

Popular Rumour in Revolutionary Paris:
1792–1794

Lindsay Porter

PhD
University of York
History
September 2014

Abstract

Rumours thrive in periods of social and political unrest; the combination of uncertainty and upheaval and a demand for information creates a crucible for the spread of unsubstantiated news. In such situations, even unconfirmed reports serve a purpose, allowing communities to give voice to their anxieties and hopes.

An examination of the role and impact of rumour during the French Revolution has the potential to shed new light on the experiences of those who lived through it. Focussing on Paris during the most radical years of Jacobinism, this thesis explores the ways in which informal communication networks helped to shape popular perceptions of the Revolution.

Adopting a different approach from Georges Lefebvre's classic study, this thesis explores the role of rumour as a phenomenon in itself. It investigates the way in which the informal authority of the *on dit* ('they say') of the street was subject to a range of historical and contemporary prejudices and the extent to which it was monitored by the authorities. Drawing its conclusions from a close reading of the police archives in Paris, this thesis examines the potential of rumour to unite communities but also to divide them, as the power of *on dit* began to play an important role in denunciations.

Contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	4
Author's Declaration	5
Introduction	6
Chapter I	51
‘Prenez garde Citoyens!’: Policing Popular Rumour	
Chapter II	89
‘Un bruit de frayeur se répand’: Informal Communication Networks and the Creation of Rumour	
Chapter III	130
Rumour, Riots, Feasts and Famines	
Chapter IV	164
Rumour and Community: Solidarity and Conflict in the Sans-Culotte Neighbourhoods of Year II	
Chapter V	205
Rumour, Reputation and Identity	
Chapter VI	241
Rumour, Denunciation and Terror	
Conclusion	280
Appendix A: <i>The Public Promenade</i>	285
Appendix B: Map of the Sections of Revolutionary Paris	286
Bibliography	287

Acknowledgements

It was my incredible good fortune to have written this under the supervision of Professor Alan Forrest. His calm direction, unflagging enthusiasm and good humour helped me to navigate the winding byways of *on dit* without losing my way or my will.

The AHRC provided funding as well as a travel grant, which facilitated an extended period of research in the archives in Paris. Thank you to the helpful staff at the French National Archives, the Bibliothèque Nationale, the Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris and, most particularly, the Archives de Préfecture de Police de Paris. Thank you, too, to the Special Collections staff at the John Rylands Library at the University of Manchester.

The lively academic community at the University of York, particularly the Centre for Eighteenth Century Studies, was an inspiring and supportive environment in which to present and discuss work in progress.

I am grateful for the valuable feedback and encouragement that was offered at academic conferences and forums, particularly from Colin Jones, and from the community at the Conspiracy and Democracy research project at CRASSH in Cambridge. The workshop organised by Alex Fairfax-Cholmely at the John Rylands Library in Manchester, 'Finding Order in Revolution', coincided with the conclusion of this thesis, and the papers and discussions that took place helped to consolidate many of the observations within. Timothy Tackett and David Andress offered insightful comments on sections of earlier drafts.

Finally, friends and family have been remarkably enthusiastic about this project since its inception, and if they ever tired of hearing about the obscure corners of the police archives of Paris they managed to disguise it with the cunning of counter-revolutionary conspirators. Most supportive of all were – and continue to be – Peter and Elspeth. My heartfelt thanks to you.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

Introduction

Les femmes disaient que l'intention des conspirateurs était de les empoisonner, en introduisant dans Paris une certaine quantité de farine préparée à cet effet. Je souhaite que ce ne soit là qu'un soupçon de femmes patriotes; mais ne pourrait-il pas se faire que les aristocrates répandissent exprès ce bruit dans Paris, pour inspirer au peuple des défiances sur l'approvisionnement déjà fait ou à faire, pour le mener plus sûrement et en quelque sorte volontairement à la famine.¹

Rapport de Perrière, 1 germinal, an II

Rumours flourish in times of anxiety; they thrive on ambiguity and uncertainty, filling the void left by lack of information. They are an articulation of fear, of hope, or of desire. Rumours spread because they are believed, at some level, to be true; in expressing them communities are able to share a collective concern. As such, the subject of a rumour, and the reaction of the participants to that rumour, can reveal a great deal about society's fears, values and desires.

An examination of the role of rumour during the French Revolution permits an entry into the collective concerns of the communities that lived through it. It opens up questions about what stories were believed and how they spread, and what repercussions – if any – followed. It allows an investigation into notions of trust – whose story is the most plausible and why – and of group dynamics, as the acceptance or rejection of a rumour unites or separates members of a community. It also allows us to investigate how they were recorded and interpreted and why.

The above report, supplied by one 'citizen observer', one of the network of spies employed by the Minister of the Interior during a period from 1792 to

¹ Pierre Caron, *Paris pendant la Terreur: Rapports des agents secrets du Ministre de l'Intérieur Publiés pour la Société d'histoire contemporaine* (Paris: Librairie Alphonse Picard et Fils, 1910), vol. VI p 89. Rapport de Perrière, 1 germinal, an II.

1794, contains many elements characteristic of rumour – and of official attitudes towards rumour – during this time. It refers to the group sharing the rumour ‘les femmes’; it refers to the protagonists of the rumour – the recently arrested Hébertistes, recast as ‘les conspirateurs’, whose plot to poison the city by the introduction of contaminated bread is the subject of the rumour. It also reveals the authorities’ uncertainty about the origins of the rumour: has it been conjured from the collective anxieties of ‘les femmes patriotes’ or is it evidence of something more sinister – a counter-revolutionary tactic to destabilise the citizenry by spreading suspicion about the provisioning of the city? These questions are at the heart of this thesis.

Rumour studies

From the outset, it is necessary to establish what is meant by rumour. Rumour is not simply a synonym for gossip, although rumour and gossip can at times be connected. (Recent scholarship has suggested that even among specialists there is no consensus about how the two differ, and so for the purposes of this thesis I will attempt to define a set of criteria.)² Rumour is not only transmitted by word of mouth, but can be communicated through just about any media: in print, in song, through popular imagery and cartoons or through satire. There is a popular perception that rumours are spread by gossiping women,³ thus belittling both the rumours and the participants equally, but rumours can and have been transmitted by authoritative news sources as easily as by individuals.⁴

² Nicholas DiFonzo and Prashant Bordia, ‘Rumor, Gossip and Urban Legends’, *Diogenes*, vol. 54, No. 1 (2007), pp. 19-35, note that the two are often used interchangeably, both colloquially and among scholars.

³ A recent corrective to this view is Nicholas Hammond’s *Gossip, Sexuality and Scandal in France, 1610–1715* (Oxford and New York: Peter Lang, 2011), which examines gossip and same-sex relationships.

⁴ At the height of the hoof-and-mouth disease outbreak in Britain in 2001, many reports in the US media confused the disease (communicable among livestock to whom it can be fatal) with hand-foot-and-mouth disease, a less serious viral infection affecting humans. Colloquially, and confusingly, both are known as foot-and-mouth disease. In addition, public perceptions of both were affected by the long shadow cast by the alarmingly titled ‘mad cow’ disease, Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy, leading to concerns in the United States that Europe was undergoing an epidemic threatening to human health. (Bryan Garner, *Garner’s American Usage*, [Oxford University Press, 2009], p.364, describes various uses of the term in print media.) A different example of the mainstream media contributing to

Gossip and rumour have some qualities in common, but also some fundamental differences. Gossip may or may not be true, but its veracity is ultimately less important than its subject. Gossip usually concerns the behaviour of individuals known to the participants (either personally or public figures). Gossip serves as a means of social exchange, bringing together the participants for the duration of the conversation. The individual who supplies the gossip enjoys a certain kudos – at least for the period of time in which he or she holds the audience in thrall: traditionally the town gossip was not held in universal respect. Patricia Meyer Spacks's *Gossip* provides a very entertaining analysis of gossip from a literary perspective.⁵ She identifies a spectrum of gossip, from the outright malicious (and in so doing subverts expectations that purveyors of hurtful gossip are exclusively women, by identifying Shakespeare's Iago as the epitome of the malevolent gossip) to more thoughtful, serious interchanges. The latter, although still focussing on individual behaviours, allows the participants 'to reflect about themselves, to express wonder and uncertainty ..., to enlarge their knowledge of one another' although their conversation may still contain 'the stuff of scandal'. Ultimately, however, Spacks sees something valuable in the exchange of gossip, describing it as 'a crucial means of solidarity and self-expression'.⁶

Rumour shares some of these qualities, as will be discussed below, but differs from gossip on several counts. The most important of these is that rumours spread because they are believed at some level to be true, or at least to reflect an element of truth. Because of this they can be seen to represent shared beliefs, hopes or fears, and thus have the potential to

misinformation can be seen in the case of media support for the now discredited research of former doctor Andrew Wakefield linking childhood vaccinations with autism; in this case some media outlets appeared to believe at the time that the research was credible. In the case of hoof-and-mouth disease, the media's spreading of misinformation was unintentional, a result of inaccurate terminology and popular misconceptions.

⁵ Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Gossip* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985).

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 4ff.

provoke or galvanise behaviour.⁷ There is an important temporal feature of rumour, which does not apply to gossip. Rumour is, at its most basic, a shared piece of information that has not yet been confirmed, but is believed to be true. It is therefore not the content that characterises or defines a rumour, but the fact that the content has not been verified. Rumours are, put simply, ‘unsecured information’⁸ – not inherently or necessarily false, but, for a time, at least, unstable. For this reason, rumours are essentially finite: once a story has been proven or disproven, it ceases to be a rumour and becomes either fact or falsehood. This later state, however, does not negate or erase the historical fact of the rumour itself. It is now a matter of historical record, reflecting the concerns and beliefs during a particular place and time. During the time in which it grows and spreads, however, and whatever the future outcome might be, it exists as a potent story, plausible enough to bear repeating.

But if rumours are merely ‘unsecure information’, unconfirmed stories that may eventually – but not necessarily – be revealed as falsehoods, why are they important, and what can they tell us about a particular time and place? As Bronislaw Baczko writes in *Ending the Terror*:

A false rumour is a real social fact; in that it conceals a portion of historical truth – not about the news that it spreads, but about the conditions that make its emergence and circulation possible, about the state of mind, the mentalities and imagination of those who accept it as true.⁹

⁷ An example of crowd action provoked by rumour was reported in 2000 by various respectable news outlets, including the BBC and the *Independent* newspaper (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/901723.stm>; <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/vigilante-mob-attacks-home-of-paediatrician-710864.html>). They described how a paediatrician had been forced to move after vigilantes had vandalised her home, having confused her job title with ‘paedophile’. However, the story itself was embellished and exaggerated by subsequent media outlets, which described ‘spates’ of attacks on paediatricians (<http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/wire/8897>). Both incarnations of the story reveal group assumptions and prejudices.

⁸ Gary Alan Fine, Véronique Champion-Vincent and Chip Heath, eds. *Rumor Mills: The Social Impact of Rumor and Legend* (New Brunswick, NJ and London: AldineTransaction, 2007), p.256.

⁹ Baczko, *Ending the Terror*, p.3.

Here it is important to reprise the two elements that Spacks identifies as important to gossip: self-expression and solidarity. Participating in the spread of rumour allows a community to express its 'state of mind', its 'mentalities and imagination'. A community reveals its anxieties and fears through the rumours that it spreads. The conditions that allow these rumours to spread – often during times of uncertainty or anxiety – can also bring communities together in solidarity, although this might at first appear to be a paradoxical statement. By sharing and spreading a rumour a community can give voice to and share or even act upon emotions.

The study of rumour first began to be taken seriously in the nineteenth century, with the development of modern psychology.¹⁰ However, rumour was not seen to be particularly significant until World War II, when social scientists began to address the effects of enemy propaganda and seditious talk. The most notable of these were Robert Knapp, whose 'A Psychology of Rumour' was published in 1944, a result of work for the Massachusetts Committee for Public Safety,¹¹ and Gordon Allport and Joseph Postman, whose influential *The Psychology of Rumor*, was published three years later, based on studies undertaken for the US Office of War Information.¹² More recently, rumour has been studied in relation to urban myths, contemporary versions of the folk tales of old, with their updated versions of scapegoats and bogeymen.¹³

¹⁰ Pamela Donavan, 'How Idle is Idle Talk? One Hundred Years of Rumor Research', *Diogenes*, vol. 54, No. 1 (2007), pp. 59–92.

¹¹ Robert H. Knapp, 'A Psychology of Rumor', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 8, no. 1 (1944), pp. 22–37.

¹² Gordon W. Allport and Leo Postman, *The Psychology of Rumor* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1947).

¹³ See, for example, Patricia A. Turner, *I Heard it Through the Grapevine: Rumor in African-American Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993); Fine, Campion-Vincent and Heath, eds, *Rumor Mills*, or DiFonzo and Bordia, 'Rumor, Gossip and Urban Legends'.

Knapp describes how, earlier in the twentieth century, rumour had been the preserve of folklorists, considered only in relation to myths and legend, and as a form of oral story-telling. However, wartime experiences made the US government aware of rumour's potentially detrimental effect on public morale, and it became a legitimate subject for study, particularly with the aim of identifying solutions for controlling it. Knapp's study concluded that rumours flourish where there is an absence of information. Wartime is thus the obvious environment in which rumours will proliferate, as secrecy, for reasons of security, and state censorship create a vacuum of official information. Knapp identified several key characteristics of rumours in his study:

1) Rumours are transmitted verbally, and are thus vulnerable to distortion.

2) Rumours provide information, and relate to a specific person, place or event. They often include very precise details that seem to impart authority. Later research describes these as 'informational credentials', which often evolve and become exaggerated with the development of the rumour.¹⁴

3) Rumours provide satisfaction; they explain the inexplicable, or meet an emotional need. Of these Knapp identified wish fulfilment ('the war will be over by Christmas'); fear (of the enemy, or of another identifiable bogey or 'other'); and hostility (what he calls 'wedge-driving'), i.e., identifying a scapegoat as a way to express aggression. (In the twentieth century this often manifests itself as racism or religious bigotry.)

As I will attempt to demonstrate in this thesis, the majority of these elements are present in popular rumours during the French Revolution, and often co-exist within the same story. (The one exception is that there are few

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 257. An example of this, which recurs throughout the period covered in this thesis, is the frequency with which numbers are used in rumour. Reports of the imminent arrival of '500 brigands' of '1,000 femmes du marché' or '100 chevaliers du poignard' occur regularly. The reference to a specific number lends an air of authority and thus appears to authenticate what is, in fact, unsubstantiated rumour. Ironically, for the modern scholar, numbers in colloquial narratives are one of the prime indicators of a rumour.

examples of positive, wish-fulfilling rumours, which are scant to non-existent. The reasons for this will be explored below.)

Later studies of rumour in the immediate post-war period developed Knapp's ideas, always with the aim of finding solutions to curtailing rumour. Allport and Postman's 1947 article, 'An Analysis of Rumour', cites a prevailing government opinion that in wartime, 'Rumour...flies in the absence of news' and that the solution, therefore, was to provide the public with reliable, comprehensive and authoritative information, promptly and regularly.¹⁵ However, the authors claim this attitude is based on the erroneous assumption that rumour is 'purely an intellectual commodity';¹⁶ that rumour fills a void only in the absence of reliable information. They suggest that during periods of extraordinary upheaval, accurate facts are not sufficient to explain the course of events; further explanations are needed to make sense of the inexplicable. This, I will argue, is borne out by the kinds of rumours circulating during the French Revolution. It was not lack of information that was motivating rumour (on the contrary, the public was swamped with a surfeit of information, which in itself led to problems of authentication and reliability, as I will discuss below): it was the need to identify some superhuman agency for these events. Allport and Postman therefore, suggest that rumours evolve in response to a psychological need, appearing to provide answers that are more palatable than reality. Steven Kaplan identifies a specific example of this in his examination of the famine plot narratives of the eighteenth century: believing in an aristocratic conspiracy to hoard grain met an emotional need that the truth – natural disaster – did not.¹⁷

¹⁵ Gordon W. Allport and Leo Postman, 'An Analysis of Rumour', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 10, no. 4 (Winter, 1946–1947), p. 501.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Steven L. Kaplan, 'The Famine Plot Persuasion', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 72, part 3 (1982), pp. 1-79.

Allport and Postman observe certain features of rumour that have framed studies of it ever since: they argue that rumours flourish where the topic is important to the listener, and where the facts surrounding it are ambiguous. This relation, they argued, between ambiguity and importance are what cause rumours to spread. If the story is ambiguous, but holds little importance to the listener there is no rumour; likewise if the story is important, but the facts are concrete and verifiable, rumour will not take hold.

Another key aspect of Allport and Postman's work was to identify the way in which rumour spreads. Like Knapp, they see it as a fundamentally oral form of transmission, during which, in what is essentially a more sophisticated version of Chinese whispers, the details of the story being transmitted are both 'levelled out' – i.e., extraneous details fall away – and 'sharpened' – i.e., important details are emphasised and heightened. This, again, is borne out by much of the archival material I consulted, in which certain narrative tropes featuring very precise details occur. In reports of crowd disturbances, for example, there is often a prominent and distinctive figure, unknown to the community – 'un étranger', 'un inconnu' – with a very conspicuous identifying feature such as a large hat of a specific colour, or a white horse.¹⁸

Allport and Postman's position has prompted further debates. A more recent study in France by Jean-Noël Kapferer notes that the first important sociological studies in the United States were informed by the wartime environment in which they were written, and that because of this, rumour studies of this period are based on the premise that rumours are inherently false.¹⁹ He suggests instead that a rumour is a search for truth, rather than obfuscation; that details are retained or rejected as they are verified, rather than because they have a particular resonance with the teller. Although I

¹⁸ See Richard Cobb, *The Police and the People: French Popular Protest 1789–1820*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970). This point is discussed in Chapter IV.

¹⁹ Jean-Noël Kapferer, *Rumors: Uses, Interpretations and Images*, trans. Bruce Fink (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1990), p. 2.

believe that information transmitted verbally lends itself to error and genuine misunderstanding more than this position admits, it does highlight an important point that is often forgotten in the study of rumour: those who engage in the transmission of the story a) genuinely believe in its veracity and b) therefore do not recognise that they are engaging in rumour-mongering.²⁰

Rumour and the French Revolution

There are some exceptions to the above, which are relevant to this study of rumour in the French Revolution. The first is that some rumours during the French Revolution *were* started by individuals, specifically as a means to slander or denigrate a rival. (One of the best known of these was the rumour of Robespierre-the-king, whose many details included reports of a newly carved fleur-de-lis seal found in the Commune offices at the time of Robespierre's arrest. The leader of the Committee of General Security, Marc Vadier, later admitted to have been the origin of this.²¹ This, however, was just one in a long line of slanderous rumours either created or exploited by different factions in order to discredit their rivals.) This practice, however, is in itself an acknowledgement of the power of rumour: once the seed has been planted, if it has any credibility at all, it will continue to be communicated by those who are sharing the story. As these numbers increase, so does the presence of the rumour until, eventually, its ubiquity serves as its own proof; the number of people who credit the story are thus complicit in its validation.

Although not all rumours during this period are as self-contained and easily traced to a single source as the Robespierre story, many others were exaggerated, manipulated or exploited by the Revolutionary government for its own means. The relationship between rumour and the discourse of

²⁰ Many of these issues are also raised in the work of Gary Fine. For example, 'Rumor, Trust and Civil Society: Collective Memory and Cultures of Judgement', *Diogenes*, vol. 54, no. 1 (Feb., 2007) pp. 5-18.

²¹ Baczko, *Ending the Terror*, pp. 16-17. Also referred to in David Andress, *The Terror: Civil War in the French Revolution* (London: Abacus, 2006), p. 346.

conspiracy so prevalent during the most radical Jacobin phase of the Revolution will be discussed below.

Another aspect of recent rumour studies, which I believe is also relevant to the eighteenth century, is what has now been studied in its own right and has come to be known as the urban myth or legend. These are stories that reappear cyclically, focussing on certain broad themes and subjects, with specific details varying to give them relevance to the listener.²² Many of the rumours that persist during the Revolution contain certain tropes or themes that frequently reoccur, whose antecedents are much earlier, but whose latest reincarnation incorporates a new Revolutionary guise. Steven Kaplan describes this as a kind of 'collective consciousness', a persisting group memory that is evoked as a means of interpreting contemporary events. This accounts, for example, for the persistent belief in the connection between famine and aristocratic hoarding and the recurrence of rumours that draw on this tradition.²³

Whereas Kaplan examines the notion of a collective consciousness specifically via the trope of the aristocratic famine plot, Arlette Farge describes how it contributes to popular rumour in general. She describes eighteenth-century Paris as influenced by 'a whole hotchpotch of culture ... made up of snatches of knowledge, truths and half-truths, including a whole mixture of allusions which were called upon according to the needs of the moment.'²⁴ These earlier beliefs were resurrected and reassembled under the Revolution, providing an historical framework with which to interpret contemporary events, while simultaneously contributing to a new body of collective narratives. For example, beliefs in the perfidy of Marie-Antoinette

²² See, for example, Turner, *I Heard it Through the Grapevine*, on the tradition of urban legend in African-American communities in the United States.

²³ Rumours that draw on this tradition are explored in greater detail in Chapter III.

²⁴ Arlette Farge and Jacques Revel, *The Vanishing Children of Paris: Rumor and Politics before the French Revolution*, trans. Claudia Miéville (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 117. Also cited in Fine, Campion-Vincent and Heath, *Rumor Mills*, p. 224.

and the debauchery of her court were, as has been well documented, exploited by revolutionaries for political reasons. However, they also belong to a long tradition of popular beliefs about the behaviour of the aristocracy in general, and aristocratic women in particular, fuelled by court tittle-tattle and a tradition of salacious *libelles* that existed prior to the Revolution, such as the *poissonades* targeting Louis XV's mistress, Madame Pompadour.²⁵ Thomas Kaiser's examination of beliefs in the foreign plot demonstrates how several pre-existing assumptions and prejudices can coalesce into a new and plausible whole with the addition of contemporary detail.²⁶ In this case, the historical animosity of France towards Austria both underpinned and reinforced suspicions that Marie-Antoinette was at the centre of an international counter-revolutionary plot, which itself was absorbed into and bolstered by the popular narrative of the queen's moral and sexual transgressions. These various, initially unrelated, themes amplified and reconfirmed one another to the extent that they eventually became inseparable, with one unfounded accusation serving as evidence for the next and vice versa, in a mutually reinforcing circle of alleged proof.

Rumours draw on what Jacques Revel describes as 'a repertoire of common references, ... a body of "knowledge" that they simultaneously bring into existence.'²⁷ Revel was referring specifically to the body of defamatory texts relating to Marie-Antoinette, but the same phenomenon contributes to the proliferation of rumour in general: recurrent narratives draw on a collective

²⁵ See, for example, Robert Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1982); *Forbidden Best Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (London: HarperCollins, 1996); and *The Devil in the Holy Water or the Art of Slander from Louis XIV to Napoleon* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010) or Simon Burrows, *Blackmail, Scandal, and Revolution: London's French libellistes 1758-92* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006) and *A King's Ransom: The Life of Charles Théveneau de Morlande, Blackmailer, Scandalmonger and Master-Spy* (London: Continuum, 2010).

²⁶ Thomas E. Kaiser, 'From the Austrian Committee to the Foreign Plot: Marie-Antoinette, Austrophobia, and the Terror', *French Historical Studies*, vol. 26, no. 4 (Fall, 2003), pp. 579–617.

²⁷ Jacques Revel, 'Marie-Antoinette in her Fictions: the Staging of Hatred' in *Fictions of the French Revolution*, ed. Bernadette Fort (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1991), p. 114.

body of shared assumptions and beliefs – what Revel refers to as ‘knowledge’ –but a body that has no actual foundation or corroborating evidence but itself. Many popular rumours during this period, therefore, build on existing pre-revolutionary tropes, and transform them to reflect contemporary events and anxieties, often with the addition of the seemingly telling, specific detail that lends them credibility. Rumours that rely on identifiable tropes legitimise past rumours and lay the foundation for future ones, in an endlessly renewable, self-perpetuating and self-justifying cycle.²⁸

This reworking of familiar narratives was reinforced by the recurrent use of key words, evoked with the regularity of the bogeyman in a fairy tale. A word or phrase that might have originated with a distinct identity – *brigand*, *say*, or *aristocrate* – over time became ever more generic and elastic. *Brigands* became synonymous with *malveillants*; *malveillants* were clearly *ennemis* and they all became absorbed under the umbrella term of ‘suspect’ with the introduction of the eponymous law in September 1793. The slipperiness of such definitions, and their use and interpretation depending on who was speaking or listening, contributed to rumours, too: how could one guarantee the communication of information if the very words used to transmit it were unreliable?²⁹

The most significant study of rumour during the French revolution is, of course, Georges Lefebvre’s *Great Fear of 1789*, which traces the transmission of rumour through the French countryside, provoked by the reality of food

²⁸ The contribution of pre-existing rumours, folk memory and collective myth is explored in other studies of specific rumours, such as, for example, Jay M. Smith, *Monsters of the Gévaudan: The Making of a Beast* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2011), which identifies the contribution of local traditions and fairy tales, the exigencies of the commercial press and the prejudices of an urban elite to create the myth of the ‘monster’ of the Gévaudan. The role of generic types in a broader context is examined by Michael Rautenberg, in ‘Stereotypes and Emblems in the Construction of Social Imagination’, *Outlines – Critical Practice Studies*, no 2. (2010), pp. 126-137. Bronislaw Baczko, *Les imaginaires sociaux. Mémoire et espoirs collectifs* (Paris: Payot, 1984) examines how this collective consciousness can be shaped and manipulated by totalitarian governments.

²⁹ Sophia Rosenfeld, *A Revolution in Language: The Problem of Signs in Late Eighteenth-Century France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), explores the political implications of the instability of language, particularly when it relates to ideological concepts.

shortages, but inspired by a tradition of famine plots and fear of *brigands*.³⁰ The result was widespread belief in the imminent arrival of bands of criminals and ruffians, funded by aristocrats, terrorizing the country. The story passed from one village to the next, gathering momentum and growing larger as it spread, and resulted in food riots, revolts and rural populations arming themselves in self-defence. George Rudé described this phenomenon as a 'contagion' and noted that, in the countryside, the general fear of *brigandage* and long tradition of aristocratic famine-plot narratives crystallised into very specific beliefs in imminent threat.³¹ This exemplifies what Allport and Postman describe as the sharpening and heightening effects of rumour – essentially describing the way in which rumours, particularly at times of high anxiety, become both simplified and streamlined as well as exaggerated, with extraneous details falling away while those that remain intensify.³² These features, however, do not apply only to stories transmitted by word of mouth: they are also characteristic of Revolutionary journalism, particularly those publications aimed at a popular readership. The nature of placards and broadsides lent themselves to a simplification and exaggeration of information – what is sloganeering if not a 'sharpening and heightening' of a more complex argument? Revolutionary journalists were able to exploit the potency of certain words and expressions among the general public, while at the same time appropriating them for the purposes of spreading the Revolutionary message. All of this contributed to specific collective narratives already in existence, whilst also helping them to evolve to reflect recent events.

One of the themes this thesis will explore is the way in which these narratives – simultaneously timeless and contemporary – permitted a politically unsophisticated population to interpret current events through

³⁰ Georges Lefebvre, *The Great Fear of 1789: Rural Panic in Revolutionary France*, trans. Joan White (New York: Schocken Books, 1973).

³¹ George Rudé, introduction to *The Great Fear of 1789*, p. xi.

³² Allport and Postman, 'An Analysis of Rumor', p. 504. Fine identifies the same phenomenon with the expression, 'truncation and elaboration' in 'Rumor, Trust and Civil Society', p.16.

language and imagery that was already familiar to them, and which, because of their historical precedence, in turn served to validate that interpretation, in an endlessly self-referential circle. These traditional beliefs and tropes were manipulated, exaggerated and exploited by the government to win public approval, most evidently through the demonising of particular figures or factions in the radical press, or in the ways in which ‘enemies of the *patrie*’ were ‘unmasked’ and their crimes publicised, in cheap pamphlets, in broadsheets, on posters and, of course, by word of mouth.³³

General rumour studies provide interesting points for discussion when looking at the influence of rumour and its subject matter during the French Revolution. That a rumour centres on a subject that both is important to the listener, and contains elements of ambiguity, is fundamental to its success during this time. Existing narrative tropes helped to give present rumours a degree of authenticity, with historical precedence appearing to validate contemporary events. However, such rumours were not caused by a dearth of information, as many general studies of rumour suggest, but, in fact, by a surfeit of it, due to the sheer volume of print that emerged after the fall of the Bastille, aimed at a much wider and more diverse readership than ever before.³⁴ For this reason, the role of the radical press, and its place in the ever-expanding print culture is as significant during this period as a pre-existing ‘collective’ memory.³⁵

³³ An example of this is the cheaply produced *Procès des conspirateurs Hébert, Ronsin, Vincent et ses complices, condamnés à la peine de mort par le tribunal révolutionnaire le 4 germinal, l’an 2 de la république, et exécuté le même jour; suivi du précis de la vie du Père Duchesne* (Paris: Chez Caillot, l’an 2 de la république [1794]). This text contains the transcript of the trial of the Hébertistes followed by a fictional and sensationalised account of the life of Hébert, which makes direct comparisons between personal immorality and political corruption.

³⁴ For social scientists of rumour during World War II (Allport and Postman; Knapp) regular, official dispatches were advised to be the key to combating rumour.

³⁵ The role of the radical press in perpetuating rumours that contributed to the September Massacres was examined in Lindsay Porter, “‘On parle d’un complot qui fait frissonner’: Popular Rumour and the September Massacres’ (unpublished MA dissertation, University of York, 2009).

Rumour and print culture

With the fall of the Bastille, the roughly half-a-dozen state-sanctioned and highly censored newspapers were replaced, almost overnight, with a veritable sea of print, from newspapers, journals and pamphlets, to broadsides and posters. Recent studies suggest the speed with which posters and broadsides were replaced on the streets created a kind of call-and-response to developing news, an ongoing debate in print that was able to react as quickly to the latest proclamation as a lively encounter in a tavern.³⁶ By the end of 1789 there were nearly 200 new journals in Paris alone; by the end of 1792 there were 500 new publications.³⁷ In the *Bibliothèque Nationale*, Jeremy Popkin counts over 1,300 publications covering the period 1789–99.³⁸ Until the return of draconian press restrictions under the Terror, Parisians could enjoy publications covering a range of political opinions and journalistic styles, from the daily reports of the National Assembly in *Le Moniteur*, to the satirical, royalist *Actes des Apôtres*, the bloodthirsty radicalism of Marat or the *sans-culotte* ventriloquism of Hébert's *Père Duchesne*. The relationship between this newly emergent print culture and the Revolution has been the subject of much academic research and debate, considering questions about whether the press was a reflection of Revolutionary behaviour, or the means of shaping a Revolutionary *mentalité*. The role of the underground press prior to the revolution, the 'forbidden best sellers' of Robert Darnton's research, has also undergone a re-evaluation, with, for example, Simon Burrows questioning whether these

³⁶ I am grateful to the workshop held at the John Rylands Library, 28 June, 2014, 'Finding Order in a Revolution: Violence, Communication and Control in Revolutionary Cultures, from 1789 to the Present Day', organised by Dr Alex Fairfax-Cholmeley, for the discussions relating to this point.

³⁷ Hugh Gough, 'The French Revolutionary Press', *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America*, ed. Hannah Barker and Simon Burrows (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 184; Lynn Hunt, 'The Rhetoric of Revolution in France', *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 15, no. 1 (Winter, 1983), p. 78.

³⁸ Jeremy Popkin, *Revolutionary News: The Press in France, 1789–99* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1990), p. 8.

'bestsellers' existed in anything like the numbers suggested in Darnton's work.³⁹

What all these debates share is an attempt to map out and define the relationship between the press and revolutionary activity; such a relationship lends itself to multiple interpretations and readings. Many studies of print culture focus on the reading habits of those with the ability to pay either the annual subscriptions, or the daily fee to enter a *cabinet de lecture* – those educated classes who were able to participate in Jürgen Habermas's public sphere.⁴⁰ I have chosen to direct my focus instead on the consumers of print who were less likely to acquire their information in the *cabinet de lecture* than in the workshop, the cabaret or on the street corner, as publications were passed from reader to reader, or read aloud to public groups. This intersection between the written and the spoken word, as the contents of newspapers were shared aloud, suggests to me a space in which rumour might thrive, as words and ideas are repeated and given a – perhaps unintentional or unwarranted – emphasis that nonetheless reflects the concerns of the day.⁴¹

Literacy rates in Paris were higher at this time than in the rest of the country, with an estimated two-thirds of adult men able to read, compared to one-half in the provinces of the south. Literacy rates among women were lower, although in Paris still comparatively higher than the rest of the country.⁴² Clearly, however, these numbers cannot indicate levels of reading

³⁹ These conclusions are drawn by Simon Burrows from the database, 'The French Book Trade in Enlightenment Europe, 1769–1794: Mapping the Trade of the Société typographique de Neuchâtel'. Darnton's thesis has also been reappraised in Haydn T. Mason, ed., *The Darnton Debate: Books and Revolution in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1998).

⁴⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: an Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).

⁴¹ This idea is developed more fully in Chapter II, particularly regarding the role of the itinerant news vendor.

⁴² Popkin, *Revolutionary News*, p. 80.

proficiency, nor do they indicate the extent to which the content of the publications may have been analysed or understood. This raises questions about the relationship between the press and the reading public, about the intentionally educational and/or propagandist role of revolutionary publications and about how popular rumour might have been appropriated and exploited by the press. (The fearful, febrile months preceding the September Massacres of 1792, for example, were exacerbated by alarmist press reports and easily digested radical sloganeering.) Many studies, too, have been made of the discrepancy between numbers of copies sold versus numbers of readers, with the latter significantly outnumbering the former.⁴³ Indeed, Popkin cites editor Pierre-Louis Roederer's survey of 1801 and estimated that a single copy of a newspaper or journal might have ten different readers in Paris, while those that were read aloud in the Republican clubs or other public places might reach an audience of scores more with a single copy.⁴⁴ The discrepancy between numbers of readers and numbers of printed copies is made clearer still by the fact that Marat's hugely popular *Ami du Peuple* had a print run of only around 3,000 copies, which was typical of the numbers of the most influential radical journals (apart from *Le Père Duchesne*, with a print run that could reach an impressive 80,000 copies).⁴⁵ Because of the ways that printed matter was shared and consumed, this did not minimise the paper's reach or message, but it did contribute to the growth of rumour, whether intentionally or not.

Many of the debates surrounding the relationship between the press and Revolutionary activity focus on which had the greater influence on the other. The reality, I suspect, is that they were mutually influential, both shaping and reflecting one another; the speed with which the press responded to events could not help but also have an influence on their outcome. The

⁴³ This raises a counter-argument to Simon Burrows's discovery that there were fewer copies of Darnton's 'forbidden bestsellers' sold and in circulation than previously thought, which is that a publication's content may still reach and influence an audience without the need for a physical copy.

⁴⁴ Popkin, *Revolutionary News*, p. 83.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

plethora of printed material creates an overwhelming impression of a society attempting to document itself whilst simultaneously directing its future. That many of the leading journalists of the Revolution were also politicians, many of whom actively courted their *sans-culotte* readers in the political sphere, is proof of just how close the relationship was between revolutionary engine and revolutionary record, between press action and reflection. Darnton presents a compelling argument describing the symbiotic relationship between the press and its readers, tracing a path by which gossip and exchanges from the street made its way into print, where it was read and circulated back into the public as fact.⁴⁶ The press was thus able to validate and seemingly authenticate oral rumours by virtue of printing them. This relationship becomes more complex as readers become increasingly politicised. This web of interlocking relationships simultaneously shaped and responded to revolutionary events, employing a language that reflected Jacobinism at its most didactic, whilst also attempting to capture the popular language of those that had hitherto been denied a political voice.

This appropriation by journalists of the language of their readers raises further avenues for investigating how rumour spreads. Hébert's journalism, for example, consciously employed a conversational, colloquial style of writing, one that seemed to mimic the intimate style of informal news exchanges which his readers would recognise from their own lives. This reflects larger questions about trust and authenticity, both on a personal level – to facilitate everyday transactions and social interchange – and in the political arena. In a familiar location for example, a listener might accept unsubstantiated news as fact depending on the perceived authority of the speaker – due to their own experiences, their standing in the community, or their credentials as an eyewitness – or because of a pre-existing relationship between speaker and audience. Hébert appropriated these informal signs of authority, allowing him to present his readers with a persona that was recognizably one of their own. The Père Duchesne's authority came precisely

⁴⁶ Robert Darnton, 'Presidential Address: An Early Information Society: News and the Media in Eighteenth-Century Paris', *American Historical Review* vol. 105, no. 1 (2000).

because his was a persona recognisable to his readers, rather than an 'official' authority figure. Likewise Marat's persona as the People's Friend implied a level of intimacy and informality – and therefore trust – denied to more official-seeming, authoritative sources. Anonymous pamphlets add a further twist to the idea of authority, reflecting a more general 'on dit', the ambiguities and significance of which are discussed later in this thesis.

Both of these journalists reflected an oral news culture in other ways. The Père Duchesne often related conversations he had overheard: eavesdropping was a regular and fruitful source of news, which allowed the journalist's persona to assume the role of eye witness to key events without the responsibility of participation. This allowed the narrator to suggest objectivity (in a way that reporting a dialogue in which he took part might not), while at the same time creating a situation with which readers would be familiar: who, in the crowded environs of Paris, had not overheard something that was not intended for their ears? And was not the very fact it was not intended to be public proof of its veracity? Hébert's journalism in this way relied on a fictionalised account of news spread by word of mouth, which in turn bolstered its authority. This acceptance of eavesdropping as a valid source of information, and, indeed, of evidence that could be used in a court of law – a practice that, to modern sensibilities, would seem underhand, even dishonest – may seem paradoxical. However, the Republican emphasis on transparency and *franchise* actually encouraged the practice, on the basis that speakers who were conducting conversations in a clandestine manner were suspect and thus should be listened to.⁴⁷

Marat's relentless, haranguing polemic also contributed to a culture of news transmitted by word of mouth. The stylistic device of frequently repeating certain key ideas and phrases ('code words' according to Popkin, 'with a definite meaning within the context of the Revolution'⁴⁸) was a characteristic

⁴⁷ Ideas about private and public spaces, of secrecy and openness, are explored in more detail in the second half of this thesis.

⁴⁸ Popkin, *Revolutionary News*, p. 8.

of radical Revolutionary journalism, and was not unique to Marat, but he deployed it to powerful effect and for several purposes. As with Hébert's journalism, the repetitive use of familiar language established an instantly recognizable voice, allowing the journalist to appropriate the role of news authority normally fulfilled by a trusted member of the community. But Marat's style of journalism did more than this: it paralleled what was earlier described as the 'levelling effect' of rumour, producing easily digested, understood, and repeated phrases using the language of conspiracy, betrayal, and perfidy, that, like rumours, gathered momentum with the telling.

The fact that the most successful radical journalists wrote as though they were speaking directly to their readers bears further scrutiny, because, despite this unprecedented access to a new range of print media, there is evidence to suggest that readers did not implicitly trust the written word simply by virtue of its being in print. Perhaps the very surfeit of printed material gave the public an accelerated education in judging the reliability of their sources. This scepticism included readers of the popular press – those whose relative lack of education one might presuppose would make them more susceptible to the power of the printed word. At the height of the Terror, a police spy reported a conversation in which the speaker complained that 'tous les journaux trompaient le peuple.'⁴⁹ A surfeit of news sources, therefore, did not help to dispel rumour. On the contrary, it made readers anxious to identify a reliable, authentic voice and trusted authority. A sense that information might come from different, possibly competing, sources and must be continually scrutinised actually perpetuated rumour and hearsay, as the public attempted to identify where to put their trust.

Newspapers, then, were not consumed uncritically, and evidence suggests that they were but one source of information in an ever-shifting hierarchy of trust. (Chapter II, 'Informal Communication Networks', explores in more

⁴⁹ Caron, *Paris pendant la Terreur*, vol. I, p. 213.

detail evidence of individuals weighing up different news sources – verbal, written, official and non-official – and giving precedence to that which meets a set of criteria at that time.) Equally important as a source of news were the informal networks that existed in close-knit communities, in which the veracity or otherwise of a story depended as much on the reliability of the teller and his or her relationship with the audience as the credibility or otherwise of the story. A spy report of March 1793 describes a man in a café, ‘who was trying to start a rumour, but was ignored’, while another reports a passer-by reading and then dismissing the importance of a poster because of the reputation of its author, suggesting that news was regularly assessed and considered before being accepted or rejected.⁵⁰

Because of this, it is important to note an aspect of rumour that was perhaps overlooked in earlier rumour scholarship but has more recently been addressed: the question of whether those engaged in transmitting rumours were aware of the story *as* a rumour.⁵¹ Many recent studies of rumour have focussed on the motivation of those that participate in them,⁵² and observe that stories are less likely to be passed on if they are believed to be untrue, due to the subsequent lack of status given to the story-teller who passes on a falsehood. In his ‘Psychology of Rumor Reconsidered’ Ralph L Rosnow questions many of Allport and Postman’s findings, among them ways in which the authorities have tried to contain rumour.⁵³ As an example he cites the lack of success in official attempts to penalise those who spread rumours in certain situations (the New York Stock Exchange, for example), finding negative sanctions or punishment no disincentive.⁵⁴ I believe that this unwittingly illustrates a fundamental element of rumour that has often been

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.154.

⁵¹ Fine, ‘Rumor, Trust and Civil Society’ addresses this.

⁵² See, for example, Prasant Bordia and Nicholas DiFonzo, ‘Psychological Motivations in Rumor Spread’, in *Rumor Mills*, ed. Fine, Campion Vincent and Heath, pp. 87–102.

⁵³ Ralph L. Rosnow, ‘Psychology of Rumour Reconsidered’, *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 87, no. 3, (May 1980), pp. 578–591.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 585.

overlooked, which is that for many, a rumour is not –perhaps cannot be – readily identified as such when one is personally engaged with it. That is to say that the classic source of an unverified story, ‘the friend of a friend’, carries more authoritative weight the closer one is to the original source. Both to the teller and the listener, this is not rumour, but actual news, and it is as news that the story is shared. According to Jean-Noel Kapferer, ‘Rumors do not precede persuasion, they are rather its visible manifestation. The labels “information” and “rumor” are not attributed before believing or disbelieving; they are consequences of belief or disbelief.’⁵⁵

What kind of news was accepted and transmitted, and what fell by the wayside or was rejected as patently untrue, and why that might be, is at the heart of this thesis. It raises questions about the relationship between the reader and journalist – and, by extension, the reader as public and the journalist as politician and representative of the government – and how both sides were affected by and/or perpetuated popular rumour. It also raises questions about the extent to which the radical press, by consciously adopting a colloquial style of writing and address was intentionally appropriating the intimate style of exchange of news familiar to its readers, and in so doing attempting to take over the role of neighbourhood confidant as authoritative source of news. If this was the case, they were not always successful, as has been seen.

Because of this, who or what has or is given authority as a news source, or is a trusted member of the community, opens up different avenues for exploration when applied to this period. It allows an examination of different sources of news and information, both official and unofficial, formal and informal, written and verbal, and including the ephemeral, such as short-lived gossip and topical songs. It also allows an exploration of how information was consumed, relayed and understood, and what the relationship was between government propaganda and the public’s interpretation of it. To explore this, it is necessary to look at what groups

⁵⁵ Kapferer, *Rumors*, p. 12.

might be involved in the spreading of rumour and who would be affected by it.

When Jürgen Habermas identified a 'bourgeois public sphere' he described a metaphorical space that permitted the exchange of ideas through print or in the salon or other semi-public spaces. Emerging in the eighteenth century, with the growth of print culture, this public sphere was ostensibly democratic and inclusive, unconcerned with rank or wealth. Later scholars questioned its claim to inclusivity, claiming it ignored marginalised groups such as women, and redefining its parameters to encompass a broader demographic. *Le menu peuple* had their own public sphere, which was also informed by print culture to some degree, and equally vital to the spread of Revolutionary discourse. But equally or even more influential on the gathering and interpretation of news were the longstanding networks of family, friends, colleagues and neighbours of the working people of Paris. Those who earned their living as artisans, as apprentices, in workshops, or market stalls, down to those whose footing on the financial ladder was precarious at best – day labourers, street sellers and beggars, including the itinerant hawkers of pamphlets who themselves were often one step away from indigence – all had their own experiences of the Revolution, and all gathered and exchanged news about contemporary events from and with one another as much as from official channels.

The densely populated areas of the city were fertile environments for the spread and influence of rumour for many reasons. The sheer numbers of comings and goings, of physical traffic, and of families living cheek-by-jowl in warren-like buildings with rooms that opened directly onto their neighbours' meant that there were continual opportunities for conversation, for the exchange of greetings on a cramped stairwell, gossip at the market stall, or whispered confidences in the alleyway.⁵⁶ Add to this an endless

⁵⁶ See, for example, Arlette Farge, *Fragile Lives: Violence, Power and Solidarity in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), Farge and Jacques Revel, *The Vanishing Children of Paris*, or David Garrioch, *Neighbourhood and Community in Paris: 1740–1790* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

stream of print: read on street corners, in workshops and taverns, or plastered and replastered on walls. These crowded areas of Paris were full of actual and visual noise: a great din of information jostling for attention.

Sans-Culottes and revolutionary authority: some definitions

These consumers of print culture, the newly politicised Parisians who participated in the revolutionary *journées* – the ‘people’ – were maligned or sanctified according to political persuasion. When surveyed *en masse*, the Revolutionary crowd could be seen as anything from a representation of popular sovereignty to a bloodthirsty rabble, and all points in between, both in contemporary accounts and among later historians.⁵⁷ Equally open to interpretation is the term used to describe the participants of these revolutionary crowds – the *sans-culotte*. Analysis of the sans-culotte archetype reveals a concept as complex and nuanced as that of the revolutionary crowd.

The sans-culotte’s natural habitat was the Paris faubourgs to the east of the city. The extensive studies of the two great popular faubourgs, Saint-Antoine and Saint-Marcel, by Raymonde Monnier and Haim Burstin respectively.⁵⁸ provide concrete examples of the lives and work of these inhabitants, labourers, for the most part, who participated in the revolutionary *journées* and came to be seen as the embodiment of the sans-culotte. Yet even that

⁵⁷ Perceptions of the crowd and group action are discussed later in this thesis, but the following titles address these themes: George Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 1959); Colin Lucas, ‘The Crowd and Politics’ in *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, vol. II, *The Political Culture of the French Revolution*, ed. Colin Lucas (Pergamon Press: Oxford, 1988); ‘Talking about urban popular violence in 1789’ in *Reshaping France: Town, Country and Region during the French Revolution*, ed. Alan Forrest and Peter Jones (Manchester: Manchester University Press: 1991); Peter McPhee, ‘Robespierre and Violence’ in *Experiencing the French Revolution*, ed. David Andress (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2013); and Sophie Wahnich, *In Defence of the Terror: Liberty or Death in the French Revolution*, trans. David Fernbach (London and New York: Verso, 2012).

⁵⁸ Raymonde Monnier, *Le Faubourg Saint-Antoine, 1789–1815* (Paris: Société des études robespierristes, 1981); Haim Burstin, *Une révolution à l’œuvre: le faubourg Saint-Marcel (1789-1794)* (Paris: Champ Vallon 2005).

assertion contains layers of complexity, with, for example, the term 'labourer' broad enough to encompass the master craftsman with several workman and apprentices in his employment, to the day labourer who relied on brawn over skill. The faubourg Saint-Antoine, home to the *vainqueurs de la Bastille*, was populated by artisans and craftsmen working in the furniture trade, but these were not simple carpenters: among these were highly skilled *ébénistes*, producing luxury items of great artistry. If the stock image of the 'labourer' begins to disintegrate under close scrutiny, a universally accepted definition of the term 'sans-culotte' all but vanishes.

In *L'invention du sans-culotte*⁵⁹ – even the title indicates the author's premise that the sans-culotte is essentially a construct – Haim Burstin scrutinises the use of the term and reveals it has a multiplicity of meanings and usages. Like perceptions of the crowd, the meaning of the sans-culotte can be adapted to different contexts, and is used, both among contemporaries and later historians, to refer at different times to the general embodiment of the people of Paris; the revolutionary crowd; the militant networks in the sections and popular societies; or even to the city itself.⁶⁰ These different usages, Burstin says, refer to realities and social categories that are often entirely different and impossible to assimilate. He cites the example of Claude François Lazowski, whose privileged background and earlier positions of authority did not prevent him from becoming the respected representative of the militant faubourg Saint-Marcel, although he bore little resemblance to Soboul's radical artisans of year II. At a more general level, these multiple definitions become problematic when they suggest a unity among potentially disparate groups: if the sans-culotte refers simultaneously to militant section leaders and the people of Paris, the aims of the first can be presented as an expression of the general will. This becomes even more problematic, as will be seen below, within the framework of government hierarchies.

⁵⁹ Haim Burstin, *L'invention du sans-culotte: regards sur le Paris révolutionnaire*. Paris: Editions Odile Jacob, 2005).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p52.

This fluidity of meaning is due to what Burstin describes as a retrofitting of the definition of the sans-culotte, identifying a tendency among many historians to construct their definition according to a pre-existing theory relating to a kind of 'proto proletariat'.⁶¹ Instead, Burstin suggests those in search of a definition should return to the *Réponse à l'impertinente question* of year II, which describes a figure chiefly identified by his politics and ideology.⁶² Socially, Burstin argues, the sans-culotte encompasses a very wide spread of society, one which excludes extremes at both ends of the social scale, that is to say, the very privileged and the destitute, but which includes manufacturers, skilled artisans and large employers. If historians such as Soboul and Rudé emphasised the lower end of the social scale, Burstin argues, it was as a counterpoint to revisionist tendencies to conflate popular political activity with mob violence. For Soboul, too, 'sans-culotte' provided a shorthand for the popular movement, as a means of differentiating it from the bourgeois nature of the Revolution.⁶³

The sans-culotte, argues Burstin is essentially an abstraction, a metonymy for the people of Paris, which itself encompasses so many varieties of inhabitant that the only universally accepted feature of the definition is Paris itself. However, as Monnier's study of the faubourg Saint-Antoine indicates, many labourers were not Paris-born, and different regions of France and beyond supplied the capital with skilled workers. When put under close scrutiny, it appears that even the Paris element of the definition of sans-culotte is not as it first seems.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 52.

⁶² *Réponse à l'impertinente question: Mais qu'est-ce qu'un Sans-Culotte?* in Walter Markov and Albert Soboul, *Die Sansculotten von Paris: Dokumente zur Geschichte der Volksbewegung 1793-1794* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1957), p. 2.

⁶³ Burstin, *L'Invention du sans-culotte*, p. 61.

Burstin's definition of 'sans-culotte' not only broadens our understanding of the term 'labourer', it also identifies it as being based on a system of values already in place prior to the Revolution. These values were influenced by local community networks – work, family, neighbours – and were very much tied with the physical geography of the cityscape, as well as a shared mental geography of common origins.

A further complication to the definition of the sans-culotte is the question of self-identity. Burstin's *Révolutionnaires*⁶⁴ examines the inter-relationship between the creation from above of the Revolutionary as new man – an archetype and abstraction created through revolutionary institutions, public education, festivals, monuments and symbols – and the reality of a new political participant. In so doing, he describes his aim to look beyond the 'anonymous crowd' or the 'professionals of the Revolution' to those who are engaging with politics for the first time: a genuinely new man whose ongoing political education helps to shape his identity as revolutionary.

Révolutionnaires analyses the processes and experiences that contribute to the emergence of a new revolutionary identity, both from above – not only as instructed by institutions, but through the adoption by ordinary people of the metaphorical language of revolution and liberty to describe their own experiences – and from below, through direct political engagement.

However, any attempt to establish a universally accepted meaning of 'sans-culotte' suffers from the same problems as the search to define 'le peuple': the sans-culotte is an abstraction born from the Jacobin imagination, one which can be co-opted to legitimise popular, often violent, behaviour, in the same way that references to 'the people' – a similarly amorphous and unspecified body – could be invoked when politically expedient.

The adaptability of the term meant that this ultimate symbol of republicanism could be employed for political purposes, but it also

⁶⁴ Haim Burstin, *Révolutionnaires: Pour une anthropologie politique de la Révolution française* (Paris: Vendémiaire, 2013).

contributed to the prevailing sense of anxiety that identities and concepts could not be fixed as absolutes: if the image and essential meaning of the sans-culotte could be co-opted and exploited how could one identify enemies of the Revolution? Concerns about the misappropriation of new political concepts in revolutionary discourse by rival factions also appear in Sophia Rosenfeld's work,⁶⁵ with the apparent elasticity and lack of consensus regarding the definition of abstract concepts reflecting larger anxieties about the instability of the new political reality.

Despite its various permutations and multiplicity of meaning, 'sans-culotte' is not meaningless: for the purposes of this thesis, it refers to a certain kind of Parisian labourer or *petit marchand*, one who, following Monnier's definition, is neither rentier nor dependent on alms. As Burstin observes, the revolutionary engagement of a sans-culotte might vary, from significant involvement such as section leader to more peripheral and sporadic activity, but, nonetheless, political awareness was an essential part of the ideological make-up of the sans-culotte; during year II, active and visible participation in the Revolution was an essential part of ordinary life.

The tensions between perceptions of the idealised sans-culotte and the reality of the activities of the popular classes, between crowd action as an expression of popular will versus violent mob rule, has parallels in different, sometimes contradictory, perceptions of the revolutionary government. On the one hand, deputies presented themselves as the people's representatives, even when imposing rule from above – a performance Burstin describes as *un escamotage* – a sleight of hand – that allowed them to intimidate and delegitimise adversaries.⁶⁶ Differentiating between the sovereign people and *la canaille* enabled *conventionnels* to invoke the will of the people when politically expedient, while seeing no contradiction in

⁶⁵ Rosenfeld, *A Revolution in Language: The Problem of Signs in Late Eighteenth-Century France*.

⁶⁶ Haim Burstin, *Révolutionnaires*, p.92.

imposing draconian measures when necessary. These shifting perceptions of 'the people' had parallels with multiple and unfixed meanings of 'authority'.

This question of authority – who holds it, who has the right to hold it, and the public's perception of it – is a complex one during this period, and contributes to the heart of this thesis. Rumours are unverified, unofficial sources of information, but are no less potent for that; for some – specifically those with a conspiratorial outlook – the fact they sit outside official discourse is what makes them so attractive, and perhaps even appears to lend them legitimacy. Who or what is responsible for official discourse, then, and is seen to represent authority requires explanation.

The complex hierarchies of the revolutionary government and the relationship between local and national bodies and the revolutionary clubs seemed almost to invite disunity and rivalries. And yet, even that is not entirely clear cut, as individuals might hold more than one position in different organisations, leading to what Michael Kennedy referred to in the provinces as 'interpenetration' between political clubs and government blocs.⁶⁷ A similar 'interpenetration' existed in Paris, with members of the Commune, self-identifying with the popular sans-culottes movement, also holding positions in the War Ministry. The slowness with which government business was conducted was also noted and criticised. Haim Burstin cites a contemporary complaining that it took three months to conclude business in the capital that was resolved in eight days elsewhere: such delays, the observer concluded, were contrived by the government for their own criminal aims.⁶⁸

Some of the ambivalence toward the notion of authority was due to residual distrust of a political elite that, under the Old Regime, had proven itself to be working on behalf of its own interests. Regular purging of the Convention

⁶⁷ Michael L. Kennedy, *The Jacobin Clubs in the French Revolution: 1793–1795* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2000) p.64

⁶⁸ Haim Burstin, *Révolutionnaires*, p. 81.

was, as Marisa Linton among others has argued, as much a public spectacle intended to demonstrate political virtue, as a way of removing rival factions. At the same time, however, regular criminalisation of former deputies kept alive an undercurrent of suspicion about the motives of the people's representatives generally, and discredited the Convention as a whole. When Saint-Just launched an attack on government corruption in 10 October 1793, he had a precedent in both recent history and under the Old Regime.⁶⁹ His solution, to declare a state of emergency and extend the powers of the Committee of Public Safety, combined with the law of 14 frimaire, redefined the meaning of revolutionary authority.

Throughout this thesis, the expression 'authority' is used loosely, referring to the bureaucratic structure in place that imposes laws, rules, or codes of practice, and to those that carry them out; given the complex hierarchies and many bureaucratic divisions in the new Republic, different official bodies might have authority of others despite their – theoretical – common goal. In addition, the ubiquitous street presence of police spies and their agents, of the National Guard and of the army, were continual reminders of government surveillance, leading to what Burstin, in his study of the Saint-Marcel neighbourhood describes as a state of continual tension between different groups. The hierarchies and 'interpenetration' of different bodies meant that few – apart, perhaps from the Committee of Public Safety itself – could feel entirely certain of their position as 'authority'.

With so many different sources of information, the question of how to judge the authenticity of a news source, of whom and what to trust, became ever more pressing. But this uncertainty was not limited to news outlets only: during the Revolution – almost since its inception – notions of reliability, trust and authenticity permeated political culture and became as problematic as they were significant. As the Revolution progressed, accepted notions of political authenticity and political virtue affected not just those in

⁶⁹ "Rapport sur la nécessité de déclarer le gouvernement révolutionnaire jusqu'à la paix", Saint Just, *Oeuvres complètes de Saint-Just*, avec une introduction et des notes par Charles Vellay, (Paris: Librairie Charpentier et Fasquelle, 1908) t. II, pp75-89.

authority, but all members of the community, as individual behaviours were increasingly scrutinised through a revolutionary lens. Chapter V, 'Rumour, Reputation and Identity', examines the extent to which political ideology increasingly intruded upon and was used as a measure to judge private modes of behaviour. Marisa Linton's work on political virtue and its significance to the reputations of individual deputies in the Convention describes an accepted code of conduct and ideal to which deputies must be seen to adhere in order to be considered men of virtue and thus true upholders of the Revolution.⁷⁰ Every community, however, has their own recognised codes of conduct, even those, which this thesis addresses, which include the most marginal figures. As the Revolution entered its most radical phase, these codes of conduct become increasingly politicised and radicalised, informed by the rhetoric of the Jacobin government.

Jacobin discourse and rumours of conspiracy

This thesis will explore how political discourse influenced colloquial language and thus provided a framework for the ordinary person to interpret their immediate surroundings. This was influenced and reinforced by the language of the radical press, as described above. But what becomes increasingly apparent as the Revolution moves towards its most radical phase is the prevalence of the discourse of conspiracy in ordinary exchanges. A constant drip-feed of language describing the imminent threat of an enemy, either circling without and drawing ever closer, or, more worryingly still, hidden within, encouraged a state of almost constant anxiety, which contributed to the creation of a mentality with which to perceive the Republic, and the language to describe it. A recent collection of essays focussing on the centrality of conspiratorial thinking to the Revolutionary government analyses the roles of conspiracies both real and imagined, with the former adding weight to the latter.⁷¹ The Classical precedent of, for

⁷⁰ Marisa Linton, *The Politics of Virtue in Enlightenment France* (Basingstoke, Hants: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).

⁷¹ Peter R. Campbell, Thomas E. Kaiser and Marisa Linton, eds. *Conspiracy in the French Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

example, the Cataline conspiracy during the Roman Empire seemed to validate the notion that a Republic would, by its very nature, be vulnerable to conspiracies. Evidence of actual contemporary conspiracies – such as the flight to Varennes – reinforced this, leading to perceptions of imminent danger at every turn.⁷² A very un-nuanced, oppositional rhetoric emerged, which was easily transmitted to and understood by a politically inexperienced public.⁷³

Republicanism and Republican discourse defined itself as the antithesis of the Old Regime; whereas the court had been closed, working on a system of private patronage and personal favour, Republicanism was open, transparent and frank. The king did not reveal matters of state to his subjects, because it was not their business to question his judgement. In order to emphasise the new positive qualities of the Republic, revolutionaries continually stressed their opposite, and as a result, Republican language laid as great an emphasis on illustrating what republicanism was not, as it did on providing positive definitions. For every affirmative attribute of republicanism, there was evidence of its obverse, creating a very simple language of opposition that could be easily understood by all levels of society: the openness of the Assembly versus the closed court; the ‘usefulness’ of the *sans-culotte*⁷⁴ and the parasitical courtier; the *franchise* of the Republican as opposed to the duplicity of the counter-revolutionary. This discourse contributed to a collective understanding of the constant presence of a counter-revolutionary conspiracy; one that could be exploited by the government to muster public

⁷² Timothy Tackett, ‘Conspiracy Obsession in a Time of Revolution: French Elites and the Origins of the Terror, 1789–1792’, *American Historical Review*, vol. 105, no. 3 (2000), pp. 691–713.

⁷³ Simon Burrows, ‘Despotism without Bounds: The French Secret Police and the Silencing of Dissent in London, 1760–1790’, *History*, vol. 89, no. 296 (2004), pp. 525–548, identifies two approaches to the origins of the Jacobin conspiracy mentality: one which identifies it as essentially part of the revolutionary process itself (favoured by Lynn Hunt and François Furet), and which is given further impetus by individuals who exploited these fears, versus those such as Timothy Tackett who acknowledge the impact of real conspiracies.

⁷⁴ ‘Réponse à l’impertinente question: Mais qu’est-ce qu’un Sans-Culotte?’, p. 2.

opposition against its enemies, certainly, but also one that, I will argue, seeped into the consciousness of the ordinary citizen. Conspiracy became a central tenet of understanding events as they unfolded, which is reflected in the kinds of rumours circulating during this period.

By year II, this continual stream of conspiratorial language – from speeches in the Convention, from government decrees, from the radical press – had contributed to a society that felt itself constantly under threat: from whom or what was so generic in nature that it could potentially encompass just about anything. Sophia Rosenfeld identifies anxieties about language itself, arguing that the words used to describe new political ideologies did not appear to have fixed meanings, leading to concerns that they were being appropriated and misused by rival factions.⁷⁵ As the perceived threat to the stability of the Republic – real or imagined – became both larger and less well defined, so the orthodoxy describing the behaviour of the good patriot became ever more strict and uncompromising. How this affected Parisian communities whose self-perception had been shaped by Jacobin rhetoric is discussed in the second half of this thesis, which examines ways in which revolutionary discourse becomes internalised to the point of affecting individual identities and personal relationships.

Rumour and conspiracy, it should be noted, are not necessarily – or always – synonymous, but during this period they become closely entwined and mutually reinforcing; few rumours during this period do not have some conspiratorial dimension. Prior to the Revolution, the *Encyclopédistes* had already recognised the potentially subversive elements of rumour, seeing it as a manifestation of discontent, or even sedition:

RUMEUR, s. f. (Gram.) bruit général & sourd, excité par quelque mécontentement dans une ville, dans une maison. Cette conduite du clergé excita de la *rumeur*. On remarqua le désaveu de ce procédé par

⁷⁵ Rosenfeld, *A Revolution in Language*.

la *rumeur*. Il se dit aussi d'une sédition: il y eut à cette occasion quelque *rumeur* que la vigilance de la police eut bientôt dissipée.⁷⁶

The Republican discourse of dualism, of *masques* versus *franchise*, of subterfuge versus openness, contributed to a mentality in which otherwise threatening or inexplicable events would be generally attributed to some hidden, malign agency. This allows, on the one hand, a human explanation for natural disaster (aristocratic hoarding rather than drought), and thus prevents feelings of helplessness in adversity, but on the other hand it breeds suspicion, leading to scapegoating and paranoia.

The *Encyclopédistes'* definition of rumour appears to support the conspiratorial outlook that would later become such an integral part of radical Jacobin discourse: the presence of rumour is seen as sign of discontent, a manifestation of widespread unease or anxiety. The assumption on the part of the Revolutionary authorities that rumour was the result of some malign agency, intentionally planted to create public disorder, reflects the wider conspiratorial mentality during the Revolution, but there is also some truth in it: rumour was sufficiently recognized as a means of swaying public opinion to be intentionally employed as a means of propaganda by the government. And although twentieth-century studies of rumour develop the definition of the word to include positive or even merely neutral stories, these studies also shed light on the way stories transmitted by word of mouth are reinterpreted in the telling, how they transmute and develop over time, and what these developments reveal about those who tell them.

Researching rumour during the Revolution

This leads to the question of how we can begin to research rumour, and what we might look for as evidence of rumour during this period. The traditional

⁷⁶ *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, etc.*, ed. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert. University of Chicago: ARTFL Encyclopédie Project (Spring 2013 Edition), Robert Morrissey (ed), <http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu/>. Rumour was also related to scandal and questions of virtue and individual reputation. According to the *Encyclopédie*: '*Scandale ... signifie aussi une rumeur désavantageuse, qui déshonore quelqu'un parmi le monde. En ce sens, on appelle la médisance la chronique scandaleuse.*'

approach to assessing the impact of rumour or specific rumours during the Revolution has been in the context of a particular phenomenon or revolutionary *journée*, with Georges Lefebvre's *Great Fear* remaining the classic account. The model of the Great Fear demonstrates the speed and the manner in which news was able to spread between different locations, and considers the wider impact on communications during this period. Other studies that investigate the role of rumour in a specific context include David Andress's examination of the Champ de Mars massacre.⁷⁷ Referring to police records and newspaper accounts, this provides a detailed analysis of the spread and amplification of rumours and the authorities' complicity in them, which contributed to the mounting tensions and the firing of the National Guard on the legally assembled crowd. More recently still, Colin Jones has been working on an hour-by-hour account of 9 Thermidor, the most well-documented *journée* of the Revolution, which reveals the role of rumour and the way in which it was exploited by enemies of Robespierre.⁷⁸ Although many of these documents were reports supplied after the event by the Paris Sections upon explicit instructions from Barras, and are therefore framed within a specific political narrative, they none the less reveal the ways in which the communication of information was managed and channelled by Robespierre's rivals to ensure their version of events was accepted by the sans-culottes. Baczko's *Ending the Terror* describes the movement of the Robespierre-the-king rumour so evocatively that one can almost see it ebb and flow, rising up in a swell, like the tidal pull on the sea. Timothy Tackett approaches the significance of rumour in a broader context, using the case of the September Massacres as a springboard with which to consider the ways in which contemporaries considered the phenomenon of rumour, and observing that by labelling certain news or opinion as 'mere' rumour it enabled educated, literate commentators to reject populist interpretations of

⁷⁷ David Andress, *Massacre at the Champ de Mars* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Royal Historical Society/Boydell Press, 2000).

⁷⁸ A preliminary publication explores this. Colin Jones, 'The Overthrow of Maximilien Robespierre and the "Indifference" of the People', *American Historical Review*, vol. 19, no. 3 (June, 2014).

the Revolution.⁷⁹ Few historical accounts of the Revolution ignore rumour completely, but most references are incidental, and generally seen as one element in a shifting and uncontrolled sequence of events. In an earlier study, I examined the role of rumour during the September Massacres, with explicit reference to ways in which the interplay between the language of radical journalism and colloquial speech allowed revolutionary journalists to promote and exploit popular fears about enemy attacks on the capital.⁸⁰

This thesis differs from the existing research on this theme by looking at the phenomenon of rumour in a broader context, examining how rumour influences communication, perceptions of information, and later, acts as evidence. By focussing mainly, but not exclusively, on a semi-literate, or perhaps more accurately, a newly literate demographic, I will argue that verbal communications were as influential as printed or official sources of news. Because of this, rumour becomes a discrete form of communication in itself: one that not only reflects the anxieties, concerns and beliefs of those who participate in its spread, but also brings those people together, either in direct political action, or in less tangible ways, such as an expression of solidarity.

In addition to previous research that refers to rumour, in recent years some new studies have offered fresh perspectives on the Revolution, including ways of reconceptualising the Terror. Dan Edelstein's important study, *The Terror of Natural Right* explores the development of a specifically Jacobin form of Republicanism, one that relied on natural right over written law. Natural Law allowed for the identification and punishment of the *hors-loi* without due process, which, Edelstein argues, led to Terror.⁸¹ (The *hors-loi*

⁷⁹ Timothy Tackett, 'Rumour and Revolution: the Case of the September Massacres' *French History and Civilisation*, vol. 4 (2011). His forthcoming book on the Terror was not published at the time of writing and I was unable to consult it.

⁸⁰ Porter, "'On parle d'un complot qui fait frissonner": Popular Rumour and the September Massacres'.

⁸¹ Dan Edelstein, *The Terror of Natural Right: Republicanism, the Cult of Nature and the French Revolution* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009).

as ‘unnatural’ has its precedent in medieval justifications for tyrannicide, in which the tyrant was ‘unnatural’ and therefore not protected by law.⁸²) The notion of the *hors-loi* filters into popular discourse, with common tropes relating to the social outcast helping first to identify those deemed outside society and, eventually, by extension, outside the law. These tropes contribute to popular rumours during the Terror and influence the ever-widening definition of ‘suspect’.

Marisa Linton’s *Choosing Terror* approaches Terror from the perspective of what she describes as ‘the politicians’ Terror’, examining how it was that the perpetrators of the Terror sent to their deaths their own friends and comrades. As she describes it, ‘the centrality of virtue made everything suspicious, even friendship.’ This inability to reconcile the existence of private friendships with public virtue was just one element contributing to a climate of denunciation that thrived on guilt by association. When an individual was called to account for shortfalls in political virtue, his cohorts would not be far behind. This culture of guilt by association, and what constituted an association, extended to the wider public and was influenced by rumour and the untraceable yet potent presence of ‘on dit’, as discussed in Chapter VI.

Richard Taws in *The Politics of the Provisional* examines anxieties about the instability of the Revolution from a very different perspective, that of its ephemera and popular printed material.⁸³ In creating a visual identity for the Republic, Taws identifies an attempt to fix the Revolution in history, yet the ephemeral nature of such items and their multiple readings reflect instead its precariousness. That official documents and certificates could be open to a multiplicity of meanings, or, indeed, counterfeited, contributes to the uncertainty of the Terror. How such documents and certificates affected or were affected by rumour is explored in Chapter V.

⁸² John of Salisbury’s *Policraticus* of 1159 justifies tyrannicide on this basis.

⁸³ Richard Taws, *The Politics of the Provisional: Art and Ephemera in Revolutionary France* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2013).

This uncertainty and precariousness, identified in these last two approaches, is something that this thesis also attempts to address, by highlighting the prevalence of rumour – not only in terms of individual narrative but also as a phenomenon in its own right. The elastic and nebulous ‘on dit’ – the significance of which is explored in more detail in Chapter I and VI – not only facilitated the spread of unconfirmed news, it functioned as a means of justifying popular opinion and, eventually, legitimising the indefensible.

Archival sources

I chose to limit my focus to Paris for the following reasons: because newspapers and chroniclers would be describing events that many readers would have witnessed themselves, Paris provided a specific environment with which to attempt to trace the effect of rumours on a community. In addition to comparing their own experiences with accounts in print, individuals might be expected to gather information from informal sources – from friends, acquaintances, or from other witnesses – and try to sift through these many and various accounts to make sense of what was happening around them. At the same time, I was interested in exploring how different degrees of literacy might have affected the reception of printed news, allowing, for example, for a current of informal news networks that existed at the same time as, and despite, official sources. The interaction between these sources – the official and informal, the written and spoken – raises questions relating to trust and authenticity and allows us to consider what or who is responsible for shaping ideas about the Revolution. Further away from the capital, the speed (or lack of speed) with which news arrived and was consumed and assimilated created different pathways of communication and exposed different concerns, as Lefebvre has shown. Paris, as the centre of Revolutionary action, would experience its own set of rumours, affected not only by its proximity to current events, but also by its own set of urban preoccupations and prejudices.

I was drawn to seek out the experiences of those who left few, if any, written records of their own and whose daily lives afforded them few opportunities to write about their own observations. The more the project began to take shape, the more this presented its own kind of logic, with the assumption that a semi- or newly literate society might favour verbal over written communication as a means of framing and understanding their experiences. This led to the great conundrum at the heart of much research regarding rumour and verbal communication generally, which is how to gather evidence. Trying to identify and examine the development of a rumour can occasionally feel as fruitful as trying to pin down a shadow. Thankfully, the revolutionary authorities were as interested in the conversations of their ordinary citizens as future historians are, and employed a network of *citoyens observateurs* – police spies under a new Republican moniker – to eavesdrop in public places and to record their findings on a daily basis.⁸⁴ These documents – and the police reports now in the Archives de Police de Paris – form the backbone of this thesis.

Many of the *observateur* reports relating specifically to Paris have been collected in Pierre Caron's six-volume *Paris pendant la Terreur*, but the French National Archives in Paris contains many more, with the sometimes idiosyncratic indexing system leading to some serendipitous discoveries, among the most fortunate being an edited selection of four months' worth of spy reports sent from the mayor's office to the Minister of the Interior. Purporting to be a barometer of *l'esprit public*, that is to say, public confidence in the progress of Revolution, a closer reading revealed them to be summaries of popular rumours. These, along with the uncollected spy reports and Caron's edited collection, are among the primary documents featured in this thesis.

Separate from the spy reports but equally valuable are the *procès-verbaux* from the *commissaire de police* of the individual Paris Sections. Unlike the

⁸⁴ The role of spies and the authorities' perception of rumour is explored in Chapter I.

spy reports, these are eyewitness accounts of a perceived crime or infraction, described, ostensibly, in the speakers' own words. William Beik cites the limitations of such documents precisely because they are eyewitness accounts, presenting a narrative from a single viewpoint, often highly subjective and with no context.⁸⁵ When read *en masse*, an impression of a similarity of tone begins to emerge, raising the question of whether and to what extent the writer of the reports may have helped to shape the witnesses' narratives, particularly among those with no more than a basic degree of literacy. Chapter V explores the ways in which Republican language helped to shape personal identity, as revealed through the way individuals described themselves in official reports, which may also have had some bearing on the narrative of the *procès-verbaux*. Despite – or perhaps because of – these limitations, these documents are revealing in unexpected ways. For example, the events described in these documents have not necessarily led to arrests (arrests are documented in the collection in the Archives Nationales); because of this they also shed a light on the kinds of social concerns or neighbourhood disputes that were sufficient to disrupt the harmony of a community without necessarily indicating criminality.

Due to a fire in 1871, the police reports – organised by Section during the Revolution – are incomplete. One of the largest group of documents still extant relates to the Butte des Moulins Section – formerly Palais-Royal, later de la Montagne – whose evolution of nomenclature itself provides in miniature a comment on the shifting nature of Revolutionary identity and language. This section, in central Paris, just north of the rue Saint-Honoré and near the Palais-Royal/place d'Égalité and Jacobin club, was a hotbed of news: the Palais-Royal was home to many printshops and newspaper vendors, as well as an area in which to promenade, to debate, to drink and gamble. A 1792 engraving, *Promenade Publique* by Philibert-Louis

⁸⁵ William Beik, *Urban Protest in Seventeenth-Century France: the Culture of Retribution*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Debucourt, suggests that all life teemed in the Palais-Royal, making it an ideal vantage point for *observateurs* to collect data. Other sections are less well represented in the Police Archives, but I tried to read as extensively across the sections as material would allow, starting from the foundation of the Republic in 1792. The reasons for this were severalfold: much of the previous research that incorporated rumour – either in great detail or in passing – focussed on the earliest days of the Revolution. By focussing on the First Republic, I hoped to explore whether changing political circumstances affected the content or prevalence of rumour. I also hoped to dispel the assumption that rumour is synonymous with conspiracy, or is an inevitable by-product of Terror, by extending the time frame beyond that of the fall of Robespierre. However, the sheer volume of documents, and the elusive nature of the quest, meant that I had to narrow my search chronologically and much as I tried not to become drawn into reflections on the nature of Terror, the ways in which rumour became entangled with Terror became impossible to ignore.

When I began this research I hoped to discover a previously overlooked rumour, one that could be traced, along the lines of the Great Fear, through the streets and alleyways, cafés and taverns of revolutionary Paris, and its outcome measured and assessed. As is the way of research, there was a gulf between what I expected and what I actually found, which proved to reveal different and unexpected aspects of the question. Rather than follow a specific rumour, this thesis looks at how rumour, no matter what its subject, acts as a medium of communication in itself, and how, during this period and for this particular demographic, rumour ultimately becomes an authority in its own right. That it is nameless, faceless and often untraceable makes it no less powerful and, ultimately, more sinister. The thesis explores this question in the following six chapters.

Chapter I, “‘Prenez garde Citoyens!’: Policing Popular Rumour’, looks at the ways in which rumour was policed by the authorities, and why they might want to do so. It examines the role of the network of spies in Paris, and

assesses their reports. It also looks at the attitudes of the Revolutionary government toward rumour, and begins to examine the symbiotic relationship between rumour and conspiracy, and how the existence of both shaped the Revolutionary *mentalité*. The authorities' ambiguous attitude to rumour – either dismissive or paranoid – allows for a discussion of the monitoring and shaping of public opinion, and reveals the tensions at the heart of the government's relationship with its people and with the idea of popular sovereignty itself.

Chapter II, “‘Un bruit de frayeur se répand’: Informal Communication Networks and the Creation of Rumour’, explores the ways in which news was transmitted, consumed and shared. It looks at the ways in which the commercial imperatives of a competitive press might have contributed to rumours – either intentionally, as a way to boost sales, or as an unintentional consequence of unreliable sources of information. It allows for a discussion of notions of trust, reliability and authority, and where it is given and by whom. None of these are constant or unanimous during this period, and it is this overwhelming sense of uncertainty and of shifting allegiances that give many rumour their impetus. This chapter more than any other also refers to memoirs, because literate chroniclers of the revolution appeared to be able to identify rumours when spread by others, without being aware of spreading them themselves. It also looks at the least literate sources of information – that of the often-illiterate street pedlars whose meagre livelihoods depended on their ability to sell the latest pamphlet or journal. The lengths they would go to do so, and their subsequent demonisation by the authorities, creates yet another channel for popular rumour.

Chapter III, ‘Rumour, Riots, Feast and Famine’, explores the role of rumour on crowd activity and, as importantly, on the policing of crowd activity. Many crowd disturbances took place in market places or in bread queues: the combination of large numbers of people, anxious about the provision – or lack – of food, drawn together because of rumours about shortages or plenty, allows scope for the examination of crowd behaviour and the

authorities' understanding of it. It also reveals common prejudices and fears: about hoarding, about elite corruption, and about other food-related tropes such as rumoured plots to starve or to poison the capital. Concerns about food were rarely absent from popular discussions and because of the increasing politicisation of the public, these concerns reflected larger political questions about Revolutionary integrity.

The second half of the thesis considers how rumours affected neighbourhoods and otherwise close-knit communities as they lived through the Terror. Drawing mainly on police reports, this part of the thesis examines how various rumour tropes were internalised, providing communities with a framework with which to interpret a world that was presented, through government decrees and the radical press, as being continually under threat.

Chapter IV, 'Rumour and Community: Solidarity and Conflict in the Sans-Culotte Neighbourhoods of Year II', looks at the ways in which rumours can serve as a means for neighbourhoods to share and express common anxieties. The sharing and spreading of rumours allows communities to strengthen bonds and show solidarity and in so doing, enables the community to reassert its own sense of identity. Many rumour narratives during this time rely on a threatening 'other', or on the notion of a scapegoat; such tropes allow the community to rally against this perceived enemy and draw closer together in doing so. This chapter looks at how the notion of the enemy draws ever closer during this period, until it exists within the community itself. The ways in which such rumours are informed and reinforced by the ideology of the Terror, erode trust and contribute to the eventual destruction of community solidarity concludes this chapter.

Chapter V, 'Rumour, Reputation and Identity', looks at the importance of personal reputation during this period and how this becomes both increasingly politicised as well as ever more vulnerable to unsubstantiated rumour. It explores received notions of personal integrity and how this

affects an individual's position within the community. It also looks at how the *conventionnels'* belief in personal and political virtue had its counterpart among the *menu peuple*, with judgements about personal integrity increasingly synonymous with patriotic authenticity and vice versa. Personal insults, if considered damaging enough to one's reputation, had always been a matter for the police; in year II they are increasingly categorised as 'calumny', a much more serious crime that illustrates the value given to a reputation, even – perhaps especially – amongst those who had little else of worth. How an individual was viewed by his or her peers, and whether they enjoyed the good opinion of the community at large, became bound up with definitions of patriotism, until ultimately, personality itself became a measure of Republican commitment.

The final chapter, 'Rumour, Denunciation and Terror', pursues this argument to its conclusion, and looks at how rumour became an inextricable part of the climate of suspicion and denunciation that existed during year II. It looks at how many arrests were based on hearsay, rumour and innuendo, which were later cited as evidence. It also looks at how the reputation of the accuser becomes integral to the perceived guilt or innocence of the accused, leading to counter-accusations as a form of defence. The use of historical evidence reinterpreted through an increasingly radicalised lens led to convictions for behaviour that, in the early years of the Revolution, would not have been criminal. These shifting perspectives are reinforced by ever-elastic and mutable definitions of 'suspect', and, ultimately reflect the instability of language itself.

The final chapter might suggest that there is something inevitable about the relationship between rumour and conspiracy, and that they inevitably lead to Terror; that with the end of the Terror comes the end of the power of rumour. My conclusion will examine this assumption, and explore the ways in which rumour continued, questioning whether the experiences of the Terror led to different tropes coming to the fore.

As the following thesis demonstrates, rumour – at any time, but even more so during this period – represents more than ‘unconfirmed news’, and is more than simply a collection of ephemeral tittle-tattle, superstitions and urban myths. The subjects that take hold, that are shared and passed on, the details that become embellished in the telling, do so because they are a representation of society’s shared fears and hopes. These are so deeply entrenched that they are expressed in an ungovernable space, impervious to official intervention.

Chapter I

'Prenez garde Citoyens!': Policing Popular Rumour

Those who persuaded the people that 170 soldiers were killed with poison, that 700 others were in hospital, are manifestly liars, brigands, subversives; it was a plot hatched to start a rumour in Paris, to ring alarm bells; in short, to start an uproar that we've been expecting for some time. I ask the Assembly... and especially the mayor of Paris, to take charge of the authors of these false rumours.

Marc-David Lasource to the National Assembly, 4 August, 1792.¹

Late on 2 August, 1792, the session of France's National Assembly was noisily interrupted by an anxious crowd. Many of the deputies had retired for the evening, but the crowd's agitation demanded they be addressed immediately: 'They are poisoning our brothers,' they insisted, referring to rumours that the Revolutionary army, at war with Austria since April, had been supplied with contaminated bread.

Girondin deputy Lasource attempted to restore order. He reassured the crowd that he and his fellow deputies were as concerned as they about the well-being of the army, and that the allegations would be investigated – so far, the typical politician's response to a troubled crowd. What is noteworthy about this particular exchange, however, is what Lasource said next. He told the crowd that they themselves were evidence of the existence of wrongdoing, one that was a far greater threat to the success of the Revolution than contaminated bread. According to Lasource, the crowd were victims of a plot by counter-revolutionaries who were intentionally spreading alarming stories in order to discredit the government. '*Prenez garde, citoyens* – the enemies of the public good are provoking you and have led you to attack

¹ *Le Moniteur universel*. No. 217, samedi 4 août, 1792, p. 81. 'Ceux qui ont persuadé le peuple que 170 volontaires nationaux étaient morts empoisonnés, que 700 autres étaient à l'hôpital, sont manifestement des factieux, des brigands, des séditionnaires; c'était un coup monté pour exciter une rumeur dans Paris, faire sonner le tocsin, répandre une alarme générale; enfin, pour exciter un mouvement que l'on attend depuis longtemps. Je demande que l'Assemblée charge le pouvoir exécutif, et spécialement le maire de Paris, de charger à nouveau les auteurs de ces faux bruits.'

your own deputies.’²

The following day, a letter was read to the Assembly, revealing the truth behind the poisoned bread affair. It had been made in the cellar of a dilapidated church and fragments of glass and masonry had fallen into the dough during its manufacture. The deputies were satisfied that the contamination was due to nothing more sinister than negligence; the findings would be made public and the matter was considered closed.

Lasource, however, interpreted the matter differently. His immediate response was to draw attention to the effect of such stories on public morale. The case, in his opinion, was far from over; such a story was neither an isolated incident nor a result of genuine misunderstanding, and it represented as great a threat to the common good as if it were actually true. He reminded his fellow deputies of the events of only the previous day, of the agitation of the crowd, convinced of the existence of a plot to poison the army and their fellow citizens. Far from being neatly resolved, this incident was proof instead of a more insidious counter-revolutionary weapon: the power of rumour. Lasource urged his fellow deputies to recognize the significance of what had occurred, insisting that the distressed state of the crowd was the result of intentional provocation: that someone – as yet, unidentified – had intentionally spread this defamatory anecdote to cause panic and destroy confidence in the authorities and, by extension, the Revolution itself.³ His peers, he acknowledged, might not believe that such tactics existed⁶⁵ to cause distress among the people, but here was proof that the crowd was being manipulated. He called upon the Assembly to find the source of these ‘faux bruits’.

This small incident exemplifies many of the themes explored in this chapter. On one level it would appear to be a simple piece of government business:

² Ibid., p. 79.

³ Ibid. ‘On ne croit point au système adopté pour agiter le peuple: cependant, ce qui s’est passé hier à la fin de votre séance, ne prouve que trop que ce système se poursuit avec activité.’

reports of contaminated rations led to an investigation and a satisfactory explanation; these findings would be made public and the matter closed. The majority of the Assembly felt they had responded adequately to a popular concern. Lasource saw the incident differently, recognizing that a rumour can be damaging in itself, completely irrespective of whether or not it is true. He recognised that the real danger in this incident was not the contamination of bread rations, but of the public's confidence in the authorities. Recognising the power of rumour to cause widespread public anxiety, Lasource assumed that it must therefore be the work of a specific author or authors who were intentionally manufacturing and spreading morale-sapping lies. With a little more persuasion from Lasource, his peers agreed to investigate the source of the rumour. Although in this particular instance, Lasource was initially in the minority, his suspicion that the rumour might be evidence of a wider conspiracy was to become increasingly common among the authorities, particularly as the Revolution entered its most radical phase.

In the address above, Lasource was particularly concerned about the effect of false stories on *le peuple*; the danger of such stories was that they would rouse Paris to a state of alarm ('exciter un mouvement que l'on attend'). He and his deputies were well aware of the power of a groundswell of opinion. In the three years since the fall of the Bastille, the crowd had amply demonstrated its ability to take part in political action. The arrival of the agitated citizens of the previous day was just one more example of this. And a month later, the capital would experience its most extreme version to date, when fear of counter-revolution resulted in the September Massacres.

Lasource was, of course, correct in recognizing how damaging rumours could be to public morale; the government's attempts to shape and police public morale is one of the themes of this chapter. But what is also important to highlight is that, crucial to Lasource's attitude to rumour, and one that is shared by the authorities during this period, was the belief that a rumour was something that was planted intentionally. Rumours did not develop

organically, as a result of misunderstanding or lack of information, but as a result of lies spread by counter-revolutionaries. Official attempts to eradicate rumour during this period typically demand that the story be traced to its source, rooted out, that the culprit be unmasked. As such, attitudes to rumour are very much informed by the discourse of conspiracy that so dominated Republican debate.

A pamphlet written two years earlier makes explicit the connection between rumour, conspiracy and counter-revolution. Written by one self-described 'avocat-patriot' L.R.J. Boussemart, the pamphlet entitled *On me l'a dit*⁴ combines Jacobin rhetoric with the imagery of Classical antiquity to argue that the alarm caused by rumour threatens the safety of the Republic. Rumour is so powerful it is the 'author of some, if not all, of our ills'. Throughout the text, gossip and rumour are equated with the secrecy of the Old Regime, positioned in stark contrast to the honesty and openness of Republicanism.

Addressing 'mes chers concitoyens' Boussemart alerts his readers to the dangers of rumour, referred to throughout the text by the phrase *on me l'a dit*. Boussemart never employs the expressions most commonly used to refer to rumour during this period, such as 'le bruit' and its variations ('le bruit court', 'le bruit sourd'), 'les murmures' or the ambiguous 'on dit' (variously 'they say/one says/it is said that'). These phrases, arguably, are more neutral than the English word 'rumour': they refer to sound, to speech, to general communication. Boussemart's expression for rumour, on the other hand – *on me l'a dit* – evokes gossip, suggesting a verbal exchange which allows the speaker to participate without having to take responsibility for the content of the story. *On me l'a dit* is merely a conduit through which news can spread without the need for verification; *on me l'a dit* absolves the speaker of having to prove or verify the story being told, or even of having any responsibility for its existence.

⁴ L.R.J. Boussemart, *On me l'a dit* (Paris, 1790).

According to Boussemart, the dangers of rumour as a medium of news are manifold, not least of all for its dual characteristics of untrustworthiness and lack of accountability. Who is this nebulous 'on' who is responsible for the news? Its reference absolves the speaker while simultaneously allowing him or her the kudos of sharing information. *On me l'a dit* is, according to Boussemart, the author of many of the country's present ills and as such is described as 'the sole and last Aristocrat that remains for us to stifle'.⁵ He continues:

[T]his monster with one hundred heads, with a hundred voices, takes any form it likes; truly Protean, it precedes us and will outlive us unless we hasten to stop its skulduggery. It is this that interprets the most pure intentions as evil and unkind; ... How many of us have been the victims of this unfortunate ON ME L'A DIT. ⁶

This short pamphlet contains several themes that can be used as a starting point for examining the Revolutionary government's attitude to rumour. It contains imagery that has Classical antecedents, but is dense with the rhetoric of the Revolution, with its evocation of the lurking, secretive 'aristocrat' that is rumour, contrasted against 'the pens of our useful writers'.⁷ The likening of rumour to an aristocrat has twofold significance: it alludes to the closed world of court intrigue, where the *eminence grise* whispers behind the throne, or the monarch's mistress yields unwarranted power through her private and thus privileged access to the king. At the same time, by equating *on me l'a dit* with the worst of the Revolution's enemies, the author is able to introduce and reinforce the idea that rumour poses as much of a threat to the success of the Revolution as the aristocracy itself.

⁵ *On me l'a dit*, p. 1. 'On me l'a dit, est l'auteur d'une partie de nos maux, je dirai même de tous'; 'le seul & dernier Aristocrate qu'il nous reste à étouffer'.

⁶ Ibid. '[C]e monstre à cent têtes, à cent voix, prend toutes les formes qu'il veut; vrai Protée, il est né avant nous, & nous survivra, si nous ne nous empressons d'arrêter son brigandage. C'est lui qui donne aux intentions les plus pures une interprétation maligne & méchante; ... Combien de personnes ont été les victimes innocentes de ce malheureux ON ME L'A DIT.'

⁷ This juxtaposition of the 'utility' of the *sans-culotte* versus the parasitical courtier is a common trope in Jacobin discourse.

Rumour, then, is both as threatening as the aristocracy and a medium of the elite, but it is also monstrous and satanic. Throughout, Boussemart repeatedly likens it to a monster, a serpent, a viper; rumour insinuates itself behind closed doors to spread its venom. Poison itself is an aristocratic weapon⁸ – and poisoning as a metaphor for the spreading of counter-revolutionary propaganda is a recurring motif in revolutionary discourse.⁹ However, this snake does not only recall the serpent of the Old Testament: it is described as having many heads and tongues, referencing the hydra of Greek myth, whose many heads grew back in ever greater numbers when one was cut off. The aristocrat as hydra is a common motif, which recurs in pamphlets and printed images of this period.¹⁰

Boussemart's rumour is both everywhere and nowhere ('il est partout et n'existe en aucun lieu'), its serpents nourished by those who enjoy listening to it ('il semble que nous prenions plaisir à écouter tout ce qui nous vient de sa part; c'est ainsi que l'on nourrit des serpents dans son sein'). In this way Boussemart astutely acknowledges the complicity between listener and speaker in helping rumours to flourish – passive listening in this instance has the potential to be as dangerous as active communication.

Boussemart continues with the language of conspiracy so characteristic of radical Jacobin discourse, whether in speeches in the clubs, in the National Convention, or in the popular revolutionary press. He speaks of denunciation, and of one of rumour's most powerful weapons: calumny and slander: '[rumour] fears pure and honest souls, but says let us slander them

⁸ Pascal Brioist, Hervé Drévilion and Pierre Serna, *Croiser le Fer: violence et culture de l'épée dans la France moderne (XVI – XVIIIème siècle)* (Champ Vallon: Seysell, 2002), refers not only to the aristocratic nature of poison but also that it is traditionally perceived of as 'feminine', p. 337. The equation of aristocracy with effeminacy and degeneracy gave added nuance to symbolic references to poison.

⁹ The *Moniteur Universel* contains many examples of this usage in government debates, as does the popular radical press during this period.

¹⁰ *L'hydre aristocratique* (anonymous, c. 1789) is just one of the many examples of engravings which employ the hydra to represent the aristocracy or the Old Regime. Others can be found at 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity' <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution>.

... some traces will always remain; raise doubts, give birth to suspicions...'.¹¹ A reputation is vulnerable to suggestion, insinuation and doubt, and once destroyed is impossible to rebuild. As will be discussed in Chapter V, establishing, protecting and defending one's reputation was a crucial part of eighteenth-century life, for all strata of society, socially, politically and commercially. And yet, this essential asset was vulnerable to the most nebulous and intangible of threats: insinuation and hearsay.¹² Even the effects of outright slander were difficult to refute, with the remnants of the accusation clinging to the offended party's reputation, despite attempts to clear his or her name. Because of this, calumny was seen as a crime against one's person, both symbolically and literally, representing an attack against both one's honour and one's assets.¹³ And yet, despite the legal framework in place to prosecute offences against one's name, unsubstantiated rumours could do irreparable damage.¹⁴

But Boussemart identifies calumny's greater power, one which extends beyond the individual to society at large, and which would be of increasing concern to the Revolutionary government. Calumny sows discord: 'C'est du sein de la discorde que j'affirmerai mon empire.' Insinuation, unsubstantiated talk, rumour and innuendo serve to destroy reputations,

¹¹ '[I]l craint le regard des âmes pures & honnêtes, mais calomnions, dit-il, calomnions toujours, il en restera quelques traces; élevons des doutes, faisons naître des soupçons.'

¹² Charles Walton, *Policing Public Opinion in the French Revolution: The Culture of Calumny and the Problem of Free Speech* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) looks at the role of personal reputation in the government. The importance of reputation among the working people of Paris is explored by Arlette Farge, *Vivre dans la rue à Paris au XVIIIème siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979) and *Fragile Lives: Violence, Power and Solidarity in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993) as well as David Garrioch, *Neighbourhood and Community in Paris: 1740–1790* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1986) and 'Verbal insults in Eighteenth-Century Paris' in *The Social History of Language*, ed. Peter Burke and Roy Porter, Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture 12 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). The importance of reputation is examined in the second half of this thesis.

¹³ Pierre-Francois Muyart de Vouglans, *Les Loix criminelles de France dans leur ordre naturel* (Paris: 1780). The author categorises calumny as a 'crime de faux', one of five categories of crimes against society and the individual. Homicide is an attack 'principally upon one's person' while *crimes de faux* represent attacks on 'Honour and at the same time on one's assets'. Preface, pp. xij, xiiij.

¹⁴ The implications of this are explored in the second half of this thesis.

resulting in suspicion and lack of trust. Although Boussemart does not make explicit reference to the National Assembly, the issue of discord was particularly relevant to the Assembly (and, later, Convention) and its reputation. As it sought to present itself as a legitimate source of government, factionalism and the denigration of rivals was a continual and irreconcilable problem: speaking badly of one's rivals threatened the reputation of the Revolutionary government as a whole. Many of the debates recorded in the *Moniteur Universel*, from the arrest of the Girondins in June 1793 to the 9 Thermidor the following year return to this issue. Writing to Danton in 1793, Thomas Paine described the danger thus:

Calumny is a species of Treachery that ought to be punished as well as any other kind of Treachery. It is a private vice productive of public evils; because it is possible to irritate men into disaffection by continual calumny who never intended to be disaffected. It is therefore, equally as necessary to guard against the evils of unfounded or malignant suspicion as against the evils of blind confidence.¹⁵

Within this hostile environment rumour not only continues to flourish, it is recognised as a means by which one can gain advantage over one's rivals. Boussemart's pamphlet thus illustrates the dual features of rumour that were increasingly to occupy political thought during the Revolutionary period: rumour was simultaneously the cause as well as the result of unrest and discord. The government's attitude towards these different aspects of rumour manifested itself in different, often conflicting, ways. The government was concerned not only with a need to control or eradicate the *content* of specific rumours – viewing rumour as a result of lack of information – but also saw rumour almost as a symbolic entity in itself – a pernicious, malicious force whose very existence proved that the transparency, rationalism and *franchise* of Republicanism was not as firmly entrenched as desired. These two attitudes represent two, possibly contradictory, facets of Revolutionary discourse: if rumour is seen to be the result of a lack of information, then the rational solution would be to

¹⁵ Thomas Paine, *The Writings of Thomas Paine*, vol. 3. (London: Forgotten Books, [1889] 2013), pp. 138-9.

encourage more openness with the public, to spread more information, and provide more education – an Enlightened approach to combatting ignorance. But running concurrently with this is the view that rumour is the result of an orchestrated conspiracy to spread lies and misinformation to a gullible public. These competing views will be discussed later in the chapter.

As defence against rumour, Boussemart is on the side of the Enlightenment, lauding the pens of ‘our useful writers’. Boussemart would appear to be pitting the authority of the written word as a trustworthy and legitimate source of news against the treachery of *on me l’a dit*, as it insinuates itself into every home. This suggests that the figure of the journalist is being promoted as a new, improved alternative to the local gossip spreading untruths and conjecture, and that, by extension, the Revolution itself will no longer trade in hearsay and innuendo, but truth and probity. A closer reading of Boussemart’s text, however, reveals the author’s more sophisticated understanding of human interaction: it is not *only* the might of the pen that will defeat *on me l’a dit*, but also sceptical inquiry, referring to the ‘prudent incredulity’ of Thomas the Apostle as a model. Unlike the authorities, whose conspiratorial world view often seems to include suspecting the public of an almost child-like credulity,¹⁶ Boussemart grants the individual some agency in determining the veracity of a story.

Boussemart’s solution clearly displays a belief in his readers’ intelligence; unlike many of the writers of the most popular revolutionary journals, whose didactic and exclamatory style allows no room for interpretation or nuance, Boussemart credits his readers with the ability to make their own judgements. He urges his readers to question, to doubt, and to look at the evidence themselves. This is in notable contrast to the style of the most popular Revolutionary journalists, who promoted themselves as the ultimate authority and arbiter of truth: their readers were not called upon to weigh up evidence for themselves, as the writers provided it for them. Both Marat

¹⁶ The authorities’ ambiguous and conflicting attitude to the public is vividly illustrated in its descriptions of and responses to crowd activity, which is explored in Chapter III.

and Hébert – two of the Revolution’s most popular radical journalists – employed a conversational, colloquial writing style that promoted a feeling of intimacy between reader and text, with the journalist in the role of trusted confidant. This impression would have been enhanced by the reading aloud of such texts, a practice remarked upon by many historians of Revolutionary print culture. Whereas Boussemart credits the reader with the ability to identify rumour in whatever guise it may appear, popular journalists – many of whom also had active roles in government – preferred to tell their readers what to believe, thus promoting government doctrine under the guise of popular Revolutionary sentiment.

In this respect, the journalist did not serve as the replacement and enlightened opposite of the village gossip, as suggested by Hans-Joachim Neubauer in his study of rumour:¹⁷ he was simply an extension of the gossip, both overtly and covertly. Those popular radical journalists who employed a colloquial style of language similar to their readers did so in a conscious attempt to mimic the authority figures of the street – the reliable artisan, the father figure, the trusted friend – rather than that of the establishment.¹⁸ Much of the papers’ content, too, came originally from the street to be fed back to its readers as news. In this respect the journalist is simply providing another conduit for gossip and rumour, overlaid with the seeming authority of the printed word. This interconnected path of hearsay, news and propaganda, moving in an eternal and complex loop between the street to the government and back again, and disseminated through official and unofficial networks, both written and spoken, lies at the heart of the government’s problematic relationship with and attitude to rumour, and its

¹⁷ Hans-Joachim Neubauer, *The Rumour: A Cultural History*, trans. Christian Braun (London and New York: Free Association Books, 1999).

¹⁸ Hébert’s Père Duchesne persona was less an act of ventriloquism than of fiction: the Père Duchesne’s Parisian ‘slang’ was often concocted by Hébert himself. Richard Cobb, *A Second Identity: Essays on France and French History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 136, cites examples of the clubs and sections of Paris adopting the contrived language of the paper, in the process authenticating the fictional voice of the Père Duchesne.

difficulty in controlling it.

Boussemart's text, then, provides in microcosm several themes that can be explored in the wider context of the government's attitude towards rumour: it presents rumour as a threat, equating it with counter-revolution and conspiracy. It also highlights the dangers of rumour as a means of destabilizing public well-being, recognizing that the mere presence of any rumour is a sign of uncertainty and general anxiety. And finally it suggests ways to combat rumour: with education and scepticism, making enquiry and verification ultimately a patriotic duty.¹⁹ How closely Boussemart's approach corresponded to the government's in the early years of the Republic will be explored in the rest of this chapter.

Monitoring popular rumour and *l'esprit public*

The progress of the Revolution depends entirely on *l'esprit public*. It accelerates or slows down depending on whether this spirit is purified or corrupted. If the public spirit were to become completely corrupt, progress would cease altogether.

Our enemies sensed the truth of this, and despairing of beating us through treachery, they have resolved to crush us with opinion. Hence this system of lies and calumnies, invented to distort the facts, spread falsehoods on men's intentions, and create a thick cloud between the people and the brave citizens who work for their Happiness.

Prospectus of the *Journal de la Montagne*, 30 May, 1793²⁰

The value of studying rumour lies in what it reveals about collective anxieties or beliefs. For this reason, it might be considered a very useful tool

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 5–6: '... si ces idées peuvent néanmoins contribuer à la destruction de cet *on me l'a dit...* j'aurai rempli une tâche bien douce & bien glorieuse, pour un Citoyen Français, zélé pour sa patrie'.

²⁰ Les progrès de la révolution dépendent entièrement de l'esprit public. Ils sont accélérés ou ralentis selon que cet esprit soit purifié ou corrompu; ils cesseraient entièrement, s'il était possible qu'il soit tout à fait corrompu.

Nos ennemis ont ressenti cette vérité; et désespérés de nous abattre par des trahisons, ils ont résolu de nous écraser par l'opinion. Ce système de mensonges et de calomnies a été inventé pour dénaturer les faits, tromper sur les intentions des hommes, et élever un nuage épais entre le peuple et les citoyens courageux qui travaillent à son Bonheur.

with which a new government might gauge any number of public attitudes. This section will look at the government's interest in and attitudes towards rumours circulating amongst the public, and the ways in which they attempted to police and curtail them. It will look at whether and to what extent the Revolutionary government, with its enlightenment ideals and emphasis on the Republican virtues of transparency and openness, was concerned with the unsubstantiated street tittle-tattle of its people and how that relates to political intrigues among its own deputies. It will also look at the relationship between popular rumour and public opinion, and how attempts to shape and ultimately regulate the second reveal the ambiguities surrounding the new Republic's attitude towards allowing the freedom of expression of its people.

This analysis is concerned less with specific rumours than with the government's understanding of and approaches towards popular rumour in general, with the aim that such an emphasis may shed light on the government's relationship with the people it has set itself up to govern. The Convention's interest in rumour, in the '*on dit*' of the street, is linked with its monitoring of *l'esprit public*, or public morale. However, popular rumours were not seen by the government solely as reflections of the public's concerns – if this were the case they might easily be assuaged by an official proclamation or a new decree.

Earlier in the Revolution there is evidence to suggest that not all figures in authority viewed rumour as evidence of darker conspiratorial forces at work. Jean-Sylvain Bailly, in his role as first mayor of Paris under the new regime, for example, observed the difficulty of policing a city the size of Paris and controlling its crowds.²¹ In 1791, he advised additional policing of crowds on market days, as they were often occasions for disturbances. Although he observed that this was often '*sous la prétexte de la liberté*' there was no suggestion that he believed these disturbances to be politically

²¹ AN AF/II/48/doc. 15. Letter of 5 May, 1790.

motivated. Nor did he refer to the incitement of ‘malveillants’ that would become so prevalent in the reports of crowd action during the more radical years of the Revolution.²² After all, disruptions during market days were not uncommon under the Old Regime, and urban overcrowding often led to violence or other disturbances. The Palais-Royal, for example, could become so crowded in the normal course of the day that a group of shopkeepers wrote to Bailly in 1790 to request guards to help disperse the crowds blocking their shops.²³ Later, however, in his memoirs, Bailly revealed elements of the conspiratorial mentality characteristic of radical Jacobinism, identifying crowd behaviours and anti-government opinion as provocations by counter-revolutionaries, often started by spreading false rumours.²⁴ By 1792, this view was largely accepted by the authorities, and popular opinion that displayed – or suggested – a lack of confidence in or disagreement with the government was often attributed to false rumours planted by counter-revolutionaries. Rumour and popular opinion became inextricably bound with one another, and it was impossible to monitor one without becoming aware of the other.

But rumour is as much conduit as barometer, and one of the reasons for the authorities’ suspicion of rumour as a means of spreading counter-revolutionary doctrine is that they themselves took advantage of the same tactics to further their own agendas. The fact that many journalists were also deputies meant that they could do so via the press, and radical journals often exacerbated popular rumours through the excoriation of public figures or incessant but vague references to ‘complots’.

Both the monitoring and spreading of rumours sheds light on the complex and often ambiguous relationship between the government and its people.

²² AN AF/II/48/doc. 59. Letter of 26 August, 1790.

²³ AN AF/II/48/doc. 76. Letter of 24 September, 1790.

²⁴ ‘Cette même malveillance agissait contre nous et répandait mille faux bruits sur la qualité des farines et de pain.’ *Mémoires de Bailly, avec une notice sur sa vie, des notes et des éclaircissements historiques, par MM Berville et Barriere* (Paris: Baudoin Fils, Imprimerie-Librairie, 1822).

To monitor rumour, for example, the Ministry of the Interior employed the same tactics deployed under the Old Regime: an extensive network of police spies who provided daily reports on activity in the Paris streets. These agents may have gloried in the Republican title of *observateurs*, but they were simply the despised *mouches* under a new name.²⁵

Observing rumour as a way of gauging public opinion was not new either: in 1745, Contrôleur général Philibert Orry was instructed by the king to undertake a ‘quasi-experimentation’ which involved planting a series of false rumours in the provinces relating to increased taxation and the raising of a militia, and then monitoring how they spread and the public’s reaction to them.²⁶ But acquiring information about its citizens by subterfuge was not the only contradiction in the Revolutionary government’s behaviour. As the progress of the Revolution became threatened by enemies both within and without, the need to regulate information in the name of national security came into direct conflict with the aim of an uncensored press, highlighting the inherent contradiction in, on the one hand, espousing free speech and a free press, whilst on the other, trying to ensure that that same speech and press were consistent with government orthodoxy.²⁷

²⁵ For policing under the Old Regime, see, for example, Ferdinand de Federici, *Flagrants délits sur les Champs-Élysées: les dossiers de police du gardien Federici (1777-1791)* (Paris: Mercure de France, 2008); Pierre Manuel, *La Police de Paris Dévoilée* (Paris: l’an second de la Liberté. [1791]); Simon Burrows, ‘Despotism without Bounds: The French Secret Police and the Silencing of Dissent in London, 1760–1790’, *History*, vol. 89 (Oct 2004); Robert Darnton, *Poetry and the Police: Communication Networks in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010); and Nina Kushner, *Erotic Exchanges: The World of Elite Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014).

²⁶ Cited in Pierre Marc, *De la bouche à l’oreille: Psychologie de la rumeur* (Fribourg, Suisse: Editions Del Val, 1987), p. 173 and Bernard-Pierre Lécuyer, ‘Une quasi-expérimentation sur les rumeurs au XVIII^e siècle: l’enquête proto-scientifique du contrôleur général Orry (1745)’ in *Science et théorie de l’opinion publique: hommage à Jean Stoetzl*, ed. R. Boudon, F. Bourricaud and A. Girard (Paris: Editions Retz, 1981).

²⁷ Walton, *Policing Public Opinion* explores this within the context of the crime of calumny. François Furet, ‘The French Revolution is Over’ in *The French Revolution and Intellectual History*, ed. Jack Censer (Chicago, IL: The Dorsey Press, 1989) observes the relationship between language, power and popular sovereignty during the Revolution, describing the power that resided in words, and thus the necessity of their being under constant suspicion.

But the government was not only interested in rumour as a means of gauging *l'esprit public*. It was also used within the government itself as a political tool – particularly as a means of undermining the integrity of a rival – and as such was part of the discourse of conspiracy that characterized many revolutionary debates during the First Republic, as well as reflecting wider eighteenth-century concerns with reputation and the crime of calumny. Rumour as a weapon among deputies was deeply problematic, however. Calumniating a fellow deputy identified him as a rival, which drew attention to factional differences and thus revealed the internal conflicts within the government. This both undermined the government's position as a legitimate replacement for the Old Regime, and contributed to national insecurity at a time when the country was at war and an appearance of unity was crucial. As the Terror progressed, the need to harness rumour ran parallel with a need to harness and ultimately silence the press, resulting in a policing of words as draconian as anything under the Old Regime, and which, taken to its most extreme manifestation, led to the Law of Suspects.

The authorities were well aware of the importance of popular rumour as a barometer of the public mood – not only as a means of identifying popular fears and anxieties, but also of public opinion generally, or, more nebulously, of *l'esprit public*. Several studies of the rhetorical use and evolution of these two expressions – *l'opinion publique* and *l'esprit public* – provide a nuanced reading of their meanings, with some suggesting that there was a degree of fluidity between the two terms that led to them being used interchangeably.²⁸ In the sources I have referred to, however, primarily

²⁸ See, for example, Mona Ozouf, 'Le Concept de l'opinion publique au XVIIIe siècle' in *L'homme régénéré. Essais sur la Révolution française* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989) and Jon Cowan, *To Speak for the People: Public Opinion and the Problem of Legitimacy in the French Revolution* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001). On the meaning of 'l'esprit public' see Colin Lucas, 'The Crowd and Politics' in *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, vol. II, *The Political Culture of the French Revolution*, ed. Colin Lucas (Pergamon Press: Oxford, 1988). For analysis of the evolution of the concept of 'public opinion', see, for example, Timothy Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary: The Deputies of the French National Assembly and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996). Tackett describes revolutionaries' perceptions of public opinion as variously 'the whims and passions of the people' to 'a kind of common denominator of popular will' (p. 112). Patrice Higonnet, *Goodness Beyond Virtue: Jacobins during the French Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1998),

those of the Paris Police Archives and the *observateurs* reports in the Archives Nationales, I have not been aware of any such subtlety, and each term appears to have been used consistently to refer to a different aspect of public thought: in short, *l'opinion public* refers to the prevailing view of specific events or individual reputations, while *l'esprit public* refers to a general mood, to what we might otherwise term public morale. A report on the public's negative response to the latest government directive, for example, might still conclude that overall 'l'esprit est bon'. This distinction may be due to the nature of the materials consulted, but for the purposes of this thesis, I will work with the definitions these sources seem to suggest.

For this reason, a number of state-funded 'citizen observers' were employed to spy on their own citizens and record the concerns and conversations of the day. The aim was, first and foremost, to identify potential counter-revolutionary activity, but equally important was to gauge the success of the Revolution through the people's confidence in it. That public disquiet or discontent was perceived as the work of *malveillants* intentionally sowing dissatisfaction reveals the complex and often contradictory attitude of the government towards its citizens, an attitude in which abstract notions of popular sovereignty and the myth of the ideal Republican were daily played out against the more mundane concerns and less exalted behaviours of actual people.²⁹

examines the evolution of the meaning of 'opinion' concluding that by late 1792, 'opinion had ... become little more than the echo of [the government's] own sectarian voice'. This concurs with my findings that 'public opinion' was thought to be intentionally corrupted when it did not correspond with government orthodoxy.

²⁹ This tension, particularly as it relates to crowd violence, is explored in, for example, Jack Censer, *Prelude to Power: the Parisian Radical Press 1789–1791* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); Colin Lucas, 'The Crowd and Politics' in *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, vol. II, *The Political Culture of the French Revolution*, ed. Colin Lucas (Pergamon Press: Oxford, 1988); Peter McPhee, 'Robespierre and Violence' in *Experiencing the French Revolution*, ed. David Andress (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2013); and Sophie Wahnich, *In Defence of the Terror: Liberty or Death in the French Revolution*, trans. David Fernbach (London and New York: Verso, 2012). David Andress, 'The Denial of Social Conflict in the French Revolution: Discourses around the Champ de Mars Massacre, 17 July 1791', *French Historical Studies*, vol. 22, no. 2 (Spring, 1999), p. 186, note 12, refers to the ambiguity of the term 'people' itself during this period.

These documents have limitations as objective records, not least because the spies were often recognised as such in the communities in which they worked.³⁰ That spies were known, too, to employ marginal, often destitute, figures such as the pedlar or beggar – ostracised yet ubiquitous in poorer urban communities – meant that many people were aware their conversations were likely to be overheard and may have tailored the subject matter and their responses accordingly. Finally, these reports were also written with a particular readership in mind, that is to say, the spies' superiors, and, ultimately, the Minister of the Interior. As the task would naturally require a sifting of material and personal judgement over what to record, the concerns of those higher up the chain must have influenced where the spies' metaphorical nets were cast.

This use of spies was one of several contradictions at the heart of the government's relationship with its people. It was an unpopular but commonly acknowledged feature of urban life and although the practice and the spies themselves were hated, some accounts suggest an almost resigned acceptance of their presence. One reason may have been that eavesdropping and being overheard was itself a common feature of densely populated urban life.³¹ Louis-Sébastien Mercier noted a fashion in Paris to 'discuss the most important things while walking', implying that spies had merely to trail behind, gathering seditious talk like so many ripe plums, while he complained that the crowded conditions in the Tuileries – a popular gathering place and the site of much public talk – impinged on one's ability to converse without the uninvited participation of passers-by.³² A satirical

³⁰ See, for example, Simon Burrows, *French Exile Journalism and European Politics, 1792–1814* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Royal Historical Society/Boydell Press, 2000); Pierre Caron, *Paris pendant la Terreur. Rapports des agents secrets du Ministre de l'Intérieur publiés pour la Société d'histoire contemporaine* (Paris: Librairie Alphonse Picard et Fils, 1910); Richard Cobb, *The Police and the People: French Popular Protest 1789–1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970) and Robert Darnton, *Poetry and the Police*.

³¹ See, for example, Farge, *Fragile Lives*, pp. 54–55.

³² Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Les Entretiens du Jardin des Tuileries de Paris* (Paris: 1789), p. 8. 'C'est à la mode à Paris d'agiter les plus grandes questions en se promenant ... Ce qu'on peut reprocher au Jardin des Tuileries, c'est d'être trop auguste, de ne pas laisser assez d'espace à

royalist dictionary published in Paris in 1790 acknowledged the relationship between public discussion and police spies under the new regime, suggesting that it was the same system of old, changed in name only. Its entry for *Espion* reads:

Spying was the shame of the Old Regime. And since our alleged rebirth, the number of spies, now known as observers, has risen considerably. As soon as two citizens speak in confidence a third appears on their trail to listen to what they are saying. Thanks to the activities of these observers, M de Lafayette knows what is being said in foyers, behind the scenes, in the boxes, at cafés & everything mysteriously discussed over supper.³³

Helen Maria Williams, during her period of incarceration under the Terror, describes spies ‘prowling around’, citing them as ‘the only ones we had to fear’.³⁴ However, their perceived ubiquity,³⁵ combined with the sense that eavesdropping was not anything to be ashamed of, and that being overheard was an inevitable part of urban life, makes one wonder how successful these spies might have been in reporting anything of significance. Certainly, Richard Cobb and Arlette Farge among others provide compelling evidence that spies, along with any other interloper or unfamiliar face, were easily recognized in close-knit communities,³⁶ while the dictionary entry, with its

ceux qui voudraient parler, & de n’être point entendus. Pour peu qu’on discute, il se forme un cercle, & tout le monde se mêle dans la conversation.’

³³ *Petit Dictionnaire des Grands Hommes et des Grands Choses qui ont rapport à la Révolution, composé par une société d’aristocrates, dédié aux Etats-Généraux dits Assemblée Nationales* (Paris, 1790). ‘L’espionnage faisait honte à l’ancienne police. Et depuis notre prétendue régénération, le nombre d’espions, que l’on nomme observateurs, a considérablement augmenté. Dès que deux citoyens se parlent à l’oreille, survient alors un troisième qui rôde pour écouter ce qu’ils disent. Grace à l’activité de ces observateurs, M de la Fayette sait ce qui se dit dans les foyers, aux coulisses, dans les loges, aux cafés & tout ce qui se raconte mystérieusement dans les soupers.’

³⁴ Helen Maria Williams, *An Eye-Witness Account of the French Revolution: Letters Containing a Sketch of the Politics of France*, ed. Jack Fruchtman, Jr. (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1997), vol. I, p.118.

³⁵ David Garrioch, *The Making of Revolutionary Paris*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), p. 231, writes that the idea of an omnipresent police was encouraged by the force itself, and that their ubiquity was greatly overestimated.

³⁶ See, for example, Richard Cobb, *The Police and the People; Death in Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978) or Arlette Farge, *Fragile Lives. Jacques-Louis Ménétra, Journal of My Life*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) also provides colourful details of how outsiders were recognized and identified as such.

references to places of entertainment and leisure as likely places of surveillance, implies that such locations were unlikely to yield significant information.

A record of the type of information being collected by such spies can be found in Pierre Caron's six-volume *Paris pendant La Terreur*, a collection of reports covering the period from August 1793 to March 1794, by a body of secret agents initially employed by Joseph Garat, who became Minister of the Interior following the fall of Jean-Marie Roland until August 1793 when he resigned. Doubtless conscious of the legacy of spying under the Old Regime, these agents identified themselves variously on their reports as 'observateurs parisiens', 'commissaires observateurs' or 'observateurs de l'esprit public', although Caron cites their official title as 'commissaire observateur local pour le département de Paris'.³⁷

These agents were established in March 1793 for a provisional six months, to whom over 400,000 livres were allocated from a larger coffer of six million livres 'destinés aux dépenses secrètes'.³⁸ They were to continue until March 1794, and although there were numerous changes in personnel, in all, nineteen agents were employed at a rate of 300 livres a month, to report daily to the Minister of the Interior on the quotidian concerns and events taking place in Paris. Caron cites the decree of 3 May, which describes in detail the duties of these 'observateurs', whose 'honourable mission' it was to report on activities 'in every location where citizens gather, in order to study the public mood [*l'esprit public*] and the developments that ensue'.³⁹ To that end they were instructed to attend all places where the public meets, both formal and informal, in order to report on potential conflict or unrest. 'If they perceive some agitation or project that might disturb the public, they

³⁷ Caron, *Paris Pendant la Terreur*, vol. I, pp. x and xi.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. i-v.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 'dans tous les lieux où se rassemblent les citoyens, pour y étudier l'esprit public et les projets qui s'y développent.'

must warn the Minister of the Interior with all haste.’ In addition to these public spaces – sites of informal or spontaneous events as well as organised gatherings – the agents were also instructed to observe more formal locations, such as courts of law (‘it is here one can best gauge public opinion on judges and officers of the court, and on individuals and their grounds for sentencing’), churches (‘to know how the clergy instruct their congregation’) and theatres (‘it is a good idea for police commissioners to witness the opening night to judge the play and the effect it has on the spectators’). No aspect of daily life was too banal, no detail too small, to escape their notice,⁴⁰ with special reference made to the newest publications in all their guises – newspapers, placards, posters and pamphlets, and the public’s reception of them.⁴¹

An undated document submitted to the Committee of Public Safety in year II details the life of a government spy on mission, and reveals the extent to which the government was prepared to observe its citizens and, ultimately, itself.⁴² In its attempts to ensure objectivity on the part of the observers, the document reveals an anxiety bordering on paranoia that the enemy will be discovered within its own institutions. The document describes how those selected as spies must be ‘patriots, proven to be the most ardent, the most enlightened, the most prudent and the most discreet’. Their duties are to travel about the country, on the pretence of being on personal business, with nothing but a passport, either on foot or in public coaches. They are to be on the look out for contraband or false assignats, but their main objective is to monitor ‘le bien public’ and, in text strikingly revealing of the state of mind of those in government during this period, to ‘thwart the plotters and

⁴⁰ Ibid. ‘Ils ne regarderont pas comme étranger à leur mission le soin de s’informer du prix des graines, farines, viandes, poissons, épiceries, foins, pailles, bois, œufs, cuirs, et généralement de tout ce qui sert aux besoins journaliers des citoyens.’

⁴¹ Ibid. ‘Ils porteront également un œil extrêmement attentif sur les ouvrages nouveaux qui se vendent chez les libraires, ou se distribuent dans les rues, sur les placards, sur les journaux, sur l’avidité plus ou moins grande du public à acheter, à lire et à louer ces écrits.’

⁴² AN F7/4433/ doc. 43. ‘Observations soumises aux Lumières patriotiques et Démocratiquement Républicaines du Comité du Salut Publique.’

schemers and uncover the twisted threads hiding in the shadows against the Revolution'.⁴³ This is best done by visiting locations where people speak freely – staying in inns or eating at *table d'hôtes* frequented by sans-culottes. The document is revealing in articulating the extent of the spies' remit, including an obligation to monitor one another. For that reason, when travelling in the provinces, one of the pair should be a native of the area, the better to win the trust of the locals, while the other should be an outsider, in order to ensure objectivity: 'The two secret agents will equally observe one another for the public good, which would be difficult if they were from the same locale, but all without disrupting the harmonious running of their operation.' They are to be given an introduction to the representatives of the people 'without stating the reason, nor the fact that they are secret agents', the better to observe their behaviour and activities far from Paris.

The purpose of this exercise in surveillance is telling: the document states that through this network of *observateurs* the Minister of the Interior, alone or in instructing the Convention, would prevent counter-revolutionary and seditious activity, 'enlighten the citizenry in their best interests' and keep the peace in the capital.⁴⁴ These dual aims, comprising, on the one hand, the policing of seditious talk, and on the other, the education of the people – in short, censorship and enlightenment – is at the heart of the government's attitude to rumour at this time. That rumours continued to flourish could be seen by the government as evidence of a failure of both of these aims. Because rumours threaten to undermine public confidence, they are by their mere existence counter-revolutionary. In addition, they are able to spread because the populace remains irrational and fearful, and has clearly not been educated and enlightened sufficiently to reject them. The existence of rumours is evidence of the limitations of both censorship and of education.

⁴³ Ibid. 'délouer les intrigants et les cabaleurs et de découvrir les trames ourdies dans les ténèbres contre la Révolution.'

⁴⁴ Caron, vol. I, pp. xviii–xix. 'Le pouvoir exécutif pourra, par lui-même, ou en instruisant la Convention nationale, prévenir tous les mouvements désordonnés et séditieux, éclairer à propos les citoyens sur leurs vrais intérêts, et maintenir la paix dans cette immense cité.'

These reports do not, of course, provide a comprehensive record of the concerns and activities of Parisians under the Terror; their content is circumscribed by the requirements of the role. Because of this they are as revealing – perhaps more so – about the working conditions of the police spy, his relationship with those he observes, and, ultimately, with his superiors, as they are about the general concerns of the average citizen. The language of the agents and the content of their reports reflect government orthodoxy, and their documents, therefore, should be read via the prism of their superior’s opinions. As an illustration of the unreliability of these documents as historical records, Caron cites a report claiming that news of the arrest of Pétion was met with jubilation, when he had in fact escaped Paris and later committed suicide.⁴⁵ However, for the purposes of this thesis, whether the arrest was true or not is less important than the documented evidence of public support for the government’s actions.

A recurring theme in these reports, and one that corresponds with debates in the Convention, is that unrest or anxieties are the result of ‘malveillants’ intentionally sowing discord or planting unsettling stories. Throughout this period popular fears about bread shortages – actual, rumoured, present or future – were a constant, and the authorities’ responses to these fears were paralleled by the attitudes expressed in the police reports. According to reports in the *Moniteur Universel* the authorities dismissed widespread beliefs in bread shortages as unfounded, believing them to be instead the result of a shadowy plot to undermine public confidence, thus furthering a counter-revolutionary agenda. The agents of these and other rumours are rarely identified specifically, and are most often referred to by the generic and all-encompassing term, *malveillants*. The observer reports covering the autumn of 1793, for example, reveal little about public attitudes to the imminent trial of the Girondins, but for a brief comment to the effect that delaying the trial is bad for public morale. The fact the reports do not record public disapproval or disagreement with the arrests and trials raises questions regarding the extent to which the reports were tailored to please

⁴⁵ Caron, vol. I, p. 45, footnote 2.

the employer. Following the arrest of the Dantonistes, for example, a report in the Archives Nationales states with confidence the trust the public has in the actions of the Committees of Public Safety and General Security, claiming that, 'The confidence in the Committees ... has reached its zenith and the more society is purged, the greater the confidence grows among good citizens and the more they observe suspect individuals.'⁴⁶ Specific evidence of this confidence is lacking, however, and is in marked contrast to the reports on reactions to alleged bread shortages, which are recorded in very detailed, daily accounts of the rise and fall in current attitudes and fears. This might suggest that faith in the government requires little documented evidence, whereas anxiety or lack of confidence necessitates close monitoring. What remains a constant, however, is the assertion that negativity and lack of public trust – low public morale – is a) unfounded and b) clearly the work of *malveillants*, intent on causing unrest.⁴⁷

For this reason, the reports cannot be read as completely impartial records of the words and deeds of the denizens of the capital, but instead as a reflection of the government's concerns and attitudes towards its people. Because of this, these documents provide compelling evidence of official understanding of rumour and what effect it might have on public opinion. Farge provides compelling evidence that, during the Old Regime, many working for the police were guilty themselves of contributing to rumour:

[T]he police...turned themselves into a mouthpiece for [rumour], carrying the news to the very top of the hierarchy without ... offering the means of assessing it – that was not required. At this level of analysis we can perhaps understand better how ridiculous were their

⁴⁶ AN W124, 18 germinal, l'an II. 'Procès-verbaux de la situation de l'Esprit public. La confiance dans les opérations des Comités du Salut Public et de Sureté Générale est à son comble, et l'on se persuade que les mesures qu'ils viennent de prendre effrayeront enfin les conspirateurs secrets. Plus la société est purgée, plus la confiance réciproque s'établit entre les bons citoyens et plus ils surveillent les gens suspects.'

⁴⁷ See for example, Rapport de Perrière, 8 septembre, 1793, in which he describes the panic caused by false rumours of shortages: 'Une crainte mal fondée se forme tous les jours, au milieu de l'abondance, à la porte des boulangers' (Caron, vol. I, p. 36); 'mais, je le répète encore, il faudrait éclairer le peuple sur ses intérêts, car la disette factice que nous avons éprouvée a fait fermenter quelques têtes' (ibid., p. 42).

attempts to prove or denounce popular fears and credulity and to see to what extent they themselves acted as proprietors, links and relays of the same, thus embodying what they at the same time were denouncing.⁴⁸

This describes one of the paradoxes of reporting on evidence of rumour: that even if the report categorically states that the story *is* a rumour, the rumour is perpetuated simply in the retelling. The police reports that attribute rumour to the work of *malveillants* provide a solution of sorts to this dilemma: the rumour has a source, albeit a nebulous one, and to that source can be attributed a purpose, which is to derail the course of the Revolution by undermining public confidence in the Republic. These rumours, therefore, are often described by the authorities as slander, which allows them simultaneously to report on their existence whilst at the same time negating their power. Rumours about bread shortages, about flour that has been tampered with, of cartloads of bread being dumped into the Seine ⁴⁹ are therefore defined and understood by the authorities as counter-revolutionary tactics rather than as manifestations of a collective anxiety. In April 1793, a debate in the Convention declared that discussing bread shortages was in itself an anti-revolutionary act.⁵⁰ This recognises the damaging effect that such discussions can have on public morale, without addressing the source of the public's anxiety nor the need to assuage it. Well into the following autumn the *observateurs* qualify their reports of concerns about food shortages with the observation that they are greatly exaggerated ('Citizens persisted in staying outside a bakery on the rue Saint-André-des-Arts, even though there was bread on display at a neighbouring bakery;

⁴⁸ Farge, *Fragile Lives*, p. 247.

⁴⁹ *Moniteur Universel*, no. 108, 18 avril, 1793. 'Commune de Paris du 15 avril: Le procureur de la Commune donne lecture d'une lettre du maire, qui annonce que beaucoup de voitures chargées de pain sortent de Paris. Il dénonce ensuite le fait que l'on jette du pain dans la rivière. Des ordres ont été donnés pour faire tendre des filets dans la Seine, afin de vérifier ce fait.'

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 'Les administrateurs des subsistances ont attesté que Paris était approvisionné pour six mois. Il est évident qu'il n'y a que les contre-révolutionnaires et les ennemis du repos public qui puissent chercher à répandre des alarmes à la terreur public.'

there was malice in this obstinacy.')⁵¹ Rumours about food shortages are regarded as a barometer of public opinion but one that is mistaken and misplaced, proof of the work of *malveillants*, rather than indicative of a generalised anxiety among the public during a particularly volatile period in history.⁵² A report of 5 September, 1793, notes how a rumour expresses the public's anxiety, but only in so far as it affects the reputation of the authorities, which are here placed at the heart of a famine plot:

[The people] think that the administrators, hidden under a false mask of patriotism and playing with the health of the people, are looking to get rich by intentionally buying contaminated flour that they'll charge at the same price as that of the best quality.⁵³

That authorities were getting rich at the expense of the people, were eating well while the people starved, or were benefitting from the course of the Revolution while others suffered misfortunes were at the heart of many rumours, both about individuals, and about the government in general. This distrust, familiar under the Old Regime, represented a breakdown in the authorities' relationship with the people and a failure in their representation of them.

Police spies might, in the absence of real news, be tempted to embellish an otherwise mundane occurrence with suggestions of malfeasance, they might interpret events to fit in with a prevailing suspicion or theory, or they might simply report what they felt their superiors wanted to hear: Latour-Lamontagne's report of 15 September, 1793 neatly describes a contented

⁵¹ Caron, vol. I, p. 48. 'Rapport de Perrière, 8 septembre, 1793.' A similar observation was made earlier in which he describes a group outside a bakery as 'un de ces rassemblements qu'une crainte mal fondée forme tous les jours, au milieu de l'abondance, à la porte des boulangers' (ibid., p.42).

⁵² Caron, vol. I, p. 65. 'Rapport de Grivel, 11 septembre, 1793. Quelques malveillants voulaient pourtant inquiéter le peuple sur la distribution de pain qui se ferait aujourd'hui. Ils disaient que le pain manquerait, afin d'inspirer des craintes...' Other culprits blamed for causing fears of bread shortages bread are Pitt, Coburg, nameless aristocrats, etc.

⁵³ Caron, vol. I, p.5. 'Rapport du Perrière, 27 août, 1793. ... il pense que les administrateurs, couverts d'un faux masque de patriotisme et se jouant de la santé même du peuple, ne cherchent qu'à s'enrichir en achetant volontairement des farines corrompues qu'ils font payer comme celles de la meilleure qualité.'

populace on the one hand, whilst on the other indicating the need for continual vigilance against wrongdoers: '*L'esprit public* is generally good, but one cannot take too much care to watch out for those evil wishers who try at every turn to disrupt it.'⁵⁴ The report is simultaneously optimistic while at the same time emphasising the need for the spies' continued employment.

If the reports should be read always with the understanding that they were commissioned for a specific purpose, and therefore will reflect to some degree the concerns of the employer, i.e., the government, there is a further argument to be made for their unreliability, the evidence for which lies in the reports themselves. As Caron notes in his introduction,⁵⁵ they are written in very different prose styles, revealing, to an extent, the specific 'voice' of individual agents. There is no set format to the accounts, and their content is the result of individual choice. Caron quotes a confidential internal report of germinal, year II, outlining the strengths and weaknesses of the various agents.⁵⁶ These range from the exemplary ('Beraud and Latour-Lamontagne: good *observateurs*, having provided many reports advantageous to the Republic') to the weaker but redeemable ('Le Harivel: weak spy, but has a good writing style') to the frankly substandard ('Mercier: ... articles are very difficult to understand due to the structure of his sentences'). Despite the professional demands of the role, therefore, the reports are surprisingly individual, and can also be read as a collection of personal narratives. The frequency with which, for example, Latour-Lamontagne provides a concluding comment, or reflects on the meaning of the day's events, suggests a journalist's eye, providing an editorial stance along the lines of those provided by those more celebrated chroniclers of 18th-century urban life, Louis-Sébastien Mercier and Rétif de la Bretonne.⁵⁷ This conflict between

⁵⁴ Caron, vol. I, p. 110. '*L'esprit public* est généralement bon, mais on ne saurait surveiller avec trop de soin les malintentionnés qui essayent à chaque instant de le pervertir.'

⁵⁵ Caron, vol. I, p. xx.

⁵⁶ Caron, vol. I, p. xx, but originally AN F1A/550.

⁵⁷ To choose but one example, Latour-Lamontagne's observation on a local gambling house concludes with the opinion that it is highly inappropriate for Parisians to be enjoying

style and function provides an extra layer of unreliability when the subject is gossip and hearsay. The overriding impression, then, is not one of factual objectivity, but that these reports may themselves be contributing to the rumours and gossip they are recording. Darnton says of the police archives, 'They are notoriously untrustworthy as a source of information about attitude and behaviour patterns. They provide a record of reported crime, not of actual criminality, and they often reveal more about the views of the police than about those of the public.'⁵⁸ With these caveats in mind, however, these reports contribute to a compelling image of a vibrant, sociable and close-knit society, where outsiders were easily recognized, and unfamiliar behaviour noted.

For the purposes of investigating official attitudes to rumour, however, the views of the police are revealing in unexpected ways. After all, police spies are themselves members of the society they are observing. Their views are undoubtedly framed by the needs, attitudes and opinions of their superiors, as well as their own prejudices and practical needs for employment, but these conditions themselves are revealing about official attitudes to popular communication, to rumour, and to the sense that there is a mass of humanity who are sharing views and ideas in an uncontrolled and possibly uncontrollable way. This last is yet another manifestation of the generalised anxiety provoked by the conspiratorial mindset at the heart of government.

Rumour and collective memory

The power of rumour meant that a whole hotchpotch of culture was in circulation in Paris, made up of snatches of knowledge, truths and half-truths, including a whole mixture of allusions which were called upon according to the needs of the moment.⁵⁹

themselves when good republicans are spilling their blood for the country. ('Que, lorsque le sang des citoyens inonde nos campagnes, verra-t-on régner parmi nous les jeux et les plaisirs, et quand seront étouffés les derniers soupirs des défenseurs de la Patrie par les accents de la joie et de la volupté?' Caron, vol. I, p. 66.)

⁵⁸ Darnton, *Poetry and the Police*, p. 55.

⁵⁹ Arlette Farge and Jacques Revel, *The Vanishing Children of Paris: Rumor and Politics before the French Revolution*, trans. Claudia Miéville (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 117. Also cited Gary Alan Fine, Véronique Campion-Vincent and Chip Heath, eds,

Farge observes that the relationship between rumour and the police under the Old Regime continued under the Revolution; in many ways, rather than helping to combat it, the authorities' attitude to rumour encouraged it to thrive. Reading spy reports of autumn 1793 in parallel with the debates in the National Convention of the same time, a picture begins to emerge of the government's need to monitor and ultimately control not only words, but by extension the beliefs and thoughts they represent, and which might undermine the success of the Revolution. The fact that many popular rumours referred to or relied upon historical precedents made their existence during the Revolution additionally problematic: their existence seemed to suggest a failure by the government to create a new Republic. As Farge describes, these allusions to previous rumours could be called upon when required, and used to reinforce prevailing opinions. The grain shortages of the autumn of 1793, for example, recalled earlier shortages in the eighteenth century, contributing to a whole host of rumours that followed and elaborated upon earlier conspiracy theories relating to famine plots engineered by aristocrats.⁶⁰ The Revolutionary government's solutions to the shortage – criminalising hoarding, and including the General Maximum (which put on a cap on the price of grain) into the Law of Suspects on 29 September 1793 – were understood by the public through the historical prism of these earlier shortages. Caron's collection of reports during the autumn of 1793 reveal popular beliefs that the *maximum* was a plot to starve Paris, and that peasants were hoarding food to sell to *malveillants* offering inflated prices on the black market. These attitudes continue in a long tradition of conspiracy fears about famine plots, and also reinforce and are reinforced by stereotypical notions and mutual suspicions of city and countryside.⁶¹

Rumor Mills: The Social Impact of Rumor and Legend (New Brunswick, NJ and London: AldineTransaction, 2007), p. 224.

⁶⁰ Steven L. Kaplan, 'The Famine Plot Persuasion', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 72, part 3 (1982), pp. 1-79.

⁶¹ See, for example, Caron, vol. I, p. 208, 'Rapport de Beraud' and p. 248, 'Rapport de Roubaud'.

Food supply was not the only recurrent historical theme to be affected by rumour: more recent events could contribute to a new round of hearsay and conjecture. Very fresh memories of the press-fuelled rumours of prison plots that led to the September Massacres in 1792 added weight to a resurgence in belief in a similar plot a year later, as described by Latour-Lamontagne in his report of 18 September: 'They plant the most horrible rumours about the fate of the prisoners, and the unpatriotic newspapers hasten to spread them.'⁶²

When the government exploited the power of rumour as a means to undermine and denigrate its enemies, historical allusions again added plausibility. Baczko's authoritative analysis of the rumour of Robespierre the King,⁶³ which circulated the night of 8-9 Thermidor, illustrates the ways in which existing rumours and conspiracy plots could be called into service to add weight to an otherwise implausible accusation. The night preceding Robespierre's arrest a rumour, started by members of the Convention, was spread via the guards to the sections of Paris and on to the street, that Robespierre was planning to marry the king's daughter and restore the dauphin to the throne. The story, and subsequent belief in that story, corresponded to and took advantage of popular understanding of the behaviour of enemy counter-revolutionaries; for the rumour to take hold, the public had to share a set of assumptions about power, corruption, and the aristocracy. What had begun as rhetorical accusations of tyranny during debates in the Convention (in which Robespierre was described as *un Cateline, un tyran* – very common terms of invective that had become almost generic by this time) became, in the minds of the public, literal tyranny, with

⁶² Caron, vol. I, p.137. 'On sème les bruits les plus horribles sur le sort des prisonniers, et les journaux inciviques se hâtent de les propager.'

⁶³ Bronislaw Baczko, *Ending the Terror: The French Revolution After Robespierre*, trans. Michel Petheram (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). Colin Jones is currently writing a book about 9 Thermidor, investigating the popular response to the fall of Robespierre and questioning historical interpretations of it. See also 'The Overthrow of Maximilien Robespierre and the "Indifference" of the People', *American Historical Review*, vol. 19, no. 3 (2014).

all the concomitant aristocratic symbols and behaviours.

The circular argument, accumulating details from the pornographic literature and *libelles* of the Old Regime, enabled the reputation of the Incorruptible to evolve overnight from one of moral probity to sexual degeneracy. As the rumour of Robespierre-the-king gained momentum, so, too, did additional stories of moral and financial corruption. Following the fall of Robespierre, stories circulated of secret palaces in and around Paris, in which he allegedly held orgies.⁶⁴ Several opportunistic letters in the Archives Nationales accuse Robespierre of financial skulduggery, their authors claiming he owed them money at the time of his execution.⁶⁵ These accusations not only correspond to the puritanical framework of Jacobin discourse, in which the morality of the *bon sans-culotte* is regularly juxtaposed against the depravity of the aristocrat, they also relate to earlier accusations against fallen deputies: suspicions surrounding Danton's accounting and involvement in the East India Company had been used against him prior to his arrest, while, following his execution, Hébert's life story was rewritten to incorporate all manner of perfidy – sexual, financial, moral cowardice, and gluttony – as a further justification for his fate, and served up as popular entertainment to a wide readership for mere pennies.⁶⁶

The Convention and popular rumour

However, it was not only the popular rumours of the street that drew on earlier examples: the government's attitude to rumour was also influenced by historical precedent, refracted through the prism of conspiratorial discourse. Debates in the National Convention in 1793, as reported in the *Moniteur Universel*, regarding public attitudes to recent events, are

⁶⁴ Baczko, *Ending the Terror*, p. 13 ff.

⁶⁵ AN F7/432/2.

⁶⁶ *Procès des conspirateurs Hebert, Ronsin, Vincent et ses complices, condamnés à la peine de mort par le tribunal révolutionnaire le 4 germinal, l'an 2 de la république, et exécuté le même jour; suivi du précis de la vie du Père Duchesne* (Paris: Chez Caillot, l'an 2 de la république [1794]).

characteristic of the government's attitude to rumour. The revolutionary government did not simply dismiss false rumours out of hand; deputies were keenly aware of the need to quash morale-sapping stories or counter-revolutionary propaganda. But it was, in fact, this conflation of these two phenomena – of any and all bad news with a counter-revolutionary agenda – that was characteristic of the Convention's approach to rumour. In the majority of cases, these morale-sapping stories were, to the government, synonymous with counter-revolutionary propaganda. Because of this, they were believed to have been intentionally planted and could, therefore, have a source that could be identified and eradicated. Lack of confidence in the army, for example, was considered by the authorities to be the result of 'les bruits alarmants' spread by 'les ennemis de notre liberté',⁶⁷ rather than an expression of collective anxiety or vulnerability. More generalised anxieties were spread by aristocrats who were purposely exaggerating the situation in Paris to cause panic. Said Barère in a session of 12 March, 1793:

I have already seen an infinite number of plots thwarted: this one will be too. The aristocracy started the campaign in 1793, just like it started the one in 1792. Follow the thread of 1792: the aristocracy tormented the army by causing panic, and today, increasing numbers of denunciations have the same effect. Then they come to Paris to investigate the results of their machinations, and they sow disorder by exaggerating how bad it is.⁶⁸

Attributing public anxiety to the work of *malveillants* provided an explanation for the public's lack of confidence in the Republic that exonerated both the government and the people. It meant that the government's reputation was sullied by those wishing it harm, rather than its own failings, while the people's lack of trust was not a sign of wavering loyalty to their representatives, but of manipulation by unseen forces. Such reasoning acknowledged the existence of popular anxieties and wavering

⁶⁷ *Moniteur Universel*, no. 73, 16 mars, 1793, p. 333. 'Lacroix, séance du 13 mars. J'ai déjà vu une infinité de complots déjoués: celui-ci le sera aussi. L'aristocratie commence la campagne de 1793, comme elle a commencé celle de 1792. En suivant le fil de 1792, elle tourmente l'armée en lui inspirant des terreurs paniques, et aujourd'hui les dénonciations se multiplient pour produire les mêmes effets. Elle vient ensuite à Paris pour examiner le résultat de ses manœuvres, et elle sème le désordre en exagérant les malheurs.'

⁶⁸ *Moniteur Universel*, no. 74, 17 mars, 1793, p. 336.

public morale without having to address their relationship with government activity.

The debates that took place in the Convention during the spring of 1793 provide an interesting case study in the government's attitudes to popular rumour and the increasing need to try to direct and shape popular ideas about the progress of the Revolution. This period saw the factional infighting that was to result in the purging of the moderate Girondins from the Convention. To achieve this, however, required a complex, even paradoxical balancing act, requiring a pillorying of the moderate deputies on the one hand, whilst simultaneously continuing to convey an image of the Convention as a united, reliable and stable body as a whole. The near impossibility of calumniating the moderates to a degree that would make plausible their exclusion from the Convention, whilst at the same time upholding the reputation of the Convention as an institution, recurs frequently within the debates of this period. Infighting is in danger of destroying the reputation of the Convention and also of causing distraction from its main purpose,⁶⁹ whilst in a séance of 24 March, there are calls to punish those who put the reputations of the deputies in jeopardy.⁷⁰

A debate that took place on 17 March, 1793, illustrates the government's recurring concern with its reputation. Barère, soon to be appointed head of the Committee of Public Safety upon its formation in early April, took to the bar to report on the measures debated and proposed by the Committees of Defence and General Security, against the members of the National Guard alleged to have made an 'assassination' attempt on fellow deputy, Léonard

⁶⁹ *Moniteur Universel*, no. 101, 11 avril, 1793, p. 448. 'Séance du 8 avril. Des citoyens invitent la Convention à monter à la hauteur de la dignité, à faire cesser les petites passions qui troublent les délibérations, à rechercher les complices de la trahison de Dumouriez et à les punir'.

⁷⁰ *Moniteur Universel*, no. 85, 26 mars, 1793, p. 381. 'Séance du 24 mars. Dubois-Crancé: Il faut punir les personnes qui peignent les membres de la Convention comme des assassins.' Ironically, he included the *Moniteur Universel* in this most recent denunciation, claiming it wrote that 'la Convention avait indiqué deux séances du soir pour égorger les citoyens.'

Bourdon in Orleans.⁷¹ (Bourdon, who was to acquire a reputation as terrorist and *buveur de sang* throughout his Revolutionary career, was implicated in the September 1792 massacre of prisoners transferred to Versailles under his authority.) In the course of the speech, Barère called attention to the familiar enemies of the revolution: ‘des prêtres, ennemis irréconciliables de la République’, ‘le fanatisme’, ‘les conspirateurs’, the counter-revolutionaries in the Vendée. And yet despite this evidence of conspirators ‘who walk about freely in all *départements* of Brittany’ the government remained divided on the question of counter-revolution:

One part of the Assembly believes and has reason to believe we are in the middle of a Revolution; the other doesn't. From these two very disparate opinions result internal divisions, and enmity between those who are accused of an exaggerated patriotism, and those that the Revolution seems to drag in its wake.⁷²

These divisions in the government and the dangers to the progress of the Revolution – not only of factional infighting in itself, but in the appearance of that infighting to the country at large – is at the heart of Barère's speech. And yet, in a refrain that will become increasingly familiar, news of these very real divisions within the government and the wider public's familiarity with and belief in them was presented not as a result of legitimate news and a growing political awareness but the result, instead, of calumny, of a slandering of the political body: ‘this Assembly, so slandered, represented to the people as though torn apart by divisions, as though incapable of doing good.’⁷³ Yet again, perceived public alienation from the government was attributed to an external force manipulating popular opinion.

⁷¹ *Moniteur Universel*, no 80, 21 mars, 1793, p. 248. ‘Suite à la séance du 17 mars.’

⁷² *Ibid.* ‘Une partie de l'Assemblée se croit et a raison de se croire en pleine révolution; l'autre ne s'y croit pas. De ces deux dispositions très disparates résultent des divisions intestines, des inimitiés entre ceux qu'on accuse d'exagération dans leurs patriotisme, et ceux que la révolution semble traîner à la suite.’

⁷³ *Ibid.* ‘[C]ette Assemblée qu'on a tant calomnié, qu'on a représenté au peuple comme déchirée par des divisions, comme incapable de faire du bien.’

As part of a policy to combat damaging rumours and counter-revolutionary plots, then, Barère reiterated the importance of communication and ‘instruction révolutionnaire’ in order to change attitudes and introduce a collective state of mind conducive to ‘liberty and the Republic’. By agreeing to these proposals, the Convention would have begun the process of restoring its reputation.⁷⁴ According to Barère, the challenge and the solution facing the Convention were one and the same: it should issue a short and energetic address to the people, reassuring them of the state of the Revolution and the health of the government. These oft-repeated exhortations to inform the public and to direct that information – ultimately to indoctrinate – revealed an underlying anxiety that news and information (or perhaps misinformation) was ever mutable and uncontrollable; that running in tandem and quickly overtaking any official missive was the malevolent and many-tongued *on me l’a dit*.

Earlier that month, Lacroix made a speech on the importance of speed to accurate communication, with particular reference to the difficulty in imparting news to the army. This again demonstrates how the urgent need to communicate official statements existed simultaneously with the belief that no matter how quickly these documents were issued they were always be outrun by hearsay:

The enemies of our freedom, and thus the enemies of the Republic, are spreading alarming rumours about the state of our armies. They are based on news we haven’t yet received, that the minister hasn’t yet issued. I ask that the Convention tasks one of its Committees with establishing a courier by which we can maintain regular correspondence with the army.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Ibid. ‘Dans un moment où les ennemis s’agitent dans tous les sens, et parviennent malheureusement à tromper le peuple, il faut que la Convention prenne des mesures pour déjouer leurs complots. Je demande qu’une Adresse courte et énergique soit faite au peuple français, relativement à l’état révolutionnaire où il se trouve maintenant. Je demande en outre que l’Assemblée s’occupe d’une instruction révolutionnaire, celle qui doit avoir pour objet de changer nos idées, nos opinions anciennes, et d’établir la morale qui convient à la liberté et à la République.’

⁷⁵ *Moniteur Universel*, no. 73, 14 mars, 1793, p. 333. ‘Les ennemis de notre liberté, par conséquent les ennemis de la république, ont circulé des bruits alarmants sur la situation de nos armées. Ils se fondent sur ce que nous n’avons pas reçu de nouvelles, que le ministre n’en a point apporté. Je demande que la Convention charge l’un de ses Comités de présenter

A fellow deputy agreed, reasserting the importance of a correspondence that is 'fidèle et rapide', whilst another stressed the importance of ensuring the trustworthiness of the couriers themselves. The desire to control the physical chain of communication by ensuring its speed, accuracy and frequency is a rational counterpoint to the nebulous, intangible and untraceable medium of rumour. During that same session, Marat raised the issue of what would become an insurmountable difficulty: the presence of the soldiers themselves. He urged their swift departure from the capital, acknowledging that their presence caused unrest in the city.⁷⁶

Contemporary memoirs reinforce the idea that news spread more quickly by word of mouth than through official missives or personal letters – although its accuracy often left something to be desired. Indeed, the picaresque memoir of journeyman glazier and sans-culotte Jacques-Louis Ménétra includes an anecdote illustrating the speed by which news can spread and be transformed by word of mouth, returning to its original source in a completely new guise. He describes the swift progress of a rumour relating to his accidental fall into a well: in the short time it took him to be retrieved, the neighbourhood was abuzz with rumours that he had attempted suicide.⁷⁷ Ménétra's story was, on this occasion, limited to the immediate faubourg Saint-Antoine area of Paris where he worked; Ménétra himself provided evidence to the contrary and so the rumour was quashed. Arthur Young, during his travels in the French provinces in the late 1780s, described the difficulty in overcoming hearsay and speculation the farther one moved from direct source of information, the cities, complaining of the prevalence of local dialect over French ('not one in sixty speaks French'), and the continuing influence of local customs over national news ('Would not one newspaper

un moyen pour établir des estafettes par le moyen duquel vous pourrez entretenir avec nos armées une correspondance.'

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Jacques-Louis Ménétra, *Journal of My Life*, with an introduction and commentary by Daniel Roche, foreword by Robert Darnton, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 176.

enlighten them more than score of priests?'). When they are to be found, he places great confidence in the influence of newspapers:

[T]here is a *salle de lecture* ... where I found several newspapers and journals ... they tell me also, that the people here are great politicians, and attend the arrival of the courier with impatience. The consequence is, there have been no riots; the most ignorant will always be the readiest for mischief.⁷⁸

While there is no question that Ménétra's tale would have been embellished for the sake of entertainment, it does illustrate the prevailing idea that speech is unstoppable, wayward and prone to distortion, intentional or otherwise. Young's observations support this, and although one should question his faith in the trustworthiness of newspapers, his confidence echoes that of the Revolutionary government, who feared the level of distortion in news spread by word of mouth, and tried to corral it.⁷⁹ That they were not able to do so was, they concluded, the work of *malveillants* rather than the natural consequence of a combination of geographical distance, human error, curiosity, misunderstanding and preconception.

Rumour and official conspiracy plots

The assumption that rumours had been intentionally planted and must, therefore, ultimately be controlled and eradicated through legislation, is part of a larger conspiratorial mentality that framed much Revolutionary discourse and thinking. Typical of discussions about rumour is a debate that took place in March 1793, which described the quest to discover the origins of the campaign against the Girondins. Echoing the imagery of Boussemart's sinuous hydra, the story is described as having an almost physical entity, which, like a pernicious weed, can be traced back to its source and rooted out: 'One must either deny there is a conspiracy, or acknowledge that here is

⁷⁸ Arthur Young, *Arthur Young's Travels in France during the years 1787, 1788, 1789* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1909), pp. 246, 225, 234.

⁷⁹ Pétion's calls that denunciations be made in writing and signed were just one attempt to halt the pernicious effect of insinuation and gossip on reputation. See *Moniteur Universel*, no. 104, 14 avril 1793, p. 465.

the thread; that such are the various links in the chain, and that it would be impossible to arrive at the end without having passed through the others.’⁸⁰

The government’s attitude to rumour is shaped and influenced by the discourse of conspiracy underpinning much Jacobin rhetoric.⁸¹ Rumours are seen to be negative (and negative, unconfirmed stories are often dismissed as mere rumour), and damaging to the Revolution and to public morale. The view that every rumour has a point of origin, intentionally planted and necessarily malign, is part of a larger political culture of conspiracy. Where no specific source can be identified, rumour is attributed to *malveillants*. This serves a dual purpose in that *malveillants* are both scapegoats (albeit unspecific ones) and also provide a rational explanation for an otherwise apparently irrational phenomenon. In this view, a rumour is not the manifestation of a collective concern, interest or anxiety, which grows organically and ‘snowballs’ as it gathers momentum. To the Revolutionary government, a rumour is one more weapon in the counter-revolutionary arsenal. It can be planted, like a malevolent seed; it will become rooted within the public’s mind and poison *l’esprit public*. A rumour, therefore, is only acknowledged if it is negative. Furthermore, as far as the government is concerned, if it is deleterious to public confidence, it must be intentional. Underlying government directives to inform and to educate in order to dispel worries is, whether explicitly stated or not, the belief that rumours are spread by enemies of the Revolution attempting to upset public equilibrium; that rumours might be a symptom rather than a cause of a general concern or malaise is not part of the Revolutionary mindset.

⁸⁰ *Moniteur Universel*, no 78, 19 mars, 1793, p. 352 ‘Il faut ou nier le complot ou convenir que tel en est le fil; que tels sont les divers anneaux de la chaine, et qu’il était impossible d’arriver au dernier sans avoir parcouru tous les autres.’

⁸¹ Recent studies concerning the role of conspiracy among the principle revolutionary participants include: Peter R. Campbell, Thomas E. Kaiser and Marisa Linton, eds. *Conspiracy in the French Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); Timothy Tackett, ‘Conspiracy Obsession in a Time of Revolution: French Elites and the Origins of the Terror, 1789–1792.’ *American Historical Review*, vol. 105, no. 3 (2000); Marisa Linton ‘The Stuff of Nightmares: Plots, Assassinations and Duplicity in the Mental World of the Jacobin Leaders, 1793–1794’ in *Experiencing the French Revolution*, ed. David Andress (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2013). See also Introduction, pp. 31-34.

The reasons for this relate both to Old Regime practices and to Revolutionary conspiracy discourse. Under the Old Regime, the covert methods by which political advantage or favour was granted at court created a climate of intrigue in which innuendo was both a powerful tool and potential weapon. Such secretive practices were antithetical to Republican transparency and openness, and thus rumour, in both theory and practice, was associated with the Old Regime and counter-revolution: rumour as a general phenomenon was an Old Regime tactic, and individual rumours were considered to be communicating a counter-revolutionary agenda. Boussemart's *On me l'a dit* makes explicit reference to these aristocratic antecedents, reinforced by classical imagery of the snake and the hydra that also came to symbolise aristocratic perfidy. In attempting to police rumour, however, the authorities relied on the Old Regime system of spies and surveillance, which served to recreate a climate of suspicion that ran counter with the Republican goals of freedom of expression, openness and *franchise*. Further implicating the authorities was the fact that rumour was employed by deputies to denigrate their rivals; little wonder, then, that the authorities were suspicious of the origins of rumours and their power to destabilise public equilibrium when there was evidence of their use among their own cohorts.

Finally, the desire to police rumour reflects larger concerns about the need to channel and direct information, which was exacerbated by the unprecedented growth in newsprint. The goal of the government to control the content and spread of information in order to produce an authorised version of the Revolution reflects larger concerns relating to the authorities' relationship with its people, one that ultimately denied them their own ideas, misunderstandings, concerns and opinions. The next chapter will examine the ways in which informal channels of communication rivalled official discourse as sources of information, and the tension that arose from the co-existence of these sources.

Chapter II

‘Un bruit de frayeur se répand’: Informal Communication Networks and the Creation of Rumour¹

Chapter I examined the government’s perception of rumour as a phenomenon that could be controlled, either through manipulating or exploiting rumour for its own political purposes, or by seeking to identify its source in order to eradicate it entirely. Jacobin rhetoric, with its concern with the covert, with ‘masks’ and metaphoric ‘poisons’, approached rumour and the causes of rumour with the same conspiratorially informed mentality.² The pamphlet by ‘Citoyen avocat’ Boussemart, *On me l’a dit*,³ identified the corrosive power of rumour and likened its ability to spread anxiety and to undermine the Revolution as comparable to ‘the last remaining aristocrat’. At the same time, his metaphor of the many-headed hydra to represent unsubstantiated rumour and use of conspiratorial rhetoric arguably contributed to the culture of suspicion that was so entrenched in Jacobin politics.

However, by viewing the existence of rumour solely as a product of conspiracy, both the authorities and the radical press ignored the importance of the informal communication networks that existed in close-knit communities, either through idle speech and gossip, such as that shared at the market, tavern or workshop,⁴ or the more private exchanges shared in

¹ Célestin Guittard de Floriban, *Journal de Célestin Guittard de Floriban, bourgeois de Paris sous la Révolution. 1791-1796* (Paris: Editions France-Empire, 1974), p.173.

² The significance of conspiracy in Jacobin discourse has been discussed in the previous chapter. See, for example, Peter R. Campbell, Thomas E. Kaiser, and Marisa Linton, eds. *Conspiracy in the French Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007) for discussion of the Jacobins’ preoccupation with conspiracy.

³ L.R.J, Boussemart, *On me l’a dit* (Paris, 1790).

⁴ For the social dynamics of the tavern see Thomas Brennan, *Public Drinking and Popular Culture in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988); David Garrioch, *Neighbourhood and Community in Paris: 1740–1790* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Matthieu Lecoutre, *Ivresse et ivrognerie dans la France moderne*

letter writing. Certain groups of people, too, seemed to be natural conduits of rumour: domestic servants were obvious candidates, in that they occupied an ambiguous position somewhere between household and street, and it was uncertain where their loyalties lay.⁵ The itinerant street pedlar – the *colporteur* – was another ambiguous figure in the city's streets; selling newsprint but also capable of commenting upon it, the pedlar could be seen both as a representative of the newspapers he sold and, as will be discussed below, an independent source of information himself. In addition, his itinerant life meant his bond with the community was potentially weak, and certainly suspect. All of these pathways allow room for an ungovernable space in which conjecture, misunderstanding, ignorance and fear contribute to the creation of rumour.

Les Cris de Paris: the role of the colporteur in the transmission of rumour

The *colporteur* – the itinerant vendor – was a ubiquitous part of the urban streetscape. Selling anything and everything portable, from printed material such as song sheets, illustrations, pamphlets and newspapers; to food, clothing, trinkets, and charlatans' cures, and on to more valuable items, the *colporteur* was both a familiar character, whose route and habits were known to the local community, and a discrete, autonomous figure, often originating from and living outside the community in which he or she hawked their wares. Not all pedlars were low status, as David Hopkin, among others, describes, but in the popular imagination the pedlar was most often associated with the vagabond and criminal.⁶ The *Encyclopédie*

(Presses universitaires de Rennes/Presses universitaires Francois-Rabelais de Tours, 2011).

⁵ See, for example, Sarah Maza, *Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century France: The Uses of Loyalty* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983).

⁶ David M. Hopkin, *Soldier and Peasant in French Popular Culture, 1766-1870* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Royal Historical Society/Boydell Press, 2003), p. 60, describes the different categories of pedlar, from those who were essentially beggars, to those who dealt in luxury items and enjoyed considerable status in their own communities. Laurence Fontaine, *History of Pedlars in Europe*, trans. Vicki Whitticker (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996) also describes the different types of travelling merchants, from the 'half-starved' to the 'merchant pedlars who ... could travel by cart and who opened shops' (p. 73).

describes colporteurs as ‘people of bad faith who roam from town to town’, and it is not difficult to see how, even for legitimate vendors of luxury goods, this suggestion of rootlessness, of the foreign, made pedlars figures of both fascination and suspicion. The more humble pedlar, existing simultaneously within the local neighbourhood yet not belonging to it, was distrusted both by the community and the authorities.

Most of the literature examining the role of the colporteur in eighteenth-century France focuses on the figure’s marginality, describing how the transience of colporteurs and their position on the fringes of society made them a target for the police: the fact of their existence suggested an ungovernability and a threat to an established order that necessitated licenses and permits.⁷ Daniel Roche describes the authorities’ concern with the *population flottante* in general, ranging from the lowly *gens sans aveu*, to the inhabitants of the *maison garnie*, illustrating the official view that anyone without a firm mooring in their community was suspected to be liable to destabilize it.⁸

In the public mind, beggars and pedlars were one and the same, with a host of superstitions arising around the beggar. While Hopkin describes the pedlar as a kind of street entertainer, mesmerising his audience with

⁷ For studies of neighbourhood communities and *les marginaux*, see Richard Cobb, *The Police and the People: French Popular Protest 1789–1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970); Arlette Farge, *Vivre dans la rue à Paris au XVIIIème siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), *The Vanishing Children of Paris: Rumor and Politics before the French Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991) and *Fragile Lives: Violence, Power and Solidarity in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993); Alan Forrest, *The French Revolution and the Poor* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981); David Garrioch, *Neighbourhood and Community and The Making of Revolutionary Paris* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002); Olwen Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France 1750–1789* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974); Jeffrey Kaplow, *The Names of Kings: the Parisian Laboring Poor in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1972).

⁸ Daniel Roche, Emile Ducoudray and Raymonde Monnier, *Atlas de la Révolution française*, vol II, *Routes et communications* (Paris: Editions de l’Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 2000), p. 28, describes how, in 1791, 80% of the population of *maison garnie* were young men, half of whom were under thirty and only 15% of whom were originally from Paris. This rootless, family-less population of mainly manual workers was kept under constant surveillance by the authorities. Arlette Farge, *Fragile Lives*, p.132, too, emphasises the importance of each member of the community having a legitimate place in the social hierarchy and the authorities’ concern with those whose position was precarious.

brightly coloured wares, painted backcloths and a showman's patter, Olwen Hufton describes a related but more sinister set of beliefs, in which the beggar was believed to have malignant powers, able to disfigure unborn children or cause miscarriages with an evil eye.⁹ That the hard life of the transient pedlar might take its physical toll, too, was also cause for suspicion: scars or a limp might indicate that the pedlar was a former convict, again reinforcing the relation between transience, peddling and criminality.¹⁰ Richard Cobb describes how this equation with criminals was not unwarranted, however, as thieves regularly 'disguised themselves as pedlars' to sell stolen goods in neighbouring areas, and were often recognized as such by the communities in which they appeared.¹¹

Rétif de la Bretonne, whose own career, based as it was on surreptitious observations of Paris nightlife, also placed him among the community but separate from it,¹² was among many to associate the pedlar's mobility with social marginality: 'I've always hated all pedlars: they are useless good-for-nothings, *des misérables*, without scruples.' Describing the vendors calling out news relating to a public execution he complained that 'our vile pedlars, with their barbaric joy and running commentary, are contrary to all that is humane'.¹³ To Rétif, the raucous comments accompanying the executions at the place des Grèves contributed to a carnivalesque atmosphere that dehumanized the spectators.

The belief in the detrimental effect of colporteurs' commentary on the public had troubled the authorities for centuries: an edict of 1669 stated that those authorised to sell printed material were also permitted to announce news of

⁹ Hopkin, *Soldier and Peasant*, p. 65; Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France*, p. 213.

¹⁰ Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France*, pp. 221–6.

¹¹ Richard Cobb, *Reactions to the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 206.

¹² *Les Nuits de Paris* is appropriately subtitled *Le Spectateur nocturne*.

¹³ Rétif de la Bretonne, *Les Nuits de Paris* (vols I–VII. London and Paris: 1788–89), vol. I, pp. 88 and 125.

public interest, such as royal edicts, criminal sentences, executions, etc., but revealed the authorities' concern that the entertainment value of one might adversely affect the serious nature of the other.¹⁴ Elsewhere, Rétif concluded an anecdote relating to the smuggling of contraband books by a pedlar with a dismissive 'It's nothing to do with me. Anyway, this pedlar was a police spy.'¹⁵ This cursory comment is revealing in what it says about attitudes towards both pedlars and spies. That a pedlar is also a police spy is so commonplace that to the writer it warrants no further explanation. It also illustrates the tendency, discussed in Chapter I, for spies to be identified as such within the community.

Rétif's disregard for the *colporteur* not only reflects the wider consensus that the street vendor was synonymous with criminal activity, it also illustrates one of the ways in which the *colporteur* was central to the transmission of rumours. Perceived as both criminal and spy, he was simultaneously a victim and beneficiary of the authorities, evoking both pity and suspicion. In addition to this physical presence, the street vendor had an oral presence – even when his physical body was hidden from view, his cries and slogans echoed through the streets, particularly when his livelihood depended on the selling and transmission of printed material. I will examine the influence on rumour of the *colporteur* as a physical presence first, and then illustrate the ways in which the oral transmission of news was affected by the *colporteur* and the ways in which he peddled his goods.

For Rétif, the *colporteur* was the lowest of the low: vile, immoral, barbaric, and both smuggler and spy. Because of this, the *colporteur* occupied a doubly hated position: his perceived criminal activities put him outside the realm of law-abiding society, while his suspected co-operation with the authorities separated him further from a community that itself had an

¹⁴ *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, etc.* (University of Chicago: ARTFL Encyclopédie Project, Spring 2013) 'Colporteurs', vol. 3, p. 660.

¹⁵ Rétif de la Bretonne, *Nuits de Paris*, vol. 1, p. 77.

uneasy relationship with the police.¹⁶ Pedlars were thus well placed to both observe and report on rumours, but also to cause them. David Garrioch describes how the daily cycle of activities in Paris neighbourhoods in the eighteenth century was so familiar to its denizens that the route and habits of local pedlars would be known to the community; any diversion from these habits could be cause for conjecture. This is born out by a denunciation in floréal year II of an elderly woman vendor suspected of hoarding butter. A neighbour's suspicions were raised when he spotted the woman carrying a large basket outside of her usual location, on a day in which she did not normally go to market. So familiar was her routine that any deviation from it was immediately considered suspect.¹⁷

Not all contemporary accounts of the colporteur were as derogatory as Rétif's. Louis-Sébastien Mercier, perhaps because of his own experiences with the authorities, shows more sympathy, describing pedlars not in collusion with the police, but targeted by them for what he considered, in essence, a public service:

The spies wage war above all on the pedlars, a species who sell the only good books that one can still read in France, and which, naturally therefore, are prohibited. They are treated terribly; the police are always on the trail of these poor creatures, who don't even know what it is they are selling ... They go to the Bastille and even the pillory for these absurd pamphlets that will be forgotten the next day... Thus do prominent people, whose very position gives birth to these comments, get their revenge ...¹⁸

¹⁶ The distrust of the police by working communities is frequently observed by historians of the eighteenth century, among those David Andress, Richard Cobb, Robert Darnton, Arlette Farge, David Garrioch and Olwen Hufton.

¹⁷ APP, Section des Droits de l'Homme, 5 floréal, an II. 'Il y a environ un quart d'heure à la croisée [le témoin] a vu une marchande de beurre qu'il connait s'installer ordinairement place des Droits de l'Homme près de la rue de Berry'. What is striking, too, about this report, is the speed with which the witness drew his conclusions about the alleged criminality of his neighbour and alerted the authorities.

¹⁸ Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Tableau de Paris* (Amsterdam: 1782), vol. 1, p. 96. 'Les mouchards font surtout la guerre aux colporteurs, espèce d'hommes qui font trafic des seuls bons livres qu'on puisse encore lire en France, et conséquemment prohibés. On les maltraite horriblement; tous les limiers de la police poursuivent ces malheureux qui ignorent ce qu'ils vendent ... On les met à la Bastille pour de futiles brochures qui seront oubliées le lendemain, et quelquefois au carcan.'

According to Mercier, the pedlars themselves, although forced to sell prohibited books through financial necessity, were nonetheless performing a public good. Ignorant of the content of the material they sold, they suffered the authorities' punishments, risking imprisonment even for ephemeral material. Mercier continued by describing how pedlars of contraband publications are scapegoats, punished by a cowardly system that refused to target the author for fear of public outcry.¹⁹ Despite article II of the Declaration of the Rights of Man ensuring a free press, as early as July 1789 an ordinance forbidding the selling of anonymous works meant that colporteurs (and printers, if they could be indentified) bore the brunt for publications that that had no identifiable author.²⁰

Mercier's assumption that colporteurs were wholly ignorant of the content of their wares and thus could not be held responsible for false statements does not tell the whole story, however. Pedlars were first and foremost salesmen. To differentiate themselves from a rival, they would need an enticing cry, a scandalous statement or some other way of differentiating themselves from competing vendors. *Les Rues de Paris*, a small volume of 1724 describing the street cries of the many vendors a visitor to Paris might expect to encounter, suggests a cacophonous streetscape in which numerous pedlars vied with one another for the attention of the crowd, with newspaper sellers just one among a vast array of pedlars of all types of

¹⁹ Ibid. 'Ces pauvres colporteurs, qui font circuler les plus rares productions de génie, sans savoir lire, qui servent à leur insu la liberté publique pour gagner un morceau de pain, portent toute la mauvaise humeur des hommes en place, qui s'attaquent rarement à l'auteur, dans la crainte de soulever contre eux le cri public, et de paraître odieux.'

²⁰ The reality was that, even from the earliest days of the Revolution, the struggle to accommodate the rights of a free press with the laws of calumny meant that all those involved in the print trade – writers, printers, vendors – could be subject to prosecution if the content fell foul of the authorities. The ordinance by the Commune of Paris of 24 July 1798, which prohibited the selling of anonymous works referred also to 'les imprimés calomnieux, propres à produire une fermentation dangereuse.' See, for example, Charles Walton, *Policing Public Opinion in the French Revolution: The Culture of Calumny and the Problem of Free Speech* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). In July 1791, Jean-Sylvain Bailly, in his position as mayor, signed an ordinance to arrest those found selling incendiary writing, citing specifically *L'Ami du peuple*. AN AF/II/48, doc. 43.

goods.²¹ Their trade was information, and they had to ensure that this information was worth paying for. Contemporary newspapers typically had no headlines, but had a brief summary of the day's news on the front page, as exemplified by the *Père Duchesne's* Grande Joie, or, more typically, Grande Colère.²² Versions of these summaries would be called out by the vendors to sell their papers. Mercier, therefore, was mistaken when he assumed that vendors in general did not know what they were selling: the publication's content was the factor that would differentiate their goods from a rival's and they would need to be aware of it to sell it successfully.

That is not to say that all vendors were literate. A vendor arrested in Paris in year II for calling out false news not described in his paper claimed in his defence that he could not read and was only repeating what he had been led to believe was contained within.²³ Other vendors were perfectly aware that they were making claims that were not within the paper, but were prepared to do so for commercial reasons, as the financial reality of a newspaper vendor was a risky one. As David Garrioch among others has described, newspaper sellers had to pay in advance for their printed material, with any stock remaining unsold at the end of the day representing a financial loss to themselves. An arrest of a newspaper distributor and two pedlars on 28 June 1791 for selling 'une libelle calomnieuse et incendiaire' reveals the reality of newspaper distribution. The distributor, one 'sieur' Nicole, claimed in his defence that he had been waiting for two days to receive the printed material. When it finally arrived, his premises were over-run with pedlars desperate to get hold of the material for which they had already paid. In order to avoid an altercation, he claimed, he had been forced to distribute

²¹ *Les Rues de Paris, avec les cris que l'on entend journellement dans les rues de la ville et la chanson des dits cris. Suivi d'un état de la dépense qui peut se faire en cette ville* (Troyes: S.D [1724]).

²² See Jeremy Popkin, *Revolutionary News: The Press in France 1789-1799* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1990), p. 11.

²³ APP Amis de la Patrie, 27 ventôse, an II.

the text without having the chance to read it first, thus inadvertently disseminating a *libelle* against the Parisian army.²⁴

Nicole's defence for selling incendiary material did not convince the authorities, who sentenced him to three days in prison, and two of the vendors to twenty-four hours each. The incident, however, is revealing about the business of selling papers: having paid in advance the vendors were desperate for the goods – any goods – and felt entitled to them.

Those vendors who pleaded ignorance when held to account by the authorities may have emphasised or even exaggerated their illiteracy out of self-defence, hoping for a sympathetic hearing and lenient sentence. One vendor, Madeleine Charlotte Carpentier,²⁵ arrested 27 floréal, year II for selling the incendiary pamphlet, *Peuple réveille-toi*, had had a fairly typical background that led to her selling newsprint. Described in the police report as 'a most unfortunate woman who has lost her husband and her fortune ... obliged, for survival, to sell the newspapers that led to her imprisonment, she knows neither the author, nor what she is selling'.²⁶ She was unusual in being allowed to take newspapers on credit. It was perhaps this detail, along with her insistence that, as a woman, she didn't understand politics, which led to her acquittal – until the next time she was apprehended for selling the

²⁴ AN AF/II/48 doc. 29. 'Que la diligence étant ... arrivée tard ce jour-là, tous les colporteurs étant réunis dans sa maison ... & ayant le plus grand besoin de vendre, plusieurs avaient pris plus que leur compte ordinaire du journal; que six d'entre eux, qui avaient déjà payé, ne pouvant en obtenir leur part, insistèrent pour avoir d'autres marchandises, en disant: 'Que voulez-vous que nous fassions? Nous n'avons plus de pain; il y a deux jours que nous n'avons rien vendu, il nous faut aujourd'hui la marchandise; que le sieur Nicole voulait en vain leur rendre leur argent; qu'il fut forcé, pour ... éviter les bruits & les insultes, de ... leur délivrer [ladite feuille], ce qui le met dans l'impossibilité absolue d'en prendre lecteur.'

²⁵ AN F7/4775/46 dossier Vignon, also cited Dominique Godineau, *Citoyennes tricoteuses: Les femmes du peuple à Paris pendant la Révolution française* (Aix-en-Provence: Alinéa, 1988).

²⁶ Ibid. '[F]emme des plus infortunées qui a perdu son mari et sa fortune ... elle a été obligée pour subsister de vendre les journaux qui lui ont fait incarcérer, elle ne connaît ni l'auteur ni celle qui la colportait.'

same publication.²⁷ Dominique Godineau notes that this was a very effective defence and was often used by highly politicised women to avoid prison. It does not necessarily indicate, therefore, that this woman was as ignorant as she claimed.²⁸

The consequences of needing to sell papers at all costs was not lost on contemporaries, as illustrated by Mercier's evocative description of competing street cries, which led to a veritable cacophony of misinformation and false news. Even allowing for journalistic embellishment on his part, Mercier's description suggested an ever-escalating torrent of headlines, in which the fervour of the street vendor transformed supposition into fact, intention into deed:

The vendors can be heard from daybreak. Proposals for decrees are transformed into actual decrees, and an entire neighbourhood debates and worries over something that hasn't even taken place.

Victories and conspiracies, battles and rebellions, the death of generals, the arrival of ambassadors, all of this is shouted out in a great jumble. For the sake of two *sous* the journalist kills off someone who is perfectly well.²⁹

Although he did not name it explicitly, Mercier was clearly describing the way in which the cries of the colporteurs contribute to rumour. The passage continues by describing how legislation and politics are at the mercy of these town criers, who mangle names, take expressions out of context, and whose sense of geography is so inaccurate that events are misattributed to completely different locations, causing unnecessary distress.³⁰ This

²⁷ Ibid. '[E]tant femme et ne connaissant point la politique, j'ai cru pouvoir vendre [le journal] sans danger'.

²⁸ Godineau, *Citoyennes tricoteuses*, p. 23.

²⁹ Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Le Nouveau Paris*, p. 111. 'Dès le matin on entend crier les journaux. De simples projets de décrets sont transformés en décrets, et tout un quartier raisonne ou s'épouvante de ce qui ne doit pas avoir lieu ... Les victoires et les complots, les batailles et les révoltes, la mort des généraux, l'arrivée des ambassadeurs, tout cela se crie pêle-mêle. Le journaliste a tué pour deux sols celui qui se porte bien.'

³⁰ Ibid. 'La législation, la politique et la diplomatie sont à la merci de ces crieurs qui défigurent les noms, dénaturent les expressions, et font dans les carrefours un historique où

'gibberish' is mulled over by its audience as they retire for bed; by the morning, it will be elaborated upon by the local gossips (symbolised by Mercier as the local wigmakers) and later transmitted around the country in private letters:

And so all this murky news, arising from the most absurd ignorance ... is gathered up and posted off in letters to the provinces, where it circulates as fact, having arisen from nothing but the street cries of Paris.³¹

It is striking that Mercier did not identify rumour by name, and yet he was clearly describing one of the ways in which rumours can spread: as part of an organic process that is a combination of ignorance, gossip and fear. He traced the rumour to its apparent source – the pedlar – but from there described a fluid movement that spread outwards from the city to the provinces, a process examined in detail in Georges Lefebvre's *Great Fear*.³² For the Revolutionary authorities, identifying the source of a rumour was like the quest for the Grail, representing a mission to eradicate it at the root, in order to restore harmony to the Republic. Mercier implicitly shared the belief that a rumour has a tangible and identifiable beginning by attributing it to the inaccurate cries of the pedlars, but he did not share the authorities' conspiratorial view that the rumour had been started intentionally and spread out of some evil design. Mercier emphasised the role of the press/street criers in providing the initial spark to ignite the rumour, but from there the role of gossip (in the form of the *perruquier*) the subconscious ('en couchant'), and the writing of letters to locations outside Paris all came in to play. The passage concludes with an observation on the impossibility of

la géographie est tellement bouleversée que le nord et le midi sont confondus, et que les affaires de Rome se trouvent à Ratisbonne.'

³¹ Ibid. 'Le peuple, qui prête l'oreille à cet épouvantable galimatias, le commente encore en se couchant; et Dieu sait de quelle manière le lendemain la narration des perruquiers devient instructive. Tel ramasse tous ces bruits fangeux, le confie à la poste, et toutes les absurdités que le rêve le plus extravagant et le plus antipolitique pourrait créer, circulent dans les petits bourgs des départements, et n'ont d'autres fondement que les criaileries des rues de Paris.'

³² Georges Lefebvre, *The Great Fear of 1789: Rural Panic in Revolutionary France* (London: NLB, 1973).

silencing these voices – ‘it would be easier to stifle sound than these people.’³³

A report from one of the vast network of Paris *observateurs* described the same phenomenon in ventôse year II, complaining that women newspaper vendors in the gardens of the former Palais-Royal were agitating crowds by spreading news of the Republican army’s recapturing of Valenciennes. On consulting the actual paper it was revealed that the news referred to the arrival of reports still awaiting confirmation.

Yesterday in the heart of the Jardin d’égalité, the women were creating a sensation by calling out at the top of their lungs: ‘News on the capture of Valenciennes by the Republican army.’ Everyone fell on the latest issue of the *Journal du Matin de la République française et du Tribunal révolutionnaire*, to find out the important details. All that was written: ‘Yesterday, we were assured that couriers arrived announcing the recapture of Valenciennes by the Republic’s troops.’³⁴

This illustrates precisely the kind of exaggerated summary of content that Mercier complained of. The paper referred not to the actual event, but to correspondence related to the event; the vendors had condensed and simplified this to mean the event itself. Unlike Mercier, however, the writer of the report did not see this as the natural consequence of haste or commercial imperative (or, indeed, wishful thinking), but evidence of a more sinister and orchestrated plot to mislead the public, one which started with the creators of the newspapers themselves, and was further exacerbated by

³³ Mercier, *Le Nouveau Paris*, p. 112. ‘Vainement a-t-on voulu imposer le silence à ces commentateurs. Ils se prétendent être des héraults privilégiés: on enchaînerait plutôt le son que leurs personnes.’

³⁴ Caron, *Paris Pendant la Terreur: Rapports des Agents Secrets du Ministre de l’Intérieur Publiés pour la Société d’Histoire Contemporaine*. (Paris: Librairie Alphonse Picard et Fils, 1910), vol. V, p. 410. ‘Rapport de Hanriot. Hier dans l’enceinte du Jardin d’égalité, des femmes ont excité la plus vive sensation en criant à toute voix: Nouvelles sur la reprise de Valenciennes par les troupes de la République. Chacun s’est jeté avec empressement sur *le Journal du Matin de la République française et du Tribunal révolutionnaire*, pour y trouver les détails important de cette reprise. On y lisait seulement: “Hier soir, on assurait qu’il était arrivé des courriers qui annonçaient la reprise de Valenciennes par les troupes de la République.”’ A note within the report states that Valenciennes was not taken by the Republican army until July 1794.

the pedlar. The report called for punitive measures against those publishing allegations before they have been confirmed as fact:

This news, which had not been confirmed in any way, made many unhappy. Why then announce such important news if it is not true. 'Look,' said the patriots. 'Look at how they continue to deceive the people.' Those who publish such things without being completely certain of the truth should be punished severely.³⁵

This report is characteristic of the prevailing attitude that the spreading of uncorroborated news – rumour, in short – was part of a larger agenda to mislead the public and undermine the success of the Revolution. Mercier was unusual among his contemporaries in his understanding of rumour, in that, although he attempted to identify its source, he recognized the human factors (fear, alarm, curiosity) that contribute to its proliferation. More commonly, rumour and the spreading of rumour was seen to be a conscious process, inextricably entwined with conspiracy, both as subject matter (rumours *about* conspiracies were very common) and in itself (the fact that rumours exist was seen as proof of an agenda to undermine the Republic). Mercier's identification of the role played by pedlars (and by extension the press in general) in the spread of misinformation was reinforced by an entry in a satirical, royalist dictionary, the *Dictionnaire National et Anecdotique* of 1790, which blamed the press for intentionally provoking public alarm in a bid to sell more newspapers. The entry for *complots* made explicit the relationship between newspapers and street vendors and the financial advantages of printing details of conspiracies:

Each time the paper includes a conspiracy, the pedlars are told the night before that there will be news of a new plot uncovered. As soon as this news begins to spread, [the journalists] go straight to the bank,

³⁵ Ibid. 'Cette nouvelle, qui n'a reçue aucune confirmation, a fait beaucoup de mécontents. Pourquoi donc nous annoncer une nouvelle d'une telle importance sans qu'elle soit vraie? Voilà, disaient les patriotes, comme on trompe toujours le peuple. On devrait punir sévèrement ceux qui impriment des chose pareilles sans être parfaitement assurés de la vérité.'

to withdraw enough funds to pay the printer for another 3000 copies.³⁶

The *Dictionnaire* described the pedlar as part of a larger information network, and as such one who was instructed by his or her employers, the printers and journalists, to convey the news in a sensational way. During the trial of Marie-Antoinette, the figure of the pedlar appeared in another guise, one in which his ubiquity was seen to be used to convey clandestine information in plain sight. Among the many accusations the queen faced during her trial were references to her *correspondances criminelles* with counter-revolutionary cells. During her trial, witnesses were called to support the allegation that the queen and her family were able to continue contact with the outside world, receiving news of the state of the Republic (and hence the success or failure of their own plots to destabilise it) despite their isolation. One of the witnesses accused of colluding with the queen denied ever speaking to her except in an official capacity, and only in the presence of his colleagues. Denying further that he ever discussed politics with the prisoner, he was nonetheless accused of enabling her to have access to the news through the means of a pedlar crying out the day's headlines.³⁷ The queen herself denied ever having spoken to the witness and dismissed as absurd the very idea of employing pedlars to convey the day's news: their ubiquity rendered it unnecessary, as pedlars and street criers were found on every corner.³⁸ Nonetheless, two more witnesses were called upon and

³⁶ *Dictionnaire National et Anecdotique* (Paris[?]: 1790), French Revolution Collection, J.B. Morrell Library, University of York, microfiche 7/216. 'Chaque fois que la feuille...insert un complot, on prévient la veille les colporteurs, ou vendeurs de papier-nouvelles, que la feuille du lendemain parlera d'un complot. Aussitôt que cet avis se propage, on va à la bourse ... et l'imprimeur porte le triage du chiffon à trois mille de plus.'

³⁷ *Procès de Marie-Antoinette, de Lorraine-D'Autriche, veuve Capet, du 23 du premier mois, l'an 2 de la République, octobre 14, 1793. Imprimé Mot pour Mot, selon toute la teneur de la Gazette Nationale, ou Moniteur Universel, du 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27 D'octobre 1793. Orné d'un portrait, En Miniature, Le plus vraisemblable de tous ceux qui ont paru jusqu'à ce Jour.* A Londres, M.DCC.XCIII. [1793], p. 63. 'Le président. Ne lui avez-vous pas quelquefois parlé politique? Le témoin. Jamais. Le président. Ne lui avez-vous pas procuré les moyens de savoir les nouvelles, en envoyant tous les jours un colporteur et de crier le journal du soir près de la tour du Temple?'

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 64. 'Je n'ai jamais eu de conversations avec le témoin; d'un autre côté, je n'avais pas besoin que l'on engageât les colporteurs à venir près de la tour; je les entendais assez tous les jours, lorsqu'ils passaient rue de la Corderie.'

accused of using newspaper vendors as a means of communicating news to the detainees of the Temple prison.

In this example, and in direct contradiction to Mercier's view, the pedlar was seen as a reliable source of news, enlisted to communicate information to prisoners who had no right to it. Here, rather than mangling the day's news due to ignorance or from commercial necessity, the pedlar was seen as a reliable conduit of information. This view that the pedlar might be an authoritative source of news rather than simply an ignorant mouthpiece, confusing and embellishing what might be contained within the papers sold, was not an isolated one. The author of a popular pamphlet of 1789 felt the pedlar was such an authoritative yet accessible figure that he named his publication *Le Colporteur National*, at a stroke elevating the humble street vendor to an authority of national importance. The first page of the first issue outlined the journal's manifesto, using the familiar Jacobin rhetoric of denunciation and revelation of aristocratic subterfuge:

I will always tell the truth and I'll peddle it everywhere. I will reveal assaults without fear & I will denounce the guilty without animosity, I will attack the antisocial hydra ... I will reveal all underground machinations, all insidious trails, of the enemies of the new fatherland & of Liberty.³⁹

The mission statement contains all the key words and aims of Jacobin discourse: with 'truth', '*patrie*' and 'liberty' juxtaposed against 'enemies', 'hydra' and 'assaults'. The conflation of the title of the publication with the journalistic voice is also characteristic of the radical press of the time: *Le Père Duchesne* was both the journal and the journal's persona; likewise *L'Ami du peuple* was both the publication and the journalist. The journal's promise to always tell the truth, to reveal, to denounce, was also typical of the promises of the radical press; what is notable however, is the inclusion of

³⁹ *Le Colporteur National*, no. 1, 1789, p.1. BN Lc2 256. 'Je dirais toujours la vérité & je la colporterai partout. Je révélerai les attentats sans crainte, & je dénoncerai les coupables sans animosité, j'attaquerai l'hydre insociable ... je dévoilerai toutes les manœuvres souterraines, toutes les menées insidieuses, des ennemis de la nouvelle patrie & de la Liberté.'

colporteur in this promise: the idea of peddling information takes on an almost heroic quality, one of national importance. Here, the pedlar was not merely a mouthpiece, but a herald of news; his status was elevated to equal the significance of the news he transmitted. The pedlar was no longer merely a conduit, he was now an active participant in the unveiling of counter-revolutionary plots.

The pedlar, then, held an ambiguous place in eighteenth-century society. Those selling newspapers may have had moments of authority – holding the crowd in thrall in a public place when the latest news or decree from the Assembly was made known – but such instances were temporary. Despite the implication of the title of the *Colporteur National*, the pedlar never shed his marginal status. The association of pedlars with begging, with criminal activities and with police spies, made it only too easy to lend credence to the belief that pedlars could be enlisted to a counter-revolutionary cause. Beggar, spy, counter-revolutionary agent: the pedlar was both a stranger and omnipresent, moving through the crowded streets spreading discord.

Legislation was put in place to control peddling. In 1789, ordinances forbidding the selling of *libelles* also included the selling of unsigned works. When the author could not be prosecuted, the printer and the pedlar were instead.⁴⁰ Aware of the potential for the pedlar to create a public disturbance by spreading incendiary news, the Paris Commune on 1 September 1789 forbade pedlars from crying out anything but official texts – just days from the drafting of article 11 in the Declaration of the Rights of Man ensuring freedom of speech.⁴¹ The Commune's ordinance, with reference to the *infidélité* of pedlars and print sellers, is revealing not only about the

⁴⁰ See, for example, Lise Andries, 'Radicalism and the book in Paris during the French Revolution', undated, accessed online September 2013, 2013.https://www.princeton.edu/csb/conferences/march_2006/.../andries.doc.

⁴¹ 'The free communication of thoughts and opinions is one of the most precious of the rights of man. Every citizen may therefore speak, write, and print freely, if he accepts his own responsibility for any abuse of this liberty in the cases set by the law.'

authorities' limits on free speech, but also on the perceived role and motives of those who disseminate printed material. It referred to the

unreliability of Pedlars and Vendors of printed matter, who cry out the most alarming or most untrue public Notices, & who, to provoke public curiosity, give the papers they sell titles that spread fear and thus jeopardise all Citizens ...⁴²

Hawkers of newsprint were seen to call out headlines that are as 'alarming' and false as possible in order to draw attention to themselves and sell more newspapers. The implication was that the intentionally frightening titles were part of this sales process, one that was undertaken for commercial gain without any thought for the deleterious effects they might have on the citizenry.

The ordinance continued, making a clear distinction between freedom of the press and the freedom to make public announcements. Pedlars were able to exploit the latter to deceive the public, leading to the proliferation of *fausse nouvelles* to the detriment of those who are taken in by them:

[T]he Assembly considers that the freedom of the Press should not be confused with the freedom to make public announcements; that the latter, which allows pedlars to deceive the public, multiplies false rumours & leaves those who have been taken in with nothing but misunderstanding & sorrow ...⁴³

In an attempt to eradicate this kind of escalating conjecture and exaggeration, vendors of newsprint were now forbidden to make public pronouncements on anything other than official business: government

⁴² *Tableau des opérations de l'Assemblée Nationale: d'après le Journal de Paris: et auquel on a ajouté tous les articles de cette feuille, qui peuvent intéresser les arts [et] les sciences* (Lausanne: 1798) vol. I, p. 306. 'l'infidélité des Colporteurs & Vendeurs d'Imprimés, qui se permettent de crier les Avis les plus alarmants ou les plus faux, & qui, pour exciter la curiosité publique, donnent aux feuilles qu'ils débitent des titres qui répandent la crainte, & compromettent indistinctement tous les Citoyens'.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 'l'Assemblée, considérant que la liberté de la Presse ne doit pas être confondue avec la liberté de la proclamation; que celle que se permettent les Colporteurs, trompant la crédulité du Peuple, multiplie les fausses nouvelles & ne laisse à ceux qu'ils ont trompé que l'erreur & les regrets'.

decrees, ordinances, arrests etc. Those who made any other kind of public pronouncement would be prosecuted for disturbing the peace.⁴⁴

Despite these laws, pedlars continued to call out information other than official decrees. Often, they would have done so because the immediate concern of earning a livelihood outweighed the future possibility of arrest. But there is also evidence to suggest that many may have been ignorant of the decree altogether. Decrees in general were often ignored for this reason. The arrests documented in the Police Archives in Paris provide interesting evidence of the authorities' continued belief in the threat to public morale by pedlars shouting alarming slogans or unsubstantiated news, which was invariably seen as part of a larger counter-revolutionary agenda.

The belief that pedlars were being manipulated to tell lies recurs throughout this period. A report from the Section de Butte des Moulins in year II describes the questioning of four newspaper vendors and subsequent arrest of two of them for misrepresenting the contents of their papers.⁴⁵ The report relates how two men and two women were each heard to declare that their papers contained lists of those who were to be executed by firing squad in the plaine des Sablons to the west of the city. Not only was this information absent from the newspaper, it technically did not yet exist, as the final judgement had not yet been made.⁴⁶ The replies of each of the vendors reveal the different ways in which information might evolve and mutate,

⁴⁴ Ibid. 'Ordonne que les Proclamateurs de tous autres Ecrits ou Brochures soient regardés comme perturbateurs du repos public, & invite tous les Districts à réprimer les abus qui font naître cette licence.'

⁴⁵ APP Section de Butte des Moulins, 21 nivôse, an II. 'Arrestation de deux colporteurs de journaux qui ont crié ce qui n'est pas dans les journaux qu'ils vendent.'

⁴⁶ Ibid. 'Ce jour du vingt et un nivôse a été conduit en notre comité deux citoyens et deux citoyennes marchands de journaux qui criaient la liste et les noms de ceux qui doivent être fusillé à la plaine des Sablons. Nous avons procédé de suite à leurs interrogations les uns après les autres à l'effet de connaître de ceux qui ont provoqué cette annonce que [...] [l'agent de police] lui a demandé pourquoi il crie ayant des journaux à la main la liste des noms de ceux qui doivent être fusillé aujourd'hui à la plaine des Sablons lorsque les dites journaux n'en font aucune mention et qu'aucun jugement n'a été rendu en notre connaissance semblable à l'annonce de ce citoyen.'

either unintentionally or by design. The incident illustrates how financial demands and the public's appetite for news might contribute to exaggerated or heightened story-telling. The result was not a lie, per se, but an embellished story that reflected current concerns and therefore had a ring of plausibility. Finally, it reveals how the pedlar himself might make a judgement about the trustworthiness of his own news sources, demonstrating that, for contemporaries, the newspaper was just one of many sources of information and did not necessarily carry any greater authority simply because the words appeared in print.

The first of the vendors, one Pierre Bougnole, admitted that he was calling out this fabricated news simply as a means of selling papers, nothing more; he had taken notice of what more successful pedlars were saying and had repeated it to improve his sales. However, he took pains to correct the details of the report, saying he wasn't describing those on the list to be executed at Sablons, but those imprisoned at the Conciergerie.⁴⁷ Although not without irony, this insistence on correcting the details of false cries also illustrates the inaccuracies of eyewitness accounts and of reported speech. Already, what the pedlar was reported to have said was at odds with what he claimed to have said, and although neither versions were true reflections of contemporary events, both had now been introduced into a public space, with the potential to take on a life of their own.

That vendors resorted to sensational or alarming slogans to sell the news, therefore, was often a question of commercial expediency rather than an orchestrated plot to alarm the public. Nonetheless, these slogans contributed to a collective impression of contemporary events, one that was composed of conjecture, half-truths and popular prejudices, fed by fear and uncertainty. To garner any attention such slogans must have, even in some small way, reflected contemporary subjects or concerns. The vendor referring to the

⁴⁷ Ibid. '[C]e citoyen a répondu qu'il n'avait pas crié à la plaine des Sablons, qu' il avait seulement dit qu'ils devaient être fusillés, lui a demandé pourquoi il croyait que les prisonniers de la Conciergerie devaient être fusillé aujourd'hui et a répondu que c'était pour mieux vendre et qu'il entendait d'autres le crier qui en vendaient beaucoup.'

executions at Sablons, for example, did so for commercial reasons, and although his slogan was not accurate, it did reflect current events generally: people *were* regularly executed; the newspapers *did* list the names of those found guilty. In displacing actual events to a different setting, in creating a fiction that had real origins, the vendor participated in the production of what Bernadette Fort describes as ‘fictions ... that are echoes and extensions of previous fictions,’⁴⁸ contributing to and conjuring up Revel’s ‘body of “knowledge”’.⁴⁹ That is to say that, although fabricated, the vendor’s announcement wasn’t plucked from the ether; it relied on familiarity with previous events and reflected current fears, which rendered it entirely plausible. And yet, the outcome of this unthinking impetus to sell papers both reinforced the view described above in the royalist dictionary – that papers concocted conspiracies to sell papers – whilst contributing to the authorities’ suspicions that there were outlets for lies which undermined public confidence. This awareness that newspapers were commercial enterprises existed simultaneously with an anxiety that news was somehow being distorted intentionally, creating an ambivalent relationship between press and reading public. Jeremy Popkin cites a police report in which an individual was heard to complain, ‘the journalists are charlatans; everything they say is lies.’⁵⁰

The authorities, however, were convinced that the vendor had been primed to spread this information and they demanded to know who had told him to do so – ‘Qui lui a dit de crier cela?’ This question recurs throughout the *procès-verbaux* of this period, demonstrating the extent to which the belief in the work of shadowy *malveillants* influenced official conduct at all levels of authority. It was assumed that the pedlar was the pawn of a more malevolent force acting against the Revolution, co-opted (following some

⁴⁸ Bernadette Fort, ed. *Fictions of the French Revolution* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1991), p. 11.

⁴⁹ Jacques Revel, ‘Marie-Antoinette in her Fictions: The Staging of Hatred’ in Fort, *Fictions*, p. 112.

⁵⁰ Popkin, *Revolutionary News*, p. 89.

financial incentive) into spread alarming stories. The authorities' aim was to identify the source of the story.

Pierre Bougnole, however, when asked where he had obtained this information, assured the police that he had overheard it at the printer.⁵¹ This suggests that he chose to put his trust in verbal exchanges, overheard in a familiar environment, over that found in printed material. There are two possibilities for this: he may have known the speaker(s), or felt some personal affinity that did not exist with the author of the journal. The second possibility is that, given the speed with which events took place during this period, news spread by word of mouth was felt to be more current and thus more accurate than print. In either event, the incident illustrates that contemporaries were subject to several currents of news sources running simultaneously and possibly competing with and contradicting each other. Faced with a decision about who or what to trust, the audience could be forgiven for choosing the one that was most familiar.

The second vendor, sixteen-year-old Elisabeth Girard, was asked the same questions, and again claimed only to have mentioned the list of prisoners at the Conciergerie, and not the impending executions at the plaine des Sablons. This information, she claimed, was garnered from various sources overheard in the street, and not at the printer. Her statement was evocative of the ways in which information spread: whether or not the story originated at the printer or she misremembered where she had originally heard it, it had now entered the wider arena of the street, moving from the semi-private interior of the printer, to a public, outdoor space. And although the police claimed that a familiar figure in the neighbourhood – 'le pâtissier au coin de la rue neuve des Petits Champs et le jardin d'Égalité' – insisted Elisabeth had mentioned la plaine des Sablons, Elisabeth herself maintained that countless neighbourhood women could corroborate her statement. For his part, the *pâtissier* claimed that, when asked, Elisabeth couldn't guarantee whether the

⁵¹ APP Section de Butte des Moulins, 21 nivôse, an II. '[I]l l'avait entendu dire dans l'imprimerie où il a pris son journal par tous ceux qui y étaient, qu'ils les criaient comme cela.'

information about the executions was true ‘because it wasn’t in the newspapers.’⁵² For this young pedlar there was no paradox in the two conflicting stories existing simultaneously: the story was not in the newspapers, so she couldn’t validate it, and yet it clearly had an oral presence in the street, which she was happy to repeat. She wouldn’t confirm or deny either story, and saw no contradiction in transmitting both.

There are additional elements in her statement that illustrate the way in which a rumour can spread. The witnesses could not agree on what was said, with each describing their own account of what they heard. All these competing versions – completely authentic and accurate in the opinion of the eye witness – were now liable to be passed on in conversation, evolving, developing, and transforming as they were told. Elisabeth herself described how she came by the story: not from the printer, but ‘from people who were passing in the street, and their friends’.⁵³ As each of these passers-by recounted their own tale (‘some said it was at the Champ de Mars et others at the plaine des Sablons’) in addition to her own reference to the Conciergerie, several permutations of an uncorroborated story began to circulate, completely separate from the contents of the newspapers. One imagines this scenario repeating itself continually throughout the neighbourhood, travelling outwards and rebounding back after meeting a different story, like so many concentric circles emanating from individual drops of water.

⁵² Ibid. ‘[Elle] a dit qu’elle cria seulement, “Voilà les noms de ceux qui sont en prison à la conciergerie” et insiste qu’elle a observé que plusieurs personnes l’ont entendu. Elle a répondu qu’elle persiste dans sa réponse et que plusieurs personnes attesteront qu’elle ne l’a pas crié et que le pâtissier au coin de la rue neuve des Petits Champs et de la descente du jardin d’Egalité lui avait demandé s’ils seraient fusillés aujourd’hui et qu’elle lui a répondu qu’elle n’en savait rien parce que cela n’était pas dit dans le journal et que les Mdes [nb: Mesdames, or marchandes] qui se situent à l’endroit où elle criait attesteront toutes qu’elle n’a crié que comme elle vient de le déclarer’.

⁵³ Ibid. ‘[L]orsqu’on lui a demandé par qui elle a entendu dire qu’ils devaient être fusillés elle a répondu que c’était par ceux qui passaient dans la rue et par ces camarades dont les uns disaient que c’était au Champ de Mars et d’autres à la plaine des Sablons[.] ... lorsqu’on lui a demandé si elle ne l’avait entendu dire dans l’imprimerie où elle a pris ces journaux, elle a répondu que non.’

A few months later, another pedlar was arrested for calling out information that was not in his newspaper. He had been taken to his section by two disgruntled citizens who had been planning to buy copies of the paper based on his information. Finding no sign of it in the journal they had felt compelled to bring the vendor before the authorities.⁵⁴ In this example, the vendor was adamant that he was calling out the information specifically because he knew it to be true; in fact, he had asked his two accusers to show him the address of the person concerned in the news item – the Juge de Paix – so he could cry the news under his very window. He credited his source – his own cousin – over the printed material, and made a judgement regarding the relevance of the news, rather than simply seeking to sell his papers by any means. This provides an interesting example of the vendor taking advantage of his role to act as a kind of town crier. The result is yet another current of informal news, which supplements the information contained within the journal.⁵⁵

What is also unusual about this incident, too, is the readiness with which the vendor identified the source of his news, which indicates the faith he has in its veracity. For the most part, the authorities' eagerness to trace the lineage of a story back to its 'root', as though it were some kind of pernicious vine, meant that those questioned about their sources were most likely to answer with evasive references to *les passants* or the generic *on*.

⁵⁴ APP Section du Panthéon, 2 floréal, an II. 'Arrestation d'un colporteur qui a crié un fait qui ne se trouvait pas dans le journal qu'il vendait ... Les citoyens François Fernand, marchand boucher, et Michel Goignard [sp?], traiteur, ont entendu un particulier vendre des journaux qui criait dans la rue la vente du Courrier républicain, en annonçant les faits qu'ils contiennent et en outre l'arrestation du Cit Le Juge de Paix de la section du Panthéon français. En ce faisant il leur a demandé de lui indiquer le domicile dudit juge pour aller crier sous sa fenêtre. Curieux de savoir si ledit journal faisait mention de la dite arrestation ils en achetèrent chaque un exemplaire de la date du jour noté, et comme ce fait n'y est pas parlé ils ont cru de voir l'arrêt et conduire par-devant nous.'

⁵⁵ Ibid. 'Lorsque nous lui avons demandé pourquoi il criait des faits qui ne sont pas mentionnés dans les papiers, il a répondu que c'est parce que son cousin lui en avait averti et qu'il est certain que le Cit. Juge [nom illisible] a été arrêté cette nuit et détenu à la Force, et que c'était pour vendre davantage de papiers.'

This discrepancy between the authorities' view on the creation of rumour – always from a single, necessarily malevolent source intent on spreading lies to undermine the Revolution – versus those involved in its transmission is prevalent throughout the sources of the period. This attitude relates to the authorities' ambivalence towards the actions and opinions of *le menu peuple* – one that, by assuming a sinister, hidden force manipulating otherwise good citizens provides an explanation for beliefs and behaviours that run counter to the government's Republican ideals. Such reductive reasoning ultimately denies its citizens individual agency.

'Ce maudit commerce de lettres': personal correspondence as conduits for rumour⁵⁶

The figure of the pedlar, simultaneously conduit and source of information, journalists' mouthpiece and, on rare occasions, authoritative news source, can be seen as the physical embodiment of the symbiotic relationship between oral and written news: Robert Darnton described the way in which information circulated from the street into print, and from the newspaper to the street, in an eternal loop of news, gathering details and embellishments from each source.⁵⁷ In the introduction, I discussed how radical journalists exploited popular rumour both in subject matter and in linguistic style: colloquial language, reductive sloganeering, and a repetition of key ideas relating to plots and conspiracy all mimic the 'heightening' of information as described by Allport and Postman in their ground-breaking study of rumour.⁵⁸ Many twentieth-century studies of rumour describe the self-consciousness with which the participants of rumour both comment on the story *as a rumour* while simultaneously passing it on. Despite the speaker or writer discrediting the story, by continuing to communicate it, they

⁵⁶ Jean-Nicolas Dufort de Cheverny, *Mémoires sur les règnes de Louis XV et Louis XVI et sur la Révolution par J. N. Dufort, ... publié avec une introduction et des notes par Robert de Crèvecœur*. (Paris: E. Plon, Nourrit et Cie, 1886), p. 130.

⁵⁷ Robert Darnton, 'Presidential Address: An Early Information Society: News and the Media in Eighteenth-Century Paris', *American Historical Review*, vol. 105, no. 1 (2000).

⁵⁸ Gordon W. Allport and Leo Postman, *The Psychology of Rumor* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1947).

nonetheless help to perpetuate it. Many examples of this can be found in personal letters, journals and memoirs, which provide interesting case studies for different ways in which news can be conveyed in writing. In the instance of letter-writing, the often informal nature of the language and the relationship between writer and reader can imbue these texts with the urgency of speech.⁵⁹ These documents offer another channel of information, commenting on, contradicting, and sometimes entirely ignoring commercial print material. They serve as an additional source of news, and occasionally, and often unwittingly, a means to transmit rumour. The writers of these texts are, for the most part, educated and bourgeois (the exception is the unique source that is glazier Jacques-Louis Ménétra's memoir).⁶⁰ They share a belief that rumours are, for the most part, alarming stories spread by the ignorant, or gossip perpetuated by sources that are not to be taken seriously, such as market women, *domestiques* (often also women) or other trades held in low esteem.⁶¹

However, these letters and memoirs also reveal an aspect of rumour that is often overlooked, both in studies of rumours in general, and in specific examinations of rumour during this period: that those who identify and decry rumour-mongering by others, often, unknowingly, participate in the spreading of rumour themselves. Many studies of rumour seem to overlook this aspect of the phenomenon, which is that those who participate in the

⁵⁹ Guy Arbellot, Bernard Lepetit and Jacques Bertrand, *Atlas de la Révolution française*, vol I, *Routes et communications* (Paris: Editions de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1987) examines in detail the postal service throughout France during this period. In 1795, for example, a letter from Paris could arrive the same day to up to three days to an area comprising, as far as Caen, Chartres, Orleans, Blois and Tours to the west; Chateauroux in the south; Lille, Dunkerque and Calais in the north and Nancy, Chaumant and Dijon to the east. Post to Bordeaux and Toulouse took six to seven days, and to Toulon, Marseille, Perpignan and Pau could take from eight to eleven days.

⁶⁰ Jacques-Louis Ménétra, *Journal of My Life*, introduction and commentary by Daniel Roche, foreword by Robert Darnton, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

⁶¹ For example, Mercier's reference to the role of *perruquiers* in the spread of *fausses nouvelles* illustrates a wider suspicion of the purpose of wigmakers in the nascent Republic; not only was their purpose ultimately a frivolous one – despite the wig-wearing of Robespierre, fastidiousness of appearance was generally viewed with suspicion by the Jacobins – the intimate nature of their business suggested confidences shared with their unpatriotically vain clients.

spread of rumour very frequently do so in good faith – information is passed on because it is believed to be true; because, until it is proven otherwise, it seems to represent the facts as they are known. Thus, letters and memoirs such as these reveal two types of rumour: those that are identified as such, and commented upon in their transmission, and those that are passed on because the correspondent genuinely believes them. These might be described as the conscious and unconscious rumour.

The letters of Rosalie Jullien, a committed Jacobin living in Paris during the Revolution, reveal this dichotomy. For many years she wrote to her husband, who was overseeing the family's property in south-eastern France, and her eldest son, in England on behalf of the Revolutionary government, while she lived in Paris in an apartment on the rue Jacob in the company of a trusted, female servant. She had enjoyed an extensive education for a woman of the time, familiar with Latin, Italian and English, and the Classics. She was in her early to mid forties during the Revolution, and was an eyewitness to many of its most historic events: from 1791–93, she went to hear the debates at the Jacobin club, and joined the crowds around the National Assembly; she heard news at the Tuileries and was involved in riots and fêtes.⁶² She was an avid reader of newspapers, but appears to have made distinctions between the newspapers she trusted, and those whose content she was simply aware of, writing in August 1791, '*L'Ami du peuple* and *L'Orateur* fulminate daily, as usual. I read the papers of Audoin ...,⁶³ *le Journal de Paris et le Moniteur*.'⁶⁴ Whereas the radical, populist papers such as *L'Ami du peuple* were dismissed as so much thunder, others were trusted implicitly, and were considered by Rosalie to speak not only for the nation, but by extension, for herself: writing to her son on 18 August, 1792 she stated, 'There are a thousand things that

⁶² Rosalie Jullien de la Drome, *Journal d'une bourgeoise pendant la Révolution, 1791-1793, publié par son petit fils Edouard Lockroy* (Paris: Calmann Levy, 1881), p. ii; Lindsay A. Parker, *Writing the Revolution: A French Woman's History in Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁶³ Pierre-Jean Audoin, editor of *Le Journal universel, ou les Révolutions du Royaume*.

⁶⁴ Rosalie Jullien de la Drome, p. 38. 'Lettre à son mari, 14 août, 1791.'

come to mind; but, because I don't want to tell you things that you can see in the papers, I'll try to discuss those that you won't see.'⁶⁵ The newspapers for her were such a trusted authority that there was no need to expand or even comment upon their contents, and several of her letters referred in passing to the journals that they all read, without any further discussion. 'I am, as ever, looking to tell you the things that you can't read in the papers,' she wrote to her husband that same month. 'As you see the *Moniteur* daily, I won't tell you about the meetings in the Senate. I would rather discuss our doings'.⁶⁶ Her letters contained information personal to her, and she provided it not to contradict or supplant the papers, but as a discrete channel of news in its own right. That the printed journals were allowed to speak for themselves demonstrated her absolute confidence in their veracity and authority.

A letter to her husband describing the aftermath of the storming of the Tuileries Palace on 10 August demonstrated the ways in which she sought information, describing the streets crowded with women both desperate for and fearful of news, and how her servant, Marion, went to see for herself events as they unfolded:

The women ran through the streets crying and lamenting, because each of them feared a cruel loss ... Marion went as far as the cour du Carrousel, where she saw four dead, of around several thousand ... She told me that the streets were full of these women: she had never seen so many people.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 238. 'Il y a mille choses qui me passent par la tête; mais, comme je ne veux pas te dire celles que tu vois dans les journaux, je cherche à t'entretenir à propos de celles qui n'y figurent pas.'

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 267. 'Lettre à son mari, 26 août, 1792. Je cherche toujours à vous dire les choses que vous ne pourrez pas lire dans les journaux'; p. 261. 'Lettre à son mari, 29 août, 1792. Comme tu vois le *Moniteur* tous les jours, je ne te parlerai point des séances du Senat. J'aime mieux t'entretenir de nos faits et dits.'

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 233. 'Lettre à son mari, 10 août, 1792. Toutes les femmes couraient dans les rues en pleurant et se lamentant, parce que chacune d'entre elles était dans la crainte d'une perte cruelle ... Marion a été jusqu'à dans la cour du Carrousel, où elle a vu quatre morts, parmi quelques milliers environ ... Elle m'a rapporté que les rues étaient pleines de ces femmes: jamais elle n'a vu autant de monde.'

On a closer reading, this passage raises questions about the authenticity of the account: has the writer seen for herself the women 'crying and lamenting', as they await the worst, or has this been elided with Marion's description of her own observation of the streets filled with women? Rosalie Jullien's account has both the detail and emotional impact of an eye-witness; it certainly reads with the authority of a first-hand account. However, it is possible that the heightened atmosphere of the day led her to embellish a description that had been relayed to her: Marion's account appears to confirm her own, and the one is absorbed into the other. In Rosalie Jullien's opinion, it seemed not to matter who was relaying the information – whether it was first or second hand – and perhaps in this account it doesn't matter. And yet, in this respect this passage illustrates an aspect of how rumour works at its most benign: with the retelling of a story, it acquires or sheds details with the teller. Marion has reportedly seen four dead – 'of around several thousand', a number that has subsequently been confirmed by historians as considerably exaggerated.⁶⁸ This unconfirmed number, however, has now been recorded in writing, following the testimony of a witness close enough to the writer that it apparently needs no further corroboration.

The exaggeration and repetition of certain details, specifically the tendency to exaggerate numbers, has been noted in several studies of the phenomenon of rumour. As Lefebvre's *Great Fear* demonstrates, numbers of brigands reported to be rampaging through the countryside in the summer of 1789 rose with each retelling. David Andress notes a similar instance following the massacre at the Champ de Mars in 1791, citing an article in *Le Courier de Paris* that referred not only to an 'infinity' of brigands, but also to beggars spreading the alarm of fifteen hundred deaths.⁶⁹ So, despite Rosalie

⁶⁸ Most sources cite less than half that number: William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), records 600 dead among the Swiss Guard and 'less than half that number ... among the besiegers' (p.189). See also Michel Vovelle, *La Révolution française: 1789-1799* (Paris: Armand Colin: 2006), p. 27.

⁶⁹ David Andress, *Massacre at the Champ de Mars* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Royal Historical Society/Boydell Press, 2000), p. 8.

Jullien's awareness of the dangers of passing on an unconfirmed rumour, her letters nonetheless indicate that she might herself be part of that process, albeit unintentionally.

The letter continues to describe how she went about trying to confirm what had happened at the Tuileries, describing the treachery of the Swiss guards shooting on the crowd, and embellishing the number of witnesses she had consulted to further authenticate her version of events:

On the way I gathered details confirmed by a hundred witnesses on the shots fired by the Swiss guards, so treacherous and unexpected that it united all sides. It was completely unprovoked, and all of Paris will attest to the truth of this.⁷⁰

The 'hundred witnesses' – a heightened use of numbers, once again – become, in the following sentence, 'all of Paris' who can confirm what happened. When Rosalie Jullien heard news that she believed, often news which accorded with her own politics or ideology, her authorities were 'tout Paris', or 'l'opinion publique'; when it did not, the news was often attributed to rumour spread by the usual suspects: 'aristocrats', she wrote in June 1792, 'spread thousands of rumours.'⁷¹ Throughout her letter writing, however, she demonstrated a scrupulous effort to avoid spreading rumours unintentionally, by providing a surfeit of details apparently corroborating her information. She explained to her husband her self-imposed reticence: 'I would write to you everyday if I were not afraid of giving you false news. It is necessary to await confirmation to avoid saying foolish things that would have to be corrected later.'⁷² She was also aware of the potential repercussions of her letters if they conveyed news that was either bad, or

⁷⁰ Rosalie Jullien de la Drome, p. 233. 'Lettre à son mari, 10 août, 1792. J'ai recueilli, sur mon chemin, des détails confirmés par cent témoins sur la décharge des Suisses, qui a été si traîtresse et si inattendue qu'elle a ... réuni tous les partis. Elle n'a nullement été provoquée, et tout Paris attestera de cette vérité.'

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 139. 'Lettre à son mari, 19 juin 1792.'

⁷² Ibid., p. 277. 'Lettre à son mari, 29 août, 1792. Je vous écrirais tous les jours si je n'avais pas peur de vous donner des fausses nouvelles. Il faut attendre d'avoir confirmation de leur véracité pour ne point dire des sottises qu'il faudrait ensuite effacer.'

was later found to be incorrect: 'Take care when discussing my letters' she cautioned her husband. 'We must inspire courage, it's our only salvation.'⁷³ Throughout her correspondence is evidence of a conscientiousness and sense of responsibility in her role as conduit of information. Conveying bad news to the provinces, where individuals could not confirm facts for themselves, was potentially damaging to the Revolution.

Because of this concern with spreading 'fausse nouvelles', Rosalie Jullien sought confirmation from different sources. The trusted newspapers, those that conformed to and reflected Jacobin ideology, were allowed to speak for themselves; to her, they represented the highest authority of all. She was aware of the existence of a counter-revolutionary press, however, and was explicit in her condemnation of it, enthusiastically reporting its demise with the increasing press restrictions of 1792.⁷⁴ However, she was not above relaying popular opinion and the *on dit* of the street, on condition that it could be confirmed by a reliable source. For example, when describing the behaviour of the Royal family in the Temple prison, Rosalie Jullien cited the testimony of one of the prison guards.⁷⁵ To describe the prison massacres in September 1792, she relied on the testimony of six masons, who saw bodies of the victims at the doors of the prisons, and who she encountered as they returned from work.⁷⁶ Her relationship with Marion was such that her servant also played a role as a trusted authority; between the two women

⁷³ Ibid. 'Ne communiquer mes lettres qu'avec prudence. Il faut exciter le courage, c'est notre seul moyen de salut.'

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 237. 'Lettre à son mari, 15 août, 1792. ... je sais que vous voyez tous les jours de bon journaux et que, grâce au ciel, il n'y en a plus de mauvais ...'; p. 258. 'Lettre à son mari. 25 août, 1792. Il n'y a plus que de bonnes affiches et de bons journaux.'; p. 269. 'Lettre à son mari. 29 août, 1792. ... il y a encore des petits pamphlets aristocratiques, qui font leurs derniers efforts pour corrompre l'opinion publique'.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 239.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 293. 'Lettre à son mari, 2 septembre, 1792. Ces maçons ont vu des morceaux de cadavres aux portes des prisons.'

there did not appear to be any of the ambiguity or suspicion that has been noted in other employer-servant relationships.⁷⁷

Rosalie Jullien's awareness of the dangers of rumour made her cautious of spreading unconfirmed news. In her letters to her family, she acknowledged and took great responsibility for her role in providing information that could not be found in the newspapers. Her information, characteristically, was provided as a supplement to the press rather than as an alternative; she was not confirming or contradicting the news in the papers, but providing a separate, personal account of events. The two sources of information run parallel to one another, rather than amplifying or negating each other. Time and again she deferred to the greater authority of the newspapers, writing, for example, to her husband on 15 August: 'There is nothing I can tell you that they can't say better than I.'⁷⁸ There are several possible reasons for this: Rosalie Jullien, situated in the heart of Paris, able to attend the Assembly and, for a while at least, political clubs, or to frequent the Tuileries and the Palais-Egalité, could supplement what was in the newspapers through her own eye-witness accounts, or through information provided by other trusted sources. However, she was also a committed and loyal Jacobin. Time and again she displayed her unwavering trust in the government and its actions, and it is for this reason she accepted unquestioningly the accounts in the *Moniteur*. Her trust in 'public opinion' too, displayed a confidence in the notion of popular sovereignty as promulgated by Jacobin discourse. An incident related in a letter of 10 August, 1792 illustrates her unshakeable confidence in both: describing a decree read out in the Assembly that evening, she confessed that she couldn't hear what was said, but judging by the cheers of the people she knew it to be good and just. 'Such

⁷⁷ See Maza, *Servants and Masters*; Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France*; and Farge, *Vivre dans la rue* and *Fragile Lives* on the position of and attitudes towards servants in the private home and in public.

⁷⁸ Rosalie Jullien, p. 237. 'Lettre à son mari, 15 août, 1793. Je ne puis rien vous dire qu'ils ne disent mieux que moi.'

is the work of the National Assembly, the wishes of public opinion are consecrated by decree.’⁷⁹

Until the Terror, Rosalie Jullien had the utmost confidence in the Revolutionary government, and was scrupulous in her support of it, going so far as to self-censor her letters for fear of spreading unnecessary alarm and to bow to the greater authority of the Republican press. As a denizen of the capital, however, she was privileged to be able to assess herself the truth of press. Letter writers in the provinces were much less trusting of official accounts and they made regular requests to those living in Paris for first-hand confirmation of what they could only read about in the newspapers. The sense of distance, of time passing and of the anxiety caused by silence is palpable in these letters: ‘It has been some time, my dear friend, that I haven’t had news from you, and how this privation weighs on my heart,’ comes a letter from the Jura to a correspondent in Paris in August 1793; ‘How hard are these days ... which do not bring us any news from those who are dear to us,’ writes another.⁸⁰ In the absence of personal testimony, and with a hunger for information that could not be supplied by the press, those separated by great distances were vulnerable to rumour until the arrival of the next letter.

References to the unreliability of the postal system are frequent: ‘In the event that my letter reaches you,’ wrote Rosalie Jullien to her husband at the end of August 1792, revealing her doubts.⁸¹ She was not alone: a selection of letters from year II, now in the Archives Nationales, illustrate the continual worry that letters were going astray. ‘The post is no longer a reliable way to communicate our thoughts,’ writes one correspondent from Paris. ‘Have you

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 2234, ‘Lettre à son mari, 10 août, 1792. Il est minuit, et le tambour m’a réveillé: c’est un décret de l’Assemblée Nationale ... que l’on proclame dans les rues. ... je n’en ai entendu que des mots; mais aux vifs applaudissements qu’ils ont reçus, je juge de sa bonté. ... tel est l’ouvrage de l’Assemblée Nationale, c’est le vœu de l’opinion publique consacré par des décrets.’

⁸⁰ AN BB3 77 Dossier entitled ‘Lettres interceptées’ of year II.

⁸¹ Rosalie Jullien, p. 267.

received my earlier letters?’⁸² The practice of numbering correspondence in order to recognise if any had been lost was also common, while in August 1792, a correspondent referred to a rumour that letters were regularly intercepted by the authorities.⁸³ There is ample evidence to suggest that was the case, and this, combined with the mundane practicalities of receiving post at the best of times, contributed to the sense that genuine information was elusive and vulnerable to external forces.

Rosalie Jullien provides a vivid illustration of the preoccupations of the literate, politicised individual during this period; her awareness of different channels of information, the different speeds at which they move and the potential for heightened emotion to exaggerate events make her a very thoughtful observer of the revolution. Writing to her husband at the end of August 1792, she worried that, in sharing a rumour that will no doubt have been resolved by the time the letter reached him, she could cause him unnecessary anxiety:

They have just told me that the Senate yesterday dissolved the municipality and that, that evening, the forty-eight sections re-established it, with threats against the Senate ... This storm frightens me; we’ll see the outcome today. I feel badly telling you this, because by the time you read this, it will be resolved: and your pain will have been unnecessary.⁸⁴

This confidence concluded with a request that the subject be discussed no further: ‘Don’t say a word about it: I predict this will all blow over.’ She was clearly torn between the need to share her own anxieties, and a sense of

⁸² AN BB3 77, anonymous, undated letter, (May-Sept 1793), Paris.

⁸³ See, for example, ‘Lettres interceptées’ in AN BB 3 77, also the memoirs of Célestin Guittard de Floriban, who cross-referenced the dates of his and his correspondents’ letters. Adrien-Joseph Colson, *Lettres d’un bourgeois de Paris à un ami de Province, 1788–1793* (Saint-Cyr-sur-Loire: Christian Pirot, 1993), described 12 August, 1792, a rumour that letters were being intercepted: ‘On veut me persuader, ce que j’ai grande peine à croire, que les lettres qui contiennent des nouvelles sont arrêtés à la poste et ne passent pas.’

⁸⁴ Rosalie Jullien, p. 282. ‘Lettre à son mari, 30 août 1792. On vient de me dire que le Senat a cassé hier soir la municipalité; et que, cette nuit, les quarante-huit sections ont rétabli cette municipalité, avec une menace contre le Senat. ... Cet orage me fait peur; il va avoir sa suite aujourd’hui. Je me reproche de vous le dire, parce que, quand vous me lirez ceci, nous serons rassurés; et l’affliction que vous en aurez éprouvée sera inutile.’

responsibility to others by hesitating to spread unconfirmed information that might cause unwarranted alarm. And yet, in passing on the unconfirmed information whilst swearing her correspondent to secrecy, she was, albeit unconsciously, complicit in the traditional tactics of rumour- or gossip-mongering.

However, this awareness of the ease with which rumours spread did not exclude her from participating in them herself; if anything, her self-avowed caution made her more credible as a source of information and thus, ironically, potentially a more successful – if unwitting – conduit for rumour. Lack of credibility could stop a rumour dead: a spy report of 13 September, 1793 described the attempts of ‘malveillants’ to spread a rumour about a massacre in Bicêtre prison, but concluded, ‘This ridiculous rumour had no effect.’ A similar incident was reported on 21 September, 1793, when a well-known author posted a placard warning of a threat of a new prison massacre: ‘This poster had no effect whatsoever; they stop for a moment, then withdraw, saying “Oh! It’s only Olympe de Gouges!”’⁸⁵

Rosalie Jullien, however, was scrupulous in her attempts to verify news before discussing it with a third party, so could be trusted as an authority. Yet this care could not exempt her from unwittingly spreading rumour; and, if anything, the very fact of the news coming from such a careful source could increase the likelihood of a rumour spreading. Rosalie Jullien and her cohorts held the very common notion among the educated that rumours were something believed by other – usually uneducated – people. As Timothy Tackett has identified, for a certain literate section of the population there was a tendency to equate rumour with the gossip and general chatter of the street, easily dismissed as so much noise.⁸⁶ This

⁸⁵ Caron, vol. I, p. 89. ‘Ce bruit absurde n'a causé aucune sensation.’; p. 154 ‘Ce placard ne fait aucune sensation; on s'arrête un instant, et on se retire en disant : “Ah ! c'est Olympe de Gouges !”’

⁸⁶ Timothy Tackett, ‘Rumour and Revolution: the Case of the September Massacres’, *French History and Civilisation*, vol. 4 (2011).

section of the population seemed unaware that they, too, might just as easily be taken in by rumour, making its effects potentially that much more insidious.

This attitude is evident in the observations of another memoirist, Guittard de Floriban. A widower in his late 60s, Floriban lived near the church of Saint-Sulpice and served as a guard in his section, Luxembourg. His daily walks throughout the city – to the Luxembourg gardens, to popular cafés such as le Procope, and to public gathering places such as the Champs-Élysées and the place de la Révolution meant he, too, was able to provide first-hand observations of events as they took place. His comments on crowd behaviour were typical of the attitude common among the more literate that rumours were perpetuated by other, usually less educated, social groups. He described in his diary how rumours about scarcity created actual bread shortages during February 1793:

Yesterday, everyone began to turn up at the bakers, following a story that there was had been no flour for the last week. Because of that, there were those who went to each baker to hoard supplies: instead of one bread, they took five or six or more, leaving others to starve.⁸⁷

Both the source of the rumour and those who acted upon it were unnamed. Floriban described instead an anonymous mob riled by an unconfirmed rumour of shortages. He himself remained unaffected by the rumour; it did not inspire him to rush to the bakery in search of bread, despite the fact that a false rumour could (and can) have very really consequences when it causes panic and hoarding. A similar attitude can be found in the letters of Adrien-Joseph Colson, a Paris advocate, who wrote at least once a week, over a period of thirteen years, to his estate manager in the provinces. Like the other memoirists cited here, Colson considered rumour to be the preserve of uneducated mobs. In April 1793, he described food riots as being instigated,

⁸⁷ De Floriban, *Journal*, p. 229. 'Hier on a commencé à se porter chez les boulangers, car un bruit a couru qu'il n'y avait plus de farine depuis 8 jours. Là-dessus, il y en a qui sont allés accaparer tous les boulangers: au lieu d'un pain, ils en prenaient 5 et 6 ou plus et affamaient les autres.'

once again by ‘malveillants’ who have ‘duped’ the easily misled people into believing in shortages.⁸⁸

These examples illustrate a shared belief that rumour is solely part of a group dynamic, influencing and influenced by collective ideas and behaviours. The nameless crowd is motivated by rumour, swept along like a startled herd by unconfirmed news of an alarming nature; the individual, on the other hand, is the disengaged observer, an objective source of information communicating empirical evidence.⁸⁹ It is this confidence among educated chroniclers that they are able to identify the truth amid the morass of popular fears and conjecture that makes rumour so pervasive, however: Rosalie Jullien, so conscious of the danger of rumour, was nonetheless unaware of her own participation in it. Colson, too, could identify rumour-mongering when others engaged in it, as per this letter of January 1792, in which he described the rumours relating to a prison fire:

According to one of the versions making the rounds, 12 prisoners burned to death, and several escaped, among them the famous abbé Bardy, and, following another version, none were burned, and no one escaped.⁹⁰

However, in a letter of 25 January, his meaning was less certain and his use of ‘*on/one*’ ambiguous:

One has been informed that once the fire had been started in all four corners of La Force, there was a plot to start fires at the same time in

⁸⁸ Colson, *Lettres*, p. 248. ‘19 avril. Des malveillants ont inspiré ici des inquiétudes sur les subsistances et le peuple, qu’il est aisé de faire illusion. Il en a été dupe au point d’assiéger tous les jours le matin la porte des boulangers et d’enlever tout, de manière qu’au bout de 7 heures il ne restait plus de pain et bien des personnes en manquaient.’

⁸⁹ Different perceptions of the rumour-crowd dynamic will be explored in more detail in Chapter III.

⁹⁰ Colson, *Lettres*, p. 210. ‘A en croire l’une des versions qui s’est répandue à ce sujet, il y a eu 12 prisonniers qui ont été brûlés et plusieurs qui se sont échappés, dont, entre autres, le trop fameux abbé Bardy, et, suivant une autre version, aucun d’entre eux n’a été brûlé ni s’est échappé.’

all the prisons ... One is also informed of a plot to cause an uprising over sugar.⁹¹

Previously the fire incident had been reported as rumour, a story spreading seemingly of its own accord, but observed and recorded by the writer with a degree of detachment. The later letter revealed a degree of engagement with the information: the writer referred to having been informed of details. Who is providing that information, however, is unclear: it cannot be entirely ruled out that Colson was creating an ironic distance, suggesting he was aware of the way rumours could be exploited to alarm the public. Colson's letters as a whole, however, do not suggest such awareness, and his language in this letter specifically perpetuated the rumour (which, in the case of sugar, was, in fact, a rumour about a plot to spread a rumour to rouse the people).

The examples cited above demonstrate that our memoirists considered themselves able to differentiate between hearsay and fact, and were confident of their ability to identify and dismiss rumours as unworthy of their notice. However, this does not tell the whole story: although they felt they were able to retain a degree of objectivity when it came to the 'word on the street', they were more readily influenced by what they read in the press. Rosalie Jullien's trust in the *Moniteur* has been outlined above – to the point that she regularly acquiesced to its greater authority ('[les journaux] ... disent mieux que moi'). These memoirists, perhaps precisely because they are literate,⁹² put their trust in the printed word, and it is therefore through print that they are most affected by rumour, as can be seen in the letters and diary entries leading up to the September Massacres.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 211. 'On est à présent informé que lorsque le feu a été mis aux 4 coins de la Force il y avait un complot pour le mettre au même moment à toutes les prisons. ... On a aussi été instruit qu'il y a un complot pour soulever le peuple au sujet du sucre.'

⁹² Daniel Roche, in his introduction to Ménétra's *Journal of My Life*, notes how unusual it was for an artisan such as Ménétra to write his memoirs. David Hopkin suggests that this dearth of memoir-writing among labourers was less a result of low literacy levels, and more due to the fact that for this demographic the 'collective' outweighed 'the personal in the construction of identity.' Hopkin, 'Storytelling, Fairytales and Autobiography: Some Observations on Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century French Soldiers' and Sailors' Memoirs', *Social History*, vol. 29, no. 2 (2004), p. 195.

The letters of deputy Pierre Dubreuil-Chambardel from Paris to his home of Poitou might seem to carry a degree of authority, by virtue of the writer's proximity to events. Certainly the recipients of his letters must have felt that they were receiving the news from the capital from a reliable eye-witness. Chambardel, however, has been described as an unsophisticated provincial 'who wore his clogs to the Convention',⁹³ and his letters do not demonstrate the care and nuance characteristic of Rosalie Jullien's writing. On the contrary, they display a bravado and drama that was more likely to enhance the reputation of the writer than to calm the worries of the recipient. Replying to a letter from his son anxious to hear about the events of 10 August, he described the attack on the Assembly by 'les perfides', aiming to 'cut the throats of the friends of the public good.' Rather than assuage his son's fears, he stressed his lucky escape. Had the mob been successful, 'I would without doubt have numbered among the victims'.⁹⁴ The sense of drama and simmering tensions in these letters of late August 1792 draw on and perpetuate the popular rumours circulated during the month that preceded the September Massacres. As such these letters seem to corroborate the alarming stories in the radical press rather than proved a clear-eyed antidote to popular fear-mongering.

The letter concluded with news confirming the fall of Longwy. These references to two actual events – the storming of the Tuileries on 10 August and the fall of Longwy less than two weeks later – bookend a highly dramatised account of the dangers facing the deputies, lending credibility to the central account.⁹⁵ This was followed by a letter a few days later to his step-daughter, describing again the narrow escape of the deputies, followed

⁹³ Pierre Dubreuil-Chambardel, *Lettres parisiennes d'un révolutionnaire Poitevin*. Preface par Claude Petitfrère; postface par Philippe Dubreuil-Chambardel (Maison des Sciences de la Ville: Tours, 1994), p. 6. Claude Petitfrère relates how this reputation as a toiler of the soil was exaggerated and that he was more correctly 'un bourgeois de campagne' than peasant.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 58. 'Il ne peut être douteux que j'aurai été du nombre des victims.'

⁹⁵ The imagery of spilt blood – specifically Chambardel's own ('J'ai toujours été décidé à aller jusqu'à répandre la dernière goutte de mon sang pour la liberté de ma patrie') – pervades this letter.

by a postscript describing the September Massacres.⁹⁶ Here, the attacks on the Assembly, in which he claimed he would have lost his life, were blamed on a conspiracy by the royal family: ‘The danger is past ... At last the conspirators have been revealed, and it is so widely known and proven that the former king and queen are the leaders of this great conspiracy.’⁹⁷ In this letter, reported events, personal story-telling and rumour reported as fact form a heady combination, successfully conveying the atmosphere of heightened anxiety prevailing in the capital, and relaying it to the provinces by letter, where it would no doubt be further embellished as the contents were discussed. The postscript describing the events of 2-3 September reported as if it were fact the rumour that set the massacres in motion:

A grand conspiracy, that we are assured had as its goal the kidnap of the former king and the siege of Paris, [and] that a great number of prisoners, 15000 we were told, were to unite in opening the [prison] doors to the conspirators, has so enflamed the people that before leaving they needed assurance that Paris was peaceful by purging the prisons of all aristocrats.⁹⁸

Even Rosalie Jullien, so careful in her assessment of fact and fiction, repeated the story of the conspiracy, seeing in it an explanation for the violent actions of the people, who were left with no choice but to defend their families and their country: ‘[T]he people said, we are leaving our wives, our children, at home, among our enemies, let us purge the earth of them. My friend, I throw a veil over the crimes that the people were forced to commit ... the black plots that have been discovered everywhere shine a terrifying light on the

⁹⁶ Dubreuil-Chambardel, *Lettres*, p. 60. This letter is dated 1 September, but describes the events of 2-3 September.

⁹⁷ Ibid. ‘Le danger est passé. ... Enfin les conspirateurs sont dévoilés et il est ici évidemment reconnu et prouvé que le ci-devant roi et la reine sont les chefs de cette grande conspiration.’

⁹⁸ Ibid. ‘Une grande conspiration que l’on assure avoir pour objet d’enlever le ci-devant roi et d’embrasser [?] Paris. On assure que tous les prisonniers étaient en grand nombre, de quinze mille environ, et devaient se réunir auprès des conspirateurs en leur ouvrant les portes. Ceci a tellement chauffé le peuple qu’avant de partir il a voulu assurer Paris de sa tranquillité et du fait qu’il voulait purger la prison de toute l’aristocratie.’

fate that awaits and threatens the patriot'.⁹⁹ Such was the potency of the counter-revolutionary plot rumour that even Rosalie Jullien, normally so careful in her assessment of information, was convinced of its authenticity. And it is precisely because she was known for her caution that her correspondents will have trusted her assessment, thus validating the rumour and extending its reach.

This chapter has examined two different modes of informal communication and the different ways in which they contribute to the transmission of rumour: the street pedlar, communicating to large crowds, and the letter writer, communicating to the individual. As such, they might seem to represent opposite ends of the communication spectrum: public versus private; spoken versus written; the stranger versus the trusted correspondent. The pedlars' cries are ephemeral, their traces remaining only in the audience's memory. When challenged, the pedlar often denied the words had been spoken at all, and yet these words, or an approximation of them, had been heard, and carried through the streets where they would be transformed yet again in the telling. The letter writer, on the other hand, in committing impressions to paper, created a permanent record, one which could be read and re-read, shared, and later saved for posterity. And yet both of these modes of communication are potential conduits for rumour. Although their motives in spreading news are different, their information comes from similar sources – from the press, from their friends and acquaintances, from their own impressions or eye-witness accounts. Because of this they are as fallible as any one attempting to piece together facts and separate truth from fiction from a variety of sources. However, it is in their position as news authorities that they have the power to affect rumour: the pedlar as the mouthpiece for the news he sells, the letter writer by virtue of proximity to events and his or her relationship with the reader –

⁹⁹ Rosalie Jullien, p. 288. 'Lettre à son mari, 2 septembre, 1792. Le peuple a dit: nous laissons dans nos foyers nos femmes, nos enfants, au milieu de nos ennemis, purgeons-en la terre de la liberté. Mon ami, je jette ici ... un voile sur les crimes qu'on a forcé le peuple à commettre ... Les noirs complots qui se découvrent de toutes parts, portent la lumière la plus affreuse ... sur le sort qui attend et menace les patriotes'.

both are granted positions of trust to a greater or lesser degree. It is their combination of apparent authority with human fallibility that makes these informal modes of communication significant driving forces in the transmission of rumour.

Chapter III

Rumour, Riots, Feasts and Famines

Many of the rumours and popular beliefs that surfaced during the Revolution existed in previous incarnations under the Old Regime. Popular rumour generally is related to a kind of collective folk memory, one that builds upon commonly held beliefs and prejudices to explain contemporary events. Popular ideas of 'aristocratic' behaviour, as reinforced by the scabrous culture of *libelles*, satirical prints and court gossip provided a template against which the shining ideals of Republicanism could be measured, with, for example, the effete and degenerate ways of the court posited against the *franchise* of Republicanism. The Manichean rhetoric of Jacobinism allowed a politically unsophisticated populace to engage with the principles of the Republic by promoting a simple dichotomy of *bons sans-culottes* vs counter-revolutionaries. What constituted a counter-revolutionary drew from, among other things, popular pre-revolutionary notions of aristocratic behaviour. The vast body of writing defaming Marie-Antoinette, for example, drew on both a previous tradition of pornographic texts against aristocratic women, as well as the oral tradition of gossip and slander that permeated the court. In such bodies of work, whose subjects were often women with undue influence at court, such as the king's mistresses, the undue, covert influence of the subject was often equated with sexual power and unnatural appetites. The exaggerated allegations against Marie-Antoinette were a legacy of these earlier beliefs, in which each slander and innuendo built upon the last in an increasingly baroque catalogue of grotesquerie.¹

¹ The ever-escalating exaggerations about Marie-Antoinette, however, suggest that these stories serve first and foremost as gossip; the teller/writer needs to differentiate the tale from previous ones for attention, and does so by adding new, ever more exaggerated, details. The need to build upon and intensify previous rumours, however, can backfire, as during Marie-Antoinette's trial, when Hébert manufactured allegations about the queen's incestuous relationship with her own son, which were rejected by many.

Arlette Farge and Jacques Revel describe a similar example in *The Vanishing Children of Paris*, in which popular perceptions of the unnatural appetites of a degenerate monarchy led to a very real belief that the children of Paris were being kidnapped by the police in order to cure the king of a venereal disease.² Here, a contemporary and disturbing phenomenon – disappearing children – was interpreted within an existing framework comprising several strands of popular thought: distrust of authority (the relationship between the police and the people of Paris had long been one of mutual suspicion); folk medicine and old wives tales (i.e., the traditional belief in the curative power of virgin blood); and a familiar, even universal, fairy-tale narrative of the ogre in his castle. These threads coalesced in the popular imagination, creating, for the inhabitants of the city, a perfectly coherent narrative that the young of Paris would be abducted and killed at the behest of a debauched ruler.

A similar phenomenon, in which both contemporary and historical popular beliefs came together to create a coherent, albeit fictionalised, popular narrative, can be seen in one of the earliest examples of Revolutionary crowd activity: the storming of the Bastille. Popularly recognised as a symbol of arbitrary and terrifying despotism, the Bastille had its reputation cemented through a body of literature that emerged at the end of the seventeenth century.³ This literature, often in the form of memoirs by former prisoners describing acts of unlimited power play and extreme cruelty, entered the popular imagination, creating and contributing to a host of allusions and stories that referenced existing beliefs about corrupt power. Thus, in July 1789, following public outcry at the sacking of Necker and rumours that the king was mustering troops to occupy the city, the popular protest enacted on the site of the Bastille was propelled by a combination of both historical and

² Arlette Farge and Jacques Revel, *The Vanishing Children of Paris: Rumor and Politics before the French Revolution*, trans. Claudia Miéville (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

³ Han-Jürgen Lüsebrink and Rolf Reichardt, *The Bastille: A History of a Symbol of Despotism and Freedom*, trans. by Norbert Schürer (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997).

contemporary rumours, and the interaction between the two. Of the many interconnecting rumours were stories that de Launay, the governor of the Bastille, had been given orders to fire on the populace of the faubourg Saint-Antoine; another was that members of the Assembly were already imprisoned in its cavernous dungeons.⁴ Such stories were easily absorbed within existing narratives of state brutality and unlawful punishment, and all the more rousing for it. The subsequent mythology of the storming of the Bastille drew on these narratives, overlooking the realities of the scant few prisoners liberated on the day to present an easily communicated tale of heroic citizens overcoming the despotism. The subsequent identification and celebration of the *vainqueurs de la Bastille* as heroes of the Revolution contributed to the making of the myth and reinforced the existence of the earlier rumours, each reinforcing the other to contribute to a collective narrative of popular political engagement.

This chapter will explore the relationship between rumour and crowd activity. It will look at what subjects provoked crowd reactions and the extent to which these stories relate to a pre-existing collective narrative. The archival material consulted – the police reports and the *observateur* reports – provide a record of both the participants in the crowd and of the authorities attempts to police them. The authorities were aware of the power of rumour to galvanise crowds, and arrested those they suspected of spreading rumours for this reason. They were also alert to rumours about future uprisings, and, as will be discussed below, feared the use of covert symbols to rally crowds. The tension between, on the one hand, suspicion of crowds and their potential for mob violence, and the Republican ideal of the sovereign people reveals itself in these documents.

The most significant examples of crowd action during the Revolution – the Revolutionary *journées* – have been extensively studied, either, as in George Rudé's classic study,⁵ focussing on the crowd itself, or on events as they

⁴ Ibid., p. 40.

⁵ George Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 1959)

unfolded, on significance of the *journée* in the greater narrative of the Revolution. The role of rumour, in these accounts, is often referred to in passing, as just one element that contributed to the momentum of the crowd's action. Rumours of stockpiled ammunition contributed to the storming of the Bastille; stories of aristocratic feasting played a part in the October marches. These narratives acknowledge the existence of popular rumours but in so doing make assumptions about their influence on group dynamics without specifically questioning how it is that rumours contribute to crowd action. It is generally understood that rumours do contribute in some way, but without close analysis these references present rumour almost as a force of nature, a vast, generalising wave that suggests the crowd is one amorphous body, a rumour one shared thought that has only one outcome.

Other historians have looked at the details of a specific rumour. Baczko's examination of the spread of the rumour of Robespierre-the-king on 9 Thermidor has been referred to previously.⁶ That rumour, although it exploited pre-existing beliefs, had an identifiable beginning, intentionally planted to encourage support for the overthrow of Robespierre. David Andress, on the other hand, in his examination of the Champ de Mars Massacre, identifies the multiple meanings and interpretations that reverberated against and influenced one another in the hours leading up to the massacre, providing a very detailed analysis of the content and trajectory of the rumours that led to the violence and the rumours that followed as a result. Here, unlike the trajectory of the Robespierre-the-king rumour, there is no one tale spreading like the proverbial wild fire, but a cocktail of prejudices, conspiracy theories, rumour and counter-rumour, relating to suspected brigands, crowds of brigands, crowds who accuse the National Guards of being brigands, and a whole host of royalist conspirators, greedy

⁶ Bronislaw Baczko, *Ending the Terror: The French Revolution After Robespierre*, trans. Michel Petheram (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

elites, and heavy-handed National Guards.⁷ Andress's investigation of the development of these rumours takes into account the relationship between pre-existing theories and current events, and illustrates how older rumours shape and are in return reinforced by new ones. The role of rumour in galvanising or provoking crowd action stems from these two impetuses: the earlier, pre-existing narrative and the immediate, contemporary event.

The behaviour and dynamics of revolutionary crowds in general have been the subject of much historical inquiry. One of the earliest of these studies, by Gustave Le Bon in 1896, perceived the crowd as an entity whose group mentality overcomes its individual parts, describing variously the crowd's 'collective mind' that supersedes individual will, or falls victim to a 'collective hallucination'.⁸ Women and children are most susceptible, but rather than being prompted by a lone instigator – a *malveillant* – these 'hallucinations' appear to surface from a group consciousness, and, once embedded are very difficult to shake. Le Bon's theory suggests there is a kind of shared memory that surfaces when the crowd is assembled from its constituent parts, which creates its own morality: 'This explains how it was that amongst the most savage members of the French Convention were to be found inoffensive citizens who, under ordinary circumstances, would have been peaceable notaries or virtuous magistrates.'⁹ In this he was identifying one aspect of the ambivalence with which writers during the Revolution perceived the crowd and, by extension, the people. Many historians, George Rudé and Colin Lucas among them, have identified a tendency among earlier writers to identify honourable political crowd activity with 'le peuple' and destructive brutality with 'la canaille'.¹⁰ Burke, and later, Taine, for example,

⁷ David Andress, *Massacre at the Champ de Mars*, (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Royal Historical Society/Boydell Press, 2000), p. 11.

⁸ Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (Batoche Books, [1896] 2001).

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁰ Rudé, *The Crowd*; Colin Lucas, 'The Crowd and Politics' in *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, vol. II, *The Political Culture of the French Revolution*, ed. Colin Lucas (Pergamon Press: Oxford, 1988), and 'Talking about urban popular violence in

viewed Revolutionary crowds as little more than rabble, while Michelet saw crowds as the physical manifestation of Republicanism. This distinction existed simultaneously among contemporaries, too, allowing the authorities to attribute unpalatable crowd behaviour to the work of brigands while still maintaining the ideal of a virtuous sovereign people.

This chapter uses these studies as a starting point to explore the effect of rumour on crowds during a particular time and place. It is concerned less with the historically significant *journées* than with the day-to-day social dynamics of urban neighbourhoods, in which the quotidian anxieties that would beset any urban poor during the eighteenth century were, by virtue of the time in which they occurred, overlaid with political significance. The physical make up of these crowded neighbourhoods meant that any minor disturbance could quickly draw an audience; if the subject had wider implications the spectators might quickly become participants. Arguments arising from the scarcity of essential goods, merchants accused of cheating or stories relating to shortages could all provoke emotive responses and might trigger a crowd disturbance. How rumour contributed to this dynamic, and what the consequences were, is the subject of this chapter. In addition, the authorities' response to these rumours and the way they interpreted rumours as a means to manipulate crowds illustrate the unresolved tension at the heart of their attitude toward *le peuple*.

During the most radical years of the Revolution, rumours relating to food – to the cause and extent of shortages, to hoarding, to who might be profiting whilst others starved – were common. These originated from a wide variety of sources. On the one hand, they were a continuation of earlier beliefs in aristocratic famine plots, as outlined by Steven Kaplan,¹¹ but given newer contemporary overtones, which reflected the Revolutionary mentality both on the part of the authorities and from the perspective of *le menu peuple*.

1789' in *Reshaping France: Town, Country and Region during the French Revolution*, ed. Alan Forrest and Peter Jones (Manchester: Manchester University Press: 1991).

¹¹ Steven L. Kaplan, 'The Famine Plot Persuasion', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 72, part 3 (1982), pp. 1-79.

Looking at a range of police reports relating to food riots during the winters of 1793/year II reveals the authorities' characteristic concerns with counter-revolutionary plots and conspiracies. As the examples below will illustrate, government officials regularly expressed the belief that trouble was being provoked by counter-revolutionary *malveillants*, either through a concerted campaign of rumours about widespread famine or through short-term rumours about imminent lack of food, closures of shops, etc., which were, in their view, responsible for rioting. The government's attitude to the formation and behaviour of crowds, too, reveals this conspiratorial interpretation: according to official reports, angry mobs of women were being manipulated into violence by a minority of strategically placed *intrigants*; within the crowds, according to the reports, were 'covert aristocrats' or men *travestie en femme* intentionally fomenting anger against the government. Even the government's own measures to ensure an equitable distribution of essential foods, such as the *carte de pain*, began to be suspected as a sign of *raillement*, as I will discuss below. On the side of the people themselves, they were caught in a vortex of self-perpetuating beliefs regarding the causes of shortages: the aristocrats and '*gros marchands*' – who were often one and the same¹² – were either actively plotting to starve or poison Paris, or were selfishly hoarding goods whilst *le menu peuple* starved. As under the Old Regime, the popular belief went, the elite grew fat while the people perished, leading to rumours that the new elite – the government – were siphoning off luxuries just as their predecessors had. Finally, Jacobin ideology itself contributed to bread rumours among the people (paradoxically, given that this existed concurrently with a popular suspicion that government officials were eating well): the emphasis on personal morality as an indication of political purity, on not being seen to benefit personally from the Revolution, meant that having bread whilst

¹² The reply of the Cordelier Club to the request of the Société patriotique du Palais Royal for affiliation illustrates this, questioning the patriotism of its merchant members: 'Nous avons d'abord examiné la liste de ses membres et nous n'y avons trouvé aucun sans-culotte: il n'y a que des gros marchands et des boutiquiers, et vous savez combien le patriotisme de cette classe est douteux.' Séance du 29 Janvier, 1793. *Le Club des Cordeliers, texte et documents*, p.1125.

others starved – the act of eating itself – became a means of identifying the immorality of others.

Food, then, was not only a practical and political issue, but also a moral one: on 3 floréal, year II, the section du Panthéon recorded the arrest of an individual for eating in a manner insulting to the public. This was registered as the ‘arrest of an individual gnawing on a large bone and eating a stuffed fish, by which he seemed to want to insult the public’s suffering.’¹³ On questioning the individual, the police concluded that, although the suspect had not spoken any offensive words directly, his behaviour alone constituted an insult and they requested further investigation into his morals.¹⁴ Although no actual law had been passed prohibiting eating, the Law of Suspects was flexible enough to accommodate sensual enjoyment as a counter-revolutionary activity.

The specific reference to what was being eaten is clearly significant here: Olwen Hufton estimates that cereal of some kind made up at least 95 percent of the diet of the poor, ‘whether as bread or some kind of liquid broth or gruel’ eked out with vegetables or ‘greenery from hedgerows’;¹⁵ a high percentage of the urban labourer’s daily wage was spent on bread.¹⁶ The consumption of meat, therefore was a luxury reserved for the very few. This individual is not only eating meat but also a fish stuffed with unimaginable luxuries, a morally questionable, if not explicitly criminal, act at a time when the city fears famine. The question of eating or lack of eating, what is eaten, and with whom shapes the reputations both of individuals and entire trades.

¹³ APP *Inventaire des Archives de la Préfecture de Police*. ‘Arrestation d’un individu qui rongeaient un gros os et mangeait du poisson gâté, et paraissait vouloir par cela insulter la misère publique.’

¹⁴ APP Section du Panthéon, 3 floréal, an II. ‘Il ne peut point tenir de propos, mais nous vous invitons à prendre quelques renseignements sur son état moral.’

¹⁵ Olwen Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France, 1750–1789* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 44.

¹⁶ William H. Sewell ‘The Sans-Culotte Rhetoric of Subsistence’ in *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, vol. 4 *The Terror*, ed. Keith Michael Baker (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1994), p. 262.

It is not difficult to imagine the grim satisfaction of the police agent who wrote up the death report of the wealthy *orfèvre* who died of an excess of food and drink in February 1793, at the height of the sugar riots.¹⁷

Excessive consumption was therefore both immoral and potentially criminal. Even worse, perhaps, was the idea of excessive waste. At the height of fears about impending famine were recurring rumours that food was being thrown away, or dumped into the Seine. An *observateur* report of 17 ventôse, year II, describes a crowd assembling following word that an individual was about to slaughter his pig. Within the crowd was a woman who described her experience of queuing for five hours to buy potatoes, having eaten, in the last 24 hours, only olive oil soup, an onion and a pound of bread, which had given her terrible stomach pains. She was convinced the shortages were artificial, intended to starve the city, and that food was being intentionally destroyed:

Certainly, she said, they want to starve us; carts full of rotting chicken thrown into the water ... heifers ... cattle ... pregnant sows that they kill, all of this proves it, and still it's the members of our Revolutionary committees, the very men who we put our trust in, who are causing the famine. Who can we trust?¹⁸

Although the instigator of the famine was here the unnamed 'on' ('on veut nous affamer'), the unfortunate woman blamed the Revolutionary committee, 'also' involved in fabricating the famine. The waste and profligacy previously associated with the aristocracy was now seen to be a characteristic of the Revolutionary government. With such an about-face, who can one trust indeed? The report does not indicate whether the woman making these accusations was arrested, but others who voiced similar opinions would not be so lucky.

¹⁷ APP *Répertoire Chronologique*, Section des Amis de la Patrie, 23 février, 1793. 'Décès du nommé Poissonier, Louis, orfèvre, mort d'excès de boisson et de nourriture.'

¹⁸ AN W112, 17 ventôse, an II. 'Certainement, disait-elle, on veut nous affamer; les voitures de volaille pourries jetées à l'eau et trouvées chez des particuliers. Les génisses ... les vaches, les truies pleines que l'on tue, tout cela le prouve bien, et encore ce sont les membres de nos comités révolutionnaires, les hommes mêmes en qui nous avons mis notre confiance qui travaillent aussi à amener la famine! A qui donc se fier?'

The unnamed woman would have heard sufficient rumours about waste to convince her that livestock was being slaughtered arbitrarily. In April of the previous year, the *Moniteur* wrote about discussions at the Commune following allegations from the mayor, Jean-Nicolas Pache, that vast quantities of bread were being carted out of Paris and thrown into the Seine. A suggested solution was to trawl the Seine with fishing nets.¹⁹ The following year, this alleged waste was both greater – poultry, cattle, plump sows — and was now believed to have been caused, rather than investigated, by the government. On the same day that rumours of the rotten chicken were recorded, there were reports of a threat to assemble outside the Hôtel-Dieu, following a rumour that the eggs intended to feed its sick were being eaten by the governors instead.²⁰ What had changed over the past year? It would appear to be an example of what historians of rumour have identified as ‘snowballing’,²¹ i.e, drawing on historical precedent while simultaneously acquiring new details relevant to the current situation. It must be remembered that the earlier rumour does not need to have been true in order to resurface later: it is sufficient that it should have existed as a rumour previously to give credence to its newest incarnation. Geoffrey Cubitt identifies a similar phenomenon in the growth of anti-Jesuit conspiracy theories in nineteenth-century France, describing how contemporary Jesuit conspiracy theories were cemented ‘by connecting present happenings with the ... the mythical version of the Jesuit past’.²² These earlier stories, then, resurface in times of anxiety, serving to explain

¹⁹ *Le Moniteur Universel*, 18 avril, 1793, no. 108. ‘Commune de Paris, 15 Avril: Le procureur de la Commune fait une lecture d’une lettre du maire, qui annonce que beaucoup de voitures chargées de pain sortent de Paris. Il dénonce ensuite que l’on jette du pain dans la rivière. Des ordres ont été donnés pour faire tendre des filets dans la Seine, afin de vérifier ce fait.’

²⁰ AN W112, 17 ventôse, an II. ‘L’on fait des menaces de se porter sur l’Hôtel-Dieu disant qu’ils sont approvisionné d’œufs toutes les semaines et que les malades n’en mangent point, que c’est au contraire ceux qui gouvernent l’hôpital qui les mangent. L’on demande qu’un pareil abus soit supprimé pour éviter un plus grand danger.’

²¹ A tendency first identified by Gordon W. Allport and Leo Postman, ‘An Analysis of Rumor’, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 10, no. 4 (Winter, 1946-1947).

²² Geoffrey Cubitt, *The Jesuit Myth: Conspiracy Theory and Politics in Nineteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 297.

and clarify complex current events and validate group prejudices. In the case of the rumour regarding the governors of the Hôtel-Dieu, for example, older prejudices about the luxuries enjoyed by an elite had resurfaced and been influenced by current beliefs and recent events. A later incident concerning a disgruntled crowd at a grocer's seems to have drawn on both old and new rumours, when news that the remaining stocks of butter were not for sale but allocated for the sick at the Hôtel-Dieu:

A large crowd assembled at the door of Dugeuse, who was distributing butter. He closed his shop saying he couldn't sell any more, that the rest was for the sick. The people wanted to rise up and break down the door.²³

Whether the story of the corruption at the Hôtel-Dieu prompted the behaviour of the crowd, or was used retrospectively to justify it, it contributed to the popular belief that food denied to the people was being taken by the undeserving under the guise of being given to the less fortunate.

Given the inter-connected relationship between greed, elitism and counter-revolutionary activity, to be accused of greed was a grave insult – even calumny – and a matter for the police. A butcher accused of short-changing a customer retaliated by accusing that customer of being greedy.²⁴ Yet accusations of greed were not the only way in which the consumption of others could be employed as an insult. A report from the Section de Butte des Moulins, in which a baker was accused of hoarding good-quality bread, was based on unconfirmed second-hand accounts; what witnesses could agree on, however, was the presence of a *fonctionnaire*, dismissing a woman in the queue with an insulting suggestion that she eat planks of wood as there was no bread for her.²⁵ Did the allegations of hoarding come after the

²³ AN W112, 17 ventôse, an II.

²⁴ APP *Répertoire Chronologique*, Section des Amis de la Patrie, 2 floréal, an II. 'Déclaration au sujet d'un bon que la bonne du déclarant a rapporté de la boucherie et sur lequel on a écrit Gourmande et Suspecte.' This incident is discussed in more detail in Chapter V.

²⁵ APP Section de Butte des Moulins, 9 floréal, an III. 'Un rapport a été fait, citoyen, par l'un de nos agents qui date du 6 du courant, dans lequel il est dit que le nommé Coulange, boulanger ... avait caché environ 200 g de pain de toute beauté pour le vendre dit-on a

insult, as a form of retaliation? Variations on the phrase occurred frequently, and carried a multiplicity of meanings. A report of 16 ventôse, year II records women in the market expressing the very real concern that if the situation continued, they would be forced to eat grass.²⁶ The insult in the bakery recalled genuine fears of starvation, whilst simultaneously echoing the alleged comment by minister Foulon de Doué that the starving of Paris eat grass. It cannot have endeared the baker to the women queuing for bread; how easy for them to turn the tables and accuse those who were failing to supply essential goods with hoarding. At the same time, could it be possible that the insult, so heinous and redolent of elite corruption, was falsely attributed as a means of tarnishing the reputation of the speaker? It would be a reckless individual who would draw parallels between themselves and the likes of Foulon, and risk the same fate.²⁷

Just as customers viewed merchants with suspicion, so the merchants themselves blamed those higher up the chain of distribution: a letter of 14 ventôse, year II, described a merchant's frustration at not being able to supply the produce requested, complaining of a black market that was pushing up prices and allowing *intrigants* to circumnavigate food regulations to supply luxury restaurants in Paris:

[I]t is impossible for me to fill your order, given that we follow the rules of what is right and lawful, whereas the farmers side with their own interests and will not hear of any law that goes against them... Our market is deserted and there isn't a single piece of butter. Everything is sold directly from the farmer, who gives preference to whoever pays the most; ... schemers buy it all up ... to supply the

raison de cent sols le livre, tandis qu'il disait aux citoyens qu'il n'avait plus de pain à leur distribuer. Il est dit aussi qu'un commissaire civil qui était à ce moment chez ce Boulanger, avait dit à une femme qui lui demandait du pain, de manger les planches: la commission t'invite à lui transmettre dans le plus bref délai des renseignements sur cette affaire.'

²⁶ AN W112 16 ventôse, an II. 'Toujours beaucoup de mécontents relativement aux subsistances, une influence terrible aux portes des marchands, les femmes disent puisqu'on ne peut rien avoir pour vivre qu'il faudra manger de l'herbe.'

²⁷ The revenge enacted upon Foulon following the fall of the Bastille made specific reference to this.

restaurateurs of Paris and grand houses, stealing from the sans-culottes the abundance that is beginning to reappear.²⁸

A report two days later repeated this belief, this time accusing butchers of diverting meat to the Vendée.²⁹ The tendency, observed by some historians, among Parisians to respond to shortages as consumers rather than suppliers created a divisive mentality within close-knit communities.³⁰ While Jacobin discourse encouraged this outlook in the abstract, the imminent prospect of food shortages (or fears of shortages) brought this outlook into the immediate neighbourhood. The supplier was at first associated and then became synonymous with the *intrigant*/elite/counterrevolutionary, rather than seen as running a modest business similar to his or her own customers. Such beliefs provided not only a justification for looting the business and livelihood of one's fellow and neighbour, it validated this looting as an act of patriotism. Rumours contributed to this, by referencing a generic bogeyman in order to demonise a specific target.

Rumours that France's abundance was being diverted to the undeserving were an extension of the pre-Revolutionary famine plot, and resurfaced regularly, either as an ongoing narrative relating to the behaviour of counter-revolutionaries and aristocrats or as a 'flash' rumour that provoked mobs to storm locations believed – whether correctly or not – to contain the desired items. A testimony of 28 ventôse to the Revolutionary Tribunal, by one Citoyenne Josephine Selledame, who worked behind the counter for a local grocer, described her belief, heard on the grapevine ('avoir ouï dire par

²⁸ AN W77, 14 ventôse, an II. '[I]l m'est impossible de remplir vos commandes vu qu'en nous rangeant sous les règles de la raison et de la loi, les fermiers se rangent du côté de leur intérêt et n'écoutent en rien toute loi qui leur est contraire ... Notre marché est désert et il n'y paraît aucun morceau de beurre. Tout est vendu chez le fermier et c'est celui qui donne le plus qui est préféré; ... Des intrigants l'achètent pour fournir les restaurateurs de Paris et les maisons de luxe et par ce moyen ravissent aux sans culottes l'abondance que commence à renaitre...'

²⁹ AN W112 16 ventôse, an II. '[I]l existe des malveillants parmi les bouchers dont un des [illisible] est celui d'avoir acheté toutes les marchandises qu'ils ont pu trouver pour la faire passer ensuite à la Vendée.'

³⁰ William H. Sewell, 'The Sans-Culotte Rhetoric of Subsistence', p. 261, analyses Soboul's and Rudé's interpretation, claiming that, although this distinction was appropriate for the riots of 1793, not all were thus motivated.

bruit public') that food was not reaching the markets but was being distributed among members of the Section de Marat, who were enjoying unfair privileges; the whole, she continued, was part of a Cordelier 'cabal' run by Vincent and Mormoro.³¹ As I will explore in more detail in Chapter VI, looking at the role of rumour in accusations and denunciations, here, different variations of the same rumour were used to reinforce and validate each other. The 'bruit public' validated the witness's belief in the allegations (rather than, say, the witness's belief contributing to the popular rumour). The account drew on early famine plots to interpret the high prices and shortage of goods in Paris, while implicating those who appeared to be benefitting from the goods that others lacked. Those who benefitted were by definition 'riches egoïstes', and the rich, the popular interpretation ran, had always succeeded by starving the poor. Rumour, accusation and further rumour came together in a perpetual circle of self-justification as proof, from which there was no escape for the accused.

The rumours among the people supported the idea that *malveillants* were responsible for shortages by either misappropriating or hoarding food or other essential goods. The authorities believed a variation on this theme: according to them, *malveillants* were indeed causing discontent, but this through spreading rumours about shortages rather than causing actual shortages themselves. These fears were reinforced by a phrase recurrent in sans-culotte discourse, that of the 'disette factice' – a false shortage – believed to be caused by speculators not only driving up prices for their own financial gain, but ultimately to starve the public.³² In the popular

³¹ AN W78 Tribunal Extraordinaire, plaque 1, doc. 5. 'Déclaration des témoins contre Ancar. La Citoyenne Joséphine Selledame, tenant le comptoir du Lohier, marchand épicier et juré du tribunal révolutionnaire...laquelle a déclaré avoir ouï dire par bruit public, que Ducroquet, commissaires aux accapareurs de la Section Marat, D'Anjou et Guilmat, membres du comité révolutionnaire de la même section, se sont permis des exceptions arbitraires envers les citoyens qui faisaient arriver les denrées pour leurs subsistances & envers autres citoyens, et qu'ils la faisaient également venir pour l'approvisionnement de Paris; qu'ils ont fait arrêtees, fait vendre & distribuer dans leur section au lieu de les laisser aller aux lieux de leur destination.'

³² William H. Sewell, 'The Sans-Culotte Rhetoric of Subsistence', pp. 256ff.; Walter Markov and Albert Soboul, eds., *Die Sansculotten von Paris: Dokumente zur Geschichte der Volksbewegung 1793-1794* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1957), p. 486.

imagination, however, it was the authorities who played a central role in the shortages, an accusation that made them dangerously synonymous with the counter-revolutionary *malveillants* gorging themselves while the people starved. A baker in the Section de Fidélité who, in the hearing of her customers, criticised the latest government initiatives relating to the sale of bread was arrested for rumour-mongering,³³ such was the potential of her complaint to turn popular opinion against the authorities.

The potency of food as a metaphor for political criminality was perpetuated and readily exploited by the authorities; having contributed to its popular significance it was essential – although barely possible – to somehow separate themselves from it. The fraternal banquets of year II repositioned food as intrinsic to the experience of sharing and communality,³⁴ but this was ultimately outweighed by the equation of food with excess, with immorality and with unnatural appetites. Again, the authorities were instrumental in this, with allegations of excessive appetite or sensual enjoyment representing the antithesis of Jacobin Puritanism and thus serving as evidence of other types of criminal behaviour.

Rumours of veritable banquets held in prison were common. Paralleling the ‘orgies’ Madame Roland was said to have held at her salon,³⁵ General Ronsin was also said to have held feasts (*orgies*) while in prison although the suggestion that there were as many women present as men, implies moral transgressions that went beyond gustatory appetites. ‘Often there are orgies and quarrels that are scandalous and upset those who haven’t permission to

³³ APP Section de Fidélité, 23 frimaire, an II. ‘Rapport contre une boulangère qui a murmuré à propos des mesures prises par le commissaire surveillant la vente.’

³⁴ Rebecca L. Spang, *The Invention of the Restaurant: Paris and Modern Gastronomic Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

³⁵ *Mémoires de Madame Roland*, édition présentée et annotée par Paul de Roux (Paris: Mercure de France, [1966], 1986).

see anyone.³⁶ As with the individual arrested for eating in a manner that would offend those who had nothing, among Ronsin's many crimes was the suffering his enjoyment caused to others. As each faction fell from grace, stories of their indulgences become proof of their treachery against the nation. Part of the mythology of the Dantonistes was that prior to their arrival at the scaffold they dined well. To today's eyes this might be interpreted as a kind of vital bravado; to contemporaries it must have seemed confirmation of their perfidy.³⁷ Hébertiste Momoro's character defects, likewise, were reinforced by rumours about his dining habits:

[M]any complain that for a long time he has been disgustingly proud. There is a lot of talk about the sumptuous dinner ... which Vincent attended, and where in a time of shortages there were all kinds of different meats.³⁸

These popular anecdotes all lend weight to the circular argument that food was being appropriated by the elite, and thus eating well proved membership of that elite. Obtaining scarce goods was not only proof of one's criminality – buying on the black market or hoarding were both criminal offences – it also was evidence of a fundamental immorality: indulging in sensual pleasure was the antithesis of the behaviour of the *bon sans-culotte*. The only way a good patriot could enjoy a meal was if he shared it with others – preferably less fortunate than himself. As an antidote to all this counter-revolutionary excess, an *observateur* noted approvingly of the sharing of a hearty repast with a friendless child of the Republic:

³⁶ AN W78. 'Ronsin... a donné dans sa chambre des repas tant à des hommes qu'à des femmes. Souvent il y a des orgies et des querelles qui scandalisent et font souffrir ceux qui n'ont la permission de voir personne.'

³⁷ Célestin Guittard de Floriban, *Journal de Célestin Guittard de Floriban, bourgeois de Paris sous la Révolution. 1791-1796* (Paris: Editions France-Empire, 1974), p. 334, among others.

³⁸ Pierre Caron, *Paris Pendant la Terreur* (Paris: Librairie Alphonse Picard et Fils, 1910), vol. V, p. 330. 'Rapport de Pourvoyeur, 25 ventôse, an II. On se plaint beaucoup que depuis longtemps il est d'une fierté révoltante. On parlait encore beaucoup du dîner somptueux que Bourgeois, Menuisier et commandant des Carmes à donné le vingt ventôse...où Vincent s'est retrouvé, où par un temps de disette il y avait beaucoup de viande de boucherie de toute nature.'

Trait d'égalité:

A citizen dined in one of the rooms of the gatehouse at the Jardin des Plantes. He saw pass by a young girl of about eleven, whose appearance displayed the greatest poverty, eating a piece of dry bread which was most likely all she would have for dinner; he called to her, sat her at his table, gave her one of his dishes, shared his wine with her and, the meal completed, asked for no other thanks but her promise to be a good citizen and to love the Republic.³⁹

Similar incidents are reported in the *Moniteur*. Indeed, the incident described above, set apart from the rest of the report with its own title, seems, if not destined to appear in the press, then certainly influenced by such anecdotes. Food shared in the spirit of openness and of *fraternité* was to be encouraged, even applauded and commemorated in print, and was described in stark contrast to the insalubrious mixed-sex prison feasts of the traitors to the republic. That *conventionnels* were known – or simply believed – to eat well, could destroy individual reputations and compromise the integrity of the Convention as an institution.⁴⁰ A report of end April, 1793 noted a rumour relating to their restaurant bills:

Rumour has it [Le bruit circule] that many of the deputies at the National Convention often have splendid meals at celebrated restaurants, at 50 and 100 a head. It's the Brissotins that enjoy themselves in this way.⁴¹

Although the Brissotins were singled out specifically in this report, such rumours were applied to all factions. The previous month, the first issue of an anonymous pamphlet, entitled *Mémoires secrets des crimes et des forfaits*

³⁹ Caron, vol. V, pp. 415–6. 'Rapport de Perrière, 29 ventôse, an II. Trait d'égalité: Un citoyen dinait dans un des cabinets du portier du Jardin des Plantes. Il voit passer une jeune fille d'environ onze ans, dont l'extérieur annonçait la plus grande misère et qui dévorait un morceau de pain sec qui, probablement, composait tout son diner; il l'appelle, la fait s'asseoir à sa table, lui donne un de ses plats, partage avec elle son vin, et, le repas achevé, ne veut de cette pauvre enfant d'autre remerciement que la promesse d'être une bonne citoyenne et de bien aimer la République.'

⁴⁰ Mette Harder, 'Crisis of Representation: The National Convention and the Search for Political Legitimacy' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of York 2009) refers to rumours about the dining habits, among others, of *conventionnels* and the repercussions on popular approval.

⁴¹ AB AF IV 1470, doc. 102. '29 avril, 1793. Le bruit circule que plusieurs députés à la Convention Nationale font souvent des repas splendides chez les fameux restaurateurs ... à 50 et 100 par tête. Ce sont des Brissotins qui se régalent de la sorte.'

qui s'ourdissent dans diverses tavernes described several accounts of plots and plans devised in taverns and restaurants. It claimed that Brissot and his followers, along with twenty-five Englishman

had established in Paris, not a club in the French style, but an English tavern, at a leading restaurateur's ... they meet three times a week; it was they who concocted the plan to assassinate King George and Pitt.⁴²

While the Brissotins were in secret correspondence with Charles Fox and Lord Stanhope from their suspiciously English-style tavern (aided by an English sailor named George),⁴³ 'D'Orléans, Robespierre, Collot d'Herbois, S.-Huruge & Marat' were reported to 'have regular chats above the Café Anglais, in the Palais-Royal; they often have late suppers together.'⁴⁴ Eating well was not only suspicious in itself, it contributed to suspicious behaviour. Conviviality was to be encouraged when it took place out doors, in public and at long communal tables; foreign taverns and late night suppers suggested all manner of privilege: privileged consumption, certainly, but also privileged access and privileged influence. Such allegations would resurface against each of the factions as they fell from grace, with witnesses recalling, sometimes years after the event, the sharing of intimate suppers with now disgraced figures.⁴⁵

Popular perceptions of a political elite's privileged access to food, therefore, carried multiple meanings, which could be (and were) exploited by their enemies. On a more visceral level, in the popular imagination, it placed the

⁴² [s.l.], no. 1er; 1er Mars, 1793. BHVP 19753. The note to the reader promised, 'Every week, we will publish an edition of these memoirs, at least until these scoundrels lose their touch.'

⁴³ Ibid., 'Fox & Stanhope correspondent avec eux; un matelot, nommé Georges, du paquebot de Douvres à calais, est celui qui porte & rapporte les correspondances.'

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.2.

⁴⁵ Spang, 'Morality, Equality, Hospitality!' in *The Invention of the Restaurant* examines the problems associated with communal dining as an expression of Republican virtue, including the difficulties of addressing notions of abundance with the virtue of frugality, and of hospitality whilst avoiding elitism. Perceptions of intimacy and friendships among deputies is explored in Marisa Linton, *Choosing Terror: Virtue, Friendship and Authenticity in the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Revolutionaries apart from the starving on the street, and reinforced the widespread belief that food was being appropriated by a select few. This sentiment recurs in many police reports describing the arrests of individuals involved in food-related disorder. A report of 24 floréal, year II, in the Section de la Commune describes an escalating situation as a boat was being unloaded of foodstuffs. A section committee member, Citoyen Perrot, described the agitation of the crowd as it was discovered that the bulk of the stock ('baskets full of eggs, butter and cheese') was destined for private individuals, while what little remained should be taken to les Halles, leading to the arrest of a woman for incitement to pillage.⁴⁶

According to witnesses, this 'noisy woman', Marie Lavande Berri, hurled insults and abuse to such an extent they were obliged to call armed guards. The testimony describes her accusing the commissioners of being rogues and scoundrels, who lacked for nothing, 'and other evil words likely to incite others'.⁴⁷ Further damaging evidence was presented: she was a known troublemaker ('Citizen Moiperon added that he had often seen that same woman outside shops, making a lot of noise and trying to incite others'). Marie Lavande Berri was accused not only of incitement, but also of insulting her section in general, and the two individuals who arrested her. Her reputation for troublemaking would not have helped in her defence.

⁴⁶ APP, Section de la Maison Commune, 24 floréal, an II. '[I]l [Perrot] a aperçu un groupe de monde et s'en est approché ... il a aperçu que l'officier ... qui portait d'un bateau plusieurs paniers de denrées, et à qui le dit Perrot a demandé si ces paniers étaient destinés pour des particuliers ou pour des marchands: à quoi l'officier a répondu ... que tous les paniers étaient pour des particuliers, et que tous ces paniers était garnis d'œufs, beurre et de fromage, et que le reste du bateau n'étant point à destination il devait être conduit à la halle. Le déclarant a remarqué que les citoyens et les citoyennes rassemblés, était très échauffés, et se plaignaient amèrement du fait que toutes ces marchandises étaient à destination: et a remarqué entres autres, une femme qui faisait beaucoup de bruit, et qui provoquait le peuple à se jeter sur les marchandises et d'arrêter qu'ils soient emportés à la halle'.

⁴⁷ Ibid. '[E]t de plus [elle] a ajouté que les commissaires sont tous des foutus gredins, qu'elle voudrait que le diable brûle la gueule de section, qu'il n'y a rien, et que les gueux de commissaires ne manquent de rien; et beaucoup d'autres mauvais propos tendant à soulever les autres citoyens; sur quoi le déclarant ... [a] été obligé d'engager la force de l'armée à écarter cette femme; et comme elle a continué à dire les mêmes mauvais propos, les dits commissaires ont été forcés à s'élever eux-mêmes contres cette femme et l'ont traduite au violon'.

The belief that a few bad characters were inciting otherwise peaceful citizens was common in the authorities' interpretation of crowd behaviour. The report of Marie Lavande Berri's arrest was characteristic of many such incidents pertaining to crowd behaviour concerning food. The sight of food being allocated to individuals rather than in the public market place reinforced the popular beliefs already in circulation relating to famine plots; in this instance the sections were believed to be revealing their true colours, benefitting from their positions while the people were left to fend off starvation for themselves. The 'mauvais propos' of the furious Marie Lavande followed a characteristic pattern, too, in which the thwarted individual turned on his or her accuser, and made the counter-claim that the accuser was on the side of the authorities, and therefore enjoying certain privileges. As Chapter VI will argue, when the Terror reached its most draconian phase, such accusations and counter-accusations could have fatal repercussions. Had Berri been accused of calumny, or worse, a false denunciation, rather than merely 'bad words', her punishment might have been greater. A similar incident, in floréal of that year, involved a woman arrested for claiming that the section commissioners should all be guillotined; she had been provoked by a rumour that they had stopped a cart laden with butter, sold off half of it and kept the rest for themselves.⁴⁸

Markets, shops and queues were places in which to exchange news and gossip as much as to make essential purchases; queues, especially lengthy ones in which one may or may not buy the desired item at the end were also, clearly, places to air grievances. The anxious *citoyenne*, concerned with feeding her family, could easily slip into an anti-government diatribe after several fruitless hours waiting to buy bread. This was rarely seen by the authorities as the natural consequence of worry and fatigue: to doubt the bounty of the nation, and of the government's ability to provide for its people, was to doubt the Revolution itself. Arrest, or at the least an official warning, for such 'mauvais propos' had the dual purpose of serving as an

⁴⁸ APP Section de l'Arsenal, 27 floréal, an II. 'Arrestation d'une porteuse de poisson qui a dit que les commissaires de section seraient guillotines.'

example to others, while also attempting to stop any rumours that might result. Such was the assumed influence of ‘mauvais propos’ that officials came to believe individuals joined bread queues with the express purpose of causing trouble, and were even paid to do so.⁴⁹

It was not only the authorities who held the view that some individuals in bread queues had come with the express purpose of incitement; the idea was accepted more widely, and allowed an individual to turn the tables on his own accuser. A citizen appeared before the Section de l’Arsenal to complain of the insults he had endured while waiting to buy his bread. Accused by ‘un particulier’ of taking more than his fair share – which he was quick to deny – he began to suspect that his accuser had been planted in the queue in order to cause trouble and thus had arrested him and brought him to the section for further questioning.⁵⁰ The incident was confirmed by a witness, citing an ‘unknown’ individual (‘un particulier inconnu à lui’) causing trouble. It is not uncommon for reports to refer to an ‘unknown’ person fomenting dissent,⁵¹ a tendency which not only reflects contemporary suspicions about the outsider, it also reveals the existence of a sense of solidarity that allows the witness to protect his or her peers by laying the blame on an unknown. However, this reliance on the ‘stranger’ narrative raises questions about the veracity of the incident, as both sides rely on popular suspicions to accuse the other: the ‘inconnu’ made allegations of hoarding; while the accused described the ‘inconnu’ as a *malveillant* causing trouble. That it was the

⁴⁹ For example, APP Section de Droits de l’homme, 11 germinal, an II. ‘Rapport au sujet des rassemblements qui se forment a la porte des boulangers.’ APP Section de Butte des Moulins, 28 floréal, an II. ‘Demande des renseignements au sujet d’un individu qui a occasionné un rassemblement considérable.’ APP Section du Temple, 28 germinal, an III. ‘Foules et rassemblements chez les boulangers.’

⁵⁰ APP Section de Fidélité, 10 août 1793. ‘A sept heures du matin ... s’est présenté le citoyen Liotties, qui a porté plainte contre un particulier, qui, étant à la porte de la boutique du citoyen Larue, boulanger rue Saint Antoine l’injuria en lui disant qu’il était un polisson et qu’il avait déjà soulevé plusieurs pains ... les propos injurieux qui ont été tenus par ce particulier l’avait fait soupçonner qu’il était posté là pour troubler l’ordre, ce qui l’avait déterminé à l’arrêter’.

⁵¹ Historians of eighteenth-century Paris neighbourhoods, including Richard Cobb, Arlette Farge, and David Garrioch all note this.

stranger who was arrested speaks volumes about the perilous position of the friendless – of those who could not be vouched for by their peers.⁵²

Underlying many of these arrests was a very real belief that there was enough food but that an elite were benefitting from it at the expense of the people, which demonstrates the deeply entrenched notion – one that carried over from the Old Regime – that there was a clear hierarchy distinguishing ‘le peuple’ from those who governed them. In the winter of year II, an individual was arrested for impersonating an official and in such a guise helping himself to food and drink.⁵³

Taking on official duties when not authorised to do so was not uncommon, although not tolerated when discovered.⁵⁴ The culture of denunciation at the height of the Terror encouraged a vigilantism that could easily evolve into opportunism, as here; that this particular individual took advantage of his false position to eat both reflects and reinforces the popular conception that the elites were nourishing themselves at the expense of the people.

If there was a common belief among ‘le peuple’ that goods were being appropriated by the – by implication, counter-revolutionary – elite, the government believed fears of a food shortages were being spread by counter-revolutionaries to alarm the public. Reports repeatedly refer to the ‘disette factice’, to exaggerated stories of food shortages that are provoking the people to riot.

The belief that crowds were manipulated by individual instigators, which pervaded much official discourse, was not only an expression of a wider Jacobin conspiracy rhetoric, it also expressed the difficulty of policing large

⁵² The significance of social networks is discussed in more detail in Chapter IV.

⁵³ APP Section de Bonne Nouvelle, 25 nivôse an II. ‘Procès-verbal contre un particulier, qui, sans être muni d’aucun pouvoir, s’est présenté au domicile du citoyen Saint-Cristau, pour s’assurer, a-t-il dit, que les scellés soient posés, et qu’il s’était fait servir à boire et à manger.’

⁵⁴ For example, APP Section de Butte des Moulins, 15 pluviôse, an II. ‘Arrestation de deux citoyens qui ont causé du trouble en allant, sans mission, chez les orfèvres, s’informer du prix de l’argenterie et les traitant d’aristocrates et de contre-révolutionnaires.’

numbers of people who might behave in unpredictable ways. If the authorities could identify the cause of disturbances, they might be able to control present riots and prevent future ones. In the earlier years of the Revolution, Jean-Sylvain Bailly, in his position of mayor of Paris, acknowledged this difficulty, referring to the fact that market days, by their nature, required extra policing.⁵⁵ This was not because of hidden *malveillants*, but simply because large numbers of people, leisure time, and – most probably – drink, could often result in some kind of public disturbance. By 1793, however, disturbances were seen through a politicised lens, one which often had conspiratorial undertones.

How to identify the perpetrators of these disturbances? A theme running through many of the reports was the suggestion that instigators were identifying themselves through secret signs and symbols, a belief that reflects the dual characteristics of Revolutionary discourse – conspiracy and Enlightenment. The conspiracy element, that secret plotters were communicating under the radar, embodied the usual conspiracy tropes. However, the belief also reflects the growth of secret societies in the second half of the eighteenth century, which had their own sets of rituals.⁵⁶ Finally, although this widespread belief in plots reflects the general state of anxiety that pervaded the Revolution during its most radical phase, it also, arguably, reveals an Enlightened approach to a seemingly insurmountable problem: an attempt to understand and predict crowd behaviour through a forensic analysis of its constituent parts.

An *observateur* report of ventôse, year II contains a short text describing how groups could be manipulated. This report does not refer to a specific

⁵⁵ AN AF II 48, doc. 76. '19 Octobre 1791. On m'assure, Monsieur, qu'il y a quelque fermentation à la Halle, c'est aujourd'hui jour de marché. Je vous prie de donner les ordres nécessaires pour y établir une grande surveillance et du monde au besoin d'y maintenir le bon ordre.'

⁵⁶ Margaret C. Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Lindsay Porter, *Who are the Illuminati?* (London: Collins & Brown, 2005).

event, but seems to act as a primer for how other members of the police network can identify the signs of incipient assembly:

Machinations in groups:

The enemies of the public good use a very clever method to insinuate their poison, and with no risk to themselves. Two or three of them form a group; one will start talking, pouring out his evil doctrine as long as no one stops him. If someone ... attempts to unmask him, he will skilfully evade the question ... ; his friends, quiet up until this point but recognisable as accomplices by many signs, and fearing their silence will render them suspect, will loudly declaim against the speaker, claiming they knew too well the purpose of his speech but were only waiting to see how far he would go.⁵⁷

This report contains many elements characteristic of Jacobin texts relating to counter-revolutionary activity, with the references to suspect speech as 'poison', which is introduced by 'insinuation', and the threat of unmasking. The reference to the 'signs' by which the accomplices can be recognised is also significant and recurs in several reports.

The 'signs' of the counter-revolutionary were often a question of appearance: a wig, a buckle, or conspicuous grooming,⁵⁸ but there were also occasions in which the signs referred to were actual totems or objects. This is not only a reflection of the use of such signs and gestures in secret societies, but is also the obverse of the use of Republican symbols to imprint the ideals of the Revolution onto society, replacing the iconography of the monarchy with that of the Republic. If Republican symbols were considered a successful means of creating a sense of identity and unity, then, by extension, any symbol could be so used. Reports and denunciations relating

⁵⁷ Caron, vol. V, pp. 415, 416. 'Rapport de Perrière, 29 ventôse, an II. Machinations dans les groupes: Les ennemis du bien public s'y prennent d'une manière fort adroite pour insinuer leur poison et l'insinuer sans danger pour eux. Ils se rassemblent en groupes de deux ou trois; l'un d'eux prend la parole et débite sa mauvaise doctrine tant qu'il ne rencontre d'opposition de la part de personne. Si l'un des auditeurs ... se met en devoir de le dévoiler; il se retourne habilement ou s'esquive au milieu de la discussion qu'il a occasionnée; ses camarades qui, jusque-là, étaient restés tranquilles, mais qu'en se fiant à plusieurs signes on pouvait reconnaître en tant que ses amis, craignant eux-mêmes de devenir suspects par leur silence, se déclarant hautement contre l'orateur ... prétendant qu'ils voyaient fort bien vers où tendaient ses discours, mais qu'ils voulaient le laisser s'avancer pour voir jusqu'où il irait.'

⁵⁸ Suspect appearance is discussed in more detail in Chapter IV.

to suspected hidden symbols of monarchy – such as playing cards, or fleur-de-lys carved in masonry – were not uncommon. That such allegations were common would, of course, have helped to pave the way for the rumour of Robespierre-the-king. Those whose job it was to observe crowds were also vigilant for indications that secret signs or symbols might reveal a covert faction or imminent rally, and there was considerable concern that signs of the Republic itself were being co-opted for nefarious ends.

Following the arrest of Hébert and his followers on 23 ventôse, year II, several reports made reference to the appearance of a small liberty bonnet badge adorning buttonholes, and suspicion it was being used as a sign of support for the conspirators. On the day of Hébert's execution, a report stated:

One is asked to be suspicious of those wearing a little red cap in their buttonhole. It is observed to be a sign of assembly. In every group I've heard this comment made, and by several patriots.⁵⁹

A second report on the same day noted a complicated fracas in which two market women insulted three citizens wearing the *carmagnole* 'with a little red bonnet at the buttonhole' who themselves were haranguing a couple 'dressed in the style of the Old Regime, that is to say, curled, and with silver buckles on their shoes.' Perhaps tipped off by the sign of the red bonnet, the market women were suspicious of the *carmagnole*-clad trio and

assembled a large number of people around the [three] citizens, and claimed they were aristocrats disguised as patriots (they were very elegant beneath their sans-culotte attire). In the end they were allowed to go ... with no harm done.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Caron, vol V, p. 331. 'Rapport de Pourvoyeur, 25 ventôse, an II. L'on invite à se méfier des particuliers qui portent un petit bonnet rouge à leur boutonnière, on observe que c'est un signe de ralliement. Dans tous les groupes j'ai entendu faire cette remarque et par plusieurs patriotes.'

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 335. 'Rapport de Rollin, 25 ventôse, an II. Deux citoyennes de la Halle ont insulté fortement trois citoyens qui, sous l'habit à la Carmagnole, portant un petit bonnet rouge à leur boutonnière et affublés d'un bonnet de poil, se raillaient d'un citoyen qui accompagnait son épouse et qui se trouvait vêtu comme dans l'ancien régime, c'est-à-dire frisé, et avait des boucles d'argent a ses souliers. Ces citoyennes ont rassemblé beaucoup de monde autour de ces citoyens (rue Saint-Denis) et ont prétendu que c'étaient des aristocrates déguisés en

Two days later the little red bonnets seemed to be on the wane. A report recorded the following neatly expository exchange:

‘You don’t see as many red bonnets as you used to,’ said a citizen. ‘Since Hébert was arrested,’ said another, ‘you don’t see as many little bonnets hanging to one side, a fact from which we can be sure it was a sign of rallying.’ On this subject, another said that he remembered well having known individuals, great supporters of Hébert, who wore these distinctive signs. He concluded that these signs could well be rallying symbols and that they must absolutely be observed more closely than one thinks.⁶¹

In the following days this symbol was closely monitored. Three days after the execution of the Hébertistes, on 28 ventôse, an *observateur* noted that ‘The hunt continues for those who wear the little bonnet on their lapel’.⁶² A report a day later described a more complex picture of the story of the little badges:

The public is absolutely persuaded that individuals wearing a little liberty bonnet in their buttonhole are part of the conspiracy that has just been uncovered, and that this sign of liberty has become, in the hands of these unscrupulous men, a rallying sign, a sign of proscription for true patriots. What is certain is that the majority of those who used to wear it have taken it off. It is noticeable that many citizens in the revolutionary and civil committees that used to so adorn themselves no longer dare to do so.⁶³

patriotes, (ils étaient très élégants sous leur costume de sans-culotte). Enfin on les a laissés s’en aller ... sans leur faire du mal.’

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 362. ‘Rapport de Charmont, 27 ventôse, an II. “On ne voit plus tant de bonnets rouge que l’on en voyait ci-devant,” disait un citoyen. “Depuis que Hebert a été arrêté,” dit un autre citoyen, “on ne voit plus tant de petits bonnets pendus au côté; d’où le fait qu’on puisse s’assurer que c’était un signe de ralliement.” A ce sujet, un autre disait qu’il se souvient bien d’avoir connu des individus, grands partisans d’Hebert, porter ces marques distinctives. Il en concluait de là que ces signes peuvent bien être un signe de ralliement qu’il faut absolument surveiller de plus près que l’on n’a pensé.’

⁶² Ibid., p. 384. ‘Rapport de Charmont, 28 ventôse, an II. On continue de faire la chasse aux porteurs de petits bonnets au côté.’

⁶³ Ibid., p. 422. ‘Rapport de Rollin, 29 ventôse, an II. On est absolument persuadé, dans le public, que les individus, à la boutonnière desquels pend un petit bonnet de la Liberté, font partis de la conspiration qui vient d’être découverte et que ce signe de notre liberté est devenu, entre les mains de ces hommes sans pudeur, un signe de ralliement et de proscription pour les parfaits patriotes. Ce qu’il y a de très certain, c’est que la plupart de ceux qui le portaient l’ont ôté. On remarque que beaucoup de citoyens en place dans les comités révolutionnaires et civils, qui affectaient de s’en décorer, n’osent plus le porter.’

What has 'persuaded the public' that these symbols of the Republic were now being employed as a sign of conspiracy? Republican imagery – accessible to all, and a means by which the individual could demonstrate his allegiance to the Revolution and, by extension, his fellow man – had now allegedly been co-opted by a select, and thus elite, few, conspiring at the very heart of Revolutionary government. What might, only a few weeks ago, have been seen as a sign of commitment to the Republic was now an indication of factionalism, and of support for the now-disgraced Hébertistes. Just as those in authority were not as they seem, so the very symbol of the Republic no longer has a fixed identity, if it can be misappropriated and employed for another purpose.

However, despite the many references to the little bonnets, the reports above indicate few actual sightings of them. Apart from the two *citoyennes* accosting the suspicious trio wearing *carmagnoles* and little bonnets, most of the reports refer to beliefs surrounding the bonnets. The earliest report records the request that the *observateurs* be on the look out for them; a few days later, citizens discuss having heard that people wear them, but that there are fewer now. Finally, once the public is of the opinion that the symbol is worn by allies of the conspirators, they seem to vanish from sight. Were these symbols as prevalent as the public were led to believe, or had their use grown in the public imagination following the latest 'unmasking' of enemies of the Revolution?

Caron noted that these reports began to appear following a speech by Saint-Just, voicing concerns about the misuse of Republican symbols by conspirators.⁶⁴ The suspicion that Republican imagery and the strikingly scruffy appearance of the true patriot could be worn as a disguise by *ci-devants* was a recurrent theme, and appeared not only in speeches and the popular press, but also in cheap prints. Saint-Just's speech, at the time of the

⁶⁴ Caron, vol. V, p. 331, note 1.

arrest of the *ne plus ultra of sans-culotterie*, le Père Duchesne himself, brought that concern once more to the fore, and the resulting reports raised questions about the relationship between the *observateurs* and their employers, and the act of observing itself. Having been primed to look for these covert symbols, the fact that many *observateurs* duly found them might as easily have been a result of professional expediency as actual sightings. The conversation describing the lack of bonnets once the conspirators had been arrested was almost *too* convenient, able to suggest that their absence was both an indication that the Republic was once more free of conspirators, as well as a reason for the spy's failure to spot them. Fears that Republican symbols, created to allow individuals to express their allegiance to a communal ideal, were being misappropriated by those whose allegiances were suspect led to the motion in many popular clubs that no marks of distinction should be worn at all.⁶⁵

This was not the last of the rumours relating to the use of such symbols. In year III, during the riots of Germinal, the *carte de pain*, introduced to ensure the fair distribution of bread during times of shortages, was suspected of being used as a sign of assembling.⁶⁶ Once again, an otherwise official symbol, which, like the badge of the *bonnet rouge*, was small and easily transported, was suspected of being used to identify a small coterie within a greater group. Although these symbols were allegedly used as a means for conspirators to recognise one another and gather together, the widespread belief that symbols could be used in this fashion is a reflection of the authorities' suspicion of crowd behaviour in general, in which few if any actions were considered to be spontaneous, and acts of violence were the result of careful orchestration by the enemy.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 'Rapport de Pourvoyeur, 25 ventôse, an II. On a décidé dans plusieurs sociétés populaires qu'aucun des membres ne pourrait porter aucune marque distinctive et qu'autrement on serait regardé comme suspect et traité en tant que tel.'

⁶⁶ APP Section de Panthéon, 17 germinale, an III. 'Déclaration au sujet de cartes de pain paraissant pouvoir servir de signe de ralliement.'

Further rumours relating to the disgraced Hébertistes both reflected current anxieties about food stuffs and contributed to the turning tide against the Cordeliers. An *observateur* noted a rumour spreading among the local women that the Hébertistes had been planning to poison Paris by introducing tampered flour.⁶⁷ The poison flour plot was a recurrent trope,⁶⁸ as even the author of the report acknowledged. Because of this he was able to speculate where and why the rumour might have arisen:

I hope that this is only a suspicion among patriot women; but I can't help but think that aristocrats might be spreading this rumour throughout Paris on purpose, to incite the people against present or future plans for provisions, in order to lead them more readily and in some ways voluntarily towards famine. ⁶⁹

This variation on the famine plot once again identified the aristocracy as key protagonists, but rather than orchestrating shortages themselves they were suspected of provoking the otherwise patriotic citizen into hoarding out of self-preservation. This reaction is characteristic of the authorities' attempts to absolve the sans-culottes of blame for bad behaviour, which David Andress has identified in his analysis of the Champ de Mars massacre as a necessity to perceive 'the people' as 'blameless and above all, an undivided entity'.⁷⁰ That they might be motivated by base self-interest, hoarding goods at the expense of others, must be attributed to external forces. For this reason the Sugar Riots at the end of February 1793 were problematic for the Jacobins. Asked Robespierre at the Jacobin Club, 'Quand le peuple se lève, ne

⁶⁷ Caron, vol VI, p. 416. 'Rapport de Perrière, 29 ventôse, an II. Bruit sur le compte des conspirateurs. Les femmes disaient que l'intention des conspirateurs était de les empoisonner, en introduisant dans Paris une certaine quantité de farine préparée à cet effet.'

⁶⁸ Chapter I examines another incident featuring this theme, as examined by the *conventionnel* Lasource as president.

⁶⁹ Caron, vol VI, p. 416. 'Je souhaite que ce ne soit là qu'un soupçon de femmes patriotes; mais je ne pourrais pas m'y faire que les aristocrates répandissent exprès ce bruit dans Paris, pour inspirer au peuple des défiances sur l'approvisionnement déjà fait ou à faire, pour le mener plus sûrement et en quelque sorte volontairement à la famine.'

⁷⁰ David Andress, 'The Denial of Social Conflict in the French Revolution: Discourses around the Champ de Mars Massacre, 17 July 1791', *French Historical Studies*, vol. 22 (Spring 1999), p. 203.

doit-il pas avoir un but digne de lui?'⁷¹ Rioting over non-essential goods such as sugar and coffee did nothing to enhance the reputation of the people.

Ironically, the authorities themselves had, arguably, contributed to the poison flour rumour in no small part, albeit unwittingly: among the arrested Hébertistes was the then minister for subsistence, Antoine Descombes, whose role included the logistically problematic task of supplying the capital with flour. Descombes appeared to have been the unfortunate victim of political expediency and administrative incompetence. When the Hébertistes were arrested, Antoine Descombes was among their number, chosen, seemingly randomly to make up a shortfall in numbers, his inability to overcome the difficulties of ensuring a reliable supply of grain into the capital used as evidence of his guilt in a larger conspiracy. Descombes appears to have been caught in the trawl to identify Hébertiste conspirators, a process which enabled the Convention to appear to regulate itself by a system of cleansing purges.⁷² His connection with Hébert was tenuous at best, but once he was implicated in a larger plot, evidence was found to support a guilty verdict.

The many letters leading up to and during Descombe's incarceration describe the case unfolding against him. Pre-existing famine plots provided a foundation for the new allegations, whilst, in confirmation of Steven Kaplan's thesis, the accusations levelled against Descombes served to reconfirm and solidify the historical precedent. That Descombes was now publicly aligned with the perfidy of Hébert, Momoro and Ronsin added weight to the most current round of famine plots. Supplying Paris with contaminated flour was yet one more variation on the theme, incorporating the underhand and covert weapon of choice of the aristocrat: poison.

⁷¹ Peter McPhee, 'Robespierre and Violence' in *Experiencing the French Revolution*, ed. David Andress (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2013), p. 81.

⁷² The symbolic role of these purges in legitimising the Convention has been identified by Harder, 'Crisis of Representation'.

The case had been mounting against Descombes prior to his arrest, with the weight of historical precedent and contemporary circumstances contributing to rumours about his malfeasance. These were not personal, or based on evidence specific to his activities: it is unlikely that anyone carrying out this role would have escaped censure. The task of moving grain to Paris was onerous and logistically complex, as numerous letters attest: the mayor of Paris, Jean-Nicolas Pache, wrote of shortages ('I beg of you ... to employ all your means to discover the causes of these delays, which could compromise the commonweal')⁷³ whilst letters from millers complained they were receiving only a tiny fraction of the amount expected ('I have forty mills with which to supply Paris and I have no grain').⁷⁴ Many letters were devoted to concerns about the quality of flour and to delays in transport, which coincided with the introduction of the *maximum* in September 1793. Descombes' correspondence suggested he was conscientious and dedicated in his role and that, initially at least, he was recognised as such, with an official letter praising him for the 'zeal' and 'patriotism' with which he carried out his duties.⁷⁵

It is the warmth of your zeal and your patriotism that has calmed our fears about supplying our brothers in Paris ... and we can only invite you to continue your brilliant success, and the inhabitants of Paris will owe you a civic crown.

After his arrest, however, the circumstances that had made his role so challenging were reinterpreted as evidence of guilt. His inability to carry out the demands of his role satisfactorily was not even considered incompetence, but part of a concerted plan to divert supplies to the capital

⁷³ AN W94 Conspiration d'Hébert. Letter from Jean-Nicolas Pache: 'le 2 du mois 2 ... Je vous prie donc d'employer tous vos moyens pour découvrir les causes de tous ces retardements, qui peuvent compromettre la chose publique.'

⁷⁴ Ibid. Undated letter to Descombes.

⁷⁵ Ibid. '20 du 1er l'an II. Lettre du Municipalité de Paris, Département de Subsistances et Approvisionnements. ... C'était la chaleur de ton zèle et de ton patriotisme qui a calmé nos craintes sur l'approvisionnement de nos frères de Paris et ta lettre est bien faite pour dissiper nos alarmes sur un objet aussi important. Nous ne pourrions que t'inviter à continuer tes brillants succès, et les habitants de Paris te devront une couronne civique.'

for his own gain. A series of handwritten documents in the Archives Nationales, filed with material relating to the Conspiracy d'Hébert, and entitled 'extrait de Correspondance de Descombes', charts the growing case against him, apparently compiled from Descombes' own letters. Writing in 12 September, 1793, over six months prior to his arrest, he referred to rumours relating to the misappropriation of flour:

The calumny spread by everyone, in this city and in the countryside, that I am sending flour to the enemy: it's not dangers to myself I am thinking of, but only of the interests of the inhabitants of Paris. It is the blackest devilry that seeks to spread such a perverse rumour, to incite the people against me and to pillage our flour and grain.⁷⁶

Letters referring to poor quality of flour suggested that this was not due to negligence alone, but 'malveillance'; there were complaints of profiteering and of unfounded and unstoppable fears of shortages. Denunciations supporting Descombes' arrest amplified these themes into a catalogue of alleged crimes, concluding with the accusation that the 'malveillant' spreading rumours about shortages was Descombes himself.⁷⁷ Descombes was in an untenable position: documents over the preceding months attested to his diligence in alerting his superiors about the difficulties in supplying the capital with essential goods; this very diligence was now being used as evidence of his own rumour-mongering and profiteering.

Descombes was a victim of circumstance twice over: the logistical challenge of ensuring a ready supply of grain to Paris meant that shortfalls were inevitable. The historical rumours relating to artificial shortages provided a context for present circumstances, meaning that Descombes' perceived failures were construed not as incompetence but as more malevolent scheming. In addition to this were the series of purges that took place in the

⁷⁶ AN W94 Conspiracy d'Hébert. 'La calomnie crié par tous, dans cette ville, et dans le campagne que j'envoie la farine a l'ennemi: ce ne sont pas mes propres dangers que j'envisage; mais les intérêts seuls des habitants de Paris: c'est avec ce Bruit profondément pervers que la scélératesse la plus noire cherche à exciter contre moi l'égarement du peuple et le pillage de nos farines et de nos graines.'

⁷⁷ Ibid.

Convention from the arrest of the Girondins to the 9 Thermidor, in which guilt by association was sufficient grounds for execution.⁷⁸ Descombes was among the twenty Hébertistes arrested on 23 nivôse, year II. He missed reprieve by the narrowest of margins: twenty-four hours prior to his execution he had been pardoned, only to have the pardon withdrawn the following morning.⁷⁹

Several different genres of rumour contributed to Descombes's arrest: there were the current rumours about food shortages, that were themselves underpinned by the historical precedents, which had entered the collective memory. As if this were not powerful enough, there was also the weight of the alleged crimes of the company he (again, allegedly) kept.⁸⁰ Once Descombes had become associated with this disgraced faction, their alleged crimes became his. But his arrest also helped to keep those rumours alive – here was evidence of the elite profiteering and commandeering essential supplies for themselves, as they had always been believed to have done. This circular, endlessly reflexive relationship between rumour and events, events and the interpretation and reporting of them, created a self-perpetuating and self-validating cycle, the apogee of which was the rumour relating to Robespierre-the-king. Arrests such as these, which many hoped would serve to restore the reputation of the Convention, in fact contributed to the opposite. Rather than ending them, they confirmed popular rumours about a self-serving elite. Beliefs in Hébert's poison bread plot brought together several interconnected themes, both past and present. The more the arrests

⁷⁸ Other witness accounts in the trials of the Hébertiste 'conspirators' refer to their profiteering from misappropriated foodstuffs. See, for example, AN W78 'Tribunal Extraordinaire, documents relatifs au complot de Hébert, Ronsin, Vincent, Momoro, témoignage de la citoyenne Joséphine Selledame, 28 ventôse, l'an II.'

⁷⁹ AN W94 Conspiracy d'Hébert. Descombes, like many accused during the Terror, compiled an extensive dossier countering the accusations, comprising character witnesses and evidence of his contributions to the Revolution, which are collected in this file. The difficulty of mounting a defence against denunciations based on rumour will be discussed in Chapter VI.

⁸⁰ See also, for example, Linton, *Choosing Terror*, on the role of the Foreign Plot in the downfall of the Hébertistes.

mounted, the more they confirmed, consolidated and helped to spread rumours, encouraged by the popular press.

As I am attempting to demonstrate throughout this thesis, the significance of popular rumour – even when false – is greater than its content. In the case of food-related rumours, they tell us much more than simply that the eighteenth-century poor were preoccupied with food (although this was indisputably the case as well). During this period of the Revolution, rumours related to food reveal a great deal about the relationship between the government and its people. From the perspective of the ordinary person, the belief that their representatives might be appropriating goods at their expense, or – arguably worse – be powerless to control the shadowy *malveillants* who were doing so, revealed an underlying suspicion of the government in general. It was evidence that they had failed in their promises of *fraternité* and *égalité*, and were equally unable to protect the nation against those who would undermine it. From the perspective of the government, attributing the baser behaviours of the people – rioting, hoarding, looting – to incitement by *malveillants* and counter-revolutionaries was a way of absolving them of conduct unworthy of the *brave sans-culotte*, providing an excuse and a motive for monitoring actual individuals whilst still retaining the ideal of the platonic citizen. This tension between the ideal and the real – between the aspirations to create a Republic peopled by selfless, hardworking citizens, and the reality of those self-same people when forced to make pragmatic decisions because of hunger, want and fear – underlies much official discourse, and speaks of a wider uncertainties about governing the nation. The ungovernability of rumour is just one facet of this.

Chapter IV

Rumour and Community: Solidarity and Conflict in the Sans-Culotte Neighbourhoods of Year II

For the authorities, popular rumours were of interest if their subject matter appeared to reflect badly on the Revolution or the government. In this case, they were characteristically seen as evidence of a malign influence, planted intentionally by *malveillants* to undermine confidence in the Revolution and, as such, just another weapon in the shadowy armoury of the counter-revolutionary. Rumour existed as a kind of foreign invader, planting its poison within the nation's consciousness. References to rooting out the cause of a rumour, to tracing it back to its origins in order to cut it off at the source, are symptomatic of the wider calls for purging and cleansing the Republic.

This chapter shifts its focus from the government to urban communities. It will examine the effect of popular rumour on close-knit Parisian communities, whose opinions and beliefs were subject to a range of influences, from official government decrees to the latest diatribes in the radical press or a hurried exchange in a crowded tavern. It will explore why some rumours took hold whilst others did not. It will also argue that rumours, even negative ones, can serve a positive purpose for the community, acting as a means to express and share collective fears, and to consolidate a community's identity and sense of itself. There is a potentially destructive side to rumours, however, which this chapter will also examine: if a community becomes overrun with rumours, it becomes suspicious and fearful, and is in danger, ultimately, of turning on itself. The final two chapters will explore what happens when this is taken to its conclusion, by looking at how the culture of rumour affects personal reputations and its role in denunciations.

For the purposes of the remaining chapters, I propose a definition of community that comprises different elements of shared experience. A 'community' might be based on geography, a trade, family connections or shared origins. Many communities may incorporate all of these elements – as has been demonstrated by many social historians of the period, certain areas of the city were dominated by particular trades, many of which were performed by groups from specific regional backgrounds. As Olwen Hufton describes, provincial migrants newly arrived to the city tended to seek out their countrymen, through whom they were able to find accommodation and offers of work.¹ Such communities, then, are united by physical location as well as trade and shared origins, making them neighbours, colleagues and countrymen. However, a community might be more nebulous and temporary – a collection of individuals in a café or tavern might form a temporary community if events bring them together in a shared experience. It is the effect of rumour on these shared experiences, and how rumour shapes such communities, which is the subject of the rest of this thesis.

I have intentionally limited the focus of this chapter to a specific period of time, from roughly the establishment of the First Republic in September 1792 to the fall of Robespierre in July 1794. In so doing I hope to illustrate how rumours are not only an expression of current fears and prejudices, but also how they reveal deep-rooted communal beliefs, often drawing on or reawakening older collective narratives, which serve as an explanation for current crises. I will argue that rumours are an expression of a community's collective concerns, and therefore are a means by which the community can draw closer together. As the members of the community – neighbours, colleagues, shopkeepers, customers, and passers-by – all share information, contribute their own interpretations and accept and incorporate those of others, the spreading of rumour becomes a group experience, allowing the community to express and share collective fears. Such expressions, however, are double-edged: discussing a shared concern may provide a degree of

¹ Olwen Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France: 1750–1789* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).

solace, but it may also contribute to increased anxiety, with the act of communicating a specific fear seeming to conjure it into being.

When, as in year II, rumours were used to identify and target scapegoats, the community and its sense of identity, I will argue, may initially become stronger: the identification of a scapegoat provides a clear set of parameters, which allows a community to define itself against this 'other'. This situation was encouraged and exacerbated by the rhetoric of Jacobinism, with its emphasis on vigilance, surveillance and hidden enemies, and which, as previous chapters have indicated, worked its way from the Convention to the street via public speeches, radical journals and government documents. As year II progressed and the Terror intensified, however, the pool of enemies became wider and the circle of the community smaller. With the introduction of the Law of 22 Prairial (10 June 1794), by which time denunciation had become a patriotic duty,² rumour had tightened its grip to become a means of arrest and execution. No longer a way of drawing communities together, rumour began to tear them apart.

Historians of the neighbourhoods of eastern Paris and of the eighteenth-century poor³ all describe a strong sense of community identity, brought about by physical proximity, enforced familiarity, shared concerns and allegiances. The cramped physical spaces of the city, with windows overlooking shared courtyards, sleeping quarters accessed only by passing through other rooms, servants sleeping in the family's kitchen, or apprentices above the workshop, meant that twenty-first century notions of physical privacy, of the boundary between public and private, between exterior and interior spaces, did not exist. Acts and behaviours that today would be conducted behind firmly closed doors were rarely entirely private,

² 'Every citizen has the right to seize conspirators and counter-revolutionaries, and to arraign them before the magistrates. He is required to denounce them as soon as he knows of them.' Chapter VI will develop this theme in more detail.

³ See, for example, David Andress, Richard Cobb, Robert Darnton, Arlette Farge, David Garrioch, and Olwen Hufton.

and opportunities for overhearing talk intended for others was common.⁴ For the purposes of this chapter, however, it is worth reflecting on how the physical conditions of the city were conducive to the spread of rumour: in an environment where few conversations were genuinely private (and were viewed with suspicion if they were) the repetitive telling of a story might be sufficient to authenticate it – the notorious, persuasive and pervasive ‘*on dit*’ lent authority to and validated an otherwise unconfirmed story through its sheer ubiquity.

1793 was a momentous year for the Revolution. It began with the execution of the king in January and, by September, had been given a new Republican identity – year II – according to the new Revolutionary calendar, which retrospectively dated the birth of the Republic to the previous year. During that time Paris saw food riots in February followed by mass conscription at the end of that same month, the arrest of the Girondin deputies in June, the assassination of Marat in July, and the execution of the queen and the Girondins in October 1793. During this time, the combined influences of the popular press, decrees of the Convention, the public gallery and the spontaneous activity on the street created a maelstrom of news, rumour and supposition. As groups came together to discuss information, air opinions, share fears and vent anger, narratives emerged that helped to shape understanding of contemporary events. Whether or not these narratives were an accurate reflection of actual events, these shared beliefs are a valid historical record of contemporary popular fears and thus can contribute to a greater understanding of the state of mind of those who have otherwise left few written records.

The sources I have consulted for this chapter suggest that these stories can be categorized into three separate but inter-related types of rumour. The first represents those rumours that are essentially a revival of older beliefs, for example, rumours relating to famine plots or to aristocratic malfeasance.

⁴ The social acceptability of eavesdropping and the communities’ discretion or turning a blind eye to private behaviours enacted in public will be explored in Chapter V.

As was discussed in chapter III, the historical precedent of such stories lent credibility to their contemporary incarnation, despite their having only previously existed in the imagination. That is to say that, as memories of earlier rumours resurfaced they validated present ones. Steven Kaplan describes this in detail in his examination of eighteenth-century famine plots, but a similar phenomenon can be seen found in Arlette Farge's study of the child kidnapping rumours of 1750. A more complex version of this is described by Alain Corbin in *The Village of Cannibals*, in which numerous deep-rooted prejudices and rumours – against the aristocracy, the Church, and Republicanism – combined with anxieties relating to the war against Prussia in an expression of what he describes as a 'collective psychosis', culminating in almost unimaginable group violence.⁵ Rumours are an expression of a common bond, and of a shared language, representing timeless, indeed, universal, fears. It is for this reason that certain themes resurface in times of uncertainty or hardship, allowing a community to focus its anxieties on a single cause or villain,⁶ and in so doing, strengthening the bonds within the group.

Rumours that feature universal, cyclically recurring themes can also be considered a close relation of the folk tale. The rumours of child abductions in Paris of the 1750s are reminiscent of the stolen children in fairy tales; both genres of story – the rumour and the fairy tale – create reverberations and echoes of the other, recalling and elaborating on earlier tropes and themes. Some of the research on folk tales offers compelling evidence that the horrors suffered by fairy-tale protagonists – of child abandonment, cannibalism, devouring by wild beasts, etc – were not a working out of

⁵ Steven L. Kaplan, 'The Famine Plot Persuasion', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 72, part 3 (1982); Arlette Farge, *The Vanishing Children of Paris: Rumor and Politics before the French Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); Alain Corbin, *The Village of Cannibals: Rage and Murder in France, 1870* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992) Corbin's description of the multiple meanings of the term 'Prussian' as 'applied not to actual foreigners but to those suspected of being enemy agents or merely accused of being enemy supporters' (p. 46) has parallels with the elasticity of the term 'brigand', which will be discussed below.

⁶ Corbin describes this as an 'overwhelming tendency to search for traitors and persecutors outside one's own group' (Ibid., p. 45).

subconscious fears, but a reflection of the stark and brutal peasant existence, rooted in real-life crimes.⁷ Robert Darnton's description of folk tales as 'historical documents, each coloured by the mental life and culture of its epoch' parallels Baczko's statement that rumours are 'a real historical fact'.⁸ Similarly, Italo Calvino's observation that folk tales carry a 'flavour of their locality' and reflect the 'moral outlook' of their origins can equally be applied to rumours, and also is another element that helps them to spread.⁹ The comparisons could continue: rumours might even be subject to a similar system of classification along the lines of the Aarne-Thompson folk-tale type index, where recurring plots and narrative patterns are divided into categories, subcategories and variations.¹⁰

The reappearance of the 'historical' type of rumour, then, is both evidence of a resurgence of a common fear and also a means of expressing and sharing it. But this manifestation of solidarity is not limited to the shared experience of telling and discussing: crucially, the subject matter, too, creates feelings of belonging, with its themes of innocent victims and plotting villains. The narrative of the famine plot, for example, provides an explanation for crop failure that is both comforting and galvanising: the belief that food shortages are the work of greedy aristocrats is preferable to the altogether more alarming prospect that a poor harvest is the act of a vengeful God, whilst simultaneously providing the community with a target for its anger: the selfish and grasping nobility.

⁷ See, for example, Eugen Weber, 'Fairies and Hard Facts: The Reality of Folktales', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 42, no. 1 (Jan.-Mar., 1981), pp. 93-113, or Maria Tatar, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales* (expanded 2nd edition, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1987, 2003).

⁸ Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Vintage, 1985), p.13; Bronislaw Baczko, *Ending the Terror: The French Revolution After Robespierre*, trans. Michel Petheram (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) p. 4.

⁹ Cited in Tatar p. 46, originally Italo Calvino, *Italian Folktales*, trans. George Martin (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), p. xxi.

¹⁰ Developed by Antti Aarne and published in 1910, this system was translated into English, revised and expanded by Stith Thompson in 1928 and 1961.

The second type of rumour is more specifically contemporaneous, reflecting the confusions or anxieties of the day, but still involving the familiar narrative of the victim/villain; oppressed/oppressor; us/them, which allows the participants to identify threatening forces external to them, and thus strengthens the group's identity and sense of belonging. These rumours carry echoes of their historical antecedents: rumours about hoarding in Paris during year II, for example, may scapegoat a particular sector of society – butchers, say, or bakers, or blame émigrés as equally as members of the Convention – but the logic behind the story is the same, and the motives and characteristics of the perceived villains strangely similar. A woman, frustrated at her lack of provisions, was arrested for criticising the Convention, claiming they were starving the people while they themselves wanted for nothing.¹¹ When no tangible target was immediately obvious, the shadowy 'ils' sufficed, a convenient catch-all encompassing the enemy *du jour*, whether *les agents de Pitt*, émigrés, priests or the generic counter-revolutionary.

Belief in an ever-present, albeit unidentified, enemy strengthened community bonds, and although the conspiratorial nature of Republican discourse no doubt contributed to a heightened sense of anxiety in local communities, it encouraged that anxiety to be directed outward, at a perceived 'other'. As the Revolution progressed, a third type of rumour became more significant, one in which the community began to examine itself, bringing the narrative of the 'other' within its own circle. This last type of rumour brought these concerns into the community and ultimately caused damage to its very fabric: the 'other' was no longer outside the group but could now be identified existing within it and the community began to stigmatize its own, targeting, variously, 'women', 'laundresses', 'merchants', or, perhaps the most problematic group of all, servants, who moved conspicuously about the community, but lived on intimate terms with their

¹¹ APP Section de Muséum, 3 prairial, an III. 'Arrestation d'une femme et d'un particulier, pour propos extrêmement séditieux.'

employers.¹² From there, it was a short step from the general to the specific, as general rumours then influenced and helped to validate rumours about individuals – about the greedy *épicier*, the secretive neighbour, or anyone exhibiting behaviour unusual to the community. The implications of this and its role on denunciations, arrests and convictions will be discussed in the final chapter.

The close relationship between public conversation, opinion, rumour and fact, and the difficulty in teasing out each as a separate entity, is unwittingly revealed in the series of documents summarising popular rumour, sent from the mayor's office to the Minister of the Interior between February and June 1793. It relates to a subtle but significant shift in the use of the ubiquitous 'on dit'. Initially 'on dit' refers to the content of general conversations, meaning 'they say' or 'the people are talking about', which indicate subjects that are causing popular anxiety. Regarding fears of bread shortages in February, 'l'on disait tout haut que la Convention n'aurait aucun égard aux pétitions'.¹³ In April 'on disait dans plusieurs cafés qu'avant peu il arriverait une insurrection'.¹⁴ During these months, 'on dit' is used interchangeably with 'le bruit se répand' or 'on murmure', all as a means of separating reports of rumours from matters of factual record. The report of 5 April relating to Dumouriez's defection recorded the public mood with the following expressions: 'on dit partout', 'on dit dans presque tous les groupes' or 'on commence à murmurer'. These related to a general mood – 'They say he's nothing but a *chevalier du poignard*; no great loss if he were killed' – but also to rumours that revealed a popular belief in the government's complicity in Dumouriez's defection. 'They say it's impossible that

¹² Sara Maza, *Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century France: The Uses of Loyalty* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983) examines the intimacy of the servant/employer relationship, while Cissie Fairchilds, *Domestic Enemies: Servants and Their Masters in Old Regime France* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), pp. 233ff, discusses the suspicion with which servants were held in the community from the earliest days of the Revolution.

¹³ AN AF/IV/1470, doc. 3, 24 février, 1793.

¹⁴ AN AF/IV/1470, doc. 80, 16 avril, 1793.

Dumouriez could have planned a counter-revolution without some of the Convention having been told ... They are beginning to whisper against the Revolutionary tribunal.¹⁵

By May, 'on dit' was no longer synonymous with 'le bruit se répand'. 'On dit' now also prefaced statements of fact. This creates much linguistic confusion: 'on dit' simultaneously referred to what people were saying, as well as serving to validate otherwise unconfirmed stories. As rumours of an insurrection in Paris began to surface in May, the number of stories attributed to 'on dit' increased, yet the authoritative distance that appeared in earlier reports disappeared. Rumours now reflected concerns shared equally by the authorities and the people. An entry of 4 May reported of a plot by 'thieves and brigands' to kill members of the Committees of General Security and Public Safety during an imminent insurrection.¹⁶ The imminent departure of troops from the capital contributed to these rumours of insurrection, echoing the anxiety that surfaced prior to the September Massacres. 'We are not surprised by the large numbers of foreigners arriving in Paris at the time when our citizens are preparing to leave for the Vendée...in order to start a civil war in the city.'¹⁷ 'They say that the English, agents of Pitt, have arrived in Paris... living in the mansions in Saint-Germain, or in the countryside, and are hoarding all the saltpetre.'¹⁸ The departure of troops provoked a host of anxieties, about the capital being left unprotected, about insurrection, and about corruption and profiteering.

¹⁵ Ibid., 5 avril, 1793. 'On dit dans presque tous les groupes que c'est un chevalier du poignard et que ça n'aurait pas été une grande perte s'il avait été tué.' 'On dit partout qu'il n'est pas possible que Dumouriez ait formé son plan de contre-révolution sans qu'une partie de la Convention Nationale en ait été instruite' 'No. 11. On commence à murmurer contre le tribunal révolutionnaire ... On craint qu'il ne devienne illusoire'.

¹⁶ AN AF/IV/1470, doc. 111, 4 mai, 1793. 'Des proposés de police nous rapportent qu'un grand nombre de voleurs et de brigands ... se préparent d'assassiner les citoyens comprenant ces deux comités au premier instant d'insurrection qui éclatera dans Paris.'

¹⁷ Ibid. 'On n'est pas surpris de voir arriver dans cette ville une grande quantité d'étrangers de tous états au moment où les citoyens se préparent à partir pour le département de la Vendée... afin d'allumer la guerre civile dans Paris.'

¹⁸ Ibid., doc. 119, 9 mai, 1793.

These anxieties, however, were shared by the authorities and 'on dit' now served as proof of these fears, validating unconfirmed rumour as fact. 'On dit' had now come to represent an omniscient authority. It exacerbated rumour and helped it to spread, heightening anxiety and leading to outbreaks of violence. Boussemart's 1790 pamphlet, *On me l'a dit*, warning against the power of rumour to destabilise the Revolution, became increasingly relevant.

The reliance on 'on dit' as a means of legitimising otherwise unconfirmed information once again highlights an important, often overlooked, characteristic of rumour: that those who participate in spreading rumours often do so unintentionally. As Timothy Tackett has observed, and as was discussed in Chapter II, many of the literate commentators of the Revolution perceived rumours to be something engaged in by the uneducated.¹⁹ It is important to reiterate that such commentators were not immune to spreading rumours either, it was just that they did not – or could not – identify their information as such. Many would (as today) spread news in the genuine belief that they were sharing confirmed facts; they had enough confidence in their sources to accept the information as genuine. However, the sheer quantity of new sources and channels of information available during this period of the Revolution had the potential to complicate rather than elucidate; it might have been easier for an individual to believe a known ally or respected community figure, to put his or her trust in 'the word on the street' than to sift through the competing information and unearth the suspected hidden agenda behind the stories in the newspapers or other official sources. This is the very opposite of Postman and Allport's conclusion to their study of rumours during World War II, which identified a lack of official information as a factor contributing to rumours.²⁰ During this period of the Revolution, the denizens of Paris suffered from a surfeit. The city was

¹⁹ Timothy Tackett, 'Rumour and Revolution: The Case of the September Massacres', *French History and Civilisation*, vol. 4 (2011), pp. 54–64.

²⁰ Gordon W. Allport and Leo Postman, 'An Analysis of Rumour', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 10, no. 4 (Winter, 1946-1947), p. 502.

awash with newsprint, and clamouring with voices, as events unfolded with a speed that was difficult to follow.

Speakers, therefore, could and did engage in the spread of rumour unintentionally; they did not need to be aware they were participating in the spread of rumour to do so – on the contrary, a belief by the participants that they are sharing facts is often what allows a rumour to be so successful. David Andress has identified the fact that some news was exceptionally localised, kept within the confines of the immediate neighbourhood, which contributed to a kind of echo-chamber effect as it ricocheted back and forth between sources, escalating with each retelling.

Some rumours, clearly, will have a short life span, because they can be verified or disproved with ease. Rumours in February 1793 of a physical attack on the mayor, in which he was alleged to have been insulted, and to have his scarf torn (a gesture both personal and symbolic) was almost immediately proven to be false.²¹ To the authorities, however – and characteristically – the rumour was evidence of the workings of ‘les ennemies de la chose publique’, who aimed, in planting the germ of the idea, to bring about an actual attack on the mayor. For the authorities, there was no possible alternative reading for the cause for the rumour. That a rumour about an attack on the mayor could reflect, for example, public anxiety about his vulnerability, or be seen as a reflection of the authorities’ sense of their own precariousness was not considered. The official response – rarely strayed from – that rumours were the work of *malveillants* did not allow for a nuanced reading of the public mood.

Even easily verified rumours were not always so easily stopped, however. A rumour relating to an attempted attack on the king, occurring in 1791, was described by John Moore, a Scottish physician in Paris during the

²¹ AN AF/IV/1470, doc. 5, 26 février, 1793.

Revolution.²² His evident amusement at the way in which the story was exaggerated and embellished with each re-telling is characteristic of many memoirists' accounts of rumours during this time:

That very morning a man had been observed loitering in the palace of the Tuileries near the King's apartment, which had roused the suspicions of some of the attendants, who had him seized and carried before the Mayor. This occasioned a great deal of noise and, as usual, was exaggerated with many circumstances unfounded in truth: among others, that concealed weapons had been found on him, particularly a dagger or *poignard* of uncommon and rancorous construction. When this person had been represented all over Paris as a desperate assassin, and the dreadful make of his *poignard* described by many who pretended they had seen it, his examination before the Mayor rendered it evident that he was a gentleman of excellent character ... who had business with someone belonging to the Palace, where he had frequently been; and that his concealed *poignard* was a *couteau de chasse*, much in fashion, which he wore openly hanging from his belt.

His description of the event illustrates the ways in which a sensational story will take on a life of its own, acknowledging, for example, the teller's appropriation of the tale for their own brief moment of social kudos ('described by those who had pretended to see it'), and noting wryly that the second (truthful) version of the story spread with much less success than the first:

This account of the matter travelled very slowly in comparison of the other; and did not prevent a number of gentlemen from immediately repairing to the Tuileries, armed with swords and pistols, having heard that his Majesty's life was in danger.

This account illustrates several points integral to the existence of rumour. Firstly there is the implication of social cohesion, and the *frisson* that accompanies the story in the telling and sharing. This feature is characteristic of rumour in general, regardless of subject matter. More specifically, the subject of this particular rumour reflected contemporary anxieties – which were themselves conflicting and ambiguous – about the

²² John Moore, *A View of the Causes and Progress of the French Revolution*, vol. II (London: 1795), p. 211.

status and future of the king. This suggests that in some circumstances the specific content of a rumour so resonates with the current climate that it reflects a collective desire or need to believe. In this way the participants could be considered to collude in continuing to discuss the story in the face of contradictory evidence, delighting in the sense of outrage and scandal that the rumour ignites. That this rumour related to a plot is not incidental either; rumours of plots and shadowy conspiracies were so prevalent during this period that even though this particular plot may have been disproved, it continued to gather momentum by unconsciously referencing other plots. Even the specificity of the weapon was not arbitrary: the *poignard* (dagger) was the covert weapon of the shadowy assassin and symbol of conspiracy.²³ In alluding to other plots, this rumour acquired further degrees of authenticity, and, in turn, it would itself become tacit evidence when a new rumour on a similar theme arose.

However, contrary to their confident belief, it was not only the educated, bourgeois diarist who was able to sift, assess and authenticate the news on the street, ever conscious of the trap of 'on dit'. A similar attitude was revealed by a crowd angered by a young baker's apprentice who boasted in a public place that he 'was paid to do nothing'. It was not so much the bravado of the claim that angered the onlookers, as the fact he uttered them during a time of acute fears of bread shortages. The testimony of one of the group, Antoine Bazin, revealed his awareness of how rumours spread and the damage they could do.²⁴ His account described the competing concerns of the group: some called for the apprentice's arrest, claiming his language was inappropriately incendiary during the present climate; others cheered on the

²³ *Poignards* later become symbols of counter-revolution, in counterpoint to the sans-culottes' weapon of choice, the humble *pique*. The *chevalier du poignard*, named for the several hundred noblemen rumoured to have been planning to help the king emigrate on 28 February, 1791 was regularly evoked in counter-revolutionary plot rumours.

²⁴ APP Section d'Arcis, 27 juin, 1793. 'Arrestation d'un garçon boulanger qui a dit dans un groupe qu'il a été payé pour ne rien faire.'

apprentice, claiming he was proof that the bakers were the source of shortages.²⁵

Another report described a woman brought to her section, 'suffering from several pike wounds' said to have been received during an altercation outside a butcher. The account described how her 'incendiary language had provoked a kind of rumour. They wanted to make her be quiet.' She had suffered several injuries during the course of her arrest, 'but despite her injuries, she was widely considered at fault'.²⁶ Little sympathy was accorded to those who were perceived to be sowing discord intentionally.

Such incidents reveal that an awareness of the importance of verifying information and of not spreading rumours was more widespread than our bourgeois diarists assumed, even among the less educated. They suggest that there were degrees of unofficial self-policing in place to prevent rumours spreading, and indicate an awareness that it was not only words committed to paper that needed to be verified before being passed on, but the spoken word, too. Just as Rosalie Jullien was careful not to repeat details of the rumours in Paris when writing to her family in the provinces, as discussed in Chapter II, so these incidents suggest that even at street level some citizens were aware that a rumour – even if widely known to be false – depends for its existence on repetition, and therefore took pains to avoid doing so.

However, not every citizen was so careful to sift fact from fiction to prevent unnecessary alarm. Some accepted without question the word on the street, particularly if it corresponded to long-held beliefs or deeply rooted prejudices, whilst others chose to spread slanderous stories or malicious

²⁵ Ibid. '[D]ans le moment de crise où nous étions il ne convient pas qu'il tienne des propos semblables, que malgré ces observations il persiste à tenir le même langage en disant que son maître le payait à ne rien faire, ce qui indisposa et indigna même les personnes présentes qui engageraient le commissariat à arrêter le particulier, avec d'autant plus de raison que déjà quelques personnes dans le groupe semblaient applaudir ses propos en disant, 'Voici comme les boulangers nous arrangent.'"

²⁶ Caron, vol. 5, p. 412. 'Rapport de Breton, 29 ventôse, an II.'

gossip in the full knowledge they were untrue. They may have been motivated by personal animosity and a desire to hurt or cause trouble, but they may equally have used these stories for personal advantage or gain, using their entertainment value as a form of social currency. The culture of *libelles*, supported by malicious court gossip, as described by Robert Darnton, Simon Burrows and Chantal Thomas among others,²⁷ exemplifies this conscious spreading of rumour for the sake of entertainment and personal kudos. Such rumours, often about shared acquaintances or public figures, created a sense of solidarity, uniting the speaker and listener(s) against the slandered subject and bestowing upon the speaker a degree of social cachet, however short-lived. Here, the sharing or spreading of a rumour served as social currency, much in the same way as gossip. But this was not the only way in which sharing rumours united the speaker and listener. When the subject of the rumour was alarming or distressing, it allowed the participants to express their anxieties collectively. This sharing was both momentarily cathartic, enabling speakers to express concerns within a receptive group, and simultaneously exacerbated the alarm by giving voice to the rumour and allowing it to spread.

Rumours are also bound to thrive in environments where the speaker has something to gain by holding the attention of the group, and the group is willing to be so entertained. It will come as no surprise that the *observateurs* found the tavern, cabaret and café such mines of potentially seditious talk and rumour and thus these establishments were regularly kept under surveillance. Pity the speaker whose extravagant tales were seen as evidence of counter-revolution rather than mere attention-seeking or wine-soaked camaraderie. A citizen arrested in a cabaret on the rue Charenton for

²⁷ See, for example, Simon Burrows, *Blackmail, Scandal, and Revolution: London's French libellistes 1758-92* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006) and *A King's Ransom: The Life of Charles Théveneau de Morlande, Blackmailer, Scandalmonger and Master-Spy* (London: Continuum, 2010); Robert Darnton, *Forbidden Best Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (London: HarperCollins, 1996) and *The Devil in the Holy Water or the Art of Slander from Louis XIV to Napoleon* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); and Chantal Thomas, *La Reine scélérate, Marie-Antoinette dans les pamphlets* (Paris: Seuil, 2003).

relaying the story that an unnamed *conventionnel* had been assassinated must have regretted he had drawn attention to himself when his statement set off a laborious chain of bureaucratic events requiring, among other things, papers attesting to his patriotism and an interview at his local *commissaire de police*.²⁸ Another individual, in recounting a rumour that counter-revolutionary agents had infiltrated the Convention, found himself under arrest for criticising the government.²⁹ 'Les mots vagues' uttered in a cabaret concerning the complexities of bread distribution were sufficient grounds for the arrest of another unfortunate citizen; a conscientious eavesdropper who had denounced him to the authorities expressed concern that such talk could damage public morale.³⁰ Similarly, rumours recounted with sufficient bravado and conviction in a public place represented a threat to public order, and were prosecuted as 'propos incendiaires', as a pugnacious group in the café de Chartres found when, riled by stories circulating about the army, they threatened to take up pistols and sabres themselves.³¹

The obvious connection between the tavern environment and immoderate speech was not ignored by the authorities, however, and not all arrests for *mauvais propos* ended in conviction. Inebriation, certainly among men, was, for a time at least, considered a reasonable defence, particularly if the suspect was otherwise known to be of good character and recognised as *un bon patriote*. An individual arrested for 'des propos tendant à soulever les femmes' was reportedly found drunk in the doorway of a butcher shop, shouting imprecations at a neighbour he had mistaken for a member of the Convention. Witnesses in his defence described him variously as 'un bon

²⁸ APP Section des Quinze-Vingts, 2 février, 1793. 'Arrestation d'un individu qui a dit, dans un cabaret, qu'un représentant venait d'être assassiné.'

²⁹ APP Section de Butte des Moulins, 9 avril, 1793. 'Arrestation d'un individu qui a tenu les propos contre les représentants du peuple.'

³⁰ APP Section des Amis de la Patrie, 7 germinal, an III. 'Déclaration au sujet d'un individu qui, dans un cabaret, a tenu des propos relatifs à la distribution de pain.'

³¹ APP Section de Butte des Moulins, 18 avril, 1793. 'Arrestation d'individus qui ont causé du trouble au café de Chartres, par leurs propos incendiaires.'

patriote' and 'de bonne foi' but admitted that, in the heat of the moment, fatigue and wine had overtaken him, with one of his friends admitting to having to relieve him of his pistols.³² Drunkenness in women, however, was generally seen as a liability rather than an excuse, and inebriated women were, as Dominique Godineau among others argues, treated both more strictly than drunken men, and often more strictly than sober women who might have committed the same infraction.³³ Godineau's studies of arrest records during this period examine the role gender plays in criminal conviction; an inebriated woman could be judged in some cases as doubly suspect, transgressing both legal and societal norms.³⁴

Cabarets and cafés, then, were seen as places where rumours might flourish, even unintentionally, if only because immoderate drinking might lead to rash public declamations that could be overheard and repeated by equally addled minds. But these sites were also the cause of rumours themselves. Cafés were frequently under surveillance as likely sites of counter-revolution, particularly around the Champs-Élysées, a traditionally well-heeled *quartier*, but where passers-by of all persuasions congregated to promenade.³⁵ The physical appearance of individuals in this area was often scrutinised, with unusual characteristics or features raising suspicions. A report of 16 April, 1793 described an altercation in a café in the area in which men reported to be 'dressed as soldiers' – in itself a telling detail, suggesting that their appearance should not be accepted at face value – tore

³² AN F7/4774/8. 'Arrestation de Lechargeur, 22 messidor, l'an III'

³³ For discussions of women and public drinking see for example, Dominique Godineau, *Citoyennes tricoteuses: Les femmes du peuple à Paris pendant la Révolution française* (Aix-en-Provence: Alinea, 1988); Thomas Brennan, *Public Drinking and Popular Culture in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988) and Matthieu Lecoutre, *Ivresse et ivrognerie dans la France moderne* (Presses universitaires de Rennes/Presses universitaires François-Rabelais de Tours, 2011).

³⁴ Conventions regarding what was acceptable behaviour and the impact on personal reputations will be discussed in more detail in Chapter V.

³⁵ Arrests and observations in this area during the Old Regime and early years of the Revolution are collected in Ferdinand de Federici, *Flagrants délits sur les Champs-Élysées: les dossiers de police du gardien Federici (1777-1791)*, (Paris: Mercure de France, 2008).

the silk scarves from ‘some young dandies’ (‘quelques jeunes gens petits-maîtres’).³⁶ However, the report continued to reveal layer upon layer of suspicious appearances and suspect motives. The scarves were felt to signal the wearer’s mockery of the Revolution; certainly silk was a fabric for the aristocracy and ‘petits-maîtres’ were the antithesis of the sans-culotte. Further investigation, however, revealed an unexpected twist: the alleged soldiers – ‘des gens prétendus amis de l’ordre’ – were themselves arrested as suspected federalists. According to the report, they were merely affecting an exaggerated show of patriotism as a cover, and were paid to foment civil war in Paris.³⁷

A closer reading of the report suggests that the *observateur* has been influenced by several popular rumours in his assessment of the incident. The allegations and assumptions contained in the report refer to several common tropes of the period: 1) that counter-revolutionaries disguised themselves as patriots (it was clearly a fine balancing act to display the correct degree of patriotism – too much being as suspect as too little); 2) that any public disruption had been orchestrated and paid for by enemies of the Republic; and 3) that Paris was in imminent danger of erupting into civil war. The obsession with appearances, and the very common anxiety that appearances could be deceptive, is also evident in this report. Little surprise, then, given their reputations as dens of intrigue, or, at the very least, sites of unseemly frivolity, that a proposal to close all cafés and cabarets was met with widespread support. A report of May 3, 1793 claimed that regular fights at the Grotte Flammande, in the Section de la Maison de l’Egalité, ‘has led good citizens to want all taverns closed, as they are, frequently, the meeting place of brigands’.³⁸

³⁶ AN AF/IV/1470 16 avril, 1793.

³⁷ Ibid. ‘On soupçonne ces gens-là, quoi qu’ils affectent un patriotisme exalté, d’être des agitateurs payés par les ennemis du bien public, pour allumer la guerre civile dans Paris.’

³⁸ AN AF/IV/1470 doc. 110, 3 mai, 1793.

Gambling houses were equally under surveillance and the subject of rumours. Viewed with suspicion under the Old Regime,³⁹ by the revolution they were known to be frequented by the usual *gens suspects* – the aristocrat and the libertine – and were thus seen as potential hotbeds of counter-revolution. However, these suspicions were not only motivated by fears of political intrigue. Equating idle pastimes and easy money with counter-revolution revealed the puritanical streak that was at the heart of Jacobinism. One *observateur* decried gambling because it was inappropriately frivolous when the country was at war and others were suffering. The country should be in mourning, he wrote, not enjoying ‘la joie et la volupté’.⁴⁰ Another report of July 1793 described a visit to the house of a former abbé, which revealed a group of people who gathered ‘under the pretext of gambling’ but who were ‘known counter-revolutionaries without *cartes de sûreté*’.⁴¹ This latter was significant in that, without the necessary documents, they could not work, and thus were presumed to be making a living from illicit means.

Words spoken in anger had the potential to cause rumours, too. Many reports described the ‘mauvais propos’ shouted in the heat of the moment in a crowded bread queue. When a woman was arrested in a queue outside a bakery for accusing deputies of hoarding essential goods while the rest of Paris starved,⁴² circumstances would suggest it was impulse and frustration rather than a concerted effort to libel the Convention; such an outburst, however, had potentially far-reaching consequences and reflected a widespread and age-old belief that those in power enjoyed benefits denied those without. An *observateur* report of April 1793 describes a series of rumours about the Commune whose narrative is strikingly similar to the

³⁹ Brennan, *Public Drinking and Popular Culture*, p. 274.

⁴⁰ Caron, vol 1. p.66. ‘Rapport de Latour-Lamontagne, 11 septembre, 1793.’

⁴¹ APP Section de Muséum, 23 juillet, 1793. ‘Visite au domicile du nommé Burgurieu, ci-devant abbé.’

⁴² APP Section de Butte des Moulins, 21 ventôse, an II. ‘Arrestation d’une femme qui a insulté un fonctionnaire.’

template of the aristocratic famine plot: ‘...their aim is to ruin the bakers, so their own members can make a profit ... they say that the Commune is to blame for the high price of wheat.’⁴³ Whether it was the Convention, the Commune or any other authority, a recurring belief was that those in power were abusing their position to the detriment of the people: in the popular imagination, one greedy, self-serving political elite had simply been replaced with another one. As such, this new ‘elite’ acquired the attributes of venality that were formerly seen to characterise the aristocrat. The ‘other’ was moving ever closer – and now was dangerously close to being synonymous with the people’s representatives.

An individual was arrested for a provocative speech on a similar theme in a queue outside a butcher, calling for another ‘10 août’ and blaming the Convention for all the country’s ills. Here, again, the Convention took on the role vacated by the aristocracy – that of an elite out to fill its own stomach at the expense of the people. By extension, those citizens who appear to benefit from more material comforts were equally suspect as being part of this elite. An eyewitness described how the suspect attempted to incite the women in the queue by suggesting that well-dressed passers-by were eating at the expense of the common women:

He insulted everyone who passed by and was wearing a clean outfit. He said to the women gathered outside the butcher, ‘Do you see those scoundrels, they have stomachs full of bread at twelve francs a pound, whereas you, little mothers, can get hold of neither bread nor meat.’⁴⁴

A dishevelled appearance served as a kind of visual shorthand for Republican integrity.⁴⁵ The suspect himself, according to a witness, was

⁴³ AN AF/IV/1470 doc. 83, 18 avril, 1793.

⁴⁴ AN F7/4774/8. ‘Il insultait tous ceux qui passaient et qui avaient un costume propre. Il disait aux femmes qui étaient assemblées à la porte du boucher, “Voyez-vous ces coquins-là, ils ont le ventre plein de pain à douze francs la livre, tandis que vous autres, petites mères, vous ne pouvez avoir ni pain ni viande.”’

⁴⁵ See, for example, ‘Imaging the French Revolution’, *American Historical Review*, no. 110 (Feb. 2005), <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/imaging/home.html>; Nicole Pellegrin, *Les Vêtements de la Liberté. Abécédaire des pratiques vestimentaires en France, de 1780 à 1800*, postface by Daniel Roche (Paris: Editions Alinea, 1989); Jennifer Harris, ‘The Red Cap of

wearing a filthy and ill-fitting jacket ('fort sale et trop long pour lui') – the *carmagnole* that was as emblematic of the sans-culotte as the *bonnet rouge*, and which in August 1792 had merited its own popular song. Tellingly, however, the witness described this suspect as 'disguised' in this iconic attire, suggesting that he had merely assumed the outward trappings of the sans-culotte in order to stir up anti-government sentiment. The witness's account was characteristic of contemporary attitudes, reflecting both the concern that the distinctive appearance of the sans-culotte could be and was appropriated by counter-revolutionaries, as well as the common belief that counter-revolutionary *agents provocateurs* were planted in crowds, particularly among crowds of women, to incite anger and violence.⁴⁶ This concern with disguises, and the inability to trust outward appearances, is a recurrent theme among police reports of this time, a reflection both of the language of the debates of the Convention and of the radical press, in which masks, disguises and the need for unmasking is a common rhetorical device.

Crowds, if eyewitnesses were to be believed, were regularly led astray by aristocrats disguised as sans-culottes, or by men dressed as women, a further twist on the 'stranger' – often conspicuously attired or astride a white horse – that Richard Cobb has identified as a regular feature in reports of crowd action.⁴⁷ The frequent reference to a distinctive yet unknown stranger in such accounts served several purposes. Such a figure provided the community with a way to protect its own, allowing a witness to cooperate with the authorities only insofar as he did not implicate a neighbour or himself. The idea of the *agent provocateur* also allowed the community to distance itself and deflect responsibility for any wrongdoing. The consequences of violent crowd action may be so distressing that the

Liberty: A Study of Dress Worn by French Revolutionary Partisans 1789–94', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3 (1981). The appearance of the sans-culotte versus that of the aristocrat recurs throughout the *Père Duchesne* (see below).

⁴⁶ Characteristic of the many examples is AN AF/IV/1470, doc. 10, 27 février, 1793. 'Hier dans un café rue des 5 Diamants, 3 particuliers ... excitaient les femmes au pillages.'

⁴⁷ For example, Richard Cobb, *The Police and the People: French Popular Protest 1789–1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 18.

community needs to identify an external (albeit imaginary) instigator in order to absolve itself – the people are not ‘canaille’ (rabble) but have been led astray. At the same time, this attitude infantilised crowd action, denying agency.⁴⁸ This is particularly striking in official attitudes towards crowds of women, where reports seldom omit a reference to a suspicious (and suspiciously masculine) ring leader.

The stranger, in these accounts however, was now explicitly identified as aristocratic and counter-revolutionary. Over the course of the Revolution the two would become conflated in the popular imagination to the extent that all ‘strangers’, i.e., all figures unknown to the local community, became immediately politically suspect. This equation of the unfamiliar with the politically suspect increased public anxiety, contributing to what is in effect a siege mentality. The departure of troops for the Vendée in May 1793 prompted another wave of fears about an undefended capital, similar to the months preceding the September Massacres. The environment was such that many women were reported to be calling for another purge of the prisons, with the authorities fearing that they might take the situation into their hands.⁴⁹ Widespread belief that strangers, typically in the pay of Pitt, were concealed in Paris, causing dissent and spreading lies, went hand in hand with increasing concerns that appearances were not to be trusted. The *Père Duchesne* decried the ease with which anyone could adopt the appearance of the sans-culotte, describing the streets of Paris as a veritable poppy-field of *bonnet-rouge*-wearing muscadins, bristling with the moustaches and sabres of the true Republican.⁵⁰ Several reports confirm a widespread belief that

⁴⁸ Colin Lucas, ‘The Crowd and Politics’ in *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, vol. II, *The Political Culture of the French Revolution* (Pergamon Press: Oxford, 1988) argues that the language used in contemporary documents to describe crowd action reveals the degree to which that action was legitimised or criminalised, with ‘le peuple’ engaging in legitimate action while ‘la canaille’ was responsible for mob violence.

⁴⁹ AN AF/IV/1470, doc. 123. ‘14 mai, 1793. De leur côté des femmes de la halle proposent de faire une pétition pour demander que les prisons soient purgées avant le départ de leurs maris et de leurs enfants. Il est à craindre que ce projet s’effectue si l’administration de police ne continue pas à le surveiller avec le plus grand soin.’

⁵⁰ *Le Père Duchesne*, no. 325, p. 4.

the appearance of the sans-culotte was being appropriated as a disguise. An *observateur* described in September 1793 seeing throughout Paris, but specifically around les Halles, large numbers of ‘badly dressed people’, widely believed to be in fact ‘très comme il faut’.⁵¹ He advised further surveillance – whether because they were intentionally disguising their true natures, or whether they were aristocrats without visible means of support, similar to the ‘handsome, barefoot men’ seen begging around the Louvre, was not stated.⁵² The following day a report described a muscadin intentionally ‘hiding beneath the costume of the sans-culotte’ fomenting discontent among women in the Palais-Royal by encouraging them to fight for equal rights. The canny women of Paris, however, recognized him as an impostor, and turned on him.⁵³

Appearances, then, could be deceptive, and unusual appearances were worthy of further investigation. Many police reports describe the questioning and often subsequent arrest of individuals ‘*en travesti*’ – either men dressed as women or women as men. The belief that crowds of women were manipulated by men in disguise was common; the example of the alleged muscadin – disguised as a sans-culotte – in the Palais-Royal is an interesting variation on that theme, in that the women are not being incited to pillage, but to fight for their rights. During the October marches, reports surfaced that among the market women were some suspiciously masculine-looking figures.⁵⁴ This alleged masculine presence undermines the idea of women’s autonomous political engagement (the women have been manipulated into taking action) whilst simultaneously preserving traditional notions of femininity (the violence and anger demonstrated by the crowd is not that of ‘real’ women.)

⁵¹ Caron, vol. I, p. 157. ‘Rapport de Panetier, 21 septembre, 1793.’

⁵² Caron, vol. I, p. 222. ‘Rapport de Latour-Lamontagne, 28 Septembre, 1793.’

⁵³ Caron, vol I, p. 165. ‘Rapport de Latour-Lamontagne, 22 septembre, 1793.’

⁵⁴ Thomas Paine described the crowd as ‘a very numerous body of women, and men in the disguise of women’. Cited in Ian Haywood, *Bloody Romanticism* (Basingstoke, Hants: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p.66.

The issue of women dressed as men was more nuanced, yet still caused concern. Stories of valiant women in soldiers' uniform fighting for the Republic had them hailed as folk heroines,⁵⁵ but civilian women dressed in men's attire were more problematic and ambiguous. During the mass recruitment drive in Paris following the uprising in the Vendée, rumours reflecting the perceived vulnerability of the capital escalated, with many rumoured sightings of aristocratic women disguised as men (and vice versa). Wrote an *observateur* in May 1793: 'They say there are many émigrés in this great city, above all former aristocratic women, many of whom are disguised as men, as well as several of the men who hide themselves in women's clothes.'⁵⁶ The counter-revolutionary purpose of this cross-dressing was not established, but was a reflection of a wider sense of unease, and distrust in appearances. Rumours of aristocrats *en travesti* had an ominous precedent, too: Marie-Antoinette was rumoured to travel to the bois de Boulogne from the Tuileries disguised in men's clothes, in order to meet with members of her Austrian Committee plotting to overthrow the republic.⁵⁷ Rumours of disguised aristocrats, therefore, did not have to make explicit reference to conspiracy in order to evoke notions of shadowy plots. Rumours implied as much as they explained.

Dominique Godineau describes how many working women adopted men's clothes because they were more practical for physical labour,⁵⁸ but the

⁵⁵ David Hopkin, 'The World Turned Upside Down: Female Soldiers in the French Armies of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars' in *Soldiers, Citizens and Civilians: Experiences and Perceptions of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1790–1820*, ed. Alan Forrest, Karen Hagemann and Jane Rendall (Basingstoke, Hants: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). Ian Germani, 'Staging Battles: Representations of War in the Theatre and Festivals of the French Revolution', *European Review of History*, vol. 13, no. 2 (2006) explores the relationship between theatrical portrayals of women soldiers and their effect on the self-perception of actual women soldiers.

⁵⁶ AN AF/IV/1470 doc. 124. '15 mai, 1793. On dit qu'il y a dans cette grande cité beaucoup d'émigrés, surtout des femmes ci-devant de qualité, dont plusieurs déguisées en homme: tandis que quelques-uns des ci-devant se cachent sous des habits de femmes.'

⁵⁷ Thomas Kaiser 'From the Austrian Committee to the Foreign Plot: Marie-Antoinette, Austrophobia, and the Terror', *French Historical Studies*, vol. 26, no. 4 (2003), p. 587.

⁵⁸ Dominique Godineau, *Citoyennes tricoteuses*, p. 19.

authorities nonetheless viewed this transgression with suspicion. A young girl arrested for stealing a handkerchief may have had her own reasons for also being dressed in men's clothes, but for the authorities the two infractions compounded one another.⁵⁹ Even if no criminal intent could be established, officials were unimpressed by those flouting convention. A young woman stopped by police in the Section de Butte des Moulins explained she was wearing men's clothes 'because it amused her'.⁶⁰ Although amusement in general had not been outlawed, she was reprimanded for frivolity in such turbulent times.

While an unusual appearance marked an individual as suspicious, specific groups were considered suspect in general. Liveried servants were so conspicuously 'other', such provocative symbols of the Old Regime, that by 1791 they were likely to be attacked when seen in public.⁶¹ Domestic servants held an ambiguous position in both public and private life. In the household they were somewhere between family member and employee, with some of the characteristics of both, but ultimately neither. The servant was privy to intimate family secrets, whether by accident or design, and moved between the two worlds of market place and, in the grander households, cloistered *hôtel particulier*. Yet their loyalties were suspected on all sides: Grace Dalrymple Elliot, an aristocratic Englishwoman in Paris during the Terror, described finding herself accidentally out after curfew, but reluctant to return to her Paris home, convinced her cook was a Jacobin waiting to denounce her.⁶² On the other hand, the well-dressed footman idling in the Palais-Royal seemed, to the ordinary passer-by, to have more in common with his masters than the common people; he was immediately

⁵⁹ APP Section de Butte des Moulins, 17 août, 1793. 'Arrestation d'une jeune fille de 15 ans, vêtue en homme, qui a volé un mouchoir.'

⁶⁰ APP Section de Butte des Moulins, 24 juillet, 1793.

⁶¹ Cissie Fairchilds, *Domestic Enemies*, p. 233, and Sarah C. Maza, *Servants and Masters*, also refer to the conspicuousness of the liveried servant in public spaces.

⁶² Grace Dalrymple Elliot, *Journal of My Life During the French Revolution* (London: Richard Bentley, 1859).

identified as separate from the hard-working patriot by his supercilious demeanour, his extravagant clothing and his long hours of inactivity. The liveried men employed in the grand houses literally received money in exchange for wearing a costume. This did not go unnoticed by one *observateur*, who described a suspicious-looking group in the Tuileries, among them one with *l'air d'un domestique*:

I saw in the Tuileries several men who appeared to me to be in the pay of enemies of the public. One of these men wore a red suit ... he has the air of a servant, speaking fairly badly. These men play a part depending on the circumstances.⁶³

Once again, the suspects were believed to be playing roles, acquiring habits and appearances as the situation requires, and who, if not a servant, displays a better ability to adapt, accustomed as he is to mimicking the mannerisms of his employer and wearing his clothes. Despite the widespread suspicion of domestic servants, however, rumours concerning their malfeasance could only go so far. A report of rumours of a planned uprising of wigmakers was rejected out of hand as utterly ridiculous, the work of the 'ill-intentioned' who had reached new lows in their attempts to exploit common fears:

The ill-intentioned, running out of ways to spread trouble and discord, are spreading false rumours and absurd news. They are claiming that the wigmaker's apprentices are planning to rally, and nothing could be more false.⁶⁴

That rumours were now focussing on this most ineffectual of social groups, the report suggested, was an indication of just how desperate of the enemies of the Revolution had become.

Perhaps most troubling of all for the authorities were reports of the misappropriation of official uniforms. After all, despite the patriots'

⁶³ Caron, *Paris Pendant la Terreur*, vol. 1 p. 62. 'Rapport de Soulet, 19 septembre, 1793.'

⁶⁴ AN AF/IV/1470, doc, 116. '8 mai, 1793. Les malintentionnés, commençant à ne plus savoir quel ressort faire jouer pour répandre le trouble et la discorde, sèment de faux bruits, des nouvelles absurdes. Ils assuraient que les garçons perruquiers devaient se rassembler et rien n'était plus faux.'

complaints, the outward appearance of the sans-culotte was available to anyone; one did not need accreditation to sport a red cap. That legitimate uniforms could be acquired by those with no right to wear them was disturbing for a number of reasons. In an echo of the report describing men 'playing different roles according to the situation' a report of April 1793 recounted incidents of individuals appearing in different uniforms on a daily basis:

We have noticed with some concern certain individuals who appear in public places, whose uniforms change daily; one day they are seen dressed as cavalry officers ...; another time they appear in the clothes of a footsoldier; the surveillance team continues to observe and follow them.⁶⁵

The question of how these uniforms were obtained was important to officialdom. Widespread beliefs that troops were selling their uniforms was counted both in terms of financial costs – 'they sell for ten *sous* a cap that costs the Republic ten francs'⁶⁶ – but most importantly in terms of the effect on public trust. That there were deserters in sufficient numbers to sell their uniforms was alarming enough for public morale; the misuse of these uniforms amplified it, and could cause irreparable damage to the public's faith in authority. A police report of April confirmed these fears, describing the attack on an isolated farmhouse by a gang of thieves availing themselves of the outward trapping of officialdom, some dressed in municipal scarves, others in soldiers' uniforms. Under the pretext of requisitioning counterfeit assignats, they ransacked the property, locking the inhabitants in the cellar before making their escape.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ AN AF/IV/1470, doc. 91. '22 avril, 1793. On remarque avec inquiétude dans les endroits publics des particuliers dont le costume change tous les jours; tantôt on les voit en hussard avec des moustaches; une autre fois ils n'en ont plus et sont habillés en fantassin ...; la surveillance les observe et les suit.'

⁶⁶ AN AF/IV/1470, doc. 124, 15 mai, 1793.

⁶⁷ AN AF/IV/1470, doc. 72. '12 avril, 1792. Des voleurs se sont partis ... au nombre de quinze, cinq d'entre eux étaient revêtus de l'écharpe municipale, les autres représentants de la force armée. Ils s'introduisaient dans cette ferme sous prétexte d'y faire perquisition de faux assignats. Ils se firent livrer tous les effets précieux. Ils feigneraient d'avoir les recherches à faire dans les caves. Ils y introduisent toutes les personnes de la maison, les y en ferment et prisent la fuite avec leurs vols.'

The ease with which the thieves were able to appropriate the appearance of authority and the effect this would have on the public's trust was obvious cause for concern. Similar reports in Paris, describing violations against private property acted under the guise of officialdom, were problematic for the authorities, and it is not always clear whether the reports were describing an abuse of local power, patriotic vigilantes or actual criminal plots. In April 1793 the Section de Fidélité reported that individuals 'revêtus des insignes de l'autorité' had broken into a local house, causing widespread damage but leaving without issuing any official papers.⁶⁸ Was this official bullying and lack of protocol, or were they thieves who had appropriated these symbols of authority to use them to gain advantage? The Section d'Arcis reported a complaint for arbitrary acts on the part of an individual claiming to be a member of the Revolutionary committee,⁶⁹ whilst the Section de Butte des Moulins reported the arrest of two individuals who appear to have taken it upon themselves to enact revolutionary justice.⁷⁰ This confusion between criminals fraudulently taking on the appearance of the authorities; on the authorities behaving criminally; and on individuals taking it upon themselves to act in the name of the authorities would have contributed to public mistrust of those in power. Rumours that deputies enjoyed lavish, private dinners while the rest of the city starved or that the Commune had orchestrated grain shortages to the advantage of its favourites contributed to this sense that those in authority were abusing their position for personal gain— quite the opposite of the equation of private and political virtue publicly espoused by the deputies themselves.⁷¹

⁶⁸ APP Section de Fidélité, 6 avril, 1793. 'Déclaration au sujet d'individus revêtus des insignes de l'autorité qui ont violé le domicile d'une citoyenne, enfonçant les portes, bouleversant tout, et qui se sont retirés sans dresser de procès-verbal.'

⁶⁹ APP Section d'Arcis, 24 vendémiaire, an II. 'Plainte pour acte arbitraire de la part d'un particulier se disant membre du comité révolutionnaire.'

⁷⁰ APP Section de Butte des Moulins, 15 pluviôse, an II. 'Arrestation de deux citoyens qui ont causé du trouble en allant, sans mission, chez les orfèvres s'informer du prix de l'argenterie et les traitant d'aristocrates et de contre-révolutionnaires.'

⁷¹ See, for example, Marisa Linton, *The Politics of Virtue in Enlightenment France* (Basingstoke, Hants: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001) describing the significance of virtue to the revolutionary mentality, with, for example, the insistence that the truly virtuous man did not gain any personal benefit from his activities in the Revolution.

Particularly problematic was the elision of authority and *brigandage*, given the potency of the image and reputation of the brigand in the popular imagination, and the incendiary rumours circulating in the provinces during the summer of 1789 during the Great Fear.

Popular conceptions of the figure of the *brigand* were various and mutable, making contemporary use of the word and its intended meaning ambiguous. Whether folk hero or hardened criminal, the *brigand* was a figure on the margins of society; unlike the pedlar or beggar, however, he was an outcast by choice, the rules of society irrelevant to him. Accusing others of being *brigands* criminalised their behaviour, putting them beyond the pale of society. Alan Forrest has examined the many incarnations of the brigand in the popular imagination, from folk hero to desperate criminal, and explored ways in which the term has been used in times of war to dehumanise the enemy, thus rendering him outside the realm of natural law.⁷² During the summer of the Great Fear, *brigands* were rumoured to be in the pay of aristocrats. As the Revolution progressed, the term became one of generic vilification, used in the Convention for any enemy, or to dismiss a rival. Like 'suspect', the term was elastic and unreliable – often but not exclusively connected with fears of counter-revolution. Encompassing criminals, *hors-loi*, aristocrats and counter-revolutionaries, it was this very unreliability that made the term so potent as an insult and yet ultimately confusing. When rival deputies accused one another of being *brigands*, what exactly was their crime?

When, in June 1793, a miller and his family were attacked and robbed by 'douze brigands habillés en garde nationaux' the crime involved actual members of the National Guard abusing their position of authority, rather than thieves appropriating their uniforms. The report relates how the family was forced to open their doors 'au nom sacré de la loi' whereupon they were

⁷² Alan Forrest, 'The Ubiquitous Brigand: The Politics and Language of Repression' in *Popular Resistance in the French Wars: Patriots, Partisans and Land Pirates*, ed. Charles J. Esdaile (Basingstoke, Hants: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Michael Broers, *Napoleon's Other War: Bandits, Rebels and their Pursuers in the Age of Revolutions* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010).

bound and blindfolded while their attackers made away with 7,000 francs worth of assignats and several pieces of silver. The report concluded with an urgent call to punish the perpetrators, otherwise households would find themselves robbed by the very people paid to protect them.⁷³

By describing the perpetrators as brigands 'dressed as members of the National Guard' the writer of this report is clearly disassociating the behaviour of the suspects from that of the actual National Guard, despite the fact they were one and the same. The association with soldiers, criminality and brigandage was already widespread in the popular imagination, and such incidents would only serve as a further confirmation of this. In attempting to create a distance between the criminal behaviour of these particular guards and the reputation of the institution, however, the report inadvertently drew attention to the ease with which the uniform of authority and the appearance of respectability could be appropriated and misused.

Equating those in positions of authority with brigands had complex repercussions due to the multiple meanings of the term, and it became increasingly politically loaded. Brigands were criminals, and the greatest crimes of all were against the nation, hence the equation of *brigandage* with counter-revolution. In May 1793 there were calls for immediate arrests for those without obvious means of employment on the basis that they must be 'thieves or brigands in the pay of the enemy'.⁷⁴ That same month, reports emerged of attempts to discover the addresses of members of the Committees of General Safety and Security by *voleurs* and *brigands* – the report made no mention of counter-revolutionaries or 'enemies' at all, although the implication was clear: 'They intend to murder the citizens of these two committees at the first sign of the insurrection they're about to

⁷³ AN AF/IV/1470, doc. 132. '24 juin, 1793. Si ce vol restait impuni ces scélérats renouvelleraient leurs brigandages et les propriétés se trouveraient violées par ceux-là même qui sont payés pour veiller à leur conservation.'

⁷⁴ AN AF/IV/1479, doc. 108. '2 mai, 1793. Vu les troubles actuels et les vols qui se sont journellement dans Paris, il serait bien urgent d'arrêter tout individu sans état et sans moyen connu d'exister. Ce ne peut être qu'un voleur ou un brigand soldé par nos ennemis.'

announce in Paris.⁷⁵ The conflation of *brigands* with counter-revolutionaries in this report is clear, and yet the term remained ambiguous. Madame Roland, for example, referred to brigands and anarchists simultaneously; when she accused the Convention of being arrogant brigands it was not counter-revolution she was evoking, but a criticism of the extremism of the Mountain.⁷⁶ So in year II, when two citizens were arrested in the Section de Fidélité for describing the government as ‘un tas de brigands’,⁷⁷ although the authorities saw it as evidence of anti-republicanism, it was not immediately clear what their intention was. The mutability of the expression recalls Mercier’s comment on the use of the term ‘scélérat’. ‘Oh, it’s nothing’, he overheard a passer-by say to another, ‘scélérat is just a term for someone who doesn’t think like we do’.⁷⁸ Such loaded yet ambiguous terms contributed to rumours in unpredictable ways: if the speaker and the listener did not have consensus on the meaning of the term, the understanding of the story discussed might be wildly different and could affect its interpretation in the retelling.

Although the term brigand was often so closely connected with counter-revolutionary activity as to become a shorthand for the enemy, it was not the only connotation. Forrest relates how closely connected notions of *brigandage* and criminal activity were with the army, particularly as deserters, often far from home and trying to make their way back, were frequently reduced to thieving in order to survive.⁷⁹ David Hopkin examines

⁷⁵ Ibid. ‘Ils se proposent d’assassiner les citoyens comprenant ces deux comités au premier instant d’insurrection qui éclatera dans Paris, qu’ils annoncèrent très prochain.’

⁷⁶ *Mémoires de Madame Roland*, ed. Paul de Roux, trans. Evelyn Shuckburgh (Paris: 1986, Mercure de France), p. 117.

⁷⁷ APP Section de Fidélité, 4 ventôse, an II.

⁷⁸ Louis Sébastien Mercier, *Paris Pendant la Révolution (1789–1799) ou Le Nouveau Paris* (Brunswick: 1800), p. v.

⁷⁹ See, for example, Alan Forrest, ‘Conscription and Crime in Rural France during the Directory and Consulate’ in *Beyond the Terror: Essays in Regional and Social History, 1794–1815*, ed. Gwynne Lewis and Colin Lucas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1983), *Napoleon’s Men: The Soldiers of the Revolution and Empire* (New York and London: Hambledon and London, 2002) and ‘The Ubiquitous Brigand: the Politics and Language of Repression’.

the significance in the folk tales of the Lorraine region of France of the soldier, a figure combining the marginality of the itinerant pedlar with the potential threat of the bandit. As such, he was a potent figure in rural communities, bringing news and tales from the world beyond the small village, whilst, in his role as outsider, arousing within that same community suspicion and fear.⁸⁰

The soldier in Paris had an equally ambiguous reputation, and the presence of the army in the capital, its movements and behaviour were the subject of many rumours. Several factors influenced rumours relating to soldiers and the army. Competing news sources were difficult to verify, with personal accounts often conflicting with official reports. The rumours that had contributed to the September Massacres were still very much in the public consciousness, and, as will be discussed below, contributed to similar concerns arising in the capital following the latest recruitment drives. The army as an institution was problematic, too, with the officer class, traditionally drawn from the aristocracy, in itself suspect, an impression upheld by the radical press's ongoing criticism of high-profile figures such as Lafayette and Dumouriez. (The later defections of both were seen as evidence of Marat's prescience and would serve as confirmation for the alleged perfidy of the officer class as a whole.)

These conflicting perceptions were both potent and bewildering. On the one hand, the army was made up of the community's sons, husbands and brothers, of familiar and beloved figures fulfilling their allotted role for the good of the Republic. Yet the soldier as a generic type prompted conflicting reactions. In the popular imagination the soldier had associations with antisocial or even criminal activity, despite the fact that actual soldiers often elicited compassion from communities, as they called to mind other sons fighting on distant soil. There was also the problematic matter of the

⁸⁰ David M. Hopkin, *Soldier and Peasant in French Popular Culture, 1766-1870* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Royal Historical Society/Boydell Press, 2003).

uniform. As reports proliferated of uniforms being sold by deserters, or appropriated by thieves, questions arose about the identity and authenticity of those in uniform. With rumours about the army, the exterior, threatening 'other' appeared increasingly to be woven into the fabric of the community, with the result that the separation between 'them' and 'us' became increasingly confused.

The presence or not of soldiers in Paris was a constant source of anxiety and rumour. In May 1793, following another recruitment drive for the Vendée, the *mairie* observed that the number of soldiers still remaining in Paris was causing alarm, and recommended their departure to restore peace and equilibrium to the capital.⁸¹ Reports of criminal behaviour and debauchery among the army did not endear them to the public. In May 1793 a report described how the cavalry in the Ecole Militaire was said to be stealing and distributing false assignats. More specifically, witnesses described seeing them stealing from civilians during food riots. There were complaints that anyone could be accepted into their ranks, casting doubt on the competence of those in command.⁸² Another account gave voice to concerns of increasing numbers of deserters, apparently disguising themselves (as women, of course) in order to evade service, whilst others, of all ranks, were openly defying orders, remaining in the capital where they lived 'the most scandalous lives'.⁸³ It was proposed that those soldiers who remained in

⁸¹ AN AF/IV/1470. '1 mai, 1793. Les murmures redoublent de ce que les gendarmes et autres troupes soldées ne partent point de Paris.'

⁸² Ibid. 'L'inconduite des dragons de la république, à l'école militaire, est de plus en plus répréhensible et punissable. Ils sont, pour le plus part, des distributeurs de faux assignats et des voleurs. On est reçu dans ce corps dès qu'on s'y présente ... ce qui prouve que les chefs ne sont pas dignes de la place qu'ils occupent. Vendredi dernier, un de ces dragons arracha le cordon de la montre d'un citoyen, lors du pillage chez les épiciers, un autre a volé la montre d'un gendarme.'

⁸³ AN AF/IV/1470 doc. 135. '27-29 juin, 1793. Le nombre des lâches de la Vendée et des frontières, et qui ont le moyen de se travestir, est considérable, et s'augmente chaque jour.'

Paris without official permission of their regiment should be declared traitors.⁸⁴

However, if the presence of those in uniform in the capital was a cause for concern, thoughts of their imminent departure was equally problematic. As with the months preceding the September Massacres, when worries about the departure of the city's able-bodied men were exacerbated by a relentless campaign by the radical press and Convention about the imminent arrival of the enemy, levels of public anxiety were high. Indeed, a residual memory of the rumours that provoked the purging of the capital's prisons in September 1792 seem to influence a report of 3 May, 1793, in which huge numbers of foreigners were said to be flooding the capital, just as the departure of its able-bodied men for the Vendée left it vulnerable to attack.⁸⁵

The official account, however, illustrated how the ambiguity of its language contributed to the uncertainty of the situation, in effect creating its own rumour:

They/we fear [*on craint*] that our enemies will take advantage of this situation and rally ... in order to spread their criminal wishes and start a civil war in Paris. They/we complain [*on se plaint*] that the Commune and the Police are not monitoring the situation and are not investigating where these very suspect foreigners have come from and why they claim to be here.⁸⁶

Once again the use of the 'on' pronoun created ambiguity; here it was unclear whether the report was recording the public mood or the authorities' view on the imminence of a civil war.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 'On se demande s'il n'y a pas quelque moyen efficace de les contraindre à rejoindre leurs corps, en déclarant traîtres à la Patrie et poursuivis comme tels ceux qui dans le délai de trois jours se trouveraient à Paris, sans mission expresse de leurs corps.'

⁸⁵ AN AF/IV/1470 doc. 111. '4 mai, 1793. On n'est pas surpris de voir arriver dans cette ville une grande quantité d'étrangers de tout état au moment où les citoyens se déposent à partir pour le département de la Vendée.'

⁸⁶ Ibid.

This belief in the arrival of foreigners, of their counter-revolutionary plots and aims to foment a civil war in the capital both echoed and confirmed the rumours of the previous summer. Rumours based on historical precedent – even if that precedent is itself a rumour – are validated by the earlier story, and also authenticate it in turn, creating a circular, self-legitimising argument. The fears of the previous summer also influenced the responses to current events, with the legacy of the September Massacres reappearing in the rumours in May 1793 that market women are going to demand a purging of the capital's prisons before the departure of their husbands.⁸⁷ (A full year after the massacres, an *observateur* reported on the general anxiety about prisons – that they were not monitored closely enough, that access to prisoners was too easy and that they were teeming with plots – all of which was encouraged by the newspapers.⁸⁸)

These endless reverberations of common themes validated contemporary anxieties, and contributed to the reluctance of Parisian recruits to leave the capital. The scarcity of foodstuffs, too, contributed to concerns for the well-being of the families left behind, with reports that men were refusing to leave for war without the assurance their families would be cared for in their absence.⁸⁹

Despite this quite reasonable concern to assure the welfare of their families before departure, the authorities, characteristically, interpreted popular resistance to the latest recruitment drive as the work of *malveillants*, who, appealing to notions of loyalty to the family rather than that of the *patrie*,

⁸⁷ AN AF/IV/1470, doc. 123.

⁸⁸ Caron, vol. 1, p. 137. 'Rapport de Latour-Lamontagne, 19 septembre, 1793. On sème les bruits les plus horribles sur le sort des prisonniers, et les journaux inciviques se hâtent de les propager.'

⁸⁹ AN AF/IV/1470, doc. 108. '2 mai, 1793. On se répète de tous les côtés, que les volontaires parisiens ne quitteront leurs foyers que lorsqu'ils seront assurés que leurs femmes et leurs enfants auront de quoi vivre pendant leur absence et quand le prix du pain et des denrées sera diminué.'

had been active in promoting the idea that young fathers in particular should be exempt from service.⁹⁰

Specific members of the community were targeted for particular rumours relating to the most recent *levée*. Based on the evidence in the Paris Police Archives, coach drivers, as a trade, had a reputation for hotheadedness and were frequent protagonists in reports of street brawls.⁹¹ They were now rumoured to be deserting, disappearing into the streets of Paris to profit from the contents of their wagons, which had originally been intended for the army's hospitals.⁹² That war profited the rich was a common theme, with rumours supporting the popular belief that valuable contracts to provide essential goods were being won by the few. The same report describing coach drivers absconding with provisions for the army's hospitals concluded with the unsubstantiated statement, presented as fact, that wealthy capitalists had a monopoly on these goods.⁹³

Reports relating to a lack of provisions, such as uniforms, weapons and other essentials were commonly blamed on an exploitative elite, believed to be making huge profits at the expense of the common soldier, such as when Fabre d'Eglantine was accused of having overseen the purchase of substandard army boots for his own financial gain.⁹⁴ That evidence could be found to support these claims could then be relied upon as a blanket explanation for any such shortages. (Conversely, popular rumours of

⁹⁰ AN AF/IV/1470, doc. 111. '4 mai, 1793. Les malveillants font tous leurs efforts pour empêcher les garçons de partir. Ils allèguent que les gens mariés ont des propriétés et des enfants à défendre.'

⁹¹ APP *Documents à Consulter pour l'histoire de la Révolution Française: Répertoire Chronologique; Inventaire des Archives de la Préfecture de Police.*

⁹² AN AF/IV/1470, doc. 108. '2 mai, 1793. La plupart des charretiers enrôlés pour les voitures ambulantes des hôpitaux de l'armée se cachent au moment du départ et ensuite ils se dispersent dans les rues de Paris sans carte civique, leur engagement leur en tenant lieu.'

⁹³ Ibid. 'D'ailleurs, il règne un grand monopole dans l'administration de ces convois. Plusieurs riches capitalistes fournissent secrètement les fonds et gagnent cent pour cent.'

⁹⁴ AN W76 Tribunal Extraordinaire.

capitalist profiteering could be exploited by rival factions when it came to denunciations, as was seen in the arrest and execution of the minister for subsistence, Antoine Descombes, arrested along with the Hébertistes in March 1794.⁹⁵) An *observateur* described how a cart laden with pikes, passing through the place des Grèves, prompted the observation from a group of young men that the government was sending them to the Vendée to be slaughtered, armed only with pikes while the government lied about a lack of guns. 'It's the politics of traitors to make us march without weapons.'⁹⁶

Rumours continued that the lack of army provisions was due to government mismanagement, with the general opinion being that ample funds were available, but that they were being diverted to other less important causes.⁹⁷ This presumption of government chicanery brought the community together in shared criticism of the authorities, suggesting a show of sympathy from the civilian for the plight of the common soldier. But suspicions were not far from the surface: the sight of a starving recruit prompted the observation that the Republic was in a sorry state if such was the calibre of soldier sent to defend it.⁹⁸ Others, although aware of the urgent need for arms, were reluctant to donate their own for fear of leaving the capital undefended with the army's departure, particularly given the popular belief that large numbers of émigrés in disguise were in the capital lying in wait for such an opportunity. Rumours, here, overlapped and influenced one another, with the fears of an undefended capital, prompted by recent memories of the September Massacres, bolstered by rumours of disguised émigrés lying in

⁹⁵ AN W77 and W78 Tribunal Extraordinaire.

⁹⁶ AN AF/IV/1470 doc. 124. '15 mai, 1793. Quatre jeunes gens ... se disent entre eux "Le pouvoir exécutif va nous faire partir, lorsque nous seront arrivés dans la Vendée, on nous armera de ces piques pour nous faire égorger, parce que l'on prétend que les fusils manquent, et qu'il est de la politique des traitres de nous faire marcher sans armes."

⁹⁷ Ibid. 'On entend, sur ce sujet, dans différents groupes, qu'il y a longtemps que toute la nation sait le besoin qu'on a d'armes; qu'elle dédie des sommes prodigieuses pour d'autres objets; qu'elle peut donc en dépenser autant pour cette partie qui est de nécessité la plus urgente.'

⁹⁸ APP Section de Roule, 9 mars, 1792. 'Arrestation d'un individu qui a tenu des propos incivique au sujet de recrutement.'

wait in the capital. The result was an echo chamber of endlessly proliferating theories and rumours contributing to the community's anxieties.

These generalised, generic rumours, of disguised émigrés, of the squandering or misappropriation of funds by the government, are in many ways so much background noise, a kind of low-level hum accepted as part of the general 'on dit' of common knowledge that could be brought to the forefront as means of describing and understanding worrying or unexplained events. The ever-present, yet cunningly camouflaged émigré provided the community with a target and, by extension, an outlet for its anxiety; likewise the mismanagement of finances by a political elite followed a conveniently familiar, and unnuanced narrative, with its own scapegoat, resulting in what Geoffrey Cubitt describes in his study of Jesuit conspiracy myths as 'an ever-expanding series of [conspiracy theories] into one vast, rambling and seemingly open-ended vision of conspiratorial counter-revolution.'⁹⁹

Not only did these generic rumours provide a target for the community's ire, uniting them against a common foe or scapegoat, they also provided a framework with which to interpret other unusual or puzzling events. Without them, the sight of some horses outside a private house on the outskirts of Paris might not have warranted a second glance; in the current environment, however, they were believed to offer proof of an imminent émigré escape from the city. Ironically, the horses were in fact due to be supplied to the army, but such was the prevailing atmosphere of distrust and recrimination that even those supporting the war effort were suspected to be undermining it.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Geoffrey Cubitt, *The Jesuit Myth: Conspiracy Theory and Politics in Nineteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 299.

¹⁰⁰ AN AF/IV/1470, doc. 77. '15 avril, 1793. Le rassemblement de chevaux dans des maisons d'aristocrates qu'on croyait destinés à servir à l'enlèvement de quelques grands personnages dénoncés par le comité de surveillance de la section du Montblanc, n'est absolument qu'un bruit ... de toute réalité, ce qui a donné lieu, c'est qu'il passe souvent sur Paris les chevaux ... venant du dépôt du citoyen Roger et compagnie ... en allant à nos armées.'

Rumours such as these, which relied upon a target or scapegoat outside the immediate community, acted as a kind of safety valve, allowing the community to express their fears and anxieties, and direct them outward at a common foe. This in turn reinforced neighbourhood loyalties, creating a sense of solidarity amongst those at home while the men left for war. Sharing suspicions of the rich, too, was a way of expressing the conflicting attitudes towards soldiers. Rumours that the rich got preferential treatment when it came to recruitment permitted the community to express grievances about the army without compromising their patriotism. The rich might be sacrificing their sons, too, but their experiences were not the same as that of the common person.¹⁰¹

Scapegoats were not, however, limited to those outside the community, and enemies identified closer to home, living within the neighbourhood, would damage the sense of solidarity brought about by uniting against a common foe. Concerns, for example, that émigrés were amassing to take advantage of the departure of the army for the Vendée led to rumours that they were being harboured in *maisons garnies*.¹⁰² *Maisons garnies* – furnished houses with rooms for rent – were regularly under surveillance because of the suspiciously rootless nature of their inhabitants.¹⁰³ That the focus at this time shifted from the typical tenant – usually a single man without family ties – to suspected émigrés was a reflection of the increasing politicisation of contemporary fears. But such rumours also brought suspicions upon landlords, or, indeed, anyone renting out a room, who then became legally obliged to vouch for the reputation of their tenants. In March 1793 it had become obligatory to post a list of the inhabitants outside the door of all dwellings,¹⁰⁴ which caused tensions within the community, as a report in

¹⁰¹ AN AF IV 1470, doc. 116, 8 mai, 1793.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ See, for example, Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre* or David Garrioch, *Neighbourhood and Community in Paris: 1740–1790* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

¹⁰⁴ *Le Chronique du Mois*, 29 mars, 1793.

April 1793 attested that these instructions were not being carried out properly.¹⁰⁵ Some months later, a young boy was arrested after witnesses claimed he had been making marks on different doors in the neighbourhood.¹⁰⁶ Rumours about mysterious marks on doors were not uncommon: David Garrioch describes how an attempt to systemise the addresses in Paris by marking the houses with numbers led to beliefs that these marks were a code indicating who was to be executed.

But the greatest resentment was directed against merchants – grocers, bakers, butchers, etc – who, even in times of want were seen to be profiting from others' misfortunes. Once a particular group was considered to be suspect, their behaviour become conflated with other examples of counter-revolutionary perfidy. For example, in September 1793 many *observateurs* were called to increase their surveillance of merchants, as rumours spread that they were harbouring émigrés in their houses, on the pretence that they were family members.¹⁰⁷ An example of the garbled rumour-logic of the time is illustrated by reports of an individual moving from café to café, spreading rumours and misinformation about the fall of Marseilles. His story became increasingly elaborate with each retelling, and finally encompassed a diatribe against grocers and the belief that they were adulterating their goods.¹⁰⁸ This is an example of the what has been described as an 'umbrella

¹⁰⁵ AN AF/IV/1470, doc. 67. '8 avril, 1793. La loi qui enjoint aux propriétaires et aux locataires des maisons d'afficher aux portes les noms de ceux qui les habitent ne s'exécutent point avec exactitude. A peine voit-on des affiches sur les quarts des maisons.'

¹⁰⁶ APP Section de Montmartre, 6 juillet, 1793. 'Arrestation d'un garçon de 15 ans qui faisait des marques à divers maisons.'

¹⁰⁷ Caron vol. 1, p. 108. 'Rapport de Leharbel, 15 septembre 1793. On prétend que beaucoup de marchands des rues Saint-Denis et Saint-Martin recèlent très soigneusement chez eux des émigrés, que plusieurs en font passer pour leurs parents. Il serait bon de faire chez eux de scrupuleuses visites.'

¹⁰⁸ AN W124. '21 frimaire, an II. Procès-verbaux de la situation et l'esprit public de Paris envoyés par le Comité du Salut Public. Un particulier dans un café vis à vis le Pont Neuf dit que Marseille a été pris. Il annonça la même nouvelle dans d'autres cafés. Ses plaintes se multiplient contre les épiciers qui vendent de la cendre pour du poivre.'

conspiracy theory',¹⁰⁹ which ultimately connects all suspect groups to the same grand, overarching plot.

It is tempting to dismiss as naive this contemporary belief that all foes were connected in the same counter-revolutionary mission, but for the communities living with uncertainty and anxiety, such a conclusion offered a degree of comfort in its certainty. By identifying an external threat, the community was able to protect itself against it, and in so doing solidify its own sense of identity and solidarity. During the Terror, however, the net began to draw ever tighter: in April 18, 1793 'a well-spoken man on the terrace of the Convention' urged citizens to be ever vigilant and to denounce the Republic's enemies, not just in public, but in their own homes.¹¹⁰ These increasing demands to scrutinise the familiar were intensified by popular rumours, which provided a pretext for assumed guilt. When it came to denouncing individuals, it was a short step to transfer existing popular prejudices about a certain group or category to specific people in order to find them suspect and, ultimately, guilty. How these imperatives affected the community will be discussed in the following chapters.

¹⁰⁹ Peter Knight, *Conspiracy Theories in American History: An Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC Clío, 2003), vol. II, p. 487.

¹¹⁰ AN AF 1470, 6 avril, 1793.

Chapter V

Rumour, Reputation and Identity

[L]es meilleures raisons, ce sont ses soupçons et contre ses soupçons rien ne prévaut, pas même l'évidence palpable.¹

The previous chapter examined ways in which rumours affected close-knit communities. It considered that rumours can bring groups closer together, allowing them to share and express common anxieties. It also looked at how, in giving voice to shared fears, rumours often led to a community attempting to identify the perceived cause of their troubles and in so doing create a target for their fear or outrage. This belief that an 'other' was the reason for a specific calamity or unidentified threat gave the group an outlet for its anxieties, whilst simultaneously strengthening the bonds within the group. In extreme situations, this could result in the kind of mob justice that Alain Corbin describes so vividly.² However, as the previous chapter concluded, during the Terror the definition of the 'other' grew ever wider and all-encompassing, until, ultimately, the community began to suspect its own members, causes it to turn upon itself. This chapter develops that idea by looking at the relationship between the generic, conspiratorial rumours circulating during the Revolution and how they began to affect group perceptions of the reputations of individuals.

The importance of personal reputation during the eighteenth century has been the subject of extensive study. Marisa Linton's examination of the

¹ Hippolyte Taine, citing *Mémoires de Garat* (1862), on Robespierre in *Les origines de la France contemporaine*, vol. IV, *La Révolution: le gouvernement révolutionnaire* (Paris: Editions Robert Laffont, collection Bouquins, [1884] 1986), p. 243.

² Alain Corbin, *Village of Cannibals: Rage and Murder in France, 1870*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992). David Andress provides an alternative reading, however, arguing persuasively that many instances of crowd violence against individuals during the Revolution were organised through a series of improvised legal procedures. See David Andress, 'Popular Violence in the French Revolution: Revolt, Retribution and the Slide to State Terror' in *Cultures of Violence: Interpersonal Violence in Historical Perspective*, ed. Stuart Carroll (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

significance of personal virtue on the forging of Revolutionary identity among the deputies of the Convention illustrates how central it was to the tenets of Jacobinism, which equated personal probity with political integrity.³ For the political elite, to derive personal benefit from the Revolution through the acquisition of wealth or other favours, was evidence of moral corruption, and proof they were not fit to hold public office.⁴ That so many rumours used to smear individual deputies focussed on allegations of personal immorality simultaneously called to mind the legendary depravity of the former aristocracy, whilst also destroying any vestiges of political competence. The puritan ethos of Jacobinism encouraged a disapproval of sensual enjoyment, and a voracious appetite was easily equated with fiscal embezzlement and political corruption.⁵

Among working communities, one's personal reputation was equally significant to one's standing within the community; to be known in the neighbourhood as an honest tradesman, a skilled labourer, as one who paid one's dues, one's debts or could be generally relied upon, was to be ensured not only of employment, but also of a recognised place within the make-up of the neighbourhood. Such a place was not only crucial to one's livelihood, but also allowed one to participate in the informal system of care that existed in communities for individuals fallen on hard times.⁶ This idea, obviously, was not introduced with the Revolution, and functioned as an unofficial but

³ Marisa Linton, *The Politics of Virtue in Enlightenment France* (Basingstoke, Hants: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001). See also Lynn Hunt, 'The Unstable Boundaries of the French Revolution', in *A History of Private Life*, vol. IV, *From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War*, general editors Phillipe Ariès, and Georges Duby (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1990).

⁴ Linton, *The Politics of Virtue*.

⁵ Following the arrest of the Hébertistes, a popular account of the life of the Père Duchesne was published, relating in great detail a life devoted to sensual excess as evidence of political corruption: *Procès des conspirateurs Hebert, Ronsin, Vincent et ses complices, condamnés à la peine de mort par le tribunal révolutionnaire le 4 germinal, l'an 2 de la République, et exécutés le même jour; suivi du précis de la vie du Père Duchesne*. Paris: Chez Caillot, l'an 2 de la République (1794).

⁶ Olwen Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France: 1750–1789* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 102ff.

crucial way of binding communities together: the good opinion or not of one's peers could be literally a matter of life and death if one's livelihood or other charity depended upon it. As Arlette Farge identified: 'For the least privileged, the loss of one's honour had serious economic consequences which were all the more worrying in an oral society.'⁷

During the Revolution, however, the ways by which one's reputation could be assessed became codified and bureaucratized. No longer was one's reputation an informal assessment by the local neighbourhood – it could now be measured and judged. While *les gens sans aveu*, those unfortunate, marginal figures were so-called because they literally had no one to 'vouch' for them, no safety net in place to keep them from falling through the cracks of society, as the Revolution progressed the necessity for being 'vouched' for would take on an increasing urgency, as ordinary citizens would be called upon to produce official proof of their legitimacy as patriots before they could work, travel, or even eat.⁸ This bureaucracy provided a new, increasingly rigid framework within which citizens identified themselves and judged others. Individual reputations now relied on being able to prove impeccably Revolutionary credentials; failure to do so could lead to arrest.

As Lynn Hunt illustrates, as the distinctions between the public and private were erased at government level '*la chose publique, l'esprit public*, invaded spheres of life that were normally private'.⁹ However, in a very short time,

⁷ Arlette Farge, *Fragile Lives: Violence, Power and Solidarity in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), p. 20. The value of personal reputation and honour among poor communities recurs in Farge's work, such as *Vivre dans la rue à Paris au XVIIIème siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979, reprinted 1992). Other historians who have examined this theme include Richard Cobb in *The Police and the People: French Popular Protest 1789–1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970) and *Death in Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978); and David Garrioch, *Neighbourhood and Community in Paris: 1740–1790* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

⁸ Passports became mandatory in 1792. *Certificats de civisme*, initially for the military in April 1792, became mandatory for all citizens by June of that year (*Bulletin des lois de la République française*, vol. 1, p. 486). These documents were necessary not for work, but to receive the various food coupons issued during the rationing of essential goods in 1793. Those without this document become one of the categories of 'suspect' as defined by the law of 17 September 1793.

⁹ Lynn Hunt, 'The Unstable Boundaries of the French Revolution', p. 13.

this invasion of the private sphere would be experienced by all levels of society. And although the private and public were not always physically distinguishable in these crowded neighbourhoods, in which windows overlooked courtyards, apprentices slept above workshops, and rooms might double as passages,¹⁰ an unspoken yet mutually understood code of behaviour meant friends and neighbours overlooked or discretely ignored certain activities.¹¹ This code broke down when Republican virtue became first a moral imperative and then a legal obligation. As this chapter will examine, the language of Jacobinism filtered down to the streets, providing a means by which the community could describe itself and judge others. These judgements existed both informally, as an extension and intensification of the neighbourhood system of vouching and standing or falling by one's reputation that was already in place, but they also, crucially, formalised what had previously been a more ad hoc arrangement, by introducing identity cards, passports, *cartes de civisme* and even *cartes de pain*, the issuing of all of which relied upon the attestation of equally certified patriots.

The importance of one's personal reputation among the poor and working communities of Paris can be seen by the number of official complaints to the police during this period for 'injures et insultes.' An eighteenth-century legal dictionary,¹² which describes types of crime in different categories, makes a distinction between crimes against belongings only (theft) and crimes that were attacks on the physical or symbolic self. Of this second category are included 'les faux' and 'les injures', both of which include an attack on one's

¹⁰ See, for example, Emile Ducoudray, Raymonde Monnier and Daniel Roche, *Atlas de la Révolution française*, vol II, *Paris* (Paris: Editions de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 2000), pp. 27-28 on the architecture of Paris. The effect of physical space and overcrowding is also referred to by David Andress, Richard Cobb, Robert Darnton, David Garrioch and Arlette Farge.

¹¹ Historians of the urban poor cite evidence of tact and a tacit understanding of the kinds of behaviours that could be overlooked as private. See Cobb, *The Police and the People, Death in Paris*; Farge, *Vivre dans la Rue*; Garrioch, *Neighbourhood and Community*.

¹² Pierre-François Muyart de Vouglans, *Les Lois criminelles de France dans leur ordre naturel* (Paris: 1780).

honour.¹³ Fraud – ‘les faux’ – relied on deceit, pretence and impersonation. Until the Revolution introduced identity cards and other forms of bureaucratic ‘voucher’, communities relied on their members being who they claimed to be, reinforced by credible personal references where necessary. That fraud should be considered a crime against one’s honour indicates the esteem in which personal honour was held, and the great importance in maintaining the social constructs and codes that allowed society to function. Crimes of fraud had always been dealt with severely,¹⁴ but during the Revolution suspicion of those who were not who or what they claimed to be took on a new political imperative. An individual arrested for lying about his qualifications was not just obtaining his position by deceit, he might be doing so for politically suspect motives.¹⁵ Appearance, as the previous chapter showed, was under scrutiny, with reports of individuals dressed in clothes of the wrong gender, in the wrong uniforms, or misusing the trappings of authority appearing regularly enough to cause official concern. With new bureaucratic initiatives in place to ensure fair distribution of essential goods came additional concerns that individuals might be making fraudulent claims to them, or subjecting them to other misuse. Year II saw individuals arrested for having more than their fair share

¹³ ‘Pour ce qui concerne les Crimes qui se commettent, tant contre la société en général, que contre quelqu’un de ses membres en particulier, nous en distinguerons de cinq espèces différentes; les uns qui frappent principalement sur la personne, comme l’Homicide; ... les autres, sur l’Honneur, comme sont les crimes de Luxure; ... d’autres sur l’Honneur et même temps que sur les Biens, comme les Faux ... d’autres sur les Biens seulement, comme le Vol; ... d’autres enfin, qui frappent également sur la personne, sur l’honneur, & sur les biens, comme l’Injure.’

¹⁴ Ludwig Von Bar, *A History of Continental Criminal Law* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1916) p. 39 describes forgery as a capital offence, while the punishment for counterfeiting was death and ‘loss of eyes’. See also, Richard Mowery Andrews, *Law, Magistracy, and Crime in Old Regime Paris, 1735-1789*, vol. I, *The System of Criminal Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1994), p. 279 and Montesquieu’s *Science of Politics: Essays on ‘The Spirit of Laws’*, ed. David W. Carrithers, Michael A. Mosher and Paul A. Rahe (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001) p. 317.

¹⁵ The increasing insistence on paperwork may have forced otherwise honest citizens into criminal behaviour, too. See APP Section de Roule, 15 mars 1793. ‘Procès-verbal contre un particulier qui, pour obtenir un passeport, a déclaré une qualité autre que la sienne.’

of bread or meat cards, but also, as vendors, for not requiring them at all.¹⁶ Others were arrested for exaggerating the hardship of their personal circumstances in order to obtain charity.¹⁷

With individual behaviours under such scrutiny, establishing and maintaining one's reputation was of the utmost social importance. Personal insults had potentially far-reaching consequences. These could be practical, in that they might destroy a reputation essential to one's livelihood, but they also could be, ultimately, fatal: as personal integrity became inextricably bound with political virtue, an insult to one's honour might cause a re-evaluation of one's political commitment to the Revolution. Accusations of greed, for example, might be morally reprehensible under the Old Regime but during the Revolution such accusations could suggest a host of suspect activity. For those members of society who had little to defend apart from their personal integrity, insults, perceived slander and other offenses against one's reputation were taken very seriously.

During this period, many of the complaints related to personal insults shared common factors: most often it was the public nature of the complaint that rendered it worthy of official intervention, with the number of witnesses contributing to the severity of the crime.¹⁸ Insults took place in cafés, taverns, in bread queues, in shop doorways or other public venues. Many public insults, too, seem to have been the culmination of a heated argument; the accused did not necessarily set out to publicly humiliate the defendant, but the circumstances escalated to the point at which a difference of opinion

¹⁶ APP Section de Roule, 12 germinal, an II. 'Arrestation d'un particulier qui s'est trouvé porteur de deux cartes de pain.' APP section de Roule, 29 germinal, an II. 'Procès-verbal contre un boulanger qui vend son pain sans exiger la présentation des cartes.'

¹⁷ APP Section de Muséum, 30 vendémiaire, an II. 'Arrestation d'un particulier cherchant à exciter la charité publique en simulant des défaillances.'

¹⁸ Among the many examples: APP Section des Piques, 25 février, 1793. A female lodger of a boarding house complained that she had been called 'une femme suspecte' by her landlord 'en présence de beaucoup de personnes qui étaient présentes.' APP Section du Muséum, 3 octobre 1793. 'Plainte contre un particulier qui a appelé le plaignant suisse, coquin, ce qui a amassé la foule.' Here the plaintiff had a very real concern that the insults might affect his physical safety as well as his reputation.

resulted in name calling and insults. As this chapter will argue, the nature of the insults, and how serious they were perceived to be underwent a significant shift in this period and insults that were commonplace under the Old Regime would take on distinctly political overtones, with, for the accused, potentially fatal consequences.

However, this emphasis on the public nature of the insult, insistence on the specific number of spectators and thus the potential reach and extent of the humiliation was not as straightforward as first appears. David Garrioch notes how insults (or, indeed, blows) exchanged in public among members of the same family did not have the same social repercussions as insults uttered by peers in public. He argues that public insults contributed to 'social precedence' in which the insulted party, through public shaming, was demonstrated to be lower in the social hierarchy than the one doing the insulting, who was now seen as socially more formidable.¹⁹ Insults among members of the same family did not have the same implications, as any perceived shame and subsequent shifting of social hierarchies between the two parties was only relevant to the family itself. This is an example, noted by other historians of the period, in which personal interactions, enacted of necessity in public through lack of a separate domestic space, were considered private and thus ignored by potential onlookers.²⁰ Arlette Farge develops this idea by noting different reactions depending on the respective reputations of the protagonists, citing as an example a violent dispute between husband and wife that might prompt external intervention only if the husband was known to be a violent bully. During the Revolution, however, notions of private and public became increasingly ambiguous when they related to behaviour made public as a result of eavesdropping, as will be seen in the next chapter. In such instances, the very fact of holding a

¹⁹ David Garrioch, 'Verbal insults in Eighteenth-Century Paris' in *The Social History of Language: Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture 12*, ed. Peter Burke and Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p.116.

²⁰ See, for example, Farge, *Subversive Words, Fragile Lives* or *Vivre dans la Rue*; Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France*.

conversation in private was proof of the suspect behaviour of the speaker, rather than the listener for overhearing.

Insults were not only an affront to one's reputation, they could be divided along gender lines, and the nature of the insults and their recurrent themes are revealing about what different members of society held most valuable. Insults aimed at women commonly concerned their sexual virtue, while those aimed at men focussed on personal integrity and honesty.²¹ Whereas many insults are so common as to be banal, seemingly barely worthy of note – 'putain', 'gueux', 'coquin' etc.²² – the kind of name-calling that Garrioch refers to as a 'symbolic' insult rather than an actual accusation – as ever, context was everything. For example, groups of fishwives, known for their robust language, and for swapping insults among themselves, were unlikely to damage one another's personal reputations by sexual slurs or accusations of immodesty. However, specific and personalised attacks on one's honour were a different matter, and women frequently felt that being called 'putain' or 'garce' in a public place was sufficiently shaming to involve the police.²³ When, as will be discussed below, the authorities began increasingly to replace the charge of 'insulte' with 'calomnie' in reports, the public nature of the affront and the number of witnesses contributed to this elevation of the commonplace insult to the more serious crime of calumny.

Insults against a woman's honour may have been more specific to the individual, but they still, on the whole, related to the societal role of women,

²¹ See for example, Garrioch, 'Verbal insults in Eighteenth-Century Paris'; Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Sarah Maza, *Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century France: The Uses of Loyalty* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983).

²² Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, p. 130, refers specifically to 'the usual litany of sexual slander' when directed against female domestic servants in the English early modern period. See also, Thomas Brennan, *Public Drinking and Popular Culture in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 61.

²³ See, for example, APP Section du Muséum, 6 juin, 1793. 'Plainte d'une femme contre une autre pour cause d'insultes,' in which an habitual meeting at a crossroads leads to the swapping of insults ('garce' etc). Specified in the report is a man witnessing the altercation, which may have prompted the complaint to the authorities.

with insults tending to emphasise the ways in which the accused transgressed accepted norms. A woman, for example, accusing her neighbours of slander for saying that she had spread a sexually transmitted disease, was clearly trying to restore her sexual reputation and thus personal virtue,²⁴ whilst another woman described as a calumny her neighbour's accusation that she was a bad mother who beat her children.²⁵ Prior to the Revolution these accusations clearly impugned upon a woman's role and value in society. During the Revolution, however, such insults had additional resonances, given the large body of scandalous literature which equated sexual misconduct with aristocratic degeneracy. Likewise, accusations of being an unfit mother had far greater implications under Jacobinism, in which the patriotic role of the mother and the importance of motherhood to the *patrie* were continually underlined in speeches, pamphlets and prints.²⁶

In her study of gendered insults in the early modern period in London, Laura Gowing observes that 'women's honesty is defined by their sexuality; men's by their association with them'.²⁷ The same can be seen in the insults brought to the attention of the Paris police during the Revolution: to insult a married woman, was also, indirectly, to insult her husband. A wayward – sexually or otherwise – wife reflected badly on her husband, and to accuse a woman as such implied weakness on the part of her husband. When, in year II, a man in the Section d'Arcis made a formal complaint against his wife's

²⁴ APP Section de Butte des Moulins, 8 janvier, 1793.

²⁵ APP Section de Butte des Moulins, 18 août, 1793.

²⁶ See, for example, Monica Juneja, 'Imaging the Revolution: Gender and Iconography in French Political Prints', *Studies in History*, vol. 12, no. 1 (1996); Joan B. Landes, *Woman and the Public Sphere in the Age of Revolution* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988); Dominique Godineau, *Citoyennes tricoteuses: Les femmes du peuple à Paris pendant la Révolution française* (Aix-en-Provence: Alinea, 1988); Lynn Hunt, 'Male Virtue and Republican Motherhood' in *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, vol. IV, *The Terror*, ed. Keith Michael Baker (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1987); Darlene Gay Levy, Harriet Branson Applewhite and Mary Durham Johnson, eds., *Women in Revolutionary Paris, 1789–1795* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1979).

²⁷ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, p. 112. Brennan *Public Drinking*, p. 61, also makes this connection.

employer, who had accused his wife of being a thief, he was not only seeking to clear her name, but, by extension, his own. That his wife, a domestic servant, was accused of stealing two baskets of laundry, was an attack on 'her honour and reputation' that could have very real consequences for her present and future employment.²⁸ However, the most common insults directed at wives related to their relaxed or non-existent virtue. These would reflect equally badly on their husbands, with connotations of impotence and powerlessness, equating, for example, the husband's inability to control his own household with an inability to satisfy his wife. That the character of the cuckold features regularly as an object of ridicule in popular entertainment attests to its enduring significance.²⁹

When men were insulted directly it most often related to their trustworthiness and their integrity. While a woman's reputation relied on whether she was sexually virtuous, a man's relied on the approbation of his peers according to accepted standards of behaviour. These social rules might vary from milieu to milieu, but they would be recognised and understood by the immediate community. (Jacques Ménétra's memoirs, for example, reveal his peers' relaxed approach to monogamy among themselves, but when it came to the sexual peccadilloes of the clergy their retribution was swift and humiliating.³⁰) During this period, as this chapter will argue, Jacobin discourse would influence and make universal these accepted notions of good character, as personal virtue become increasingly synonymous with Republican duty. As the private lives of authority figures were held up for public scrutiny, and became an inextricable part of their fitness to take part in Revolutionary politics, standards of acceptable personal conduct began to filter down from above to regulate private behaviour among *le menu peuple*.

²⁸ APP Section d'Arcis, 2 vendémiaire, an III, 'Plainte contre un individu qui a injurié la femme du plaignant.'

²⁹ Robert M. Isherwood, *Farce and Fantasy: Popular Entertainment in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 30.

³⁰ Jacques-Louis Ménétra, *Journal of My Life*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 206, 221.

These generalised insults were often used symbolically rather than literally: being called a thief or a beggar was more an indication of the low status of these marginal figures within society than an actual accusation of theft or indigence,³¹ although as insults they were considered sufficiently offensive to damage one's reputation and to warrant official complaint. Shopkeepers, for example, had more at stake if they were accused of theft in the hearing of others, as did servants whose employment relied on a trustworthy reputation and good references.

During this period, however, these generalised insults began to take on a political dimension: terms of abuse referred to the aristocracy, to spying, or to other counter-revolutionary activity.³² A complaint in year II described a fishwife, clearly infuriated by a rumour that the authorities were hoarding butter for themselves, erupting with a whole panoply of symbolic invective – 'rascal, thief, spy, pimp' – against a local shopkeeper. The object of her wrath was not all of these things, nor, in fact, any of them, but her choice of insult revealed the lowly position of the spy in the popular imagination.³³ Similarly, when a woman, thwarted in her attempts to take more than her share of bread by a crowd of people in the queue, turned on them and accused them of being aristocrats she was merely wielding the most contemporary verbal weapon.³⁴ The aristocrat and the spy had now joined the ranks of the social outcast – the thief, the beggar, the slut – in their derogatory potential.³⁵

³¹ David Garrioch, 'Verbal insults in Eighteenth-Century Paris', p. 117.

³² Complaints about being called a spy feature regularly, e.g.: APP Section de Muséum, 22 janvier, 1793. 'Plainte contre un particulier qui a traité le plaignant de mouchard.' Section des Tuileries, 12 fructidor, an II. 'Plainte contre un individu qui a appelé le plaignant mouchard du comité de sûreté générale.' Section des Amis de la Patrie, 21 germinale, an III. 'Mauvais propos dans un café; traité de mouchard.'

³³ APP Section de l'Arsenal, 27 floréal, an II.

³⁴ APP Section de l'Arsenal, 27 février, 1793. 'Déclaration d'un boulanger au sujet de menaces qui lui ont été fait par un individu a qui il n'a voulu donner que quatre pains de 4s.'

³⁵ A more extreme example of this is the use of 'cannibale' or 'buveur de sang', symbolic insults that carry with them a whole host of political implications.

What clearly posed a problem during this period was when the symbolic insult was taken literally, and used as incriminating evidence. An individual arrested in a café for making reference to the king explained in his defence that he invoked the name as a form of blasphemy, in the same way as he might utter the name of the devil. The authorities saw it as evidence of his allegiance to the former monarchy.³⁶ When denunciation became a legal imperative, what was once merely a symbolic insult now became an accusation; with the introduction of the Law of 22 Prairial, an accusation would become evidence.³⁷

Amongst the many reports of generic insults were some specific to their time and place, and because of this, all the more powerful. A report in year II described a complicated affair relating to a public shaming, which reflected contemporary suspicions about hoarding and a puritanical dislike of luxury.³⁸ One citizen Julien Auger, *épicier*, related how his ‘fille de confiance’³⁹ had been sent to a butcher, discovered she had been short changed, and ‘with some difficulty’, eventually received the shortfall. With the *dix sous* was a receipt on which had been written ‘gourmand et suspect’. Auger, knowing his maid to be ‘une honnête fille et une bonne républicaine’ did not hold her responsible for the note, but assumed it had come from the butcher. (Unfortunately, the note in question, Auger explained, had been destroyed lest his children find it.) The small incident revealed the many layers of offence and attempts at face-saving in that simple transaction, from the butcher, who, possibly offended for being called to account in public for giving the wrong money may, out of spite, have slipped the offensive note

³⁶ Thomas Brennan, *Public Drinking*, p. 297.

³⁷ This is examined in Chapter VI.

³⁸ APP Section des Amis de la Patrie, 2 floréal, an II. ‘Déclaration au sujet d’un bon que la bonne du déclarant a rapporté de la boucherie et sur lequel on a écrit Gourmand et Suspect.’

³⁹ According to Cissie Fairchilds, *Domestic Enemies: Servants and Their Masters in Old Regime France* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), p. 232, during the Terror the terms ‘laquais’ and ‘domestique’ were forbidden and servants were rechristened ‘fille/homme de confiance’ in an attempt to remove the stigma both from the role itself and from the act of hiring them.

into the hand of the maid; the maid's impeccable credentials; to the affronted party himself, so offended at the allegation that he destroyed the evidence lest it should lead his children to believe him 'suspect'.

However, as personal insults began to take on political overtones, from 1792 the charges of 'diffamation' and 'calomnie' began to appear in the police records with increasing frequency, replacing the more common charges of 'insultes' or 'injures'.⁴⁰ From these documents alone one cannot deduce whether the use of 'calomnie' came from the aggrieved party themselves, or whether this was the official designation from the authorities recording the complaint. In either case, however, it suggests that, if crimes against personal reputations were not more numerous than before, they were, with this new designation, taken increasingly seriously. On 24 December, 1792, a cook in the Section de Roule accused her mistress of calumny rather than insult;⁴¹ the records do not show the content of the complaint, but given that 'calumny' at this time is relatively uncommon in these sources, it might be assumed that the accusation was serious enough potentially to lead to dismissal and damage future employment prospects. Similarly, a report of year II in the Section d'Arcis described an insult against an individual as 'grave et capable de le déshonorer'. In this instance, the insult was made publicly at the individual's section, and related specifically to the quality of his work. This suggests that specific attacks on professional reputations, capable of impeding future work, were treated differently than general accusations of dishonesty.⁴²

Official complaints about being called an 'aristocrat', 'royalist' or 'counter-revolutionary' appear increasingly in the police records from 1792. The Section de Butte des Moulins records details of the arrest of an individual for

⁴⁰ APP *Répertoire Chronologique*.

⁴¹ APP *Répertoire Chronologique*. '24 décembre, 1792. Section de Roule. Plainte d'une cuisinière contre sa maitresse pour calomnie.'

⁴² APP Section d'Arcis, 14 vendémiaire, an II.

having called another a counter-revolutionary,⁴³ but for the most part these official complaints will have been an attempt to clear one's name by quashing the accusation before it could spread throughout the neighbourhood. Attempts to re-establish a damaged reputation took different forms. Individuals might take out their own newspaper advertisements, such as one citizen Balin, a surgeon practising near the place de Grève, who evidently had been the subject of ongoing rumours about his future plans that he had been unable to stop:

Citizen Balin ... hearing once more that ill-wishers are still trying to mislead the public ... by announcing that he plans to leave his post, declares formally and for the last time that this has never been his intention. Aged 52 and with 32 years of experience... he will persist in devoting the rest of his career to the alleviation of human suffering.⁴⁴

Others took more drastic measures. An anecdote in the memoirs of the executioner Sanson described how an honest young woman, wrongly appearing on a list of alleged *filles publiques* was so shamed by this public ignominy that her only recourse was to kill herself.⁴⁵

Reputation was a form of social currency that both needed protection and deserved compensation if irrevocably damaged, as is illustrated by a report of germinal, year III.⁴⁶ The complainant described receiving an insulting letter containing 'undeserved invective and imprecations'. The author of the letter, meanwhile, was described by the subject 'as a slanderer

⁴³ APP Section de Butte des Moulins, 10 juillet, 1793. 'Arrestation d'un particulier qui a dit que le citoyen Raffez était un contre-révolutionnaire.'

⁴⁴ *Annonces et Avis Divers, ou Journal General de France*, Supplément, 30 mai, 1792. 'Le cit. Balin ... venant d'être instruit de nouveau que des malveillants cherchent encore à abuser le Public sur son compte, en annonçant ... qu'il se propose de quitter son état, il déclare formellement & pour la dernière fois, que jamais il n'a eu cette intention. Agé de 52 ans & ayant 32 ans de pratique... il persistera à consacrer le reste de sa carrière au soulagement de l'humanité souffrante.' French Revolution Collection, John Rylands Library, University of Manchester.

⁴⁵ *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la Révolution Française par Sanson, exécuteur des jugements criminels pendant la révolution* (Paris: Librairie Centrale, Palais Royale, 1829). II vols. P. xx. Although this is anecdotal evidence only, it gives an indication of the importance of public reputation and the apparently insurmountable difficulty of restoring it once lost.

⁴⁶ APP Section des Amis de la Patrie, 8 brumaire, an III.

[*calomniateur*] and troublemaker.’ According to the plaintiff, the letter described him and his cohorts as rogues (‘gredins’) and scoundrels (‘coquins’) – generic as insults go, and lacking the specificity of an epithet such as ‘thief’ or even ‘aristocrat’. Yet even if this is interpreted as no more than a ‘symbolic’ insult, the plaintiff saw it as an attack on ‘his integrity and moral conduct’. In retribution the complainant demanded several very public acts of compensation: firstly the letter writer was instructed to explain in public ‘en présence des juges’ the meaning of the insults. Following this, he had to make reparation in the form of a donation to the local homeless hospice, as well as three hundred posters retracting the original insults.

That a range of motives might be behind such attacks on another’s reputation – in retaliation, as retribution, as part of an on-going feud, or out of sheer malice – did not escape the notice of the authorities. Attached to the declaration were several documents serving as character references for the letter writer, as the authorities attempted to make sense of the tangled narrative of claims and counter-claims.⁴⁷ Other instances were more complicated still, and making sense of motives, not to mention attempting to re-establish one’s reputation, become even more problematic when the letters were anonymous. In year II, the Section de la place Vendôme investigated reports of a series of anonymous letters believed to have been written by one of the workers at a local factory.⁴⁸ In time, however, the anonymity of the author would be no hindrance in establishing the subject’s guilt, as insinuation, rumour and ‘on dit’ were increasingly used as evidence in denunciations.

Another way in which an individual could attempt to restore his or her reputation was by making a counter-claim of calumny, a useful tool in that it

⁴⁷ Ibid. ‘Les dites pièces nous été déposées pour nous donner des connaissances concernant les mœurs du dit Carmillet, lesquelles pièces nous ont parues nécessaires et bonne à produire avec notre procès-verbal.’

⁴⁸ APP Section de la Place Vendôme, 25 brumaire, an II. ‘Procès-verbal relatif à des lettres anonymes qu’on croit écrites par un ouvrier de la manufacture Arthur et Robert.’

cast the aggrieved party in the role of victim, whilst potentially criminalising the accuser. From 1793, the Paris Police Archives reveal an increase in recorded instances of accusations of calumny. Whether this term was used specifically by the aggrieved party or whether the designation was chosen by the recording official cannot be determined definitively from these records alone, but this increase suggests there may have been a growing awareness among the general population of a legal form of recourse to restore damage done to one's reputation. 'Calumny' was one of the watchwords of Jacobin rhetoric, which would have filtered down to street level via the various channels of pamphlets, speeches and slogans that conveyed Republican discourse from the Convention to the people.

Charles Walton examines the contradictions between the Revolutionary goal of freedom of expression and the crime of calumny. The accusation of calumny, he argues, was a means by which deputies could safeguard their honour in circumstances where they had no historical authority. However, accusing critics of the government or its representatives of calumny ultimately served to stifle legitimate debate and criminalise criticism of the government.⁴⁹ When, in year II, one Jacques Thomeret was arrested and imprisoned for discussing with two others in a tavern the purge of the Brissotins, he was charged with 'calumny against the government, the Jacobins and the people',⁵⁰ a common conflation which equated the people and their representatives with the abstract authority they both embodied and carried out. Among his alleged calumnies were describing the Jacobins as 'scélérats', Marat and Robespierre as 'two cannibals covered in human blood' and the people of Paris as 'selfish' for keeping grain while the rest of the country starved. If proof were needed of the dangers of striking up conversations with strangers, Thomeret argued in his defence that the conversation had been at the instigation of the strangers, who accused him

⁴⁹ Charles Walton, *Policing Public Opinion in the French Revolution: The Culture of Calumny and the Problem of Free Speech* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁵⁰ APP Sections divers, 25 ventôse, an II. 'Jacques Thomeret, prévenu d'avoir calomnié la Convention Nationale, les jacobins et le peuple'.

of calumny against the government because he had offended them by an earlier statement.⁵¹

This culture of calumny enabled criticism of government to be interpreted as an attack on personal virtue, one that made no distinction between the abstract body of government as an institution, and the individual bodies of the representatives. Such criticism was thus able to be met with the counter-attack of calumny, which accused the speaker of criminal activity. This dynamic influenced personal interactions at a popular level, as use of the term 'calumny' increased. Its appearance in the police records may indicate an increasingly bureaucratic method of categorising personal disputes, one which ran in tandem with a growing reliance on certification and documentation generally, as will be discussed below. It may also indicate another example in which certain key terms during this period – *brigand*, *ennemi*, *aristocrate*, *suspect* – acquired a ubiquity which rendered them both infinitely powerful but ultimately meaningless, with an endlessly elastic definition that made them relevant to any given situation.

As 'calumny' became a more commonly recognised term, it offered a form of recourse for those attempting to re-establish a reputation damaged by insult or rumour. The individual who was called an aristocrat in the employ of Pitt by a police agent in the middle of a meeting of the Commune had a great deal to lose if he could not clear his name, as his testimony described. He made reference to the immense repercussions of such a public statement: the loss of public trust, the irreparable damage to his honour, and the need for reparation.⁵² Many reports suggest that 'calumny' was used when the plaintiff had himself been accused by another of a criminal activity.⁵³ On the

⁵¹ '[Le cit. Thomeret] a R[épondu]: Que la conversation politique qu'il a eu dans la dite auberge a été créée par deux étrangers qui s'y sont trouvés en même temps et que la dénonciation lancée contre lui a pour cause le mécontentement qu'un d'eux a éprouvé de ce qu'il lui avait dit.'

⁵² APP Section de Fidélité, 7 brumaire, an II. 'Plainte contre un administrateur de police qui a dénoncé le plaignant comme aristocrate employé par Pitt.'

⁵³ For example, APP Section de Muséum, 2 mai, 1793. 'Plainte d'une femme contre une autre, pour calomnies' relates to an accusation of false assignats, whilst APP Section d'Arcis, 11

other hand, in the same way in which accusations of calumny stifled legitimate debate in the government, its overuse in everyday conversation had the potential to criminalise personal interactions. One no longer uttered an insult in a heated exchange, it was now defined as 'une vile calomnie', the speaker 'un calomniateur'. Furthermore, to accuse another of calumny falsely, was itself a calumny, intensifying the echo chamber of accusations and counter-accusations. This became particularly fraught when denunciation became a public duty, as a common form of defence for the accused was to cast doubt on the reputation of the individual responsible for the denunciation, resulting in a series of arguments in which one's innocence relied upon proving the guilt of the accuser.⁵⁴

A network of peers – colleagues, neighbours, family – was crucial in eighteenth century society, not only for professional and social support, but also in order to help to establish and maintain individual reputations. The good opinion of one's peers was a form of currency, and could lead to work, financial loans, hospitality – all social interactions that relied on trust. Darnton argues that it was nearly impossible for an outsider to take advantage of the patronage system of the Old Regime, meaning that a young man without contacts would struggle to progress in his chosen career.⁵⁵ And yet all levels of society had some degree of social network in which members looked out for each other, whether formal hierarchies such as the guild system under the Old Regime, or more informal connections such as a shared regional background, or an acquaintance in common.⁵⁶ Jacques Ménétra's memoirs describe how, for example, the tavern served equally as

frimaire, an II. 'Plainte contre trois particuliers qui ont dénoncé le plaignant comme vendeur d'argent' describes the accusation as calumny.

⁵⁴ This argument will be developed in the next chapter.

⁵⁵ Robert Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1982) and *Forbidden Best Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (London: HarperCollins, 1996).

⁵⁶ Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France*, examines networks of migration from the provinces to Paris, in which specific regions not only settled in a particular area of the capital, they specialised in specific trades (pp. 94ff).

an informal employment bureau and as social venue: similar trades would drink together and swap information about opportunities for work, with those within that circle the first to hear about the new jobs. Sociability and employability were inseparable, and the ability to take a joke, stand a round and pull one's weight were as important for employment as the necessary skills.⁵⁷ Under the Revolution, the meetings of the Paris sections created another type of community, one which formalised the previously more amorphous neighbourhood networks. The secret rituals of allegiance and friendship that cemented ties to a particular guild were now replaced by the public oaths and fraternal ceremonies attesting to commitment to the Revolution.

From 1792, however, a new form of 'vouching' was introduced. These were the *cartes de sûreté*, obligatory for all working Parisian men over fifteen. Ostensibly introduced to keep track of migration within the city, these cards were issued by the *comité de surveillance* via the local sections, and required two witnesses to vouch for the card holder's identity.⁵⁸ That they were also known as *cartes de civisme* illustrates the extent to which the holder's identity and official recognition of it was bound up with notions of citizenship and its authentication. These cards, detailing the holder's date and place of birth, profession and address, were later followed by other documents such as passports, or even *cartes de pain* or *de viande* – all of which ultimately relied upon official authorisation and recognition of one's authenticity as a citizen. These documents were essentially a type of personal 'voucher': an officially – and universally – recognised way of establishing one's credentials. Such certificates formalised through layers of bureaucracy those networks that had previously been dependent on

⁵⁷ Jacques-Louis Ménétra, *Journal of My Life*, pp. 113-115.

⁵⁸ Alain Blum and Jacques Houdaille, '12,000 Parisiens en 1793. Sondage dans les cartes de civisme', *Population*, vol. 41, no.2 (1986), pp. 259-302 and Olivier Faron and Cyril Grange, 'Un recensement parisien sous la Révolution. L'exemple des cartes de sûreté de 1793', *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome – Italie et Méditerranée*, no. 2, vol. 111, (1999), pp. 795-826.

personal connections. A new-comer no longer had to rely on degrees of familiarity or social connection to legitimise his place in the neighbourhood – his *carte de sûreté* demonstrated he had the approval of the State, now the ultimate arbiter of personal reputation. However, if there was an expectation that the issuing of certificates and stamps could rationalise and even supersede these pre-existing social connections and emotional bonds, this was not the case. Informal networks of personal vouching and recommendation continued to run alongside, and sometimes even to influence, official channels of authentication. Officially, the issuing of certificates was immune to cronyism or favouritism, but the reality was that personal animosities and loyalties become absorbed within the state's apparatus.

Nicolas Ruault, in a letter to his brother, described an incident that illustrates the enduring influence of personal relationships and references within an apparently bureaucratic framework, during what is perhaps the Revolution's most extreme example of the visceral nature of both 'popular' and State justice, the September Massacres. The September Massacres, with their cursory 'tribunals', are depicted as a travesty of a judicial system, with the traditionally objective framework of the court perverted by personal animosities and prejudices. Popular accounts of the massacres described prisoners freed apparently on a whim, with the bloodthirsty executioners moved to pity by the stoicism of the aged or the sacrifices of the young, usually women. These narratives demonstrated the vast gulf between the theatrical displays of rational 'justice' enacted by the sans-culotte executioners, and the emotional and sentimental manner in which judgements were made.⁵⁹ The experience of Ruault, as he tried to save an

⁵⁹ This trope continues throughout the nineteenth century. See, for example, Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution* (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1838), pp. 417–9. 'Note old Marquis Cazotte: he is doomed to die; but his young Daughter clasps him in her arms, with an inspiration of eloquence, with a love which is stronger than very death: the heart of the killers themselves is touched by it; the old man is spared.'; and G. Lenotre, *Les Massacres de Septembre* (Paris: Perrin, 1907). See also Ian Haywood, *Bloody Romanticism* (Basingstoke, Hants: Palgrave, 2006) p. 69 ff. on contemporary accounts of the September Massacres and their reliance on apocryphal narratives.

acquaintance from execution, illustrates this duality. His account demonstrates the ways in which informal, personal networks co-existed with and responded to the formal, bureaucratic systems that were being established, as he tried to accumulate sufficient references to vouch for a prisoner and obtain his release.⁶⁰

It was because of his own standing in the community and reputation for fairness that Ruault was initially approached by a female acquaintance to save the life of a prisoner. 'You are an honest patriot, well-known in your section, and only you can save [him].' The prisoner, M. Gandolphe, was judged guilty by the makeshift tribunal because of his employment as a secretary to a government minister. Through the means of a note smuggled from the prison, his family had been able to establish that if a known patriot could vouch for his commitment to the Revolution he would be released. Gandolphe's personal relationships could therefore both inculcate and exonerate him; running parallel to the 'official' channels of the (here, informally established) court was an informal path of communication, kept open by way of smuggled notes and whispered confidences. Ruault himself was known by the acquaintance who approached him and also fulfilled the state's criteria of patriotism; he was thus simultaneously a formal and informal reference, recognised by the state as 'un bon patriote' but chosen to help because of a chain of acquaintances that connected him distantly to the prisoner.

Ruault approached one of the self-appointed judges, a citizen Maillard, and described the prisoner, using the qualifiers that would become increasingly familiar during this period; he is 'honnête homme, père de cinq enfants' and Ruault himself, a respected member of his section, could personally vouch for his civic mindedness. Maillard was implacable, and replied that, in any case, he did not know Ruault personally – the value of Ruault's reference, and of Ruault's reputation, therefore counted for nothing. 'The people will

⁶⁰ Nicolas Ruault, *Gazette d'un Parisien sous la Révolution. Lettres à son frère. 1783–1796* (Paris: France Loisirs, 1976).

judge the villains locked up here,' he told Ruault. 'But they can distinguish the innocent from the guilty. If the person you seek is without reproach, he will be freed at once. Bring me written proof of his civic mindedness and we will consider your request'.⁶¹

The incident reflects the tension between formal and informal systems of attestation, between state-sanctioned authorisation and personal testimony. The self-appointed judge and arbiter, Maillard, himself seemed uncertain which authority held precedence. He did not know Ruault and even if he did, he swore to answer to the judgement of the people over that of a personal acquaintance. This statement illustrates two concepts fundamental to the way in which the apparatus of the state began to have an impact on individual reputations: firstly it illustrates how personal relationships were now subservient to one's duty to the state ('I do not know you, and even if I did I could not do as you ask.') Secondly, in evoking 'the people' as the embodiment of the state, the speaker appropriated what had previously been an informal method of social interaction and personal vouching, of judgement by one's peers, and elevated it to an impersonal judge led by reason rather than emotion. Ruault, as an individual, did not have the authority to vouch for the unhappy prisoner; instead he was ordered to return – in just a few hours – with written proof of the prisoner's patriotism, in order to obtain his release. To leave the prison, however, Ruault was not given an official document to ensure his safe exit; instead he was advised of the informal code – *mettez votre chapeau en sortant* – which would allow safe passage. Once again, a seemingly inflexible state-apparatus, demanding proof in the form of written documents and certificates co-existed with an informal series of codes and behaviours. This would continue throughout the Terror, with the consequence that, as will be discussed in the next chapter,

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 309-10. 'Maillard prit un grand registre ... et cherchait dedans le nom du prisonnier. Impatienté de ne pas le trouver assez tôt il le renferme et me dit: 'Monsieur je ne vous connais et quand je vous connaîtrais je ne vous le rendrais pas sur votre demande. Le peuple fait justice des scélérats qui sont ici renfermés. Mais il sait distinguer l'innocent du coupable. Si la personne que vous réclamez est sans reproche, elle sera remise en liberté dès ce jour. Apportez-moi une preuve écrite de son civisme, et nous délibérons sur votre demande.'"

seemingly impartial, official evidence and documentation was vulnerable to personal interpretation, insinuation and rumour.

Ruault then described his efforts to obtain the necessary documentation, turning to the prisoner's section for personal testimony. Waiting over an hour he eventually had an audience with the president ('a gallant man, but very timid') who initially refused to vouch for the prisoner, fearful of the repercussions to himself if the prisoner was found guilty.⁶² The section's position of authority was ambiguous: for the prison guards it represented an objective measure of 'civisme', more credible than Ruault's personal reference, and yet it was subject to the same unspoken rule of guilt by association as any other personal connection. The president of the section was a symbol of authority only in so far as the prisoner may be found innocent; if found guilty, he would be re-cast in the role of associate and co-conspirator. (The irony, which was left unspoken, was that Ruault did not personally know the prisoner either, but having been asked to assist, he did everything in his power to do so, at considerable risk to himself.) Eventually, the necessary document was obtained from the section, counter-signed at the Commune, and Ruault was able to obtain the prisoner's release. The breathless narrative recounting the episode referred in passing to the vestiges of authority that made the passage easier: the *canonnier* who accompanied him throughout his ordeal and whose uniform seemed to offer a degree of protection,⁶³ the parting of the crowd at the prison gates, when he waved the precious certificate 'stamped with the big red *cachet* of the Commune'. And yet the arbitrary nature of the release was evident: the Commune signed the document seemingly on a whim,⁶⁴ while at the gates Ruault and his cohorts evoked the authority of the wrong section

⁶² Ibid., p. 310. 'Je ne connais point ce Monsieur-là ... comment voulez-vous que je certifie, dans un moment aussi terrible, la civique probité d'un inconnu.'

⁶³ Ibid., p. 309. 'J'y cours avec le fidèle canonnier, qui ne nous abandonnait pas et dont l'uniforme m'était d'un très grand secours.'

⁶⁴ Ibid. 'J'entre dans ce bureau. Qui vois-je là? Marat qui dormait, Panis et deux autres qui écrivaient. Je leur présente cette attestation que j'appuie du peu de mots que je puis prononcer en faveur du prisonnier. Panis, je lui rends justice, fut très facile. Il regarde l'attestation et écrit deux mots qui portaient l'invitation aux commissaires juges à l'Abbaye à mettre en liberté M. G...'

(Gandolphe's was the Fontaine de Grenelle rather than Marseille). What appeared to be evidence of an objective, rational authority had merely been superimposed on top of one dependent on personal connections and individual whim. The president's reaction, too, illustrated the conundrum inherent in relying on personal references for official authorisation, a kind of 'Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?', that is to say, who was to provide the reference for the referee? And how is that reference compromised if the referee himself was found to be suspect and vice versa? With the increase in denunciations of year II, an individual's credentials had potentially far-reaching repercussions, as claim and counter-claim, defence and prosecution, increasingly depended not just on one person but on the entire cohort and network of connections called to support or prosecute his case.

The issuing of *certificats de civisme* and *cartes de sûreté* from September 1792 seemed initially to provide a solution to such an idiosyncratic and unpredictable arrangement, as each active citizen was now equipped with universally recognized proof of their republican credentials.⁶⁵ In Paris, the *carte de sûreté*, a proto identity card, was, from 1792 to 1795, required of all males over the age of fifteen in order to work or to move freely about the capital. No longer would individuals be dependent on an informal, and thus potentially unreliable, network of references and personal attestations. On 11 August, 1793, the Section du Temple reported details of the arrest of one Daniel Poucet, who had no means of employment nor was able to provide a valid reason for being in Paris. Sent to prison as suspect, he was released on the word of some generous friends who both attested to his good character and were prepared to support him financially.⁶⁶ Others were not so lucky, and in communities where an unfamiliar face or unexpected accent might attract attention and suspicion a universally recognized certificate attesting to one's patriotism was an invaluable tool.

⁶⁵ *Bulletin des lois de la République française*, vol I., pp. 464, 485-6. *Certificats de civisme* were introduced first to the military, then to civil servants.

⁶⁶ APP Section du Temple, 11 août, 1793.

Those without the safety net of well-off and well-respected friends could, in theory, now be guaranteed equally fair treatment if in possession of their state-issued reference, and every accredited citizen would be welcomed and aided by his brethren, whether personally known to one another or not: 'As soon as a citizen with a card asks for help ... all the inhabitants of the house, the street, the neighbourhood, the section, the city, must fly to his aid.'⁶⁷ State approval now took the place of community approbation; with the relevant card or certificate, a patriot could move among different communities and be welcomed and trusted in neighbourhoods where he had no personal connections. The cards provided universally recognized credentials to deserving patriots; no longer did one's personal reference have to be known to a third party – these state-issued cards and certificates provided the necessary proof.

The reality of course, was more complex: to be issued with the relevant papers, citizens had to provide evidence of their commitment to the Republic, confirmed by two recognised patriots. Citizens must always carry their card with them and could be requested by 'tous les corps de gardes, piquets, patrouilles' to produce it at any time. Those without would be escorted to their section for immediate identification, or arrested.⁶⁸ Subsequent laws extended the reach of these documents, making them essential for employment, to receive a pension or to be issued with a visa.⁶⁹ This surfeit of paperwork, however, led to confusion, even among those in authority. The Section de Butte des Moulins recorded the arrest of an individual for not having a *carte de sûreté*; his defence was that, as a *domestique*, he did not know he was required to have one.⁷⁰ Complicating matters further, he was able to produce instead a *carte de citoyen*, which caused consternation amongst the authorities. They concluded that, because

⁶⁷ *Le Moniteur Universel*, 12 septembre, 1792, p. 226.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Répertoire général de la législation française*, pp. 271-2.

⁷⁰ APP Section de Butte des Moulins, 28 mars, 1793.

that particular card was not required of him he could not have been entitled to it, and must there have obtained it by deception. He was held until his employer could come to vouch for him – thus negating the authority and the necessity of the official document in the first place.

Although possession of the necessary cards and certificates appeared to provide citizens with a universal validation of their credentials, the issuing of these documents was open to abuse. Reports circulated that sections threatened to withhold certificates as a means of forcing through petitions⁷¹ or to extort money.⁷² Petty acts of vindictiveness or examples of power play, too, were reported on the side of the authorities: in 1793 an eighteen-year-old apprentice from the Section des Quinze-Vingts applied for a replacement *carte de sûreté* after having lost his. Confronted with an implacable wall of bureaucratic resistance, the frustrated young man called the committee ‘des mauvais citoyens, qui font mal aux honnêtes gens’. For this he was arrested and imprisoned for several months.⁷³

Although obtaining the necessary documents could be onerous, there was no question of being able to survive without them: dubious behaviour was rendered doubly suspect if the subject could not produce the relevant certificates when required. In July 1793 the Section d’Arcis reported the arrest of an individual ‘sans aveu, paraissant suspect ... arrêté par une patrouille de nuit ... sans carte ni papiers’. Far from being a penniless vagrant, however, he was found to be carrying suspiciously large bundles of

⁷¹ Ernest Mellié, *Les Sections de Paris pendant la Révolution Française* (Paris: Société de l’histoire de la Révolution française, 1898), p. 126, citing *Le Moniteur Universel*, 18 avril, 1793, ‘A la séance du 18 avril, Vergniaud revint sur cette question, releva la maladresse de la Convention en signalant la façon dont les signatures étaient recueillies: ... “Les rédacteurs et leurs amis, dit-il, se répandent au même instant dans les sections de Paris. Chaque émissaire dit à la section où il se présente: ‘Voici une pétition qu’il faut signer, – Lisez-la. – Inutile, elle est déjà adoptée par la majorité des sections.’ S’ils veulent faire quelques observations, on leur répond par ces mots terribles ‘Signez, ou pas de carte de civisme.’”

⁷² APP Section de Fidélité, 5 avril, 1793. ‘Dénonciation contre un secrétaire de la section qui extorquerait de l’argent pour délivrer les certificats de résidence.’

⁷³ AN AF 4775/24/doc. 1. ‘Rapport de Tabourin.’

notes, for which he was imprisoned.⁷⁴ Far worse than being an itinerant beggar *sans aveu*, was to be a man of wealth *sans aveu*: article 2.2 of the Law of Suspects, relating to those with no visible means of livelihood,⁷⁵ embraced both ends of the social scale, criminalising equally the vagrant and the *ci-devant* suspected to be living off unearned wealth.

In the abstract, the issuing of documents and certificates could be seen as an objective, rational way of assessing and legitimising an individual's reputation, releasing it from the vagaries of petty rivalries or enmities that were so reminiscent of the whispered innuendo that dominated court politics and the social interactions of high society. The certificates delineated a seemingly objective measurement of citizenship, one that could be catalogued and certified. In reality, however, whether or not one received the relevant paperwork was often dependent on an individual's standing in the community.

There may have been perfectly innocuous reasons for not having a valid card. Apart from the loss of the card itself, personal circumstances may have made it difficult if not impossible to obtain one; a recent arrival to the city, for instance, may not have had the contacts to secure the attestation of two recognised patriots. Whereas previously this lack of social network might have made life difficult for a newcomer, now, without a card, it rendered him criminal. The possession or not of the relevant certification also had repercussions on the kinds of personal disputes that earlier might have been settled through the judicious appraisal of eye-witness accounts and personal testimonies; those with cards had an advantage over those without in such disputes. In the same way, behaviours or accusations that might adversely affect an individual's chances of receiving the necessary documents were that much more serious. In germinal year II, the Section de l'Arsenal

⁷⁴ APP Section d'Arcis, 6 juillet, 1793. 'Arrestation d'un individu paraissant suspect.'

⁷⁵ Among suspects are 'those who are unable to justify, in the manner prescribed by the decree of 21 March, their means of existence and the performance of their civic duties'.

recorded a complaint against a couple for ‘mauvais propos’.⁷⁶ The plaintiff described how a couple had accused him of ‘pillage and theft’ from the army and protested that such calumnies could prevent him from receiving his *carte de civisme*.⁷⁷ The repercussions of personal animosities and public insults had now been amplified considerably, with potential consequences extending far beyond the immediate neighbourhood. Prior to the introduction of these documents, any allegations – whether of criminal activity, as here, or a less serious slight upon one’s character – might have stayed within the immediate community, of interest only to one’s peers. Now, with the withholding of the relevant certificate, the plaintiff’s alleged crimes would not only be evident to everyone, they could prevent him from working, from travelling, from receiving a pension, potentially casting him out from society and relegating him to a life of destitution. As personal reputations increasingly came under official scrutiny, and were measured against a set of ideological abstractions that came to define the *bon patriote*, so came a more urgent need to protect them; this no doubt has something to bear on the proliferation of accusations of calumny during this period, replacing earlier complaints of *insultes* and *injures*.⁷⁸

A *carte de civisme* proved one’s Republican credentials, and as such was a kind of universal passport to the Republican brotherhood. If the Old Regime relied on a system of patronage and personal introduction, the new Republic, the existence of these cards implied, was potentially open to everyone, as long as they could prove their commitment to the *patrie*. Who one knew was now nothing compared to who one was, and to be in possession of a document attesting to one’s patriotism and commitment to the Revolution proved, by extension, that the holder possessed the personal qualities

⁷⁶ APP Section de l’Arsenal, 16 germinal, an II. ‘Plainte contre un particulier et sa femme, pour mauvais propos sur le compte du plaignant.’

⁷⁷ Ibid. ‘[Sa réputation] ne peut souffrir de semblable calomnie.’

⁷⁸ The *Répertoire chronologique de police de Paris* reveals a significant increase in official complaints of ‘*calomnie*’ as opposed to ‘*insultes*’ and ‘*injures*’ from during 1793-4 compared to 1792.

characteristic of the *bon patriote* – moral probity, honesty, *franchise*. Jacobin discourse, disseminated through the radical press, as well as in speeches in the Convention and the clubs, played a part in creating and perpetuating the model of the ideal citizen, one that was increasingly synonymous with the model of *bon sans-culotte* as defined by the text, ‘Réponse à l’impertinente question ‘Mais qu’est-ce qu’un sans-culotte.’”⁷⁹ The characteristics referred to in that speech – the humble background, the practice of honest, useful labour and the commitment to one’s family – came to be seen as evidence of patriotism in themselves, and references to such themes occur with increasing frequency in personal statements of this time.

In addition to popular Jacobin discourse, the introduction of official certification influenced the ways in which citizens began to describe themselves and each other, with personal reputations now defined and interpreted according to the parameters established by the Jacobins. In the year II until the fall of Robespierre, police records reveal an increasing reliance on the language of Jacobin bureaucracy. This is to be expected when an individual is called upon to prove his *civisme* in order to receive the requisite document: his or her identity needed to conform to the set of criteria established by the authorities. Those individuals required to vouch for one another for bureaucratic purposes learned to describe and measure themselves according to these criteria. Standard phrases and descriptions recur throughout these records – ‘brave’, ‘honnête’, ‘bon père de famille’; numbers of children appear to increase with the Terror, suggesting a popular association of fecundity and patriotism. Some professions required more stringent proofs of Republican purity than others. Not only those holding a government position of any kind,⁸⁰ but also teachers, for example

⁷⁹ Cited Walter Markov and Albert Soboul, eds. *Die Sansculotten von Paris: Dokumente zur Geschichte der Volksbewegung 1793–1794* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1957), p. 2.

⁸⁰ *Bulletin des lois*, pp. 484-487.

were subject to the most stringent of checks and references, requiring the testimonies of ten accredited patriots.⁸¹

Declarations of patriotism followed a formula, and were often self-referential, with the same group of individuals vouching for one another. Within two days of one another, the Section de Fidélité and the Section des Droits de l'Homme recorded the attestations in favour of three individuals:⁸² twenty people, among them neighbours and long-time family friends, provided glowing character references, all of which employed similar or identical phrases. Each was 'reconnu pour un bon patriote', each well versed 'dans les vrais principes de la Révolution'; they acted with *probité, honnêteté*, and were active in their civic duties. Patriotism and community here converge: a well-respected member of the group would have no problem gathering witnesses to provide the testimony that would earn the requisite paperwork. Local government was merely adding a layer of bureaucracy to an informal network already in place. However, those without the safety net of a community were now rendered more desperate than before: the outcast, the vagrant, the orphan or the friendless was now officially *sans aveu*. Such a lack of certification compounded or even caused destitution, creating a spiral of deprivation from which it could be impossible to extricate oneself. A man arrested in June 1793 for begging 'while pretending to be blind' was further criminalised for not having a *carte de sûreté*; he was forced to beg, he said, precisely because he did not have one.⁸³

In addition to the almost insurmountable practical restrictions caused by the lack of relevant certification – lack of employment, reduced movement – was the equation of patriotism and political virtue with private morality.

Robespierre's claim that 'un homme qui manque des vertus publiques, ne

⁸¹ AN AF/II/48, doc. 55. 'Décrets de la Convention Nationale sur l'organisation de l'instruction publique. Article III.3'.

⁸² APP Section de Fidélité, 28 brumaire, an II. 'Déclaration de plusieurs citoyens qui attestent le civisme de trois particuliers'. Section des Droits de l'homme, 30 brumaire, an II. 'Déclaration de patriotisme en faveur de trois individus.'

⁸³ APP Section de Muséum, 3 juin, 1793.

peut avoir de vertus privées' extended to the private behaviour of the ordinary citizen, with a *carte de civisme* serving as certifiable evidence not only of an individual's political commitment but of their private integrity. The criteria used to measure an individual's right to the relevant certificate become increasingly common in ordinary discourse. Witnesses attesting to an individual's personal qualities emphasised their patriotism as proof of their trustworthiness. Likewise, those seeking to exonerate themselves from any allegation of wrongdoing, whether criminal, moral, or ideological, stressed the patriotism and their *probité*, and described themselves as *bon républicain, bon père de famille*, etc. As the Terror progressed, and the need to prove one's patriotism became increasingly important, these declarations of civic commitment become noticeably heightened, even exaggerated, with the numbers of offspring comprising the family of *un bon père de famille* or sacrificed by patriotic mothers to the *patrie* seeming to increase.⁸⁴ For this reason, to cast aspersions against a woman's mothering during this period had repercussions far beyond a slur on an individual's character; to be a bad mother, to neglect one's children, was potentially damaging to the *patrie*. To be accused of such, or to have the reputation as such, would add weight to accusations of political criminality.

Ordinary criminal activity was now inseparable from the political. Those suspected of a crime who were not in possession of the requisite documents could find the latter adversely influencing the investigation into the former: perceptions of crime were now exacerbated by the lack of appropriately documented civic commitment. For example, during the sugar riots of February 1793, two individuals were arrested for threatening a grocer.⁸⁵ In order to establish their guilt or innocence, the authorities first asked the suspects what they had done for their sections, and whether they had the

⁸⁴ Many stirring examples of mothers' sacrifices and patriotism are described in, for example, *Le Moniteur Universel*, in ventôse and pluviôse, year II. The appeal of one Vignolle, *cocher*, arrested and detained in fructidor, an II (AN F7/4775/46), for *propos incivique*, refers to his role as father ('père de huit enfants dont 4 garçons') over any other patriotic duty.

⁸⁵ APP Section de Fontaine de Grenelle, 25 février, 1793.

relevant certificates with them. Being unable to prove their civic commitment would count against them, serving as proof that they were the kind of bad sorts likely to demand sugar ‘avec des menaces’.⁸⁶ Conversely, suspects were certain to proffer the various documents and testimonies to their patriotism if they had them, with the hope that evidence of civic virtue would help to exonerate them from the charges at hand.

Often a lack of commitment – or, more correctly, a lack of proof of commitment – and criminal activity were so inextricably linked that the subject was condemned before he was even heard, as in the hapless individual arrested in a *maison de jeu*, with no papers, no personal testimonies and no proof of commitment to the Revolution.⁸⁷ Implicit in this particular arrest was the subject’s immorality. His ‘indifférence à la révolution’ – a crime according to the Law of Suspects – was both amplified and illustrated by being found idling in a gambling house (one suspects, too, that his profession as tailor did not help his cause).⁸⁸ Public duty and private behaviour were so inextricably entwined that subjects known in the community to be thoroughly unpleasant would have a lack of patriotism added to their list of infractions, and vice versa. When one Vincent Boucher, *épiciier*, was arrested for *propos anti-civiques* and public disorder in 1793, the fact that he was known in the neighbourhood for brutality and abusing his wife was provided as additional evidence of his lack of patriotism.⁸⁹ When

⁸⁶ Ibid. ‘On lui a demandé s’il s’est fait reconnaître dans sa section comme citoyen et de nous exhiber la carte. A répondu qu’il ne pouvait nous présenter qu’un billet de la garde qui’ il a montré le dix-sept de ce mois, n’ayant fait aucun autre acte exigé de citoyen.’

⁸⁷ APP Comité de Surveillance du département de Paris, 2 germinal, an II. ‘Liste des personnes envoyées par le comité dans différentes maisons d’arrêt depuis le 22 ventôse. 23 ventôse: Le nommé Houquet, tailleur ... envoyé à la mairie et trouvé dans une maison de jeu, n’ayant pas de carte de sûreté, n’y aucune personne qui puissent le réclamer, et suspect par son indifférence à la révolution.’ Another example concerned a *garçon limonadier*, arrested for lack of papers at the Théâtre de Vaudeville, compounded by the fact that ‘depuis 18 mois qu’il est à Paris, il n’a jamais rempli aucun devoir de citoyen.’

⁸⁸ Tailors, like wigmakers and domestic servants, held a dubious position in Republican communities: as discussed in Chapter IV, a dishevelled appearance was a very visible sign of Jacobin commitment. To employ a tailor was the antithesis of this.

⁸⁹ APP Section Divers, 3 juin, 1793. ‘Procès-verbal de la séance du comité de surveillance de la Section des Piques. Un membre ouvre l’avis, et fait la proposition au comité de directeur sur l’incivisme du nommé Bouchez, épiciier ... notoirement connu par les discours et les

asked by his committee to answer to the allegations, he severely underestimated the importance of his private behaviour on his reputation as patriot: 'He replied in a very negative and unsatisfactory fashion that what he said and did in his own house was no one's business.'⁹⁰ For the committee, however, private behaviour and public duty as a patriot were inseparable and they recommended he be detained as suspect.

Boucher was indeed a brutal individual, but in general the notion that private behaviour was inseparable from patriotic duty and was therefore proof of Republican authenticity was puritanical and deeply conservative. A statement from the Section de l'Arsenal in March 1793 questioned the competence of an individual to act in an authoritative role in the section 'pour des raisons de décence, des prodigalités et de fureur'.⁹¹ Women with a reputation for easy virtue could now be suspected of *incivisme* or worse, as the *bonne républicaine* was first and foremost a fecund yet self-sacrificing mother supplying the *patrie* with future soldiers. These assumptions about the relationship between patriotic commitment and private morality become increasingly dangerous when denunciation became a public duty.

Despite these attempts to establish a systematic and official means of recognising and recording the true Republican, concerns remained that these symbols of legitimacy could be obtained by fraud or subject to other abuses. The possession of the relevant certificates was incontrovertible proof of one's authenticity and therefore crucial to one's livelihood. Because of this there were huge concerns that such cards might be obtained fraudulently. The Police Archives reveal numerous instances either of

propos séditieux depuis la révolution, tendant à troubler l'ordre public et ayant envers son épouse des intentions méchantes et perfides, contraires à l'intérêt de la société dont il fait partie. Le comité délibèrent, avec une connaissance parfaite de l'incivisme du nommé Bouchez'.

⁹⁰ 'Il a répondu d'une manière très négative et peu satisfaisante, en disant que ce qu'il disait et faisait chez lui ne regarde personne.'

⁹¹ APP Section de l'Arsenal, 20 mars, 1793. 'Déclaration qu'un particulier que l'Assemblée Générale de la Section charge quelque fois de la représenter en qualité de Commissaire, est en interdiction.'

individuals appearing to try to obtain cards by deception, or of engaging in behaviour that was suspected could lead to fraud, including using false names or otherwise making false claims.⁹² That counterfeit cards or replacements could be obtained with the right connections was illustrated by an *observateur* report describing a conversation in which a young man lamented the loss of his *carte de civisme*. His companion was quick to assure him that replacements were available at the Palais-Royal: 'Viens souper avec moi au Palais-Royal; je t'en ferai avoir une; la boutique est toujours ouverte.'⁹³ The Palais-Royal was not only a milieu for obtaining unauthorised certificates, but also offered rich pickings for officials on the look-out for citizens committing bureaucratic infractions. The joint-surveillance operation between the Section de la Montagne and the Butte des Moulins unearthed what must have seemed a jackpot: ten 'individus suspects' at the royalist café de la Grotte Flamande in the Palais-d'Egalité, all without papers, with an eleventh suspect, a female companion, found cowering under a table.⁹⁴

As official totems of approval proliferated, so did concerns that they could be misused or misappropriated. The Section de Fidélité reported an individual receiving by deceit a medal for taking part in the storming of the Tuileries of 10 August –acquiring the prestigious reputation of a true patriot without having earned it was described as 'un véritable escroquerie',⁹⁵ as serious as impersonation and fraud. Indeed, to possess such an item without the right

⁹² Among the many reports relating to this are the following: APP Section de Roule, 6 septembre, 1792. 'Arrestation d'un particulier qui a cherché à faire signer un certificat par plusieurs personnes.' Ibid., 15 mars, 1793. 'Procès-verbal contre un particulier qui, pour obtenir un passeport, a déclaré une qualité autre que la sienne.' Ibid., 26 mars, 1793. 'Plainte d'une citoyenne contre une femme qui prend le nom qui appartient à la plaignante.' APP Section d'Arcis, 19 janvier, 1793. 'Arrestation d'un individu ayant cherché à s'enrôler au moyen d'un certificat reconnu faux.' APP Section de l'Arsenal, 4 pluviôse, an II. 'Déclaration concernant une femme qui, pour obtenir les secours, produit des actes falsifiés.' APP Section de la place Vendôme, 21 germinal, an II. 'Arrestation d'un particulier qui porte un nom autre que le sien.'

⁹³ Caron, *Paris Pendant la Terreur*, vol I., p. 58. 'Rapport de Beraud. 10 septembre, 1793.'

⁹⁴ APP Section de Butte des Moulins, 18 ventôse, an II.

⁹⁵ APP Section de Fidélité, 12 août, 1793.

to do so was to impersonate the *brave sans-culotte* and reflected the wider concern that the appearances could be deceptive, that the symbols of Republicanism – so successful at signalling one’s political allegiance – could be appropriated by anyone. The designer of an official seal was singled out for praise for making it so difficult to counterfeit, while the loss of the seal of the Section de Tuileries was a cause of consternation and calls for tighter control.⁹⁶

For many, however, the introduction of certificates and official documentation was a hindrance, permitting bureaucrats or illiterate guards to indulge in petty power play or extravagant shows of patriotic fervour.⁹⁷ Honoré Riouffe, imprisoned in 1793, described the almost parodic sans-culotte encountered in prison, amply whiskered and bristling with weapons, reciting the slogans of the Mountain like a litany, and doubtless certified, documented and officially stamped: ‘Je parie aussi qu’il était fort en règle du côté des cartes civiques et des certificats.’⁹⁸

But what was most troubling of all, even more than the idea that individuals were succeeding in obtaining certification and authorisation to which they were not entitled, was doubts concerning the legitimacy of those issuing the certificates. A rumour overhead by an *observateur* in the former Tuileries gardens (renamed the Jardin national) in March 1794, just two days before the execution of the Hébertistes, revealed an anxiety about the legitimacy of the certificates that had already been issued (itself an extension of

⁹⁶ APP Section des Tuileries, 11 vendémiaire, an III. ‘Procès verbal relatif à la perte du Cachet du Comité révolutionnaire de la section’

⁹⁷ The *Nouveau Dictionnaire français* observed that the introduction of passports put honest citizens at the mercy of soldiers ‘qui savent à peine lire.’ *Nouveau Dictionnaire français*, ‘passeports’. French Revolution Collection, J.B. Morrell Library, University of York, microfiche 7/227.

⁹⁸ Honoré Riouffe, *Mémoires d’un détenu par Riouffe* (Bibliothèque chrétienne et morale: Limoges, 1871), p. 33. ‘[I]l avait à la bouche certains mots de Montagne, de sans-culottes, de jacobins, comme un bedeau de paroisse, celui des luthériens, du pape et de l’assemblée des fidèles. Voilà, je crois, tout ce qu’il avait de la révolution: au reste, il était costumé convenablement, les moustaches, le large sabre, les pistolets à la ceinture’.

suspicious about the legitimacy and motives of the Hébertistes). The elaborate system of documents and certificates, developed as a means to prevent fraud, were now seen as nothing more than a ruse to place counter-revolutionaries ('les chevaliers de poignard') at the heart of government. Three-quarters of the certificates issued should be rendered void, the gossip went; les *intrigants* were able to obtain them at the expense of the true patriots, who were left without:

[A] group of people in the Jardin national said [that]... Chaumette, who was no doubt involved in the conspiracy, often issued new ones, or changed their appearance, in order to disrupt the administration, all the better to place new *chevaliers de poignard* within it. It is essential then, that the Convention establishes a new way to distribute these certificates, rather than entrust such an important job to the Commune, which the public now sees as corrupt. Because who do you see in the all the government offices? Partisans of Hébert ...⁹⁹

While all this certification and documenting might be seen as a means of formalising what had previously been a fluid and unregulated method of vouching, replacing the cronyism and patronage of the Old Regime with an ostensibly fair and transparent method of identifying and authenticating the true patriot, the reality was that these certificates were as affected by the existing framework of familial and neighbourhood loyalties, emotional ties, social conflicts, animosities and rivalries as the informal system of vouching that operated prior to their introduction. Antisocial behaviour, whether outright criminal, or merely unpleasant, was now inextricably linked with civic duty and proof of patriotism; one's personal reputation, therefore, was now of political importance. And yet official legitimacy was no protection against the power of rumour. Nowhere is this more amply illustrated than by the manner in which denunciations were submitted, verified and enacted upon, as will be seen in the next chapter.

⁹⁹ Caron, *Paris Pendant la Terreur*, vol. VI., p 21. 'Rapport de Beraud. 2 germinal, an II.'

Chapter VI

Rumour, Denunciation and Terror

Although the documents, stamps, seals and certificates proving one's commitment to the Revolution may have appeared to replace the more informal, ad hoc arrangement of personal attestation and vouching, when denunciation became a public duty, no certificate or official stamp was able to stand up to the power of rumour. A government that had attempted to quantify, catalogue and authenticate patriotic duty and by extension the private morality of its citizens – in effect, to introduce a rational system of measurement of individual character – was now prepared to criminalise its people based on the merest innuendo or unsubstantiated rumour. How was it that rumour – arguably the opposite of Enlightened, rational thought – should replace empirical evidence when it came to establishing guilt? This chapter will argue that the culture of denunciation encouraged by Jacobin discourse created an atmosphere in which politically virtuous behaviour was so rigidly and narrowly defined that, ultimately, individuality itself became suspect. This was combined with the endlessly mutable and elastic definition of 'suspect' in the law of September 17, along with a veritable cult of transparency and continuous demands to observe, spy on and denounce one's fellow and, in such an environment, as will be argued below, concrete evidence became secondary to the court of public opinion and 'on dit'.

Denunciation, hated under the Old Regime and allied to the system of police informers and *lettres de cachets*,¹ had been obligatory since the decree of 16 September 1791; by year II it had been elevated to a demonstration of political virtue – 'far from being a moral crime [denunciation] is a virtue and

¹ Arlette Farge and Michel Foucault, *La désordre des familles. Lettres de cachet des Archives de la Bastille au XVIIIème siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982) describe how the system of *lettres de cachets* allowed families to have recalcitrant or wayward members arrested and imprisoned in order to save the family's honour. Such 'evidence' was submitted secretly, with the accused not able to defend themselves, nor able to know the nature of their crimes.

a duty'.² Spying, previously the preserve of *les mouches*, was now recast as 'vigilance' and lively speeches in sections described how silence was itself suspect, while denunciation should be actively rewarded.³ The new virtuous light cast on the practice of denouncing one's fellows was enshrined in law, but had been encouraged by the radical press, whose commitment to the promotion of denunciation went hand in hand with an enthusiasm for individual surveillance. The character of the Père Duchesne frequently shared with his readers conversations he happened to overhear while going about his Republican business,⁴ while Marat's thundering exhortations to spy and denounce were a regular feature of his journal. Publications with titles such as *L'écouteur aux portes* or *Le dénonciateur publique*⁵ reinforced the impression that listening, observing and denouncing were not only civic duties, they were positively banal. A recent study of eavesdropping argues that during the early modern period, although active spying was frowned upon and would earn the witness the reputation as a sneak or peeping Tom, information overheard by accident was admissible in court and did not carry any negative connotations.⁶ Indeed, as has been argued in Chapter IV, physical privacy was rare in well-populated urban areas and thus overhearing and being overheard was a common occurrence. (This seems to be reinforced by the frequency with which it appears as a plot device in fiction, with a distinction again made between accidentally overhearing and

² Etienne Barry, 'Essai sur la dénonciation politique', cited in Albert Soboul, *The Parisian Sans-Culottes and the French Revolution 1793-4* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 143.

³ Ibid.

⁴ The Père Duchesne's fictional occupation as a stove maker gave him access to homes at all levels of society, hence being able to 'overhear' the perfidy of, for example, Marie-Antoinette Madame Roland or Brissot.

⁵ In his analysis of the role of the press in 'normalising' the act of surveillance and denunciation, Antoine de Baecque, *Le corps de l'histoire: métaphores et politiques (1770-1800)* (Paris: Calman-Lévy, 1993), p. 268 cites titles such as *l'Observateur*, *l'Observateur français*, *Le Spectateur* and *le Club des Observateurs*.

⁶ John L. Locke. *Eavesdropping: An Intimate History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

actively spying. The latter often occurs in a salacious context, as in the many anti-aristocratic *libelles*.⁷)

While the denizens of popular Paris lived daily with a very real lack of privacy due to enforced physical proximity and the structure of the urban landscape, Jacobin rhetoric encouraged a suspicion of privacy and of separateness, which ultimately extended beyond the physical body to one's private thoughts.⁸ As Lucien Jaume argues, the idealised figure of the *bon sans-culotte* represented an archetype of Republican behaviour that did not allow for any nuances of personality; during the Terror individuality itself became suspect.⁹ Colin Lucas's analysis of denunciation in the provinces identifies a pattern of blaming stock 'types' – representing the clergy or the nobility – who were seldom present to answer the charges, which, in any case rarely contained concrete evidence.¹⁰ If the *sans-culotte* was defined and recognized by an inflexible series of characteristics, so the 'suspect', too, could be so recognized. Ease of recognition features, too, in several other studies of denunciation, which looks particularly at the importance of physical appearance in identifying suspects, with corpulence and cleanliness the mark of the *muscadin*, while lean and hungry squalor marks out the true patriot.¹¹

⁷ Ibid., and also, for example, William H. Trapnell, *Eavesdropping in Marivaux* (Genève: Droz, 1987); Patricia Myer Spacks, *Gossip* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985).

⁸ On the importance of *fraternité* and the solidarity of the group over the individual Lucien Jaume refers to Albert Soboul's citation of a section report describing 'Le patriote ne garde rien de personnel pour lui. Il rapporte tout à la masse commune: ses jouissances, ses sentiments douloureux ; il épanche tout aux seins de ses frères.' Lucien Jaume, 'La Dénonciation, poursuite de l'individu dans sa différence' in *Le Discours jacobin et la démocratie* (Paris: Fayard, 1989), p. 206.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Colin Lucas, 'The Theory and Practice of Denunciation in the French Revolution', *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 68, no. 4, Practices of Denunciation in Modern European History, 1789-1989 (1996), p. 781.

¹¹ For example, Antoine de Baecque, 'Le Grand Spectacle de la Transparence' in *Le corps de l'histoire* (pp. 275–302) or Michael Sonenscher, 'Artisans, *sans-culottes* and the French Revolution' in *Reshaping France: Town, Country and Region during the French Revolution*, ed. Alan Forrest and Peter Jones (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991). Explicit reference to appearances was reported in *Le Moniteur Universel*, 'Article 15 du décret du 6 septembre, 1793: Dans les Révolutions tous les bons citoyens doivent être physionomistes; tous ceux qui ont aujourd'hui la mine patibulaire, les yeux hagards, un costume évidemment

The identification and demonisation of generic counter-revolutionary types, of the 'other' as described in Chapter IV, relied on popular prejudices that were spread and exacerbated by rumour. The guilt of the suspected hoarder, noble, spy or clergymen could be assumed based on a series of popular preconceptions. Marisa Linton, however, identifies a different set of assumptions in her study of the importance of virtue and friendship among Revolutionary deputies, one in which denunciations were based not on generic accusations but on the supposition of very specific, private knowledge, known to only intimates. Given the suspicion with which any private conduct was viewed, such information was not without problems – on the one hand, it might be presumed to carry greater weight than the 'on dit' of popular opinion, but on the other, there was always the possibility it might be motivated by personal vindictiveness. Said Robespierre on the problems of relying on personal testimony of this kind: 'Un malveillant peut, en un quart d'heure, ruiner la confiance que vous méritez.'¹²

The practice of denunciation, specifically when it became a civic duty, raises important questions about the relationship between the individual and the state, and how the state intruded upon personal relationships. The culture of denunciation during the Revolution was, in effect, an extension of the culture – cult, even – of transparency: in the name of openness, nothing was private or off-limits, with the converse being that anything not made public must be suspect.¹³ This relationship between public duty and private interest or

déguisé, sont de mauvais citoyens que tout vrai républicain a le droit d'arrêter sur le champs.' Cited in Sophie Wahnich, *L'Impossible citoyen: l'Étranger dans le discours de la Révolution française* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1997), p. 41.

¹² Cited in Jaume, 'La Dénonciation', p. 208, originally F.A. Aulard, ed., *Recueil des actes du Comité de Salut Public avec la correspondance officielle des représentants en mission* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1889–1951), vol. V, p. 297.

¹³ Among the many scholars who have addressed this question, Lynn Hunt writes in 'The Unstable Boundaries of the French Revolution' in *A History of Private Life*, vol. IV, *From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War* (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 13-14: 'In the midst of revolution, private meant factional, and privacy was equated with the secret that facilitated plotting.' The boundaries between public and private had been effaced to the extent that 'if the public man was not defending the revolution, the private man must be corrupt.' As this chapter will show, the converse was true, too, in that the privately corrupt man (or woman) or those believed or rumoured to be privately corrupt must could be denounced as enemies of the Revolution.

loyalty meant that denunciations could be a means of exorcising personal grudges or animosities.¹⁴ (And in this, Sheila Fitzgerald sees a precursor in the self-interested nature of many accusations in the *lettres de cachet*.)¹⁵ But there was also a potential for conflicting loyalties.

Official channels could help to overcome any such ambivalence, with concerted campaigns promoting denunciation as not only a civic duty, but an honourable one at that. Colin Lucas¹⁶ describes how a wide range of writers consciously set out to divest the practice of negative connotations,¹⁷ making frequent references to the practice in ancient Rome, which is reflected in Mette Harder's interpretation of government purges of *conventionnels* as sacrificial spectacle,¹⁸ while Jacques Guilhaumou and Lucien Jaume trace the etymology of denunciation from its earliest use of denouncing an unjust law, to denouncing the behaviour of an individual.¹⁹ Because of this, Guilhaumou

Marisa Linton discusses the centrality of virtue in the shaping of the Revolutionary identity among deputies in *The Politics of Virtue in Enlightenment France* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001).

¹⁴ Marc Bouloiseau, *The Jacobin Republic, 1792-1794*, trans. Jonathan Mandelbaum (Cambridge and Paris: Cambridge University Press/Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, reprinted 1987), p. 36 describes the potential danger of private conflict among public figures thus: '[I]f paid informers were despised and women's gossip not taken too seriously, personal rivalries and expressions of impatience were given political significance. People were imprisoned on the strength of rumours and clapped in irons for trifling offenses.' Personal rivalries and long-standing grudges feature, too, in D.M.G. Sutherland, *Murder in Aubagne: Lynching, Law, and Justice During the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹⁵ Sheila Fitzgerald and Robert Gellately, 'Practices of Denunciation in Modern European History, 1789-1989', *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 68, no. 4, (1996), pp. 747-767.

¹⁶ Colin Lucas, 'The Theory and Practice of Denunciation in the French Revolution', *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 68, no. 4, (Dec., 1996), pp. 768-785.

¹⁷ Ibid. 'Mirabeau ("in the perils which surround us, informing ... must be seen as the most important of our new virtues"), Desmoulins ("I am trying to rehabilitate the word 'informing.' ... In our present circumstances, we need to see the word honoured"), Mercier ("denunciation is one of the 'heroic virtues'"), Marat, and so on.'

¹⁸ Mette Harder, 'Crisis of Representation: The National Convention and the Search for political legitimacy' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of York, 2009).

¹⁹ Jacques Guilhaumou, 'Fragments of a Discourse of Denunciation', in *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, vol. 4, *The Terror*, ed. Keith Michael Baker (Oxford: Pergamon Press 1994), pp. 139-144. Guilhaumou attributes this shift specifically to Marat's 'Maxims of denunciation' listed in *L'ami du peuple*, which, in Guilhaumou's words, encouraged readers 'to indict a type of behaviour rather than to collect juridical evidence.'

stresses the importance of separating the denunciatory act of 1789 with the 'institutionalised practice of the year II' and of conflating denunciation with Terror.²⁰

Although the practice of denunciation was not exclusive to the Terror, by year II its role had pervaded the popular consciousness to the extent that spying, watching, reporting and suspecting were presented as commonplace. This last is important to emphasise in that suspicion encouraged a presumption of guilt on the part of the observer, who, expecting to find evidence of malfeasance, was probably able to do so. War, too, contributed to the conditions that allowed denunciation to flourish.²¹ Rumour both naturally evolved from that, and helped to do the government's work, providing another outlet for discussion about 'the enemy', whoever that may prove to be. Rumour also permitted an outlet for the individual who may have had residual ambivalence about the practice of denunciation due to its relation to spying; rumour filled the role of concrete evidence. Some of the examples that will be discussed below will illustrate how rumours came to be accepted as evidence of popular consensus, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of validation in which the frequency with which allegations were repeated and shared becomes a type of evidence in itself. In this, the model provided by trials of public figures provided a standard for denunciations among ordinary citizens, in which the accumulation of alleged personal infractions and private vices contributed to a body of evidence of political crimes. When Robespierre declared that 'Un homme qui manque des vertus publiques, ne peut avoir les vertus privées'²² – the opposite was also true, with private vices indicative of public ones.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 142.

²¹ Fitzpatrick and Gellately, 'Practices of Denunciation in Modern European History, 1789-1989', p. 762.

²² Cited in Jaume, 'La Dénonciation', p.192.

Lively speeches in the sections urged witnesses to come forward, simultaneously absolving the reluctant of responsibility for the outcome of their reports, as well as ensuring the information-gathering net was cast as widely as possible: 'It will be for the juries and judges ... to assess the value of your statements'; all that was required of individuals was to have witnessed the events they described.²³ In addition, the qualification that passivity itself was a crime²⁴ meant that citizens were not only actively encouraged but positively goaded into producing accusations, for fear of being found wanting themselves. Because of this, and despite the imperative that these statements should be based on eye-witness accounts, many were not, as will be seen below. Hearsay, interpreted through the veil of existing prejudices and suspicions, neatly filled the void left by concrete evidence. Many were arrested and then convicted on the flimsiest of evidence, which was amplified by popular fears of counter-revolutionary activity. Growing exponentially with the urgency to establish one's innocence was the near impossibility of being able to do so. Before 1793, denunciations had to be made publicly, and in writing, in order to prevent denunciations based on personal animosity. False denunciation was considered a crime comparable to enemies of the state, and a proposal was made suggesting those found to have done so should have their names posted in a public place.²⁵ By 1793, with no safety checks in place, denunciations based on personal animosities, innuendo and rumour could flourish, despite the penalties for false denunciation remaining. The Paris Police Archives are filled with reports of complaints of calumnies based on denunciations, whether on the part of the accused or the accuser, with an ever-escalating series of claims and counter-claims made by the

²³ Cited in Soboul, 'The Parisian Sans-Culottes', p. 143.

²⁴ The criminalization of passivity was explicitly referred to in, for example, a speech by Chaumette in the Commune in October 1793, in which suspect persons included those 'who, having done nothing against liberty, have also done nothing for it.' The sentiment was echoed later that month by St-Just: 'You have to punish not only the traitors, but even those who are indifferent; you have to punish whoever is passive to the Republic and who does nothing for it.' *Rapport sur la nécessité de déclarer le gouvernement révolutionnaire jusqu'à la paix* (19 vendémiaire, an II), cited Bronislaw Baczko, 'The Terror Before the Terror? Conditions of Possibility, Logic of Realization', in *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, vol. 4 *The Terror*, ed. Keith Michael Baker, p. 27, note 9.

²⁵ Lucas, 'The Theory and Practice of Denunciation', p. 775.

parties concerned. Post-Thermidor, complaints about being accused of false denunciations increased, which would seem to suggest a shift in the public's trust in the validity of denunciation as a practice, and an indication that to have the reputation of making a false denunciations was by this time, ultimately more damaging than to have been denounced in the first place.

Central to the power of the insinuated denunciation was the elasticity of the term 'suspect', as introduced by the law of September 17, 1793. 'Suspect' was anyone who 'by their conduct, associations, comments, or writings have shown themselves partisans of tyranny or federalism and enemies of liberty'.²⁶ What constituted 'suspect' behaviour was endlessly mutable and all-encompassing. Baczko notes the crucial role of 'the concept and representation of the suspect', in perpetuating Terror 'as a system of power threatening and punishing people for what they were, not what they did'.²⁷ Who was suspect was nearly impossible to define, and was under a constant process of reassessment and recalibration.²⁸ But like the brigand, the noble, the counter-revolutionary, or the spy, the perception of the suspect was both informed by and perpetuated by popular notions of threat. What differentiated the 'suspect' however, from these other stock representations of the enemy, was that there were no comfortably identifiable feature, no wig or elegantly cut jacket, no foreign accent or clerical robe. However, it drew on and amplified all of these fears, intensifying the rhetoric of exclusion while at the same time decreasing the parameters that separated 'the other' from oneself. Helen Maria Williams described how 'any good citizen was authorized to arrest every man in the street as an aristocrat, who held his head too much up or looked too much down, and also all those who looked on one side, instead of looking you in the face'.²⁹ Baczko describes how

²⁶ The Law of Suspects, 2.1.

²⁷ Baczko, "The Terror before Terror?", p. 26.

²⁸ Sophie Wahnich's *L'Impossible citoyen* suggests parallels between *étranger* and *suspect*.

²⁹ Helen Maria Williams, *An Eye-Witness Account of the French Revolution: Letters Containing a Sketch of the Politics of France*, ed. Jack Fruchtman, Jr. (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc, 1997), p. 170.

attempts to clarify the definition of suspect served only to confuse: the same session in the Commune that had explicitly criminalized passivity, also targeted assertiveness and grief.³⁰ Calm, zeal, sorrow – there were few human emotions or characteristics that could escape censor, leading Lucien Jaume to conclude that the Republican ideal of the *bon sans-culotte* left no room for individualism.³¹ When citizens were instructed, then commanded, to survey, observe and document every movement of their friends and neighbours, few would be able to withstand such scrutiny without demonstrating any degree of ‘suspect’ behaviour; and if ordinary behaviour came under scrutiny, then anything unusual was immediately worthy of further investigation. A woman bringing food to ‘un homme caché’ following the assassination of the deputy Le Peletier was immediately suspect due to the circumstances;³² less obvious was a lengthy report involving the meeting of a man and woman in the Jardin de l’Egalité, who the diligent spy pursued through several streets before concluding that theirs was an entirely respectable business transaction.³³ Petty rivalries and animosities, too, came to the surface and had a new resonance,³⁴ and friends’ and neighbours’ unusual behaviour was immediately viewed in a suspect light.³⁵ Individuals

³⁰ ‘1. Those who, in assemblies of the people, arrest its energy by crafty discourse, turbulent cries and threats. 2 Those, more prudent, who speak mysteriously of the misfortunes of the republic, are full of pity for the lot of the people, and are always ready to spread bad news with an affected grief.’ Session de la Commune, 10 octobre, 1793, cited in Baczkó, ‘The Terror Before the Terror?’, p.27.

³¹ Lucien Jaume, ‘La Dénonciation’.

³² APP Section des Tuileries, 26 janvier, 1793. ‘Rapport au sujet d’une femme, qui, depuis l’assassinat de Le Peletier, porte à manger à un homme caché.’

³³ APP Section de Buttes des Moulins, 7 frimaire, an II ‘Arrestation d’un homme et d’une femme à allures suspectes.’

³⁴ Ménétra, *Story of My Life*, pp. 221-226, for example, describes the culture of denunciation as being one of personal rivalries and vendettas.

³⁵ Jacob-Nicolas Moreau, *Mes Souvenirs. Collationnés, annotés et publiés par Camille Hermilin. Seconde Partie (1774-1797)* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1901), p. 481, describes how his family was viewed as suspect for lighting a lamp outside their house every night, while Jean-Nicolas Dufort de Cheverny, *Mémoires sur les règnes de Louis XV et Louis XVI et sur la Révolution par J. N. Dufort, ... ; publié avec une introduction et des notes par Robert de Crèvecoeur* (Paris: E. Plon, Nourrit et Cie, 1886), describes the arrest of his elderly lodger for obsessive letter-writing, and his neighbours’ surprise that he and his family continued to stand by her following her arrest.

were denounced for being too clean, too happy, too well fed, for arrogance or for vanity.³⁶ The *limonadière* who reported as suspect the well-dressed, high-spending crowd in her establishment³⁷ may genuinely have thought she had a counter-revolutionary cell liberally imbibing on her premises, but she may equally have been afraid of the effect such customers might have on her own reputation. On the other hand, she may simply have been envious of their money and conviviality, which, like the individual arrested for eating with insulting relish and *gourmandise*,³⁸ suggested not only an equation of sensual pleasure with aristocracy, but a puritanical suspicion of pleasure *tout court*. Royalist sympathies could be detected in a slip of the tongue, as with the individual who unthinkingly referred to the Palais-Royal, rather than by its new name of Palais d’Égalité,³⁹ or by the individual arrested for describing the throne as ‘solid’. Rather than an expression of his beliefs on the permanence of the monarchy, he had been describing the actual conflagration destroying the effects plundered from the Tuileries palace. The fact he was a priest no doubt contributed to a wilful misunderstanding of his intent and he was sent to prison but later released.⁴⁰

The fervour with which some quarters embraced the practice of denunciation, and the all-encompassing definition of ‘suspect’ was revealed in a letter from the revolutionary committee for the Section de la Cité, demanding the re-arrest of a suspect who had been released without charge

³⁶ Helen Maria Williams, vol. 1, p. 118. ‘One person was sent to prison because aristocracy was written in his countenance; another, because it was said to be hidden at his heart; many were deprived of liberty, because they were rich; others because they were learned; and most who were arrested enquired the reason in vain.’

³⁷ APP Section de Tuileries, 6 thermidor, an II. ‘Déclaration faite par une limonadière au sujet d’individus qui lui paraissent suspects.’

³⁸ Cited Chapter III, note 12.

³⁹ APP Section de Butte des Moulins, 25 février, 1793.

⁴⁰ APP Section Divers/Section des Invalides, 10 août, 1793. ‘Le 10 août ... deux citoyens membres de la Commune nous ont présenté un citoyen accusé d’avoir tenu des propos inciviques sur la place de la Révolution le temps où l’on livrait aux flammes les attributs de la royauté. ... Le déposant lui assure avoir entendu dire, le moment ces attributs de la royauté se réduisaient en cendre excepté le trône qui résistait au feu, le suspect citoyen a dit que le trône était solide et qu’il ne tombait pas; il a mal exprimé ce qu’il a vu sans autre motif.’

after questioning by the police.⁴¹ For this, the committee ‘denounced’ the police themselves for not detaining the suspect, all the while reiterating the importance of surveillance.

Such was the exhortation to observe, report and denounce that the threat of denunciation was often used as a means to intimidate, to settle a score, or for other personal reasons, all of which were quite separate from any actual suspect activity. In nivôse year II, one Joseph Charlary Daunoire made a declaration to his section, describing threats by a woman to denounce him as a counter-revolutionary.⁴² A long-standing dispute over an unpaid debt had led her to threaten to denounce him to all and every tribunal and committee (‘aux tribunaux ou comités tant révolutionnaires que de sureté générale’).

The accusations against Daunoire were described in the vaguest of terms – he was a ‘bad citizen’, who had ‘blasphemed against the Revolution’ – for which proof would be forthcoming as necessary. The public nature of the threats was addressed by the plaintiff, not simply to provide evidence of witnesses, but also, as with any public insult, as a means of expressing the gravity of the charge. The woman, in threatening an official denunciation had already made a public attack on Daunoire’s reputation – with the threat of arrest hanging over him, however, the need to clear his name becomes ever more urgent. This incident highlights the social repercussions of living in a society which encouraged citizens to denounce one another, a denunciation culture which not only bred suspicion between individuals, it actively promoted the seeking

⁴¹ APP Section Divers/Section de la Cité, 29 août, 1793. ‘Nous dénonçons l’administration de police pour avoir mis en liberté le citoyen Maillard. ... Citoyens, que deviendra la liberté, que deviendra la révolution, si de pareilles infractions sont commises par les autorités. ... A quoi sert la surveillance exercée envers les gens suspects par les comités révolutionnaires, si les mesures qui’ ils prennent en conséquence sont ainsi paralysées par ceux mêmes qui doivent non seulement les soutenir, mais même les stimuler en cas de besoin?’

⁴² APP Section de Butte des Moulins, 5 nivôse, an II. ‘Déclaration du citoyen Joseph Charlary Daunoire au sujet d’une femme qui menace de le dénoncer en tant que contre-révolutionnaire. ... elle disait que c’était un mauvais citoyen pour avoir blasphémé contre la Révolution et qu’en plus elle en avait les preuves. ... Une foule d’imprécations et de menaces sont finalement sorties de la bouche de cette femme ... qui entre autres menaces à dit ... [qu’] elle le conduirait, lui, et toute sa famille, à la guillotine. Toutes ces menaces ont été entendues par les voisins, ainsi que des personnes rattachées à son service.’

out of suspect behaviour, and in so doing redefined the parameters of social exchanges. From the perspective of the plaintiff, the woman was exploiting the practice of denunciations as a means to intimidate, or at least to add some pressure to obtain the money owed. From her point of view, however, she might have sincerely believed he was indeed engaged in counter-revolutionary activity: he was a successful businessmen who not only owed a considerable sum of money to her brother in law ('six mille et quelques centaines de livres'), he was very high-handed when asked to pay what was due ('Les affaires de son beau-frère ne sont pas les siennes'). Material wealth and arrogance – according to Jacobin doctrine, these were both indicators of an enemy of the Republic. That the threats were uttered in the hearing of others (both neighbours and employees) would have damaged his standing among them, whether or not the accusations were true; by contacting the authorities himself he was not only potentially turning the tables on his accuser (false denunciation, as will be discussed below, was a criminal offence), he was also attempting to re-establish his reputation.

However, despite the fervour with which citizens were encouraged to denounce suspect behaviour, and the enthusiasm with which many did, the authorities were aware that personal animosity, spite or retribution might have prompted the accusation, as the procès of one Marie Therèse Chauffeu, an innkeeper, in year II revealed.⁴³ Following an unspecified denunciation against her husband, she was closely interrogated regarding her domestic arrangements, which revealed the fact she was often known to leave the marital home to stay with her sister in the Section de Butte des Moulins. That this might be evidence of marital discord led to questions about her relationship with one of her lodgers, who, it transpired, had stayed at the same address. Suspicious that the wife's denunciation against her husband might have had something to do with this third party, the authorities ordered her to be taken to the Conciergerie. The suspicion that illicit couples might connive to denounce an inconvenient spouse underpinned other

⁴³ APP Section Divers/Interrogatoires, 265. Commune de Paris, 11 pluviôse, an II. Procès de Marie-Thérèse Chauffeu, la femme de Taboureau.

interrogations relating to false denunciations, and official lines of questioning often took a very personal turn. Such inquiries reveal increasing state intrusion into personal affairs, with lack of privacy no longer solely the preserve of the poor living in overcrowded accommodation.

As the boundary between the public and private eroded,⁴⁴ so the company one kept was increasingly used as evidence of suspect behaviour. This could encompass a wide range of accusations, from general immorality to criminal complicity. The previous chapter explored how individual reputations were affected by the reputation of one's cohorts. Judging individuals by the company they kept was not new to the Revolution, but it became formalised through the emphasis on fraternisation in sans-culotte discourse and practice, which called for oaths of allegiance not only to the Revolution, but also commitment to one's peers. In contrast to such public displays of camaraderie and solidarity, then, were the private relationships that took place behind closed doors, which were redolent of the *salon*, of patronage and of undue influence. Denunciations of *conventionnels* frequently referred to private dinners, which not only suggested unfair material privilege, but also implied back room negotiations, particularly if the accused was rumoured to have dined with a now-discredited public figure.⁴⁵ The infractions, real or imagined, of one's friends or immediate peer group reflected badly on oneself at all levels of society, with fraternisation with a suspected criminal immediate cause for suspicion. Women acquaintances were often presumed to be accomplices of men under investigation. When the landlord of a *maison garnie* was questioned by the authorities regarding

⁴⁴ Lisa Jane Graham, 'Crimes of Opinion: Policing the Public in Eighteenth-Century Paris' in *Visions and Revisions of Eighteenth-Century France*, ed. Christine Adams, Jack Censer and Lisa Jane Graham (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1997) says on the relationship between policing and public space: 'By the eighteenth century, the term *public* designated persons, places and practices that needed policing.' By this definition, during the Terror there was no longer room for the concept of private space.

⁴⁵ This theme recurs in debates recorded in the *Moniteur* during this period, in which the reputation of one's peers is called upon as evidence. On 12 April, 1793, the moderate deputy Marguerite Elie Guadet, under attack from the Mountain, reminded Danton that he was known to have attended the theatre with Dumouriez in the past, and referred to Robespierre having dined with Lafayette in 1791. See *Le Moniteur universel*, no. 105, pp. 468ff.

irregularities in his rent, a young woman lodger was assumed to be in a relationship with him and thus was considered complicit in defrauding the other tenants.⁴⁶

In addition to the endlessly flexible definition of ‘suspect’ was the equally adaptable yet no less powerful ‘on dit’. From July 1793, ‘on dit’ entered the police records with increasing frequency, and, as with the *observateur* reports sent to the mayor’s office (described in Chapter IV) the expression was both authoritative and ambiguous: ‘on dit’ represented evidence, and yet the witnesses were never named; it instead appeared to refer to common knowledge in the community, to a general mood or shared assumption. ‘On dit’ was the unattributed (and unattributable), yet powerful, voice of popular opinion. These denunciations based on ‘on dit’ referred to alleged crimes as varied as handling counterfeit coins, illegal burial, even murder.⁴⁷

As was discussed in Chapter I, ‘on dit’ was personified in a 1790 pamphlet as a many-headed hydra, the ‘last remaining aristocratic’ threatening the Republic by undermining public confidence through the power of rumour.⁴⁸ Its author cautioned readers not to fall under its spell, demanding they reject news that can only be corroborated by ‘on dit’ as nothing more than ridiculous gossip.

Boussemart’s pamphlet presents rumour as allegory, combining imagery from the Classical world with that of the Old Testament. As well as the many-headed hydra, it is likened to a serpent and a viper. By rejecting its power, it

⁴⁶ APP Section Divers, 11 pluviôse, an II. ‘Procès de Marie Madeleine Geneviève Rabaye et femme Chabanne, âgée de 32 ans.’

⁴⁷ APP, Section d’Arcis, 11 fructidor, an II. ‘Dénonciation contre un ancien guichetier qui a été, dit-on, l’agent des fabricateurs de fausse monnaie.’ APP Section de Popincourt, 15 germinale, an II. “Dénonciation contre le fossoyeur de la section qui, dit-on, enterre les cadavres même à la terre.” APP Section d’Arcis, 15 ventôse, an II. “Dénonciation contre un individu qu’on dit avoir commis plusieurs assassinats.’

⁴⁸ L.R.J. Boussemart, *On me l’a dit* (Paris, 1790).

will be cast into eternal flame.⁴⁹ André Morellet, in a contemporaneous pamphlet not published until after his death addressed the problem of ‘on’ from a philosophical and linguistic perspective.⁵⁰ In so doing he highlighted its effectiveness in communicating unattributed information with conviction yet no personal responsibility, and the ramifications of this. ‘On’ was popularly understood to refer either to a ‘great authority’ or to ‘a large number of well-informed people’. Because of this, he warned of the ease with which unsubstantiated calumny or slander could be accepted into the wider community, entirely on the strength of ‘on’.

Is this not the method commonly employed by calumny...? *They* say that she lives with Mr So-and-so; *they* assure us that that officer had an adventure that didn’t end well; *they* think that minister won’t go far. In each of these examples, they, depending on the intent of the speaker, means either a great authority, or a large number of well informed people, and once accepted, who would doubt that Madame was not amorous, that the soldier not a coward, and that the man in question won’t soon be fired?⁵¹

Morellet calls for a ban on the indefinite article ‘on’, calling for the accuracy of ‘a precise and known name.’⁵² ‘On’ is neither precise, nor known; on the contrary, it refers to unspecified multitudes:

Grammarians call this an indefinite particle; but they could more logically say that it is infinite, because he who uses it often believes, or at the very least wants it to be believed, that it includes an infinite number of individuals.⁵³

⁴⁹ Ibid. ‘[C]e fanfaron ... ira cacher sa honte & retrouver bientôt ... la Discorde, au fond des enfers, où ces deux monstres resteront enchaînés pour y subir éternellement les supplices que leurs crimes méritent’.

⁵⁰ Abbé André Morellet, ‘Remarques Philosophiques grammatico-morales sur la particule ON’ in *Mélanges de littérature et de philosophie du 18ème siècle*, vol. 4. (Paris: 1818).

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 224. ‘N’est-ce pas aussi la méthode commune employée par la calomnie ... ? *On* dit qu’elle vit avec M. un tel; *on* assure que cet officier a eu une aventure dont il ne s’est pas bien tiré; *on* pense que ce ministre n’ira pas loin. Dans tous ces sens, *on*, selon l’intention de celui qui l’emploi, signifie ou des grandes autorités, ou un grand nombre de personnes bien instruites; et cette signification une fois admise, qui peut douter que madame ne soit galante, que le militaire ne soit pas lâche, et que l’homme en question ne soit pas bientôt chassé?’

⁵² Ibid., p. 230.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 225, ‘Les grammairiens disent que cette particule est indéfinie; mais ils pourraient dire avec plus de raison qu’elle est infinie, puisqu’elle comprend souvent dans l’opinion de

In his examination of the imprecision of 'on' Morellet highlighted a larger concern that had arisen and been identified by writers and deputies during the earliest days of the Revolution: that key words and concepts central to the establishment of the Republic could be and were misappropriated, their definitions distorted by what Sophia Rosenfeld refers to as 'an ever-expanding number of public spokesmen'.⁵⁴ She argues that 'as new vocabulary was being invented for new ideas, and old terms took on new meanings ... the sense that the significance of words was becoming dangerously unstable and malleable increased'. Not only was the use of 'on' simultaneously authoritative yet unattributed, implying consensus by an unspecified public, the very language employed by that public might have multiple, conflicting meanings, with, as Rosenfeld describes 'accusations of ... deliberate *abus des mots*' from adversaries on all points of the political spectrum.⁵⁵ 'On' was exploited in the same way that the words, concepts or opinions attributed to it were. James Billington similarly identifies how the mercurial, shape-shifting nature of language contributed to the impact of denunciations when he refers to the 'power of badly defined words' combined with the camouflage of 'on dit'.⁵⁶

Both of these concerns come into play when looking at the language of denunciation: the imprecise yet authoritative 'on', coupled with the repetition of key words whose meanings were not fixed and could be influenced by the speaker or the circumstances, meant that the accused was often facing shadowy accusations based on innuendo and conjecture – or even on a simple misunderstanding, but one that could only arise in a society conditioned to discover plots even when there are none. Helen Maria

celui qui l'emploie, ou du moins qu'il veut lui faire comprendre, un nombre infini d'individus.'

⁵⁴ Sophia Rosenfeld, *A Revolution in Language: The Problem of Signs in Late Eighteenth-Century France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 134.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ James H. Billington, *Fire in the Minds of Men: Origins of the Revolutionary Faith* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), p. 38.

Williams, imprisoned in the Luxembourg palace, described hearing of the plight of a pair of fellow inmates, an unimpeachably patriotic count and countess with a long record of Republican ardour and generous civic donations. Their arrest was due to an intercepted letter that referred to a broken marble hearth – a *foyer* that must be repaired at Paris.’ *Foyer*, also meaning the ‘central point of a system’, was seized upon as evidence of a counter-revolutionary cell needing reinforcements. Williams imagined the Revolutionary committee discovering the letter: “‘Here,” said they, “is a daring plot indeed! A foyer of counter-revolution, and to be repaired at Paris! We must instantly seize the authors and the accomplices.” In vain the Countess related the story of the hearth, and asserted that no conspiracy lurked beneath the marble.’⁵⁷ (The final irony, of course, is that the story recounted was itself embellished in the telling; Helena Maria Williams had no way of knowing the words of the Revolutionary committee.) However, as with the incident above referring to the indestructibility of the throne, the presumption of guilt took advantage of linguistic ambiguity as evidence.

What Williams described as the Jacobin culture of ‘denouncing indiscriminately’ meant that ‘the completion of one prophecy gave an air of credit to the rest.’⁵⁸ Allport and Postman’s study of rumour identifies a ‘levelling’ and ‘sharpening’ effect, in which extraneous details fall away (‘levelling’), while those that remain are ‘sharpened’ or exaggerated.⁵⁹ This simultaneous simplification and exaggeration of detail has a direct correlation with the evidence used in denunciations. Denunciations were not only often based on rumours, in that the evidence might be scant or insubstantial to the point of non-existent, they also were influenced by a similar process of simplification and exaggeration, which allowed no room for nuance or ambiguity: the interpretation of ‘foyer’ to mean a counter-

⁵⁷ Helen Maria Williams, vol. I, p. 57.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁵⁹ Gordon W. Allport and Leo Postman, ‘An Analysis of Rumor’, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 10, no. 4 (1946-1947), p. 504.

revolutionary cell was influenced directly by existing prejudices about the letter writers as a generic type (i.e. aristocrats). Had the letter been addressed to a *bon sans-culotte* the incriminating word might have been interpreted differently.

'On dit', then, served different functions in the discourse of denunciation. When relating to a specific accusation it might take the place of a named eye witness. Of the many examples in the Police Archives, for example, are denunciations based on alleged hoarding of gold,⁶⁰ of reports of a heavy trunk 'said to have been left at the house of Dumouriez's cousin',⁶¹ of an individual who was 'believed to be English and who has bought many horses'⁶² of another 'said to correspond with the Girondins'.⁶³ This is Morellet's nameless but authoritative 'on dit'. Yet in denunciations 'on' also served as a generalised character assessment, the 'on dit' of popular opinion, of Morellet's 'personnes bien instruites'. When 'on dit' was employed in judgement of individual personal reputations, reference to a specific crime was no longer necessary. These nebulous accusations, weighted with the evidence of 'on dit', could be easily adapted to reflect the rhetoric of the Law of Suspects, in which individual 'conduct, associations, [and] comments'⁶⁴ both past and present, were viewed through the lens of patriotic surveillance and inevitably found wanting. The case studies below will demonstrate this.

Marisa Linton, in her analysis of Jacobin conspiracy rhetoric explores how the Girondin purge of May 1793 heralded the increasing scrutiny of private

⁶⁰ APP, Section de Butte des Moulins, 24 juillet, 1792. 'Dénonciation contre un individu qu'on dit posséder des baquets pleins de livres et de sous.'

⁶¹ APP Section de Beaubourg, 10 janvier, 1793. 'Dénonciation relative à des malles très pesantes qui, dit-on, ont été déposées dans une maison de campagne qui appartient à un cousin de Dumouriez.'

⁶² APP Section d'Observatoire, 8 février, 1792. 'Dénonciation contre un particulier qu'on croit anglais et qui achète beaucoup de chevaux.'

⁶³ APP Section des Champs-Élysées, 23 juillet, 1793. 'Dénonciation contre un nommé Durfour qu'on dit avoir des intelligences avec les fédérés de Rouen et les Girondins.'

⁶⁴ Law of Suspects, 2.i.

behaviour and personal reputations as a measurement of Republican virtue.⁶⁵ Not only were rumours of fiscal impropriety evidence of political corruption, but friendships and personal associations were also under observation, as evidence of cronyism or favouritism, and, by extension, secret plots and counter-revolutionary conspiracy.⁶⁶ Among such 'signs' that might reveal a meeting of conspirators were 'private friendships, suspicious gestures and overacting'.⁶⁷ A similar range of behavioural patterns and indicators – friendships, personal associations, gestures and speech – were all scrutinised and assessed in denunciations, amplified and intensified by a consensus view informed by popular opinion and rumour, as will be seen below.

Details of the arrest of one Jean-Baptiste Leclerc, a government clerk, provides an example of the symbiotic relationship between rumour and reputation and their combined role in denunciation.⁶⁸ The denunciation was damning: Leclerc was arrested for suspected *incivisme*. He was known to be argumentative, to have been arrested several times before, and, in general, was regarded as 'un assez mauvais citoyen'. He drank, he argued, he larked about; his conduct was not fittingly serious and Republican. And yet, a close reading of the allegations against him reveal that many of the eye witnesses relied not on the evidence of their own experience, but instead on what they have heard about him generally; their views of his conduct were based on perceived opinion. In short, his reputation preceded him and condemned him. And what a poor one it was. As one colleague said:

⁶⁵ Marisa Linton, "Do you believe we're conspirators?": conspiracies real and imagined in Jacobin politics. 1793–4' in *Conspiracy in the French Revolution*, ed. Peter R. Campbell, Thomas E. Kaiser and Marisa Linton (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

⁶⁶ As Linton emphasises, individuals could not be seen to gain personal benefit from the Revolution. The importance of friendship and personal associations among deputies is also analysed in 'Fatal Friendships: the Politics of Jacobin Friendships', *French Historical Studies*, vol, 31, no. 1 (2008).

⁶⁷ Linton, "Do you believe we're conspirators?" p. 139.

⁶⁸ APP Section Divers/Section d'Arcis, 1er août, 1793. Jean-Baptiste Leclerc, âgé de 36 ans, employé au bureau du bien des émigrés, ... suspect d'incivisme, ayant tenu des propos contraires à la révolution en la tournant en dérision, et troublant ainsi l'ordre de son bureau.

I always considered Leclerc doubly suspect of aristocracy, in words as much as deeds. In the office where he worked, he dressed frivolously, indecently, and he not only did nothing, he disrupted everyone else.⁶⁹

But there was far worse: Leclerc rejoiced in news unfavourable to the Republic, all the while appearing to commiserate with his peers (a description which echoes so closely one of the myriad descriptions of ‘suspect’ described in a speech in the Commune a few months later as to itself raise suspicions).⁷⁰ He ridiculed his peers in the bureau, and was known to dine with a particular *ci-devant* (with whom, most certainly, he discussed counter-revolution). Those who crossed him were accused of being *mouchards* and his entire demeanour was at odds with his peers’.⁷¹ ‘In short, he is not fit ... to be in the company of good citizens and true Republicans.’⁷² This wording recalls Lucien Jaume’s observation about the suspicion of individual personality during the Terror.⁷³ Leclerc’s singularity was seen not only to separate him from his colleagues, but there was also the suggestion that he might somehow influence them as well.

The witness called for corroboration from other bureau colleagues,⁷⁴ who were equally vocal in their condemnation of the accused, despite not having

⁶⁹ Ibid. ‘J’ai toujours perçu Leclerc comme un homme doublement suspect d’aristocratie, tant par les propos qu’il tient que par les actions qu’il engage. Dans le bureau où il travaille, il se vêtait avec frivolité et indécence, et non seulement il ne fait rien mais en plus il dérange les autres.’

⁷⁰ See note 30 re: Session of the Commune, 10 October, 1793, calling attention to those who ‘are always ready to spread bad news with an affected grief’.

⁷¹ APP Section Divers/Section d’Arcis, 1er août, 1793. ‘Il ne fréquente que des gens suspects ... Lorsque les nouvelles distribuées par la clameur public sont mauvaises pour la république il s’en réjouit, tout en ayant l’air d’y prendre part., il a exposé a plusieurs fois les patriotes de bureau a être insulté pour leur opinions, il boit et mange souvent chez un certain ci-devant dont le frère est émigré [...] et a coup sûr ils n’entretiennent que des propos contre – révolutionnaires. Il traite tous ceux qui lui déplaisent de Mouchards et cherche à les nuire par tous les moyens concevables’.

⁷² Ibid. ‘En un mot il n’est peu fait, malgré son bel esprit, pour être en compagnie de bons citoyens et de vrais républicains.’

⁷³ Jaume, ‘La Dénonciation’, p. 193.

⁷⁴ APP Section Divers/Section d’Arcis, 1er août, 1793. ‘Ce que j’ai écrit peut être prouvé par tous les patriotes du Bureau qui sont encore mieux renseignés sur son compte que moi-même.’

first-hand experience of his behaviour. Several accounts revealed that the witnesses knew the suspect as a bad citizen only by reputation:

I only know citizen Leclerc through having seen him at the Bureau of Emigrés ... and because he works on the first [floor] and I on the third, I've never paid attention to his words. All I know is that he has been arrested several times for his lack of civic mindedness, and that the patriotic employees have told me that Leclerc is a really bad citizen; that's the truth.⁷⁵

His 'propos incivique', which were by common consent insulting to the nation, centred, according to at least three witnesses, on the absurdity of the *cartes de civisme*: 'Il se moque des carte de civisme'; 'il s'en fout des cartes'. What could, in other circumstances, be seen as evidence of a bureaucrat's frustration with bureaucracy was reinterpreted and recast in the sinister light of counter-revolution. The testimonies relied on the many witnesses' corroboration of one another's opinions, rather than an accumulation of evidence. Each incident – the rejoicing in misfortune, the levity, the disrespect for officialdom – appears to lend credence to the next, but on closer inspection it becomes evident that many anecdotes were either based on gossip, given extra ballast by the sheer weight of popular opinion, or were interpreted in the light of Leclerc's reputation. How, for example, could his mockery of the clergy be considered an example of *incivisme* if his character had not already been judged and found wanting?⁷⁶

Leclerc's personality was on trial, his personal foibles redefined as crimes under the Law of Suspects. As secrecy was suspect under the Terror, so the individual no longer has a 'secret' self, with attendant weaknesses or character traits; behaviour outside the narrowly defined tenets of

⁷⁵ Ibid. 'Je connais le cit. Leclerc uniquement pour l'avoir vu au Bureau d'émigrés ... et du fait qu' il travaille au 1er et que moi je suis au 3ème. Pour autant je n'ai jamais suivi ses discours ; tout ce que je sais, c'est qu'il a été arrêté plusieurs fois pour cause d'incivisme et que les employés patriotes ... m'ont dit que ce Leclerc était un fort mauvais citoyen; voila la vérité.' The expressions 'regardé comme un mauvais citoyen' and 'connu pour être un mauvais citoyen' recur throughout the testimonies.

⁷⁶ APP Section Divers/Section du Muséum [s.d.]. 'Un jour, Leclerc a sorti de sa poche un rabat de prêtre qu'il a posé sous son menton. ... [L]es bons citoyens ont rougi.'

Republicanism was now criminal. Despite the seemingly daily acts of *incivisme*, and inappropriate behaviour, however, and to the astonishment of Leclerc's colleagues, he received the requisite documents attesting to his patriotism.⁷⁷ How to explain this discrepancy? Could it have been that the colleagues who initiated the accusations were guilty of disguising personal animosities under a cloak of civic duty, and the remaining witnesses were swept along on a tide of 'on dit' and general consensus? Or does a society primed for vigilance find suspect behaviour where none exists?

Bureaucracy and official certification now gave individuals a legitimate reason for investigating the private behaviour of their neighbours. A decree of March 1793 demanded that the names of a building's occupants were clearly posted outside.⁷⁸ Landlords and owners of *maisons garnies*, themselves under surveillance because of their transient occupants, therefore, had a legitimate reason for knowing who was visiting their tenants. Such was the excuse given by the landlady who made an official complaint that her lodger had brought an unknown woman to his room,⁷⁹ although we will never know whether, prior to the ruling, she whispered behind her lodger's back or simply turned a blind eye. Whether these new bureaucratic and legal requirements compelled individuals to take an interest in others despite themselves, or whether they were exploited by the inquisitive gossip, the end result was the same: private behaviour was a matter of public concern, to the extent that any behaviour enacted in private – the very concept of privacy itself – became suspect.

⁷⁷ APP Section Divers/Dossier Jean-Baptiste Leclerc. 'J'ai moi-même été surpris, ainsi que mes collègues, du certificat que le comité lui a délivré après avoir entendu toutes les attestations portées contre lui. Ses confrères ont été scandalisé par le résultat du certificat.'

⁷⁸ *La Chronique du Mois*, 29 mars, 1793, 'Ou décrète que les noms des citoyens seront affichés à la porte des maisons qu'ils habitent.' Guittard de Floriban noted that this was to be carried out within three days. *Journal de Célestin Guittard de Floriban, bourgeois de Paris sous la Révolution. 1791–1796*, p. 140.

⁷⁹ APP Section de Butte des Moulins, 25 février, 1793.

With the idea of privacy synonymous with secrecy, and private implying covert, the full glare of peer opinion fell on individual reputations. Relying on character judgements as evidence of criminal behaviour became the norm. Witness accounts of what might have amounted to no more than a momentary indiscretion, and which might have taken place years ago, would be dredged up as evidence of present criminality, with the present accusation used in turn to interpret a (quite possibly) innocuous incident of the past. Documents relating to the arrest of one army officer, Citoyen Attiret,⁸⁰ in year II, illustrate the central role of personal anecdote in denunciation, and reveal how the mentality and laws of radical Jacobinism influenced individual memory. Comparing the testimonies against him with his own defence reveals the way in which hearsay and speculation were intrinsic to the culture of denunciation.

Attiret's case illustrates the relationship between individual personality, public reputation and perceived criminality. The initial investigation was launched due to 'plusieurs déportations contre [sa] moralité' which had cost Attiret the esteem of his peers and compromised his position as an army officer.⁸¹ The various accusations against him dated back to 1790. They included a lack of commitment to the new constitution, making unfavourable comparisons between his present situation and the Old Regime; singing royalist tunes; and referring to former Christian holidays. The accusations veered wildly from the uncannily verbatim, relying on total recall of conversations held years before, and the curiously vague, referring repeatedly to his '*ton moqueur*' or his 'unrepublican' character, without providing specific detail. This latter is consistent with the emphasis given to personal reputation in denunciation, which carries a weight and importance quite independent of the facts or evidence.

⁸⁰ AN AFII49/381/39. 'Comité du Salut Public. Copie de la procédure instruite contre le Citoyen Attiret, lieutenant au 3ème Bataillon de la 54ème demi Brigade. A l'avant-garde de l'armée du Rhin, Le 14 fructidor, l'an 2 ... Au Citoyen Michaud Général en Chef de l'armée du Rhin.'

⁸¹ Ibid. 'de le dénoncer comme ayant perdu l'estime de ses camarades et de ne plus mériter sa place parmi eux'.

Further investigation reveals the true nature of the accusations: Attiret was essentially on trial for arrogance; his individual character traits, measured against the strict parameters of acceptable Republican behaviour, had been found sadly inadequate. His accusers recalled incidents that had taken place several years before, and now interpreted them within the moral framework of Jacobinism. His mocking tone, according to accounts, was accompanied by 'equally disdainful gestures'. His 'lofty character ... [was] not Republican', while he disparaged other officers as 'peasants and picklocks' and hit his young servant. Witnesses reported having heard him compare the Republic to a child in a cradle. Throughout, Attiret's behaviour was evidence of his 'aristocratie', characterized not only by arrogance and high-handedness, but also a frivolity, a lightness of spirit, at odds with the radical Jacobin.⁸²

The Attiret case is revealing on several counts. It illustrates the way in which the moral codes of Jacobinism were retrospectively fitted to the earlier, less radical phase of the Revolution. In so doing, it meant that previous behaviour could be 'denounced' as counter-revolutionary according to a set of criteria that had not yet been established; the rules, as it were, had been changed mid-match. It also demonstrates the relationship between morality and the respect of one's peers. At the military tribunal, Attiret was not investigated for counter-revolutionary behaviour but for moral laxity, a characteristic that had the potential to undermine the confidence of his men. The importance of an army officer's reputation and its impact on his ability to lead was not new to the Revolution; in such a context the perception of reputation is as significant as actual deed if it affects the way in which others might respond to his command. However, the military investigation into Attiret's behaviour corresponds with the mechanics of denunciation in a larger Revolutionary context, particularly regarding the nature of the evidence provided and the significance it was accorded. Many of the testimonies depended on absolute recall of dialogue, from several years earlier, which was then newly

⁸² This would seem to confirm Antoine de Baecque's observation that the revolutionaries found nothing amusing about Republicanism. *Les Éclats de Rire: La Culture des rieurs au XVIIIème siècle* (Paris: Calman-Lévy, 2000).

interpreted through the puritanical prism of Jacobinism and often completely at odds with the motive described by the accused. Other of the testimonies seemed to confirm a general feeling, an 'on dit', which only stood up to scrutiny if the initial allegations were, indeed, watertight, creating a kind of closed-circuit of mutually corroborating evidence.

However, despite the numerous witness accounts seeming to verify Attiret's reputation for arrogance and mockery, the military tribunal suspected that it was based on the hearsay of 'quelques personnes malintentionnées'; that despite the many testimonies supporting a specific interpretation of his character, each alleged infraction had only one eye-witness. The military tribunal did not find enough evidence to convict him, and he was sent to a civil tribunal, who took a more robust view of the evidence and placed him under house arrest.⁸³ The evidence would indeed suggest that he had lost the respect of his peers; it was, after all, his peers who provided the evidence. But this itself is problematic, and points to a larger conundrum at the heart of denunciation culture: when an individual's reputation is under investigation, the witness account simultaneously provides the evidence as well as calling the reputation into being; even scant or erroneous evidence will conjure a narrative that reflects on the public perception of the individual, essentially creating a new reputation before the tribunal. What, essentially, is a reputation apart from what others say or believe to be true about another? The power of 'on dit', therefore – of what 'they say' about the accused – becomes potentially limitless in the denunciation process. Attiret's defence acknowledged this.

Attiret argued that his enemies ('les laches') had acted out of jealousy and spite.⁸⁴ In his defence he provided a dossier of witness statements attesting to his patriotism and good character, and describing how he had ascended the ranks of the army to lieutenant, a position which he carried out like a true

⁸³ AN AFII49/381/39. 'Un homme comme lui ne peut être qu'un très mauvais exemple dans un corps: arrêtent.'

⁸⁴ Ibid. '[M]es dénonciateurs n'ont été guidé que par une basse jalousie et ne sont que des vils calomniateurs.'

Republican. His account emphasised the qualities that are familiar from many such defences and personal attestations, citing personal characteristics of bravery, zeal, and energy.⁸⁵ As Chapter V described, the introduction of *cartes de civisme* and other official documentation provided an approved set of character traits essential to Republicanism, which all aspiring citizens must demonstrate, and more importantly, be known to demonstrate, in order to receive the required paperwork. That chapter set out to illustrate how citizens increasingly described themselves according to those characteristics. Attiret's choice of adjectives to describe both his fitness for the position of officer and his commitment to the Revolution is another example of this tendency.

According to Attiret's account, his service and character had never been in doubt, up until the time he was considered for promotion to captain. The warning of an impending denunciation followed shortly after, based, initially, on vague allegations that threatened to cast doubt on his patriotism.⁸⁶ From the point of the accused, a whispered smear campaign could undermine his company's morale just as successfully as a tribunal. In his defence, Attiret described how his actions had been misinterpreted, drawing attention to the fact that those making the accusations and the eye-witnesses were one and the same. The only independent witness his accusers were able to produce issued a statement containing only 'vague and indifferent' claims.⁸⁷ Attiret described how his comments had been intentionally

⁸⁵ Ibid. 'Ma direction suivit les principes et l'énergie qui caractérisent un vrai républicain; j'ai été pendant une campagne entière à la tête d'un détachement de tirailleurs et je ne crains pas d'avouer que j'ai fais preuve d'une bravoure rare; enfin – il y avait quelques méchants qui étaient mes dénonciateurs, mes ennemis, mais ils ne me reprochent rien sur mon service. Ce silence fait sans doute mon éloge.'

⁸⁶ Ibid. '[U]n de mes dénonciateurs ... disait qu'il y avait une dénonciation à porter contre moi et promit des informations sur mon patriotisme. La dénonciation ne tarda pas à paraître.'

⁸⁷ Ibid. '[I]l n'y a qu'un seul témoin pour chacun [des faits] et ces témoins sont les dénonciateurs eux-mêmes. Si j'avais manifesté des sentiments contraires à la révolution, alors toute ma compagnie, tout mon Bataillon, ne s'en seraient-ils pas aperçu? Alors qu'en réalité mes dénonciateurs n'ont pu trouver qu'un seul témoin...et si vous regardez sa déposition, vous pouvez constater qu'elle ne porte que sur des faits indifférents et vagues.'

misconstrued, with, for example, his comparison, made years earlier, of the Republic to a child in its cradle not an insult to the nation, but an innocuous – arguably accurate – reference to its then infancy. The darker interpretation provided by the witness, Attiret presumed, was prompted either by ‘complaisance’ or by fear of his denunciators – this latter a strong motivation to prevent being the target of denunciation oneself. The denunciation against Attiret relied on an accumulation of repeated allegations. In isolation, it might have been possible to dismiss or ignore completely individual incidents, but collectively they contributed to a slow drip of innuendo, which, taken together could cast even the most anodyne behaviour in a sinister light. Despite insufficient evidence to send the accused to the Revolutionary tribunal, these insinuations succeeded in destroying his reputation, and after 12 years of service Attiret was decommissioned, sentenced to live under house arrest indefinitely.⁸⁸ His description of the verdict as ‘a thousand times more cruel than death’ was not mere hyperbole; such a fate represented the complete annihilation of his reputation: ‘The representatives of the people ... declared that I should be seen as suspect in the eyes of the French nation.’ The success of the denunciation had cast out the suspect from society, forced forever to live on the margins. ‘Suspect’ is no longer a temporary condition, to be tried through a court of law with the possibility of resolution, it is a life sentence. If, prior to the Terror, outsiders were seen as suspect, even in such densely populated neighbourhoods as that of Paris, with the Law of September 22, suspects became outsiders – ostracised if not physically excised from the community.

In concluding his defence, Attiret warned the tribunal against giving undue weight to hearsay motivated by personal animosity. He called on the Convention to recognise accusations such as these as calumny:

If this decision was not revoked, the cruel will dominate our society. They will take pleasure in denouncing the most honest people.

⁸⁸ Ibid. ‘[I]l doit être regardé comme suspect aux yeux de la nation française. Un homme comme lui ne peut être considéré que comme un très mauvais exemple dans un corps: arrêté.’

But with a return to justice, I hope that the National Convention will make reference to my case, and recognise in the denunciation nothing but a vile calumny.⁸⁹

The evidence used against Attiret was a collection of personal recollections, anecdote and gossip, relating to incidents dating back several years. Although unable to plead his case before the Revolutionary tribunal, Attiret expressed confidence that, had he been able to do so, he would have proven his accusers to be nothing but 'vile calumniators ... driven by base jealousy'. This tension between denunciations and counter-accusations of calumny occurred frequently in witness statements. Attiret's defence, based on undermining the credibility of his accusers by in turn accusing them of calumny, was a fairly common one. For those whose 'crime' was based on peer assessment of their character, in many cases their only recourse was to cast doubt on the character of their accusers.

Attiret's denunciation was based on others' interpretation of specific incidents, none of which, in themselves, might be construed as counter-revolutionary, but accumulatively, and given a malicious interpretation, seemed to create a character assessment of someone unfit to be an army officer. His case illustrates how rumour, whether unsubstantiated or categorically disproved, is as powerful as incontrovertible evidence, and even can serve as evidence itself: accused of having lost the confidence of his subordinates and peers, the existence of the rumours are proof of a lack of confidence. The circularity of the argument is impregnable.

The denunciation of one Citoyen de Maimard on 28 October 1793 was even more generalised, based on a collective opinion that seemed to gain momentum with each additional signature.⁹⁰ Maimard was not accused of counter-revolutionary activity *per se*; indeed signatories made a point of

⁸⁹ Ibid. 'Si ce type de cette décision n'était pas révoqué, les méchants domineraient dans la société. Ils prendraient plaisir à dénoncer les plus braves gens. Mais la justice ayant repris son empire, j'espère que la Convention Nationale saura se faire rapport de mon affaire, et qu'elle ne verra dans la dénonciation qu'une calomnie atroce.'

⁹⁰ AN AFII49/380/31.

citing a distinct lack of counter-revolutionary behaviour, but that was, in itself, held up as an example of his general lassitude and lack of commitment to any principle beyond his own self-interest:

de Maimard is neither friend nor enemy of the Republic. A complete egotist, he has said on many occasions, in the hearing of others, that he would serve neither king nor country, but himself, and only in order to claim his pension ... He cares about himself too much to take measures against the state, and he cares too little about the state to serve it as he should.⁹¹

And, as with Attiret, these personal failings making him an unfit leader, having lost the esteem of his peers:

He is not a counter-revolutionary but he is even less a good citizen. He isn't a traitor, but one could prove he is a bad leader, with no interest in his subordinates, and having no esteem for, friendship with or trust in anyone.⁹²

As with Attiret's case, personal integrity and professional suitability were inseparable from the values of Republicanism, Maimard was not accused of specific counter-revolutionary behaviour: there was no mention of the vague but all-purpose accusation of *complots* or other behaviours typical of the traitor, nor was he accused of financial or moral corruption – the usual tropes of denunciation. Instead, his lack of commitment to any ideology was his ultimate failing:

[I]n the three years he has been here in the corps, he has shown no spark ; no indication ... of virtue. In short, [he is] too narrow-minded, too ignorant and too inflexible to take part in a Revolution provoked by the misfortunes of the people ... and carried out from a love of liberty.⁹³

⁹¹ Ibid. 'de Maimard n'est bon à présenter ni aux amis, ni aux ennemis de la République. Égoïste avant tout, il a déclaré plusieurs fois en présence des témoins qu'il ne servait ni pour le roi, ni pour la nation, mais pour lui-même seulement, mais uniquement pour atteindre à la pension attribuée à l'époque de long service. Il s'aime trop pour ne rien entreprendre contre l'état, et il aime trop peu l'état pour le servir comme il devrait.'

⁹² Ibid. 'Il n'est pas contre-révolutionnaire, et il n'est encore moins un bon citoyen. Il n'est pas un traître, mais on peut démontrer qu'il est un mauvais chef, n'ayant aucun intérêt pour ses subordonnés, et n'ayant ni estime, amitié, ou confiance pour personne.'

⁹³ Ibid. '[D]epuis trois ans qu'il est ici au corps, il n'a montré aucune preuve de lumière; aucun indice ... de vertu; ... Enfin, [il est] trop borné, trop ignorant, et trop impassible pour

The short, one-page letter is followed by three pages of closely written signatures. On sheer number alone, Maimard could not dismiss the accusations as mere jealousy. That is not to say, however, that numbers should be taken as proof of guilt, merely that many colleagues were willing to express their belief in his guilt and to commit to it in writing. Of those signatures, many may have found it politically expedient to agree with the majority, particularly given the nebulous nature of the accusations. Others may have been swayed by the volume of signatures, illustrating a facet of Allport and Postman's 'snowballing' effect of rumour, which gains momentum exponentially with rising numbers of participants.

As personal characteristics and private behaviour were increasingly held up to public scrutiny, the accused often countered their denunciations by claiming their accusers were motivated by jealousy. The lofty ideals suggested by the call for all good citizens to observe and report, driven by a common cause to serve the Republic and protect it from its enemies, was in danger of being reduced to petty rivalries and animosities. Whether driven by genuine concern for the safety of the Republic, malice or envy, these personal statements could destroy a reputation and lead to imprisonment. The solution for the accused was to attempt to unmask as conspirators those accusing others of conspiracy. The language of denunciation and counter-denunciation, accusation and defence, reoccurs in an ever-decreasing spiral as suspects attempt to cast their accusers in an equally bad light, in turn undermining their reputations and integrity.

Characteristic of such defences is a letter written by one Citoyen Rabaliati on 22 prairial, year II, detained with his wife in the Luxembourg prison for unspecified crimes.⁹⁴ In protesting their innocence, he called for a collective

prendre une part active à une révolution provoquée par les malheurs du peuple ... et exécutée par un amour pour la liberté.'

⁹⁴ AN W93. Conspiration du Luxembourg.

vigilance against those who had denounced them. The Jacobin rhetoric of plots and conspiracy, of a collective call to ‘unmask’ the shadowy conspirators threatening the Revolution, was now being redeployed and directed at the denouncers:

We are the victims of the jealousy of others. There is no doubt about it, my brothers! Prepare to unmask them, and rest assured that you will have served both justice and humanity...⁹⁵

In this example, personal jealousies have been elevated to a universal threat, an abstraction wielding the same power as ‘on dit’ against the twin pillars of truth and justice. The struggle to refute one’s accusers became a kind of war of attrition, in which claims and counter-claims were produced to discredit the accuser whilst restoring the reputation of the suspect. Many such documents referred to the ‘jealousy’ of others, a general defence that was difficult to prove or disprove. Less frequently, there were references to specific disputes. One such example is illustrated by the dossier of one Citoyen Joubert, a wineseller, in which it was claimed he was the victim of a vendetta. Over thirty documents attesting to his patriotism were supplied to the authorities in his defence, including his *carte de civisme*; a *carte de logement*; a personal statement listing all revolutionary activities from 1789, including an attestation of his participation in the events of 10 August; statements from his section (Guillaume Tell) and a covering letter describing his reputation as a good father and husband. Despite the support from his community and peers, however, he had been imprisoned in the Conciergerie on the word of one Brocheton, newly installed as commissioner of Joubert’s section, who had held a grudge against Joubert ever since the latter had been called as a witness against him in an earlier dispute.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ ‘Nous sommes victimes de la jalousie de quelques individus. Il n’y a pas à en douter, mes frères! Prêtez-vous à les démasquer, et soyez convaincus, que vous aurez servis en même temps et la justice et l’humanité’.

⁹⁶ AN W93. Lettre du 21 messidor, an II.

Dossiers such as these support the thesis argued by Alex Fairfax-Cholmeley that, far from being passive victims of the Revolutionary tribunal, those under arrest conducted spirited campaigns to clear their names, aided by their peers and families, and employing the system of accreditation and certification that the government had put in place.⁹⁷ Yet, as the case of Joubert illustrates, despite the necessary certificates, attestations, and the support of his section, when it came to denunciations, the power of ‘on dit’ was on an equal footing with even the most concrete proof of Republican commitment. The authorities were in a paradoxical situation: on the one hand, the demands for certification and demonstrable proof of patriotism should have allowed ‘enemies of the Republic’ to be identified with ease; on the other, the nebulous nature of denunciation was allowed to undermine even the most tangible evidence of patriotic commitment, as though the authenticity of the Republic itself was under suspicion.

While rumours led to denunciations, rumours about denunciations were also a great cause of anxiety, as an incident reported in the Section des Piques over several days early in messidor, year II, illustrates.⁹⁸ The complainant, Citoyen Lemarchand, recounted how one Citoyen Rouan told a crowded café that Lemarchand was due to appear before the Revolutionary Tribunal in a few days and would be guillotined.⁹⁹ When asked to explain himself at his section, Rouan was unable to confirm which ‘Lemarchand’ he had been referring to, suggesting that the maligned party in the café was guilty only in sharing the same name as the unfortunate suspect due to appear before the

⁹⁷ Alex Fairfax-Cholmeley, ‘Reassessing Revolutionary Justice: Suspects, the Paris Revolutionary Tribunal and the Terror in France, 1793–4’ (unpublished PhD thesis, Queen Mary University of London, 2011).

⁹⁸ APP, Section des Piques 3, 5 and 7 messidor, an II. ‘Déclaration faite par le citoyen Lemarchand, menuisier, contre le nommé Rouen, menuisier, pour avoir dit que le dit citoyen Lemarchand irait à la guillotine.’

⁹⁹ The importance of the number of witnesses to insult or other verbal infractions was discussed in Chapter V.

tribunal.¹⁰⁰ Yet idle speculation such as this could have serious repercussions, both for the accused and his entirely innocent namesake. The report, too, illustrates how quickly gossip turned to rumour, both in the casual exchanges of the café, and in the process of the investigation itself.¹⁰¹ Following Lemarchand's complaint, witnesses were called upon to interpret a conversation they had overheard, but not necessarily taken part in themselves, while the source of the (mis)information, Rouan, was himself uncertain of the identity of his subject.

The café incident above illustrates the difficulty in policing talk about arrests and denunciations. An arrest in the night, or speculation about a verdict, would naturally lead to gossip and conjecture, which might in turn affect the outcome for the accused. The denunciation of the bureaucrat Leclerc mentioned above demonstrates the influence of group consensus on an individual's reputation. Even those colleagues with no direct contact with the accused did not hesitate to discuss what they had heard of his behaviour, with the result that the group's perception of the individual carries as much weight as eye-witness statements. Likewise, speculation in a café, in the hearing of a group who may or may not be agreed on the identity of the suspect, could lead to unnecessary alarm, suspicion and guilt by association.

Denunciation-led rumours could present problems for the authorities in other ways, particularly when rumours led to crowd action or riots. Citizens might be encouraged to observe, spy and denounce, but they must do so within the framework of bureaucracy, not with such enthusiasm that they cause rioting. A report in the Section des Droits de l'Homme illustrates the authorities' attempts to curtail the kind of vocal denunciations that could

¹⁰⁰ APP, Section des Piques 3, 5 and 7 messidor, an II. '[I]l lui répondit qu'il ne savait pas si c'était celui de la rue Saint Martin ou un autre, mais qu'il croyait que c'était celui qui avait travaillé à la Convention.'

¹⁰¹ The role of the police and police procedures in perpetuating rumour has been identified by Arlette Farge and Jacques Revel, *The Vanishing Children of Paris: Rumor and Politics before the French Revolution*, trans. Claudia Miéville (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991) who observe that in reporting on rumours the police become part of the process that calls them in to being.

lead to rumour and unrest.¹⁰² The report details the investigation of one Citoyen Dariencour, who announced, on the doorstep of a local butcher, that some customers were given preferential treatment at the expense of others.¹⁰³ Following the issuing of cards and coupons to purchase essential goods in May 1793, public accusations of bribery or favouritism outside shops or in markets could have immediate repercussions, inflaming already volatile situations. Denunciations relating to the alleged dishonesty of merchants are a common occurrence in the archives, from short changing, inaccurate weighing and compromised quality of goods, to ignoring the correct procedures regarding cards, coupons and rationing, all of which was welcome information for the authorities. This incident is different, however, in that it implicates the authorities themselves: Dariencour's complaint against the butcher implied there was a two-tier system of provisioning, a suggestion, the police concluded, that intentionally put the authorities in a bad light.

Accusing those who criticised the government of calumny stifled debate and criminalised dissent. This incident frames that argument within the context of counter-revolution, with the authorities arguing that for Dariencour to claim such inequity and cronyism is a greater act of counter-revolution than the alleged act itself. Fortunately for Dariencour, he was found not guilty of making a false denunciation, nor of uttering calumnies against the authorities. Nonetheless, it was of the utmost importance that his allegation was noted in official records as false, in order to quell any potential rumours of corruption or favouritism among the authorities.

Others who made complaints or criticised authority were less fortunate and were arrested for 'dénonciations calomnieux'. One Citoyen Lagneau, speaking at the Convention on behalf of a fellow citizen waiting for aid from the *Comité*

¹⁰² APP Section des Droits de l'Homme, 3 prairial, an II. 'Arrestation d'un particulier pour des propos qui tendent à exciter la tumulte.'

¹⁰³ Ibid. '[L]es citoyens remplaçants ... avaient de la bonne viande tous les jours, tandis que depuis longtemps [le cit Dariencour] n'avait ... jamais de quoi faire un pot au feu.'

de secours, was called the next day to explain himself to his section's revolutionary committee, who had interpreted his comments as a 'denunciation' of their (in) ability to carry out their duties. When questioned, he said he had no denunciation to make of any of its members, yet, to be forced to appear before the authorities, to account for his public speech in this way, had potentially chilling repercussions on the decreasing limits of free speech and the need for self-censorship.¹⁰⁴

Although accusations of false denunciations and calumny curtailed criticism of authority and restricted legitimate debate, it was also a means by which individuals could attempt to claw back what shreds remained of their ruined reputations, by turning the tables on their accusers. Whether the denunciation itself was a direct accusation or relied on a more subtle combination of insinuation and innuendo, the defence relied on a particular model: the accused would provide proof of the generic qualities of *un bon patriote*, through relevant certificates and character references, as well as providing more specific evidence of personal commitment to the Revolution, whether, for example, as a proven *vainqueur de la Bastille*, or as a *bon père de famille*. The appearance of these documents suggest a correlation between the increasingly nebulous content of the denunciations and a correspondingly formalised set of criteria for the defence. As the qualities and behaviour expected of a good patriot became more exaggerated, the accusations against them became ever more generic and less defined. At the same time, by providing evidence of one's own unimpeachable integrity, one could immediately cast doubt on that of the denouncer, as though the two could only exist as polar opposites of one another. Such encounters are further evidence of the extent to which the unnuanced rhetoric of radical

¹⁰⁴ APP Section de Muséum, 11 germinal, an II. 'Déclaration d'un citoyen qui dit n'avoir aucune dénonciation à faire contre les membres du comité révolutionnaire. Le citoyen Lagneau s'est présenté au comité civil et le comité l'a invité à dénoncer les membres du comité ... et du comité révolutionnaire de la section ... contre lesquels il aurait porté des plaintes pour faute de négligence dans leurs fonctions. ... Lagneau répondit qu'il n'avait aucune reproche à leur faire ... et que s'il avait parlé hier dans l'assemblée générale en faveur d'une citoyenne qui lui avait dit avoir de grands besoins, et que s'il avait pensé que le comité de secours ... était sur le point de finir son travail et de distribuer les secours. ...[I] n'aurait pas ... demandé à l'assemblée générale à ce que les secours lui soient donnés.'

Jacobinism influenced the self-perception of ordinary citizens, providing a moral framework within which one could measure one's own actions against others, and an accessible set of criteria with which one could judge and be judged.

A limited comparison of the Police Archives between 1792 and year III suggests that in the months leading up to Thermidor there was an increase in accusations of false denunciations. This has several implications: that the government's program to encourage surveillance of one's fellows, influenced by the paranoid rhetoric of radical Jacobinism, was taken up with such enthusiasm by its citizens that a kind of denunciation mania took place; that this increase in denunciations emboldened the accused to mount their own attacks, by undermining the credibility of their accusers before their own cases could be heard; and finally, that the seriousness of the crime of false denunciation was a belated attempt to rein in the policy that had so encouraged a reliance on speculation, suspicion and rumour as evidence.

These spirited defences were not only between ordinary citizens and neighbours. Accusing officials of false denunciations and calumnies suggests a robust attitude to self-preservation. In brumaire year II, the Section de Fidélité reported a lengthy complaint against a police administrator who had, in a meeting of the Commune, accused the complainant of being an aristocrat and one of Pitt's agents. There was no worse calumny, the complainant continued, and it was based on no proof whatsoever, but was capable of doing irreparable harm to his reputation. But counter-accusations against officials were themselves high risk: because making false denunciations was a crime, to accuse another of making a false denunciation was potentially defamatory. Suspects, therefore, were in a precarious position: when defending and maintaining one's own reputation relied to a large degree on maligning another, there was always the possibility they might be accused of committing further infractions, e.g. calumniating another in the process of defending themselves. Similarly, the individual making the denunciation would have to be confident that their own credentials could withstand close

scrutiny. A witness called before the revolutionary tribunal in ventôse, year II, came under investigation himself for his 'violente et apparente aristocratie', whose testimony was suspected of being exaggerated for his own reasons and was therefore 'of limited use'.¹⁰⁵

Although the culture of denunciation might seem to favour those who best fulfilled – or appeared to fulfil – the criteria of a good Republican patriot, this was not always the case. Even a humble pedlar, characteristically on the margins of society and thus, as discussed in Chapter II, with more reasons than many to avoid the authorities, was confident enough of his innocence to bring a counter-accusation of false denunciation and calumny against three individuals who had accused him of dealing in goods for which he had no permit.¹⁰⁶ This raises the possibility that the system could have been beneficial for those who needed to re-establish a damaged reputation – if their accusers were found guilty of false denunciations, so much the better for the exonerated party. For many, however, an official exoneration was only just part of the process of rehabilitating one's reputation. Many individuals demanded published retractions or posters to clear their names of any residual suspicion.

Post-Thermidor this cycle of accusation and counter-accusation took on another dimension, as those who had performed their civic duty under the Jacobin regime now came under fire, described as 'mouchards' and held responsible for the deaths of many patriots.¹⁰⁷ Contributing to these denunciations, as Baczko describes in *Ending the Terror*, were the rumours of Jacobin atrocities which now circulated in the place of the counter-revolutionary suspicions that had reached their peak under the Terror.

¹⁰⁵ AN W76, doc. 143. 'Déclaration de témoin.'

¹⁰⁶ APP Section d'Arcis, 11 frimaire, an II. 'Plainte contre trois particuliers qui ont dénoncé le plaignant comme vendeur d'argent.'

¹⁰⁷ APP Section des Tuileries, 12 fructidor, an II. 'Plainte contre un particulier qui a appelé le plaignant mouchard du Comité de Sûreté Générale.'

The role of rumour within the Jacobin culture of denunciation was complex and ultimately paradoxical. On the one hand, the criteria by which patriotism and republican duty could be assessed and proven was, in theory, transparent and comprehensible, allowing patriots to identify themselves and be identified by others. However, increasing requests to be ever vigilant and aware of potentially counter-revolutionary behaviour created a climate of suspicion that ran concurrently with the avowed cult of transparency, with the result that anything that was not public was immediately considered suspect. This suspicion of the private extended beyond activities and behaviour conducted behind closed doors, to the private self, ultimately casting the notion of individuality itself in a suspect light.

Further factors exacerbated this suspicion of individuality. The endless mutability of the term 'suspect' stretched its definition beyond anything useful, either legally or practically, but its ubiquity was a universally recognised label that provided instant classification for anything or anyone that was puzzling, unusual or even moderately outside the strict parameters of what it meant to be a good patriot. These shifting boundaries and definitions, however, meant that past behaviours could be analysed retrospectively, resulting in denunciations based on recall of conversations made years previously, now interpreted and understood in the context of a very different political climate.

When an individual's reputation was on trial, the significance of rumours became even more pronounced, with witnesses referring not to what they knew, but what they had heard about the accused. But, who could blame them? When the issue at stake was, as in the case of Attiret, one of collective confidence in an individual's reputation, the public perception of the individual's character was the ultimate deciding factor. In such cases, the slow drip of accumulated hearsay and innuendo formed a formidable body of evidence, with the rumours calling in to existence the very crime for which the suspect is on trial.

And here is yet another paradox of denunciation culture as it intensified under the Terror: despite the explicit ways of establishing and demonstrating one's political credentials, this was still no match for whispered insinuations and slander – the very characteristics of Old Regime politicking that the Revolutionaries, with their emphasis on openness and transparency, sought to dispel. Furthermore, in acknowledging these rumours, in allowing them to be expressed as evidence, such a culture also authenticated them.

Conclusion

Rumours thrive in periods of social and political unrest. As scholars of rumour have identified, the combination of uncertainty and upheaval and a demand for information create a crucible for the spread of unsubstantiated news. The circumstances in the French Revolution were no different. Indeed, cataclysmic events such as revolution, war, and disaster provoke a need to seek and share information. In such an environment, even unconfirmed reports serve a purpose, allowing communities to explore, give voice to and share their anxieties, hopes and fears.

However, there were some circumstances particular to the French Revolution that made those living through it particularly susceptible to rumour. The rapid growth of print, addressing a much wider readership than before, was both informative yet potentially bewildering – even misleading: ‘In revolutions’, Arthur Young grumbled, ‘one rascal writes and a hundred thousand fools believe.’¹ If only it were that simple, however, the new government might have been able to control unsubstantiated rumour by issuing regular, informative decrees and official publications.

That they could not was due to several reasons. The first was that, despite Young’s reflections on the power of the printed word, news was conveyed through a variety of media and came from different sources: print might have had a larger reach than before, but it did not supplant other forms of communication, such as the spoken word, eyewitness reports or personal letters. Consumers of print culture, even those new to it, were not undiscerning, and displayed an ability to pass judgement and offer opinion on the content of their journals. As this thesis has demonstrated, when it came to the transmission of news, the role of authority was not a fixed one: personal anecdote or observation might at any time supplant an official

¹ Arthur Young, *Arthur Young’s Travels in France during the years 1787, 1788, 1789* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1909), p. 58.

report. Trying to make sense of these many, sometimes conflicting, sources of information contributed to the spread of rumour.

Another contributing factor was that, despite official efforts to do so, Revolutionary ideology did not sweep clean all that came before it. Old certainties were difficult to dislodge when faced with a new and challenging future. It was perhaps this anxiety that made individuals reluctant to relinquish what they knew, relying on the word of a friend, neighbour or other trusted source. Among these was a pre-existing, collective folk memory, comprising oral and personal histories, and providing a collection of familiar narratives that could be adapted to explain and interpret contemporary events. These narratives included easily identifiable tropes and recognisable themes, which had their antecedents under the Old Regime, but which could be easily adapted to suit Revolutionary circumstances. Thus pre-existing popular narratives about, for example, greedy speculators, degenerate aristocrats or treacherous females were integrated into present conversations, which were validated by historical precedents, themselves seemingly validated in turn by interpretations of contemporary events.

A third element, which contributed not only to the spread of rumour, but also the content of many rumours, and the fear of rumour itself, lay within the government. The fear of conspiracy – what Timothy Tackett has described as a conspiracy obsession – that was at the heart of much Jacobin rhetoric led the Revolutionaries to view rumour with great suspicion, while, paradoxically encouraging its spread.² Reports of conspiracies, both real and imagined, were a regular feature of Revolutionary discourse, and were transmitted to the public through a variety of channels – through speeches, official documents, and through the press. The rhetoric of conspiracy, with its reliance on plots and subterfuge, on ‘unmasking’ of ‘false patriots’, influenced public discourse, reaching individuals at all levels of society. The

² Timothy Tackett, ‘Conspiracy Obsession in a Time of Revolution: French Elites and the Origins of the Terror, 1789–1792,’ *American Historical Review*, vol. 105, no. 3 (June, 2000).

result was an atmosphere of anxiety to the point of paranoia, in which rumour was able to flourish.

The authorities, however, viewed the existence of rumour with suspicion. Having encouraged its people to be vigilant, suspecting plots and conspiracies at every turn, that they did so was seen as a sign of waning confidence in the success of the Revolution. This undermining of public confidence – of *l'esprit public* – through insinuated reports of the Republic's failings, was seen as a powerful weapon in the counter-revolutionary's armoury. Ironically, the government's evidence of the dangerous power of rumour came from their own circles: many of the revolution's key figures used rumour to undermine and bring down their enemies.

Despite attempts to introduce a system to monitor, identify and catalogue Revolutionary activity through the introduction of passports and other certificates, these still relied on community networks and personal attestations, beneath which an undercurrent of *on dit* and rumour might still be detected. At the height of the Terror, rumour played an unexpected – albeit unacknowledged – role in denunciations. This, again, had been facilitated by the authorities, who made surveillance and observation of one's fellow citizens not only a virtue but also a public duty. This ensuing culture of denunciation actively encouraged individuals to seek out and identify suspect behaviour. The definition of 'suspect' had shed any meaningful legal parameters, and therefore what constituted suspicious behaviour was open to a wide range of interpretations, vulnerable to innuendo and the weight of popular opinion, expressed by the ambiguous phrase *on dit*. Just as Morellet had warned, *on dit* represented a metaphorical but unattributed consensus of opinion; under the Terror it could be used as proof of guilt.³

³ Abbé André Morellet, 'Remarques Philosophiques grammatico-morales sur la particule ON', *Mélanges de littérature et de philosophie du 18ème siècle*, vol. IV (Paris: 1818).

Despite the authorities' attempts to monitor and control rumour, it was complicit in creating an atmosphere in which rumour thrived. That it did so represented a failure of the government's agenda on several levels. Firstly, it proved that despite the publication of government decrees, and of the efforts of the press, there was still an 'unofficial' current of news and exchange of ideas over which the authorities have no control. The very presence of this 'underground' channel of information was proof that official sources of news have been unsuccessful in claiming the minds of the people; that despite official efforts to educate and inform, individuals and communities continued to seek their information from and put their trust in different sources. There is evidence to suggest that this was in part due to cynicism or distrust in official discourse, but this was not the only reason why the authorities might be concerned about rumour. Rumour and innuendo are arguably Old Regime tactics, and therefore had no place in an open and enlightened Republic; that rumour continued to exert its influence suggested uncomfortable comparisons between the two regimes.

The scope of this thesis, both chronologically and thematically, did not allow an investigation of the role of rumour following the fall of Robespierre and beyond but some initial observations can be made. The end of the Terror did not end the spread of specific rumours, nor the role of rumour as a general phenomenon. The content changed to reflect contemporary anxieties: the rumours that arose during the Thermidorian reaction, for example, related to accounts of Jacobin atrocities in the Vendée. These, again, built on a series of tropes, which were readily absorbed into a collective folk 'memory', creating their own narrative. As Bronislaw Baczko argues in *Ending the Terror*, the spread of these accounts was a result of collective trauma.⁴ In the sharing and telling, they represented an attempt to work through and purge the experience, a collective way of making sense of the unthinkable. That these accounts evolved and became exaggerated in the telling, and which

⁴ Bronislaw Baczko, *Ending the Terror: The French Revolution After Robespierre*, trans. Michel Petheram (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

features were retained and enhanced, provides scope for further investigation. Accounts of 'Republican weddings' and *baignades* shaped and were shaped by popular perceptions of Jacobins as *buveurs de sang* and *cannibales*; as such they not only provided an outlet for a working through of collective trauma, but a reframing of recent history.

The way in which atrocities are recollected in nineteenth-century memoirs of the Terror supports the idea that recounting and narrating is a means of making sense of trauma. However, many of these memoirs reveal the influence of a 'folk' memory rather than personal recollection or archival evidence; that is to say, in many of these memoirs, rumoured accounts of events have not only been accepted as true, they have been integrated into personal histories. Ronald Schechter unpicks nineteenth-century accounts of the *bals des victimes* – the legendary dances allegedly held during the Thermidorian reaction to which only those who had lost a close relative to the guillotine were accepted – to reveal they are entirely absent from contemporary records.⁵ The elaborate descriptions of grotesque rituals recalled nearly thirty years later are informed, he reveals, by a variety of sources, including the authors' own traumatic memories, as well as by the Gothic sensibility of the period. And yet references to *bals des victimes* continue to appear as a matter of historical record.⁶ As a symbol of a society recently woken from a nightmare perhaps it is too potent to discard.

Such historical detective work allows us to reflect upon the relationship between rumour, shared narratives and personal recollection, and to consider the extent to which they might shape our own writing of history.

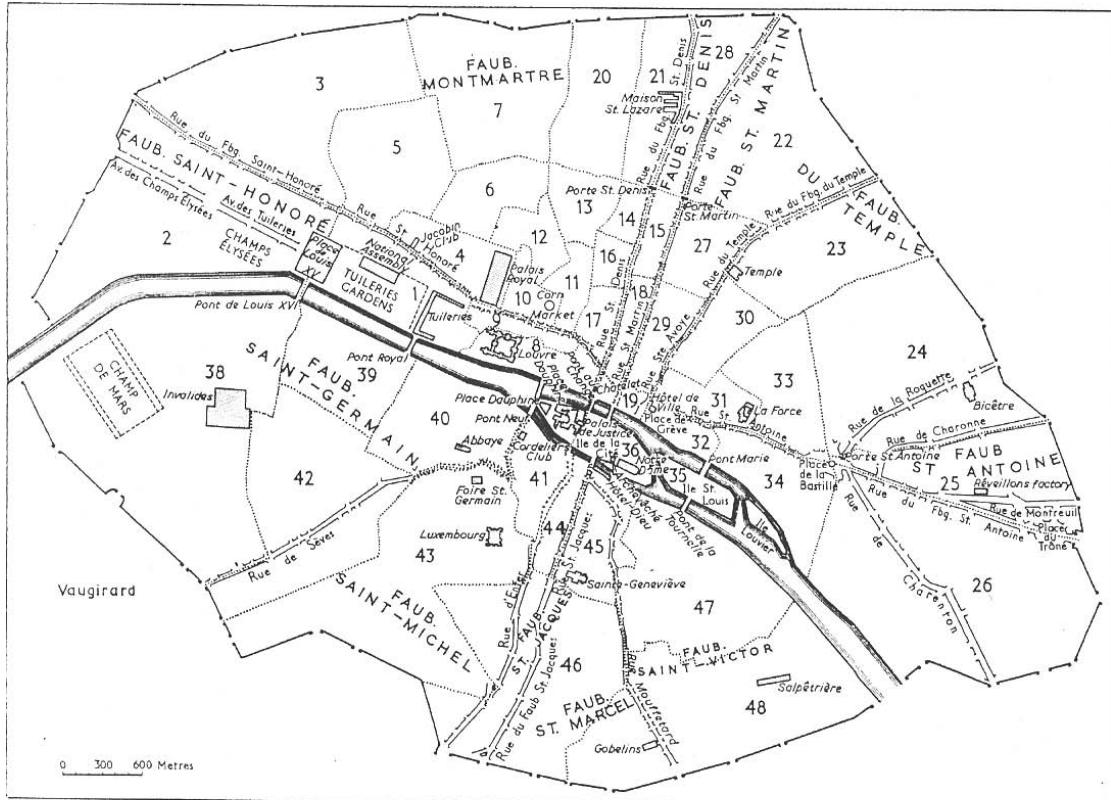
⁵ Ronald Schechter, 'Gothic Thermidor: The *Bals des victimes*, the Fantastic, and the Production of Historical Knowledge in Post-Terror France', *Representations*, no. 61, Special Issue: Practices of Enlightenment (Winter, 1998).

⁶ François Gendron, *The Gilded Youth of Thermidor*, trans. James Cookson (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), p. 31 does not refer directly to a source, but appears to draw on the account described in the 1824 memoir of the Comte de Ségur, supporting Schechter's argument.

Appendix A: *The Public Promenade*, Philibert-Louis Debucourt, 1792.



Appendix B: Map of the Sections of Revolutionary Paris



REVOLUTIONARY PARIS IN SECTIONS

PARIS SECTIONS

- | | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 TUILERIES | 17 MARCHÉ DES INNOCENTS | 33 PLACE ROYALE |
| 2 CHAMPS ÉLYSÉES | 18 LOMBARDS | 34 ARSENAL |
| 3 ROULE | 19 ARCIS | 35 ÎLE SAINT-LOUIS |
| 4 PALAIS ROYAL | 20 FAUB. MONTMARTRE | 36 NOTRE DAME |
| 5 PLACE VENDÔME | 21 POISSONNIÈRE | 37 HENRI IV |
| 6 BIBLIOTHÈQUE | 22 BONDY | 38 INVALIDES |
| 7 GRANGE BATELIÈRE | 23 TEMPLE | 39 FONTAINE DE GRENELLE |
| 8 LOUVRE | 24 POPINCOURT | 40 QUATRE NATIONS |
| 9 ORATOIRE | 25 MONTREUIL | 41 THÉÂTRE FRANÇAIS |
| 10 HALLE AU BLÉ | 26 QUINZE VINGTS | 42 CROIX ROUGE |
| 11 POSTES | 27 GRAVILLIERS | 43 LUXEMBOURG |
| 12 PLACE LOUIS XIV | 28 FAUB. SAINT-DENIS | 44 THERMES DE JULIEN |
| 13 FONTAINE MONTMORENCY | 29 BEAUBOURG | 45 SAINTE-GENEVIÈVE |
| 14 BONNE NOUVELLE | 30 ENFANTS ROUGES | 46 OBSERVATOIRE |
| 15 PONCEAU | 31 ROI DE SICILE | 47 JARDIN DES PLANTES |
| 16 MAUCONSEIL | 32 HÔTEL DE VILLE | 48 GOBELINS |

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Archives

Archives Nationales (AN)

I have consulted material from the following series in the Archives Nationales de France:

F7 (Police générale)

W (Juridictions extraordinaires)

AF II (Pouvoir exécutif)

AA (Collections de lettres et pièces divers)

C (Assemblées Nationales)

F1 (Police Surveillance)

Archives de la Préfecture de Police de Paris (APP)

At the Archives de la Préfecture de Police de Paris, the following unpublished inventories provided useful information over and above that of an index:

Documents à Consulter pour l'histoire de la Révolution Française: Répertoire Chronologique.

Inventaire des Archives de la Préfecture de Police.

Registre de Police ou d'Internement des Prisons.

The majority of the samples in this thesis came from series AA 48-266 Procès-verbaux des commissaires de police des sections de Paris, focussing on 1792-4, and including the following sections:

Amis de la Patrie

Arsenal

Arcis

Butte des Moulins
Droits de l'Homme
Fidélité
Fontaine de Grenelle
Muséum
Panthéon
Piques
Quinze-Vingts
Temple
Tuileries

Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris (BHVP)

Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BN)

French Revolution Collection, John Rylands Library, University of Manchester

French Revolution Collection, J.B. Morrell Library, University of York

Digital archives

Stanford University Libraries and the Bibliothèque nationale de France.
French Revolution Digital Archive. <http://frda.stanford.edu>.

'Imaging the French Revolution', *American Historical Review* vol. 110, no. 1
(Feb. 2005). <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/imaging/home.html>

Newspapers

Affiches, Annonces et Avis Divers, ou Journal Général de France, May 1793

L'Ami du Peuple

Le Chronique du Mois

Le Journal des Jacobins

Le Journal de la Montagne

Le Moniteur Universel

L'Orateur du Peuple

Le Patriote Français

Le Père Duchesne

Le Publiciste de la République française

Other printed primary sources

Anonymous. 'A conversation, supposed to have passed since the beginning of the month of December 1792: between Thomas Paine, Marat, Pétion, Dumouriez, and Roland; in which the views of France upon this country are somewhat developed.' London: John Bell, 1793.

A series of letters, containing a particular account of the massacres of Paris, in the months of June, July, August, and September, M, DCC, XCII, ... [London]: 1793.

Anti-Revolutionary Thoughts of a Revolutionary Writer: from 'The Secret History of the Revolution of France,' by Monsieur François Pagès. Salisbury: Printed for (and by) J. Easton, High-Street; and J. Wright, Piccadilly, London: 1800

The Cannibals' progress; or the dreadful horrors of a French invasion, as displayed by the Republican officers and soldiers, in their perfidy, rapacity, ferociousness, and brutality, exercised towards the innocent inhabitants of Germany. Translated from the German, by Anthony Aufrer, Esq. London: published by Wright, Cadel and others; and republished at Hartford, by Hudson & Goodwin, 1798.

Le Colporteur National. nos. 1 and 2. Paris: 1789. BN Lc2 256.

Corps Législatif: Conseil des Cinq-Cents. Rapport sur La Calomnie, fait au nom de la Commission de la Classification & de la Révision des Lois, Par Emm. Pastoret. Séance du 8 Brumaire, an V. BHVP 968757 no. 19.

Décrets de la Convention Nationale, du 29 jour de Frimaire, an second de la République Française, une & indivisible, Sur l'Organisation de l'Instruction publique. AN AF/II/48

Les Dénonciateurs Dénoncés. Paris [s.d.]. BN Lb39-4547

Les Dénonciateurs secrets dénoncés au public. Paris [s.d.]. BN Ld4-2954

Dénonciation à l'Assemblée Nationale & à l'opinion publique de plusieurs ci-devant Nobles, Curés et autres ARISTO-INCENDI-CALOMNIATEURS. Paris [s.d.]. BN Lb39-4653

Dictionnaire National et Anecdotique, [s.l.]: 1790.

French Revolution Collection, J. B. Morrell Library, University of York, microfiche 7/216

Discours sur la Censure Publique et la Calomnie Patriotique: lu dans une Société de patriotes. Paris: Imprimerie Veuve Hérissant, 1791. BN LB39 9773

L'Ecouteur aux portes. nos. 1 and 2. Paris: 1789. BN Lc2 256.

L'Eloge de la Peur, prononcé par elle-même, en présence de l'Assemblée nationale et des parisiens, Paris: 1790 [anon: Lenormant, Charles-Francois]. BN LB39- 3926

Flower of the Jacobins containing biographical sketches of the Leading Men at present at the Head of Affairs in France dedicated to Lewis the Sixteenth King of France and Navarre, etc. Second edition. London: J Owen, 1792.

Les Funestes Effets du Libertinage ou Esquisse de la Vie des Particuliers qui se son[t] révoltés dans la prison de la Conciergerie du Palais, à Paris, le 28 Septembre, 1784. Paris: Imprimerie Veuve Hérisant, 1784. BHVP 19844

Interesting Anecdotes of the Historic Conduct of Women during the French Revolution. Translated from the French of M. Du Broca. London: H.D. Symonds, 1802.

Journal Officiel de la Convention National (1792-3) Procès-verbaux officiel des séances depuis le 21 Septembre, Constitution de la Grande Assemblée Révolutionnaire, jusqu'au 21 Janvier 1793, Exécution du Roi Louis XVI. Paris: Librairie Populaire.

Journal Populaire ou Le Catéchisme des Sans-Culottes. Ouvrage sur l'Education et l'Instruction Par des Jacobins Dédié à la Société des Amis de la Liberté et de l'Egalité. vol. VII. Paris: 1792.

Jugement du Tribunal Extraordinaire et Révolutionnaire, qui condamne à la peine de mort, avec une chemise rouge, les surnommés ci-après [...] comme auteurs et complices de l'assassinat de Léonard Bourdon et qui met en liberté les nommés [...] non convaincu d'être complice de cet assassinat. BN 4-LB41-741

Jugement prévôtal rendu en la chambre criminelle du Châtelet de Paris, qui condamne Pierre Michelin à être attaché au carcan, dans la place de Grève [...] avec écriture devant & derrière, portant ces mots: (Perturbateur du repos public), & de suite conduit au château de Bicêtre [...]. BN Lb39-2229

Justification de M Bruneau, Juge de Paix de la Section de la place de Louis XIV, ... outrageusement calomnié dans une libelle imprimée et distribuée avec une profusion affectée, sous le nom de défense. Paris: 1791. BHVP 956011

Lettre du Ministre de la Police générale à tous les Préfets des Départements de la République, relative aux faux bruits répandus, sur la prétendue rentrée des Emigrés, et dans laquelle le Ministre recommande aux dits Préfets de rassurer tous les citoyens, parce qu'il n'y aura jamais d'amnistie pour eux. De l'imprimerie du Journal de Grenoble, chez Ferry, rue Chenoise [s.d]. BHVP 603102.

Mémoires pour les criminels de lèse-nation. BN BNF36305125

Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la Révolution Française par Sanson, exécuteur Royale, 1829. II vols.

Mémoires secrets des crimes et des forfaits qui s'ourdissent dans diverses tavernes. no. 1. 1er Mars, 1793. BHVP 19753

Municipalité de Paris. Par le Maire et les Officiers municipaux. Arrêté concernant la Lettre du roi, aux Maire & Officiers Municipaux, à Paris. Du lundi 13 Février, 1792, l'an quatrième de la Liberté. BN LB40-194

Nouveau dictionnaire français, à l'usage de toutes les municipalités, les milices nationales, et de tous les patriotes, compose par un aristocrate, dédié à l'assemblée dite nationale. Paris: 1790.

French Revolution Collection, J. B. Morrell Library, University of York, microfiche7/227

Observations du Samedi premier Janvier 1791. Sur des faux-bruits, relatives à un prétendu projet d'assassiner M de la Fayette. Paris: L'imprimerie du Postillon [s.d.]. BHVP 964371

Le Patriote Incorruptible, ou L'homme de Province. nos 1 and 4. BN Lc2 256.

Petit Dictionnaire des Grands Hommes et des Grands Choses qui ont rapport à la Révolution, composé par une société d'aristocrates, dédié aux Etats Généraux dits Assemblée Nationale. Paris: 1790.

French Revolution Collection, J. B. Morrell Library, University of York, microfiche 7/228

Procès des conspirateurs Hebert, Ronsin, Vincent et ses complices, condamnés à la peine de mort par le tribunal révolutionnaire le 4 germinal, l'an 2 de la république, et exécuté le même jour; suivi du précis de la vie du Père Duchesne. Paris: Chez Caillot, l'an 2 de la république [1794]. BHVP 10139

Procès de Marie-Antoinette, de Lorraine-D'Autriche, veuve Capet, du 23 du premier mois, l'an 2 de la République, octobre 14, 1793. Imprimé Mot pour Mot, selon toute la teneur de la Gazette Nationale, ou Moniteur Universel, du 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27 D'octobre 1793. Orné d'un portrait, En Miniature, Le plus vraisemblant de tous ceux qui ont paru jusqu'à ce Jour. A Londres, M.DCC.XCIII. [1793].

Procès-Verbaux du Comité d'Instruction Publique de la Convention Nationale, publié et annoté par M. J. Guillaume. vols I-VIII. Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1891-1958.

Procès-Verbaux de la Commune de Paris (10 août 1792–1 juin 1793), annoté par Maurice Tourneux. Paris: Société de l'histoire de la Révolution française, 1894.

Les Rues de Paris, avec les cris que l'on entend journallement dans les rues de la ville et la chanson des dits cris. Suivi d'un état de la dépense qui se peut faire en cette ville. Troyes: Vve P. Garnier, [1724]. BN FRBNF33334001

Silence de la Calomnie ou Adresse au Peuple Français. Paris [s.d]. BN LB39 8527

Société des amis de la liberté et d'égalité séante aux Jacobins à Paris. Discours de Maximilien Robespierre, sur l'influence de la calomnie sur la Révolution, prononcé a la société, dans la séance du 28 Octobre, 1792, l'an premier de la République.

BNF Lb40 721

Tableau des opérations de l'Assemblée Nationale: d'après le Journal de Paris: et auquel on a ajouté tous les articles de cette feuille, qui peuvent intéresser les arts [et] les sciences. vol. I. Lausanne: 1798.

Tous les absents n'ont pas tort ou Réponse au Domine Salvum Fac Regem, par un Homme de Lettres Patriote, Citoyen du District des Petits-Augustins. BN Lb39-2476

Vie Privée et Politique de J-R Hébert, auteur du Père Duchesne. Pour faire suite aux Vies de Manuels, Pétion, Brissot et d'Orléans. Paris: l'an II (1793-4) BHVP 6968

Aulard, F.A., ed. *Recueil des Actes du Comité de Salut Public avec la Correspondance Officielle des Représentants en Mission.* vol. I. Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1889–1951.

Bailly, Jean-Sylvain. *Mémoires de Bailly, avec une notice sur sa vie, des notes et des éclaircissements historiques, par M.M. Berville et Barrière.* Paris: Baudoin Fils, Imprimerie-Librairie, 1822.

- Barnave, M. *Grande Dénonciation faite à la Tribune des Jacobins, par M. Barnave, d'une quantité étonnante de libelles répandus dans Paris*. Paris: 1790.
- Barras, Paul, *Mémoires de Barras, membre du Directoire*. Paris: Hachette, 1895.
- Barruel, Abbé Augustin. *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire du Jacobinisme*. Londres: chez Ph. Le Boussonier et Cie. Et se trouve à Hambourg et Brunswick, chez P. F. Fauche et compagnie, 1799.
- Barry, Etienne. 'Essai sur la Dénonciation politique' in *Discours prononcés les jours de décadi dans la section Guillaume Tell*, vol. II. Paris: Massot, [1793].
- Bergoeing, François. *La Longue Conspiration des Jacobins pour dissoudre la convention nationale prouvée par Bergoeing, député de la Gironde et membre de la commission des XII*. BHVP 15521.
- Burke, Edmund. *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. London: 1791
- Bourdon, Leonard. *Rapport fait à la Convention Nationale, au nom des Comités d'agriculture et de Salut public, par Leonard Bourdon*. BN LE38- 2322
- Boussemart, L.R.J. *On me l'a dit*. Paris: 1790.
- Brissot, J.P. *JP Brissot, Député à la Convention Nationale, à Tous Les Républicains de France sur la Société des Jacobins de Paris, Paris 24 Octobre 1792*. BHVP 15521
- Charron, Joseph. *Lettre sur les troubles populaires de Paris, en Août et en Septembre 1788, avec des notes, par M Charon [sic]*. Londres: 1788.

Colson, Adrien-Joseph. *Lettres d'un bourgeois de Paris à un ami de Province: 1788-1793*. Saint-Cyr-sur-Loire: Christian Pirot, 1993.

Conan, Jean. *Les Aventures extraordinaires du Citoyen Conan (1765–1843)*. Traduit du breton par Paolig Combot. Préface de Mona Sohier-Ozouf. Morlaix: Editions Skol Vriehz, 2001.

Courriex, *L'Enterrement des Jacobins, ou le sang des Patriotes que crie Vengeance*. vol. 1, no. 15. Paris [s.d.]. BHVP 15521.

Debret, Valentin. *Thermomètre de l'Esprit Public des Français a la Convention Nationale. Les Républicains composant la Société Populaire régénérée de la Commune de Saint-Pol, Département du Pas-de-Calais*. 26 vendémiaire an III. BHVP 964984

Diderot, Denis and Jean le Rond d'Alembert. *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, etc.*, University of Chicago: ARTFL Encyclopédie Project (Spring 2013 Edition), general editor: Robert Morrissey. <http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu>.

Desmoulins, Camille. *Discours de la lanterne aux Parisiens*. Paris: l'an premier de la Liberté [1789]. BN Z CORR 3-102

Desmoulins, Camille. *La Tribune des Patriotes ou Le Journal de la Majorité. Ouvrage destiné à servir de suite au no. 86 et dernier des Révolutions de France et de Brabant*. vols I-IV. Paris: 1792

De Cock, Jacques, *Les Cordeliers dans la Révolution Française*. vol. II. *Textes et Documents*. Lyon: Fantásque Editions, 2002.

Dubreuil-Chambardel, Pierre. *Lettres parisiennes d'un révolutionnaire poitevin*. Préface par Claude Petitfrère; postface par Philippe Dubreuil-Chambardel. Tours: La Maison des Sciences de la Ville, 1994.

Dufort de Cheverny, Jean-Nicolas. *Mémoires sur les règnes de Louis XV et Louis XVI et sur la Révolution par J. N. Dufort, ... publié avec une introduction et des notes par Robert de Crèvecoeur*. Paris: E. Plon, Nourrit et C^{ie}, 1886.

Dunker, Balthasar Anton. *Esquisses pour les artistes et amateurs des arts sur Paris. Nonante et six figures gravées à l'eau-forte dont l'explication se trouve dans le 'Tableau de Paris', par Mercier*. Yverdon [1787]. BN V-10496

Elliot, Grace Dalrymple. *Journal of My Life During the French Revolution*. London: Richard Bentley, 1859.

Federici, Ferdinand de. *Flagrants délits sur les Champs-Élysées: les dossiers de police du gardien Federici (1777-1791)*. Edition présentée et annotée par Arlette Farge. Postface de Laurent Turcot. Paris: Mercure de France, 2008.

Friquet, Madelon. *Grand et horrible conspiration des demoiselles du Palais-Royal contre les droits de l'homme*. Paris, 1789. BN Lb39-7677

Fournier L'Américain. *Mémoires secrets de Fournier L'Américain publiés pour la première fois d'après le manuscrit des Archives Nationales avec introduction et notes par F.A. Aulard*. Paris: 1890.

Gorsas, Antoine-Joseph. *Précis Rapide des évènements qui ont eu lieu à Paris dans les journées des 30 & 31 Mai et 1er & 2 Juin 1793 par A-J Gorsas, Député à la Convention Nationale, l'un des XXXIV proscrits*. Paris: 1793 BN Lb 666

Guittard de Floriban, Célestin. *Journal de Célestin Guittard de Floriban, bourgeois de Paris sous la Révolution. 1791-1796*. Présenté et commenté par Raymond Aubert. Paris: Editions France-Empire, 1974.

Hardy, Siméon-Prosper. *Mes Loisirs, ou Journal d'évènements tels qu'ils parviennent à ma connaissance (1753-1789)*. vols 1 and 2. Présenté par Nicolas Lyon-Caen. Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2009.

Jullien, Rosalie. *Journal d'une bourgeoise pendant la Révolution, 1791-1793, publié par son petit fils Edouard Lockroy*. Paris: Calmann Levy, 1881.

Journiac de Saint-Méard. *Mémoires sur les journées de Septembre 1792, suivis des Délibérations prises par la Commune de Paris*. Paris: Librairie de Firmin Didot Frères, Fils et Cie, 1858.

de Langres, Lombard. *Mémoires anecdotiques pour servir à l'histoire de la Révolution française, par Lombard de Langres, ancien ambassadeur de Hollande et membre de la cour de cassation sous le Directoire*. vol 1. Paris: Ladvocat, 1823.

Lebois, René-François. *Rendez Nous nos Dix-Huit Francs et Foutez-Nous le Camp bien Vite*. [Paris] [s.d.]. BN Lb41 2923

Lindet, Robert. *Rapport fait à la Convention nationale, dans la séance du 4me des sansculottides de l'an II au noms de Comités de Salut Public, de Sûreté Générale et de Législation réunis (Paris, 24 septembre, 1794, vieux style)*

Lindet, Robert. *Discours [du 3 Germ de l'an III]...sur les dénonciations portées contre l'ancien comité du salut public et le rapport de la commission des 21 (Paris 1795)*.

Linguet, Simon-Henri-Nicolas. *Mémoires sur la Bastille*. Préface et notes d'Olivier Boura. Paris: Arléa, 2006.

Manuel, Pierre. *La Police de Paris Dévoilée*. 2 vols. Paris, l'an second de la Liberté [1791].

Marat, Jean Paul. *Dénonciation faite au tribunal du public ... contre m. Necker* [s.l.] [1790].

- Marat, Jean Paul. *Ecrits*. Présentés par Michel Vovelle. Paris: Messidor, Editions Sociales, 1988.
- Markov, Walter and Albert Soboul, eds. *Die Sansculotten von Paris: Dokumente zur Geschichte der Volksbewegung 1793–1794*. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1957.
- Ménétra, Jacques-Louis. *Journal of My Life*. With an introduction and commentary by Daniel Roche. Foreword by Robert Darnton, translated by Arthur Goldhammer. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.
- Mercier, Louis Sébastien. *Tableau de Paris*. vol. I. Amsterdam: 1782
- Mercier, Louis Sébastien. *Les Entretiens du Palais-Royal de Paris*. Paris: 1787
- Mercier, Louis Sébastien. *Les Entretiens du Jardin des Tuileries de Paris*. Paris: 1789.
- Mercier, Louis Sébastien. *Paris Pendant la Révolution (1789–1799) ou Le Nouveau Paris*. Brunswick: 1800.
- Moore, John. *A Journal During a Residence in France from the Beginning of August to the Middle of December, 1792. To Which is Added, An Account of the Most Remarkable Event That Happened at Paris from that Time to the Death of the Late King of France*. London: 1793.
- Moore, John. *A View of the Causes and Progress of the French Revolution*. London: 1795.
- Moreau, Jacob-Nicolas. *Mes Souvenirs*. Collationnés, annotés et publiés par Camille Hermilin. Seconde Partie (1774-1797). Paris: Librairie Plon-Nourrit et C^{ie}, 1901.

Morellet, Abbé André, 'Remarques Philosophiques grammatico-morales sur la particule ON', *Mélanges de littérature et de philosophie du 18ème siècle*. vol IV. Paris: 1818.

Muyart de Vouglans, Pierre-François. *Les Lois criminelles de France dans leur ordre naturel*. Paris: 1780

Paine, Thomas. *The Writings of Thomas Paine*. vol. III. Collected and edited by Moncure Daniel Conway. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1894.

Proudhomme, Louis. *Histoire Générale et impartiale des erreurs, des fautes et des crimes commis pendant la Révolution française*. Paris: an V de la République (1797 vieux style).

Rétif de la Bretonne. *Les Nuits de Paris, ou le Spectateur nocturne*. vols I–VII. London and Paris: 1788–89.

Riouffe, Honoré. *Mémoires d'un détenu par Riouffe*. Limoges: Bibliothèque chrétienne et morale, 1871.

Robespierre, Maximilien. *Œuvres de Maximilien Robespierre*, vol. IX. *Discours, Septembre 1792–27 Juillet 1793*. Edition préparée sous la direction de Marc Bouloiseau, Georges Lefebvre, Jean Dautry et Albert Soboul. Presses Universitaires de France.

Robison, John. *Proofs of a Conspiracy*. Boston: Western Islands, [1798] 1967.

Roland, Madame. *Mémoires de Madame Roland*. Translated and edited by Evelyn Shuckburgh. London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1989.

Roux, Jacques. *Le Publiciste de la République Française*. Paris: EDHIS, 1981.

Roux, Jacques *Scripta et Acta*. Textes présentés par Walter Markov. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1969.

Rouyl, l'Ainé. *Assassinats commis sur 81 Prisonniers de la Prison dite Saint-Lazare, Les 7, 8 et 9 Thermidor, par le tribunal Révolutionnaire, les Moutons et les fabricateurs de conspirations, dans ladite Prison; ensemble le tableau des horreurs qui furent exercées envers les détenus de ce tombeau des vivants*. Paris: Imprimerie de Guffroy [sd]. BHVP 19844.

Ruault, Nicolas. *Gazette d'un Parisien sous la Révolution. Lettres à son frère. 1783-1796*. Textes rassemblés par Anne Vassal. Introductions de Christiane Rimbaud et Anne Vassal. Paris: France Loisirs, 1976.

Saint-Just, Louis Antoine de, *Oeuvres complètes de Saint-Just*, avec une introduction et des notes par Charles Vellay, Paris: Librairie Charpentier et Fasquelle, 1908. t. II

Saint-Méard, Journiac. 'Recit de Saint-Méard.' In Saint-Méard, Beaumarchais, Riouffe. *Les Prisons sous la Terreur*. 2nd edition. Paris: Bibliothèque du Foyer, 1869.

Savine, Albert. *Les Déportés de Fructidor: Le Journal d'Ange Pitou, annoté d'après les documents d'Archives et les Mémoires*. Paris: Louis Michaud, 1905.

De Staël, Germaine. *Considerations on the Principal Events of the French Revolution*. Newly revised translation of the 1818 English edition. Edited, with an introduction and notes, by Aurelien Craiutu. Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2008.

Trassart, P. 'Discours sur les Bonnes Mœurs.' In *Discours prononcés les jours de décade dans la section Guillaume Tell*, no. 6, vol. 2. Paris: Massot, [l'an 2], 4 vols.

Vilate. *Causes Secrètes de la Révolution du 9 au 10 Thermidor*. Paris: l'an III (1795).

Williams, Helen Maria. *An Eye-Witness Account of the French Revolution: Letters Containing a Sketch of the Politics of France*. Edited by Jack Fruchtman, Jr. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc, 1997.

Young, Arthur. *Arthur Young's Travels in France During the Years 1787, 1788, 1789*. Edited with introduction, biographical sketch and notes by Miss Betham-Edwards. London: George Bell and Sons, 1909.

Secondary sources

Adams, David and Adrian Armstrong, eds. *Print and Power in France and England, 1500–1800*. Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006.

Agulhon, Maurice. *Marianne into Battle: Republican Imagery and Symbolism in France, 1789-1880*. Translated by Janet Lloyd. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Allport, Gordon W. and Leo Postman. *The Psychology of Rumor*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1947.

Andress, David. *French Society in Revolution*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999.

Andress, David. *Massacre at the Champ de Mars*. Woodbridge, Suffolk: Royal Historical Society/Boydell Press, 2000.

Andress, David. "A Ferocious and Mised Multitude": Elite Perceptions of Popular Action from Rousseau to Robespierre.' In *Enlightenment and Revolution: Essays in Honour of Norman Hampson*, edited by Malcolm Crook,

William Doyle and Alan Forrest. Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004.

Andress, David. *The Terror: Civil War in the French Revolution*. London: Abacus, 2005.

Andress, David. 'Popular Violence in the French Revolution: Revolt, Retribution and the Slide to State Terror.' In *Cultures of Violence: Interpersonal Violence in Historical Perspective*, edited by Stuart Carroll. Basingstoke, Hants: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Andress, David. 'Introduction: Revolutionary historiography, adrift or at large? The paradigmatic quest versus the exploration of Experience.' In *Experiencing the French Revolution*, edited by David Andress. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2013.

Andrews, Richard Mowery. *Law, Magistracy, and Crime in Old Regime Paris, 1735-1789*. vol. I, *The System of Criminal Justice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Andries, Lise. 'Récits de survie: les mémoires d'autodéfense pendant l'an II et l'an III.' In *La Carmagnole des Muses. L'homme de lettre et l'artiste dans la Révolution*, edited by Jean Claude Bonnet. Paris: Armand Colin, 1988.

Andries, Lise. 'Liberté surveillée. La circulation de l'imprimé à Paris, 1789-1794.' In *L'Imprimerie à Paris*. April 1989.

Andries, Lise. 'Radicalism and the book in Paris during the French Revolution.' Undated, accessed online September 2013, 2013. https://www.princeton.edu/csb/conferences/march_2006/.../andries.doc.

Applewhite, Harriet B. and Darline G. Levy, eds. *Women and Politics in the Age of the Democratic Revolution*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1990.

Arasse, Daniel. *The Guillotine and the Terror*. Translated by Christopher Miller. London: Allen Lane, 1989.

Arbellot, Guy, Bernard Lepetit and Jacques Bertrand. *Atlas de la Révolution française*. vol. 1, *Routes et communications*. Paris: Editions de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1987.

Aulard, F.A. *La Sociétés des Jacobins: Recueil des documents pour l'histoire du club des Jacobins de Paris*. vols I-VI. Paris: 1889–1897.

Baczko, Bronislaw. *Les Imaginaires sociaux. Mémoire et espoirs collectifs*. Paris: Payot, 1984.

Baczko, Bronislaw. *Ending the Terror: The French Revolution After Robespierre*. Translated by Michel Petheram. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Baczko, Bronislaw. 'The Terror before the Terror? Conditions of Possibility, Logic of Realization.' In *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, vol. 4, *The Terror*, edited by Keith Michael Baker. Oxford: Pergamon Press 1994.

De Baecque, Antoine. *Les Éclats de Rire: La Culture des rieurs au XVIIIe siècle*. Paris: Calman-Lévy, 2000.

De Baecque, Antoine. 'Le Grand Spectacle de la Transparence.' In *Le corps de l'histoire: métaphores et politiques (1770-1800)*. Paris: Calman-Lévy, 1993.

De Baecque, Antoine. 'La Dénonciation publique dans la presse et le pamphlet (1789–1791).' In *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*:

- The Press in the French Revolution*, edited by Harvey Chisick with Ilana Zinguer and Ouzi Elyada. Oxford: The Taylor Institution, 1991.
- De Baecque, Antoine. *La Caricature révolutionnaire*. Paris: Presses du CNRS, 1988.
- Baker, Keith Michael. *Inventing the French Revolution: Essays on French Political Culture in the 18th Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Von Bar, Ludwig. *A History of Continental Criminal Law*. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1916.
- Barrell, John. *The Spirit of Despotism: Invasions of Privacy in the 1790s*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Beik, William. *Urban Protest in Seventeenth-Century France: the Culture of Retribution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Bercé, Yves-Marie. *Fête et révolte. Des Mentalités populaires du XVI^{ème} au XVII^{ème} siècle*. Paris: Hachette Littératures, 1976.
- Biard, Michel. *Collot d'Herbois. Légendes noires et révolution*. Préface de Michel Vovelle. Lyon: Presse Universitaires de Lyon, 1995
- Biard, Michel. *Parlez-vous sans-culotte. Dictionnaire du Père Duchesne 1790-1794*. Paris: Editions Tallandier, 2009.
- Billington, James H. *Fire in the Minds of Men: Origins of the Revolutionary Faith*. Book I: Foundations of Revolutionary Faith: the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries. New York: Basic Books, 1980.

- Bindman, David. *The Shadow of the Guillotine: Britain and the French Revolution*. London: British Museum Publications, 1989.
- Le Bon, Gustave. *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*. Ontario: Batoche Books, [1896] 2001.
- Bouloiseau, Marc. *The Jacobin Republic, 1792-1794*. Translated by Jonathan Mandelbaum. Cambridge and Paris: Cambridge University Press/Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1987.
- Brennan, Thomas. *Public Drinking and Popular Culture in Eighteenth-Century Paris*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988.
- Brioist, Pascal, Hervé Drévilion and Pierre Serna. *Croiser le Fer: violence et culture de l'épée dans la France moderne (XVI – XVIIIème siècle)*. Champ Vallon: Seysell, 2002.
- Broers, Michael. *Napoleon's Other War: Bandits, Rebels and their Pursuers in the Age of Revolutions*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010.
- Burley, Peter, ed. *Witness to the Revolution: American and British Commentators in France, 1788-94*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989.
- Burrows, Simon. *French Exile Journalism and European Politics, 1792–1814*. Woodbridge, Suffolk: Royal Historical Society/Boydell Press, 2000.
- Burrows, Simon, and Hannah Barker, eds. *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Burrows, Simon. *Blackmail, Scandal, and Revolution: London's French Libellistes 1758-92*. Manchester: Manchester University Press 2006.

Burrows, Simon, *A King's Ransom: The Life of Charles Théveneau de Morlande, Blackmailer, Scandalmonger and Master-Spy*. London: Continuum, 2010.

Burstin, Haim. *Une révolution à l'œuvre : le faubourg Saint-Marcel (1789-1794)*. Paris: Champ Vallon 2005.

Burstin, Haim. *L'invention du sans-culotte: regard sur le Paris Révolutionnaire*. Paris: Editions Odile Jacob, 2005.

Burstin, Haim. *Révolutionnaires: Pour une anthropologie politique de la Révolution française*. Paris: Vendémiaire, 2013.

Campbell, Peter R., Thomas E. Kaiser and Marisa Linton, eds. *Conspiracy in the French Revolution*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007.

Carlyle, Thomas. *The French Revolution*. vols. I and II. Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1838.

Caron, Pierre. *Paris pendant la Terreur. Rapports des agents secrets du Ministre de l'Intérieur publiés pour la Société d'histoire contemporaine*. vols I-VI. Paris: Librairie Alphonse Picard et Fils, 1910.

Caron, Pierre. *La Commission des subsistances de l'an II. Procès-verbaux et actes*. Paris: Leroux 1925.

Carrithers, David W., Michael A. Mosher, and Paul A. Rahe, eds. *Montesquieu's Science of Politics: Essays on The Spirit of Laws*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001.

Censer, Jack R. *Prelude to Power: the Parisian Radical Press 1789–1791*. Baltimore, MD and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.

Censer, Jack R. and Jeremy D. Popkin, eds. *Press and Politics in Revolutionary France*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987.

Censer, Jack R, ed. *The French Revolution and Intellectual History*. Chicago, IL: The Dorsey Press, 1989.

De Certeau, Michel, Dominique Julia and Jacques Revel. *Une Politique de la langue. La Révolution française et les patois: l'enquête de Grégoire*. Paris: Gallimard, 1975.

Cobb, Richard. *A Second Identity: Essays on France and French History*. London: Oxford University Press, 1969.

Cobb, Richard. *The Police and the People: French Popular Protest 1789–1820*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970.

Cobb, Richard. *Reactions to the French Revolution*. London: Oxford University Press, 1972.

Cobb, Richard. *Death in Paris*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Cobb, Richard. *The People's Armies: the armées révolutionnaires: instrument of the Terror in the departments April 1793 to Floréal Year II*. Translated by Marianne Elliot. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987.

Corbin, Alain. *Village of Cannibals: Rage and Murder in France, 1870*. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992.

Cowans, Jon. *To Speak for the People: Public Opinion and the Problem of Legitimacy in the French Revolution*. New York and London: Routledge, 2001.

Coward, Barry and Julian Swann, eds. *Conspiracies and Conspiracy Theory in Early Modern Europe: From the Waldensians to the French Revolution*. Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, 2004.

Cubitt, Geoffrey. *The Jesuit Myth: Conspiracy Theory and Politics in Nineteenth-Century France*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.

Cuno, James, ed. *French Caricature and the French Revolution, 1789–1799*. Los Angeles, CA, Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts: University of California Press, 1988.

Darnton Robert. *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1982.

Darnton, Robert. *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*. New York: Vintage, 1985.

Darnton, Robert. *Forbidden Best Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France*. London: HarperCollins, 1996

Darnton, Robert. *The Devil in the Holy Water or the Art of Slander from Louis XIV to Napoleon*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.

Darnton, Robert. *Poetry and the Police: Communication Networks in Eighteenth-Century Paris*. Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010.

Darnton, Robert and Daniel Roche, eds. *Revolution in Print: the Press in France 1775–1800*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press in Collaboration with the New York Public Library, 1989.

Davis, David Brion, ed. *The Fear of Conspiracy*. Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1971.

Desan, Suzanne. "'Constitutional Amazons': Jacobin Women's Clubs in the French Revolution.' In *Re-creating Authority in Revolutionary France*, edited by Bryant T. Ragan, Jr., and Elizabeth A. Williams. Foreword by Lynn Hunt. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992.

Donald, Diana. *The Age of Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Age of George III*. New Haven and London: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press, 1996.

Doyle, William. *The Old European Order, 1660-1800*. The Short Oxford History of the Modern World. General editor, J.M. Roberts. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Doyle, William. *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Ducoudray, Emile, Raymonde Monnier and Daniel Roche, eds. *Atlas de la Révolution française*. vol. XI, *Cartographique*. Paris, Editions de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 2000.

Dupuy, Pascal. *Face à la Révolution et l'Empire. Caricatures anglaises (1789-1815)*. Collections du Musée Carnavalet, Paris: co-édition Paris-Musées, Nicolas Chaudin et Musée Carnavalet, 2008.

Edelstein, Dan. *The Terror of Natural Right: Republicanism, the Cult of the Nation and the French Revolution*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Estrée, Paul. *Le Père Duchesne. Hébert et la Commune de Paris (1792-1794)*. Paris: Ambert, 1908.

Ewing, Tabettha Leigh. 'Rumour and Foreign Politics in Louis XV's Paris during the War of Austrian Succession.' Unpublished PhD thesis, Princeton University, 2005.

Fairchilds, Cissie. *Domestic Enemies: Servants and Their Masters in Old Regime France*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984

Fairfax-Cholmeley, Alex. 'Defence, Collaboration, Counter-attack: the Role and Exploitation of the Printed Word by Victims of the Terror, 1793–1794.' In *Experiencing the French Revolution*, edited by David Andress. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2013.

Farge, Arlette and Michel Foucault. *Le désordre des familles. Lettres de cachet des Archives de la Bastille au XVIIIème siècle*. Collection Archives dirigée par Pierre Nora et Jacques Revel. Paris: Gallimard, 1982.

Farge, Arlette. *The Vanishing Children of Paris: Rumor and Politics before the French Revolution*. Translated by Claudia Miéville. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991.

Farge, Arlette. *Vivre dans la rue à Paris au XVIIIème siècle*. Paris: Gallimard, 1979, reprinted 1992.

Farge, Arlette. *Fragile Lives: Violence, Power and Solidarity in Eighteenth-Century Paris*. Translated by Carol Shelton. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993.

Farge, Arlette. *Subversive Words: Public Opinion in 18th -Century France*. Translated by Rosemary Morris. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994.

Farge, Arlette. *Effusion et tourment, Le récit des corps: Histoire du peuple au XVIIIème siècle*. Paris: Odile Jacob, 2007.

Farge, Arlette. *La déchirure: Souffrance et déliaison sociale au XVIIIe siècle*. Paris: Bayard Jeunesse, 2013.

Fine, Gary Alan, Véronique Champion-Vincent and Chip Heath, eds.

Rumor Mills: The Social Impact of Rumor and Legend. New Brunswick, NJ and London: AldineTransaction, 2007.

Fleischmann, Hector. *Behind the Scenes in the Terror.* Translated by Henry Blanchamp. London: Greening & Co., 1914.

Funck-Brentano, Frantz. *Marat ou le mensonge des mots.* Paris: Editions Bernard Grasset, 1941.

Fontaine, Laurence. *History of Pedlars in Europe.* Translated by Vicki Whittaker. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996.

Forrest, Alan. *The French Revolution and the Poor.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981.

Forrest, Alan, 'Conscription and Crime in Rural France during the Directory and Consulate.' In *Beyond the Terror: Essays in Regional and Social History, 1794-1815*, edited by Gwynne Lewis and Colin Lucas. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Forrest, Alan. *Napoleon's Men: The Soldiers of the Revolution and Empire.* New York and London: Hambledon and London, 2002.

Forrest, Alan 'La Patrie en danger: The French Revolution and the First *Levée en masse.*' In *The People in Arms: Military Myth and National Mobilization since the French Revolution*, edited by Daniel Moran and Arthur Waldron. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Forrest, Alan. *Paris, the Provinces and the French Revolution.* London: Arnold, 2004.

Forrest, Alan. 'The Ubiquitous Brigand: the Politics and Language of Repression.' In *Popular Resistance in the French Wars: Patriots, Partisans and Land Pirates*, edited by Charles J. Esdaile. Basingstoke, Hants: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Forrest, Alan, Karen Hagemann and Jane Rendall, eds. *Soldiers, Citizens and Civilians: Experiences and Perceptions of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1790–1820*. Basingstoke, Hants: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Fort, Bernadette, ed. *Fictions of the French Revolution*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1991.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Random House, 1975.

Furet, François. *Interpreting the French Revolution*. Translated by Elborg Foster. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Furet, François and Mona Ozouf, eds. *Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989.

Ganochaud, Colette. 'L'Opinion Publique chez Jean-Jacques Rousseau.' Unpublished PhD thesis, l'Université de Paris V, 1978.

Garrioch, David. *Neighbourhood and Community in Paris: 1740–1790*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Garrioch, David, 'Verbal insults in Eighteenth-Century Paris.' In *The Social History of Language*, Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture 12, edited by Peter Burke and Roy Porter. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

- Garrioch, David, *The Formation of the Parisian Bourgeoisie 1690-1830*. Cambridge, MA and London: 1996.
- Garrioch, David. *The Making of Revolutionary Paris*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002.
- Gendron, François. *The Gilded Youth of Thermidor*. Translated by James Cookson. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993.
- Gerould, Daniel. *Guillotine: Its Legend and Lore*. New York: Blast Books, 1992.
- Gilchrist, J. and W. J. Murray, eds. *The Press in the French Revolution: A Selection of Documents taken from the Press of the Revolution for the Years 1789-94*. London: Ginn and Company, 1971.
- Godineau, Dominique: *Citoyennes tricoteuses: Les femmes du peuple à Paris pendant la Révolution française*. Aix-en-Provence: Alinea, 1988
- Goodman, Dena. *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994.
- Gottschalk, Louis R. *Jean Paul Marat: A Study in Radicalism*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1967.
- Gough, Hugh. *The Newspaper Press in the French Revolution*. London: Routledge, 1988.
- Gowing, Laura. *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words and Sex in Early Modern London*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996
- Graham, Ruth. 'Rousseau's Sexism Revolutionized.' In *Woman in the 18th Century and Other Essays*, edited by Paul Fritz and Richard Morton. Toronto and Sarasota: Samuel Stevens Hakkert & Co, 1976.

Graham, Lisa Jane. 'Crimes of Opinion: Policing the Public in Eighteenth-Century Paris.' In *Visions and Revisions of Eighteenth-Century France*, edited by Christine Adams, Jack Censer and Lisa Jane Graham. University Park: Penn State University Press, 1997.

Guilhaumou, Jacques. 'Fragments of a Discourse of Denunciation.' In *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, vol. 4 *The Terror*, edited by Keith Michael Baker. Oxford: Pergamon Press 1994.

Gutwirth, Madelyn. *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992.

Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Translated by Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989.

Haine, W. Scott. *The World of the Paris Café: Sociability among the French Working Class, 1789–1914*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.

Hammond, Nicholas. *Gossip, Sexuality and Scandal in France (1610–1715)*. Medieval and Early Modern French Studies. Series editor Noël Peacock. Bern: Peter Lang, 2011.

Hampson, Norman. *The Life and Opinions of Maximilien Robespierre*. London: Duckworth, 1974.

Hampson, Norman. *Danton*. London: Basil Blackwell, 1978.

Harder, Mette. 'Crisis of Representation: The National Convention and the Search for Political Legitimacy.' Unpublished PhD thesis, University of York 2009.

Harder, Mette. 'Reacting to Revolution – the political career(s) of J.-L. Tallien.' In *Experiencing the French Revolution*, edited by David Andress. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2013.

Hardie, Philip. 'Visual Representations of *Fama*.' In *Rumour and Renown: Representations of Fama in Western Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Haywood, Ian. *Bloody Romanticism: Spectacular Violence and the Politics of Representation, 1776-1832*. Basingstoke, Hants: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

Heffernan, James A. W. ed. *Representing the French Revolution*. Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1992.

Hesse, Carla. 'The Cultural Contradictions of Feminism in the French Revolution.' In *The Age of Cultural Revolutions: Britain and France, 1750–1820*, edited by Colin Jones and Dror Wahrman. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. 2002.

Hesse, Carla. *The Other Enlightenment: How French Women Became Modern*. Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001.

Higonnet, Patrice. *Goodness Beyond Virtue: Jacobins during the French Revolution*. Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1998.

Hofstadter, Richard. *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays*. New York: Vintage, 1967.

Hopkin, David M. *Soldier and Peasant in French Popular Culture, 1766-1870*. Woodbridge, Suffolk: Royal Historical Society/Boydell Press, 2003.

Hould, Claudette, Annie Jourdan, Rolf Reichardt and Stephane Roy. *La Révolution par la Gravure: Les Tableaux historiques de la Révolution française, une entreprise éditoriale d'information et sa diffusion en Europe (1791- 1817)*. Paris: Reunion des musées nationaux, 2002.

Hufton, Olwen. *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France: 1750–1789*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974.

Hufton, Olwen. *Women and the Limits of Citizenship in the French Revolution*. The Donald G. Creighton Lectures, 1989. Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1992.

Hunt, Lynn. 'The Unstable Boundaries of the French Revolution.' In *A History of Private Life*. vol. IV *From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War*, edited by Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby. Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1990.

Hunt, Lynn. *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*. New York and London: Routledge, 1992.

Hunt, Lynn. 'Freedom of Dress in Revolutionary France.' In *From the Royal to the Republican Body: Incorporating the Political in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-century France*, edited by Sara E. Melzer and Kathryn Norberg. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1998.

Hunt, Lynn. *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004.

Hussey, Andrew. *Paris: The Secret History*. London: Penguin Books, 2007.

Isherwood, Robert M. *Farce and Fantasy: Popular Entertainment in Eighteenth-Century Paris*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Jacob, Margaret C. *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Europe*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Jaume, Lucien. 'La Dénonciation, poursuite de l'individu dans sa différence.' In *Le discours jacobin et la démocratie*. Paris: Fayard, 1989.

Johnson, James H. 'Revolutionary Audiences and the Impossible Imperatives of Fraternity.' In *Re-creating Authority in Revolutionary France*, edited by Bryant T. Ragan, Jr. and Elizabeth A. Williams. Foreword by Lynn Hunt. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992.

Jones, Colin, 'Picking up the Pieces: The Politics and the Personnel of Social Welfare from the Convention to the Consulate.' In *Beyond the Terror: Essays in Regional and Social History, 1794-1815*, edited Gwynne Lewis and Colin Lucas. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1983.

Jones, Colin. *The Great Nation: France from Louis XV to Napoleon*. New York and London: Penguin, 2003.

Jones, Colin. *Paris: Biography of a City*. New York and London: Viking Penguin, 2004.

Jordan, David P. *The King's Trial: Louis XVI vs. the French Revolution*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004.

Jordan, David P. 'Rumor, Fear, and Paranoia in the French Revolution.' In *The Fundamentalist Mindset: Psychological Perspectives on Religion, Violence, and History*, edited by Charles B. Strozier, David M. Terman, James W. Jones and Katherine A. Boyd. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Kapferer, Jean-Noël. *Rumors: Uses, Interpretations and Images*. Translated by Bruce Fink. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1990.

- Kaplow, Jeffrey. *The Names of Kings: The Parisian Laboring Poor in the Eighteenth Century*. New York: Basic Books, 1972.
- Kates, Gary. *The Cercle Social, The Girondins, and the French Revolution*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985.
- Kates, Gary. *The French Revolution: Recent Debates and New Controversies*. New York and London: Routledge, 1998, 2nd edition 2006, reprinted 2008.
- Kelly, George Armstrong. *Victims, Authority, and Terror: The Parallel Deaths of d'Orléans, Custine, Bailly, and Malesherbes*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982.
- Kennedy, Emmet. *A Cultural History of the French Revolution*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982.
- Kennedy, Michael L., *The Jacobin Clubs in the French Revolution, 1793-1795*, Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books, 2000.
- Knight, Peter, ed. *Conspiracy Theories in American History: An Encyclopedia*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC Clio, 2003.
- Kuchner, Nina. *Erotic Exchanges: The World of Elite Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century Paris*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2013.
- Landes, Joan B. *Woman and the Public Sphere in the Age of Revolution*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988.
- Langlois, Claude. *La Caricature Contre-révolutionnaire*. Paris: Presses du CNRS, 1988.
- Lawday, David. *Danton: The Gentle Giant of Terror*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2009

Lécuyer, Bernard-Pierre. 'Une quasi-expérimentation sur les rumeurs au XVIIIème siècle: l'enquête proto-scientifique du contrôleur général Orry (1745).' In *Science et théorie de l'opinion publique: hommage a Jean Stoetzel*, edited by R. Boudon, F. Bourricaud and A. Girard. Paris: Editions Retz, 1981.

Lecoutre, Matthieu. *Ivresse et ivrognerie dans la France moderne*. Presses universitaires de Rennes/Presses universitaires François Rabelais de Tours, 2011.

Lefebvre, Georges, Marcel Reinhard et Marc Bouloiseau, eds. *Procès-verbaux des Séances de la Convention Nationale*. 3 vols. Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1959.

Lefebvre, Georges. *The Great Fear of 1789: Rural Panic in Revolutionary France*. Introduction by George Rudé. Translated by Joan White. London: NLB, 1973.

Leith, James A. *The Idea of Art as Propaganda in France: 1750–1799*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965.

Lenotre, G. *Les Massacres de Septembre*. Paris: Perrin, 1907.

Le Meur, Cyril, 'L'agrandissement du regard: Chamfort journaliste dans les *Tableaux historiques de la Révolution française*.' In *Paris sous la Révolution. Nouvelles approches de la ville*, edited by Raymonde Monnier. Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2008.

Levy, Darline Gay, Harriet Branson Applewhite and Mary Durham Johnson, eds. *Women in Revolutionary Paris, 1789-1795*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1979.

Linton, Marisa. *The Politics of Virtue in Enlightenment France*. Basingstoke, Hants: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001.

Linton, Marisa. 'The Stuff of Nightmares: Plots, Assassinations and Duplicity in the Mental World of the Jacobin Leaders, 1793–1794.' In *Experiencing the French Revolution*, edited by David Andress. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2013.

Linton, Marisa. *Choosing Terror: Virtue, Friendship, and Authenticity in the French Revolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Locke, John. L. *Eavesdropping: An Intimate History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Lucas, Colin. 'Themes in Southern Violence after 9 Thermidor.' In *Beyond the Terror*, edited by Gwynne Lewis and Colin Lucas. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Lucas, Colin. 'The Crowd and Politics.' In *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, vol. II, *The Political Culture of the French Revolution*, edited by Colin Lucas. Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1988.

Lucas, Colin. 'Talking about Urban Popular Violence in 1789.' In *Reshaping France: Town, Country and Region during the French Revolution*, edited by Alan Forrest and Peter Jones. Manchester: Manchester University Press: 1991.

Luckert, Steven. 'Jesuits, Freemasons, Illuminati and Jacobins: Conspiracy Theories, Secret Societies, and Politics in Late Eighteenth-Century Germany.' Unpublished PhD thesis, State University of New York at Binghamton, 1993.

Lüsebrink, Han-Jürgen and Rolf Reichardt. *The Bastille: A History of a Symbol of Despotism and Freedom*. Translated by Norbert Schürer. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997.

Lyons, Martin. *France Under the Directory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975.

Marc, Pierre. *De la Bouche à l'oreille: Psychologie sociale de la rumeur*. Cousset (Fribourg), Suisse: Editions Del Val, 1987.

Mason, Haydn T., ed. *The Darnton Debate: Books and Revolution in the Eighteenth Century*. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1998.

Mason, Laura. *Singing the French Revolution: Popular Culture and Politics, 1787–1799*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996.

Mathiez, Albert. *The Thermidorian Reaction*. Translated by Catherine Alison Phillips. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1931.

Mayer, Arno J. *The Furies: Violence and Terror in the French and Russian Revolutions*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000.

Maza, Sarah. *Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century France: the Uses of Loyalty*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983.

Maza, Sarah. 'The Social Imaginary of the French Revolution: The Third Estate, the National Guard and the Absent Bourgeoisie.' In *The Age of Revolutions: Britain and France 1750–1820*, edited by Colin Jones and Dror Wahman. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002.

Maza, Sarah. *Private Lives and Public Affairs: The Causes Célèbres of Pre-revolutionary France*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1993.

McKay, Charles. *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*. New York: Crown Publications, [1841] 1995.

McPhee, Peter. *A Social History of France, 1780-1800*. London and New York: Routledge, 1992.

McPhee, Peter. 'Robespierre and Violence.' In *Experiencing the French Revolution*, edited by David Andress. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2013.

Mellié, Ernest. *Les Sections de Paris pendant la Révolution Française*. Paris: Société de l'histoire de la Révolution française, 1898.

Métayer. *Au Tombeau des secrets. Les écrivains publics du Paris populaire. Cimetière des Saints-Innocents XVIe-XVIIIe siècle*. Paris: Albin Michel, 2000.

Melzer, Sarah E. and Leslie W. Rabine, eds. *Rebel Daughters: Women and the French Revolution*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Milliot, Vincent. *Les Cris de Paris ou le Peuple Travesti; Les représentations des petits métiers parisiens (XVIe- XVIIIe siècles)*. Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1995.

Monnier, Raymonde. *Le Faubourg Saint-Antoine, 1789-1815*. Paris: Société des études robespierristes, 1981.

Monnier, Raymonde, ed. 'Les pratiques culturelles d'une capitale: paroles, écritures, regards.' In *A Paris sous la Révolution. Nouvelles approches de la ville*. Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2008.

Montjoie, Galart de. *Conjuration de Louis-Philippe-Joseph D'Orléans, surnommé Egalité*. Paris, 1831.

Moran, Daniel. Introduction to *The People in Arms: Military Myth and National Mobilization since the French Revolution*, edited by Daniel Moran and Arthur Waldron. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Neubauer, Hans-Joachim. *The Rumour: A Cultural History*. Translated by Christian Braun. London and New York: Free Association Books, 1999.

Nisard, Charles. *Histoire des livres populaires ou de la littérature du colportage depuis l'origine de l'imprimerie jusqu'à l'établissement de la Commission d'examen des livres du colportage–30 Novembre 1852*. Paris: E Dentu, 1864.

Outram, Dorinda. 'Le Langage Mâle de la Vertu: Women and the Discourse of the French Revolution.' In *The Social History of Language*. Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture 12, edited by Peter Burke and Roy Porter. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Ozouf, Mona. 'The Terror after the Terror: An Immediate History.' In *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, vol. 4, *The Terror*, edited by Keith Michael Baker. Oxford: Pergamon Press 1994.

Ozouf, Mona. *L'homme régénéré. Essais sur la Révolution française*. Paris: Gallimard, 1989.

Parker, Lindsay A. *Writing the Revolution: A French Woman's History in Letters*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Parker, Noel. *Portrayals of Revolution: Images, Debates and Patterns of Thought on the French Revolution*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990.

Pellegrin, Nicole. *Les Vêtements de la Liberté. Abécédaire des pratiques vestimentaires en France, de 1780 à 1800*. Postface de Daniel Roche. Paris: Editions Alinea, 1989.

Pipes, Daniel. *Conspiracy: How the Paranoid Style Flourishes and Where it Comes From*. New York: The Free Press, 1997.

- Popkin, Jeremy D. *Revolutionary News: The Press in France 1789–1799*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1990.
- Porter, Lindsay. *Who Are the Illuminati?* London: Collins & Brown, 2005.
- Porter, Lindsay. “‘On parle d’un complot qui fait frissonner’: Popular Rumour and the September Massacres.’ Unpublished MA dissertation, University of York, 2009.
- Prat, Jean-Honoré. *Histoire du Faubourg Saint-Antoine: vieux chemin de Paris, faubourg artisanal, quartier des grands ébénistes du XVIIIe siècle, nerf des révolutions, capitale du meuble*. Paris: Editions du Tigre, 1961.
- Renard, Jean-Bruno. *Rumeurs et légendes urbaines*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999.
- Reumaux, Françoise. *Toute la Ville en parle: Esquisse d’une théorie des Rumeurs*. Paris: Edition l’Harmattan, 1994.
- Reynaud, Françoise et Roselyn Hurel, préface de Pascale de la Vaissière. *L’art de l’estampe et la Révolution Française*. exh. cat., Paris: Musée Carnavalet, 1977.
- Roberts, J. M. and R. C. Cobb, eds. *French Revolutionary Documents*. vols I and II. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966.
- Roberts, J. M. *The Mythology of the Secret Societies*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1972.
- Roberts, J. M. *The French Revolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.
- Robertson, George M. ‘The Society of the Cordeliers and the French Revolution, 1790-1794.’ Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1972.

Roche, Daniel, *The People of Paris: An Essay in Popular Culture in the 18th Century*. Translated by Marie Evans in association with Gwynne Lewis. Leamington Spa: Berg, 1987.

Rose, R.B. *The Making of the Sans-Culottes: Democratic Ideas and Institutions in Paris: 1789–92*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983.

Rosenfeld, Sophia. *A Revolution in Language: The Problem of Signs in Late Eighteenth-Century France*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001.

Roux, Marcel, Edmond Pognon, Yves Bruad, Michèle Hébert, Yves Sjoberg and Françoise Gardey. *Inventaire du fond français, gravures du XVIIIème siècle*. XIV vols. Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1930-1977.

Rudé, George, *The Crowd in the French Revolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959, reprinted 1979.

Sabattier, Jacqueline. *Figaro et son maitre. Les domestiques au XVIIIème siècle*. Collection Pour l'Histoire. Dirigée par Pierre Chaunu. Paris: Librairie Académique Perrin, 1984.

Sagan, Eli. *Citizens and Cannibals: The French Revolution, the Struggle for Modernity, and the Origins of Ideological Terror*. Lanham, Boulder, New York and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, Inc., 2001.

Schama, Simon. *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution*. London: Penguin Books, Ltd, 1989.

Sewell, William H. 'The Sans-Culotte Rhetoric of Subsistence.' In *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, vol. 4, *The Terror*, edited by Keith Michael Baker. Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1994.

Sgard, Jean. 'On dit.' In *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century: The Press in the French Revolution*, edited by Harvey Chisick with Ilana Zinguer and Ouzi Elyada. Oxford: The Taylor Institution, 1991.

Shibutani, Tomotsu. *Improvised News: A Sociological Study of Rumor*. Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merril, 1966.

Slavin, Morris. *The Hébertistes to the Guillotine: Anatomy of a 'Conspiracy' in Revolutionary France*. Baton Rouge, LA and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1994.

Smith, Jay M. *Monsters of the Gévaudan: The Making of a Beast*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2011.

Soboul, Albert. *Les Papiers de Sections de Paris (1790–An IV) Répertoire Sommaire*. Paris: Maurice Lavergne, 1950.

Soboul, Albert. *Les Sans-Culottes Parisiens en l'an II. Mouvement Populaire et Gouvernement Révolutionnaire 2 juin 1793 – 9 thermidor an II*, Paris: Librairie Clavreuil, 1958.

Soboul, Albert. *The Parisian Sans-Culottes and the French Revolution 1793–4*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964.

Sonenscher, Michael. *Work and Wages: Natural Law, Politics and the Eighteenth-Century French Trades*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Sonenscher, Michael. 'Artisans, sans-culottes and the French Revolution.' In *Reshaping France: Town, Country and Region during the French Revolution*, edited by Alan Forrest and Peter Jones. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991.

Sonenscher, Michael. *Sans-Culottes: An Eighteenth-century Emblem in the French Revolution*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008.

Spacks, Patricia Meyer. *Gossip*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985.

Spang, Rebecca L. *The Invention of the Restaurant: Paris and Modern Gastronomic Culture*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2000.

Stauffer, Vernon. *New England and the Bavarian Illuminati*. New York: Russell and Russell, [1918] 1967.

Steinberg, Ronen. 'Trauma before trauma: imagining the effects of the Terror in post-Revolutionary France.' In *Experiencing the French Revolution*, edited by David Andress. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2013.

Stephens, H. Morse. *The Principal Speeches of the Statesmen and Orators of the French Revolution 1789–1795*. vols I and II. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892.

Sussman, George D. *Selling Mother's Milk: the Wetnursing Business in France 1715-1914*. Urbana, Chicago, IL and London: University of Illinois Press, 1982.

Sutherland, D.M.G. *Murder In Aubagne: Lynching, Law, and Justice During the French Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Sydenham, Michael J. *The Girondins*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1972.

Sydenham, Michael J. *The First French Republic 1792–1804*. London: BT Batsford, 1972.

Sydenham, Michael J. *Leonard Bourdon: the Career of a Revolutionary 1754-1807*. Wilfred Laurier University Press: Waterloo, Ontario, 1999.

Tackett, Timothy. *Becoming a Revolutionary: The Deputies of the French National Assembly and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Culture (1789-1790)*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996.

Tackett, Timothy. *When the King Took Flight*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2003.

Taine, Hippolyte. *Les origines de la France contemporaine*. vol. III, *La Révolution: la conquête jacobine*. vol. IV, *La Révolution: le gouvernement révolutionnaire*. Paris: Editions Robert Laffont, collection Bouquins [1881 and 1884] 1986.

Tatar, Maria. *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales*. Expanded 2nd edition. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1987, 2003.

Taws, Richard. *The Politics of the Provisional: Art and Ephemera in Revolutionary France*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013.

Thiers, M. A. *Histoire de la Révolution Française*. 4th edition, Paris: Chez Lecointe, Editeur, 1834.

Thomas, Chantal. *La Reine scélérate. Marie-Antoinette dans les pamphlets*. Paris: Seuil, 2003.

Tridon, Edme-Louis Gustave, *Les Hébertistes: Plainte contre une calomnie de l'histoire*. Paris: Chez l'auteur, 1864.

Tuetey, Alexandre. *Répertoire général des sources manuscrites de l'histoire de Paris pendant la Révolution Française*, 11 vols. Paris, 1890-1914.

- Turcot, Laurent. *Le Promeneur à Paris au XVIIIe Siècle*. Préface d'Arlette Farge. Paris: Gallimard 2007.
- Van Kley, Dale K. 'Damiens' Peers' in *The Damiens Affair and the Unraveling of the Ancien Régime, 1750-1770*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984.
- Vovelle, Michel. 'The countryside and the peasantry in Revolutionary iconography.' In *Reshaping France*, edited by Alan Forrest and Peter Jones. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991.
- Vovelle, Michel. *La Révolution française: Images et récits, 1789-99*. 5 vols. Paris: Livre Club Diderot, 1986
- Wahnich, Sophie. *L'Impossible citoyen: l'Étranger dans le discours de la Révolution française*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1997.
- Wahnich, Sophie. *In Defence of the Terror: Liberty or Death in the French Revolution*. Translated by David Fernbach, with a foreword by Slavoj Žižek. London and New York: Verso, 2012.
- Walter, Gérard. *Catalogue de l'Histoire de la Révolution Française. Ecrits de la Période Révolutionnaire*. 6 vols. Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1969.
- Walton, Charles. *Policing Public Opinion in the French Revolution: The Culture of Calumny and the Problem of Free Speech*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Weber, Caroline. *Terror and its Discontents: Suspect Words in Revolutionary France*: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.
- Weber, Caroline. *Queen of Fashion: What Marie-Antoinette Wore to the Revolution*. New York: Picador, 2007.

Weber, Eugen. 'Who Sang the Marseillaise?' In *The Wolf and the Lamb: Popular Culture in France from the Old Regime to the Twentieth Century*. Stanford French and Italian Studies 3, edited by Jacques Beauroy, Marc Bertrand and Edward T. Gargan. Saratoga, CA: Anma Libri & Co. 1977.

William, Vaughan and Helen Weston, eds. *Jacques Louis David's Marat*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Williams, Gwyn A. *Artisans and Sans-Culottes: Popular movements in France and Britain during the French Revolution*. London: Edward Arnold, 1968.

Williams, Raymond. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1976.

Ziesche, Phillip. *Cosmopolitan Patriots: Americans in Paris in the Age of Revolution*. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2010.

Journal articles

Allport, Gordon W and Leo Postman. 'An Analysis of Rumour.' *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 10, no. 4 (Winter, 1946-1947), pp. 501-517.

Andress, David. 'The Denial of Social Conflict in the French Revolution: Discourses around the Champ de Mars Massacre, 17 July 1791.' *French Historical Studies*, vol. 22, no. 2 (Spring, 1999), pp. 183-209.

Andress, David. 'Social Prejudice and Political Fears in the Policing of Paris, January-June 1791.' *French History*, vol. 9, no. 2 (Spring, 1995), pp. 202-226.

Andress, David. 'Living the Revolutionary Melodrama: Robespierre's Sensibility and the Construction of Political Commitment in the French Revolution.' *Representations*, vol. 114, no. 1 (Spring, 2011), pp. 103-128.

Andrews, Richard Mowery. 'Social Structures, Political Elites and Ideology in Revolutionary Paris, 1792-94: A Critical Evaluation of Albert Soboul's *Les sans-culottes parisiens en l'an II.*' *Journal of Social History*, vol. 19, no. 1 (Autumn, 1985), pp. 71-112.

Blum, Alain, and Jacques Houdaille. '12,000 Parisiens en 1793. Sondage dans les cartes de civisme.' *Population*, 41e année, no. 2 (1986), pp. 259-302.

Buckner, H Taylor. 'A Theory of Rumor Transmission.' *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 1 (Spring, 1965), pp. 54-70.

Burrows, Simon. 'Despotism without Bounds: The French Secret Police and the Silencing of Dissent in London, 1760-1790.' *History*, vol. 89, no. 296 (Oct., 2004), pp. 525-548.

Censer, Jack, and Lynn Hunt. 'Picturing Violence: Limitations of the Medium and the Makers.' *American Historical Review* vol. 110, no. 1 (Feb., 2005), http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/imaging/essays/censerhunt2.html#CH_8.

Chisick, Harvey. 'Public Opinion and Political Culture in France During the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century.' *English Historical Review*, vol. 117, no. 470 (Feb., 2002), pp. 48-77.

Cioffi, Frank. 'Blather.' [review of *The Rumour: A Cultural History* by Hans-Joachim Neubauer, translated by Christian Braun]. *London Review of Books*, vol. 2, no. 12, June 22, 2000, pp. 20-1.

Cornu, Pierre. 'François PLOUX, *De bouche à oreille, naissance et propagation des rumeurs dans la France du 19^e siècle*, Collection historique, Paris, Aubier, 2003.' *Ruralia*, 2004-14, <http://ruralia.revues.org/document991.html>; accessed online 2 March 2011.

Crowston, Clare Haru. 'Credit and the Metanarrative of Modernity.' *French Historical Studies*, vol. 34, no. 1 (Winter 2011), pp. 7–19.

Cruickshank, Evelyn 'Public Opinion in Paris in the 1740s: The Reports of the Chevalier de Mouhy.' *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, no. 7 (1954), pp. 54–68.

Darnton, Robert. 'Presidential Address: An Early Information Society: News and the Media in Eighteenth-Century Paris.' *American Historical Review*, vol. 105, no. 1 (Feb., 2000), pp. 1–35.

Donovan, Pamela. 'How Idle is Idle Talk? One Hundred Years of Rumor Research.' *Diogenes*, no. 54, no. 1 (Feb., 2007), pp. 59–82.

DiFonzo, Nicholas and Prashant Bordia. 'Rumor, Gossip and Urban Legends.' *Diogenes*, no. 54, no. 1 (Feb., 2007), pp. 9–35.

Faron, Olivier and Cyril Grange. 'Un recensement parisien sous la Révolution. L'exemple des cartes de sûreté de 1793.' *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome – Italie et Méditerranée*, vol. 3, no. 2 (1999), pp. 795–826.

Fine, Gary. 'Rumor, Trust and Civil Society: Collective Memory and Cultures of Judgment.' *Diogenes* vol. 54, no. 1 (Feb., 2007), pp. 5–18.

Fitzpatrick, Sheila and Robert Gellately. 'Practices of Denunciation in Modern European History, 1789-1989.' *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 68, no. 4 (Dec., 1996), pp. 747–767.

Garrioch, David 'The Everyday Lives of Parisian Women and the October Days of 1789.' *Social History*, vol. 24, no. 3 (Oct., 1999), pp. 231–249.

Gelbart, Nina Rattner. 'The Blonding of Charlotte Corday.' *Eighteenth-Century Studies* vol. 38, no.1 (Fall, 2004), pp. 201-221.

Germani, Ian. 'Staging Battles: Representations of War in the Theatre and Festivals of the French Revolution.' *European Review of History*, vol. 13, no. 2 (June, 2006), pp. 203–227.

Harris, Jennifer. 'The Red Cap of Liberty: A Study of Dress Worn by French Revolutionary Partisans 1789–94.' *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 14, no.3 (Spring 1981), pp. 283–312.

Heffernan, Michael J. 'Rogues, Rascals and Rude Books: Policing the Popular Book Trade in Early Nineteenth-Century France.' *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol. 16, no. 1 (Jan., 1990), pp. 90–107.

Hofman, Amos. 'Opinion, Illusion, and the Illusion of Opinion: Barruel's Theory of Conspiracy.' *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 27, no.1 (Autumn, 1993), pp. 27–60.

Hopkin, David M. 'Storytelling, Fairytales and Autobiography: Some Observations on Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century French Soldiers' and Sailors' Memoirs.' *Social History*, vol. 29, no. 2 (May, 2004), pp. 186–198.

Hunt, Lynn. 'The Rhetoric of Revolution in France.' *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 15, no. 1 (1983), pp. 78–94.

Hunt, Lynn and Jack Censer. 'Imaging the French Revolution: Depictions of the French Revolutionary Crowd.' *American Historical Review* vol. 110, no. 1 (Feb., 2005), <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/imaging/home.html>.

Jones, Colin, 'The Overthrow of Maximilien Robespierre and the 'Indifference' of the People.' *American Historical Review*, vol. 19, no. 3 (June, 2014), pp. 689–713.

Jourdan, Annie. 'Les Discours de la terreur à l'époque révolutionnaire (1776-1798): Etude comparative d'une notion ambiguë.' *French Historical Studies*, vol. 36, no. 1 (Winter, 2013), pp. 52–81.

Juneja, Monica. 'Imaging the Revolution: Gender and Iconography in French Political Prints', *Studies in History*, vol. 12, no.1 (Feb., 1996), pp. 1–65.

Kaiser, Thomas E. 'Who's Afraid of Marie-Antoinette? Diplomacy, Austrophobia and the Queen.' *French History*, vol. 14, no. 3 (2000), pp. 241–271.

Kaiser, Thomas E. 'From the Austrian Committee to the Foreign Plot: Marie-Antoinette, Austrophobia, and the Terror.' *French Historical Studies*, vol. 26, no. 4 (Fall, 2003), pp. 579–617.

Kaplan, Steven L. 'Religion, Subsistence and Social Control: The Uses of Saint Genevieve.' *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 13, no. 2 (Winter, 1979–1980), pp. 142–168.

Kaplan, Steven L. 'The Famine Plot Persuasion.' *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 72, part 3 (1982), pp. 1–79.

Kaplan, Steven L. 'The Paris Bread Riot of 1725.' *French Historical Studies*, vol. 14, no. 1 (Spring, 1985), pp. 23–56.

Kindleberger, Elizabeth R. 'Charlotte Corday in Text and Image: A Case Study in the French Revolution and Women's History.' *French Historical Studies*, vol. 18, no. 4 (Autumn, 1994), pp. 969–999.

Knapp, Robert A. 'A Psychology of Rumor.' *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 8, no. 1 (1944), pp. 22–37.

Linton, Marisa. 'Fatal Friendships: the Politics of Jacobin Friendships.' *French Historical Studies*, vol. 31, no.1 (Winter, 2008), pp. 51–76.

Linton, Marisa. 'The Man of Virtue: the Role of Antiquity in the Political Trajectory of L.A Saint-Just.' *French History*, vol. 24, no. 3 (Sept., 2010), pp. 393–419.

Linton, Marisa. 'Virtue Rewarded? Women and the Politics of Virtue in Eighteenth-Century France. Part I.' *History of European Ideas*, vol. 26, no. 1 (2000), pp. 35–49.

Linton, Marisa. 'Virtue Rewarded? Women and the Politics of Virtue in Eighteenth-Century France. Part 2.' *History of European Ideas*, vol. 26, no. 1 (2000), pp. 51–65.

Lucas, Colin. 'The Theory and Practice of Denunciation in the French Revolution.' *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 68, no. 4 (Dec., 1996), pp. 768–785.

Mason, Laura. 'Ça ira and the Birth of Revolutionary Song.' *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 28, no. 1. (1989), pp. 22–38.

Mitchell, Hannah. 'Art and the French Revolution: an Exhibition at the Musée Carnavelet.' *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 5, no. 1 (1978), pp. 123–146.

Mullen, Patrick B. 'Modern Legend and Rumour Theory.' *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, vol. 9, nos. 2-3 (Aug–Dec., 1972), pp.95–99.

Popkin, Jeremy D. 'The Royalist Press in the Reign of Terror.' *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 51, no. 4 (Dec., 1979), pp. 685-700.

Rautenberg, Michael. 'Stereotypes and Emblems in the Construction of Social Imagination.' *Outlines – Critical Practice Studies*, no. 2 (2010), pp. 126–137.

Rosnow, Ralph L. 'Psychology of Rumour Reconsidered.' *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 87, no. 3, (May, 1980), pp. 578–591.

Schechter, Ronald. 'Gothic Thermidor: The *Bals des victimes*, the Fantastic, and the Production of Historical Knowledge in Post-Terror France.' *Representations*, no. 61, Special Issue: Practices of Enlightenment (Winter, 1998), pp. 78–94.

Soboul, Albert. 'Robespierre and the Popular Movement 1793-4.' *Past and Present*, 1958, pp. 54–70.

Tackett, Timothy. 'Conspiracy Obsession in a Time of Revolution: French Elites and the Origins of the Terror, 1789–1792.' *American Historical Review*, vol. 105, no. 3 (June, 2000), pp. 691–713.

Tackett, Timothy. 'Interpreting the Terror.' *French Historical Studies*, vol. 24, no. 4 (Fall, 2001), pp. 569–578.

Tackett, Timothy. 'Rumour and Revolution: the Case of the September Massacres.' *French History and Civilisation*, vol. 4 (2011), pp. 54–64.

Taylor, Michael. 'British Conservatism, the Illuminati, and the Conspiracy Theory of the French Revolution, 1797–1802.' *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 47, no. 3, (Spring, 2014), pp. 293–312.

Weber, Eugen. 'Fairies and Hard Facts: The Reality of Folktales.' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 42, no. 1 (Jan.–Mar., 1981), pp. 93–113.

Wood, Gordon S. 'Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style: Causality and Deceit in the Eighteenth Century.' *Journal of American History*, vol. 60, no. 2 (Sept., 1982), pp. 294–308.

Zizeck, Joseph "'Plume de fer": Louis-Marie Prudhomme Writes the French Revolution.' *French Historical Studies*, vol. 26, no. 4 (Fall, 2003), pp. 619–660.