social needs, the office of the *Préfet de la Seine* who administered the program, also underlined that the purpose of the coupon was not purely social.

²²⁶ ADS, VD4 dossier 19, Distribution des bons de blanchissage, 4 avril 1848.

The *Bureaux de Bienfaisance* in every *arrondissement* were to distribute the coupons with the understanding that the individual women were to use the *lavoirs* instead of the river. Even in a time of turmoil, which characterized the Provisional Government, the sight of women using the river was not acceptable.

During the political upheaval of 1848, another devastating cholera epidemic raged in Paris. The cholera epidemic of 1848 did not affect the laundry facilities and laundresses in Paris directly. However, the *Préfet de Police* took the opportunity to reorganize the *Conseil de Salubrité* in hopes of finding a solution to the epidemic. The *Conseil de Salubrité* changed its name to the *Conseil d'Hygiène Publique et de Salubrité*, and there would be a *Conseil d'Hygiène* – composed of seven to fifteen members – in every *arrondissement*.²²⁷ The Minister of Agriculture and Commerce and the *Préfet de Police* would appoint the members. The changes to the *Conseil* brought it closer to the politicians which made it more difficult to be an independent body outside of politics making recommendations for hygiene. The reorganization of the *Conseil* meant a larger presence in every *arrondissement*, which indicated a more concentrated presence for the surveillance of classified businesses like *lavoirs*.

Contrasting with the concept of political economy that characterized the previous regime, and for the first time in Paris, a government would intervene to create a laundry facility in the center of Paris for the urban poor. In line with the ideas outlined in the treatise *L'extinction du paupérisme* published in 1844, Louis

²²⁷ ADS, VD4 dossier 3131 Instructions aux membres des commissions d'hygiène publique 18 décembre 1848.

Napoléon was interested in ameliorating the lives of the poor.²²⁸ Although he never explicitly discussed laundry facilities in his treatise on pauperism, being odor-free was now considered healthy,²²⁹ and Louis Napoléon funded the building of a *lavoir*. In 1849, Louis Napoléon created a commission to study the organization of *lavoirs* in England.²³⁰ The head of the commission, Gilles Netlam, illustrated the novelty of this project in his statement to Louis Napoléon after the group finished its study. He stated: “This is a heavy burden to bring these services to the *classes laborieuses* considering the poor conditions in Paris the laborers live in. The *lavoir* renders important services to the working population and I have seen their tendency to use these establishments in my neighborhood in the twelfth *arrondissement*. Your goal is truly to bring hygiene to the people.”²³¹ Netlam also traveled to England, where he was able to acquire different models of *lavoirs* designed to meet the needs of hundreds of women laundering as well as professional laundresses per day. It was only after the *coup d'état* – when Louis Napoléon made himself emperor – that he was able to see his grand project realized.

²²⁸ Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, *L'extinction du paupérisme*, quatrième ed. (Paris : imprimerie Lacrampe et Fertiaux , 1848), 15.

²²⁹ Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination*. trans. Miriam Kochan (Leamington Spa, NY: Berg, 1986), xii.

²³⁰ Archives Nationales, here after cited as AN, F21 dossier 1347 Bains et Lavoirs publics 1853-1865.

²³¹ Ibid.

In 1853, at the beginning of the Second Empire, Napoléon III, implement the exceptional construction of a *lavoir public* in a poor neighborhood of Paris – in the Quartier du Temple – to remedy the scarcity of laundry establishments for the poor and to contribute to the hygiene of the urban poor.²³² This *lavoir* was one of only a dozen *lavoirs publics* in central Paris. This was an attempt to win over the working classes and make them loyal to their imperial benefactor since he needed their political support due to the new universal male suffrage Napoléon had instituted.²³³ He bought the land and paid the construction costs with money from the purse of the *Maison de l'Empereur*.²³⁴ However, he wanted the *lavoir* to be run privately and for profit.²³⁵ Napoleon's idea closely resembled that of the Social Catholics who were influential during the Second Empire and supported the idea of private charity taking care of social needs. They did not believe that poverty was the fault only of the poor, but also of the rich whose duty it was to help the less fortunate of society.

Impressed by the English model, Napoléon III hired an English architect to build the *lavoir*; the construction began in May of 1853. It was not a simple proposition to build a *lavoir* next to the *Marché du Temple*, now in the 3rd

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Shapiro, *Housing the Poor of Paris*, 51. Shapiro describes Napoléon III building a few apartment buildings for the working class so he could depend on their political support. Napoléon III first used the plebiscite on December 2, 1851 to confirm his coup d'état and used the process four more times during his reign.

²³⁴ AN F21 Bâtiments civil, 1347 Lavoir public Napoléon III 1853-1865, Dotation Immobilière 1853.

²³⁵ Ibid.

arrondissement. An investigation of inconveniences caused by the installation needed to take place before the construction could begin. The neighbors were not excited about having the *lavoir* in their neighborhood and lodged oppositions with the *Préfet de Police*.²³⁶ One neighbor did not want the *lavoir* because the fuel used to operate the steam machines created black smoke that deposited on the surrounding buildings and could alter the life of the neighborhood.²³⁷ Another commented that, as a home owner, he had to protest because the space “would have sadness and poverty”²³⁸ Another neighbor asked if the surrounding land could be turned into parks or gardens in order to inhibit the practice of urinating in pots along the wall of the *lavoir*; indeed laundresses would use the salts resulting from the evaporation of urine.²³⁹ Yet another was afraid the *lavoir* would lower their property value.²⁴⁰ These reports from the neighborhood illustrate the difficulties a private business owner would encounter when trying to build a *lavoir* in a very populated area. They help explain the relative lack of laundry facilities in Paris despite a growing indigent population.

²³⁶ AN F21 Bâtiments civil, 1347 Lavoir publique Napoléon III 1853-1865 Correspondance d’Achille Fielo à la maison de l’Empereur, 21 avril 1853.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ AN F21 Bâtiments civil, 1347 Lavoir publique Napoléon III 1853-1865. Correspondance de Dunay à la maison de l’Empereur, 9 mai 1853.

²⁴⁰ AN F21 Bâtiments civil, 1347 Lavoir publique Napoléon III 1853-1865. Correspondance de Mellé à la maison de l’Empereur, 4 mai 1853.

The report from the *Conseil d'Hygiène* was not supportive of the *Lavoir* Napoléon. It highlighted that the importance of the *lavoir* was found in its philanthropic endeavor more than in its actual need, and that Napoléon was simply making himself feel better.²⁴¹ The argument stated that the facility overestimated the needs of the indigents.²⁴² The report implied that the urban poor would not use the facilities, because they did not care about personal hygiene as much as other classes (not because they could possibly not afford it). The construction was not greeted with excitement in finally being able to address the hygiene of the indigents in the center of Paris. Rather, it provoked some skepticism about how poor residents would use the facilities and what their presence would bring to the neighborhood.

Nevertheless, the construction of Napoléon's *lavoir* began in August of 1853. The plans addressed all the concerns of the neighbors, including a chimney reaching thirty meters above the roof to direct the smoke, and a urinal to be built on Rue Caffarelli. During the construction, the technological differences between England and France came to the forefront. The water heaters were English built, but tested in Paris.²⁴³ Although the heaters did not operate at the correct pressure, the *Conseil d'Hygiène* granted them an exceptional authorization because it was

²⁴¹ ADS, VD6 dossier 80, Procès verbaux des séances, Commission d'Hygiène et de Salubrité du 12 octobre 1855.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ APP, DA 46 Etablissements bains et lavoirs Napoléon, permission pour appareils à vapeur, 6 juillet 1854.

the emperor's pet project. The engineers complained the English had constructed them without consulting with them first, but the *Conseil d'Hygiène* and engineers forged ahead, and the builders completed the *lavoir* in two years. The costs of the land, building, machinery and furniture came to two hundred thousand francs.²⁴⁴ This was an immense amount of money to spend on a *lavoir* compared to the daily wage of a laundress who could expect to earn 1.05 francs per day of work.²⁴⁵ As discussed in chapter one, *lavoirs* were not very profitable businesses, which underlined the philanthropic nature of the project.

The construction of the *Lavoir Napoléon* attracted attention from a commune in the *banlieue*, Bercy, where there was a large proportion of *bateaux-lavoirs* and *lavoirs* and a large working-class community extending from the twelfth *arrondissement*. The mayor wrote that he was inspired by the work of Napoleon and in 1853 the commune began constructing a *lavoir* that would be free-of-charge or at reduced prices. He also commented that the poor of the community needed access to laundry facilities at reduced prices.²⁴⁶ The commune acquired the land at a discounted price and applied for an allocation of state funds of twenty thousand francs. The owner of the company building the *lavoir* would lend the remaining forty thousand francs to the commune, and in thirty-three

²⁴⁴ AN, F21 dossier 1347 Bains et Lavoirs publics 1853-1865, des bâtiments et de la dotation mobilière, 12 juillet 1856.

²⁴⁵ *La Fronde*, 5 février 1900 p. 3. An article on women's wages revealed that the pay in 1881 was 3,25 francs and was 5,00F in 1900.

²⁴⁶ ADS, DO3 dossier 28, Bercy, Bains et lavoirs publiques, 23 décembre 1856.

years the *lavoir* would become the property of the commune.²⁴⁷ Bercy then developed subsidized laundering to accommodate the needs of its large working-class community. At that time, without government intervention, poor women in Paris had to fend for themselves.²⁴⁸ The government intervention into the lives of the poor in this fashion was unheard of during the July Monarchy and underlined the shifting attitudes about government intervention under Napoléon III.

Hausmann and Changes for Lavoirs in Paris

In 1853, Louis Napoléon appointed Georges Eugène Hausmann as *Préfet de la Seine* who began a transformation of Paris' streets, buildings and sewer system. During the entire July Monarchy, the *Préfet de la Seine* was Rambuteau, who had been concerned with the reorganization and hygiene of Paris as well.²⁴⁹ Hausmann continued Rambuteau's project and enlarged it. Rambuteau had focused his priorities on improving the circulation of traffic and opening up the city, just as Hausmann would do for his planned renovations.²⁵⁰ Hausmann sought to reorder Paris to render it cleaner and more functional to enable business and to prevent epidemics. There were also changes to the structure of the *Conseil d'Hygiène* in keeping with the concern to ameliorate the city in terms of hygiene. Physicians, chemists and architects interested in public hygiene continued to

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ For social attitudes towards government welfare for women, see Fuchs, *Poor and Pregnant in Paris*, chapter two.

²⁴⁹ Jordan, *Transforming Paris*, 106; Nicholas Papayanis, *Planning Paris before Hausmann* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), 170.

²⁵⁰ Papayanis, *Planning Paris before Hausmann*, 151.

dominate *Conseil*; however, the *Préfet de Police* created the position of Secretary General, which would allow the administration to have a representative in every meeting and bring the *Conseil* even closer to the city administration.²⁵¹

Because the rents in Paris rose during the Haussmannization of the city, the numbers of *lavoirs* continued to grow in the *banlieue* during the second half of the 1850s, which would be annexed in 1860. There was only one small *lavoir* opened on Rue des Tournelles in the third *arrondissement* of Paris during the last five years of the decade that could provide places for ten women.²⁵² Haussmann forged ahead with the reorganization of Paris, which had gathered momentum by mid-decade. He cleared slums in the center of Paris in order to widen and straighten streets to bring light and air to the dwellings. The restructuring gave rise to land speculation.²⁵³ The property developers soon realized that building affordable housing was not as lucrative as high-end dwellings. Consequently, the slums Haussmann had razed were not being replaced by other alternatives for the popular classes or the poor. Thus, many inhabitants of Paris went to the *banlieue* in favor of lower-cost housing.²⁵⁴

²⁵¹ ADS, DO9 dossier 31, Correspondance du Préfet de la Seine au Maire de Passy, nomination de Charles Poisson, secrétaire général au Conseil d'Hygiène publique. 31 août 1853.

²⁵² APP DB 133 Etablissements classés, autorisation d'exploitation du lavoir rue des tournelles, 23 juin 1855.

²⁵³ Shapiro, *Housing the Poor of Paris*, 36

²⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 40

The migration to the *banlieue* is indicated in the records for laundry establishments. As the rents increased in Paris, the barely profitable *lavoirs* continued to leave Paris in favor of less expensive rents and more tolerant neighbors. The *lavoirs* found a hospitable environment in the less affluent neighborhoods and between 1855 and 1857, six *lavoirs* opened in La Chapelle. The most popular sites for *lavoirs* were in the communes of La Chapelle and Belleville with six new establishments each, which were located just outside of the walls of Paris and would be absorbed into the city in 1861. These were working-class sections and the authorizations to open *lavoirs* indicated that there were no oppositions from the neighbors for any of the establishments.²⁵⁵ While Haussmann dug new sewer lines for drainage and built separate lines to deliver potable water in Paris, increasing the sewer system by fifty kilometers, he largely ignored the working-class neighborhoods.²⁵⁶ One of his critics charged that he had done the easy work in the center of Paris while avoiding the areas most in need like La Chapelle, La Villette, Bercy, Vaugirard and Grenelle, which were all areas that had a higher concentration of laundry facilities that needed improved

²⁵⁵ ADS, DO9 dossier 18, La Chapelle, Etablissements insalubres, autorisation lavoir Nanteuil 24 mars 1857. ADS, DO9 dossier 18, La Chapelle, Etablissements insalubres, autorisation lavoir Gay 22 juin 1857. ADS, DO9 dossier 18, La Chapelle, Etablissements insalubres, autorisation lavoir Limousin 5 octobre 1857. ADS, DO9 dossier 18, La Chapelle, Etablissements insalubres, autorisation lavoir Cholet 15 novembre 1857.

ADS, DO9 dossier 18, La Chapelle, Etablissements insalubres, autorisation lavoir Lecomte 17 août 1857.

²⁵⁶ Reid, *Paris Sewers and Sewermen*, 26.

sewers in order to operate in accordance with hygiene regulations.²⁵⁷ However, the authorizations indicated no special instructions for the drainage of waste waters for those establishments opening in La Villette.²⁵⁸ The inspector charged to investigate an application to open a *lavoir* on Rue de Constantine indicated that the business "...is well located and will fit in well with its surroundings."²⁵⁹ The authorizations for the commune of Belleville had the same salutary tone; the *Conseil d'Hygiène* approved all applications without demanding they build underground canals or even pits, which they had been so adamant about in the beginning of the decade and in the 1840s. The only application that was denied was because of the neighborhood, not the water drainage. The owner had wished to locate his business at Place Ménilmontant.²⁶⁰ The neighbors had not submitted any opposition, but the inspector for the *Conseil d'Hygiène* decided that the location of the *lavoir* would be "prejudicial" to the place since there was also a church there, the Notre Dame de la Croix.²⁶¹ He stated in his report that the inevitable noise coming from the *lavoir* would disturb the church services. The

²⁵⁷ Shapiro, *Housing the Poor of Paris*, 45.

²⁵⁸ ADS, DO9 dossier 42, La Villette, Etablissements insalubres, autorisation lavoir Lecollier 5 août 1857. ADS, DO9 dossier 42, La Villette, Etablissements insalubres, autorisation lavoir Linart 12 novembre 1858. ADS Do9 dossier 42, La Villette, Etablissements insalubres, autorisation lavoir Chelins 25 septembre 1858.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., ADS Do9 dossier 42, La Villette, Etablissements insalubres, autorisation lavoir Chelins 25 septembre 1858.

²⁶⁰ ADS, DO9 dossier 10 Belleville, Etablissements insalubres, autorisation lavoir Duchemin 27 avril 1857.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

laundresses were not appropriate neighbors for a church because of their reputation for being loud and immodest. There was no opposition to the four *lavoirs* built in La Villette during the last five years in the decade because it was a working-class neighborhood whose residents were employed by the *lavoirs*. In Charonne, the only prescriptions from the *Conseil* were to build chimneys high enough not to inconvenience the neighborhood with smoke.²⁶² Because they were in the banlieue and there was no opposition from the neighbors the *Conseil* was willing to let the *lavoirs* open.²⁶³

In contrast to the eastern *banlieue*, which had a primarily working-class population, the western outskirts of Paris hosted wealthier residents who had moved out of the city to build grand houses. Consequently, Haussmann increased his attention to the western banlieue because its residents were more influential and because the commune of Passy enjoyed sewer services.²⁶⁴ The *lavoirs* had no problems with authorizations because there was an underground canal that ran the length of Rue St. Denis and connected to the Rue de Longchamps, which was part of the Parisian sewer system.²⁶⁵

²⁶² ADS, DO9 Charonne, Etablissements insalubres, autorisation lavoir Huart, 20 mars 1856.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Shapiro, *Housing the Poor of Paris*, 50.

²⁶⁵ ADS, DO9 dossier 31 Passy, Etablissements insalubres. Autorisation lavoir Levêque 21 septembre 1857.

To the consternation of the laundry establishments, the sewers did not always function properly. In the commune of Gentilly, for example, the construction of the waste deposit tank in the Quartier Maison Blanche was meant to be a step forward in the hygiene of Paris and the *banlieue* toward which the Bièvre flowed.²⁶⁶ The city administration decided that the cost of building the tank could be assigned to the funds for building and repairing the sewers. The tank served to keep waste water out of the Bièvre and stop it from giving off putrid and rotten odors.²⁶⁷ The problem was that the Bièvre could not be dredged easily to allow the water to flow more swiftly. The bed of the river was mud and sand and gave off horrible odors when the sewer services had tried to dredge it. The engineers argued that the tank would present no inconveniences and would improve the smell of the Bièvre.²⁶⁸ The engineers supervised the building of the tank, completing it in November 1857. In June of 1858, the office of the *Préfet de la Seine* received a petition signed by three hundred laundresses and thirty male owners of *blanchisseries* located on the Bièvre.²⁶⁹ They complained that since the addition of the sewers in the Quartier Maison Blanche, all types of impurities infected the river and gave off a fetid odor. One owner stated that the impurity of

²⁶⁶ ADS, D4S3 dossier 8, Service hydraulique. Gentilly, Pétition au service de l'établissement d'un bassin à dépôt, service des ponts et chaussées. 5 septembre 1857.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ ADS, D4S3 dossier 8, Service hydraulique. Gentilly, rapport de l'ingénieur ordinaire des ponts et chaussées. 11 novembre 1857.

the water did not allow him “...to serve the public health” using the discourse of the *Conseil d’Hygiène* to better gain their attention.²⁷⁰ They appealed to the antiquated theory of miasmas, claiming that when the sewer men emptied the tank, a passerby could suffocate and the odors could make the neighbors ill; reducing the problem to the most vital, they argued that the situation was simply untenable for their businesses.²⁷¹ The engineer Gilles Petit, working in service of the *Préfet de la Seine* answered the petition in August of 1858. He reiterated that the problem the *blanchisseries* workers were unhappy about – the sewer system backing up into the water they took out of the Bièvre – was not because the sewer was built incorrectly. Rather, the problems stemmed from the Bièvre needing to be dredged – which no one wanted to finance – and not the sewer system itself.²⁷² One solution the engineer proposed was to direct the sewer water into the dead arm of the Bièvre. However, this option was – admittedly – not a viable solution, since he later stated that the dead arm of the Bièvre was already infected and drained directly into the Seine. He then used a different tone, underlining that the businesses on the dead arm of the Bièvre were much larger and more important than the petitioners, the owners of the *blanchisseries*. The engineer further explained that the problem could be fixed by hooking up the waste deposit tank to

²⁷⁰ ADS, D4S3 dossier 8, Service hydraulique. Gentilly, pétition des Blanchisseries Moulin-des-Prés au Préfet de la Seine. 9 juin 1858.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² ADS, D4S3 dossier 8, Service hydraulique. Gentilly, rapport de l’ingénieur ordinaire des ponts et chaussées. 5 août 1858.

other sewers that emptied into the Seine, which would cost at least Fr 100,000.²⁷³

In the closing sentence, he scoffed at the idea of improving the water for the laundry establishments who “everyday infect the water of the Bièvre.”²⁷⁴ The chief engineer shared his opinions and chose to deny the petitioners any recourse for their problem. This attitude from the city administration on this problem reflects the idea that the laundry establishments were nuisances that did more harm than good; they did not merit the same type of considerations as other types of businesses. Moreover, there was no discussion of the water quality affecting the health of the laundresses or their clients.

In contrast, when faced with Napoléon III’s *lavoir*, the *Conseil d’Hygiène* was more supportive of laundry establishments. The general work report of 1859 chronicled the *Lavoir Napoléon* and the benefits it presented for the poor and working classes in central Paris.²⁷⁵ The report underlined that although the plans for that particular *lavoir* came from England, it was actually France that built the first *lavoir* in 1837, compared to the English model of 1842 first seen in Liverpool. The *Conseil* reported that it had always been supportive and interested in laundry facilities multiplying in all the neighborhoods of Paris and that the new *lavoir* provided a model for others to build from. Yet, upon examination of the responses and conditions for authorizing *lavoirs* within Paris, this rhetoric seems

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ ADS, VD6 dossier 80, Procès verbaux des séances, Commission d’Hygiène et de Salubrité du 12 octobre 1852 au 31 décembre 1859, juillet 12 1857.

hollow. When circumstances were not perfect, the *Conseil* would not approve the business unless the owner made costly changes to the environment, or the facility was not approved at all based on complaints from neighbors. The Minister of Commerce wrote that the city needed to support the *lavoirs* that were of great importance to the poor by reducing prices of terrain and giving concessions for water; this support had yet to be demonstrated by the end of the decade.²⁷⁶ This discourse confirms that the ideas of Ministers and the Emperor did not always translate into action for individual *lavoir* owners.

The Lavoir Napoléon and the Acceptance of Laundry Facilities

New ideas and regulations for *lavoirs* emerged from the building of the Lavoir Napoléon, as well as from new advances in technology that would shape the business in the coming decades. The Lavoir Napoléon was under more scrutiny than a private facility because the *Conseil d'Hygiène* used it as a model in which to observe the laundresses and the uses of the facility. The *Conseil d'Hygiène* counseled against using the most corrosive chemicals for laundering, like *chlorure de chaux*, which had been in free use since the advent of *lavoirs*, but left the enforcement of what types of chemicals laundresses used to the establishments. The *Conseil* also pointed out the benefits of heating water and washing in one space, instead of having the process spread out in around the city in dwellings that were crowded. They argued that the steam was not good for the lungs of the inhabitants or the buildings where the steam could penetrate the walls

²⁷⁶ ADS, VD6 dossier 3, Compte Rendu des travaux du Conseil d'Hygiène publique et de salubrité 1849-1859, 15 Septembre 1862.

and break down the building materials.²⁷⁷ The *Conseil d'Hygiène* indicated that the drying rooms supplied with hot air dried the clothes more quickly and enabled the women who used the *lavoir* to take home dry clothes instead of drying them in their own rooms, coming back to the problem of water damage.

In the last paragraph of the 1862 report of the *Conseil d'Hygiène*, it heralded a new technological advance for *lavoirs*. A *lavoir* on Rue Popincourt in Belleville, which became part of Paris in 1860, had begun using machines that completely mechanized the washing process. The owner had equipped the large tanks that the laundresses used for the hot water portion of laundering with an arm at the bottom that agitated the laundry the entire time it was in the hot water. The hot water process usually took about ten or twelve hours with laundresses taking turn agitating the laundry with a long wooden paddle. The agitator meant the time the process took could be cut in half to around six hours; the tanks could be much larger since there was no laundress needing to reach the bottom to agitate all the linens properly; it only took eight people to do one thousand kilograms of laundry. These machines were put to use primarily in large establishments like *blanchisseries* who had clients with large-scale needs such as hospitals and restaurants. The agitator also made destructive processes – like brushing with stiff brushes that eventually caused holes in the laundry – obsolete.²⁷⁸ The *Conseil d'Hygiène* favored the mechanical additions immediately, pointing out the health advantages of cleaner laundry. There is no evidence that these changes were

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid

welcomed or shunned by laundresses. However the machines made laundering, which was back-breaking work- a bit easier. It would be easy to surmise that they were not disappointed if the *lavoir* a professional laundress or a woman doing her family's laundry used incorporated this technology.

As the decade came to a close, there were four petitions to establish *bateaux-lavoirs* in the *banlieue* illustrating that the increase of *lavoirs* in all areas surrounding Paris had taken the rest of the inexpensive properties bordering the Seine and Bièvre; the only place left was the river itself. However, the need for laundry facilities was not diminishing. Rising standards for bodily hygiene added to the increasing population made laundry facilities more in demand than ever.²⁷⁹ The navigation engineers had no reservations about allowing these facilities to grow and approved all the applications for their establishment. Yet, the proposed *bateaux-lavoirs* were not small; they averaged twenty-six meters in length. The mayor of Bercy, for example, welcomed the establishment of a *bateau-lavoir* in his commune.²⁸⁰ He stated: "I look forward with pleasure at the projected establishment. This *bateau-lavoir* will do Bercy well in light of its tremendous growth in the last five years. It will facilitate cheap washing for poor families. In consequence we are taken to welcome this project favorably."²⁸¹ It cost five

²⁷⁹ Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant*, xii; Alain Corbin, *Time, Desire and Horror: Towards a History of the Senses*. trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 65.

²⁸⁰ APP, DA 336 Navigation. Bercy, Autorisation bateau-lavoir Prochon, 19 août 1859.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

centimes per hour or forty centimes for the day to wash at this facility. This was the same mayor that used communal funds to build a *lavoir* that would provide laundering facilities at a reduced price modeled after the *Lavoir* Napoléon.

Not every *bateau-lavoir* was welcomed as warmly as that in Bercy. In the western communes, the concern was keeping the property values intact, confirming the differences that had arisen between the eastern half of Paris and the wealthier western areas. The mayor of Neuilly approved the application for a *bateau-lavoir* in that city, but only with reservations. The attitudes about uses of urban space prevalent in Paris began to influence the *banlieue*. The engineers approved the boat with a glass chassis to protect the laundresses from the elements, but turned down the request to hang clothes on the river banks explaining that "...it would be an alienation of public domain and even in a place not frequented it would produce a disagreeable effect for the view."²⁸² The engineers were concerned that hanging laundry on the river banks would, in effect, be a tacit approval for private businesses and individuals to use public property for their own purposes. In Paris, the restriction on hanging laundry on the river occurred during Napoléon's reign. Concerns about how the laundry would affect the appearance of the river bank reflected the changes to the use and look of urban space already taking place inside the city.

The *bateau-lavoir* proposed in Courbevoie had a more hostile reception, not from the mayor or navigation engineers, but from its future neighbor, a private

²⁸² Ibid.

resident.²⁸³ The mayor denied the original place requested because it would be too far from the center of the town and therefore too hard to observe it and ensure the business followed regulations. The owner agreed to move the requested placement, which happened to be in front of a private residence. The mayor saw nothing wrong with this place, but the resident was very opposed to it. He wrote to the mayor on more than three occasions to find a solution more suited to his taste. He argued that the *bateau-lavoir* "...would destroy the spirit of amelioration that has taken hold on the western side of Paris."²⁸⁴ He further stated that "the river is not for the establishments of individuals and one should respect the rights of the residents first, then the locale and its improvement. We want to attract the affluent population who will not live next to such an establishment. There is a large development happening in Paris near the Bois de Boulogne and a beautiful road to connect the Porte de Suresnes, making a loop back to the Bois. I don't think it is right to sacrifice such a bright future to this *bateau-lavoir*, an industry so inconvenient."²⁸⁵ The resident's argument echoed the mayor of Neuilly's decision regarding public space and its use for private business. As long as the bateaux-lavoir did not use the banks for hanging laundry the mayor responded that for reasons of regulation enforcement, he saw no impediment the *bateau-*

²⁸³ APP, DA 336 Navigation. Neuilly, Autorisation bateau-lavoir Lavarin, 9 novembre 1859.

²⁸⁴ APP, DA 336 Navigation. Courbevoie, Autorisation bateau-lavoir Dupuit, 20 Septembre 1859.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

lavoir would be stationed at the pre-determined place.²⁸⁶ The mayor in the banlieue would only accept the boat in his commune if he could make it conform to standards of appearance for the area. He recognized that some residents needed the facility, however he was not willing to have the installation if it meant drastically decreasing the aesthetic value of his commune.

Conclusion

The exportation of laundry facilities out of Paris suited the goals of the *Préfet de la Seine* and the *Conseil d'Hygiène*: First, to control the development of a potentially dangerous industry that required drainage Paris could not accommodate and move it to locations that could. Second, to move the poverty associated with the *lavoirs* outside of central Paris. The needs of the changing city contributed to making the presence of the poor out of place in the city at the very time their numbers in the city had swelled. Once the facilities were outside of the city, the *Conseil d'Hygiène* was less concerned about water drainage issues. For laundry services inside the city, Napoléon III had to fund the *lavoir* at the Marché du Temple with his own money, which included building an underground canal to the Seine for drainage. Most *lavoir* owners did not have this kind of capital and thus moved to where construction was easier, outside of the city. Moving out of Paris meant the owners of *blanchisseries* could build new buildings on large tracts of land, which facilitated large buildings to house the many washing processes plus heated rooms devoted to drying, as well as taking care of water drainage by

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

having drainage fields. Haussmannization did not remedy the issues the laundry facilities faced; there was still a rudimentary sewer system both inside of Paris and in the *banlieue*, which would not be completed until the Third Republic. The problems with laundry establishments had not been solved; they were simply moved out of sight and further from the poor women of Paris who were left in need. Chapter four will show that shifts in uses of urban space persisted. It will also reveal that changes in attitudes towards the *bateaux-lavoirs* mirrored changes in the conceptualization of the uses of the Seine in Paris.

Chapter 4

POLICY SHIFTS TOWARDS THE BATEAUX-LAVOIRS AND THE PREFETS DE LA SEINE: 1860-1885

Chapter three explored the inconsistencies of the *Préfet de Police* and *Préfet de la Seine* in the treatment of *lavoirs* in the *banlieue* and in Paris. Compared to the applications to open *lavoirs* within the city of Paris, which were difficult to obtain, the authorizations to build *lavoirs* in the *banlieue* did not reflect the same anxiety about water issues. The authorizations and rejections, which differed under the regimes reflected the prevailing ideas about government intervention for the poor. The *Conseil d'Hygiène* supported the *lavoirs* in the *banlieue* because they wanted to move the laundry establishments outside of the city which the *Préfet de Police*, who directed the *Conseil*, supported. The *Conseil* contended that the establishments were health threats that did not belong in Paris. They moved the matter that was out of place in the city to its outskirts, where laundry establishments would fit. Ironically, these areas that were outside of the city in 1820-40s, became part of Paris under Napoléon III. The *Préfets* allowed the segregation of *lavoirs* because the *Conseil* contended that they would spread disease with their poorly drained water. The city administration was less concerned with the *banlieue* because it had a lower population density than central Paris before mid-century. However, the prime land in the *banlieue* to build terrestrial facilities became scarce quickly because the one hundred *lavoirs* built between 1849 and 1859 took the inexpensive land with convenient places next to

natural drainage.²⁸⁷ To the contrary, in Paris, the inflexible stance of the hygiene inspectors towards applications to open *lavoirs*, the opposition of the neighbors to have such an establishment nearby, and the rudimentary state of the sewer system to service facilities remote to natural drainage, made opening a *lavoir* in central Paris very complicated. These factors contributed to a shortage of laundry establishments for the poor in the central *arrondissements*. The *Conseil d'Hygiène*'s stance on *lavoirs* in central Paris resulted in restricting access to laundry resources for the poor – laundresses and poor women alike. The *bateaux-lavoirs* were the only inexpensive laundry facilities serving the center of Paris. However, Eugène Haussmann, the *Préfet de la Seine* at the time, sought to eliminate the *bateaux-lavoirs* within the city to free the river Seine of objects that sullied its appearance and obstructed other commercial traffic. Haussmann gave no thought to the many women who lived near the Seine who would be left without a place to launder.

This chapter will demonstrate that the political context and power of the *Préfet de la Seine* was crucial in deciding the fate of the *bateaux-lavoirs*. Ideas about the *bateaux-lavoirs* shifted with the *Préfet de la Seine*'s political agenda of the time. During his *préfecture* (1853-1870), Georges Eugène Haussmann wanted to create a clear thoroughfare for commercial traffic and align the appearance of the river, the symbol of Paris, with the changes he made to the appearance of the city. He supported the “Bateaux Omnibus” a municipally-operated public

²⁸⁷ ADS, VD6 dossier 3, Compte Rendu des travaux du Conseil d'Hygiène publique et de salubrité 1849-1859, 18 Septembre 1862.

transportation company – that did not do laundry – over the *bateaux-lavoirs*. In contrast, Ferdinand Duval, the *Préfet de la Seine* from 1873 to 1879, did not enforce Haussmann's *ordonnance* and supported the *bateaux-lavoirs* because they had public utility. He approved the repairs of old establishments and was favorable to new establishments. From 1879 until 1883, the following *Préfets* followed the same trend, which indicate that the idea of what presented an obstacle was in the attitude of the politicians rather than the physical impediments of the *bateaux-lavoirs*. However, as political needs changed, the *bateaux-lavoirs* came under threat again after the last decade of the nineteenth century. Eugène Poubelle's *préfecture* (1883-1896) focused on hygiene and order, continuing Haussmann's vision. The *Conseil d'Hygiène* contended that the facilities were polluting the river and should be eliminated for public health. Poubelle agreed with the *Conseil* and decided to enforce Haussmann's *ordonnance*. This chapter will also uncover some of the representations of laundresses set in the Second Empire and Third Republic that contributed to negative attitudes regarding their places of work. The representations in this chapter mirror the discourse about laundresses discussed in the second chapter in regards to eliminating the *bateaux-lavoirs*. They were disgraceful to Paris because they showed poverty.

The Troubling Presence of Bateaux-Lavoirs in Paris

The *Préfets*' treatment of all types of laundry facilities for the poor revealed their ambivalence between providing for the needs of less affluent residents of Paris and developing businesses not associated with poverty, unlike laundry. Moreover, *lavoirs* in the center of Paris did not get built to fill the

lacunae that the *bateaux-lavoirs* would leave if the city administration eliminated every laundry establishment on the river. From a legal perspective, eradicating the *bateaux-lavoirs* also meant violating the residents' right to use the river for domestic purposes, which had been outlined when Louis XIII gave concessions to the *bateaux-lavoirs*.²⁸⁸

As Haussmann sought to reconstruct Paris, gentrifying the city, the *bateaux-lavoirs* did not fit with his aims. He accused the boats of presenting an “...*aspect disgracieux*;” the *bateaux-lavoirs* would not survive unless they conformed to his vision of the river.²⁸⁹ In Paris, he began to regulate the *bateaux-lavoirs* on the Seine according to the appearances of the *bateaux*. He created guidelines regarding their size, color and shape. Haussmann ordered that the boats should present a uniform appearance to fit with his new standards elsewhere in the city.²⁹⁰ For example, in 1862, he approved the replacement of a boat stationed at Pont St. Louis on the grounds that it measured no more than eighteen meters in length and five meters wide, stipulating that the owner was to paint the hull of the boat in black with the top in grey.²⁹¹ The prescription of regularity for the façade

²⁸⁸ APP, DA 336 Navigation, Mémoire pour les propriétaires des bateaux-lavoirs établis sur la seine, 1868.

²⁸⁹ APP, DA 336 Navigation. Correspondance du Préfet de la Seine au Préfet de Police, Ordonnance du 17 juillet 1867 concernant les bateaux-lavoirs dans la traversée de Paris.

²⁹⁰ APP, DA 337 Navigation. Correspondance du Préfet de la Seine à Préfet de Police, réglementation relative aux bateaux-lavoirs dans la traversée de Paris, 8 août 1862.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

of the boats reflected his previous commitment to unify the façades of the buildings lining his new boulevards.

The *bateaux-lavoirs* encountered fierce opposition from their would-be neighbors on the river and the river banks, which reveal the negative attitudes regarding *bateaux-lavoirs* from the people who did not use them. This attitude stemmed from the idea that they did not fit in Paris and were not welcome on the Seine. For example, a proposed *bateau-lavoir* at the limit between Bercy and Paris initiated resistance. An examination of oppositions to the *bateau-lavoir* revealed that the neighbors just behind the establishment had lodged a complaint that it would pollute the Seine with all types of organic materials and noxious smells.²⁹² However, the inspectors for navigation asserted that there was another laundry boat just twenty meters away that had operated for more than a decade without complaints. They defended the proposed *bateau*, stating that, because the waters of the Seine did not flow as swiftly in that area, it did not preclude the laundry establishment from being built and stationed there when “it is recognized by everyone as in the public’s interest.”²⁹³ The *Préfet de Police* initiated another examination in the week following the navigation inspector’s investigation, which defended the utility of the establishment in terms of women’s safety and ability to access water to launder with. The report revealed that the *bateau-lavoir* was

²⁹² APP, DA 336 Navigation, Enquête Inspecteur Général, 20 juillet 1864.

²⁹³ Ibid.

“incontestably in the public utility despite the oppositions.”²⁹⁴ He indicated that, in contrast to the communal *lavoir*, which was fed by a stream that did not flow in the summer season, the boat would create a sheltered place to wash in all conditions and in all seasons. Without it, the women would be required to walk to the Seine and wash on the banks, which was formally illegal since 1827.²⁹⁵ Furthermore, the river was dangerous for laundresses in this area because the haulage ropes operating just outside of the city sometimes came into the area and could throw them into the river. The antagonists’ arguments concentrated on the undesirability of attracting more *laveuses* –washerwomen – to the area, intimating that there would be more unacceptable behavior, and that it would ruin the industry of *blanchissage* that both men and women worked in because more women would do their own laundry.²⁹⁶ The *Préfet de Police* decided to allow the *bateau-lavoir*.

The *Lavoir Napoléon* closed in 1862, demonstrating the difficult nature of running a *lavoir* in the center of Paris and the unwillingness of the city administration to keep it open despite it being built and financed by Napoléon III himself, and despite its usefulness for the poor. Indeed, only two years before its demise, the hygiene and safety inspector had remarked – in the application for more water boilers – that “the establishment rendered immense services to a

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 3

²⁹⁵ APP, DA 336 Navigation. Arrêté 13 juin 1827, Le droit de propriété ne doit faire obstacle à l’emploi de l’eau par les tiers pour les usages domestiques.

²⁹⁶ APP, DA 336 Navigation. Enquête Inspecteur Général, 20 juillet 1864.

population without means.”²⁹⁷ The *lavoir* closed after the family who rented it went bankrupt.²⁹⁸ The family reported that it had been difficult to keep the establishment running with the high price of water subscriptions and building rent.²⁹⁹ Napoléon had commissioned an English family to operate it for the first six years; later, the Amable family rented the building and operated the *lavoir*. However, their tenure only endured three years until the family breached their lease.³⁰⁰ Following an incident involving the Amable family, the *Préfet de Police* opened an investigation into their management of the *lavoir*. According to the *Commissaire de Police*’s (Police Chief’s) report, five or six members of the family were fighting in the street over who was really in charge of the *lavoir*.³⁰¹ The laundresses who witnessed the fight reported that the brothers had hurled insults at them. The *Commissaire* added that “the public had accustomed itself to considering the direction of this establishment as directly tied to the house of the Emperor. Unfortunately, they have a position that puts them in contact with the

²⁹⁷ APP, DB 226 Lavoirs. Préfet de Police, rapport des minutes de la séance du 23 janvier 1864.

²⁹⁸ APP, DA 46 Lavoir et Bains Napoléon. Rapport de l’Inspecteur Général au Préfet de Police, 5 Octobre 1863.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ APP, DA 46 Lavoir et Bains Napoléon. Rapport au Préfet de Police de l’Inspecteur Général, 10 Octobre 1862.

³⁰¹ APP, DA 46 Lavoir et Bains Napoléon. Rapport de l’Inspecteur Général au Préfet de Police, 30 octobre 1862.

public, especially the public of the working class.”³⁰² Haussmann, *Préfet de la Seine*, took the opportunity to expropriate the property to build the *Mairie* of the third *arrondissement* of Paris.³⁰³ Haussmann selected to use the property for his own administration – turning the space into a service for the government – instead of maintaining the laundry business to support the working class in central Paris. In theory, the *Préfet de Police* and the *Préfet de la Seine* supported terrestrial *lavoirs*; in practice, the facilities were scarce within the city due to oppositions from neighbors and water drainage problems, and because the businesses could not charge enough (despite their high frequentation, its users were unable to pay higher prices to launder) to cover their costs (high overhead of property taxes, costly maintenance, expensive rents in central Paris).

In 1865, the general report from the *Conseil d’Hygiène* highlighted the obstacles to opening public laundry facilities in Paris. The report outlined that the quantity of *lavoirs* in Paris did not compare with that of *blanchisseries* being opened in the *banlieue*.³⁰⁴ Unsurprisingly, the *lavoirs* were not being built in the city to replace the *bateaux-lavoirs* since the former enjoyed little support from the *Conseil d’Hygiène*. *Blanchisseries* were the choice of laundry establishments for

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁰³ APP, DA 46 Lavoir et Bains Napoléon. Procès-verbal de la commission pour l’établissement d’une Mairie au XVème arrondissement.

³⁰⁴ APP, *Rapport général sur les travaux du conseil d’hygiène publique et de salubrité du département de la seine pour les années 1862-1866* (Publié par ordre du Préfet de Police, Bouquin, Imprimeur de la Préfecture de Police, Paris : 1870), 300.

the affluent. These establishments were able to get the laundry back in a matter of days because they had larger cauldrons in which to wash, and had drying rooms and ironing services attached to the business. The *Conseil d'Hygiène* rejected three applications for *lavoirs* within Paris because the *lavoirs* were contiguous with a school or apartment building and thus presented problems, namely being too noisy and producing steam that could seep into the building's walls.³⁰⁵ The report concluded that there was more opposition from the neighbors to open a *lavoir* in Paris than in the rural communes because it would be in close proximity with their neighbors, bringing undesirable elements like laundresses with it.³⁰⁶ The report summarized the number of *lavoirs* within Paris compared to those in the *banlieue*. In 1860, there were twelve establishments within Paris versus forty-one in the *banlieue*; by 1865, there were only five within the city compared to one hundred-fifty outside the city's new boundaries.³⁰⁷

The difficulties in establishing *lavoirs* in Paris meant that *bateaux-lavoirs* remained the only real solution to the problem of access to laundry facilities in central Paris by the working class. Although the city administrators like the *Préfet de la Seine*, *Préfet de Police*, and the Department of Navigation had entertained the idea of eliminating *bateaux-lavoirs* within Paris since the second decade of the nineteenth century, the *Préfet de la Seine* begrudgingly allowed a new *bateau-*

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 303.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

lavoir to be stationed on the Quai d'Anjou in the fourth *arrondissement*, in the very heart of Paris in 1865. Haussmann also placed a condition on the establishment that the owner could not repair it without permission, or if he did, he would risk having the boat removed at the owner's expense.³⁰⁸ Haussmann then extended his *Arrêté* for the *bateau-lavoir* at the Quai d'Anjou to all other *bateaux-lavours* being purchased and sold, on the condition that the owner obtain permission before repairing.³⁰⁹

Bateaux-Lavours under Attack: The Defense against Haussmann

Increasing the restrictions he placed on *bateaux-lavours* owners within Paris during the 1860s, Haussmann decided that it was time to rid Paris of the *bateaux-lavours* and banish the establishments. In 1867, Haussmann requested that the *Préfet de Police* investigate the impediments to creating a larger “*Compagnie des Bateaux Omnibus*” with more stops and larger boats. The *Préfet de Police* had created the company to serve the *Exposition Universelle* twenty years before. The Bateaux Omnibus was a city-owned company. The *Préfet de Police* decided on the number of boats, the hours and tariffs.³¹⁰ The city was trying to close private businesses to make way for a municipally-owned business

³⁰⁸ APP, DA 336 Navigation, Correspondance de l'Inspecteur Général au Préfet de Police, 12 janvier 1865.

³⁰⁹ APP, DB 336 Navigation, Ordonnance du Préfet de la Seine relative au bateaux-lavoir « Quimbel » 25 février 1865. APP, DB 336 Navigation, Correspondance de l'Inspecteur Général au Préfet de Police, 5 mars 1866.

³¹⁰ APP DA 337 Navigation, Correspondance de la maison de l'Empereur au Préfet de Police concernant la création de la Compagnie des Bateaux-Omnibus, 8 janvier 1867.

which underlined the politically sensitive nature of the report on the *bateaux-lavoirs*.

In 1867, Haussmann wrote a new *arrêté* concerning the *bateaux-lavoirs* inside of Paris.³¹¹ At the time, there were seventy five *bateaux* within Paris from Bercy to Pont Iéna.³¹² In addition to the terms that no repair or modification can take place without prior permission, the new rules stipulated that the *Préfet de la Seine* would not approve any repairs that would extend the life of the laundry establishment. The section that troubled the owners above all was the stipulation that the government could eliminate the boat without any indemnification. If executed, this *arrêté* signaled the end of a business that began in Paris with concessions from Louis XIII 16 September 1623.³¹³

Consequently, a group of twenty-two *bateaux-lavoirs* owners immediately pooled their money and hired a lawyer in an attempt to strike the law down. The

³¹¹ APP, DA 336 Navigation. Mémoire pour les propriétaires des bateaux-lavoirs établis sur la seine, 1868, p22, 17 juillet 1867 : Arrêté réglementaire: « Art. 1 : nul ne pourra faire des réparations ou modifications aux bateaux à lessive (...) dans la traversée de Paris *sans permission préalable* obtenu, à cet effet, *une permission spéciale de l'administration*. Art. 2 : les réparations *ayant pour résultat de prolonger la durée des bateaux* à lessive ne seront pas autorisées sans avoir préalablement obtenu ... Art. 3 : Toute infraction aux articles précédents ou aux arrêtés d'autorisation rendus par application de l'article 1^{er} *entraînera la suppression immédiate et sans indemnité* du bateau auquel elle s'appliquera. Art. 4 : Le droit de suppression *sans indemnité* à un moment quelconque, et pour raison d'utilité publique, est expressément réservé. »

³¹² Ibid., 18

³¹³ Ibid., 6

case went to the *Cour de Cassation* – the highest appeal’s court, equivalent to the U.S. Supreme Court – and then the *Conseil d’Etat* for a final decision.

Their lawyer, Christophe Mazeau, worked as the *avocat au Conseil d’Etat* and at the *Cour de Cassation* from 1856 to 1869. He wrote a detailed report detailing the defense of the owners.³¹⁴

Mazeau used four arguments in his appeal to attack Haussmann’s *arrêté*.³¹⁵ The overarching argument in the report was that, by creating the *arrêté*, Haussmann had overstepped the legal boundaries of his powers as *Préfet de la Seine*.³¹⁶ The first argument supporting the *bateaux-lavoirs* owners against Haussmann drew on the original concession given by Louis XIII. In the report, he argued that the concessions for the two original concessionaries, La Grange and Marie, stipulated that they were to maintain the banks and build a bridge across the river Seine where they decided to place their *bateaux-lavoirs*.³¹⁷ The Pont Marie in Paris took his name from the *bateau-lavoir* Marie. The concessionaries had the right to pass the concession on to their heirs or anyone who bought their business. In effect, there were twenty-two descendants or concession holders of

³¹⁴ Extrait du « *Dictionnaire des Parlementaires français* », Robert et Cougny (1889). After his term, the electors of the Côte-d’Or chose him to serve on the Conseil Général and then as a representative to the Assemblée Nationale in the beginning of the Third Republic.

³¹⁵ APP, DA 336 Navigation, Mémoire pour les propriétaires des bateaux-lavoirs établis sur la seine, 1868, 71.

³¹⁶ Ibid., 70.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 22.

either La Grange or Marie still operating *bateaux-lavoirs* on the Seine within Paris. Since the concession held the owners responsible for the upkeep of the banks and building bridges, their concession was *à titre onéreux*, which meant they were entitled to an indemnity if the government seized or destroyed their business on the river for any reason.³¹⁸ In Haussmann's *arrêté*, he stated that there would be no indemnity for anyone. This was legal for other *bateaux-lavoirs* which had been established later, but not for the descendants of La Grange and Marie. Moreover, there was no time limit specified in the concession; thus, it could never expire. Mazeau further argued that, even during the Revolution, the revolutionaries had respected concessions for other businesses including the *bateaux-lavoirs*.³¹⁹ There had been other threats to the existence of the *bateaux-lavoirs* earlier in the nineteenth century. However, they were always saved by the municipal council of Paris, which would not go against precedent and deny the royal concession.³²⁰ The position had been reified by the Napoleonic government who created a new tax regime which the *bateaux-lavoirs* owners paid to the *Préfet de Police* who controlled the river and ports. The taxes were specifically for the upkeep of the banks and ports. Being taxed strengthened their legitimacy as being lawful and contributing to the good of the city.³²¹ Lastly, only the head of state could take away a royal concession.³²²

³¹⁸ Ibid., 24.

³¹⁹ Ibid., 32

³²⁰ Ibid., 18.

Mazeau's second argument was that the *Préfet de la Seine* had not consulted the *Préfet de Police* before he wrote the *arrêté*, and, in doing so, had abused his power. Thus, it was legally null since it did not have the approval of the *Préfet de Police*. The changing structure of power in the administration of Paris under Napoléon III played a role in the changing treatment of the *bateaux-lavoirs*. The sharing of administrative duties between the *Préfet de Police* and the *Préfet de la Seine* had, in reality, given the *Préfet de la Seine* power over both offices.³²³ In this atmosphere, the *Préfet de la Seine* could administrate the *bateaux-lavoirs* directly and without regard to the *Préfet de Police* who had not legislated against the establishments and had even protected them against opponents. Mazeau connected the mission of the *Préfet de Police*, set out by the Napoleonic regime, to safeguard the cleanliness of the city, which was in the original description of the post.³²⁴ The *bateaux-lavoirs* offered laundry services to the poor and, therefore, ensured the cleanliness of the poor and, by extension,

³²¹ Ibid., 19.

³²² Ibid., 41.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Arrêté du 12 messidor An VIII (1 juillet 1800) : les attributions de Préfet de Police consistent à procurer la liberté et la sûreté de la voie publique (art. 22), à assurer la salubrité de la cité (art. 23), à maintenir l'ordre et la tranquillité en surveillant les places et lieux publics, au nombre desquels l'article 53 mentionne spécialement la rivière, les établissements qui sont sur la rivière pour les blanchisseries, le laminage ou autres travaux. Art. 34 : Le Préfet de police dispose du droit de (...) requérir les réparations des ports, quais, abreuvoirs, bords, francs-bords, puits, (...) et des établissements et machines placés près de la rivière pour porter secours aux noyés, etc...

Paris.³²⁵ According to his argument, the *bateaux-lavoirs* should only be administrated by the *Préfet de Police*. He added that the *Préfet de Police* had required the *bateaux-lavoirs* to have first-aid kits, ropes, life boats and a guardian who could swim well. Thus, they were ensuring the safety of the river, as well as the nearby terrestrial inhabitants and the laundresses on the boats while also ensuring the hygiene and safety of the poor and Paris.³²⁶

Mazeau's third argument further highlighted that the decrepitude of the *bateaux-lavoirs* would make them unsafe to their users. Haussmann's *arrêté* stated that the owners of *bateaux-lavoirs* could make no repairs without previous permission from the *Préfet de la Seine* and that, if one did repair without permission, it would cause the immediate destruction of the business.³²⁷ Mazeau argued that the *arrêté* would endanger those using the establishments and that jurisprudence did not support the *arrêté*. No business had ever been subjected to this type of restriction. Anyone could be injured, or worse, drown if the boats could not be repaired in a timely fashion.³²⁸ He pointed out that even in cases where a factory or mill completely obstructed the river there was never any injunction on repairing the businesses.³²⁹ In effect, the *arrêté* devised a

³²⁵ APP, DA 336 Navigation, Mémoire pour les propriétaires des bateaux-lavoirs établis sur la seine, 1868, 53.

³²⁶ Ibid., 35.

³²⁷ Ibid., 22.

³²⁸ Ibid., 54.

³²⁹ Ibid., 60.

completely new sanction: the immediate destruction of a private business. Since there was no jurisprudence to support the new law, Mazeau charged Haussmann as being arbitrary and against business.³³⁰

In the fourth section of the report, Mazeau argued that no power could alienate a natural right from the people of Paris which, in this instance, was the use of water from the Seine for domestic purposes.³³¹ Natural rights were not contingent upon any particular law or government, but universal and inalienable, contrary to legal rights which derived from specific governments. Allen Wood argued that during the nineteenth century there was a decline in the validity of the idea of natural rights as a reaction to the French Revolution. The following governments were much more interested in establishing legal frameworks particular to their own ideas about rights.³³² There was already a ban on washing laundry on the banks of the river Seine within Paris.³³³ The only legal place to wash laundry was on the *bateaux-lavoirs*. Therefore, if the banks were forbidden,

³³⁰ Ibid., 63.

³³¹ Ibid., 65. « L'eau, comme substance destinée à satisfaire aux besoins naturels de l'homme est du droit naturel qui subsistent en dehors des règles du droit civil. »

³³² Allen W. Wood and Songsuk Susan Hahn, *Cambridge History of Philosophy in the 19th Century, 1790-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), xii.

³³³ APP, Navigation 336. Arrêté 13 juin 1827. Le droit de propriété ne doit faire obstacle à l'emploi de l'eau par les tiers pour les usages domestiques.

and there were no more *bateaux-lavoirs*, the people would be alienated from using the water of the Seine for domestic use.³³⁴

The argument for the public utility of the *bateaux-lavoirs* did not sway Haussmann who only viewed the boats as impediments to economic growth and eyesores which denigrated the capital. On the opposite side of the argument, Mazeau debated that it was Haussmann's decrees that hindered industry and economic growth. Unsurprisingly, neither antagonist even considered the rights of the poor women an issue. According to Mazeau's report, the *bateaux-lavoirs* would remain more efficacious and efficient than the terrestrial *lavoir*; the current of the river provided a more thorough rinse with cleaner water than in the *lavoir* where the laundresses rinsed many kilos of laundry coming from different customers in the same water.³³⁵ Since Napoléon III took English *lavoirs* as the model for the Lavoir Napoléon, the *bateaux-lavoirs* could be viewed as a point of pride because they presented an advantage to the population that London did not possess; it only had terrestrial laundries which cost households ten centimes more per kilo than in Paris on the *bateaux-lavoirs*.³³⁶

The *Conseil d'Etat*'s response to Mazeau's report reflected the reigning political attitude towards the *bateaux-lavoirs*. In the meeting of 22 July 1870, the *Conseil* voted to continue the suppression of the facilities. They rejected the claim

³³⁴ APP, DA 336 Navigation. Mémoire pour les propriétaires des bateaux-lavoirs établis sur la seine, 1868, 67.

³³⁵ Ibid., 19

³³⁶ Ibid.

that the *Préfet de la Seine* had taken too much power; the *Ordonnance* stipulated the shared powers of the *Préfets* were vague, and thus, Haussmann could not be charged.³³⁷ However, the administration would uphold the claim to indemnities to those holding concessions from La Grange or Marie.³³⁸ Surely, it was upholding the jurisprudence in regards to protecting business owners that mattered to Mazeau, not defending the rights of poor women to have access to the river to wash.

A New Life for the Bateaux-Lavoirs from the Siege of Paris until Poubelle

By the end of the Second Empire, the Parisian and French administration was soon to be disrupted. On 15 July 1870, France declared war on Prussia. The invasion of Paris by Prussian troops was a traumatic event. During the four-month siege of the city, the Prussians destroyed or blocked the water delivery system; consequently, the *bateaux-lavoirs* took on a new significance. They represented the only laundry facilities for Paris during the siege. The capture of Napoléon III and French troops at Sedan in September 1870, coupled with the siege of Paris, led to the surrender of France and the end of hostilities in January 1871. The surrender led to the formation of the Third Republic and to changing attitudes towards the *bateaux-lavoirs* based on the whim of the *Préfets de la Seine*. The

³³⁷ APP, Navigation 336, Ministre des travaux publics, Conseil d'Etat, Section du Contentieux, Séance du 22 juillet 1870. Commission pour l'étude des mesures à prendre en vue de la suppression des bateaux-lavoirs, établis sur la Seine, dans la traversée de Paris.

³³⁸ Ibid

service the *bateaux-lavoirs* had rendered during the siege spared them from further threats during the Commune.

The Prussian siege changed the way the *Préfets* would think about the *bateaux-lavoirs* until the mid 1880s. This change in attitude demonstrated that the boats filled a vital function to the city and the administration, which was unwilling to continue the campaign against the *bateaux-lavoirs* that Haussmann had started. In September of 1871, Léon Say, the new *Préfet de la Seine*, decided that he would not take any measures against the *bateaux-lavoirs* owners who went against the prescriptions of Haussmann.³³⁹ For ten years after the siege, the Third Republic tolerated and even supported the *bateaux-lavoirs*.

The negative attitude toward the *bateaux-lavoirs* within the city continued until the Second Empire ended. For instance, in 1871, the *bateau-lavoir* operated by the Prochon family requested to move to Ivry, just outside of Paris.³⁴⁰ The report outlined that Ivry was a popular place for *bateaux-lavoirs* and many had requested to be stationed there since it was in a working-class area and could still serve the residents of Paris who lived in the 12th and 13th *arrondissements*.³⁴¹ This may have been an overestimation of their use because the geography of the 12th *arrondissement* did not lend itself to easy access to the river. However, it did

³³⁹ APP, 336 Navigation. Correspondance du Préfet de la Seine à l'Inspecteur Général de la Navigation, 4 février 1876.

³⁴⁰ APP, 336 Navigation. Direction de l'Administration Préfectorale. Autorisation pour l'établissement d'un bateau-lavoir, Port d'Ivry, 4 octobre 1870.

³⁴¹ Ibid.

highlight the importance of the *bateaux-lavoirs* to the working-class area of Ivry. Jules Ferry, the *Préfet de la Seine* underlined that many *bateaux-lavoir* owners had made requests to be in that area, which he had denied. However, since the Prochon boat was a serious impediment within the city, Ferry was in favor of giving it preferential treatment and allowing it to station at the port of Ivry.³⁴²

During his *préfecture* (1871-1872), the *Préfet de la Seine* Léon Say was unwilling to arbitrarily eliminate a vital service to the poor of Paris. Say was avowedly against Haussmann and his strong-arm methods of reordering the city. Though the difficulties poor women faced were not necessarily relevant to him, he was a Liberal and supported the rights of small businesses. This shift of attitude from Haussmann also revealed that the *bateaux-lavoirs* were victims of the previous *Préfet de la Seine* who based his campaign on their appearance with no regard to the service they rendered or the establishment of businesses. The *Préfet de la Seine*, Say, authorized two new establishments in 1872.³⁴³ In one instance, he gave permission to a *bateau-lavoir* owner stationed at the Port de Grenelle in the 15th *arrondissement* to extend his boat another fifteen meters.³⁴⁴ This permission was over the objections of the navigation inspectors who

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ Ibid., 3.

³⁴⁴ APP, DA 336. Navigation. Service de la navigation, 6 avril 1873.

complained that the administration had suddenly changed opinion because the *bateaux-lavoirs* had rendered service during the Prussian siege of Paris.³⁴⁵

However, not everyone was pleased with the new tolerance towards laundry establishments. An article in the *Journal de Paris* chronicled the complaints they received from anonymous residents of Paris regarding laundry. “About the *buanderies* in the open: Hoping that we have a convention that puts an end to the universal hanging of shirts and rags, barely washed, in the public roads. These articles, floating on for several kilometers offers nothing gracious to the eye.”³⁴⁶ The city technocrats, like the engineers of navigation, were not pleased with the new tolerance the *Préfet de la Seine* Say lent to the *bateaux-lavoirs*. The inspectors communicated in reports that the administration had a tolerant stance that they found regrettable. Since Haussmann had given them the opportunity to clear the river of *bateaux-lavoirs*, the sudden reversal of opinion left them without the power to ameliorate the navigation as they saw fit – though *bateaux-lavoirs* were not actually physical impediments to navigation. Unsurprisingly, the engineers’ only concern was to make sure the commercial traffic on the Seine had ample room to maneuver and places to dock. The engineers of navigation signaled their frustration with the *bateaux-lavoirs*.³⁴⁷ These boats occupied some of the most valuable spaces on the river in terms of tourism and navigation, around the

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ APP, BA 336, Buanderies. *Paris-journal* 19 Février 1872, 5.

³⁴⁷ APP, DA 336, Navigation. Service de la navigation, rapport de l’inspecteur ordinaire, 4 février 1876.

Ile St. Louis and Ile de la Cité; however the stance of the new *Préfet de la Seine* did not deprive the poor residents of these laundry facilities. The inspectors of navigation reported that the *bateaux-lavoirs* owners had taken the opportunity to repair, replace and enlarge their establishments during this tolerant period.³⁴⁸

The decision of Ferdinand Duval, the next *Préfet de la Seine* from 1873 until 1879, illustrated his difficulties in compromising the two opposite viewpoints the *bateaux-lavoirs* presented to the administration. His experiences during the Franco-Prussian siege may have contributed to his lenient stance towards the *bateaux-lavoirs*. During the siege of Paris Duval was a captain in the *Garde Nationale* that the government mobilized to protect Paris.³⁴⁹ He witnessed the difficulties the residents had during the traumatic siege and the service the *bateaux-lavoirs* rendered. They were the only laundry establishments still working. The Prussians had cut the water lines so everyone depended on the river for laundry.

Duval's decisions in favor of the *bateaux-lavoirs* frustrated the engineers of navigation who wanted to continue Haussmann's project and sweep the boats off the Seine as it traversed Paris. In 1873, Duval declared that he would follow the prescriptions Haussmann had outlined for *bateaux-lavoirs* in his *Arrêté*. However, the inspector of navigation reported that "the *Préfet de la Seine* renounced, for the moment, taking the measures that would lead to its

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 2.

³⁴⁹ *Dictionnaire universel illustré, biographique et bibliographique, de la France contemporaine* (Paris : Boulangier, 1885), 217.

application.”³⁵⁰ The owner of a *bateau-lavoir* that was stationed on the Quai d’Orléans petitioned to keep the outer structure he had built to protect the women washing out of the weather and enclose a drying room on the top. The inspector for the *Préfet de Police* stated that the owner seemed careful and the establishment had served the low-income neighborhood around the area.³⁵¹ The inspector also pointed out that laundering with flowing water was much superior to any other choice. In the last sentence of the report, he added that he had not defended Haussmann’s *Arrêté*, which, the inspector insisted, was up to the *Préfet de la Seine*.³⁵² The inspector of navigation under the *Préfet de la Seine*’s engineer found that, while the boat did not follow Haussmann’s law, “...it did not seem that the time had come for the *Préfet de la Seine* to depart from the benevolence that has made itself a rule in these last years and it is within this frame that we accord the permission for this establishment.”³⁵³ Then, the report passed to the chief inspector who wanted to remind the *Préfet de la Seine* that “...it would be regrettable to the author if this boat becomes larger. The motives that have prompted the *Préfet [de la Seine]* to see the necessity of reducing the numbers of

³⁵⁰ APP, DA 337 Navigation, Rapport de l’ingénieur ordinaire, bateau-lavoir Bousquin Quai Bourbon, 3 mai 1872.

³⁵¹ APP, DA 337 Navigation, Direction des travaux, Préfet de la Seine à Préfet de la Police, 13 juillet 1873.

³⁵² Ibid., 2.

³⁵³ APP, DA 337 Navigation. Rapport de l’ingénieur ordinaire, bateau-lavoir Bousquin Quai Bourbon, 3 mai 1872.

bateaux-lavoirs still existed; therefore, the establishment should be refused authorization.”³⁵⁴

The following case further illustrates the *Préfet de la Seine*'s hesitancy to enforce Haussmann's *Arrêté*. In 1874, two *bateaux-lavoirs* owners applied for a place within Paris at the Viaduc d'Auteuil (also called the Viaduc du Point-du-Jour) in the 16th *arrondissement*.³⁵⁵ In the navigation inspector's report, he recounted the arguments of both owners who had appealed to the public utility of the project and the utility of the *bateaux-lavoirs* for the surrounding inhabitants who supported the establishments. The inspector underlined that he had worked to reduce the numbers of *bateaux-lavoirs* on the rivers. He emphasized a facet of the problem that the two *Préfets de la Seine* since Haussmann had to contend with: “Once there was a *bateau-lavoir* on the river it was very difficult to rescind authorizations already given and to eliminate an existing establishment even if they became a considerable blockage for navigation.”³⁵⁶ He disagreed with the argument that the *bateaux-lavoirs* had a right to exist because they were useful to the public: “If the *bateaux-lavoirs* are useful, they are not indispensable and it is possible to give satisfaction to the population by the creation of *lavoirs*. There is

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ This bridge was the only one touched during the bombardments in 1943, and the city demolished it soon after and built another bridge named Garigliano after a victory in Northern Italy during WWII.

³⁵⁶ APP, DA 337 Navigation. Service de la navigation. Installation d'un bateau-lavoir, 6 novembre 1874.

no reason to accord the petition.³⁵⁷ However, the mayor of Passy supported the usefulness of such an establishment in a letter to Duval. The *Préfet de la Seine* sided with the mayor of the 16th *arrondissement* instead of the navigation inspectors and allowed one of the establishments to station at the Viaduc d'Auteuil.³⁵⁸ The navigation engineer was trying to follow the prescription to eliminate the *bateaux-lavoirs* within Paris while the mayor decided that it would be in his interest to allow the facility. This episode highlighted the political nature of where the bateaux stationed.

Similarly, on the small arm of the Seine on the Ile St. Louis, the *bateau-lavoir* owner Martin petitioned to extend his establishment and re-waterproof the hull, which the inspectors of navigation did not approve; indeed, the 1867 *arrêté* restricted modifications that would extend the life of the boat.³⁵⁹ In the correspondence, the tone of the engineers towards the *bateaux-lavoirs* owners became more frustrated because the *Préfet* continually ignored their suggestions to stop authorizing repairs of the bateaux-lavoirs and begin eliminating them from the Seine. The inspector's report underlined their own exasperation in working towards a goal that all of the *Préfets de la Seine* of the Third Republic, thus far, had refused to execute. According to the inspector, "the request was completely contrary to Haussmann's law, but the circumstances in the last years justified that

³⁵⁷ Ibid

³⁵⁸ APP, DA 337 Navigation. Rapport de l'ingénieur ordinaire, 17 février 1875.

³⁵⁹ APP, DA 336 Navigation. Mémoire pour les propriétaires des bateaux-lavoirs établis sur la seine, 1868, 22.

the Administration has not executed the *arrêté*. Since the other *bateaux-lavoirs* owners have taken advantage of this tolerance it seems difficult in these conditions not to decide in favor of Mr. Martin.” The inspector highlighted that the legal principle to eliminate the businesses had already been decided in favor of abolishing the facilities and that the administrations had already taken all the necessary care and concern for the population that used the establishments. He argued that “the administration only prolongs the navigation problems that they have the power and the opportunity to ameliorate in the interior of Paris by eliminating the parasitic establishments that encumber the Seine.”³⁶⁰ He added that, although he understood the administration was lenient with the *bateaux-lavoirs* after 1870-71, the circumstances in 1875 were no longer the same, and it was time to think about enforcing the law again.³⁶¹ Even after the impassioned pleas of the service of navigation inspectors, Duval decided to go against Haussmann’s edict and to approve the application to make the business larger by fifteen meters. The *Préfet de la Seine* chose not to take such an important resource away from the working class; he approved the request immediately after receiving an appeal from a mayor or petitions from the owner showing the inhabitants support the *bateau-lavoir*.

The *Préfet de la Seine* Duval chose not to execute the law against the *bateaux-lavoirs* during second half of the 1870s either. For instance, on the Quai

³⁶⁰ APP, DA 337 Navigation, Service de la navigation, Rapport bateau-lavoir Martin, Quai d’Anjou, 11 mai 1875.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

Malaquais in the 6th *arrondissement*, Duval granted authorization for a *bateau-lavoir* to be completely overhauled along with a new boat to enlarge the establishment by thirteen meters.³⁶² In 1877, Duval also accorded permission to the *bateau-lavoir* “Quentin”, located on the Pont d’Arcole in the 4th *arrondissement*, to replace an old boat with a new one and build drying rooms on the top. The inspector added his opposition to the request, stating that “it was not in the interest of the development of navigation.”³⁶³ During the same year, the “Picaud” establishment located on the Quai Bourbon on the Ile St. Louis applied for permission to replace a boat that was out of service. Against advice of his engineers and inspectors, the *Préfet de la Seine* gave permission to extend the life of *bateau-lavoir* “Martin” in the heart of Paris.³⁶⁴ Duval gave the same establishment permission a year later to replace the whole chassis.³⁶⁵ After the engineers of navigation had argued for clearing the area around Ile St. Louis because it presented difficulties to navigate around the island, The *Préfet de la Seine* decided to allow the *bateau-lavoir* “Leneru” to be moved near Pont Sully

³⁶² APP, DA 337 Navigation. Service de la navigation, Rapport de l’inspecteur ordinaire, bateau-lavoir Guernier, 12 novembre 1876.

³⁶³ APP, DA 337 Navigation. Direction des travaux, Service de la navigation, Rapport de l’ingénieur ordinaire, bateau-lavoir Picaud, 30 novembre 1880.

³⁶⁴ APP, DA 337 Navigation. Direction des travaux, Service de la navigation, Rapport de l’inspecteur ordinaire, 6 juin 1879.

³⁶⁵ APP, DA 337 Navigation. Direction des travaux, Service de la navigation, Rapport de l’inspecteur ordinaire, 3 août 1879 1879.

on the side of the island.³⁶⁶ The *Préfet de la seine* also authorized the *bateau-lavoir* Quentin to rebuild the front half of the structure after a boat carrying stones hit it in 1879.³⁶⁷

The next three *Préfets de la Seine* from 1879 until 1883 did not make serious efforts to change the tolerance that the previous administration had exercised during the previous decade; their actions did not result in the diminution of the *bateaux-lavoirs* within Paris. Illustrating the lenient attitude, in 1880, Ferdinand Hérold, *Préfet de la Seine* from 1879 to 1882, gave his approval to establish the *bateau-lavoir* “Gallet” on Quai Malaquais.³⁶⁸ Hérold was engrossed in secular reforms including taking religious emblems out of schools and was not as interested in city planning issues. While concentrating on republican reforms he may have diverted his attention away from the problems the *bateaux-lavoirs* presented. He permitted the owner of the *bateau-lavoir* “Martin” on Quai Anjou to add another boat to his establishment, place a glass chassis onto it, make repairs to another boat, and add drying rooms on the top so that the establishment would then comprise four boats.³⁶⁹ The *Préfet de la Seine*, Hérold, also allowed the

³⁶⁶ APP, DA 337 Navigation. Direction des travaux, Service de la navigation, Rapport de l’ingénieur ordinaire, 15 octobre 1879.

³⁶⁷ APP, DA 337 Navigation. Direction des travaux, Service de la navigation, Rapport de l’ingénieur ordinaire, 25 octobre 1879.

³⁶⁸ APP, DA 337 Navigation. Correspondance Préfet de la Seine à la Direction des travaux, Service de la navigation, l’Inspecteur Général, 11 juin 1880.

³⁶⁹ APP, DA 337 Navigation. Correspondance Préfecture du département de la Seine à la Direction des travaux, Service de la navigation, l’Inspecteur général, 25 avril 1880.

“Langlois” establishment owners to make extensive repairs after the ice flows during the winter of 1879-1880.³⁷⁰ The chief engineer of navigation made his opposition clear in his report, arguing that the natural disaster had given the administration the perfect opportunity to clear the river.³⁷¹ The engineer wanted the facility to be moved two hundred meters to Quai Bourbon, on the other side of Ile St. Louis where there was less traffic. However, Langlois wrote to the office of navigation to dispute the decision. Langlois stated that “the move would lead to my ruin since there are many *bateaux-lavoirs* on the Quai Bourbon and my clientele lives in the quartier Latin and would not follow me to the proposed place.”³⁷² The *Préfet de Police* acknowledged that he understood the *bateaux-lavoirs* were a cause of trouble for navigation and that the engineers wanted to reduce the numbers of establishments. However, this was not the right opportunity for that type of action.³⁷³ The *Préfet de la Seine* answered the inquiry by taking up the cause of the business owner, stating that “it would be cruel not to let him rebuild and stay in his old place.”³⁷⁴ This political stance permitted the triumph of small business owners. This reflects what Philip Nord found, that

³⁷⁰ APP, DA 337 Navigation. Service de la Navigation, Rapport de l’Ingénieur en chef, 14 mars 1880.

³⁷¹ Ibid., 3.

³⁷² APP, DA 337 Navigation. Correspondance Monsieur Langlois au Préfet de la Seine, 9 avril 1880.

³⁷³ APP, DA 337 Navigation. Correspondance Ingénieur en chef au Préfet de Police, 15 mai 1880.

³⁷⁴ APP, DA 337 Navigation. Correspondance Préfet de la Seine au Préfet de Police, 19 juin 1880.

during the depression of the 1880s small business owners unionized and successfully petitioned the government for protection against encroachments on their ability to run their business.³⁷⁵ Further, larger projects like inculcating secularism was more important to him than taking the *bateaux-lavoirs* off the Seine.

Located off the Ile St.Louis, the owner of the *bateau-lavoir* “Prochon” petitioned the *Préfet de la Seine* Hérold to build a second boat with a drying room on top. According to the navigation inspector, this would double the size of the establishment and cause navigation problems.³⁷⁶ The inspector suggested that the *Préfet de la Seine* reject the application to facilitate clearing the river.³⁷⁷ The *Préfet* then received a letter from the mayor of the 4th *arrondissement* and municipal counselors who inserted themselves into the process. They wrote that the addition of the second boat would not hamper navigation.³⁷⁸ The navigation inspector then replied that they ignored that the chassis already blocked the vision of pilots on the river near the Ile St. Louis where it was already tight. Anticipating future problems, the inspector added that the larger the establishment, the more difficult it would be to move or destroy. He further added that the other boats

³⁷⁵ Philip Nord, *The Politics of Resentment: Shopkeeper Protest in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986) 145.

³⁷⁶ APP, DA 337 Navigation. Direction des travaux, Service de la Navigation, Rapport de l’Inspecteur ordinaire, 30 juillet 1881.

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

³⁷⁸ APP, DA 337 Navigation. Correspondance de la Mairie du 4^{ème} arrondissement aux Préfets de la Seine et de Police, 15 septembre 1881.

navigating the river were missing adequate anchor points because the *bateaux-lavoirs* used them all.³⁷⁹ Despite the engineer's legitimate complaints, the *Préfet* decided to accord permission to Monsieur Prochon.³⁸⁰ Hérold also permitted the new *bateau-lavoir* "Devaux" upstream of Pont St. Michel in the small arm of the Seine on Ile de la Cité.³⁸¹ The owner had applied for a new *bateau-lavoir* on the grounds that there were large numbers of workers in the area with little other facilities to serve their laundry needs.³⁸² He added that, in the time when everyone was so concerned with hygiene, his establishment could bring benefits to that end. While his argument did not convince the navigation engineers, it nonetheless persuaded the *Préfet de la Seine*.³⁸³

The application to replace the defunct boats of the "Mahy et Trottenat" *bateaux-lavoirs* spanned the terms of Hérold and the next *Préfet de la Seine*, Charles Floquet. During his short *préfecture* (January 1882 to November 1882), Floquet defended the armistice in favor of those who participated in the Commune and did not betray his commitments to the working class as he

³⁷⁹ APP, DA 337 Navigation. Correspondance de l'ingénieur en chef au Préfet de Police 9 octobre 1881.

³⁸⁰ APP, DA 337 Navigation. Autorisation pour bateau-lavoir «Prochon » 25 octobre 1881.

³⁸¹ APP, DA 337 Navigation. Préfet de la Seine à la Direction des Travaux, Service de la navigation, Autorisation pour l'installation du bateau-lavoir "Devaux", 9 novembre 1881.

³⁸² Ibid

³⁸³ Ibid

supported the continuation of the *bateaux-lavoirs* for the workers living in the center of Paris. The engineers of navigation argued against repairing the establishment with their usual vigor. They reported that the river was already too encumbered for proper navigation and that the repairs would prolong the life of an establishment that was already in the most inconvenient place, directly behind the *bateau-lavoir* of Langlois on the Quai Bourbon in the passage between Ile St. Louis and Ile de la Cité.³⁸⁴

When the “Bateaux Omnibus” began operating under Haussmann’s support the *bateaux-lavoirs* received even more criticism for obstructing navigation. The municipally-operated company “Bateaux Omnibus” had complained to the navigation service that they could not operate safely in the passage with all of the *bateaux-lavoirs*. The engineer declared that the argument for safe navigation within Paris was the goal of Haussmann’s regulation and the “Bateaux Omnibus” company was also serving the public utility.³⁸⁵ The chief inspector advised that the *bateaux-lavoirs* blocked the view of the incoming and outgoing “Bateaux Omnibus” and tug boats. He continued advising against the overhaul of the “Mahy et Trottenat” pointing out the advantages of clearing the passage between the Ile St. Louis and Ile de la Cité.³⁸⁶ However, at the end of the

³⁸⁴ APP, DA 337 Navigation, Direction des travaux, Service de la Navigation, Rapport de l’ingénieur ordinaire, 9 mars 1882.

³⁸⁵ Ibid

³⁸⁶ APP, DA 337 Navigation, Direction des travaux, Service de la Navigation, Rapport de l’Inspecteur en chef, 25 mars 1882.

report, he highlighted that the *bateau-lavoir* “Langlois” had just been rebuilt after the ice flows of the previous winter and that, if the administration had to wait until that establishment went out of service, it would be unjust to deny the application of the “Mahy et Trottenat” establishment.³⁸⁷ The *Préfet de Police* also opposed the renovation of the boat. He underlined that the repairs went against the regulations which consisted of making the oldest boats disappear as they went out of service.³⁸⁸ Against all advice, the *Préfet de la Seine* Floquet approved the repairs of the laundry boat; yet, he did add the condition that any concession on public domain could be rescinded at any time.³⁸⁹ This was the first time a *Préfet* had acted somewhat in line with Haussmann’s project of eliminating the *bateaux-lavoirs*. Floquet had ensured that the owner realized that he was operating on public space by permission from the government and not by right.

Resumed Antagonism toward the Bateaux-Lavoirs

In October 1883, the tolerant attitude of the *Préfets de la Seine* towards the presence of the *bateaux-lavoirs* ended with the appointment of Eugène Poubelle, lawyer, administrator and diplomat, who became known after he established new guidelines for rubbish collection and the containers people used for their trash. One of his first acts was to deny a petition from the *bateau-lavoir* “Noël” to move

³⁸⁷ Ibid

³⁸⁸ APP, DA 337 Navigation, Correspondance du *Préfet de Police* à l’*Ingénieur en chef*, 10 avril 1882.

³⁸⁹ APP, DA 337 Navigation, *Préfet de la Seine* à la *Direction des Travaux*, *Service de la navigation*, *Autorisation pour bateau-lavoir* « Mahy et Trottenat » 10 août 1882.

two meters further away from a sewer outlet. The work on the Pont d'Austerlitz necessitated that the *bateau-lavoir* move; there was no compromise from Poubelle who pointed out that the boat would have its original place in a few months and that was enough reward for the owner's troubles.³⁹⁰ While it was not difficult to move the bateaux, this episode highlighted the negative attitude toward the owner of the *bateau-lavoir* by not conceding even the smallest of favors.

Poubelle's priority was to improve the traffic of boats in Paris and the hygiene of the river. He was intensely interested in issues of hygiene and may have been influenced by the *Conseil d'Hygiène*'s new vigor to restrain the epidemic of contagious diseases, such as diphtheria, typhoid, and tuberculosis that were rampant during this time. The *Conseil* was interested in water and its possible role in spreading dangerous diseases, and in 1886 commissioned a report that accused the *bateaux-lavoirs* of being responsible for putting the Parisian residents' health in jeopardy by polluting the Seine with diseases from infected clothes. In the first month of occupying his new post, he denied an application to place a new *bateau-lavoir* downstream of Pont Royal, indicating that he had cleared that place in the river to make a dock to access the municipally-operated "Bateaux Omnibus".³⁹¹ The "Bateaux-Omnibus" had no potentially health-threatening pollution. His decision marked a visible change from the previous

³⁹⁰ APP, DA 337 Navigation. Préfet de la Seine à la Direction des Travaux, Service de la navigation, 11 novembre 1883.

³⁹¹ APP, DA 337 Navigation. Préfecture du département de la Seine, Direction travaux publics, 23 août 1883.

Préfets de la Seine who had demanded that the private transport company compromise and share the public domain with other businesses that served the public utility. In contrast, Poubelle made the decision to give priority to the passenger transport company instead of the business that served the poor of Paris. Another reason Poubelle began to discriminate against the *bateaux-lavoir* was the *Conseil d'Hygiène*'s argument that the *bateaux-lavoir* could be dangerous to the health of Paris. He denied the request of *bateau-lavoir* "Martin" to make one boat five meters longer.³⁹² His action diverged from the previous *Préfets de la Seine* who had allowed Martin to add a new boat and replace an out-of-service boat earlier in the Third Republic. Another *bateau-lavoir* owner applied to move into a space on the Quai d'Horloge, a request that the *Préfet* and navigation engineers sharply rebuked. The report from the navigation engineer stated that "it seems useless to examine such requests and why they would not work when looking at the present difficulties navigation has."³⁹³ He also underscored that the administration had purposefully begun to clear the river of such establishments and had already given the passenger boats the places, for which they would build docks shortly.³⁹⁴

³⁹² APP, DA 337 Navigation. Préfecture du département de la Seine, Direction travaux publics, 18 septembre 1883.

³⁹³ APP, DA 337 Navigation. Direction des travaux, Service de la Navigation, Rapport de l'Inspecteur en chef avec avis du Préfet de la Seine, 9 octobre 1883.

³⁹⁴ Ibid

The navigation engineers exposed the views of the new administration towards the *bateaux-lavoirs*, stating that clearing the river had really begun with the new *Préfet de la Seine*, Poubelle, who finally supported the opinion of the navigation engineers.³⁹⁵ Henri Godard, a navigation engineer working in the office of the *Préfet de Police*, stated that the *bateaux-lavoirs* had no more reason to exist now that the city was fully equipped with underground sewers which would permit the establishment of *lavoirs* in the city.³⁹⁶ Yet, more *lavoirs* were not built during this time. In Godard's statements against the boats, the engineer admitted that until the 1880s, it had not been practical to build a *lavoir* in central Paris with no sewer system, explaining the persistent need for the *bateaux-lavoirs* up until the 1880s. The engineer then utilized the *Conseil d'Hygiène's* language by accusing the boats of "infecting" the river.³⁹⁷ This discourse will be further explored in the next chapter, which will examine how the public hygiene movement of the next decade associated all laundry operations with pollution and disease, rendering everything associated with laundry matter out of place that needed to be outside of the city.

The current city administration (1883-1886) had officially stopped tolerating *bateaux-lavoirs* within Paris. In addition to being influenced by the *Conseil d'Hygiène*, Poubelle also wanted to support the circulation of boats on the river to move people, making the city function better. When a boat owner

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 4.

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 5.

³⁹⁷ Ibid., 6.

requested to move his *bateau-lavoir* to the Pont d'Arcole, he received a negative response to his request. The engineer of navigation indicated that the administration sought to give priority to the passenger boat companies on the river. He expressed some excitement that the service had finally made a place for the new navigating boats, the *Bateaux-Expresses*.³⁹⁸ He also commented on the *bateaux-lavoirs* that still resided on the Seine: "...they dishonor the river that is one of the beauties of Paris. They dirty the water and are hazardous during epidemics."³⁹⁹ The engineer used the dual points of pollution and disease to make an argument that they did not belong in Paris. However, there were no plans to move or close the *bateaux-lavoir* upstream of Paris, nullifying the points about pollution and disease. This revealed the underlying reason the administration renewed the campaign against them; they were once again out of place in Paris.

Similarly, *bateau-lavoir* owner Maciet met a negative response to his request to build a walkway down to his establishment on the Pont Neuf in 1883.⁴⁰⁰ The owner requested this modification because the banks were shallow for twenty meters until the place where the boat could be stationed. Maciet claimed that a floating walkway would be dangerous for the women who carried

³⁹⁸ APP, DA 337 Navigation, Direction des travaux, Service de la Navigation, Rapport de l'Inspecteur ordinaire, 11 janvier 1884.

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁰ APP, DA 337 Navigation, Direction des travaux, Service de la Navigation, Rapport de l'Ingénieur ordinaire, 20 novembre 1883.

heavy loads; therefore, he wanted to build a solid walkway.⁴⁰¹ He added that the walkway would not block the view of the bridge and the river, acknowledging that the appearance of his business was an argument against it. The engineer argued against the permanent walkway on the grounds, stating that “it would spoil the entrance to the small square that was carefully renovated the year before.”⁴⁰²

In 1885, the requests that the *Préfet de la Seine* Poubelle approved for *bateaux-lavoirs* in Paris all involved reducing the size of the establishments. Two establishments on Quai Voltaire petitioned to repair their boats.⁴⁰³ One, *bateau-lavoir* “Chauchefoin,” agreed for the administration to draw plans that suited them and to rebuild his business accordingly. The navigation engineers shortened the boats eight meters and required the owner to paint them in the colors Haussmann had prescribed in his law, black on the hull and gray for anything above.⁴⁰⁴ The other establishment on Quai Voltaire agreed to reduce the boats by five meters in return for permission to make extensive repairs to the hulls of the boats.⁴⁰⁵ Both authorizations also repeated the instructions forbidding any work not preapproved

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 1.

⁴⁰² Ibid., 2.

⁴⁰³ APP, DA 337 Navigation. Direction des travaux, Service de la Navigation, Rapport de l’Ingénieur ordinaire, bateau-lavoir Chauchefoin, 19 septembre 1885. APP, DA 337 Navigation, Direction des travaux, Service de la Navigation, Rapport de l’Ingénieur ordinaire, 6 novembre 1885.

⁴⁰⁴ APP, DA 337 Navigation. Direction des travaux, Service de la Navigation, Rapport de l’Ingénieur ordinaire, bateau-lavoir Chauchefoin, 19 septembre 1885.

⁴⁰⁵ APP, DA 337 Navigation. Direction des travaux, Service de la Navigation, Rapport de l’Ingénieur ordinaire, 6 novembre 1885.

by the navigation service.⁴⁰⁶ This instruction began to appear on all permissions as it had after Haussmann's law overtly signaling the end of the tolerance for the *bateaux-lavoirs* in Paris.

Pasteur's Germ Theory and its Effect on the Bateaux-Lavoirs

With the discoveries of Pasteur, the public hygiene movement gained new legitimacy. Now, in the 1880s, the *bateaux-lavoirs* could be implicated as centers of contagion and dangerous microbes, putting the establishments within the jurisdiction of the *Conseil d'Hygiène* and hygiene inspectors. The germ theory encouraged more intervention by medical professionals who had new knowledge of modes of disease transmission. This knowledge would be helpful to the *Préfets* when they again contemplated purging the *bateaux-lavoirs* from Paris. Added to knowledge of microbes, English physician, John Snow discovered that cholera was a water-borne illness through mapping the neighborhoods most affected by the disease. The social unrest associated with epidemics motivated the city administrators to find ways of detecting future generators of epidemics that destabilized society.

In November 1885, charged with protecting the health of Parisians, the *Préfet de Police*, Jean Garagnon, commissioned a study of *the bateaux-lavoirs* to ascertain the amount of pollution coming from the business, the safety of drinking the water and whether the laundry process killed microbes. The goal of the report

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.,3.

was to aid in the decision to close the *bateaux-lavoirs* within Paris.⁴⁰⁷ Dr. Alfred Gérardin, the director of classified establishments and a doctor of sciences, wrote the report. He had previously conducted micrographic analysis of the waters (drinking wells, reservoirs, distributions pipes) in the commune of Vésinet in 1877 and 1884, and had published a report in 1874 on the quality of rivers.⁴⁰⁸ In addition to his microbial analysis, his 1885 report provides contextual information regarding state of the laundry facilities in Paris.

Gérardin's report begins with *lavoirs* operating on the ground. As a comparison, he exposed exactly the reasons the *bateaux-lavoirs* existed within Paris and survived the earlier attempts to remove them from the river. According to his report, there were no terrestrial *lavoirs* in the center of Paris; they were instead located in a ring around the limits of the city, where the old wall was.⁴⁰⁹ He blamed the lack of facilities in central Paris on the high rents that would preclude profitability for the business. Yet, in places where the population was less dense, there would not be enough usage to make the business lucrative. The facilities further from the center were less expensive to use, but there was not enough population to use them to the maximum.⁴¹⁰ Gérardin explained that the

⁴⁰⁷ APP, DA 337 Navigation, Rapport par Dr. Alfred Gérardin, L'altération des eaux de la Seine par les bateaux-lavoirs établis dans la traversée de Paris, 4 Décembre 1885.

⁴⁰⁸ A.C. Gérardin, *Rapport sur l'altération, la corruption et l'assainissement des rivières*. (Paris : Imprimerie Nationale, 1874).

⁴⁰⁹ Gérardin, *Rapport sur l'altération, la corruption et l'assainissement des rivières*, 30.

lavoirs needed both the service from the city's water delivery system and their own well water to meet the businesses' water needs. However, the water from wells within Paris could not be used for rinsing because they gave off a foul odor.⁴¹¹ The water delivery system was an issue that dated back early in the century. His study also contradicted the statements the engineers made in their reports on *bateaux-lavoirs*. He claimed that the navigation service used any argument they could find to get the *bateaux-lavoirs* off the river, chiefly, that they were a major hindrance to navigating on the Seine. Gérardin argued that it was not true since the *bateaux-lavoirs* were docked on the sides and that the Préfet had already eliminated or moved those who were in the way of passenger boat debarkation points. The neighborhoods where one could establish a *lavoir* were few in central Paris. Gérardin indicated that there were social constraints in opening a *lavoir* near the center. He wrote that "towards the center [of Paris] the lodgings were more demanding; lease terms forbade hanging laundry in windows facing the street or courtyard." The laundresses or women using the *lavoir* had to use the drying rooms which cost thirty centimes per twenty-four hours and the spinning machine which was twenty-five centimes for a packet of six men's shirts.⁴¹² Laundresses who lived outside of Paris faced none of these restrictions and usually did not use the spinning machines since they could hang laundry in

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 32.

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

⁴¹² Ibid., 31

their windows, whatever they faced.⁴¹³ His last point examined the lack of comfort of washing in a terrestrial *lavoir* compared to a *bateau-lavoir*. He found that the women using the boats had access to more fresh air because many of the *lavoirs* on the ground had their washing facilities located in basements to ease the water draining. The air was less humid on the boats, and there was usually a great quantity of molds in the terrestrial *lavoirs*, since they could never have enough ventilation in the humid basements.⁴¹⁴ Thus the boats seemed more comfortable.

Gérardin's report actually supported the existence of the *bateaux-lavoirs* in terms of hygiene when compared to the terrestrial *lavoirs*, which the city administration championed. In his estimation, a *bateau-lavoir* on the river did not seriously contribute to the pollution of the Seine because the water current diluted the concentration of any possible contaminants coming from the laundry. In 1885, there were still twenty-two *bateaux-lavoirs* within Paris, with ten located around the Ile de la Cité and Ile St. Louis.⁴¹⁵ There were twenty-three hundred places for laundering in total on the *bateaux-lavoirs*, with one hundred and ten places for laundresses per establishment. This allowed a few establishments to serve large numbers of women who had no laundry service otherwise. The numbers of *bateaux-lavoirs* had continued to grow during the 1870s and 80s while there were still restrictions on building *lavoirs*. Unsurprisingly, the report showed that the

⁴¹³ Ibid., 33

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., 35

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

bateaux-lavoirs were superior in terms of hygiene than the terrestrial *lavoirs*. The laundresses had more space and air; more water to wash and rinse the laundry with resulting in cleaner clothes with less microbes. They could wash more laundry because there were more quantities of water with larger washing caldrons. The drying places were five centimes compared to thirty in the terrestrial *lavoirs*. Because the conditions were better on the *bateaux-lavoirs*, they catered to laundresses who served all the neighborhoods surrounding the business. According to Gérardin, the terrestrial *lavoirs* could only count on the women from the neighborhood in which it was located. Another favorable point he exposed was the smaller unemployment rate among the owners of *bateaux-lavoirs* than among the terrestrial *lavoir* owners because they pulled clients from farther, and their clients were more loyal. It was also less expensive to run a *bateau-lavoir*; there was no cost for water, no worries about drainage and canalizations and fewer complaints from the neighbors.⁴¹⁶

The microbial concentration of *the bateaux-lavoirs* was inferior to the water coming from the terrestrial *lavoirs*. The pre-rinse in the *bateaux-lavoirs*, the operation that posed the most problems, was usually done at the laundresses' home to save money.⁴¹⁷ Gérardin then underlined an essential problem: much of the drainage system of the city dumped directly into the river Seine; therefore, there was really no way to know what polluted the water more, households,

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., 38.

(*bateaux-lavoirs*, factories, or hospitals.⁴¹⁸ He also reported that most laundresses skipped the pre-soak step and brought the clothes dry to go directly into the boiling step, so the danger from it was attenuated.⁴¹⁹ The laundresses performed the boiling step from seven pm until five am the next day to be able to do the finishing processes in the daylight. In his studies, he found that the microbes could not live in water at this temperature for ten hours.⁴²⁰ After this step, the laundress carried out the soaping and then rinsing which had no effect on the safety of the used water.⁴²¹ He also reported that the passenger boat companies that used the river and dumped debris from their steam engines into the river, which in Gérardin's estimation, had a more negative effect than the operations from the *bateaux-lavoirs*.⁴²² Indeed, his report showed that there was no measurable trace of the used waters coming from the *bateaux-lavoirs* after two hundred meters.⁴²³ The report exposed the positive effects the *bateaux-lavoirs* demonstrated for the economy, the hygiene of the population of central Paris, and argued that the establishments had no major negative effect on the water quality. This report underlined the capricious nature of the renewed campaign against the *bateaux-lavoirs*. Indeed, the *bateaux-lavoirs* did more to promote public hygiene

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 38.

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

⁴²¹ Ibid., 39.

⁴²² Ibid., 40

⁴²³ Ibid.

than to erode it, according to the report. Naturally, Gérardin's final analysis was in favor of the *bateaux-lavoirs* since he was writing to justify and support their existence. Yet, he made some points that the hygiene service and *Préfet* had ignored regarding the working conditions for laundresses who used the facilities and the methods of washing that needed more water than many of the *lavoirs* could provide. Despite evidence that the *bateaux-lavoirs* provided useful hygiene services and did not pose a health threat, Poubelle continued his program of eliminating them to ameliorate the appearance of Paris and make room for increased passenger and commercial traffic.

Conclusion

This chapter described the decisions about the presence of *bateaux-lavoirs* in Paris from 1860s to the 1880s. When Haussmann sought to reorganize the city, his plans also included refashioning the river to look and function like one of his new boulevards with priority given to circulation and regularizing the appearance of the banks. After trying this strategy, he decided that the *bateaux-lavoirs* could not co-exist with his remodeled city. He created a law which aimed at reducing the numbers of *bateaux-lavoirs* by not allowing repairs. However, his law was ineffective since the subsequent *Préfets* did not enforce it. After the Second Empire and the Commune, in the 1870s the *Préfets de la Seine* emphasized keeping the *bateaux-lavoirs* and showing tolerance for the business owners. In contrast, in 1883, the new *Préfet de la Seine*, Poubelle, decided that he would enforce Haussmann's prescriptions as part of his campaign to enforce hygienic measures. He operated within the resurgence of the public hygiene movement. He

sought to bring a new level of cleanliness to the city by establishing regulations for trash collection. It was in that spirit that he commissioned an *enquête* to clear the *bateaux-lavoirs* from the waterways of Paris. As the arguments for/against *bateaux-lavoirs* changed with the shifting policies from each *Préfet*, their fate also rested upon the attitude of the various *Préfets de la Seine*, i.e., how they wanted the river to look and/or to be used, whether they prioritized private businesses on the river, and less upon problems linked to navigation or public hygiene. When the *bateaux-lavoirs* did not serve the *Préfets*' goals or match their general policies – enabling business owners to continue exploiting the river, appeasing the poor population to prevent another uprising like the Commune – the arguments became that the *bateaux* were polluting, disease-spreading detritus that was matter out of place in Paris. However, despite the shift in policies, there was a constant underlying tension that they did not fit in Paris. The positive reports about the *bateaux-lavoirs* did not change the attitudes about them. Part of the reason Gérardin's report did not sway Poubelle's program of elimination could have been that he had opposition in the *Conseil d'Hygiène* from one Dr. Émile Jungfleisch; while Gérardin was the head of classified establishments and not directly implicated in hygiene matters. Chapter five will illustrate how Pasteur's discovery of microbes became the new weapon for the *Préfets de Police* and *Préfets de la Seine* to rid Paris of unwanted laundry establishments. Eager for their ideas to be heeded in regards to regulating the city, the *Conseil d'Hygiène* provided the tools to banish laundry from the city. The only laundry facilities approved by the *Conseil d'Hygiène* were industrial laundry facilities located

outside of Paris, to which the poor could not afford to send their laundry. Pushing laundry facilities out of Paris made standards of hygiene more difficult to attain for all but the affluent of Paris.

Chapter 5

DANGEROUS LAUNDRY OR A DISTURBING BUSINESS? 1885-1905

The previous chapter examined the inconsistent treatment of *bateaux-lavoirs* by the various *Préfets de la Seine* between 1860 and 1885. The shifting attitude and motivation from the *Préfets* towards the laundry establishments trumped the recommendations from engineers and hygiene inspectors who consistently argued against the *bateaux-lavoirs* in order to rid them out of Paris by relocating them to the *banlieue*. The temporary support for the *bateaux-lavoirs* confirmed the importance of these laundry facilities in the city, though not explicitly to help the poor of Paris – laundresses and other poor women of the city. After the *Commune*, the next seven *Préfets de la Seine* did not take the risk of eliminating the *bateaux*. It was only during Poubelle's public hygiene campaign that the city administrators resumed their discourse about *bateaux-lavoirs* as major obstacles to the growth and cleanliness of Paris. The *bateaux-lavoirs* became a symbol of pollution, litter on the Seine, to be swept out of Paris with the *Conseil d'Hygiène* providing the tools in the campaign against them.

This chapter will chart the growing power of the *Conseil d'Hygiène* after the acceptance of Pasteur's germ theory, as well as the 1886 investigation of the *bateaux-lavoirs* mandated by the government, which produced contradictory reports between Émile Jungfleisch and Gabriel Pouchet, two chemists working for the *Conseil d'Hygiène*.⁴²⁴ This chapter will also examine how *lavoirs* were

⁴²⁴ Jungfleisch was an academician, the School of Pharmacy appointed him chair of organic chemistry in 1876 and in 1908 the Conservatoire des Arts et Metiers

another focus of the *Conseil d'Hygiène's* discourse which did not align with the actions the city administration took. I argue that the city administration during the Poubelle and Casimir de Selves *préfectures* merely used the suggestions of the *Conseil d'Hygiène* to implement their governmental policies, namely exporting *lavoirs* to the *banlieue* and closing *bateaux-lavoirs* in the city in favor of passenger and other commercial traffic. When the hygienic recommendations suited their goals, the *Préfets de la Seine* heeded their advice. Yet, when the *Conseil d'Hygiène's* advice did not correspond to the *Préfets'* policies, the *Préfets* would ignore them. The *Conseil d'Hygiène* argued that, in order to facilitate good hygiene, the city should support building *lavoirs* throughout Paris which would adhere to new hygiene standards. This change in orientation from the *Conseil* came as a result of the epidemic of tuberculosis and other contagious diseases and the discovery of the microbes that caused the diseases. The *Conseil* thought increased laundering in sanitary facilities would help stem the tide of illness that plagued Paris. However, they demanded that the laundry facilities follow strict sanitary standards that many smaller facilities could not implement, which resulted in very few *lavoirs* obtaining permission to open. The *Conseil* also proposed that those who could not follow their prescriptions close. The continued inconsistencies from the *Préfet de la Seine* indicated that the *bateaux* were simply unwanted in the city, not necessarily vectors of epidemics. The fluctuations of

nominated him as professor of chemistry. Gabriel Pouchet was the head of the laboratory of the *Conseil d'Hygiène* in 1889 and in 1897 became a member of the Academy of Medicine in the chemistry section. They were not members of any legislative or governmental bodies except that of the *Conseil d'Hygiène*.

opinion from the *Préfets* reflected the zeitgeist. After the Prussian siege, when the *bateaux-lavoirs* were the only functioning laundry facilities in Paris, the *Préfet* Duval and his successors were reluctant to follow Haussmann's program of elimination. However, when Poubelle became *Préfet* in 1883 he wanted to continue Haussmann's plans to change the function of the Seine and targeted the *bateaux* as polluters. Although the *Conseil d'Hygiène* and the *Annales d'Hygiène* explicitly targeted *bateaux-lavoirs* and *lavoirs* as potentially dangerous centers of disease, hygienists of the *Annales d'Hygiène* or the *Conseil d'Hygiène* were never able to scientifically link laundry or laundresses to the spread of contagious illnesses. The gulf – between what the *Préfet de la Seine* and *Préfet de Police* did and what the *Conseil d'Hygiène* recommended – suggests that the *Préfets* were not afraid of *bateaux-lavoirs* and terrestrial *lavoirs* as purveyors of epidemics. During the tenure of Poubelle the goal was to find a way to move the *bateaux* out of Paris and compel *lavoirs* to follow the sanitary prescriptions of the *Conseil d'Hygiène*.

There were a variety of reasons the city administration, the *Conseil d'Hygiène*, and the navigation engineers wanted the laundry establishments moved out. First, the neighbors of *lavoirs* and *bateaux-lavoirs* complained to the inspectors of the *Préfet de Police* about the unpleasant appearances, smells, and noise associated with the *bateaux-lavoirs*. Then, the *Conseil d'Hygiène* believed that the establishments spread disease, which Poubelle used as a reason to move them out of the city. Further, engineers wanted to clear the Seine for commercial traffic such as sand barges and public transport. As the city changed, there were

fewer convenient spaces where laundry establishments could exist. The *Conseil d'Hygiène* started a new campaign against the *bateaux-lavoir* and *lavoirs* based on the possibility that infected clothes could transmit diseases, which gave city administrators a new impetus to clear the river without having to pay indemnities. *The bateaux-lavoirs* could not be investigated by the *Conseil d'Hygiène* because they were not a classified business. It was only when they became theoretical incubators of disease-causing microbes that the *Conseil* could begin to argue for their closure.

The Bateaux-Lavoirs on Trial: 1886

The goal of the city administration was to get rid of the *bateaux-lavoirs* in Paris. Since the *Conseil d'Hygiène* framed the laundry establishments as dangerous, and that microbe theory could provide scientific reasons to banish these boats from the city, the administration could then press the issue. It was in that spirit that, in 1886, the *Préfet de Police* commissioned an investigation to examine the effects of the *bateaux-lavoirs* on the water quality of the Seine with the intention of using the findings to close the establishments.⁴²⁵ The *Préfet de Police* commissioned the chief chemist of the *Conseil d'Hygiène*, Jungfleisch, who worked directly with the city administration, usually on problems associated with hospitals and epidemics. In light of their close working relationship, the *Préfet de Police* chose him to create the report, which should give the city ample

⁴²⁵ APP, DA 336 Navigation. 5 mars 1886, Dr. Emile Jungfleisch, « Rapport sur l'intérêt que présentent pour la santé publique le maintien ou la suppression des bateaux-lavoirs » 1.

evidence to legally close the *bateaux-lavoirs*.⁴²⁶ Jungfleisch, who authored the report, recounted the origins of the study in the opening paragraph. He identified the *Préfet de Police* as the catalyst stating, “*Monsieur le Préfet*, you have asked the *Conseil d’Hygiène* to advise you on the hygienic effects of *bateaux-lavoirs* on the Seine for the length of Paris, and to advise the *Préfet* on keeping or closing the establishments.”⁴²⁷ The *Conseil d’Hygiène* published the investigation in their annual work report, and Jungfleisch delivered it as a speech during their bi-annual meeting.⁴²⁸ His investigation concentrated on the negative aspects of the establishments, namely water pollution. Yet, in an investigation on the dangers and inconveniences of *bateaux-lavoirs* six months later, none of Jungfleisch’s conclusions were shared by his colleague, hygiene inspector Pouchet – who also worked for the *Conseil d’Hygiène* – who argued that the water pollution was minimal and *the bateaux-lavoirs* provided a healthier environment for women. Their disagreements exposed the biased nature of the Jungfleisch report, which the *Préfet* could use – as a hygienic tool – to get rid of the *bateaux-lavoirs*.

Jungfleisch’s report began by outlining the negative aspects of the *bateaux-lavoirs*. First, they were an obstacle to the growth of navigation and commerce on the Seine, which was stifling the economic growth of Paris. Then, Jungfleisch stated that everyone despised the *bateaux-lavoirs*. He cited navigation reports that chronicled the problems other boat captains on the river had with the

⁴²⁶ Ibid., 4.

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

⁴²⁸ Ibid., 2.

establishments and complaints made by neighbors on the river banks behind them – that they were noisy and produced smoke that drifted into their apartments. Now the administration could count microbes against them. By 1886, there were still twenty *bateaux-lavoirs* within Paris, with fifteen located in central Paris between the Ponts Sully and Aléna.⁴²⁹ The city administration was once again on the hunt to drive them out of the city because the Préfet de la Seine wanted to change the look and use of the Seine in Paris.⁴³⁰ Jungfleisch alluded to the *Préfet's* motives, facilitating the expansion of the Omnibus boat traffic, a municipally-run business, which justified ridding the river of the *bateaux-lavoirs* (and the dirt and poverty their represented) to enable better fluidity through the city. While the *bateaux-lavoirs* probably impeded traffic on the river to a certain extent they could also be moved to more strategic places and still have room for other traffic.

Jungfleisch's investigation, when compared to a rival report by Pouchet, showed that they both were biased since the respective reports presented the issue in such opposite terms. The *bateaux-lavoirs* provided 2,023 places for washing in the heart of Paris.⁴³¹ Jean Moisy, the head of the *lavoir* owners union, estimated in his report on *lavoirs* in Paris that there were around 10,000 places available for laundering, particularly around the outskirts of the city; the *bateaux-lavoirs* accounted for about twenty per cent of places to launder in the city.⁴³² However,

⁴²⁹ Ibid., 5.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Ibid., 6.

he did not take into account there were few *lavoirs* in the center of Paris, most being located around the edges of the city.⁴³³ Although he attempted to make a strong case for the terrestrial *lavoirs* of Paris, by pointing out that they were more numerous and provided more places for laundry, were cleaner and more efficient than laundry establishments on water, Jungfleisch weakened his point by interjecting that the *bateaux-lavoirs* had less expensive docking fees than rents for space on land in Paris and that the laundry boats had access to unlimited amounts of free water.⁴³⁴ His report raised doubts in regards to the superior status of land-based establishments. Water usage was more expensive on land; therefore, people used less water in the *lavoirs*. Jungfleisch's investigation failed to provide scientific evidence demonstrating that *bateaux-lavoirs* were greater vectors of disease than their counterparts on land. Yet, his report showed contradictions regarding the superior sanitary conditions of *lavoirs*. These contradictions raises concerns that it was not driven by scientific motives, but rather connected to the *Préfet's* expectations of the city – based on its new conceptualization of space – that *bateaux-lavoirs* were obstacles to its flow.

The heart of Jungfleisch's argument was that the *lavoirs* were classified establishments and the *bateaux-lavoirs* were not. Classified businesses fell into one of three categories based on their danger to the public. *Lavoirs* were in the third and least dangerous classification – requiring the owner to apply for

⁴³² J. Moisy, *Les Lavoirs de Paris* (Paris : Imprimerie de E. Watelet, 1884), 15.

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

permission to open the business from the *Préfet de Police* which included an inspection by the *Conseil d'Hygiène*. Because the *bateaux-lavoirs* existed before the classification system, they were exempt from regular inspection from the hygiene inspectors. Therefore, the *bateaux-lavoirs* bypassed the inspection from the *Conseil d'Hygiène*; instead, they were regulated directly by the *Préfet de Police* and the department of navigation, which would want to remove them from the river for the sake of traffic and commerce. While the *lavoirs* had to submit to inspections and a public enquiry to open and remain in business, the *bateaux-lavoirs* could be sold from one owner to another with just a navigation safety inspection. Everything about the *lavoirs* could potentially be regulated; the chimneys that produced smoke were to be six to eight meters tall so that noxious smoke did not bother their neighbors. In contrast, the *bateaux-lavoirs* chimneys were of varying heights, but always low enough that smoke floated into the rooms in the buildings around the river. Jungfleisch argued that on a boat the extent of the pollution from the machines could not be measured, whereas in a *lavoir* everything was standardized, which meant that pollution levels could accurately be measured.⁴³⁵ Yet, Jungfleisch did not produce comparative data that demonstrated that *bateaux-lavoirs* polluted more than terrestrial *lavoir*. Since he tested the waste water of the *bateaux-lavoir* it was possible to test the waste water from a *lavoir*.

⁴³⁵ APP, DA 336 Navigation. Dr. Emile Jungfleisch, « Rapport sur l'intérêt que présentent pour la santé publique le maintien ou la suppression des bateaux-lavoirs » 1886 *Rapport général sur les travaux du conseil d'hygiène publique et de salubrité* (Paris : Imprimerie Chaix, 1886), 7.

Jungfleisch's last argument against the *bateaux-lavoirs* was directed at their relationships with their neighbors and the undesirable culture that these establishments cultivated. He concluded by reminding the *Préfet de Police* of all the trouble he had had with criticism coming from the neighbors of the *bateaux-lavoirs*: They complained about the smoke coming from the chimneys; the *bateaux* burned coal instead of coke, a much cheaper fuel, which made thick black smoke that left deposits on anything outside. The inhabitants of the *quais* also complained about the noise coming from the *bateaux-lavoirs*, where women would yell to each other to be heard above the noise of the spinning machines and boilers, while other women were singing and their children screaming.⁴³⁶

The remainder of the report was an account of the virtues of *lavoirs*. Jungfleisch praised the uniformity in the washing process. The model establishments had purpose-built facilities that accommodated every step of the washing process in a salubrious manner. He asserted that the used water from the *lavoir* went into the sewer.⁴³⁷ However, the sewer system was not completed until the first decade of the twentieth century.⁴³⁸ The best sewer sections were in the wealthy new neighborhoods in the western part of the city.⁴³⁹ The water and

⁴³⁶ Ibid., 8

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

⁴³⁸ Donald Reid, *Paris Sewers and Sewermen: Realities and Representations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 81.

⁴³⁹ Anne-Louise Shapiro, *Housing the Poor of Paris* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 146.

sewer lines came to the first through third *arrondissements* only in the last decade of the nineteenth century.⁴⁴⁰ This underlined the problems with building *lavoirs* in the areas that the *bateaux-lavoirs* served. Jungfleisch's claims – that *lavoirs* could be easily opened in the central areas of Paris or that the sewers system from which they derived their benefit was finished completely – were inaccurate. Although he did not write about the problem related to clandestine *lavoirs* that never obtained the proper permits – which the city had little control over – Jungfleisch nevertheless readily highlighted the uncontrolled aspect of the *bateaux-lavoirs* again, stating that their used waters went directly into the river, which was particularly problematic after a night of boiling with the addition of alkaline soaps.⁴⁴¹ Yet, this waste water would not have contained dangerous microbes if it had a high alkalinity.

However, Pouchet's 1887 investigation of *bateaux-lavoirs* six months later did not come to the same conclusions regarding the dangers of the *bateaux-lavoirs*. Pouchet commented that he had lived on many of the *quais* around Paris. His report argued that the presence of the *bateaux-lavoirs* was overall benign for the health of the river and the spread of dangerous microbes in the Seine.⁴⁴² Pouchet had studied the practice of pre-soaking and analyzed the microbe content

⁴⁴⁰ Reid, *Paris Sewers and Sewermen*, 5.

⁴⁴¹ APP, DA 336 Navigation. Dr. Emile Jungfleisch, « Rapport sur l'intérêt que présentent pour la santé publique le maintien ou la suppression des bateaux-lavoirs » 1886 *Rapport général sur les travaux du conseil d'hygiène publique et de salubrité* (Paris : Imprimerie Chaix, 1886), 7.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*

of water used in the pre-soaking process.⁴⁴³ Pouchet's study found that the amount of water in the Seine diluted the amount of microbes down to a safe level, especially where it flowed rapidly.⁴⁴⁴ Although Jungfleisch doubted the efficacy of the current in destroying microbes,⁴⁴⁵ subsequent analyses from a *Conseil d'Hygiène* report confirm Pouchet's results by demonstrating that the water from the *lavoirs* had a higher concentration of microbes than the *bateaux-lavoirs*.⁴⁴⁶

Pouchet further argued that microbes from *bateaux-lavoirs* were no more dangerous than the others present in the Seine. The water quality was not a problem according to Pouchet who found that the water samples he took directly downstream from the *bateaux-lavoirs* were not dangerous during the first hours after taking them.⁴⁴⁷ Although he did not precise whether he took the samples within the first hours after a laundering process, the waters from each process were so diluted that they did not constitute a threat.⁴⁴⁸ It was only after the water

⁴⁴³ APP, DA 336 Navigation. Gilbert Pouchet « Réponse au rapport de M. Jungfleisch » 1886, 1.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., 2.

⁴⁴⁵ APP, DA 336 Navigation. Dr. Emile Jungfleisch, « Rapport sur l'intérêt que présentent pour la santé publique le maintien ou la suppression des bateaux-lavoirs » 1886, 9.

⁴⁴⁶ APP, DB 226 Blanchisseries. Compte rendu des séances du Conseil d'Hygiène Publique et de Salubrité du Département de la Seine, 1908. *Rapport général sur les travaux du conseil d'hygiène publique et de salubrité* (Paris : Imprimerie Chaix, 1908).

⁴⁴⁷ APP, DA 336 Navigation. Gilbert Pouchet « Réponse au rapport de M. Jungfleisch » 1886, 1.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., 14

stagnated for several hours that the microbes would multiply and would react on the gelatin plate used to grow bacteria. These findings helped clarify the ‘*bateaux-lavoirs vs lavoirs*’ debate concerning water contamination. They suggest that a source of dangerous contamination could originate from the *lavoirs*’ drainage systems, which were known to be faulty; the holdings tanks leaked or would become watertight instead of filtering the water, leaving a stagnant pool of putrid water. In terms of water hygiene, the *bateaux-lavoirs* represented a better choice, since their used waters were much more diluted in the Seine and would never stagnate. Another problem with *lavoirs* was that the establishments limited the amount of water use with different sized buckets. On the *bateaux-lavoirs*, the amount of water was unlimited, so one could wash and rinse with different water. According to Pouchet’s evaluation of the dangers *bateaux-lavoirs* raised, “the cleanliness of body and linens are the most essential conditions to good hygiene and it is my advice that the administration support, by all means possible, the extension of these establishments where ever they exist.”⁴⁴⁹ Based on scientific evidence, terrestrial *lavoirs* raised many more problematic issues for public hygiene than *bateaux-lavoirs*. Yet, the city administration held fast to the position that the boats were a huge problem for the city. Although the administration’s ultimate goal was to clear the path for transport and commerce on the Seine, it tried to couch the elimination of the *bateaux-lavoirs* in an argument about health and hygiene.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

The issue of all the other pollutants of the Seine resurfaced. Pouchet exposed the many establishments and individual users who dumped all their waste into the Seine. Although navigating boat captains also did their laundry and threw their garbage and their chamber pots into the Seine, no one demanded that they be removed from the river.⁴⁵⁰ Added to these pollutants, the hospitals of Paris used the river to soak the used linens. This laundry contained more pathogens than typical customers' linens.⁴⁵¹ Some *bateaux-lavoirs* owners asked: “do they have an immunity that one refuses to us?”⁴⁵²

Jungfleisch admitted that the *bateaux-lavoirs* were filling a need that current *lavoirs* had not met (because the *lavoirs* that the city administration and *Conseil d'Hygiène* regularly suggested were not yet built in the city). There was a scarcity of *lavoirs* in Paris.⁴⁵³ By the end of the nineteenth century there were no more than a dozen in the central *arrondissements* of Paris. Indeed, *lavoirs* were difficult to run in central Paris – the area the *bateaux-lavoirs* served – even when the Emperor was willing to cover the costs of building the facility.⁴⁵⁴ Although it

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.,16.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Ibid.,17.

⁴⁵³ APP DA 46 Lavoir Napoléon. Napoléon's commentary regarding the area he chose to build in, 20 septembre 1853. It was for this reason Napoléon III wanted to build a *lavoir* in this area, where the working-class community was the most underserved.

⁴⁵⁴ APP DA 46 Lavoir Napoléon, The financial advisors to Napoleon III had crunched the numbers on running a *lavoir* when he built the *Lavoir Napoléon*

was clear from Jungfleisch's own evidence that *bateaux-lavoirs* contributed to better public health, in his report the *lavoirs*' superiority arguably derived from their connection to the sewers. Yet, he never acknowledged that the sewers simply carried waste back to the Seine outside of Paris for others to possibly ingest. He showed his partiality for the *lavoirs* by disregarding evidence that they were worse for public health than the *bateaux-lavoirs*. These omissions demonstrate that science was not the core motivation behind his report. As chief chemist of the *Conseil*, he owed his appointment, in part, to the *Préfet de Police*. Thus, his investigation and conclusions potentially reflected a personal bias.

Despite the top figure of 150 francs per square meter for profitability, Jungfleisch claimed that *lavoirs* could open in the third and fourth *arrondissements* where land was, on average, 232 francs a square meter.⁴⁵⁵ He further added that the presence of the *bateaux-lavoirs* had naturally pushed the clientele away from the *lavoirs* and thus stopped the *lavoirs* from developing.⁴⁵⁶ Jungfleisch's analysis did not address a critical point: the public investigation when the *Préfet de Police* registered any opposition to the establishment from neighbors. Indeed, opposition from neighbors was one of the most consistent obstacles to establishing new – legal – *lavoirs* in neighborhoods.

during his reign. 10 décembre 1853. The business had not developed because the rents were too high to be profitable.

⁴⁵⁵ APP, DA 336 Navigation. Dr. Emile Jungfleisch, « Rapport sur l'intérêt que présentent pour la santé publique le maintien ou la suppression des bateaux-lavoirs » 1886, 21.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

Further, Jungfleisch's report outlined the various sources of pollution for the Seine. First, he mentioned that some of the *bateaux-lavoirs* were next to the cold baths where people bathed; laundresses would then use this water for laundering. The next source of pollution came from the sewers. Paradoxically, he lamented that sewers still drained directly into the Seine. He argued that the *bateaux-lavoir* presented as serious a threat to the river as the sewers.⁴⁵⁷ This was true. At the time, there was one water treatment site at la Villette that used a filtration method; the other sewers of the city were not yet connected to treatment facilities.⁴⁵⁸ The proposed *lavoirs* would have been connected to sewers that emptied directly into the Seine as well. By arguing that the water would infect the clothes instead of the clothes polluting the water, Jungfleisch implied the *bateaux-lavoirs* had a benign impact on their environment, contradicting his own position that the *bateaux* negatively affected the cleanliness of the river Seine.

Next Jungfleisch presented the dangers and/or obstacles resulting from the transport of used laundry. Although the *lavoirs* workers also transported used laundry without closed sacks and sorted it outside where a passersby could be contaminated by it, he associated the open transport and mixing of dirty laundry on the *quais* as a practice unique to *bateaux-lavoirs*. He added that the engineers of navigation had already cited the practice as obstructive for other businesses on

⁴⁵⁷ APP, DA 336 Navigation. Dr. Emile Jungfleisch, « Rapport sur l'intérêt que présentent pour la santé publique le maintien ou la suppression des bateaux-lavoirs » 1886, 12.

⁴⁵⁸ Reid, *Paris Sewers and Sewermen*, 62.

the *quai*. Yet, other business could use the area to load and unload goods as long as it did not stay on the *quai* for an extended amount of time.⁴⁵⁹ The navigation engineers – who clearly wanted the *bateaux-lavoirs* gone to facilitate commercial traffic – were not respecting the right to that space.⁴⁶⁰ Jungfleisch even tried to blame the cholera outbreak of 1884 on the practice of sorting clothes on the *quai*, arguing that the *Préfet de Police* considered forbidding the practice because of its danger to public health. Yet, by that time, cholera was known to be a water-borne pathogen, demonstrating again the partiality of his report against the *bateaux-lavoirs*.

Jungfleisch denied the *bateaux-lavoirs* had any stationing rights beyond what the government had already allowed. He argued that they were under a privileged concession that could be revoked at any time. Jungfleisch had not been briefed in the legal complexities of the royal concession, since he kept on arguing that the owners had no protection against the administration revoking their right. As discussed in chapter three, the *Préfet de la Seine* could not simply revoke the stationing rights without indemnity for the few boats that were direct descendants of those who had received the concession from the king three hundred years before. The concession still held some power.

The impact Jungfleisch's recommendations would have on the women who used the *bateaux-lavoirs*, was indistinguishable from the city

⁴⁵⁹ APP, DA 337 Navigation. Correspondance entre le Préfet de Police et le Préfet de la Seine, 25 août 1882.

⁴⁶⁰ The right of the residents of Paris to freely access the Seine to use for domestic purposes. See Mazeau in chapter three.

administration's attitude towards them. As for the laundresses and other women who used the *bateaux*, "they will have to find other places to practice their profession, and their interest cannot be invoked in favor of keeping the establishments."⁴⁶¹ Predictably, the women who were directly affected by eliminating this resource were not consulted about what type of facility they would prefer or which location would help them the most. Moreover, *bateaux-lavoirs* owners declared that the administration's figures on the numbers of available *lavoirs* were erroneous, arguing that their customers would not walk from the center of Paris to Montmartre with a heavy load, and that the administration should only count facilities in a two-kilometer radius.⁴⁶² The owners gathered fourteen thousand signatures against the closing of the *bateaux-lavoirs*.⁴⁶³ The customers, laundresses and women doing their own laundry, had an outlet to express their views on a resource that was important to them. While city officials made public policy, the women could finally make their voices heard when they signed the petition against the closing of the *bateaux-lavoirs* that the owners had organized.⁴⁶⁴ The notion that the ones who used the resource had the

⁴⁶¹ APP, DA 336 Navigation. Dr. Emile Jungfleisch, « Rapport sur l'intérêt que présentent pour la santé publique le maintien ou la suppression des bateaux-lavoirs » 1886, 8.

⁴⁶² This northern area of Paris was situated 6 km from the city center and was part of the former banlieue Napoléon III incorporated into the city in 1860. APP, DA 336 Navigation. Gilbert Pouchet « Réponse au rapport de M. Jungfleisch » 1886, 4.

⁴⁶³ APP, DA 336 Navigation. « Réponse aux rapports de MM. Les ingénieurs de la navigation de la chambre syndical des patrons des bateaux-lavoirs » 1886, 6.

least say reflected the underlying purpose of the report and the city administration's quest to rid Paris of *bateaux-lavoirs*. It was not to ameliorate the living conditions of those who used the facilities who were among the less-affluent residents of Paris, but to implement the development of a modern, unobstructed city, which did not include laundresses and other poor women in public space.

In contrast, Pouchet's investigation focused on the women who used the facilities, an aspect that Jungfleisch dismissed as unimportant. He criticized the conditions in the *lavoirs* and focused on the health considerations of the women who worked in them. The *lavoirs* were often in the basement of a building and did not have adequate ventilation so the women were breathing humid, hot air for sixteen hours a day.⁴⁶⁵ The spaces in the center of Paris did not accommodate the introduction of water wells. As previous chapters have shown, drainage had been an issue since people started doing laundry away from the river as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century. Unlike the *bateaux-lavoirs*, the *lavoirs* in the center of Paris were usually in the basements of apartment buildings where ventilation and drainage raised complicated issues, and where humidity and steam encouraged the growth of mold. In these conditions, many women were

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁵ APP, DA 336 Navigation. Gilbert Pouchet « Réponse au rapport de M. Jungfleisch » 1886, 10.

thoroughly soaked from manipulating the clothes and standing in puddles of water.⁴⁶⁶

Pouchet's investigation also revealed the existing wariness among the *lavoirs* owners associated with the *Conseil d'Hygiène's* plans to further regulate laundry facilities; owners already had difficulties running their business, due in part to the inadequacy of the water delivery system developed by Haussmann. The city water service only provided a limited amount of water that was not sufficient to cover the needs of a *lavoir*. Therefore, *lavoirs* were obliged to install pumps and wells to obtain the amount necessary.⁴⁶⁷ The *lavoir* owners as well as *bateaux-lavoirs* owners were afraid that they would be taxed more if they used too much water.⁴⁶⁸

The *Chambre Syndicale* of *Bateaux-Lavoirs* owners, which were all men, also argued that the economic conditions Jungfleisch cited in his report were inaccurate. The *Chambre Syndicale de Maîtres des Bateaux-Lavoirs* organized in 1867 as Haussmann tried to eliminate the establishments from the Seine. The owners decided they needed to protect themselves and organized a lawsuit against Haussmann claiming that he had abused his power as *Préfet*.⁴⁶⁹ As examined in chapter two, an entrepreneur first had the idea of *bateaux-lavoirs* closing and

⁴⁶⁶ APP, DA 336 Navigation. Gilbert Pouchet « Réponse au rapport de M. Jungfleisch » 1886, 15.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁶⁹ APP, DA 336 Navigation, Mémoire pour les propriétaires des bateaux-lavoirs établis sur la seine, 1868.

lavoirs opening to fill their place in 1823; however, this had never happened because the business was not profitable in the center. The city charged the *bateaux-lavoirs* that were in the center the same docking fees as in mid-century.⁴⁷⁰ The *Chambre Syndicale's* report gave the numbers of registered *lavoirs* in the center: In the first arrondissement, none; in the second, none; in the third, none; in the fourth, six. Moving away from the center, the numbers began to rise dramatically: In the eleventh arrondissement, fifty two; in the eighteenth, forty six; in the twentieth, thirty nine.⁴⁷¹ These arrondissements had been the *banlieue* and now were newly incorporated into the city. These numbers show that the *bateaux-lavoirs* were the only legal laundry establishments serving the poor in the center of the Paris. The report further outlined the financial weakness of the *lavoirs*, pointing to a generally unhealthy business climate with 368 closing in the last year around Paris.⁴⁷² *Lavoirs* were not a thriving business that was set to take the place of the *bateaux-lavoirs* that served over two-thousand women.

Later in the same year, 1886, the *Conseil d'Hygiène* conducted a report intended to examine the health of laundresses through the investigation of the amount of space reserved for each woman in *lavoirs*.⁴⁷³ Henri Bunel, the hygienic inspector, found that the average space currently in use was less than a

⁴⁷⁰ APP, DA 336 Navigation. Gilbert Pouchet « Réponse au rapport de M. Jungfleisch » 1886, 15.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Ibid.

⁴⁷³ APP, DB 226 Blanchisseries. Henri Bunel « Rapport: L'espace à réserver aux laveuses dans les lavoirs » 5 août 1886.

cubic meter. This amount was not sufficient for air flow according to an older set of calculations from the construction of the Lavoir Napoléon; consequently, most of the establishments would need to enlarge the places and spaces. The pressing problem was the humidity of the *lavoirs*. Since most were underground in buildings with the least expensive rent, the ventilation was problematic and the air would remain saturated with bleach fumes.⁴⁷⁴ Laundresses had their hand and feet in the water with their clothes wet five or six days a week. The floors were also problematic. Sometimes there was only a sand floor or one of *bitume*; both were difficult to clean, and deposits from the water would attach to the floor.⁴⁷⁵ The reporter concluded it was the responsibility of the administration to ensure every *lavoir* provided laundresses with enough space, water and ventilation to not provoke arthritis or other diseases.⁴⁷⁶

Moreover, the navigation engineers also argued against the presence of the *bateaux-lavoirs* as well as the *Conseil d'Hygiène*, which contributed to the tide against the *bateaux-lavoirs* rising still higher. *Bateaux-lavoirs* owners wrote a defense in response to the navigation engineers' prosecuting scrutiny and their will to have the Seine free of *bateaux-lavoirs*, which had been the department of navigation's wish since Haussmann's campaign against them.⁴⁷⁷ The owners

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁵ Black mixture that is solid at ambient temperature – tar, asphalt.

⁴⁷⁶ APP, DB 226 Blanchisseries. Henri Bunel « Rapport: L'espace à réserver aux laveuses dans les lavoirs » 5 août 1886.

argued that they had conformed to every rule that the administration had devised, from the uniformity of their image – all had black hulls with grey upper structures – to stopping the practice of drying laundry outside.⁴⁷⁸ The owners recognized Poubelle’s agenda – to clear the water for passenger boats – and fought against it in the report they published. The report detailed how the *bateaux-lavoirs* had not taken all the places for embarkation, and there was room to build new pontoons.⁴⁷⁹ The owners also claimed there was more room to build new ports; at that time, there was no increase in hauling, which the boats could impede. They pointed out that all towing was being handled by steam boats, and hauling by horses was falling out of favor.⁴⁸⁰ The conclusion was that all the developments listed in the report supported the idea that the *bateaux-lavoirs* could continue to use in the Seine in harmony with other boats.

To further build their defense, the *bateaux-lavoir* owners argued that it was the city administration that came to the *bateaux-lavoirs* owners during the siege of Paris to build more facilities for people. Though the current era differed from the political situation during the time of the Franco-Prussian war, the owners sought to highlight that the working-class population still depended on their

⁴⁷⁷ APP, DA 336 Navigation. « Réponse aux rapports de MM. Les ingénieurs de la navigation » 1886.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., 2

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

establishments.⁴⁸¹ The owners of *bateaux-lavoirs* were not going to let the criticisms from the *Conseil d'Hygiène* and the department of navigation run them out of business; their next offensive was to publicize their plight in the journal *Parole*.⁴⁸² In an article, they defended their businesses and right to be on the Seine. The owners made light of the navigation problems engendered by their boats, saying that it was the captains of the new steam boats that did not know how to drive. Then, addressing the arguments against their appearance, the owners defined the scenes on their boats as lively – in contrast to the charge that they were too loud to live next to – and happy, not impoverished.⁴⁸³

The accusation of polluting the Seine and thus the residents of Paris was serious, and the article did not fail to address it. The article in *Parole* put the city administration on trial, accusing it of overpricing the water delivery service and stating: “the Administration leases it to me at the price of spring water but it is true, I cannot drink it.”⁴⁸⁴ The article sought to reveal the hypocrisy of the city administration by underlining that *lavoirs* using the sewers was equal to dumping waste water in the Seine since the sewers ran straight back to the river. The article called into question the biases of Jungfleisch and his methods, indicating that the numbers for the cubic centimeters of water passing through Paris were false, which made the concentrations of microbes much lower and therefore less

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., 3

⁴⁸² APP, DB 226 Blanchisseries. “Les bateaux-lavoirs,” *Parole*, 17 août 1886.

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

dangerous. The article ended with the following sardonic sentence: “*Monsieur le Préfet*, leave the *lavandières* alone and give us spring water to drink.”⁴⁸⁵ By using the term *lavandières* instead of *blanchisseuses*, which was the more common term, the author of the article sought to romanticize the scene around the *bateaux-lavoirs*.⁴⁸⁶ The article also emphasized that the owners of the boats – as well as the laundresses who used the *bateaux-lavoirs* – were easy targets and that there were much greater threats to the water quality of the Seine; indeed, the article

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁶ In rural settings, laundresses dried the washed linens on lavender bushes, where laundry was not something that was out of place. This greatly contrasted with the situation urban laundresses faced. The term was never used in urban settings. A poem by Victor Hugo exemplifies the difference in terms:

Et je lui dis : -" ô lavandière !

«L' oiseau gazouille, l' agneau bêle,
Gloire à ce rivage écarté !
Lavandière, vous êtes belle.
Votre rire est de la clarté.

«Je suis capable de faiblesses.
Ô lavandière, quel beau jour !
Les fauvettes sont des drôlesses
Qui chantent des chansons d' amour.

«Voilà six mille ans que les roses
Conseillent, en se prodiguant,
L' amour aux coeurs les plus moroses.
Avril est un vieil intrigant.

«Les rois sont ceux qu' adorent celles
Qui sont charmantes comme vous ;
La Marne est pleine d' étincelles ;
Femme, le ciel immense est doux.

Victor Hugo, *Les Chansons des rues* (1865, reprint Paris : Ollendorf, 1933), 151.

revealed that the waste from hospitals, slaughter yards, homes and other pollutants all flowed into the Seine without treatment.⁴⁸⁷

The investigation of the *bateaux-lavoirs* produced a clear image of the administration's intentions regarding the establishments on the river. The different reports, contradictions, and hypocrisies emphasized one consistency throughout; Poubelle wanted the *bateaux-lavoirs* off the river even if they were better for public hygiene – and the health of the women who used them – than the terrestrial laundry facilities. This prejudice helped define what was consistent in the interest of the city government. The city administration was no longer haunted by the lack of water and supplies to launder which were direct effects of the Prussian siege; the *bateaux-lavoirs* could no longer count on their contributions during the siege to legitimize their current position. The administration wanted to support other types of businesses like the passenger boats at the expense of establishments that fulfilled a greater public role for the poor in Paris. The women who used the *bateaux-lavoirs* did not get a voice in determining their fate; however, they did vote with their feet and continued to use the facilities.

After the Jungfleisch report and the attempted defense from the *bateaux-lavoirs* owners, the city administration – the *Préfet de la Seine* and *Préfet de Police* – had not been able to come to a consensus with the *Conseil municipal* over their closure or continuation. The *Conseil municipal* wanted to keep the *bateaux-lavoirs* while the *Préfets de la Seine* and *de Police* with the *Conseil*

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

d'Hygiène and the *Service de Navigation* wanted to close them.⁴⁸⁸ Because the city government could not come to a decision, the investment in a future project of municipally-run *lavoirs* could not be approved. In letters addressed to both the *Préfet de la Seine* and *Préfet de Police, conseiller municipal* Pétrot called attention to the fact that he had supported a plan submitted to build a series of *lavoirs* six months ago and had received no response from the administration.⁴⁸⁹ The *conseiller* was worried that “even the smallest towns have a city-funded *lavoir*; Paris must not fall behind.”⁴⁹⁰ He continued, emphasizing that if the administration did decide to eliminate the *bateaux-lavoirs*, they would need to build a few test pieces for the rest of the city; therefore, there should be no obstacle to building the *lavoir* already proposed.⁴⁹¹ The creation of *lavoirs* was urgent if the *Préfet de la Seine* closed *bateaux-lavoirs*. Yet, they were not rushing to build anything to replace the needed facilities. Pétrot ended his letter by admonishing the *Conseil municipal de la ville de Paris* and the *Préfets* for not being able to come to a decision and “establish *lavoirs* in the interest of the poor population.”⁴⁹² In the last years of the nineteenth century, the *Préfet de la Seine*, Justin Germain Casimir de Selves, unceremoniously ordered the first five

⁴⁸⁸ APP, DB 226 Blanchisseries. Correspondance du conseiller municipal Pétrot aux Préfets de la Seine et de Police, 10 septembre 1886.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.

⁴⁹² Ibid.

bateaux-lavoirs to be eliminated, based on the needs of the Navigation Department.⁴⁹³ De Selves staggered the demission of the *bateaux-lavoirs*; those established first left Paris first. It would take until the winter of 1910 to completely eliminate them from Paris when the Seine froze and destroyed the remaining ones. After the recriminations and spirited defenses, the owners agreed to have their establishments towed out of the city to a place in the surrounding communes like Issy-les-Moulins, and Boulogne-sur-Seine who still welcomed the *bateaux-lavoirs*.

Lavoirs Still Unwanted in Paris

Although touted as the answer to the problems created by the *bateaux-lavoirs*, the *Conseil d'Hygiène* was not satisfied with the *lavoirs* in Paris either, and sought to regulate them further in view of public hygiene concerns, primarily microbes which were linked to contagious diseases like tuberculosis and diphtheria. The focus of this section will be the new standards of hygiene set forth by the *Conseil d'Hygiène* for *lavoirs* and the manipulation of dirty laundry from 1890-1905. Fear of the tuberculosis epidemic resulted in new power for the *Conseil d'Hygiène* to go into private homes as well as *lavoirs* to root out these diseases.

These new standards would have immense consequences for the *lavoirs* operating in Paris. Those *lavoirs* who could not meet the *Conseil d'Hygiène's* demands to use the latest technologies could be closed. The government would

⁴⁹³ APP DA 336 Navigation. Arrêté du Préfet de la Seine, 25 février 1898, les *bateaux-lavoirs* de MM. Blondeau, Langlois, Haÿe, Chloët, Pérruche, sont supprimés 1 avril 1898.

not be finished targeting laundry facilities until they were safely out of the city. Chapter two showed how the administration was more rigorous with those who applied to open *lavoirs* within the city and would let *lavoirs* conduct their business more freely in the *banlieue*. With the wave of fear set off by another cholera outbreak in 1887, the administration once again directed their blame toward the *lavoirs*. On the one hand, the administration commended *lavoirs* over *bateaux-lavoirs*; on the other, it sought to close more *lavoirs* than ever before.

The *Conseil d'Hygiène* renewed their supervision of *lavoirs* with vigor, and based their attacks on the threat of microbes and contagious disease. In a report prepared for the annual work summary for 1887, it called attention to the looming danger that *lavoirs* represented in Paris.⁴⁹⁴ The reporter reminded the *Conseil* that the *lavoirs* were in the third class of dangerous establishments and that severe precautions should be taken so that these establishments would not become a health risk for the people living around it.⁴⁹⁵

The work reports from 1890-1894 reflected how difficult it was to establish *lavoirs* in any neighborhood because the inspectors or neighbors would find a problem with the physical constraints of the placement or the cultural preconception of the *lavoir*, particularly that it would be noisy. The inspector denied the application for a proposed *lavoir* on Rue St. Jacques in the fifth

⁴⁹⁴ The work reports were records of what work the *Conseil d'Hygiène* had undertaken, i.e., various inspections, requests, concerns or topics the *Conseil* was interested in. The annual reports were compilations of the reports written throughout the year.

⁴⁹⁵ APP, ed. Ferdinand Drujon, *Rapport général sur les travaux du conseil d'hygiène publique et de salubrité 1887* (Paris : Imprimerie Chaix, 1889).

arrondissement, traditionally a working-class neighborhood, because it was in a courtyard and thus not easily observed; further, it would share a wall with a girl's school. The inspector thought that it was not appropriate for the *lavoir* to be so close to the school and suggested that the culture of the *lavoir* would corrupt the school girls with the laundresses' obscene language.⁴⁹⁶ The inspector's denial of the application on the grounds that it was attached to a school or other type of group home for children was not uncommon, since five other applications were turned down in the same year based on similar grounds.⁴⁹⁷

The debates over the regulation of *lavoirs* took place against the backdrop of the general anxiety regarding tuberculosis. Some estimated that, by the late nineteenth century, seventy to ninety percent of the population in cities around Europe had contracted the disease.⁴⁹⁸ In 1898, the *Conseil d'Hygiène* determined that the *lavoirs* needed further regulation to stop the threat of contagion. The idea of contagion had won the medical communities loyalty since Robert Koch's discovery of the tuberculosis bacillus in 1882. From that point forward, the effort was to find the most effective methods in identifying contagion that caused the most diseases, as well as in stopping the spread of the bacteria, which merely consisted of the trial-and-error method. Since laundry was already on the radar as

⁴⁹⁶ APP, ed. Ferdinand Drujon, *Rapport général sur les travaux du conseil d'hygiène publique et de salubrité 1890-1894* (Paris : Imprimerie Chaix, 1896), 890.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 893.

⁴⁹⁸ David Barnes, *The Making of a Social Disease: Tuberculosis in Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 80.

a source of contagion, it became an easy assumption that it enabled the danger associated with tuberculosis. Added to this phenomenon, Germain Casimir de Selves, the new *Préfet de la Seine*, formerly the director of *Postes et Télégraphes*, was interested in cleaning the city, creating more water lines to feed Paris, installing electricity around the entire city and reforming transport.⁴⁹⁹

The anxiety regarding the dangers raised by the Parisian *lavoirs* and the subsequent drive to bring new regulations to the laundry industry was a result of the *Conseil d'Hygiène*'s knowledge that many small washing businesses in Paris existed outside of the law; it is impossible to know the exact numbers of these laundry boutiques since they were not declared. The Conseil was afraid that the dirty laundry itself would cause increase the incidence of contagious disease. It was precisely these types of establishments and their handling of dirty laundry that the *Conseil d'Hygiène* feared was the locus for contagious diseases, particularly tuberculosis in the last years of the nineteenth century.⁵⁰⁰ The *Conseil d'Hygiène* demanded that *lavoirs* post notices with the new rules in every establishment. The first and most important rule for the hygienists was that the laundry packets from different families not be mixed.⁵⁰¹ The obstacle to regulating these small businesses was that the *Service d'Inspection de Travail* did

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid, 84.

⁵⁰⁰ APP, Ferdinand Drujon, ed. *Rapport général sur les travaux du conseil d'hygiène publique et de salubrité 1898* (Paris : Imprimerie Chaix, 1900), 466.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

not consider them as industrial because they did not have more than ten employees during a work day.

Laundry itself had not been specifically connected to outbreaks of deadly diseases before; the cholera epidemics did not prompt the public health experts to target the laundry businesses as propagators of disease. During the cholera epidemics of the early-nineteenth century, doctors and scientist interested in the spread of the disease warned not to wash clothing in contaminated water. In that case, it was not the clothes that caused illness. In the case of the tuberculosis epidemic of the late-nineteenth century, hygienists thought the clothing itself was the source of contagion. Regulating the laundry business in all of its forms – the large industrial-size establishments in the *banlieue* to the small boutique run by one laundress who employed a few other women – became of paramount importance in the fight against contagion. If the plan was to stop the bacteria and quarantine it, then, the microbes in dirty laundry needed to be contained. Until WWI, the *Conseil d'Hygiène*'s focus consisted of stopping and containing the danger the establishments posed. This focus was not easily managed by the establishments who could not meet the demands to install ever-changing machines that promised to kill all bacteria they washed. Disinfection of laundry was the new priority. Current medical knowledge about bacteria and other contagions disprove the *Conseil d'Hygiène*'s ideas about laundry's ability to spread illnesses. Bacteria and viruses cannot live on soft surfaces for more than a few hours and one would have to have direct contact between the infected clothing and a mucous membrane to transmit any illness. However, the idea of

germs contaminating laundry is still current in popular culture, which I discuss in the conclusion.

In 1898, in light of these new concerns about laundry and contagious diseases, Dr. Eugène Deschamps, who was the head inspector at the *Service des Epidémies*, wrote an extended article on the threat laundry represented to both the laundresses and their customers. Dr. Deschamps investigated the methods of laundering practiced in the *lavoirs* to determine the danger for contagion.⁵⁰² The inquiry was at the behest of the *Conseil municipal de Paris* who was also preoccupied with the prevention of contagion. The assumption at the beginning of Deschamps' study was that the laundresses were transmitting diseases that they contracted during their work.⁵⁰³ The hygienists on the *Conseil d'Hygiène* were certain that the laundresses were becoming ill because they worked with contaminated clothes; they were convinced that only the bacillus made people sick and turned away from the idea that people's housing and diet also played a role in people contracting diseases.⁵⁰⁴ Deschamps reported that, despite the relatively few cases of pulmonary tuberculosis among laundresses, he would go ahead with the research because the *Conseil municipal* had charged him with studying the question.⁵⁰⁵ He found the women who gave laundry to a laundress

⁵⁰² Eugène Deschamps « La désinfection du linge à Paris » *Annales d'Hygiène publique et de médecine légale*, Troisième Série Tome XXXIX (Paris : Librairie J.-B. Ballière et fils, 1898), 24.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁵⁰⁴ Barnes, *The Making of a Social Disease*, 81.

would generally not divulge that there was a contagious person in their house for fear that the laundresses would ask for more money.⁵⁰⁶ This problem arose when the medical services wanted to force people to give embarrassing information about an illness in their home that could ostracize them in the community or possibly cause them to lose their work for being contagious. People had many reasons to hide that they were seriously ill, which made studying the issue particularly difficult. Deschamps believed that it was only with the power of inspection that the *Conseil d'Hygiène* could identify contagious illnesses in people's homes. According to the doctor, the most dangerous process for the laundress was the sorting of laundry before the washing.⁵⁰⁷ Importantly, he found that the washing of laundry with soap effectively rendered the germs harmless and therefore "this danger, in practice, [was] illusory."⁵⁰⁸ However, Deschamps emphasized that he would carry out the investigation to its conclusion for the *Conseil municipal*. He found that the other processes, soaking, washing, rinsing, were without danger to the laundress because the water diluted and carried away the pathogens. The washing occurred in a large cauldron heated to boiling were all the contagions would be killed.⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁵ Deschamps « La désinfection du linge à Paris », 24.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., 27

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid., 28

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid.

The public hygiene services had a license to investigate and root out the causes of contagious diseases, which gave them permission to become more intrusive into people's homes to find a sick person – who could cause an epidemic.⁵¹⁰ They also advocated laws that obligated people to announce their disease to a centralized office that would send out experts to decontaminate the home and laundry.⁵¹¹ The *Préfet de la Seine* required all *conseillers municipaux* to inform the *Conseil d'Hygiène* if they had encountered a case in their *arrondissement* that had not been signaled to the proper authorities.⁵¹² A *conseiller municipal* turned in a report of a laundress who had developed a lesion on her arm following her normal work routine.⁵¹³ He immediately connected the lesion with a sick person who had passed some horrid illness on to the unwitting laundress. The *Conseil d'Hygiène* nominated Dr. Deschamps – who had previously studied laundry – to interview the laundress at her residence. He determined she had not gone to the doctor and therefore, it was impossible to determine what she had at the time the *conseiller municipal* announced the

⁵¹⁰ Barnes, *The Making of a Social Disease*, 78.

⁵¹¹ APP, Emile Jungfleisch, « Au sujet de la désinfection, préalablement à tout lavage, des linges contaminés » *Annales d'Hygiène publique et de médecine légale*, Troisième Série Tome XXXIX (Paris : Librairie J.-B. Ballière et fils, 1898), 331.

⁵¹² APP DB 226 Blanchisseries. Correspondance au Préfet de Police d'Henry Boucher, Ministre du Commerce.

⁵¹³ APP, Compte rendu des séances 1898, *Rapport général sur les travaux du conseil d'hygiène publique et de salubrité* (Paris : Imprimerie Chaix, 1898), 421.

lesion.⁵¹⁴ Deschamps emphasized the complex nature of contagion through laundry. He also characterized the practice of blaming laundry for diseases as outmoded.⁵¹⁵ It was already a motive in the medical repertoire and an easy scapegoat without conclusive proof. He reported that the professional laundresses marked each sack as it came in; so any contaminated laundry would be identifiable. The only other real danger Deschamps found in *lavoirs* was the mixing of linens, when the laundresses took the clean laundry, before it went to the drying room, into the same room where they brought in the used laundry. The *lavoirs* used wooden tables, which he contended stored germs that the moist laundry released.⁵¹⁶ He accused the small boutiques of this practice and discussed the budgetary limitations if they had to implement new procedures. When the laundry – which was possibly contaminated by the wood tables – dried, it would not produce any threat; the bacteria and viruses that found their way to the laundry would die while it was drying.⁵¹⁷

Deschamps recounted a case that involved a child who was ill with Diphtheria without having any contact with anyone sick, which illustrate the fear of the workers themselves transmitting disease to their clients. The laundress, who

⁵¹⁴ Ibid.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.

⁵¹⁷ According to the Center for Disease Control, the life-span of viruses and bacteria are varied; however, viruses are only able to live outside the body on a hard surface. Surfaces such as wood and clothing would be poor hosts. Bacteria thrive on soft surfaces, but only if they remain humid. CDC.gov/HAI 4 January 2011

had a child with diphtheria at home, delivered the linens on the day before the child became ill. Thus, the doctor concluded, with only circumstantial evidence, that the laundress must have been a carrier for the illness and had infected the child when she delivered the laundry.⁵¹⁸ The packages that laundresses used for the delivery and pick-up of laundry was often the same; Deschamps decried this practice as being a serious cause of contagion. Importantly, the doctor argued that it was those who had the money to send their laundry out who were most at risk.⁵¹⁹

Deschamps outlined the ways to protect the population from these laundry establishments. He identified the *trriage* as the operation that seemed the most useless and dangerous. However, it was during that stage that the laundress attached the tags to her clients' clothes before they were mixed in with the other clients' laundry for boiling. For the *trriage* to be safe, he argued, it was necessary to have a room dedicated to that specific purpose. Although Deschamps wanted the government to legislate and enforce these plans, he admitted in the following paragraph that the small establishments would never be able to work within such restrictions.⁵²⁰ Only the industrial *blanchisseries* would be able to meet these requirements; there would be no more independent laundresses working for themselves. Deschamps complained that nothing in the current legislation let the *Conseil d'Hygiène* attack these problems that *lavoirs* engendered and therefore

⁵¹⁸ Deschamps « La désinfection du linge à Paris », 28.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid.,28.

⁵²⁰ Ibid.,29.

recommended legislating that everyone must disinfect their laundry before the laundress came and collected it.⁵²¹

In contrast, Deschamps called the women who ran laundry boutiques “mercenaries” who could never be regulated since their business was not classed.⁵²² The doctor was highly critical of the laundry boutiques and was convinced that laundry coming from these businesses was a major propagator of contagion.⁵²³ The Minister of Commerce also listed the many dangers laundry boutiques presented to public health. He argued that, because they employed people and were the biggest threat to public health, the boutiques should be classed.⁵²⁴

Consequently, in 1903, the Minister of Commerce solicited the *Conseil d’Hygiène* for an investigation into the nomenclature of laundry establishments and their classification and specifically asked if they were dangerous in light of the tuberculosis epidemic reports he had read from cities in France.⁵²⁵ He wanted to know if they should be classed as dangerous establishments in the second class or remain in the third class. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Minister of

⁵²¹ Ibid.

⁵²² Ibid.

⁵²³ Ibid

⁵²⁴ APP DB 226 Blanchisseries. Rapport sur la nomenclature des lavoirs, Compte rendu des séances 1903, *Rapport général sur les travaux du conseil d’hygiène publique et de salubrité* (Paris : Imprimerie Chaix, 1903), 430.

⁵²⁵ APP DB 226 Blanchisseries. Communication relative au projet de classement des lavoirs publics du Ministre de Commerce.

Commerce had recommended placing them in the third category for the purpose of easing restrictions on establishing new *lavoirs* in Paris.⁵²⁶ The proceedings then established the nomenclature for the different types of laundry establishments. *Buanderies* being the establishments that only heat the water, all other processes were done elsewhere and were private, with only the laundresses by profession being able to use them. The *lavoirs* – housing every process – were necessarily public, inviting in anyone who wanted to wash. The *Blanchisseries* were industrial-size *lavoirs* that were private. All of these establishments were already classed.

Paradoxically, the *Conseil d'Hygiène* did not support a *lavoir* specifically operated for people infected with tuberculosis despite their own requirement to disinfect the laundry of the ill. According to one of its inspectors, the case of a *lavoir* connected to an anti-tuberculosis dispensary in the ground floor of an apartment building presented too many possibilities for contagion.⁵²⁷ The *lavoirs* would take laundry from sick patients and would disinfect them, as well as carry

⁵²⁶ APP, Communication relative au projet de classement des lavoirs publics. *Compte rendu des séances 1903, Rapport général sur les travaux du conseil d'hygiène publique et de salubrité* (Paris : Imprimerie Chaix, 1903) 304. First class was the most dangerous businesses with inspection twice per year by the Conseil d'Hygiène. Second class businesses required yearly inspections from the Conseil as well as regular inspections to stay open. Third class businesses – which could possibly create a public health problem but received the least scrutiny – required only one inspection from the Conseil to open and could operate without inspections thereafter.

⁵²⁷ APP *Compte rendu des séances 1903, Rapport général sur les travaux du conseil d'hygiène publique et de salubrité* (Paris : Imprimerie Chaix, 1903), 59.

out isolation measures of the contaminated laundry.⁵²⁸ The *Préfet de Police* had awarded the facility a limited permit to operate, which was conditional on perfecting the lighting and flooring. The owner had made the changes, but the inspector recommended that the application be denied.⁵²⁹ The owner wrote a letter arguing that the facility served the public interest by disinfecting the laundry. In addition, the owner would insulate the motors to reduce the noise, and the laundry would be given back without being ironed and with no contact with the residents of the apartment building. However, the recommendation was supported by the *Préfet de Police*, but since the *Conseil d'Hygiène* thought it was too risky and advised against it. The *Préfet* ultimately rejected the application.⁵³⁰

The law on the disinfection of laundry used by people with contagious illnesses like tuberculosis, typhoid, small pox, cholera or meningitis, among other diseases, made it mandatory to declare a contagious illness in the household to the police – who would then contact the *Conseil d'Hygiène* – and to disinfect the laundry by passing it through a disinfection solution.⁵³¹ Within an article explaining their new regulatory powers, the members of the *Conseil d'Hygiène* worried that they had not been able to get the *lavoirs* classed as more dangerous,

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

⁵²⁹ Ibid.

⁵³⁰ Ibid., 60.

⁵³¹ APP *Compte rendu des séances 1903, Rapport général sur les travaux du conseil d'hygiène publique et de salubrité* (Paris : Imprimerie Chaix, 1903), 336.

specifically in reaction to the threat of tuberculosis.⁵³² However, the Minister of Commerce was the one who had rejected the idea of reclassifying *lavoirs* and requiring them all to install a disinfection tub on the contention that “it would be too difficult to enforce while still respecting private interests.”⁵³³ The problem with regulating the mandatory use of specific disinfectants was that they often reacted with stains in different manners. In effect, if one mandated a certain type of disinfectant, it could ruin hundreds of people’s laundry. Although the *Conseil d’Hygiène* could not decide what to use, its intent to regulate the laundry industry more closely in the face of tuberculosis was clear. Yet, the Minister of Commerce had rejected the idea of reclassifying the *lavoirs* to enable the inspectors to examine every laundry business, and there was no agreement on a type of disinfectant. Thus, the *Conseil*’s intentions came to nothing.

The city administration grew more unsatisfied with its regulatory powers and sought new laws to protect against the spread of contagious disease they thought laundry establishments were responsible for. The *Conseil d’Hygiène* pushed for the reclassification of *lavoirs* from third to second class.⁵³⁴ The Minister of Commerce informed the *Préfet de Police* that there was no possibility

⁵³² APP, Au sujet de la désinfection des linges dans les lavoirs. Compte rendu des séances 1903, *Rapport général sur les travaux du conseil d’hygiène publique et de salubrité* (Paris : Imprimerie Chaix, 1903).

⁵³³ Ibid.

⁵³⁴ APP, Communication relative au projet de classement des lavoirs publics. Compte rendu des séances 1903, *Rapport général sur les travaux du conseil d’hygiène publique et de salubrité* (Paris : Imprimerie Chaix, 1903), 304.

of granting this request.⁵³⁵ The *Comité Consultatif des Arts et Manufactureurs* deliberated on the request that had been made and returned with instructions that a law specific to the contagious aspect of used laundry was already under review.⁵³⁶ Further, the Minister argued that the workers were already covered under the 1893 law protecting the health of the workers and the 1902 law which required the declaration of any contagious disease in a household.⁵³⁷

The *Conseil d'Hygiène* was disappointed by the answer the Minister of Commerce gave the *Préfet de Police*. In their June 1904 quarterly meeting, the subject of disinfection returned, and they agreed that every modern *lavoir* would have to be equipped with a special disinfection bath for all laundry that passed through.⁵³⁸ This law would not apply to the few *bateaux-lavoirs* that were left on the Seine because they were not a classified industry, thus the *Conseil* had no oversight of those establishments. The *Conseil* contended that the law on the disinfection of laundry had not been effectively enforced and that “the threat of tuberculosis alone should have been sufficient for the reclassing of *lavoirs*.”⁵³⁹ The *Conseil* was not convinced that they could obtain the necessary political support to require every *lavoir* to install a disinfection bath since the Minister of

⁵³⁵ Ibid., 305.

⁵³⁶ Ibid., 306.

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

⁵³⁸ APP, Au sujet de la désinfection des linges dans les lavoirs. Compte rendu des séances 1904, *Rapport général sur les travaux du conseil d'hygiène publique et de salubrité* (Paris : Imprimerie Chaix, 1904), 342.

⁵³⁹ Ibid.

Commerce had already rejected the idea of reclassifying *lavoirs* on the grounds that it would hamper the economy by closing small businesses.⁵⁴⁰ Following the requirement to have a disinfection bath raised the problem of which disinfectant to use; Lysol, Cresol and Formol would ruin people's laundry making stains permanent.⁵⁴¹ The *Conseil d'Hygiène* could also decide to be less exigent in according permission to proposed *lavoirs* which were not meeting the standards already in place. Included in the report on disinfecting laundry, the investigation of a proposed location for a *lavoir* in the XXth *arrondissement* reflected the anxiety the *Conseil d'Hygiène* had about the establishments. After looking at the space, the inspector wrote that the *lavoir* was "irredeemable", and it would be "impossible to not compromise the neighbor's health [with the establishment]."⁵⁴² The inspector ended with a somber warning that "the improper installation of a *lavoir* in the heart of Paris could become a home for sickness and a breeding ground for tuberculosis."⁵⁴³ The *Conseil d'Hygiène* did not accord permission for the *lavoir*. Factually, the 20th *arrondissement* was definitely not "in the heart of Paris" at the beginning of the twentieth century; the inspector's use of this metaphor may signify that the *Conseil d'Hygiène* considered any laundry establishment within the boundaries of Paris dangerous.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., 343.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

⁵⁴² Ibid., 344.

⁵⁴³ Ibid.

The *Conseil d'Hygiène* was convinced that the manipulation of dirty laundry in *lavoirs* and industrial *blanchisseries* was the cause of high rates of tuberculosis, typhoid, diphtheria and other contagious diseases among laundry workers.⁵⁴⁴ They were convinced that the bacillus of tuberculosis and other diseases could be contained and destroyed.⁵⁴⁵ Yet, the myriad environmental factors coupled with countless sources of viruses and bacteria made rooting out sources of contagion for every illness nearly impossible. These confounding variables made the crusade against laundry useless. Moreover, the idea of contagion obscured other important causes associated with the contraction of contagious diseases, such as living conditions and malnourishment. Living conditions for the poor and working classes only saw the first improvements by the beginning of the twentieth century.⁵⁴⁶

The constant effort on behalf of the *Conseil d'Hygiène* to identify laundry and *lavoirs* as dangerous finally convinced legislators to write a decree on the law of 1893 protecting workers' health, specifically targeting laundry workers. The decree served to protect the greater population from contagious illnesses. The work on crafting the proposed law began two years earlier, and the French President Émile Loubet signed the decree in 1905.⁵⁴⁷ The law required the owners

⁵⁴⁴ Marcel Frois « L'Hygiène et le lessivage du linge dans les lavoirs et blanchisseries » *Annales d'Hygiène publique et de médecine légale*, 1905 Quatrième Série Tome XXXX (Paris : Librairie J.-B. Ballière et fils, 1907), 45.

⁵⁴⁵ Barnes, *The Making of a Social Disease*, 85.

⁵⁴⁶ Shapiro, *Housing the Poor of Paris*, 115.

and managers of all laundry establishments to follow a specific set of procedures when taking in laundry to be washed. The laundry had to be closed in a bag until it arrived at the washing facility.⁵⁴⁸ Although some women sorted their laundry on the street, laundresses would usually sort the laundry immediately, before arriving at the facilities, usually in the carriages they used to retrieve the laundry from clients; the *Conseil* worried this action was a possible source of contagion to bystanders and laundresses. The law required the laundry worker to immediately put all laundry into a disinfectant bath, or a boiling caldron, or to spray it to fix the dust to the clothing. After she arrived at the *lavoir*, then, she needed to disinfect the laundry bag. In cases where there was a known infectious disease in the customer's house, she needed to disinfect the laundry by chemical means only.⁵⁴⁹ Moreover, the owners and managers of the establishments were to provide overcoats to those who sorted the used laundry. The law outlined the regular washing and maintenance of the coats, as well as forbidding their storage in any rooms where the workers stored clean laundry or washed laundry.⁵⁵⁰ Article six also forbade the sorting or storage of used laundry in the ironing rooms.⁵⁵¹ The workers regularly used the ironing rooms as a store-all area and as

⁵⁴⁷ « Décret sur la manipulation du linge sale dans lavoirs et blanchisseries »
Annales d'Hygiène Public, Quatrième Série, Tome 40 (Juillet 1905) : 369-370.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid. Article 2

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid, Article 3.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid. Article 4.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid Article 5.

an eating area since there were tables. Finally, the law also required every *lavoir* to evacuate used water through closed pipes leading directly to the underground sewer.⁵⁵² In 1913 there was a major investigation commissioned by the Minister of Commerce and Work under the rubric of health and safety for workers. Chapter six will study the investigation to determine if the blanchisseries and lavoirs complied with the prescriptions set out by the law of 1905.

The new regulations for the manipulation of dirty laundry threatened the existence of small facilities that operated in the basements and courtyards of buildings around Paris. Most of these facilities had only one or two rooms to work. The law would hamper the small businesses whose owners could not afford to rent larger premises that would allow them to follow the new regulations. In effect, the *Conseil d'Hygiène* had greater power to close those *lavoirs* that could not strictly follow the new prescriptions. From this time, the *Conseil d'Hygiène* had regulatory powers over all laundry facilities; yet they could not practically regulate clandestine laundry boutiques. The larger industrial facilities had no problem keeping pace with hygienic developments. They installed and developed new technologies that the *Conseil d'Hygiène* used as models for hygienic facilities. At least one member of the *Conseil d'Hygiène*, Marcel Frois – who had owned and operated an industrial *blanchisserie* – commented that these regulations would be an advance in hygiene but would nonetheless mean the demise of small *lavoirs* and their employees for the sake of public health, since

⁵⁵² Ibid, Article 6.

they would never be able to implement the new regulations.⁵⁵³ Being an owner of an industrial *blanchisserie* meant that Frois was not impartial on the subject and would not be sorry to see his competition be regulated out of existence. The push for regulation highlighted the partiality of the *Conseil d'Hygiène*.

In 1908, three years after the new regulations became law, the *Conseil d'Hygiène* revisited the problem of regulating the small *lavoirs* in the heart of Paris. Armand Gautier, a chemist on the *Conseil d'Hygiène* who worked on questions of food hygiene, wrote an article for the *Annales d'Hygiène* outlining his observation on hygiene and laundry in Paris.⁵⁵⁴ Gautier claimed that the inspectors of classed businesses were reluctant to formally classify small *lavoirs* in the poor neighborhoods of Paris because of their rapid growth. The steady stream of migrants to Paris had not abated, and the city was not yet fully equipped to cope with the influx of people in need of affordable housing. The neighborhoods with the least-expensive housing experienced the most rapid growth, and it was in those neighborhoods that laundresses would open clandestine *lavoirs*.

Gautier identified the small *lavoir* as being a public health danger. He underlined that “it is not the large *blanchisseries* that are away from the population, but the small *boutique de blanchisseuse* in the heart of the

⁵⁵³ Marcel Frois, « Triage du linge sale » *Annales d'Hygiène Publique*, quatrième série, tome treizième (Janvier 1910) : 217-229.

⁵⁵⁴ APP, Armand Gautier, « Rapport : Hygiène dans les lavoirs après le décret du 1905 » *Compte rendu des séances 1908, Rapport général sur les travaux du conseil d'hygiène publique et de salubrité* (Paris : Imprimerie Chaix, 1908), 45.

neighborhood.”⁵⁵⁵ He argued that the boutiques were a danger to the laundresses and to the residents because the dirty laundry was sorted at the laundress’ home before being washed. The large industrial facilities had special rooms suited for this purpose.⁵⁵⁶ He claimed that “these precautions were not taken in smaller facilities that existed by the hundreds which the *Préfet de Police* and his inspectors were usually ignorant of anyway.”⁵⁵⁷ He emphasized that the law had not curbed the dangers presented by laundresses and dirty laundry because it could not regulate the *boutiques de blanchissage* and ironing shops that frequently doubled as boutiques.⁵⁵⁸ Repeating the argument that persisted at least since 1800, Gautier claimed there was no place for laundry establishments inside of Paris because the high population density precluded hygienic laundry operations.⁵⁵⁹ His article sought to illustrate that the law on the manipulation of used laundry was flawed; it did not take into account the various types of laundry facilities that were most worrisome to Gautier. He argued that the law actually made hygienic conditions worse in the *boutiques de blanchissage* because the women hid the laundry in their rooms where their children lived.⁵⁶⁰

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid., 46.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid., 47

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., 48.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid.

While tuberculosis raged across Europe, and other contagious diseases like typhoid and diphtheria cut down the population, the French government grappled with the problem of a diminishing population caused by low birth rates and high infant mortality. A contagious disease like diphtheria would be particularly deadly for infants. In an attempt to increase the population they tried to root out disease, which came at the expense of laundresses. The *Conseil d'Hygiène* sought to close every business that was not closely regulated without regard to the consequences for the workers in the industry or the residents who needed washing facilities. Gautier's article demonstrates that the law the *Conseil d'Hygiène* pushed for succeeded in hiding the problems from public sight, but had not resolved the contagion problem, particularly among the poorer residents of Paris.

The problem of dirty laundry and contagion was not yet resolved. A year after Gautier's report, the *Conseil d'Hygiène* grappled with the problems of enforcing the regulations on sorting used linen and the issue of clandestine *boutiques de blanchissage*. These were businesses run by women and employed women, in contrast to the bateaux-lavoirs, lavoirs and blanchisseries. The boutiques were akin to the establishment Zola described in *L'Assommoir*. Maurice Bezonçon, reporter for the *Conseil*, elucidated the ongoing issues with laundry. He related to the *Conseil* that the sorting of dirty laundry still took place on the streets, in apartment building corridors, carriages, courtyards and private

rooms.⁵⁶¹ In four years, the law had done little to stop what the *Conseil d'Hygiène* believed to be the most dangerous part of laundering. Members of the *Conseil d'Hygiène* wanted to create an annex to the law on the manipulation of soiled linens, anything that people used or wore that could be washed, which specifically outlawed the sorting everywhere except rooms specifically created for the purpose.⁵⁶² The problem was the lack of hygiene inspectors to investigate and find the facilities not following the law. The *Conseil* suggested that work inspectors should be added to the hygiene service to find the clandestine facilities that, in the *Conseil d'Hygiène's* opinion, could contaminate an entire neighborhood. Bezonçon accused the laundresses of not caring if they made others ill.⁵⁶³ The *Conseil d'Hygiène* complained that there were many different types of laundry facilities that remained unregulated because they had less than three employees, and that there was no way to close the dangerous businesses without more inspectors. For example, on Rue Marcadet, located in the 18th arrondissement, only one boutique owner had employees – and thus was regulated – out of sixty other laundry boutiques on the same street.⁵⁶⁴ The problem was that most laundresses had two or three jobs, working in successive boutiques since one could rarely fully employ a group of laundresses and ironers since they drew their

⁵⁶¹ APP, Maurice Bezonçon, « Rapport : Les causes d'insalubrité dans les lavoirs du Paris » Compte rendu des séances 1909, *Rapport général sur les travaux du conseil d'hygiène publique et de salubrité* (Paris : Imprimerie Chaix, 1910), 115.

⁵⁶² Ibid.

⁵⁶³ Ibid., 116.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid., 117.

client base from the neighborhood around their business. The inspectors had trouble finding the clandestine boutiques because taking in laundry and ironing – coupled with bread delivering and housekeeping – was often a hidden occupation that married women used to help make ends meet.⁵⁶⁵ Bezonçon concluded that, while closing small laundry businesses would be a heavy price to pay for the women, it would have to be done to protect public health. He added that the laundresses could go work in the *blanchisseries*, not taking into account the reasons women took in washing – distance to travel for other work, to take care of their children, and control over their hours of work. Bezonçon admitted that “...this transformation of an ancient method of work carried by tradition will not go without difficulties, but will it not be desirable progress?”⁵⁶⁶ His statement reflected the willingness of the Conseil d’Hygiène to sacrifice laundresses and their work in the name of progress instead of teaching new methods of washing.

Conclusion

This chapter described how, by discriminating against *bateaux-lavoirs*, tightly regulating *lavoirs* in the center of Paris, only approving laundry facilities in the outskirts of Paris, the city administration pushed laundry facilities for the poor out of the city. The biased report from Jungfleisch exposed the city administration’s real intention. The *Préfet* simply wanted the *bateaux-lavoirs* out of Paris, not in regards to hygiene concerns, but because they blocked the traffic

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid., 118.

of municipally-operated transport companies, and did not match his overall vision of the city and its public space which prioritized fluidity and a clean image.

Moreover, this chapter demonstrated that *lavoirs* were not wanted in Paris either. While tuberculosis raged across Europe, and other contagious diseases like typhoid and diphtheria affected the population, the French government attempted to root out disease. The *Conseil d'Hygiène* identified laundry as a *possible* medium for the growth of disease-causing microbes because of its proximity to contagious people. However, there was never any conclusive proof for this idea. Consequently, the *Conseil d'Hygiène* sought to close every laundry facility that was not closely regulated without regard to the consequences for the workers or the residents who needed washing facilities. There were already industrial *blanchisseries* outside the city to meet the more affluent residents' needs, so when microbes and contagion theory became the dominant paradigm to assess and control crises in public hygiene, *lavoirs* became an easy target. Although in Jungfleisch's report he did identify hospitals being another major source of pollution, the city could not afford to close or move those institutions.⁵⁶⁷ The *tanneries* on the Bièvre had moved out of Paris in 1905 after a strike and reopened in the southern communes outside of Paris and the river was covered over in 1912 in Paris.⁵⁶⁸ Described as clandestine, irredeemable, corrupting or inappropriate, *lavoirs* were associated with noisy, damp, dark, cluttered and

⁵⁶⁷ APP, DA 336 Navigation. 5 mars 1886, Dr. Emile Jungfleisch, « Rapport sur l'intérêt que présentent pour la santé publique le maintien ou la suppression des bateaux-lavoirs » 10.

⁵⁶⁸ Renaud Gagneux, *Sur les traces de la Bièvre Parisian* (Paris : Parigramme, 1990), 40.

insalubrious buildings, which opposed the city administrators' concept of urban space favoring open, light and clean streets.

On the water, the campaign against the *bateaux-lavoirs* succeeded, and by the turn of the century, they were slowly being eliminated one-by-one. On land, the building of *lavoirs* – the *Conseil d'Hygiène*'s proposed replacements of the *bateaux-lavoirs* – never occurred in great numbers and most establishments located themselves in less expensive areas around the edges of Paris since inspectors did not approve the establishment of any *lavoirs* located in the urban center from 1885-1905. The *Conseil d'Hygiène* admitted that the task of bringing all the clandestine laundry boutiques under regulation was nearly impossible because the women could easily hide the business. Thus, by clearing the streets of its clutter, optimizing the flow of traffic, privileging profitable businesses, exporting poverty to the *banlieue*, hiding women from public space, and providing a cleaner image of the city centre, the Parisian government was closer to achieving its goals for modernizing the city. The reports and their internal contradictions made it clear that laundry was not a disease vector: it was matter out of place.

The *Conseil d'Hygiène* and *Annales d'Hygiène* focused on one solution to the city's laundering needs: the *blanchisseries*. They contended that these establishments had the money to incorporate all the required changes to ensure hygiene such as separate rooms for sorting dirty laundry and the installation of disinfection baths. The *Conseil d'Hygiène* asserted that these measures would also protect the women who worked in them from transmissible diseases. However,

chapter six will show that these assertions were not always true. Moreover, the women became wage workers with no control over their working environment or hours; they went from laundresses to laundry workers. However, this change in work enabled women to gather and rally for better conditions, wages, and hours.

Chapter 6

WOMEN'S WORKING CONDITIONS IN LAVOIRS AND THE INDUSTRIAL BLANCHISSERIES: 1865-1913

Chapter five showed the focus on laundry facilities as vectors of disease were the result of the actions of the *Conseil d'Hygiène*, which, armed with the discovery of microbes, thought they could pinpoint the source of infectious diseases that threatened the Parisian population. Their strict regulations of the laundry industry affected laundresses in Paris. I argued that, rather than subsidizing and updating existing facilities in Paris to enable better hygiene practices benefiting everyone, city administrators used the suggestions of the *Conseil d'Hygiène* to achieve their own goals – to reorder the city and move laundresses and laundry away from central Paris via regulations – having identified them as potential vectors of epidemics. Exporting *blanchisseries* into the surrounding areas of Paris solved several problems: Laundresses would be out of sight, hanging laundry would no longer conjure images of poverty and pollution, and the businesses would be able to incorporate the latest developments in public hygiene. The *Conseil d'Hygiène* championed the improved health and hygiene standards of the larger industrial establishments, arguing that these facilities could integrate all the hygiene regulations. They touted the *blanchisseries* as the answer to the city's problems about laundry businesses: on the one hand, the problems related to pollution of the Seine by *bateaux-lavoirs*; on the other hand, the possibility of epidemics coming from the small laundry boutiques that could not adhere to prescriptions on manipulating dirty laundry.

This chapter will explore the conditions of the laundry worker after the mechanization of the laundry process and the effects of the labor laws on women who worked in the *blanchisseries*. In *lavoirs* and clandestine laundry boutiques, laundresses earned money working for themselves cleaning others' clothes; they were entrepreneurs choosing their own hours, and isolated, lacking a shared interest in changing their working conditions. In the industrial *blanchisseries*, which used mechanized laundering and served the affluent population of Paris and large businesses that required linens, the women who worked in them did not work for themselves. *Blanchisseries* had moved out of Paris early in the century to take advantage of inexpensive land, ample water and easier drainage. Women working in the large *blanchisseries* faced similar problems that other women who worked outside of the home in industrial conditions encountered; these conditions led to a consciousness of laundresses' shared plight as working women. The advent of industrial *blanchisseries* from 1865 generated a new type of laundresses with the awareness among these women that they had the right to better conditions. The machines employed in *blanchisseries* were new and often did not have any safety measures. The laundry workers were subjected to working hours over which they had no control. They fought for better wages and demanded that their bosses respect their right to a rest day. Organized chronologically, this chapter will explore their struggles to improve their working conditions, through demands, unions, letters, and strikes. Their actions were relayed by the socialist newspapers of the time which highlighted the lack of safety controls for the machines the *blanchisseries* used compared to the *lavoirs* and traditional methods

of laundering. This chapter will describe various protective labor laws that affected the working conditions of laundry workers. It will also investigate the records of adherence to these laws, revealing that the laundresses' and the public's health were not better protected in the *blanchisseries* than in the smaller *lavoirs* as the *Conseil d'Hygiène* had argued they would be. The *blanchisseuses* working in the industrial laundry facilities will be referred to as laundry workers in this chapter to reflect their changing work conditions.

The Unions and Strikes of Laundry Workers: 1865-1904

In her work on English laundresses, Patricia Malcolmson succinctly summarized what these women did: “laundry work was first and foremost heavy manual labor, and it was the means, whether primary or secondary, of earning a living.”⁵⁶⁹ Malcolmson highlighted the perception that laundry workers were independent, quoting a laundry owner who spoke before the Royal Commission on Labour: “laundresses were the most independent people on the face of the earth.”⁵⁷⁰ This characteristic was true in France as well, for laundresses at the *lavoirs* and the *bateaux-lavoirs* generally worked for themselves. In contrast, with the industrialization of the laundry process, laundry workers in the *blanchisseries* – while not abandoning their independent spirit and outspoken tendencies – became subordinate to their *patrons* (managers) and worked under patriarchal domination. This shift in workplace significantly affected their conditions and

⁵⁶⁹ Patricia Malcolmson, *English Laundresses: a Social History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 103.

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

their attitude. Industrial *blanchisseries* utilized large machines to process great amounts of material; they catered to hospices, hospitals, and other institutions as well as commercial ventures, and personal clothing. The *blanchisserie* represented a place where women could communicate with a wider community of workers sharing a similar experience under similar circumstances. The communal aspect of the *blanchisseries* was important; working outside the home was the first component that enabled laundry workers to conceptualize taking action; sharing the same plight and having a boss, manager, owner, to rally against, enabled these women to take action to ameliorate their working conditions. Indeed, their workplace represented the most important variable in the formation of unions and in their *grèves* (strikes). In the *blanchisseries*, laundry workers did not work in isolation; they could discuss matters with others workers with little or no supervision.

The presence of the laundry workers' supervisor rarely constituted a major obstacle blocking them from collective action; without fellow male employees, who could possibly co-opt their movement and make a separate peace with the employer, the women could organize themselves and strike for what they needed without interference. On 13 May 1865, laundry workers took action. In the article published in *Le Temps* the newspaper of record, and the forerunner of *Le Monde* – there is no information regarding the workers' demands. Yet, the newspaper article underscored the importance of clean laundry to Parisians. The article described the workers in sympathetic terms with a remark about the many small items Parisian women wore to be fashionable without caring that someone would

have to wash them. “The numerous strikes happening now are a subject of preoccupation for the public. From the coach driver to the *blanchisseuses de fin*, it is the rich who will suffer from the cessation of labor. Who will wash the bonnet that the *Parisiennes* are so fond of? Who will drive the *promeneur du dimanche* to the country? It is possible to go without ‘carriages’, but not without white linen. This is beyond Parisians’ strength. This time, one will have to – willingly or not – wash the family’s linen ourselves.”⁵⁷¹ The article highlighted that the laundresses were even more essential than the coach drivers because no one could go without clean laundry and adhere to social norms. The author also alluded to the affluent women who did not do their own laundry and that it would be against custom for them to wash their own family’s laundry.

Several laws designed to offer protective legislation to women marked the evolution of *blanchisseuses* as laundry workers. The law of 1874 indicated for the first time that women were treated as specific individuals. It stipulated that workers between ages 16 and 21 were forbidden to work nights and days over 12 hours. Women workers engaged in strikes because of issues related to their wages, the length of their workday, and their *patron*’s sexism. The textile sector was the most affected by these *mouvements revendicateurs*. Between 1871 and 1890, strikes by women accounted to 5.9 percent (versus 12 percent mixed); in 1903 the percentage rose to 21.5 percent.⁵⁷² Among the laundry workers, working

⁵⁷¹ *Le Temps*, 13 mai 1865, p.2.

⁵⁷² Sylvie Schweitzer, *Les femmes ont toujours travaillé : une histoire de travail des femmes aux XIX^e et XX^e siècles* (Paris : Odile Jacob), 126.

conditions were one of the causes for striking. The laundresses showed no interest in actually toppling the social order; syndicalism was an outlet that provided an organization to strike against unfair conditions. Peter Stearns also demonstrated that the workers in France found syndicalism convenient for their form of action, the strike, and had little interest in either destroying the social order or engaging in a general strike.⁵⁷³ They were only revolutionary in the sense that they wanted fair pay for a fair day's work. The working conditions in the laundry establishments were dreadful. The following article published in *Le Temps* in 1887 underscores the point that difficult working conditions prompted laundresses to strike. "The *Conseil d'Hygiène Publique et de Salubrité du Département de la Seine* has dealt with diverse accidents of laundresses caused by the use of lye and bleach... From the hardening and wrinkling of the skin epidermis, the chemicals produce temporary muscle spasm of the fingers that hinder their proper functioning and their normal position. The *Conseil* has emitted [an] advisory...[banning the use of] concentrated bleach... and making the manager responsible for the non-execution of the... prescriptions."⁵⁷⁴ On 4 October 1887, following the report by the *Conseil d'Hygiène*, *Le Temps* reported that the *Préfet de Police* had decided to enforce the ban on the use of bleach and *chaux chloride* (lye) based on the skin and muscle injuries that it caused.⁵⁷⁵ However, the

⁵⁷³ Peter Stearns, *Revolutionary Syndicalism and French Labor* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1971), 65.

⁵⁷⁴ *Le Temps*, June 9 1887, p. 3b

⁵⁷⁵ *Le Temps*, October 4 1887, p. 4C

enforcement consisted of posting a warning about the dangers of its use and letting the establishment control the regulations.

The working conditions only grew worse, as laundresses took work in *blanchisseries*. Without a union, industrial *blanchisseries* workers in Marseille went on strike. On 18 October 1881, a report from *La Citoyenne* – a feminist newspaper – commented that the strike illustrated the severe economic deprivation the laundresses worked under. However, the feminist press was not the only ones to observe the difficulty of the work and the dangerous working conditions in which laundresses worked. The article further claimed that men refused to wash laundry because they claimed they were embarrassed to handle women’s underclothes; and yet, the commentator noted, embarrassment never stopped them from becoming women’s physicians. “Let us notice that the *blanchisseuses* who work in this difficult profession are paid very little and have to support their children alone. It does not matter if she is a widow, non married or married; if she has children she must take care of them.”⁵⁷⁶ Moreover, the reporter pointed out that no matter what the social or financial circumstances were; society expected mothers to take care of their children.

The press attention to the working conditions present in industrial *blanchisseries* facilitated the creation of a union – specifically for the interests of the women workers – and the coordination of strikes. In 1884, the legislature of France passed a law allowing for the creation of unions; the Waldeck-Rousseau law gave women *la liberté syndicale* (freedom to join a union). However, the

⁵⁷⁶ *La Citoyenne*, 18 October 1881, p.3

number of working women who belonged to *syndicats* remained relatively low; in 1900, there was 30,000 women in *syndicats* (versus 558,000 men) ; in 1914, there was 89,000 women in *syndicats* (versus 1 million men).⁵⁷⁷ The working women's low representation in unions could be attributed to their economic conditions and to the daily burden they endured; they saw little means to emancipate themselves. According to Yannick Ripa, gender consciousness among female workers was inexistent during the time feminists such as Marguerite Durand organized conferences (1878-1907).⁵⁷⁸ Other factors account for women's difficulty in using their right to unionize. Given the fact that the *Code civil* required wives to submit to their husband's authority, and that some associations demanded women to ask written permission – via their husband or father – in order to speak up, women's public expression was often met with mockery.⁵⁷⁹ Yet, in 1889, seeking to improve their lives through organizational structures, laundry workers took advantage of the 1884 law to create their own union in Paris and the *banlieue*. They were interested in advancing their own cause, not necessarily a syndicalist cause.

Le Temps and *La Citoyenne* both reported on the creation of the *syndicat de blanchisseuses* in distinct ways. In the earlier *Le Temps* article it underlined that the laundresses were a part of everyday life and their absence would

⁵⁷⁷ Schweitzer, *Les femmes ont toujours travaillé*, 123.

⁵⁷⁸ Yannick Ripa, *Les femmes, actrice de l'Histoire : France, 1789-1945* (Paris : Armand Colin, 2002), 89.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

negatively affect individual families. The article highlighted their role as women in society whereas the feminist newspaper, *La Citoyenne*, focused on their legal rights, the creation of a union, the women's right to meet at the *Bourse de travail* (labor exchange), as well as their protection under the law of 1900 limiting their work day to eleven hours.⁵⁸⁰ *Le Temps* described the occasion emotionally, and emphasized that the women had to stand outside for work, implicitly making the parallel between the conditions laundresses were forced to work in and prostitutes. The article begins with an evocative sentence: "The 10,000 *blanchisseuses* of Paris have dreamt for a long time to have a *Chambre Syndicale* to take care of their interests."⁵⁸¹ It quotes Mrs. T, a speaker at the event, who explained the laundry workers' plight:

We have only one *place de grève*, underneath the bridge from the Rue de Rocher. The ones among us who want to get hired are forced to go there on the street from seven to nine in the morning, feet in the water, and the snow, empty stomach; they often think about the crying child they left at their house. Well, let us hurry to create a syndicate that will be able to demand an office at the *bourse du travail*. At least there, we will be sheltered and we could stay there the whole day. Our delegate will be able to receive job offers from both individual houses and *patrons blanchisseurs*. We currently earn 3 to 3.25 francs per day for eleven hours. Let us ask 3.75 for a day that starts at eight [a.m.] and ends at seven[p.m.].

On 19 February 1889, three days after the creation of a syndicate, laundry workers were striking for a place of their own and a raise in their pay. *Le Temps* covered the event. The article noted that *blanchisseuses* were now organized, and had planned for all of the workers involved in the laundry industry to meet under

⁵⁸⁰ *La Citoyenne*, March 3 1889, p. 3

⁵⁸¹ *Le Temps*, February 16 1889, p. 3

the bridge on Rue Portalis in the 8th arrondissement of Paris. This event was a special meeting because the famous socialist Louise Michel was supposed help the laundresses work with their *patron*. *Le Temps* described a scene in which the laundry workers took the initiative to march on top of the bridge with banners that announced the imminent arrival of Louise Michel.⁵⁸² It described the laundresses as being charmingly ignorant of the laws because they held their meeting outside, which was dismissive of their attempts to create a larger march. Again the article appealed to gendered ideas about women that they had only gathered to talk.⁵⁸³ The article focused on the disorderly aspect of the march and that the laundresses would not even listen to Louise Michel; instead, they only wanted immediate gains in their pay and a sheltered place to solicit day work.

A few hand banners had announced “the help of Louise Michel was assured.” Louise Michel went back to the Chemin de Levallois after simply inviting the *blanchisseuses* to choose a room where people could hear one another. “At my place if you want?” But the *ouvrières* showed no hurry to go to Levallois. They let the revolutionary woman go and they spread in small groups, all composed of 2-3 *ouvrières* who talked with one *patronne* who would not stop repeating “you have the right to demand shelter, this is right, about the rest, demand to be paid by the piece and everyone will be happy.”

The group of laundry workers did not obtain the help they had intended on receiving from Louise Michel. Piece work being the most exploitative. They had assumed that she would bring immediate gains in their pay, while she was interested in constructing dialogue for more long-term solutions. Laundry

⁵⁸² *Le Temps*, February 19 1889, p.3

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.*

workers were striving for better pay and shorter hours, goals they deemed obtainable.

On 23 March 1889, *Le Temps* reported with a congratulatory tone that the secretary of the *Syndicats des Ouvrières Blanchisseuses* received one thousand francs that morning, which had originated from an unnamed industrial person in the neighborhood of L'Hôtel de Ville. The article reported that the laundry workers would finally be able to use a large meeting room at the *bourse du travail* three days a week between seven and nine in the morning thanks to the donation. The article added in sympathetic terms, that they would no longer have to endure the weather under the bridge on Rue Portalis which impugned their dignity.⁵⁸⁴ The comment alluded to the parallels that could be drawn between the laundresses on the streets looking for work and prostitutes. In May of 1889, *Le Temps* reported in one line that another group of laundresses formed a *syndicat* on Avenue de Clichy, making the laundresses one of the better organized groups of working women in the city.

In 1892, The Millerand-Coillard law was passed. This labor law limited the hours of work, forbade night work for women, gave workers *repos hebdomadaire* (one weekly rest day) and *respect des fêtes légales* (official holidays). However, Yannick Ripa described an exception in terms of hypocritical discourse apparent in the 1892 law; female nurses were permitted to work at night because it was a feminine domain, in the pure tradition of the

⁵⁸⁴ *Le Temps*, March 23 1889, p4.

woman as *soignante* (caretaker) by nature.⁵⁸⁵ Ripa underscores the gendering of different types of work.⁵⁸⁶ Sylvie Schweitzer described how moral arguments were advanced to protect society as a whole. One theory about night work was that it permitted *offenser les bonnes moeurs* (violation of sexual norms) sexual harassment at the work place.⁵⁸⁷

The length of the workday was one of the largest concerns for laundry workers. The dual demands for fewer hours and more pay were constant factors in their strikes. Mary Lynn Stewart highlights that women rarely went on strike. However, when they did, it was to maintain their pay or their rate of work. When the Millerand-Coillard law passed in 1892, a group of women mill workers went on strike to protest the labor law because they did not want to give up the night shift because it worked well for their family and childcare.⁵⁸⁸ Laundry workers went on strike in order to regulate their work hours so their bosses could not obligate them to do night work. Women in a feminine trade had little hope of help from the government in regulating their working conditions to meet their particular needs.

⁵⁸⁵ There was a similar discourse and exception in the Law of 1906 for a day of rest associated with the *blanchisseuses*; “special conditions, nature and/or character” required them to work on Sunday (described later in this chapter).

⁵⁸⁶ Ripa, *Les femmes, actrice de l’Histoire*, 90.

⁵⁸⁷ Schweitzer. *Les femmes ont toujours travaillé*, 35.

⁵⁸⁸ Mary Lynn Stewart. *Women, Work and the French State: Labour Protection and Social Patriarchy, 1879-1919* (Montreal: Queen’s-McGill University Press, 1989), 164.

Stewart attributes this situation to the dual market that relegated women's work to a lower paying status because it worked well for the economy.⁵⁸⁹ The inattentiveness of the law pressed laundry workers to act on their own behalf.

Stewart found a gendered discourse in the legislation limiting the hours women could work. She concluded that instead of protecting women, the laws were contrary to the women's needs.⁵⁹⁰ Her conclusions were true for women working in the mills who appreciated the flexibility of working at night, since the practice did not compete with their family responsibilities. According to the legislators, the women were endangering their essential reproductive function by working long hours in the mills. The legislators never mentioned laundresses who also worked long hours, often at night, perhaps because the laundresses were in a typically feminine occupation in contrast to the mill workers. Consequently, night work and other types of work the politicians deemed dangerous became unlawful. On the one hand, the laws limited the ability for women employees to earn as much as they did before the cut in hours. On the other hand, laundresses working in *blanchisseries* used later labor laws to fight for better working conditions, to protect themselves from bosses who required them to work all night on weekends when the demand was the heaviest.⁵⁹¹ When the women went on

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., 10.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁹¹ AN F22 362 Blanchisseries. Enquête repos hebdomadaire 1906-1913. Correspondance de Madame Dugeunes au Ministre du Travail, 31 juillet 1907. This was a letter from a laundress who requested a work inspector to inspect her boss because he required women to work over the legal amount of hours.

strike over working conditions, they referenced the labor laws as their justification.

Between 1900 and 1910, laundry workers were active in terms of strikes and syndical activity. Two important laws may have contributed to such activities: The law of 13 March 1900 restricted women and children to only work 10 hours a day, and men 12 hours; the law of 30 March 1900 stipulated that there would not be any night work in any industry for women.

In this survey of newspaper coverage of strikes regarding working hours and pay, the socialist-syndicalist newspapers reported on laundry workers' strikes and unions more frequently than the feminist press. One reason may have been the lack of attention from moral reformers. Many feminists urged the women who worked in the sweated industries to organize, thereby completely neglecting the laundry workers who actually carried out organization and actions to gain their demands. According to Judith Coffin, moral reformers considered needle workers "the epitome of femininity", which explained why they attracted so much attention from moral reformers.⁵⁹² While needle workers perfectly illustrated the perils of women who worked, laundry workers were hardly the "epitome of femininity"; in contrast the (pejorative) descriptor usually applied to them was *forte en gueule* – loudmouth.

Through these years of agitation and their fight for better working conditions, the laundress perpetuated the image of an outspoken and independent

⁵⁹² Judith Coffin, *The Politics of Women's Work: The Paris Garment Trades 1750-1915* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 5.

woman. In April of 1900, laundry workers went on a series of strikes that occurred in the Parisian *banlieue* where all of the industrial *blanchisseries* were located. An article on the strikes ran in the anarchist newspaper *Le Libertaire* on 9 April. The reporter commented that, “the *blanchisseuses* and *blanchisseurs* of Paris have the intention to join their comrades of the *banlieue*. This is a very good way to force the bourgeois, who do not have the courage, to wash their own *chemise*.”⁵⁹³ The circumstance of women and men “agitating together” was not unusual for the workers of the industrial *blanchisseries*. Laundering had been a feminine task until the mechanization of the 1880s when large *blanchisseries* gathered men and women on the same floor. However, men worked on the machines, while women did the tasks associated with washing laundry. The men working on the machines was skilled labor, one had to have knowledge of machinery and hydraulics. The women’s work handling laundry, transferring it from one machine to the next was unskilled labor. Yet, both men and women were in the same spaces, men working on the machines while women used them. According to Yannick Ripa, “industrialization shattered the spatial differentiation of labor. Not only did women cease to be invisible, they found themselves in a mixed space.”⁵⁹⁴

There was little competition or hostility from the men in creating or joining syndicates amongst laundry workers. The men and women had different skills and men were not afraid of being undercut by women for doing the same

⁵⁹³ *Le Libertaire*, April 29 1900, p.3.

⁵⁹⁴ Ripa, *Les femmes actrices de l’Histoire*, 66.

work for less pay. Yet, aspirations of better pay grew among women. In April 1900, *La Fronde*, a feminist newspaper funded and run by Marguerite Durand, reported on a strike at an industrial *blanchisserie* in Billancourt. This strike was an example of how women and men working in the *blanchisseries* although not doing the same work, came together for a common gain both wanted better pay. The *patron*, claiming to be guided by a spirit of reconciliation, complained that he did not want to throw any discredit on the upcoming strike and was therefore working with the women and men, but his patience would not last much longer. The article recounted that there were 1500 to 1800 strikers at the meeting place at a school on Avenue de la Mairie. “There were a few people who went back to work, but it was insignificant; the strike will continue. We were at the *Bourse du travail* today, 3,000 strikers; the speakers asked for persistence in the strike. There were some young women who applauded strongly. The success was for each striker, each *blanchisseuse*... Regarding salary, they will only go back to work after their demands are met.”⁵⁹⁵ The article illustrated that, despite the labor division based on sex, men were willing to cooperate with the women so that each could have better working conditions. It also underscored that both sexes felt that their work in *blanchisseries* was difficult and not remunerated properly.

The 1900 article in *La Fronde* also described a case in which a *blanchisseuse* brought laundry from a *lavoir* to do at her home, a case that was not unusual. The anomaly is that a woman who worked in her home was aware and willing to throw her lot in with the other laundry workers to get better pay. She

⁵⁹⁵ *La Fronde*, April 26 1900, p. 1.

did not participate in the undercutting and strikebreaking that strikers commonly charged homeworkers with. Undercutting was a fact of life for the women who relied upon competitive piecework to get jobs. The article recounted her situation and applauded this woman's fortitude to refuse piecework because it undermined the strike that the *blanchisseuses* were engaged in.⁵⁹⁶

The unions wielded greater power against the exploitation of the *patron* than a single person and were an immense aid to remedy the problem of working conditions. In December of 1900, *La Voix du peuple* published an article to inform their readers of the working conditions in *blanchisseries* to shed light onto the problem and to help the laundry workers obtain some protective regulation. The government remained uninterested in such regulation until the 1905 law on the manipulation of dirty laundry. The report detailed the abusive conditions present in the laundry industry. The ironers worked fifteen or sixteen hours a day, but labor inspection reports did not reflect that reality since the inspectors were on such friendly terms with facilities' *patrons* that inspectors would warn them before the visit to guarantee the results; on the day of the expected inspection, all of the workers would be gone by seven or the *patron* would rush them out of the back door upon the inspector's arrival. In addition, the *patron* would falsify the worksheets to document that the workers only attended from seven in the morning to five in the evening. The article also indicated that the *patrons* of establishments located in the *banlieue* – Boulogne, Sevres, Chaville, Arcueil-Cachan, Vanves, etc. – had submitted a petition to the commerce minister for the non-application of

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid.

the 1892 law which limited women's workdays to ten hours. The strategies the *patrons* used to collect the signatures for the petition were appalling. The article described the abuses of the owners. "What goes beyond the limits is the pressure coming from the *patron* to recruit the signatures. They used threats of dismissal and actual dismissals, false signatures, double signatures, etc. For instance, in Sevres and Chaville, some *ouvrières* were forced to sign under their maiden name and their married name. In Boulogne, the *patron* had signed for the *ouvrières* who came from Italy under the pretext they did not know how to write in French."⁵⁹⁷ However, the *Fédération des Syndicats Ouvriers Blanchisseurs* started an education campaign which convinced the commerce minister not to accept the petition. The workers' managers were sources of negative treatment and power-based intimidation.

The Effects of Hygiene Law of 1905 and Labor Law of 1906

The law of 15 February 1902 provided the groundwork in terms of health protection for laundresses. It became obligatory to declare and disinfect linens in case of known transmissible diseases (tuberculosis, typhoid, variole, diphtheria). In the *Annales d'Hygiène Publique et de Médecine Légale*, Marcel Frois asserted that the law would not only protect the public, but also laundry workers who came

⁵⁹⁷ *La Voix du Peuple*, 16 December 1900, p. 3. While the article described abuses with the women's names to gain an exemption from the 1892 law, women retained their maiden name when married and were listed as wife of someone, which illustrated that the owners and managers of the blanchisseries were willing to go to great lengths to obtain an exception from the law because they wanted to continue having women work at night.

into contact with the possibly contaminated laundry.⁵⁹⁸ The architects of the law claimed that it would protect laundresses from possible contamination through laundry from people who had contagious diseases. In effect, it would sanitize their work environment and provide them with safer working conditions by disinfecting the laundry. However, the *Conseil d'Hygiène* used the law to propose the closure of *lavoirs*, and targeted laundresses as possible incubators for the contagious diseases of their clients, and potentially dangerous to the city's health.⁵⁹⁹

The Minister of Commerce and Work commissioned a study to investigate how well the *blanchisseries* around France had incorporated the law in 1911-1913.⁶⁰⁰ The inspectors reported their findings to the Minister of Commerce who then set out a series of fines depending on the seriousness of the infraction. The rubric the inspectors used asked a series of nineteen questions: how many workers were employed; was the laundry enclosed in bags for transport; did the service have any knowledge of the bag being opened during transport; was there a chemical disinfection or boiling disinfection process; was there an aspersion system for fixing dust to laundry; was the laundry disinfected by the laundry process; was dirty laundry sorted in a separate room if it had not been pre-

⁵⁹⁸ Marcel Frois, « Triage du linge sale » *Annales d'Hygiène Publique et de Médecine Légale*, quatrième série, tome treizième (Janvier 1910) : 217-229.

⁵⁹⁹ *L'Humanité*, 19 February 1908, p. 3.

⁶⁰⁰ AN F22 572 Travail et Sécurité Sociale, Enquête sur les conditions du travail dans les blanchisseries, 1911-1913.

disinfected; was the local carefully cleaned after each delivery; was there an overcoat for people sorting dirty laundry before disinfection; and were the soaking waters drained by underground canal outside of the workshop?⁶⁰¹ There were some questions the inspectors never answered, such as any knowledge of the bags being opened during transport and whether the washing process laundry had disinfected the laundry.⁶⁰²

Over the three-year investigation, the reports gathered by inspectors mandated by the Minister of Commerce and Work demonstrated that the majority of the *blanchisseries* did not follow the prescriptions of the law such as putting laundry into closed bags, sorting laundry in separate rooms designed for the purpose, wearing an overcoat while sorting and putting laundry through a disinfection bath before washing it. Out of 412 *blanchisseries* in the Paris agglomeration, 100 establishments installed a disinfection bath, though the inspector commented that only 15 had the bath ready during working hours, when he had visited.⁶⁰³ Among these *blanchisseries*, 230 had followed the rule for closed-bag deliveries and pick-ups, 103 had installed a separate room for sorting laundry, and only 80 had provided personnel with overcoats used specifically for

⁶⁰¹ AN F22 572 Travail et Sécurité Sociale, Enquête sur les conditions du travail dans les blanchisseries, 1911-1913. Rubric of the questionnaire.

⁶⁰² Ibid.

⁶⁰³ AN F22 572 Travail et Sécurité Sociale, Enquête sur les conditions du travail dans les blanchisseries, 1911-1913. Questionnaires de Paris, février 1911-mars 1913.

the sorting process (and washed after every delivery).⁶⁰⁴ The laundry workers were still exposed to transmissible diseases.

Reports on the law of 1905, which regulated the manipulation of dirty laundry, provided useful information about the conditions of industrial laundry establishments.⁶⁰⁵ The hygienists on the *Conseil d'Hygiène*, who the *Préfet de la Seine* appointed, intended the law to slow the epidemics of contagious diseases such as tuberculosis, diphtheria, and typhoid. However, as the reports revealed, the *blanchisseries* were not the bastions of health and hygiene that the hygienists writing for the *Annales d'Hygiène* and working on the *Conseil d'Hygiène* touted. Instead, the owners, trying to save money, rarely employed separate rooms for the sorting of dirty and possibly contaminated clothing and linens. The *blanchisseries* were, in many cases, no better than the small *lavoirs* or the clandestine laundry boutiques in the heart of Paris, which both the *Conseil d'Hygiène* and the *Annales d'Hygiène* had claimed were incubators of transmissible diseases, had railed against and made so difficult to open.

The reports of the *Conseil d'Hygiène* exposed their preferences toward the modern *blanchisseries* which, they perceived, provided better working environments for laundresses and were safer for public hygiene to the detriment of facilities within Paris serving those with modest incomes. Yet, the reports

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid.

revealed that, far from being actual threats to the health of laundresses or the greater public, laundry facilities were only a nuisance to the city.

On 13 July 1906, a labor law was passed guaranteeing a rest day on Sunday and no days longer than ten hours. The *syndicats* who represented the laundry workers denounced the *blanchisseries* owners' irregularities and malpractice by writing letters addressed directly to the Minister of Commerce. For instance, one writes: "The owner of the *blanchisserie* on Rue St. Denis does not observe the Sunday rest day and keeps twelve to fourteen women on Sunday. He only has to give a small *pot de vin* (bribe) to the inspector and he can therefore do what he wants."⁶⁰⁶ The letter also reported that the owner had also hidden women in his private apartment in a cupboard where they had almost suffocated.⁶⁰⁷ In another example, Madame Dugeunes, *blanchisseuse*, wrote to the Minister of Commerce herself requesting that her place of work, a *blanchisserie* on Rue de la Fédération in Paris, be inspected immediately for non-compliance of the 1906 law.⁶⁰⁸ The Minister of Commerce promptly enlisted chief inspector Boulisset to send out a work inspector to investigate the establishment.⁶⁰⁹

⁶⁰⁶ AN F22 362 Blanchisseries. Enquête repos hebdomadaire 1906-1913. Correspondance du Syndicat des Blanchisseuses et Blanchisseurs de Boulogne au Ministre du Travail, 19 décembre 1906.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁸ AN F22 362 Blanchisseries. Enquête repos hebdomadaire 1906-1913. Correspondance de Madame Dugeunes au Ministre du Travail, 31 juillet 1907.

⁶⁰⁹ AN F22 362 Blanchisseries. Enquête repos hebdomadaire 1906-1913. Correspondance de l'inspecteur divisionnaire du travail à Monsieur Boulisset, 2 août 1907.

One of the laundresses at a *blanchisserie* at Issy-les-Moulins in the *banlieue* requested that the inspectors come back to the establishment for non-compliance of the 1906 law. She wrote to the Minister that they worked on Sundays and that on the weekdays they worked from seven in the morning until eleven or midnight which violated both the 1906 law and the 1892 law on night work. She added that they were counting on the Minister to make this abuse stop.⁶¹⁰ Although she had taken the first step in protecting herself and her fellow laundresses, she made clear that her employer had no intention of following the law and that the Minister of Commerce was the only one with the power to compel him to do so. The issue resulted in a citation and increased visits from the inspectors to force the manager of the *blanchisserie* to follow the law.⁶¹¹ The following Sunday, an inspector visited the same establishment and saw another ten women washing clothes; he gave another citation to the manager and told him that the business would be under special surveillance until he brought it into compliance. The inspector added that he could get no testimony from the workers and that he suspected that if they had talked to him they would have been laid off.⁶¹² This case revealed the difficulties in compelling a *blanchisserie* to conform

⁶¹⁰ AN F22 362 Blanchisseries. Enquête repos hebdomadaire 1906-1913. Correspondance de Madame Lefrey, blanchisseuse au Ministre du Commerce, 25 avril 1908.

⁶¹¹ AN F22 362 Blanchisseries. Enquête repos hebdomadaire 1906-1913. Inspection du travail dans l'industrie. Rapport de l'inspecteur divisionnaire au Ministre du Commerce, 7 mai 1908.

to a law that presented logistical challenges for its daily operations. The rest day on Sunday was no small matter to enforce for a business that had traditionally done most of its business that day. The case also illustrates the workers' courage to denounce their manager or the owner of the *blanchisserie* when it could lead to their dismissal.

Another impediment to gaining more rights was the owner's attitudes towards the laundresses who worked for them. Georges Mény, head of the union for owners of blanchisseries, illustrated the owner's opinions of laundresses in a pamphlet detailing the profession of laundry and its future in 1908. He stated that "when one asks the bosses about their workers, they unanimously complain about the immorality of their personnel and that their level of morality keeps going down. The older workers corrupt the young ones with foul language and behavior and three-quarters of them are alcoholics."⁶¹³ In his reiteration of the owner's opinions, Mény did not take into account that the owners themselves gave laundresses alcohol on their break and then blamed them for being drunk. Drinking alcohol was a traditional supplement to the laundresses' pay. Mény's writing also exposed the negative attitudes towards laundresses and their working habits which may have also contributed to the owner's justification for not providing the legally required day off.

⁶¹² AN F22 362 Blanchisseries. Enquête repos hebdomadaire 1906-1913. Inspection du travail dans l'industrie, rapport du l'inspecteur divisionnaire au Ministre du Commerce, 15 mai 1908.

⁶¹³ Georges Mény, Pour nos blanchisseries ! (Paris : Victor Lecoffre, 1909), 13.

In 1909, the *Chambre Syndicale des Ouvrières et Ouvriers Blanchisseurs* of Chaville filed a petition with the Minister of Commerce for an immediate inspection of five *blanchisseries* in the area.⁶¹⁴ They cautioned the Minister to send his inspectors without foreknowledge of their visit because the laundresses knew the owners had tried to hide workers in the *blanchisserie* at night and on Sunday to circumvent citations. The newspaper *La Révolution*, a socialist periodical which had knowledge of the infractions committed in these *blanchisseries* – most likely from employees writing in to report the *blanchisserie* – declared the law of 1906 a “dead letter”.⁶¹⁵ The inspector wrote to the head of the union promising that he would adhere to the suggestions made by the workers to try and catch the owner in an infraction.⁶¹⁶ The inspector went to the named *blanchisseries* and could not find anything to garner a citation. Although, he did write back to the *Chambre Syndicale* to keep it informed in case anything else came to his attention.⁶¹⁷ However, the report came two months later, illustrating

⁶¹⁴ AN F22 362 Blanchisseries. Enquête repos hebdomadaire 1906-1913. Correspondance de la Chambre Syndicale des Ouvrières et Ouvriers Blanchisseurs de Chaville au Ministre du Commerce, 13 mars 1909.

⁶¹⁵ AN F22 362 Blanchisseries. Enquête repos hebdomadaire 1906-1913. Newspaper clipping : *La Révolution* 10 février 1909.

⁶¹⁶ AN F22 362 Blanchisseries. Enquête repos hebdomadaire 1906-1913. Correspondance de l'inspecteur divisionnaire à la Chambre Syndicale des Ouvrières et Ouvriers Blanchisseurs de Chaville, 17 mars 1909.

⁶¹⁷ AN F22 362 Blanchisseries. Enquête repos hebdomadaire 1906-1913. Correspondance de l'inspecteur divisionnaire à la Chambre Syndicale des Ouvrières et Ouvriers Blanchisseurs de Chaville, 21 mai 1909.

that, in 1909, the system was slow to react to petitioners' grievances, which possibly gave the owners time or indications to avoid citations.

The owners of the *blanchisseries* were reluctant to follow the new law and sought to be exempted from the 1906 law which designated Sunday as the legal day off from work. The owners complained that Sunday was their busiest day. It was the day people would request their laundry to be finished and ready for pick-up or delivery.⁶¹⁸ The owners pleaded with the Ministry of Commerce to be exempted from the law by simply moving the required rest day from Sunday to a holiday, if one happened to occur during the week. While this was legal under the 1892 law, the 1906 law did not allow for this type of substitution and provided two rest days during the week which owners of *blanchisseries* found infuriating.⁶¹⁹ Saturday night was often the busiest time for laundresses who prepared the clothes for Sunday morning; the manager or owner often required them to work all night or until the early morning. The owner of a *blanchisserie* that proclaimed to be specialists in work for the *maisons bourgeoises* could not understand why the laundresses were entitled to two rest days simply because a holiday fell on a day other than Sunday that week. He wrote to the Minister of Commerce complaining that this was detrimental to his business and fundamentally unfair to him as an owner.⁶²⁰

⁶¹⁸AN F22 362 Blanchisseries. Enquête repos hebdomadaire 1906-1913. Correspondance du Ministre du Travail à Monsieur Beaulieu, Secrétaire de la Chambre Syndicale des Patrons-Blanchisseurs, 28 décembre 1906.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid.

The inspections and application of the law were not systematic, which led to both workers and owners complaining about the inequality of the investigations. The *Syndicat des Blanchisseuses et Blanchisseurs-sur-Seine* (located in the western Parisian agglomeration) complained that there were many *blanchisseries* in Boulogne which had never been inspected, where the owner flagrantly disregarded the law and did not give his employees any rest day, even the holidays. The head of the union wrote that he “had informed inspectors of another establishment that employed twenty women on Sunday and there had never been any inspection of this *blanchisseries*.” Further, the employer “did not allow complaints about the work schedule and had threatened to fire anyone who talked to an inspector.”⁶²¹

Blanchisseries tried to find ways to be exempt from the law by triangulating between the Minister of Commerce and the *Préfet de Police*, which the unions and other *blanchisseries* objected to vehemently. This illustrated the patchy enforcement and flexibility of the law when the owner complained to a powerful person such as the *Préfet*. The *blanchisserie* Emile on Rue Maître-Jacques in Boulogne had written to the *Préfet de Police* asking to make an exception for his establishment, arguing that being open Sunday morning was essential to his business. The *Préfet de Police* permitted the owner to open on Sunday morning and close Sunday afternoon to Monday afternoon. The *Syndicat*

⁶²⁰ AN F22 362 Blanchisseries. Enquête repos hebdomadaire 1906-1913. Correspondance de Monsieur Procheff au Ministre du Commerce, 20 septembre 1906.

⁶²¹ Ibid.

des Blanchisseuses et Blanchisseurs de Boulogne-sur-Seine wrote to the *Ministre du Commerce* protesting the unequal treatment that the employees would suffer from. Additionally, the union claimed that nothing would stop other *blanchisseries* from requesting the same special treatment, which would eventually render the law ineffectual.⁶²² However, the *Ministre du Commerce* upheld the *Préfet de Police*'s decision and allowed the different hours.⁶²³ However, the *Ministre* investigated the matter again, as twenty-five *blanchisseries* in Boulogne also requested an exemption from the 1906 law. The *Conseil Municipal* and the mayor requested that all of the *blanchisseries* in their commune be exempted from the law because the industry "worked under special conditions" requiring that the businesses were open on Sundays.⁶²⁴ The *Préfet de Police* also wrote to the *Ministre du Commerce* in support of the *blanchisseries* of Boulogne insisting that their "unique character added to the fact that the owners recognized that the work on Sunday was only to last a very short time and employ a minimum of women."⁶²⁵ All of those in support of the industry thought that the

⁶²² AN F22 362 Blanchisseries. Enquête repos hebdomadaire 1906-1913. Correspondance du Syndicat des blanchisseuses et Blanchisseurs de Boulogne au Ministre du Commerce, 28 août 1906.

⁶²³ AN F22 362 Blanchisseries. Enquête repos hebdomadaire 1906-1913. Correspondance du Préfet de Police au Ministre du Commerce, 2 septembre 1906.

⁶²⁴ AN F22 362 Blanchisseries. Enquête repos hebdomadaire 1906-1913. Correspondance du Conseil Municipal au Ministre du Commerce, 30 août 1907.

⁶²⁵ AN F22 362 Blanchisseries. Enquête repos hebdomadaire 1906-1913. Correspondance du Préfet de Police au Ministre du Commerce, 5 septembre 1907.

business should not be put under pressure to adhere to the law protecting the rights of women and children – the ones who worked on Sundays – or the right to a rest day on Sunday. The mayor of Boulogne-sur-Seine and its *Conseil Municipal* wanted to protect the business rather than workers rights, expressly those of women. The *Comité Consultatif des Arts et Métiers* also wrote in support of the *blanchisseries* and their “special nature” adding that it was in the best interest of the industry if the *Ministre du Commerce* changed the nomenclature of the law of 1906 to include *blanchisseries* in the businesses that enjoyed a deferment of the Sunday rule in favor of a system of rolling days off which guaranteed at least two days off a month like *auberges* (inns) and *cafés*.⁶²⁶ In November of 1907, the *Ministre du Commerce* gave a final review of the status of the *blanchisseries* after receiving the different arguments in favor of exempting the *blanchisseries* of Boulogne-sur-Seine. The advisory council of the *Ministre du Commerce* did not agree with the opinions of the *Préfet de Police*, the *Comité Consultatif des Arts et Métiers*, the *Conseil Municipal* and the mayor of *Boulogne-sur-Seine*.⁶²⁷ The advisory council found no reason to inscribe the *blanchisseries* on the list of exempted businesses due to their special working conditions or needs. The *Ministre* added that “since the *blanchisseries* in

⁶²⁶ AN F22 362 Blanchisseries. Enquête repos hebdomadaire 1906-1913. Correspondance du Comité Consultatif des Arts et Métiers au Ministre du Commerce, 15 septembre 1907.

⁶²⁷ AN F22 362 Blanchisseries. Enquête repos hebdomadaire 1906-1913. Correspondance du Ministre du Commerce aux Préfet de Police, Conseil Municipal de Boulogne-sur-Seine et Maire de Boulogne-sur-Seine, 16 novembre 1907.

Boulogne-sur-Seine have no special character of a nature to motivate different treatment than the *blanchissage* industry in the rest of France, I cannot maintain the exemption that the *Préfet de Police* accorded”⁶²⁸ The *Ministre* remarked that the industry had already the right to cancel fifteen Sundays a year, which should give the industry the needed elasticity that was already built into the law of 1906. The women who worked in the industry now had rights they could not be deprived of, and the law protected them against these types of authorizations.⁶²⁹

With the 1892 legislation – limiting the hours women were allowed to work and banning night work – and the subsequent 1906 legislation – giving every worker the right to a full day on Sunday away from work – women found a legal foundation to fight for better working conditions. The reports generated by the investigations into the adherence of the 1906 labor law and the requests produced by the laundresses themselves for inspections of their workplace revealed that the *blanchisseries* were not havens of cleanliness and order for the laundresses who worked in them. The *blanchisseries* owners were reluctant to provide the rest day required by the 1906 law. Furthermore, the requests by the laundresses to inspect their workplace provide an insight into their lives and working conditions that was only gleaned *en passant* in earlier chapters. The historical sources from the *Conseil d’Hygiène*, *Annales d’Hygiène*, the correspondence with the *Préfet de la Seine* and *Préfet de Police*, navigation engineers and other government officials did not document the women’s thoughts

⁶²⁸ Ibid.

⁶²⁹ Ibid.

or opinions. It was only in the documents directly relating to working conditions that their voices could finally be heard and they became central actors in the story of laundry in Paris.

Moreover, the reports from the laundry workers' unions and the women themselves also highlighted a problem with the corrupted inspection system. However, when the *Ministre du Commerce* opened the investigation, the laundresses and their unions took the opportunity to denounce the practices of dishonest bosses and work inspectors. It was only in this industrial context – regulated by legislation – that laundresses found opportunities to protect themselves as workers, and that their agency came into the full view of historical records.

Lavoirs and the 1906 Law

The *lavoirs* represented a special case for the law of 1906. The *Syndicat des Blanchisseuses, Laveuses, et Repasseuses* of Bercy wrote to the *Ministre du Commerce* protesting that there were two *lavoirs* open on Sunday in their neighborhood. They objected to the establishment being open and taking possible business away from their industry and also employing a small number of women to oversee the operations.⁶³⁰ The *Ministre* answered their query explaining that he “had accorded an exception in the *quartiers populeux* of certain areas that were used Sunday mornings by *ouvrières* who were working outside of the home the

⁶³⁰ AN F22 362 Blanchisseries. Enquête repos hebdomadaire 1906-1913. Correspondance du Syndicat des Blanchisseuses, Laveuses et Repasseuses de Bercy au Ministre du Commerce, 27 février 1908.

rest of the week so they could do their family's laundry."⁶³¹ He further explained that in these cases there were no professionals washing, and he had requested that the owners of the *lavoirs* provide hot water and supplies for the women who wanted to use the facilities. This exception was by no means open to *blanchisseries* that employed professional *blanchisseuses*.⁶³² This case was also an example of the *lavoirs* being used by women who could not afford to send their family's laundry out to a *blanchisserie* for washing. Instead they used their only day off to finish the household chores.

There were also complications in the nomenclature of *blanchisseries* and *lavoirs*. Some *lavoirs* were large enough to accommodate small business owners who would use them to finish some of the laundering processes they were not able to complete in their own facilities. The question arose as to what laws these businesses needed to follow if they used another place of business to work in. The *Fédération des Ouvrières et Ouvriers de Blanchissage* of Chaville – which was in the Parisian agglomeration – wrote to the inspector of industry to clarify the rights of the workers. The federation highlighted that everyone seemed to have their own rules as to what was legally acceptable for the workers since the small businesses could manage their practice themselves, although when everyone was working the businesses consisted of more than fifty laundresses. Indeed, they were working Sundays and national holidays, as if it were a *lavoir* open to the public and accessible for the *ménagère* doing her laundry, but employed only

⁶³¹ Ibid.

⁶³² Ibid.

professional *blanchisseuses*. The federation wrote that the case seemed abusive and was convinced that the work inspector could clarify the matter.⁶³³ The chief inspector responded by sending the area inspector to investigate the case, who found that the *lavoirs-blanchisseries* in question were indeed employing laundresses on Sunday. After interviewing the laundresses, he found that the owners had hid other laundresses as he was coming in. He gave a citation to the owners and suggested the continued scrutiny of the business.⁶³⁴ The unions attempted to standardize business practices so that one manager or owner could not compel his employees to work based on the practices of other establishments. Professional laundresses fought for their day of rest; it was the women doing laundry for their family that wanted the *lavoirs* open on Sundays because they worked the rest of the week.

A *blanchisserie* in St. Maur-sur-Seine illustrated the complex enforcement of the 1906 legislation for businesses that also made use of hydraulic machines to power, in the case of the *blanchisserie*, the mechanical arm used to turn the clothes during the washing process. The work inspector caught four men working in the engine room of the *blanchisserie* on a Sunday morning and cited the owner

⁶³³ AN F22 362 Blanchisseries. Enquête repos hebdomadaire 1906-1913. Correspondance de la *Fédération des Ouvrières et Ouvriers de Blanchissage de Chaville* à l'inspecteur du travail dans l'industrie, 12 juillet 1910.

⁶³⁴ AN F22 362 Blanchisseries. Enquête repos hebdomadaire 1906-1913. Rapport de l'inspecteur de Boulogne sur Seine à l'inspecteur divisionnaire, 15 juillet 1910.

for non-compliance with the law of 1906.⁶³⁵ The owner answered the charge by stating that he didn't think he had committed an infraction because they were fixing and marinating machines that could cause death or serious injury if not repaired in a timely manner.⁶³⁶ The *Ministre* confirmed the owner's idea and wrote an exemption for the citation the inspector gave the owner, reminding the inspector that when it came to machines using pressure, their maintenance could be done legally on a Sunday.⁶³⁷

Another case generated bad press, and the inspection service of industrial work felt compelled to defend its actions in the face of criticisms. The conservative newspaper *l'Echo de Paris* called into question the utility of a citation the work inspector issued against an owner of a *blanchisserie*.⁶³⁸ The article reported that a fire had broken out and destroyed already clean laundry ready to be delivered to his Parisian clientele. He claimed that spontaneously, his laundresses offered to help him in whatever way was possible. The newspaper recounted that "everyone was working when the terrible inspector came along.

⁶³⁵ AN F22 362 Blanchisseries. Enquête repos hebdomadaire 1906-1913. Inspection du travail dans l'industrie. Rapport de l'inspecteur divisionnaire au Ministre du Commerce, 17 septembre 1909.

⁶³⁶ AN F22 362 Blanchisseries. Enquête repos hebdomadaire 1906-1913. Correspondance de Monsieur Severez au Ministre du Commerce, 21 septembre 1909.

⁶³⁷ AN F22 362 Blanchisseries. Enquête repos hebdomadaire 1906-1913. Ministre du Commerce à l'inspecteur divisionnaire, 2 octobre 1909.

⁶³⁸ AN F22 362 Blanchisseries. Enquête repos hebdomadaire 1906-1913. Requête de l'inspecteur divisionnaire du travail dans l'industrie. Newspaper clipping : *L'Echo de Paris* 10 mars 1910.

The terrible inspector gave him a citation and the owner had to go in front of the judge for violating the rest day on a national holiday. The judge was so indignant at such a citation that he gave the owner the minimum sentence. Are we going to modify such a stupid law soon?"⁶³⁹ The tone of the article was clearly against the inspection service and the law of 1906 giving all workers the right to a rest day. Expectedly, the conservative newspaper positioned itself on the side of business.

The owner's wife provided another account of what transpired. The owner had left a gas lamp burning above a pile of laundry that was waiting to be ironed on the evening of 12 July 1909. The lamp fell and started a fire which burned a portion of the laundry valued at two thousand francs. Insurance covered this loss. The laundry not burned needed to be rewashed and whitened, and the laundresses the *blanchisserie* employed came back to do this work on 14 July. The inspector happened to be in the neighborhood to confirm that no *blanchisserie* was to open on the national holiday, upholding the law on the required rest day on holidays. The owner made the inspector aware of the fire and why the workers were there on a national holiday. The inspector wrote the citation anyway, not wanting others to think he was not impartial since he had already written citations to other *blanchisseries* that remained open on the holiday. The citation had no specific fine amount, leaving the judge free to give the lightest penalty he could.⁶⁴⁰

⁶³⁹ AN F22 362 Blanchisseries. Enquête repos hebdomadaire 1906-1913. Newspaper clipping : *L'Echo de Paris* 10 mars 1910.

⁶⁴⁰ AN F22 362 Blanchisseries. Enquête repos hebdomadaire 1906-1913. Correspondance de l'inspecteur de Chaville à l'inspecteur divisionnaire, 15 mars 1910.

Predictably, the inspector, Monsieur Bris, gave another account of the story, reporting that he could see no damage from a fire and that the laundresses present behaved like it was a regular day and no emergency had transpired. The owner had attempted to hide the workers, but could not do so before the inspector saw them. He was separating the dirty laundry in the ironing room and wished to hide that fact – since it violated hygienic regulations. The situation was not at all what the newspaper described; the citation concerned the manipulation of dirty laundry in a room where clean laundry was processed. Furthermore, the inspector's second citation concerned the failure to post that the owner had applied for an exemption; the business was entitled to a maximum of fifteen per year.⁶⁴¹

The division inspector decided the citation – that *L'Echo de Paris* had criticized – was completely justified and that the judge could not have been indignant about the citation because it was legally justified and irrelevant to the judgment. The inspection service may have been self-conscious about its role in possibly exaggerating, or worse, looking like it was uncaring in the face of a citizen's hardship. Inspectors needed to justify their intentions and the process by which they generated citations.

⁶⁴¹ AN F22 362 Blanchisseries. Enquête repos hebdomadaire 1906-1913. Correspondance de l'inspecteur Bris à l'inspecteur divisionnaire, 17 mars 1910.

Solidarity among Laundry Workers and Strikes: 1907-1913

In 1907, the newspaper *L'Humanité* – a newspaper founded in 1904 by Jean Jaurès, which became the newspaper of the French Communist Party in 1920, reported on the working conditions of laundry workers under the heading “*communication syndicale chez les laveuses.*” The article indicated that the inspectors were still not enforcing the 1892 law limiting women’s hours. “The *laveuses* are deserving citizen women who are the most exploited of all; they are abandoned by the public powers...the labor law is violated everyday. In the *lavoir du Quartier de Martire*, the *laveuses* are forced to work after 6 pm without being paid.”⁶⁴²

In 1908, *L'Humanité* reported on the ongoing struggle for industry regulation by *les Syndicat des Ouvrier and Ouvrière de Blanchisseurs* of Paris. The delegation of workers wrote a report on the infractions to the law of 30 March 1900 – which stipulated that there would be no night work in any industry – and presented it to the *Ministre du Commerce*. The delegation requested that no establishment be granted an exception. They pointed out that most *blanchisseries* did not observe the law of 1906 for a day of rest or the decree of April 1905 on the dangers of the manipulation of soiled linen.⁶⁴³

Expectedly, *L'Humanité* was one of the most sympathetic newspapers to the laundry workers’ cause in obtaining better working conditions. The article

⁶⁴² *L'Humanité*, 26 September 1907, p. 3.

⁶⁴³ *L'Humanité*, 19 February 1908, p. 3.

highlighted the dangers that the industrial *blanchisseries* and new machines presented to the women who were already exploited by their *patron*. The *blanchisseuses* needed regulation because in the industrial *blanchisseries* the *patron* paid them by the day which was officially 11 hours. If the laundress worked overtime, there was no system of remuneration for that. In contrast, people paid their laundresses who worked out of their home or in a *lavoir* by the piece. Laundry workers did not get overtime, and there was no separate shift at night like in mill work. They came in the morning and left when they finished the washing. Therefore, regulation was crucial for these women and men. The dangers the new industrial machines presented were due to a lack of regulations. There were few safety protocols; when they existed, the manager or owner ignored them because installing safety equipment or encouraging the laundresses to work more slowly cut into their profits. The drying machine that industrial *blanchisseries* utilized was notorious for burning and crushing the hands of the *blanchisseuses* who ran this machine. In an article entitled « *Le Travail des blanchisseries, des mains broyées et brûlées* », *L'Humanité* detailed the cases where the drying machine crushed and burned laundresses who could then no longer be able to work. In support of fellow workers, the newspaper shed light on this horrific situation that exemplified the callousness with which the *patron* treated their workers. This article was also a rallying cry to the workers not yet syndicated. The article reported that “an *ouvrière* had both of her hands destroyed by a machine that dries with steam. It is the ninth accident that has come in four years at this factory. The comrades have declared that the work in a *blanchisserie*

is dangerous and rough. The *ouvrières* from the large factories of *blanchisseries* are exposed to brutal accidents caused by the machines.”⁶⁴⁴

The labor laws forbidding night work for women necessitated men working in the *blanchisseries*. The large *blanchisserie* took care of table and body linen as well as linens from hotels, cafes, salons, and hairdressers, as well as the aprons and overcoats from slaughter houses. The men worked from six in the evening to six in the morning boiling laundry in a *couleur* and earned forty francs per week. From there, the linen went to the *barbottes*, a cauldron with a mechanical agitator, where it is washed. The men who work at the *barbottes* were soaked constantly from head to toe, like the women had been in the *lavoirs*. They did not have special clothes for this work; neither did they have other clothes to change into, explaining the high mortality rate among *blanchisseurs* hospitalized in Laë nec, a public hospital that served the Paris region which was dedicated to lung ailments. The tuberculosis rate among *blanchisseurs* was around 75 percent.⁶⁴⁵ The *essoreuses* (drying women) sorted the linen and dried it. They fed the clothing through two metal ringers that were heated by steam to 80 to 100 Celsius. The workers were grouped around the machines by teams of six. One would get the wet linen out of the washing baskets, beat it and shake it to separate it. At the same time, the worker would throw it onto a platform where the other workers pushed the linen through fast spinning cylinders; the linen went through the machine very quickly, and workers caught it on the other side. This machine

⁶⁴⁴ *L'Humanité*, 9 April 1909, pg. 1

⁶⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

presented a real danger, as there was no protection between the spinning cylinders and the workers' hands. The article conveyed the horror of the accidents that have happened because of this machine.

A second of weakness, distraction, or inattention – who would not have any of those things after long hours of working while standing – and next thing you know the hand becomes trapped, pulled through, broken and burned. Such accidents are extremely frequent; the details that were told to us by numerous *ouvriers* and *ouvrières* are tragic. At the *blanchisserie* of Grenelle, a 16 year-old girl puts a piece of cloth in the *sécheuse*, the piece of linen does not feed through and she tries to get it out of the machine. Her hand is taken, the girl screams and a woman comes to her rescue. One tries to stop the machine; it took 8 minutes to get her away from the machine. Taken by pain, screaming, wanting to disengage her right hand, she pushes her left hand against the hot cylinders; a man had to hold her back while another got her left arm away from the machine. Feb. 16 at 13:15 a similar incident happened at *Blanchisserie de la Seine*. When her hand got caught, a 25-year-old woman let out a scream of pain so atrocious that some women ran away. Other women came quickly and rushed to the devices that controlled the *sécheuse*. It took 7 minutes for the machine to stop. When the cylinders stopped moving it did not mean they stopped squeezing. It took metal bars to pull the two cylinders apart to relieve the pressure. It took four men to accomplish this task and release the hand. Not only her hand, but her forearm until her elbow was crushed, burned and flattened like a piece of paper. During her panic, in shock and in pain, she had pushed her other hand against the machine resulting in her arm being burned to the bone. One had to cover her head so she could not see her arms.⁶⁴⁶

The problems did not end there for the *blanchisseuses* who became injured. The largest disability pension given was 200 francs. The articles sarcastically indicated that, in searching for the best way to compensate someone who was

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid.

crippled for life, the *patron* settled on two hundred francs. While the employer may have welcomed her back after her recovery, he would have found a pretext to fire her. The article called for more comprehensive protection for these women, starting with building new safety guards in front of the steam rollers. According to the report, the syndicates needed to intervene and lobby for the protection of work. Many of the *ouvriers* and *ouvrières* explained that “in large blanchisserie they would suspend the worker who does not do a good job drying a piece of linen through the rollers from one to four days. You can now understand why the 16 year-old *ouvrière* cited above risked destroying her hand to catch a serviette that was not engaged in the rollers correctly. Four days of suspension, what a reduction in salary for the week.”⁶⁴⁷ The minimum age to work in industry was sixteen, which was also the age one could leave school.

L'Humanité reported that some *blanchisseuses* had begun to strike against the *patrons* when they did not meet the demands for higher wages put forth by the laundresses in a meeting at the *bourse du travail*. Even in places that seemed hostile to organizing workers, the *blanchisseuses* were receptive and were willing to strike when necessary. The article illustrated the solidarity of the *blanchisseuses* as they left the meeting. On the way out, they all began to sing *L'Internationale*, the song commonly used by the unions to raise morale. In 1911, the monthly journal *La Vie Ouvrière* published an article detailing a major strike formed by the laundresses of Chaville who worked in the *blanchisseries*. The *patrons* of *blanchisseries* wanted to raise their prices, but before the new prices

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid.

took effect for the customers, they wanted to take the price increase out of the worker's salaries. The *patrons* had started their own syndicate to protect their interests and sought to standardize their prices to protect themselves against each other because they constantly undercut each other. The article indicated that syndicates were supposed to bring about better conditions for all workers. However, the *patrons* only organized to protect themselves; they did not care to improve the working conditions of their employees or encourage them to organize themselves. The workers prepared a list of claims to submit to the *patrons*. The workers listed their grievances, which were not unlike the other grievances examined in this chapter. They sought to remedy ⁶⁴⁸

the unhappiness of the *ouvrière* caused by their cost of living, the rise in housing prices, and the lack of application of the workers laws in relation to hygiene, protection of labor and to the limits of the work day and to the weekly breaks, abuse of the *patron*, the insufficient salaries, and the formation of new *syndicat patronal*, the insults from the *patrons* to the workers have pushed the personnel of the industry of *blanchissage* to regroup itself to claim their rights.

The *blanchisseuses* who began their day at six in the morning and often ended around eight or nine at night, earned between twenty five and thirty centimes an hours plus a few extras like a glass of wine, coffee, or liquor, they asked for forty centimes an hour minimum. The memoranda from the syndicate of *patrons* indicate they were not willing to work with the demands of their workers. The owners warned that this was only the beginning; if they gave in to their employees' demands they would not be able to turn a profit anymore. However

⁶⁴⁸ *La Vie ouvrière*, « Grève de blanchisseurs de Chaville » May 10 1911, pp 20-25.

they could not stem the tide that had already started, and recognized that if they wanted to avoid a strike and more loss of profit they had to grant the laundresses thirty-five centimes an hour, not the forty that they had originally asked for. The owners also threaten that if anyone asked for more they would be fired immediately.⁶⁴⁹

Yet, those concessions came at the detriment of other perks the workers enjoyed. The *blanchisseuses* would no longer get their break with the customary coffee or liquor. The article argued that the concessions were merely a trick. “By posting the propaganda, the *patron* wanted to trick their workers by giving the *blanchisseuses* a paid salary. The other workers believed that the women would lead to the death of the strike, but they were definitely mistaken.”⁶⁵⁰ The women did not break the strike.

Conclusion

This chapter described how industrial *blanchisseries* changed working conditions for women which helped form a consciousness of themselves as workers and led to them working for better conditions. Working together in an establishment, under a manager, provided the atmosphere for the women to realize that they had common problems and that they could join together to solve those problems through unions and strikes. In many instances, it was less safe to work in the *blanchisseries*, which used machines that had no safety guidelines or protection, than in the *lavoirs* or in the clandestine laundry boutiques. The *lavoirs*

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid.

were not as conducive to women forming unions and striking. The women working in *lavoires* were entrepreneurs and had no comrades to join with and no boss to fight against. They made their own hours and negotiated their pay. Moreover, the *blanchisseries* were not the hygienic utopias that the *Conseil d'Hygiène* and *Annales d'Hygiène* had asserted. The investigations into the adherence of the 1905 law illustrated that these industrial establishments had not integrated the measures the law prescribed. The laundresses working in the *blanchisseries* were exposed to the same possible contamination and had to endure unsafe machines and bosses who wanted them to work over the legal hours. It was these very conditions that provided laundry workers with the impetus to fight for better working conditions. The 1906 law on a weekly rest day represented a platform for the laundresses to protect themselves. While the other chapters of this dissertations focused on public policy and examined how it influenced the laundry business which affected the laundresses, this chapter brought forth the voices and the agency of these working women.

Chapter 7

CONCLUSION

Epilogue

At the urging of the *Conseil d'Hygiène*, the government had passed the law of 1902 requiring the disinfection of laundry that came from homes infected with contagious illnesses, as well as the law of 1905 prescribing hygienic methods for handling dirty laundry in *blanchisseries*. By 1910, the *Préfet de la Seine* had effectively rid Paris of the *bateaux-lavoirs*, and the city had finished building the sewer system, which enabled *lavoirs* to drain used water. The only laundry facilities the city administration did not control were the clandestine laundry boutiques which the *Conseil d'Hygiène* admitted were nearly impossible to regulate because their owners could hide the business easily.⁶⁵¹ From 1914, the *Conseil d'Hygiène* and the *Annales d'Hygiène*, as well as the *Préfet de la Seine* turned their attention away from laundry issues within Paris.

Although the *Annales d'Hygiène* still published articles about laundry, the First World War focused attention on laundry problems in battle; the emphasis was on cleaning soldiers' clothes on the front lines and making bandages sterile. A 1915 article in the *Annales d'Hygiène* proposed new types of mobile machines that could both heat water and agitate the clothes, which the Germans had already begun using.⁶⁵² With a team of twenty men, the machines could wash 2,000

⁶⁵¹ APP, Armand Gautier, « Rapport : Hygiène dans les lavoirs après le décret du 1905 » Compte rendu des séances 1908, *Rapport général sur les travaux du conseil d'hygiène publique et de salubrité* (Paris : Imprimerie Chaix, 1908) 45.

uniforms in twenty-four hours. The article expressed the need for the French military to develop a similar system that would effectively clean soldier's clothes on the front lines.⁶⁵³ Another article from the same edition of the *Annales d'Hygiène* reported that ironing bandages was an effective method for sterilization.⁶⁵⁴ The ironing had to be carried out as laundresses had customarily done it, with the bandage lightly humidified and with an iron heated to 50°. This practice followed the principle of sterilization in a humid environment with heat. After the First World War, advances in the technology of washing machines also emerged.

The introduction of the washing machine into the home was a slow process. The first washing machines for the home appeared on the market in France at the *Salon des Arts Ménagers* in 1923.⁶⁵⁵ The manufacturers marketed the machines as time-saving devices for working women who did not have time to do laundry in the traditional way that took days for every step. Yet, the machines were bulky, expensive, and did not clean clothes as well as the *blanchisseries*.⁶⁵⁶ In 1934, washing machines with a motor for agitation and spinning cost 3,601F. A

⁶⁵² “Blanchisseries militaires automobiles en Allemagne” *Annales d'Hygiène publique et de médecine légale*, quatrième série, tome vingt-quatrième (Paris : Librairie J.-B. Ballière et fils, 1915), 122.

⁶⁵³ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid., 124.

⁶⁵⁵ Quynh Delaunay, *Histoire de la machine à laver : Un objet technique dans la société française* (Rennes : Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 1994), 13.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid., 15.

skilled worker – plumber, tailor, carpenter – with an hourly salary of 6.34F, working 40 hours a week, would need to work between nine and fifteen weeks to earn enough to buy a washing machine.⁶⁵⁷ However, the Great Depression affected the stability of work; the material deprivation during the Second World War meant that most people still did not have washing machines in the 1950s. Moreover, only 58 percent of lodging around Paris had running water available in the interior of lodgings in 1954; this number increased to 91 percent by 1968. The infrastructure for electricity also had to be widespread before washing machines could be introduced into the home. It was only in 1962 that the national electric company *Electricité de France* succeeded in equipping the majority of private dwellings with electric power. Until that time, many women used the *planche à laver* – a washing board – usable anywhere there was running water. The washing machine was not present in the majority of private dwellings until 1964, when 41 percent reported they had a motorized washing machine. Yet, the national statistics hid regional differences; in the Paris region 58 percent reported having a washing machine compared to 79 percent in the north of France. The more industrialized region used private machines at a great frequency because more women worked outside of the home so the family purchased time-saving devices at higher rates. In *Histoire de la machine à laver*, Quynh Delaunay argues that the Parisians' habit to use *blanchisseries* represents another factor limiting the presence of washing machines in the home.

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid., 212, 216, 217, 219, 265.

The Influence of Representations

This dissertation has shown that the influence of representations that portrayed laundresses in negative ways had a negligible effect on how the *Conseil de Salubrité*, *Conseil d'Hygiène* and *Préfets de la Seine* regulated the laundry business and treated laundresses. The sexualized images of laundresses Zola presented in *L'Assommoir* or in Degas's paintings, nor did the statistical analysis published by the Paris Chamber of Commerce motivate city administrators to take action against the laundry industry or laundresses. The concern about laundry was not due to laundresses being outside gender norms. Instead, the *Préfet de la Seine* was concerned with modernizing Paris and creating an aesthetic appeal to the city. The *Conseil de Salubrité* and *Conseil d'Hygiène* wanted to eliminate epidemics.

The statistical analysis published by the chamber of commerce in 1853 portrayed laundresses as being prone to immorality brought on by the conditions in which they worked.⁶⁵⁸ The study asserted that women who were not subjected to a patriarchal structure in their working environment experienced a negative effect on their morality. The *Statistique* listed laundresses as being part of industry, which meant that they engaged in entrepreneurial and not only productive activity as “an individual making goods to order for bourgeois clientele.”⁶⁵⁹ Scott asserts that this was a political and statistical solution to the problem of Paris being overrun by workers, although it would have been more

⁶⁵⁸ Chambre de Commerce de Paris, *Statistique de l'industrie à Paris, 1847-1848*, 2 vols (Paris : Guillaumin, 1861), 1 : 18-19.

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid.

accurate to call them workers since essentially they were selling their labor and not necessarily goods.⁶⁶⁰ In their work, laundresses were self-managed. In the terms of social commentators this could be dangerous for their morality because they had no male oversight; yet, to city administrators this did not matter in terms of regulations. The *Statistique* claimed that laundresses were also in danger of being immoral because “those who launder receive a glass of *eau-de-vie* [on their break] and would be led into drinking too much.”⁶⁶¹ The passage did not indicate who would provide the liquor although it was customary for the owner to furnish the drink for their break as a bonus to their salary; yet they were faulted for having the moral laxity of becoming drunk. The laundresses’ reputation for drinking and being independent put them outside of acceptable gender behavior and influenced the treatment of the places they worked in by the *Conseil d’Hygiène* and the *Préfet de la Seine*. The women were undesirable therefore the places they worked were also.

The conditions laundresses worked in, in underclothes and consuming alcohol, disposed them to the judgment of bourgeois social commentators who had little influence over the motivations of the *Préfets de la Seine*. Photographs from the time revealed laundresses dressed only in chemises and corsets and in underskirts.⁶⁶² To wash laundry the women would strip down to their bodices

⁶⁶⁰ Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1999), 128.

⁶⁶¹ Chambre de Commerce de Paris, *Statistique*, 1 :71.

⁶⁶² Nicolas de Cointet, ed. *L’eau et Paris* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2010), 87. Reproduction of a postcard from Paris « Lavoir » 1860.

(undergarments) or simply wear a cloth with a hole cut out for the head and tied under the arms. The naturalist author Emile Zola represented laundresses in a sexualized way. He reflected the discourse about working women's immorality from social commentators. However, his depiction remained relegated to the fictional world. The city administration did not restrict laundresses based on his representation of them. He planned the cycle of the Rougon-Macquart family in 1869. He had trouble publishing the novel because of its content, some thought it was nothing more than pornography, and serialized it in 1875 before publishing it in 1877.⁶⁶³ Being influenced by ideas of naturalism, Zola aimed to create a novel that painted a true picture of a laundress's life. However, historians must also take into account that he wrote with a bourgeois lens through which he interpreted what he witnessed in the neighborhoods he visited to gather information for his novel. While the novel aimed to be "the first novel about the common people that [did] not lie" he could not escape his bourgeois-male worldview.⁶⁶⁴

Laundresses' working uniform gave the impression that they were immodest, and sexually available, which did not affect their treatment in terms of legislation against them. Further, working-class women were not always interested in meeting bourgeois standards of behavior because they simply could not when it interfered with their work. Gender standards of the time placed a high value on modesty, which was a sign of morality. Laundresses were therefore outside the acceptable gender norms. Set during the Second Empire, Zola's

⁶⁶³ Robert Lethbridge, introduction to *L'Assommoir*, trans. Margret Mauldon (1877, Oxford : Oxford University Press, reprint, 1995), v.

⁶⁶⁴ Lethbridge, introduction to *L'Assommoir*, vii.

L'Assommoir, the only novel wholly dedicated to the story of a laundresses' life, depicted the struggles the main character Gervaise endured trying to adhere to gender prescriptions while being a laundress and working class. Intent on making the novel colorful, Zola did not hesitate to portray sexually charged scenes that tempted men when they passed Gervaise's workshop. The temperatures in *lavoirs* and *bateaux-lavoirs* could reach 50° with the stoves to heat irons and the boiling water to wash laundry. In these conditions laundresses would be tempted to take off their over clothes. In the following example, *L'Assommoir* echoed the women's propensity to wear only a *chemise*, a thin shirt that went under the bodice. Gervaise had fired up the stove for ten irons. "My goodness... We're going to melt away today! Makes you want to take off your *chemise*!...[the woman was] in her white underskirt, with her sleeves rolled up and her bodice slipping off her shoulders, her arms and neck bare..."⁶⁶⁵ An ironer, more concerned with the image she portrayed to anyone passing the shop had not taken her coat off and exclaimed: "Oh no Mademoiselle Clémence, put your bodice on again! While you're about it, why not show off everything you've got. There's already three men stopped across on the other side." Clémence was not embarrassed and retorted: "This is mine, after all, ain't it?" Gervaise interceded and asked the girl to put her bodice on again because "People'll take my shop for something it's not."⁶⁶⁶ In this scene Clémence is fully aware that her behavior could be taken as immodest and possibly immoral. Yet, she was unconcerned with

⁶⁶⁵ Zola, *L'Assommoir*, 138-139.

⁶⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

the connotations of being half dressed because she was suffering in the heat of the workshop. She was in control of the scene and her sexuality. Clémence also reflected many working women's attitudes towards society's rules regarding proper behavior. While she was working she did not care about rules regarding modesty because they hindered her. In a latter scene, Gervaise's former lover is watching her, making his sexual observations discreetly when she is focused on her work. The latter scene made her an object of desire, putting the observer in control of her sexuality. "Clémence was leaning heavily over the work table, her wrists turned inwards. Her elbows held high and wide apart, her neck bent with the effort she was making, and all of her bare flesh seemed to swell, her shoulders lifting rhythmically as the muscles under her fine skin slowly pulsated, while her breasts, damp with sweat, bulged in the rosy shadows of her gaping bodice. So then [Lantier] reached down with his hands, wanting to touch."⁶⁶⁷ The passages reflect how Zola, as a bourgeois male, portrayed the laundresses being half-clothed in public. Although it reflected their working conditions, he did not hesitate to sexualize the situations. It was a titillating experience to see laundresses at work, immodest in public, akin to seeing a prostitute walking the streets. This was his fictionalized idea of their world and did not reflect the concerns of the *Préfet de Police* or the *Préfet de la Seine*.

Other novels written by Zola used laundresses to depict sexually available women. While he only wrote about them *en passant*, the eroticized theme was similar throughout. In Zola's *Une Page d'Amour*, the leading male character

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid., 147.

asked his friend if he had dreamt of seducing his *blanchisseuse*.⁶⁶⁸ In *La Fortune des Rougon*, a man cheated on his wife with a laundress.⁶⁶⁹ Bourgeois men also thought of women of lower class status as being sexually available, which may have contributed to Zola depicting laundresses that way.⁶⁷⁰

The fact that laundresses had access to private information about other people through their dirty laundry also placed them outside of gender norms; information was power. Having power over their customers, including men, signified they were no longer dependent to the patriarchal structure. Zola recounted a scene in the laundry boutique as the women sorted through their customer's laundry, readying it for washing. They surmised the customer's "... fortunes of their beds, cracking jokes about every hole or stain they came across." The state of the laundry communicated what customer's had used it for and could also communicate wealth or poverty and their private habits.⁶⁷¹

Those table napkins belonged to the Goujets; you could see with half an eye that they'd never been used to wipe the bottom of a saucepan. The pillowcase was undoubtedly the Boches', because of the pomade Madame Boche plastered all her linen with. And she knew other details, very personal things about how clean everyone was, about what was underneath the silk skirts that neighborhood

⁶⁶⁸ Emile Zola, *Une page d'Amour* (1878, reprint ; Paris : Gallimard, 1961), 1014.

⁶⁶⁹ Emile Zola, *La Fortune des Rougon* (1871, reprint ; Paris : Gallimard, 1963), 125.

⁶⁷⁰ Rachel Fuchs, *Gender and Poverty in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2005), 119.

⁶⁷¹ Zola, *L'Assommoir*, 139-140.

women wore out in the street, about the number of stockings, of handkerchiefs, of shirts people got dirty in a week. So she had masses of stories too tell. Every time they sorted the laundry in the shop, they undressed the entire neighborhood of the Goutte-d'Or in this way.

Laundresses were outside of the social order the bourgeoisie sought to create and maintain.

Several paintings from 1860 to 1885 also depicted laundresses in a sexualized manner, though not all. Honoré Daumier's *The Laundress* stands out from others as being one that represented a laundress in a respectable light. The painting shows a laundress walking up the steps from a river carrying a load of washing. She is holding a little girl's hand, probably her daughter, while the little girl holds a paddle used to wash laundry. In the painting, the laundress is not in her underskirts and chemise, in water, or drinking, which is the way other artists painted them. She is a respectable mother with her daughter who has engaged in respectable work. There are no overtones of sexual availability, or immodesty. Daumier was an ardent supporter of the working class and sought to bring to light the desperate lives of the poor during the July Monarchy when society the poor bore sole responsibility for their condition.⁶⁷² His attitude may have influenced his sensitive portrayal of a woman who worked outside of the home for wages.

In contrast, the many images Edgar Degas painted of laundresses are eroticized or have overtones of bad behavior. However this had no bearing on how the city administration regulated the business. Coming from a bourgeois

⁶⁷² Bruce Laughton, *Honoré Daumier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), xvi.

family, his background possibly influenced how he represented working women.⁶⁷³ Degas echoed some of the presumptions about laundresses as available and having little morality. His interest in laundresses and ballet dancers came from their work, as it demanded movement and interesting postures. The two professions also were associated with prostitution. Judith Hanna points out that “middle and upper-class men’s leisure was sustained and enlivened by working women.”⁶⁷⁴ Degas in particular connected the working ballerina and prostitute.⁶⁷⁵ The working environments of both types of women contributed to their reputation as being engaged in prostitution. Dancers had to rely on men to keep them because dancing did not pay very much. The public associated laundresses with prostitution because some women were day laborers who were in public looking for work. Degas once declared to his friend: “everything is beautiful in the world of people. But one Paris laundry girl, with bare arms, is worth it all for such a pronounced Parisian as I am.”⁶⁷⁶ This quote indicated the excitement and pleasure Degas took from seeing a woman engaged in laundry work. In 1869, he painted *La Repasseuse*, portraying the woman with half-open languid eyes and a slightly open mouth. The pose is inviting the viewer in, not looking modestly away so the viewer remains as an onlooker. The painting also ignores the hard labor that

⁶⁷³ Marcel Guérin, *Lettres de Degas* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1931), v.

⁶⁷⁴ Judith Hanna, *Dance, Sex and Gender: Signs of Identity, Dominance, Defiance and Desire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 120.

⁶⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁶ Eunice Lipton, *Looking into Degas : Uneasy Images of Women and Modern Life* (Berkeley : University of California Press), 138.

ironing was, heating a stove and pushing an object that weighed three to four kilos over and over, while not burning the linen. Degas painted *Les Repasseuses* in 1884. In his portrayal of a group of women ironing, one is taking a rest with a bottle of wine or spirits, echoing the idea that they drank too much and had questionable morality because of it. While not every painting of laundresses Degas completed had sexual or immoral overtones, he did echo the ideas of a bourgeois mentality that these women were immodest or immoral. The representations of laundress in Zola and Degas's work reflected more about the bourgeois idea of the occupation than reality. The *Préfet de la Seine* and the *Conseil d'Hygiène* based their regulations on their ideas about acceptable uses of urban space and hygiene and not on popular representations of laundresses.

Modernization and Medicalization

This dissertation has demonstrated that the forces of modernization and medicalization (hygiene) replaced women's *savoir-faire* and made laundry the domain of public policy and medical knowledge, just as the washing machine replaced women's knowledge of laundry with the need for technical/mechanical knowledge. The washing machine symbolizes the key relationship between laundry and Paris over the nineteenth century, that of modernization and hygiene. Kristin Ross connected the mass introduction of the washing machine into private homes in the 1960s with the drive to cleanse society and remake the old as new in a redemptive hygiene.⁶⁷⁷ Ross asserts that the drive toward privatization, on the

individual level the withdrawal of the middle class into their domestic interiors, was part of the modernization of French culture.⁶⁷⁸ The middle-class woman would no longer have to share personal information through her laundry with either household staff or, in a more public setting, a laundress. She now had the choice not to wash dirty laundry in public. Ross equated the inclination for new levels of hygiene with the modernization of society. As the French compared themselves with Americans, who were the ultimate symbols of modernity after the Second World War, they sought to emulate their hygiene practices. Washing clothes was something that was difficult to do before the improvements in water and electric services. During the 1960s with the washing machine, French women could attain the modern cleanliness standards of American women.

Modernization also meant that women would have to contend with machines they knew little about. In a 1954 advertisement in *Elle* for the Hoover washing machine, a woman declares that the company sends out a service-man regularly to verify and maintain her washing machine. While attempting to create the image of an easy-to-use machine, the advertisement also implies that the woman has no idea how the machine functions and is totally dependent upon a service-man's knowledge. Washing clothes no longer involved "a commonsense response or the vague memory of how one's grandmother performed the task -

⁶⁷⁷ Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 74.

⁶⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 11, 80, 103.

experts must be consulted...⁶⁷⁹ Similarly, Delaunay claims that during the nineteenth century the technical aspects of urban laundering stripped the city of its mythic representations; the dislocation of washing from its natural environment on the banks of streams to the city in *lavoirs* and the use of chemicals like *chlorure de chaux* and bleach submitted the process to regulations and business relationships at the expense of women and their ancient knowledge.⁶⁸⁰

Modernization of urban space in Paris consisted of a re-conceptualization of the use of space beginning with Napoléon. As early as 1805, the government had banned women from using the river banks and the Seine within Paris, giving preference to boat traffic. During the July Monarchy, the *Préfet de la Seine* Rambuteau identified the circulation of goods and people as a major hurdle in the development of Paris and sought to redefine how the inhabitants used the space to make the city more prosperous. Movement was at the core of his new vision; the Seine was to be used as a thoroughfare as it flowed through Paris. Limiting the floating merchants and *bateaux-lavoirs* eased navigation in the same vein as Napoléon's earlier regulations. Focusing on the maintenance of roads that had been used as social gathering points, Rambuteau also sought to change how the residents used the streets of the capital. In the case of laundry, roads had commonly been used as drainage for *lavoirs* and – for other businesses – general dumping grounds for refuse. New regulations called for the public way to be kept clean, and made it more difficult to launder in Paris. During the Second Empire,

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid., 102.

⁶⁸⁰ Delaunay, *Histoire de la machine à laver*, 11.

Hausmann implemented the vision that Paris needed to function better in the way it moved goods and people. In his drive for modernization, there was no room for the *bateaux-lavoirs*. Hausmann ordered the phasing out of the laundry boats, which had been in existence since the 1600s, prioritizing a new use of the river in the city, specifically the transportation of municipally-run passenger boats.

The re-conceptualization of space to reflect modernity also included the aesthetic appeal of Paris as a capital city. As the national government shifted back to Paris and away from Versailles during the French Revolution, the city needed to reflect France's importance on the European political stage. Napoléon began to remake Paris as a city to reflect national glory, building the Arc de Triomphe for example. In his 1823 pamphlet proposing to rid the city of *bateaux-lavoirs*, Lefort accused the *bateaux* of debasing the beauty and greatness of Paris. In Hausmann's bid to get the *bateaux-lavoirs* out of Paris, he accused them of being disgraceful. Today, the consequences of this modernization through the exclusion of laundry from the city can be seen in the prohibition, in apartment buildings, to hang one's laundry in the windows or balconies where it is visible. The mayor of Reillanne, a small town in the south of France, recently forbade any resident to hang their laundry outside because, in his words, "the village is beautiful but dirty, and I want to restore order. I consider hanging laundry a visual nuisance."⁶⁸¹

⁶⁸¹ Retrieved 3.23.2011, http://www.lepost.fr/article/2010/09/14/2220421_a-reillanne-le-maire-interdit-d-etendre-du-linge-dans-l-espace-public-l-affaire-divise-et-on-se-retrouve-au-tribunal.html

The resident that legally opposed him answered that he thought the mayor wanted the village to look like “a village of Parisians.”⁶⁸²

The medicalization of laundering progressively joined with modernization in a dialectical relationship. I argue that modernization was often thought of, and carried out through, a program of medicalization; in some cases the medical became the modern. As the city sought to modernize, medical explanations supported the idea that laundering did not fit in urban space. Moreover, the medicalization of laundry in terms of hygiene shifted the expertise about laundering from women to the medical domain. Laundering was part of women’s knowledge passed on from generation to generation. Women used household products like ashes or urine to bleach the laundry. When the *Préfet de Police* classified laundry businesses in 1815, they came under the supervision of the *Conseil de Salubrité*, which, from that point, decided how and where laundering would be done. Laundering became a medical issue.

The *Conseil de Salubrité* focused its attention on laundry for two reasons: first as a result of the waste water accumulated from washing; later as a potential source of disease transmission. Hence, the Parisian sewer system exemplified the convergence of medical issues and modernization of the city. Before the completion of the sewer system at the end of the century, the *Conseil* considered waste water from laundry as a dangerous nuisance. In the 1820s and 1830s, as new ideas about the acceptability of certain odors became current, the waste water would build up around the *lavoirs* and emit foul odors that disturbed urban

⁶⁸² Ibid

space.⁶⁸³ The *Conseil* granted permission to establish laundry facilities in Paris only when the owner committed to building underground canals that would direct waste water to the few existing sewer lines. This process was a costly requirement for a business that was not extremely profitable, and laundry facilities often did not meet the requirements set forth by the *Conseil de Salubrité* to exist in urban space. The development of the sewer system was also an issue of modernizing Paris. In his memoir, Haussmann's engineer Eugène Belgrand declared that "Paris became the cleanest capital in the world, after having been the foulest."⁶⁸⁴ To prove that Paris was a modern capital, it had to compete with cities like London who had a functioning sewer system by the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The Third Republic's reliance upon medical explanations for France's perceived national degeneration presented another occasion to medicalize laundering.⁶⁸⁵ The *Annales d'Hygiène* and the *Conseil d'Hygiène* articulated the idea that laundry could transmit contagious diseases like tuberculosis and diphtheria, which reached epidemic proportions. Physicians pointed to laundering practices, such as mixing the clothes of the healthy and sick, as one source of transmission, whereas chemists debated the idea that contaminated laundry could

⁶⁸³ Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination* trans. Miriam Kochan (Leamington Spa, NY: Berg, 1986), 15.

⁶⁸⁴ Eugène Belgrand, *Les Travaux souterrains de Paris, tome V* (Paris: Dunod, 1887), 5.

⁶⁸⁵ Robert Nye, *Crime, Madness, and Politics in Modern France: The Medical Concept of National Decline* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 8. Although he did not write about laundering, I have taken the idea of the medicalization of decline from his work.

infect the Seine by transmitting dangerous microbes to the waters that people still used as drinking water in the 1880s. The *Conseil* used the latter argument against the remaining *bateaux-lavoirs* in Paris. The *Conseil* and *Annales d'Hygiène* proposed a series of standards by which laundering should be done, moving knowledge from the women's domain to the medical domain. The government made the proposed standards for laundry washing and handling into laws and effectively changed the occupation of laundry. The new regulations favored the *blanchisseries*, industrial facilities, that the *Conseil* asserted could maintain hygiene standards and prevent the transmission of microbes. However, the *blanchisseries* rarely implemented the regulations, and laundresses worked in worse health and safety conditions than the *lavoirs* or *bateaux-lavoirs* that were at the center of the debate on microbes.

Yet, the medicalization of laundry and the connection to modernization through hygiene persists to this day. Advertising still associates laundry with the medical sphere. The widespread introduction of the washing machines and other household appliances after the Second World War ushered in the idea that housewives were responsible for maintaining a home not only clean to the eye, but hygienic as well.⁶⁸⁶ The idea of germs in laundry and their ability to infect the person wearing the clothes remains current. The advertisement for the laundry detergent Vanish Oxi Action Extra Hygiène claims that it “eliminates 99.9 percent of bacteria.”⁶⁸⁷ Although the pink packaging and advertisement still target

⁶⁸⁶ Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*, 103.

women, the technical expertise rests with the detergent and the scientists who formulated it. The women consumers only have to read a label, removing the need to have any technical knowledge of the product. Through modernization and medicalization, laundry can be sanitized to meet evolving hygiene standards and no longer has to be done in public space.

⁶⁸⁷ Retrieved 5.24.11, <http://www.vanish.fr/product.php?id=5>.

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