

Prostitution in Bristol and Nantes, 1750-1815:
A comparative study

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Abstract

This thesis is centred on prostitution in Nantes and Bristol, two port cities in France and England, between 1750 and 1815. The objectives of this research are fourfold: first, to understand the socio-economic characteristics of prostitution in these two port cities. Secondly, it aims to identify the similarities and the differences between Nantes and Bristol in the treatment of prostitution and in the evolution of *mentalités* by highlighting the local responses to prostitution. The third objective is to analyse the network of prostitution, in other words the relations prostitutes had with their family, the tenants of public houses, the lodging-keepers and the agents of the law to demonstrate if the women were living in a state of dependency. Finally, the geography of prostitution and its evolution between 1750 and 1815 is studied and put into perspective with the socio-economic context of the different districts to explain the spatial distribution of prostitutes in these two port cities.

The methodology used relies on a comparative approach based on a vast corpus of archives, which notably includes judicial archives and newspapers. Qualitative and quantitative research allows the construction of relational databases, which highlight similar patterns of prostitution in both cities. When data is missing and a strict comparison between Nantes and Bristol is made impossible, extrapolations and comparisons with studies on different cities are used to draw subsequent conclusions.

As a result, this thesis offers a unique picture of provincial prostitution in eighteenth-century port cities in France and England. It shows that women were using prostitution as a strategy of survival and on a casual basis and, if forced by economic necessities to

do so, they kept a certain independence towards the people they met on a daily-basis. This thesis also shows, thanks to the comparative approach, that local events had a great influence on the shift of attitudes towards prostitution. It highlights, through the study of the dialectic national-local discourses, the specificities of local responses to prostitution and the importance of considering change of *mentalités* as a result of long- and short-term developments. Finally, this study also brings to light the similarities in attitudes towards prostitution which transcended the English and French national framework.

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Introduction

This thesis is focused on the study of prostitution in Nantes and Bristol between 1750 and 1815 and has four main concerns: understanding the place of prostitution in urban society, its similarities and the differences between these two ports cities; giving a social analysis of the "common woman" in a defined spatial and temporal context;¹ highlighting the particularities of the local responses to prostitution; and mapping the spatial distribution of prostitutes and its evolution in port cities in relation to the socio-economical context of the districts. In order to address these issues, I analyse a large corpus of archives from both cities, comparing the data relating to prostitutes' social background and their networks. In addition, analysis of data relating to prosecutions, condemnations and the police and agents of the law will reinforce the interpretation of similarities and contrasts between Bristol and Nantes. I aim to offer an original view on provincial prostitution in France and England in the eighteenth century, by establishing the profile of a port prostitute, her relations with the population and the representatives of the judicial/legal system and by explaining where prostitutes lived, why they lived in these particular locations and why we can see an evolution in their spatial distribution.

In 1994 in a review of *Forbidden History*, Mary Lindemann asserted that the history of sexuality had begun to shift from the nineteenth century towards the eighteenth century: the 1990s saw the very birth of the eighteenth-century history of what was formerly called deviant sexuality.² However, despite a deep interest since the 1990s in the history of sexuality and prostitution in particular, the historiography on prostitution in the

¹ "Prostitute" is an anachronism, but for commodity it will be used throughout this thesis to refer to women being paid for sexual transactions on a casual or long-term basis; it will sometimes be replaced by eighteenth-century expressions such as "common woman", "public woman" and the like in French.

² Lindemann M., 'Forbidden History review', *Journal of Social History*, 27 (1994), pp. 885-888, p. 887.

eighteenth century remains incomplete. Before the 1990s, studies which only focused on prostitution could be classified in three categories: firstly the general history of prostitution, which aimed to look at the phenomenon of prostitution in different countries and through different periods. Pierre Dufour, *Histoire de la prostitution chez tous les peuples du monde depuis l'Antiquité la plus reculée jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris, 1851) and Fernando Henriques, *Prostitution in Europe and the New World* (London, 1963) are two studies which mark the start and end of this type of history of prostitution.³ In the nineteenth century, linked with the hygienist discourse, statistics on prostitutes in French cities were published: these are very important sources of empirical information not only prostitutes but also on their representation through the eyes of upper-middle class doctors.⁴ These studies reveal much more than a simple analysis of prostitution, they give an insight into the zeitgeist of some nineteenth-century urban doctors. The strength of the general histories of prostitution, and at the same time weakness, was that by looking at such a wide context, the authors tried to show an evolution in prostitution from the sacred prostitutes to the dancers and actresses

³ Dufour P., *Histoire de la prostitution chez tous les peuples du monde depuis l'Antiquité la plus reculée jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris, 1851); Henriques F., *Prostitution in Europe and the New World* (London, 1963); for other studies looking at the history of prostitution on a long period see: Basserman L., *The Oldest Profession* (London, 1967); Béraud, F.-F.-A., *Les filles publiques de Paris et la police qui les régit précédées d'une notice historique sur la prostitution chez les divers peuples de la terre* (Paris, 1839); Morel de Rubempre, M.-J. (Dr), *La Pornologie ou Histoire nouvelle, universelle et complète débauche, de la prostitution et autres dépravations dans tous les pays du monde, notamment en France, particulièrement dans Paris, depuis les temps les plus anciens jusqu'à nos jours, et moyens infaillibles de remédier à ces fléaux et de diminuer le nombre des prostituées sans employer la rigueur.* (Paris, no date); Rabutaux A., *De la prostitution en Europe depuis l'antiquité jusqu'à la fin du XVIe siècle* (Paris, 1851); Debray Th.-F., *Histoire de la prostitution et de la débauche chez tous les peuples du globe depuis l'antiquité jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris, 1879);

⁴ Giraudeau de Saint-Gervais, J. (Dr), *Traité des maladies syphilitiques, ou Étude comparée de toutes les méthodes qui ont été mises en usage pour guérir les affections vénériennes, suivi de réflexions pratiques sur les dangers du mercure et sur l'insuffisance des anti-phlogistiques, terminé par des considérations hygiéniques et morales sur la prostitution* (Paris, 1838); Parent-Duchâtelet A., *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris, considérée sous le rapport de l'hygiène publique, de la morale et de l'administration* (Paris, 1836); Potton A., *De la Prostitution et de la Syphilis dans les grandes villes* (Paris, 1842); Lippert H. (Dr.), *Die Prostitution in Hamburg in ihren eigenthümlichen Verhältnissen* (Hamburg, 1848); : Duchesne E.-A., *De la Prostitution dans la ville d'Alger depuis la Conquête* (Paris, 1853); Pradier F.-H., *Histoire statistique, médicale et administrative de la Prostitution dans la ville de Clermont-Ferrand* (Clermont-Ferrand, 1859); Acton W. (Dr), *Prostitution considered in its moral, social and sanitary Aspects in London and other large Cities and garrison Towns* (London, 1870).

but they could not reasonably offer sufficient data or analytical comparison between the different locations.

The second "wave" of studies on prostitution was linked with the development of feminist and gender studies in 1970s. As highlighted by Henderson, these studies tend to focus on specific campaigns against prostitution (i.e.: the Contagious Disease Acts in England and regulationism in France) and are particularly interesting as they use judicial archives and newspapers articles to build up their argumentation. These studies of prostitution also have the merit of looking at specific cities: Walkowitz worked on Plymouth and Southampton while Finnegan concentrated on York.⁵ Their work sustained the feminist theories on prostitution, condemning it as a result of patriarchalism and women's oppression in the nineteenth century. In France, Corbin's study of Parisian prostitutes and Rossiaud's study of medieval prostitution opened the path to further interest on this subject, although they cannot be said to be part of the feminist movement, but rather historians of representations.⁶ This intensive work carried out in the 1970s on the history of prostitution clearly integrated prostitutes into the history of women. However these studies mainly focused on the nineteenth century. This can be easily explained by the fact that prostitutes became clearly defined from the other poor, beggars and working-class women when regulatory policies were put in place and when not abiding to the weekly or monthly visit to the surgeon became an

⁵ This list is in far from being exhaustive and does not include specific work on London: Walkowitz J. and Walkowitz D., 'We Are Not Beasts of the Field': Prostitution and the Poor in Plymouth and Southampton under the Contagious Diseases Acts, *Feminist Studies*, 1, n° 3-4 (Winter - Spring, 1977), pp. 73-106; Finnegan F., *Poverty and Prostitution: A Study of Victorian Prostitutes in York* (Cambridge, 1979); Walkowitz J., *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State* (Cambridge, 1980); Boyd K., *Scottish Church Attitudes to Sex, Marriage and the Family, 1850-1914* (Edinburgh, 1980); Hill M., *Prostitution in New York City, 1830-1870* (University of Maryland, 1989); Oldenberg V., 'Life Styles of Resistance: the Courtesans of Lucknow', *Feminist Studies*, (1990), pp. 259-87.

⁶ Corbin A., *Les Filles de Noce: Misère sexuelle et Prostitution XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1982); Rossiaud J., 'Prostitution, Jeunesse et Société au XVe siècle', *Annales ESC*, 2 (1976), pp. 289-325; Harsin J., *Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Princeton, 1985).

offence. In some ways, one could argue that the legislation of the nineteenth century gave birth to the figure of the criminal prostitute. By choosing the nineteenth century, historians could also rely on a larger quantity of archives to sustain their argument, compared to the preceding centuries. The work of these historians had much to offer gender history and the history of representation by showing how judicial archives could be used to give us information on the legal and social status of prostitutes in the nineteenth century.

The third category of studies which had an impact on the history of prostitution relates to literary studies, focusing in particular on the character of prostitutes. One peculiarity of these studies is that they also looked at prostitutes in eighteenth-century literature. Historians mainly focused on the nineteenth century whereas literary analysis went further back: Defoe, Richardson, Mandeville or Restif de la Bretonne in France were analysed and commented upon from a literary point of view.⁷ As much as the authors claimed that they were inspired by real women to draw these characters of prostitutes, I avoided referring to them to depict the daily life of a prostitute in a port-city, their personages remaining works of fiction.

French historiography on prostitution in the eighteenth century followed a slightly different path to the research in England. The specificity of the French research relies on the importance of local history combined with the history of the poor. Poussou's work on Bordeaux for example includes prostitutes in the study of criminals and immigration in the port city: the decision to include them with criminals is subject to discussion, but

⁷ Radner J.-B., 'The Youthful Harlot's Curse: the Prostitute as Symbol of the City in Eighteenth-Century English Literature', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 2 (1976), pp. 59-64; Albistur M. and Armogathe D., *Histoire du féminisme français* (Paris, 1977); Gutwirth M., *The Twilight of The Goddesses* (New York, 1991); Righeschi-Caldwell C., *Figures controversées: Rétif de la Bretonne (1734-1806) et la femme* (Oklahoma, 2006).

at least it has the merit of not forgetting them.⁸ Other path-breaking studies on the French poor integrated prostitutes as an important female character in the economy of makeshifts: Olwen Hufton devoted a whole chapter to prostitutes and Arlette Farge examined the links between prostitutes and the community.⁹ But in these studies of the poor in France in the eighteenth century, prostitutes were never the main subject; they were always integrated in the paupers' networks and were rarely considered independent from these communities. A clear example, Colin Jones, who wrote an interesting article on the relationship between prostitution and the elite in Montpellier, used the data he collected for his thesis "Poverty, vagrancy and society in the Montpellier Region, 1740-1815".¹⁰

The development of gender studies gave the opportunity to historians to use woman as their core subject and more specific studies on the social background of prostitutes appeared from the study of the poor and the history of women. Benabou succeeded in analysing the links between the police, the prostitutes and their social characteristics in eighteenth-century Paris.¹¹ It was the first French thesis which looked at prostitutes as the main subject (former histories of prostitution excepted). From the 1990s onwards, English historians also started to look at the eighteenth-century history of prostitution: Henderson underlined the lack of eighteenth-century studies of disorderly women in the introduction to his doctoral thesis.¹² Benabou and Henderson's theses are built up in a similar manner: they use the judicial archives to understand the experience of

⁸ Poussou J.-P., *Bordeaux et le Sud-Ouest au XVIIIème siècle: Croissance économique et Attraction urbaine* (Paris, 1983), pp. 151-181.

⁹ Hufton O., *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France* (Oxford, 1974); Farge A., *La Vie fragile: violence, pouvoirs et solidarités à Paris au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1986); Farge A. (ed.), *Vivre dans la rue à Paris au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1992).

¹⁰ Jones C., 'Poverty, vagrancy and society in the Montpellier Region, 1740-1815', PhD thesis (Oxford University, 1978).

¹¹ Benabou E.-M., *La Prostitution et la police des mœurs au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1987).

¹² Henderson T., 'Female Prostitution in London, 1730 – 1830', Ph.D. thesis (University of London, 1992).

prostitution in these two capitals, the same methodology that I have followed for this thesis. Both studies comprehend intensive archival work and a deep analysis of the social data available but their focus, logically, remain on the two largest cities in Europe at the time. The peculiarities of the legal system in Paris and London, the number of inhabitants and the extent of the policies put in place in the eighteenth century against prostitutes in particular were unknown anywhere else. Thus these two detailed studies can only be partially applied to the reality of prostitution in provincial cities and the idea of comparing a city of one million inhabitants at the end of the eighteenth century, such as London, to a provincial city of 80,000 inhabitants, such as Bristol, seems illogical. Similarly, it would be difficult to find the same quantity and quality of data in a provincial city.

These two studies were followed by regional studies of prostitution, which also relied on the use of judicial archives in Ireland or Basques countries, for example.¹³ But there was still no comparative study of provincial European cities in the eighteenth century. However, both in France and in England, historians of provincial prostitution could support their arguments with the development of the historiography on crime and police. Indeed, the historiography of crime offers interesting approaches to female offenders and gives both local and national data. Although prostitutes were not criminals *per se*, the use of judicial archives as a basis for researching prostitution explains why criminal history is important. As Peter King points out, Beattie's extremely informative work on crime and courts in England did not distinguish between

¹³ Fleming D., 'Public Attitudes to Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century Ireland', *Irish Economic and Social History*, 32 (2005), pp. 1-18; Bazán Díaz I., Vázquez García F., Moreno Mengibar A. and Bremond C., 'La prostitution au Pays basque entre XVe et XVIIe siècles', *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 55, n° 6 (Nov. - Dec., 2000), pp. 1283-1302.

male and female criminals regarding the prosecution and condemnation.¹⁴ However Clive Emsley noticed a correlation between the application of the law/condemnation and the gender of the offender; he also highlighted the fact that in the Victorian era a woman accused of theft was also often accused of being "an abandoned prostitute" and showed that gender had an important role in representation and prosecutions.¹⁵ Feeley and Little also tried to give women a place in the historiography of crimes: their article "The Vanishing Female" argues "that one of the central puzzles for students of gender and crime should be the vanishing female participation in the criminal process."¹⁶ Although they looked at what they called "serious crimes", it is quite evident that their argument can be applied to prostitutes, as they were eventually considered as criminals. Peter King's work underlines a similar pattern as Emsley and his research on prosecutions for felony at the Old Bailey and on the Home Circuit gives an opportunity to discuss the similarities between female crimes and prosecutions at a local and national levels.¹⁷ The actual French research on crime tends to focus more on the different officials and police, such as *commissaires* and *guet*, their functions and duties, offering a new point of view on the importance of personal initiatives in the policing of the cities. Kaplan first looked at Parisian *commissaires* and was later followed by Milliot, who underlined the importance of the *quadrillage* of the city and the links between *commissaires* and inhabitants to work effectively.¹⁸ Danet wrote an informative

¹⁴ King P., *Crime and Law in England, 1750-1840, Remaking Justice from the Margins* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 165; Beattie J., *Crime and the Courts in England 1660-1800* (Oxford, 1986). See also: Beattie J., 'The criminality of women in Eighteenth-century England', *Journal of Social History*, 8, n° 4 (1975), pp. 80-116.

¹⁵ Emsley C., *Crime and Society in England 1750-1900* (New York, 2nd ed., 1996), p. 154.

¹⁶ Feeley M. and Little D., 'The Vanishing Female: The Decline of Women in the Criminal Process, 1687-1912', *Law & Society Review*, 25, n° 4 (1991), pp. 719-758, p. 720.

¹⁷ King, *Crime and Law in England*, pp. 165-226; King P., *Crime, Justice and Discretion in England, 1740-1820* (Oxford, 2000).

¹⁸ Kaplan S., 'Note sur les commissaires de police de Paris au XVIII^e siècle', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 28, n° 4 (Oct. - Dec., 1981), pp. 669-86; Milliot V., 'Saisir l'espace urbain: mobilité des commissaires et contrôle des quartiers de police à Paris au XVIII^e siècle', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 50, n° 1 (Jan. - Mar., 2003), pp. 54-80; Milliot V. (dir.), *Les Mémoires policiers, 1750-1850. Écriture et pratiques policières du Siècle des Lumières au Second Empire* (Rennes, 2006).

article on Nantes *commissaires*, which would benefit from a deeper analysis of the exchange between *commissaires* and the population to explain their longevity in charge.¹⁹

Since Henderson's publication of *Disorderly Women*, which underlined the lack of research on eighteenth-century prostitution, further work has been done, notably in terms of growth of moral regulation and social control (Foucauldian approach), which often includes references to prostitutes.²⁰ Bristow justly outlined the fact that "purity work", meaning for example the campaigns against vice, had a great influence on the English legal system, and according to him, entertainment, arts and private attitudes to sexuality.²¹ But he also insisted on the "Englishness" of the concept and how it was deeply rooted within British society, which explains, in part, why French historiography is less concerned with matters such as "immorality" and charity. Studies such as Dabhoiwala's work on the Societies for Reformation of Manners at the beginning of the eighteenth century examine the impact of the societies on a practical basis (i.e. number of protagonists) but also at a cultural level.²² Dabhoiwala shows how societies were gradually deprecated by the population and how motives to impose sexual discipline changed over time. Joanna Innes specifically studied the revival of the Reformation of Manners in 1787 in order to examine the "cultural climate" that surrounded this renewal;²³ however it must be underlined that the revival of Vice Societies did not have

¹⁹ Danet V., 'Les *commissaires* de police de la ville de Nantes au XVIII^e siècle (1720-1792)', *Annales de Bretagne et des Pays de l'Ouest*, 116, n°4 (2009), pp. 39-72.

²⁰ Henderson T., *Disorderly women in the Eighteenth Century London, Prostitution and Control in the Metropolis 1730-1830* (London, 1999). For example: Roberts M., *Making English Morals: Voluntary Association and Moral Reform in England, 1787-1886* (West Nyack, 2004).

²¹ Bristow E., *Vice and Vigilance, Purity Movements in Britain since 1700* (Dublin, 1977), p. 4.

²² Dabhoiwala F., 'Sex and Society for Moral Reform, 1688-1800', *Journal of British Studies*, 46 (April, 2007), pp. 290-319.

²³ Innes J., *Inferior Politics, Social Problems and Social Policies in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 179-226; see also Roberts M., 'The Society for the Suppression of Vice and its Early Critics, 1802-1812', *Historical Journal*, 26 (1983), pp. 159-176.

a direct effect on Bristol politics. The first society was introduced as soon as 1698 in Bristol, the second wave called the Society for the Suppression and Repression of Vice was established by Bristol upper-classes between 1802 and 1810.²⁴ Even though the reports of the Vice Society in London claimed that Bristol was part of the first thirteen, societies that were created in province between 1802 and 1810, information on its precise date of creation and its aims seems very difficult to find in Bristol archives.²⁵

Concurrent with the reformation of manners was the development of charities and relief for the different categories of poor, especially poor women. Andrew's *Philanthropy and Police*, although mainly focused on London, has the great merit of looking at different types of charities and at the social origins of their subscribers.²⁶ She demonstrates the change of behaviour and the gradual loss of interest amongst the upper classes in helping prostitutes, when she analyses the differences between the creation of the Magdalen Hospital in 1758 and the "rise of female penitentiary" at the end of the eighteenth century.²⁷ The study of charities, notably for helping prostitutes, is linked with the history of middle-class identity and governance and their role in social control.²⁸

In parallel to studies on moral reformation, the history of representation of prostitution has seen a great development since 2000s. Carter and Ganey's studies on the popular representation of sexuality and prostitution demonstrate that the comic stance used in these ballads and prints hides a certain fear of female sexuality. Probably inspired by Stave's work in the 1980s, their interesting point of view gives a deeper knowledge of the behaviour of common people towards prostitutes, which is often missing in the

²⁴ Roberts M., *Making English Morals*, p. 77.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

²⁶ Andrew D., *Philanthropy and Police* (Princeton, 1989).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

²⁸ Wilson B., *Decency and Disorder* (London, 2007), pp. 108-109.

history of prostitution.²⁹ Rosenthal took another standpoint and chose to work on the economic side of prostitution and its representation in eighteenth-century literature.³⁰ These studies also established a clear link between literary texts, prints, ballads and the cultural framework of eighteenth-century people: this differentiates them from former literary studies of Mandeville or Richardson, which did not always clearly connect literary production and its public.

In parallel with the history of representation, works on gender and especially women and work should not be forgotten when studying prostitution. Eighteenth-century women, married or not, have been the subject of much research which has highlighted a wide range of possibilities for them: from multiplying strategies of survival to keeping a business on their own, eighteenth-century women seemed much more independent from patriarchal control than the first feminist studies believed.³¹ Single women particularly appeared under a new light, with their own connections and with their own social and professional responsibilities. By highlighting the different roles of women in society, these studies have given to the historian of prostitution a framework through which the casualness of prostitution can be explained.

²⁹ Carter S., *Purchasing Power, Representing Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century English Popular Print Culture* (Aldershot, 2004); Ganev R., "Milkmaids, Ploughmen and Sex in the Eighteenth-Century Britain", in *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 16, n° 1 (2007), pp. 40-67; Staves S., 'British Seduced Maidens', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 14, n° 2 (Winter, 1980-1981), pp. 109-134.

³⁰ Laura J. Rosenthal, *Infamous Commerce: Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century British Literature and Culture* (London, 2006).

³¹ King S. and Tomkins A. (eds), *The Poor in England, 1700-1850: An Economy of Makeshifts* (Manchester, 2003); Hill B., *Women Alone, Spinsters in England 1660-1850* (Yale, 2001); Sharpe P. (ed.), *Women's Work, The English Experience 1650-1914* (London, 1998); Erickson A., *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (New York, 1993); Honeyman K., *Women, Gender and Industrialisation in England, 1700-1810* (London, 2000); Kowaleski-Wallace E., *Consuming Subjects, Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1997); Froide A., *Never Married, Singlewomen in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2005); Clark A., *The Struggle for the Breeches, Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (London, 1995). Barker H., *The Business of Women, Female Enterprise and Urban Development in Northern England 1760-1860* (Oxford, 2006); Phillips N., *Women in Business, 1700-1850* (Woodbridge, 2006).

Finally, research on illegitimacy, child abandonment, abortion and infanticide in French and English historiography must be considered apart from the previous works. Interestingly, prostitutes were rarely mentioned in work on infanticide or on infants' abandonment, although they must have become pregnant at some point in their lives: the lack of documents, notably when the child was left on the door of the *hôpital général* seems the most plausible explanation for not linking it with prostitution. Likewise, bastardy cases in England were often recorded on a form which was filled in only with the name of the mother, father, place of settlement and either the age and name of the child or an approximate date for conception, leaving no space for explaining how the woman got pregnant.³² Since 1556 in France, unmarried women had to declare their pregnancy in front of an official in the city or to the priest in a village.³³ Refusal to do so could have been considered as a willingness to hide a pregnancy and if the newly born were to die, the woman could be accused of infanticide. Besides, these declarations assumed the character of an official injunction to the supposed father to pay the bills of the lying-in. What looks like a useful source for the history of prostitution was in fact shown by historians as being not so interesting. Depauw's detailed work on the 8,000 *déclarations de grossesse* of eighteenth-century Nantes indicates that very few of the women who bore an illegitimate child were prostitutes (or at least said so).³⁴ His results were confirmed by Lottin in Lille, Ormières in Anjou, Chapelain-Nougaret in Rennes and Cissie Fairchilds in a general report on illegitimacy.³⁵ But it does not mean

³² BRO, JQS/P/ 33-45-190-221-224-226-267, Bristol bastardy information.

³³ '(...) *Toute femme qui se trouvera dûment convaincue d'avoir celé, couvert ou occulté tant sa grossesse que son enfantement sans avoir déclaré l'un ou l'autre et avoir pris de l'un ou l'autre témoignage suffisant même de la vie ou mort de son enfant lors de l'issue de son ventre et qu'après se trouve l'enfant avoir été privé tant du saint sacrement du baptême que sépulture publique et accoutumée, soit telle femme tenue et réputée d'avoir homicide son enfant et pour réparation punie de mort et dernier supplice* (...) ' Henri II, 1556. Phan M.-C., 'Les déclarations de grossesse en France, XVIe – XVIIIe siècles', *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine*, 22 (1975), pp. 61-88.

³⁴ Depauw J., 'Amour illégitime et société à Nantes au XVIIIe siècle', *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 27, n° 4-5 (1972), pp. 1155-1182.

³⁵ Lottin A., 'Naissances illégitimes et filles-mères à Lille au XVIIIe siècle', *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et*

that a connection cannot be made or similarities cannot be drawn between illegitimate mothers and prostitutes, especially concerning their age, occupational status and social background.

From a local point of view, the historiography of Bristol and Nantes was firstly turned towards the economic strength of both ports which, as will be explained later, was an important factor in the selection of these two cities.³⁶ But the earlier studies were rarely interested in the social aspects of the economic development and it is only quite recently that the social organisation of the urban space became "independent" subject. As is often the case, historians first examined the elites, and finally looked at the history from below.³⁷ Indirectly linked with prostitution but important in the understanding of the mentality of eighteenth-century Bristolian merchants towards the poor and poor relief, is the work of Mary Fissel.³⁸ Fissel shows the merchants' role, assigned by themselves, in the attempt to relieve certain types of poor. She also shows an evolution, a democratisation of the aid that could be received from the upper-classes. Steve Poole's research on sodomy in the mid-eighteenth century is unique for Bristol in terms of study on sexuality and judicial process and shows that there is still a lot of work to do to decipher the *mentalités* of eighteenth-century provincial cities.³⁹ In Nantes the research

Contemporaine, 4 (1970), pp. 278-322; Chapalain-Nougaret C., 'Les filles-mères du diocèse de Rennes au XVIIIe siècle et la prostitution' in *Justice et répression : actes du 107e congrès national des sociétés savantes (Brest, 1982)*, (Paris, 1984), pp. 101-116; Fairchild Cissie, 'Female Sexual Attitudes and the Rise of Illegitimacy: A Case Study', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 8, n° 4 (Spring, 1978) pp.627-667; Ormières J.-L., 'Natalité, fécondité et illégitimité en Anjou au XIXe siècle', *Histoire, Economie et Société*, 19, n° 2 (2000), pp. 235-252; See also Capul M., *Internat et internement sous l'ancien régime*, tome 2 (Paris, 1984), on *Enfants-Trouvés*.

³⁶ On Bristol and Nantes' economy: Sacks D. *The Widening Gate: Bristol and the Atlantic Economy, 1450-1700* (Oxford, 1991); Minchinton W., *The Trade of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century* (Bristol, 1957); Morgan K., *Bristol and the Atlantic Trade in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1993); Jeulin P., *L'Evolution du Port de Nantes; Organisation et Trafic depuis les Origines* (Paris, 1929); Guépin A., *Nantes au XIXe Siècle: Statistique topographique, industrielle et morale* (Nantes, reprint, 1981).

³⁷ Dresser M. and Ollerenshaw P. (eds), *The Making of Modern Bristol* (Tiverton, 1996).

³⁸ Fissel M., *Patients, Power and the Poor in Eighteenth-Century Bristol* (Cambridge, 1991).

³⁹ Poole S., 'Bringing Great Shame upon this City': Sodomy, The Courts and the Civic Idiom in Eighteenth-Century Bristol', *Urban History*, 34, n° 1 (2007), pp. 114-126.

was structured on a similar manner: Saupin's thesis on Nantes elites in the seventeenth century gives a good basis to understand the political and economic role of the elite in the government of the city.⁴⁰ However, in order to find some information on the poorer classes it is necessary to look at Bois's general history of Nantes or Pétré-Grenouilleau's works on slavery in Nantes. Madge Dresser's work on slavery in Bristol offers the same kind of information.⁴¹ Therefore, despite numerous economic studies on these two ports and detailed work on their elite, the history of poor women in these provincial cities is still to be done and the archives necessary for this subject are still available.⁴²

The decision to study Bristol and Nantes was taken to respond to the void in the French and English secondary literature but also to respond to Marc Bloch's assertion "*la nécessité des études comparatives, seules capables de dissiper le mirage des fausses causes locales*."⁴³ The historiography of Bristol and Nantes shows that much work is still needed in terms of understanding the social construction of these cities and the relations between the inhabitants. These relations must also be examined through the lens of spatial distribution within the city, to understand how people interacted. The decision to articulate my research around a comparison results from my questioning the social organisation of the cities: their socio-economic developments were very similar and I wondered if in terms of attitudes towards prostitution the reactions would have been identical. I aim to demonstrate that prostitution was very similar in terms of its social characteristics and also that there were common cultural and moral values that

⁴⁰ Saupin G., *Nantes au XVIIe siècle, Vie politique et Société urbaine* (Rennes, 1996).

⁴¹ Bois P. (ed.), *Histoire de Nantes* (Toulouse, 1977); Pétré-Grenouilleau O., *Nantes au Temps de la Traite des Noirs* (Paris, 1998); Dresser M., *Slavery obscured: the social History of the Slave Trade in an English provincial Port* (London, 2001).

⁴² An interesting article on vagrant women in Nantes and its countryside: Boutera D., 'Les Bohémiens en Bretagne sous l'Ancien Régime', *Annales de Bretagne et des Pays de l'Ouest*, 113, n° 4 (2006), pp. 135-158.

⁴³ Quoted in Binion R., 'Marianne au foyer. Révolution politique et transition démographique en France et aux États-Unis', *Population*, 55, n° 1 (2000), pp. 81-104, p. 87.

transcended national difference, determining the attitude of contemporaries towards prostitution.

Marc Bloch's comment refers to the necessity of engaging in comparative studies to challenge the usual arguments which give all the credit to the Local. Of course since Marc Bloch, micro-history developed and historians have demonstrated that there is still great interest, and a necessity, in looking at local history. By comparing prostitution in these two cities, I hope to establish a pattern in port cities in the eighteenth century but also to underline the dialectic between the national discourse and the local response regarding prostitution. My thesis will show that the French Revolution, or rather the local uprisings linked with the Revolution had an impact on the treatment of prostitutes by the police in Nantes, but that in Bristol the influence of the end-of-the-century turmoil could also be seen, in the multiplication of charities in an attempt to increase control over the labouring classes.

The choice of the period 1750-1815 was made in the light of the archives available, the administrative changes in France until the fall of the Empire and the constraint of time. Bristol sources were more difficult to use: the Quarter Sessions records have sparse information and the end of the century seemed a more suitable period to study than an earlier one, all the more as I wished to include the period of the Revolution in my research. Besides, the docket books between 1753 and 1808, which recorded minor offences, have been lost, leaving only as judicial archives the Quarter Sessions records, the Newgate calendars, which was also used as a bridewell and the gaol delivery fiats, which recorded both sentences from Quarter Sessions and from the Assizes (capital offences). Some records have been found, which look like reports of convictions from

summary courts; however, none of them reported any woman confined for disorderly behaviour, nor was it possible to match the names of the prostitutes with the women condemned: they have therefore been disregarded for this study.⁴⁴ In Nantes, it would have been possible to go further back, for example up to 1724 when Louis XV reiterated the *ordonnance* to lock up the poor and disorderly but the discrepancy between the data available in both cities would have been too significant to overcome, hence the choice of 1750. 1815 can be explained as being the end of the Empire in France but also because the lists of prostitutes by districts in Nantes are incomplete between 1809 and 1817 but there was a clear improvement during these years, which shows that the system was gaining in strength: I believe that in the decade 1810-1820, Nantes regulationism entered a second phase of development, with the support of the *préfet* who actively supervised the process.⁴⁵ Therefore I decided to set the boundary in 1815, with the return of the monarchy. Besides, the rapid growth of the industrialisation in both cities, coupled with an accentuated migration from the countryside and accelerated urban development in the suburbs in the nineteenth century changed the urban environment and the conditions that encouraged prostitution significantly. The social structure of nineteenth-century cities was very different from that of the eighteenth century, which was another reason for not placing the temporal boundary any later.

Before looking at the sources and the methodology used in this work, it seemed necessary to give some information on the historical background of these two cities and on their governance. Nantes and Bristol reached a population of 80,000 inhabitants each at the end of the eighteenth century and they grew steadily thanks to maritime trade and

⁴⁴ BRO, JQS/C/2.

⁴⁵ ADLA, 4 M 227.

early industrialisation, which boosted their employment market.⁴⁶ The ports can be seen as the epicentre of the development of both cities since their foundation, the original towns being strategically situated at the back of the estuary of two important rivers, the Loire and the Avon, allowing an easy defence but also encouraging trade both towards the sea and inland.⁴⁷ They were facing the same problems which were the consequence of intensive urban development, in a century where both cities saw their apogee and the start of their decline. Rapid population growth, rapid urban development, absence of urban planning (especially in poor districts) and sporadic war threats throughout the eighteenth century led both cities (in certain cases more so for Bristol) to a state of apparent spatial incoherence, from old medieval streets like Tower Lane and rue des Trois-Marins to newly-built districts, such as Queen Square, the improvements of St Michael parish or the *quartier* Graslin and the isle Feydeau in Nantes.⁴⁸

Such urban extension and modification can be explained by the arrival of capital and the willingness to invest in estates and lands to secure this money.⁴⁹ In parallel with the growing wealth of certain merchants, the development of factories and overseas trade attracted people from the countryside. These two processes, which worked concomitantly during the eighteenth century, were the consequences of a deep-rooted economic pattern. At the end of the middle age, both cities already had a strong

⁴⁶ Morgan K., 'The Economic Development of Bristol, 1700-1850' in Dresser M. and Ollerenshaw P. (eds), *The Making of Modern Bristol* (Tiverton, 1996), p. 49; Bois P. (dir.), *Histoire de Nantes* (Toulouse, 1977), pp. 178-180.

⁴⁷ Joxe R. and Casevitz J., 'Nantes, la ville et l'industrie', *Les Annales de Géographie*, 38, n° 213 (1929), pp. 230-245, p. 232.

⁴⁸ Maps of Britol and Nantes are available at the end of the thesis: appendices n° 3 to n° 7. Lelièvre P. *L'Urbanisme et l'Architecture à Nantes au XVIIIe siècle* (Nantes, 1942), p. 79; Dhombres N. and Déré A.-C., *Chroniques de Nantes en l'An II* (Nantes, 1993), p. 116; Jones S. J., 'The Growth of Bristol: The Regional Aspect of City Development', *Transactions and Papers (Institute of British Geographers)*, n° 11 (1946), pp. 57-83; Minchinton W., 'The Port of Bristol', in McGrath P. (ed.) *Bristol in the Eighteenth Century* (New Abbot, 1972), p. 153; Fissel M., *Patients, Power and the Poor in Eighteenth Century Bristol* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 7; Leech R., *The St Michael's Hill Precinct of the University of Bristol* (Bristol, 2000); Aughton P., *Bristol: A People's History* (Lancaster, 2000), p. 86.

⁴⁹ Morgan K., 'The economic development of Bristol 1700-1850', pp. 48-75.

historical background in international trade, exchanging goods with Spain, Portugal and across the North Sea.⁵⁰ Nantes also traded with London while Bristol secured its trade with Ireland. Both of them managed to get financial security by encouraging an important riverine trade first.⁵¹ With the discovery of the New World and the establishment of colonies, Bristol first, and then Nantes after 1660, opened their routes across the Atlantic Ocean. Sugar, wood, cotton, cocoa, fish, furs and slaves especially for Nantes (42.7% of the 3 341 French expeditions sent to capture and trade slaves)⁵² were the main "goods" exchanged with the colonies. At the end of the eighteenth century, Bristol port was 1.4 times more active than Nantes.⁵³ Bristol mainly engaged its ships in *commerce de droiture*, by sailing towards America in a straight line; although before the mid-eighteenth century Bristol took the lead in slave trading (in competition with London), it was quickly surpassed by Liverpool.⁵⁴

Directly linked with the development of the sea trade was the growth of factories. Both cities developed important industries in sugar refineries and glass houses, as well as in the manufacture of *pacotilles* in Nantes (goods like glass jewellery, cotton fabrics but also guns which were exchanged with African traders for slaves).⁵⁵ The sugar factories

⁵⁰ For more details see: Minchinton W., *The Trade of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century* (Bristol, 1957); Jeulin P., *L'Evolution du Port de Nantes; Organisation et Trafic depuis les Origines* (Paris, 1929).

⁵¹ Musset R., 'L'évolution d'un grand port français: Nantes', *Les Annales de Géographie*, 40, n° 227 (1931), pp. 568-570, p. 568; Minchinton, 'The Port of Bristol', p. 133; Morgan K., 'Bristol and the Atlantic Trade in the Eighteenth Century', *The English Historical Review*, 107, n° 424 (Jul., 1992), pp. 626-650, pp. 626-628; See also: Minchinton, W., *Politics and the Port of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century* (Bristol, 1963), on petitions sent to the Parliament by the Society of Merchants-Venturers.

⁵² Pétré-Grenouilleau, *Nantes au Temps de la Traite des Noirs*, p. 7.

⁵³ Comparison between the data of Morgan K., 'The economic development of Bristol 1700-1850', in Dresser M. and Ollerenshaw P. (eds), *The Making of Modern Bristol* (Tiverton, 1996), p. 55 and Guépin, *Essais Historiques sur les Progrès de la Ville de Nantes* (Nantes, 1832), p. 135; the ships' tonnage was slightly different between England and France: one ton in England was equal to approximately 1.1 cubic meters and in France, it was worth 1.2 cubic meters.

⁵⁴ McInnes C. M., 'Bristol and the Slave Trade', in McGrath P. (ed.), *Bristol in the 18th Century* (Newton Abbot, 1972) p. 170.

⁵⁵ Walker F., 'The Industries of Bristol', *Economic Geography*, 22, n° 3 (Jul., 1946), pp. 174-192, p. 176; Defoe, *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain*, p. 309; Aughton P., *Bristol: A People's History* (Lancaster, 2000), p. 84; Pétré-Grenouilleau, *Nantes au Temps de la Traite des Noirs*, p. 31.

as well as the glass industry needed coal to work and the proximity of Kingswood, with its rich coal mines, was a godsend for Bristol. Bristol's development relied heavily on its close hinterland for agricultural supplies and raw materials like coal and as a consequence, the countryside benefitted from the wealth entering the port.⁵⁶ In Nantes however, the hinterland did not gain as much as for instance, Bordeaux's hinterland or Bristol countryside, as the rural region of Loire was mainly turned towards agriculture and stock farming: nevertheless, Nantes attracted some people from the adjacent countryside to work in its prosperous factories and port.⁵⁷

Both cities can be considered as active ports and prosperous cities in the early modern period, playing an important role in the maritime trade of both countries and the development of colonial markets. But both of them would also face a period of decline from the second third of the eighteenth century. The continuous wars in Europe, the loss of some of the French colonies during the Revolution and the Empire and finally the abolition of the slave trade (1807 in England and 1794 under the Convention in France, even though this date is debatable) and the multiplication of privateers disturbed Bristol and Nantes' overseas trade.⁵⁸ The Revolutionary wars had a dramatic effect on the economy: in Bristol up to fifty bankruptcies occurred (mainly merchants and local banks). In Nantes, the economic crisis accompanied the upheavals of the Revolution; the agricultural economy was already in crisis because of three consecutive years of bad weather and the start of the Revolutionary wars in 1792 did not improve the general economic state.⁵⁹ In addition to the insecurity at sea, Nantes had to face the Chouans "riot" or guerilla uprising and the war in Vendée which, since 1793, threatened the

⁵⁶ Morgan, 'The Economic Development of Bristol', p. 63.

⁵⁷ Pétré-Grenouilleau, *Nantes au Temps de la Traite des Noirs*, p. 31; Poussou J.-P., *Bordeaux et le Sud-Ouest au XVIIIème siècle: Croissance économique et Attraction urbaine* (Paris, 1983), pp. 151-181.

⁵⁸ Minchinton, 'The Port of Bristol', p. 132.

⁵⁹ Bois, *Histoire de Nantes*, p. 243; Treille M., *Le Commerce de Nantes et la Révolution* (Nantes, 1908).

borders of the city.⁶⁰ The historiography on the Vendée war and the Chouans uprisings evolved rapidly in the 1980s with the approaching bicentenary of the Revolution. Prior to the 1980s the uprisings had been considered purely as peasant's *révoltes*, but historians such as Secher and Dupuy demonstrated that they actually amounted to a civil war, because of the existence of an army with a structured hierarchy, defined objectives and organised manoeuvres.⁶¹ Fuelled by a clear antagonism between towns and countryside, the Chouans in the north were using guerrilla techniques such as *brigandage* to weaken the Republican army; in the south, in Vendée, a civil war started with the organisation of a royalist army which received back up from the "*brigands*" in Brittany.⁶² The most violent troubles occurred between March 1793 and May 1794 but it has been shown that the roots of this war already lay in the 1788 "flour revolt" (lack of grains) and would not end before 1799.⁶³ Nantes was in the middle of this conflict and was relatively easy to attack as its ramparts were pulled down at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Besides, the disruption of communications by land forced Nantes' city council to concentrate on the agricultural supplies and defence of the city before any other trade. This almost permanent and local state of war explains why Nantes municipality increased measures against foreigners and for the control of the population: as we will see in greater detail in a subsequent chapter, legislation against prostitutes was also affected by these local events.

In both cities the economic crisis linked with the Revolution and Empire wars left its marks. In Bristol, the unfinished Yorkshire crescent remained an indelible stain upon the

⁶⁰ Dupuy R., *La Bretagne sous la Révolution et l'Empire (1789-1815)* (Rennes, 2004).

⁶¹ Secher R., *Le Genocide franco-français, La Vendée -Vengée* (Paris, 1986); Dupuy R., *De la Revolution à la Chouannerie, Paysans en Bretagne 1788-1794* (Paris, 1988).

⁶² Mann P., "Les insurrections paysannes de l'Ouest: Vendée et chouannerie", *Revue Française de Sociologie*, 30, n° 3-4 (July-Dec., 1989), pp. 587-600.

⁶³ Dupuy, *De la Revolution à la Chouannerie*, p. 19.

city's built form for 100 years. In Nantes, the slow down was not visible in terms of urban architecture but overseas trade was clearly disrupted. According to Joxe and Casevitz, Nantes lost 7,000 workers between 1790 and 1815.⁶⁴ Unemployment, migration and conscription must have been the main reasons which explained this drop: Secher counted 6,500 *disparus* in Nantes because of the Vendée war (men and women).⁶⁵ Musset claimed that the port of Nantes was "almost entirely paralysed by these wars" but if compared with the figures of Le Beuf, it seems that a certain amount of economic activity still existed, although it was mainly towards the interior of the country.⁶⁶ First the *petit cabotage* or riverine commerce was at a similar level in 1790 and 1802 (the Peace of Amiens), which shows the importance of the exchange between Nantes and the other ligurian cities. However, the *grand cabotage* (Europe) and *long cours* (colonies), suffered a decline: from 271 and 259 boats respectively engaged in these forms of commerce in 1790, only 136 and 104 were accounted for in 1802. The consequences of this collapse in international and colonial-trade, with respect to this thesis, must be understood in terms of rising unemployment and a reduction of remunerated work, notably for women. Guépin showed that Nantes' production of cotton fell from 500 *métiers* in 1790 to 230 in 1802.⁶⁷ The manufacture of *indiennage* also decreased, as well as the production of hats.⁶⁸ However, despite a diminution in overall production of goods in Nantes, seven cotton factories opened during this decade, the wool trade developed quickly and industrial development was constantly

⁶⁴ Joxe and Casevitz, 'Nantes, la ville et l'industrie', p. 236.

⁶⁵ Secher R., *Le Genocide franco-français*, p. 254.

⁶⁶ Musset R., "L'évolution d'un grand port français: Nantes", *Les Annales de Géographie*, 40, n° 227 (1931), pp. 568-570; Le Beuf E. B., *Du commerce de Nantes. Son passé, son état actuel, son avenir* (Nantes, 1857), pp. 234-238. However his figures do not represent an average over ten years, but the state of commerce in Nantes in respectively 1790 and 1802; in 1802, a peace treaty was signed which eased the maritime trade, therefore fluctuations over the decade have to be taken into account.

⁶⁷ Guépin, *Essais historiques*, p. 225.

⁶⁸ Strangely, as it will be shown later, milliners were not the most common prostitutes.

increasing.⁶⁹ The slowdown of Nantes' economy during the Revolution and Empire is undeniable, but this must be understood in a wider context, as most of the cities in Europe suffered from the constant state of war.⁷⁰ As Audran explains in her thesis, the historical debate on the economic crisis linked with the Revolution has now reached a new level and instead of talking of decline, historians are now studying the strategies put in place by merchants and their adaptation to the disruption of traditional commercial routes.⁷¹ Admittedly Nantes suffered from unemployment when the maritime commerce almost came to a stop between 1793 and 1794: but the loss of thousands of men, the relatively strong riverine trade, the employment of men and women in supplying the army and the development of manufactures eased the economic situation of the city during these troubled times.⁷² The social history of the work force in port cities such as Bristol and Nantes is still to be done and in correlated subjects such as the study of prostitution, the lack of research on women's conditions in these cities in a difficult economic period has to be underlined.

The composition of the city councils (sometimes called Corporation in Bristol) evolved during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with the most important change in Nantes being the opening of the councils to the rich bourgeoisie. From

⁶⁹ Guicheteau S., *La Revolution des ouvriers nantais: Mutations économiques, identité sociale et dynamiques révolutionnaires, 1740-1815* (Rennes, 2008), p. 75.

⁷⁰ Cullen L. M., "History, Economic Crises, and Revolution: Understanding Eighteenth-Century France", *The Economic History Review*, 46, n° 4 (Nov., 1993), pp. 635-657, p. 655; See also Le Bouedec G., "Economie Atlantique et Profil des Villes-Ports en Europe (XVIIe- XIXe Siècles)" in Saupin G. (ed.), *Villes Atlantiques dans l'Europe Occidentale du Moyen-Age au XXè Siècle* (Rennes, 2006), pp. 45-56, p. 53.

⁷¹ Audran K., "Commerce réel et commerce pensé dans les zones portuaires bretonnes, 1789-1820", Colloque de l'AFHE, *Les lunettes pour voir et les mots pour dire. L'outillage mental des acteurs de l'économie* (Nov. 2007), p. 1 <http://afhe.ehess.fr/docannexe.php?id=477> [assessed 27/10/11]; Audran K., « Les négociants portuaires sous la Révolution et l'Empire en Bretagne : bilan et stratégies. Saint-Malo, Morlaix, Brest, Lorient & Nantes, 1789-1815 », *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 360 (2010), pp. 197-206; see also Hirsh J.-P., "Les milieux du commerce, l'esprit de système et le pouvoir à la veille de la Révolution française", *AESC*, 6 (1975), pp. 1337-1370; Pétré-Grenouilleau O., *Les Négociants maritimes français (XVIIe-XXe siècle)* (Paris, 1997).

⁷² Bois, *Histoire de Nantes*, p. 290.

councils dominated by noble origins or officers of justice, the rich merchants finally succeeded in gaining a monopoly on seats at the end of the seventeenth-century, as was already the case in Bristol.⁷³ Both cities benefitted from powerful and independent city councils which had the freedom to legislate and to encourage and support economic development intra-muros. Bristol's governance was based on the original Common Council, which was composed of forty aldermen, a mayor, a recorder and a sheriff.⁷⁴ Since the instigation of the town council in the fourteenth century, the aldermen and mayors gradually took over judicial responsibilities: after 1499, Bristol aldermen also acted as justices of the peace as they dealt with the criminal legislation, withdrawn from the hands of the sheriff.⁷⁵ As a consequence, three of them (later twelve), plus the Mayor and the Recorder, had to hold the Quarter Sessions four times a year and the Assize twice a year, the records of which are the main source of information for the study of prostitution in Bristol in the eighteenth century. They also had an influence on poor relief and on the Corporation of the poor created in 1696, which supervised the workhouse. Nantes' municipal organisation was based on a similar model to that of Bristol but the differences lay in the exercise of justice. The city council shared its judicial duties with the *sénéchaussée* and *présidial*, the king's courts of justice.⁷⁶ Despite this share of governance, Nantes' city council dealt with issues as varied as the security of the citizens, public works, poor relief and the municipal police.⁷⁷ In the eighteenth century, the municipality

⁷³ Saupin G., *Nantes au XVII^e siècle, Vie politique et Société urbaine* (Rennes, 1996), p.85.

⁷⁴ Harvey A., *Bristol, a Historical and Topographical Account of the City* (London, 1906), p. 220; Fleming P., 'The Emergence of Modern Bristol', in Dresser M. and Ollerenshaw P. (eds), *The Making of Modern Bristol* (Tiverton, 1996), pp. 1-24, p. 13.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁷⁶ The distinctions between the judicial functions of the different courts is not easy to define: the *sénéchaussée* and *présidial* dealt with criminal cases like heresy, profanations, false money, kidnapping, arson, vagrant and soldiers' crimes and larcenies, violence with weapons. See Saupin G., 'La compétence criminelle du présidial de Nantes sous le règne de Louis XIV', *Les Cahiers du Centre de Recherches Historiques*, 23 (1999), <http://ccrh.revues.org/index2172.html> [assessed on 23 May 2011].

⁷⁷ See Perrot J.-C., 'Rapports sociaux et villes au XVIII^e siècle', *Annales, Economies, Sociétés*,

succeeded in buying most of the royal offices, such as the offices of Lieutenant Général de Police and *commissaires*, and had *la main mise* on the judicial system of the city. The economic and familial links between the magistrates and main officials of the city have been studied in depth by Saupin and Hautebert, who both underline the close relationship between the different courts and the municipality, which was already established by the seventeenth century.⁷⁸

The concerns of the middling-sort in Bristol and Nantes were mainly focused on the protection of the city's economic interests, by encouraging trade but also by rendering the city safer and favorable to commercial exchange. This implied the growth of manufacturing and improvements to the port and quays but it also implied that a constant influx of migrants, workers or traders, as well as capital were necessary for the city to keep growing. Therefore its security had to be provided for and the task of the city council was to reduce the criminal threat and to maintain sufficient relief for the poor to prevent any disorder. As Barry observed while analyzing the urban legislation concerning the poor, "such aspirations are normally described as 'social control', aimed at the unruly poor, but they were also important as an affirmation of civic, bourgeois identity."⁷⁹

The sources available to research prostitution in the eighteenth century are not as scarce as one might think, although they are difficult to find.⁸⁰ Because of the lack of specific legislation against prostitutes, the local archives analysed for my research were

Civilisations, 23, n° 2 (1968), pp. 241-267.

⁷⁸ Saupin, *Nantes au XVIIIe siècle*, pp. 181-202; Hautebert J., *La Justice pénale à Nantes au Grand Siècle* (Paris, 2001), pp. 30-31.

⁷⁹ Barry J., 'Bristol pride: civic identity in Bristol c. 1640-1775', in M. Dresser and P. Ollerenshaw (eds), *The Making of Modern Bristol* (Tiverton, 1996), pp. 25-47, p. 35.

⁸⁰ See Gilfoyle T., 'Prostitutes in the Archives: Problems and Possibilities in Documenting the History of Sexuality', *The American Archivist*, 57, n° 3 (Summer, 1994), pp. 514-527, for a very interesting discussion on the availability of American sources to study prostitution.

extremely varied. Any kind of information on the subject of prostitution becomes important when looking at cities that do not offer many archives: the nature, aims or author of documents should not be at first the main concern for the historian of provincial prostitution. Only once the corpus of archives has been created, is it possible to categorise the documents by types: because of the specificity of the subject, and indeed the provincial locations, it would be difficult to focus on only one type of archives, as the material available would rarely be in sufficient quantity.

As noted already, the main sources are the judicial archives which give the most detailed information on prostitutes and their interactions with the inhabitants of the city. The Quarter Sessions records, Gaol Delivery Fiats in Bristol and the records of the *police municipale* in Nantes will be analysed throughout this thesis and will serve as the basis for the discussion on prostitution. However these archives, by their nature, offer a distorted image of prostitutes at that time as these women were recorded mainly as criminals or offenders. As Arlette Farge argued, the necessary formal language of judicial archives forms a barrier between the historian and the reality of the *mentalités*.⁸¹ But these archives are still the best source through which to evaluate common attitudes towards prostitution and the women involved in it in these port cities.

The classification of archives in France is primarily organised around two main categories: the *série moderne* and the *série ancienne*, the division being centred on the French Revolution. By creating new civil officials, the government therefore established new official documents⁸² and rationalized the administration. The archives that were

⁸¹ Farge Arlette, *La Vie Fragile: Violence, Pouvoirs et Solidarités à Paris au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1986), p.8.

⁸² See the *Code Civil* of 1804 as a result and culmination of these administrative changes and rationalization.

subsequently created were thus recorded as civil and secular documents as opposed to clerical records and monarchical laws and decrees. Both series will be analysed in the development of this thesis and it seems important to detail the main sections which will be of use. The archives in Nantes recorded under the category FF refer to the municipal police and judicial decrees applied by the city council before 1792; these are followed by the modern I series, referencing police administration and judicial cases: the indexing of the archives is based on the national framework. The judicial system in Nantes before the Revolution was organised under different courts of justice, which had authorized jurisdiction over the city. The admiralty, bishopric, city council and royal officials divided judicial cases between themselves according to the types and severity of crimes. In this thesis, the arguments will rely on evidence relating to measures taken by the city council and to the application of the law by the police. This choice has been motivated by the fact that the tribunal of the admiralty dealt only with cases involving ships, cargos and crew (like deserters or mutineers on board)⁸³ whereas the tribunal of the bishop or *Régairé* as it was called in Nantes treated cases involving the secular possessions of the bishop⁸⁴ and did not include judicial cases against disorderly behaviour. The majority of the judicial documents studied in Nantes were written by *commissaires*: indeed, after further research, it came to my attention that the *Maréchaussée*, which was active outside Nantes, did not deal with prostitutes and *tapage* but with more serious offences such as robberies, deserters and vagrancy.⁸⁵

The reports of the *commissaires* were constructed upon two types of judicial proceedings: reports of their night shifts offer important information on the location of

⁸³ Archives Départementales de Loire-Atlantique, C 662.

⁸⁴ See ADLA series G 3-4 for examples of temporal transactions by the bishopric.

⁸⁵ ADLA, B 8758 – *Registre des écrous de la police municipale*. This prison's register only recorded the arrests made by the *Maréchaussée* and not by the *commissaires*, it was therefore possible to compare them with the arrests made by the police to see the differences.

prostitutes and the relations *commissaires* had with these women. The second type of report or *procès-verbal* was the result of an inquest made after direct complaints from prostitute' neighbours or by demand of the *lieutenant criminel* (most commonly, but other officials and magistrates could refer to the *commissaire* to establish information), who was a magistrate at the Présidial. In both cases, if the evidence led to an arrest, the woman was then brought to the Bouffay, the royal prison of Nantes and later sent to court to be sentenced. However the judgements and the interactions between prostitutes and magistrates in a court of justice were not analysed in this thesis; I decided to focus on the relations between the lower middle-class and prostitutes in a familiar environment, where they interacted with the police as simple witnesses and citizens of the city and not systematically as culprits. Other types of judicial archives include prisons' registers (after trials), as well as the "*écrous de la police municipale*" which recorded the arrests made by the *commissaires*.⁸⁶

The judicial sources for Bristol are the records of the different courts of justice: compared to the important amount of reports and registers that must have been compiled for each trial, the number of archives still available is rather low. This study will rely on the analysis of the Quarter Sessions records, some trials from the Assizes and the Gaol Delivery Fiats that registered the details of the prisoners held in Newgate and their sentences: the latter documents were recorded on average twice a year, at a specific date, therefore they did not include all the prisoners that entered the prison during the year. Information on trials is scarce but offers a good basis to work on prostitution and the links between these women, the people they met and the law. In most cases, the only details of the affair still available are the depositions or

⁸⁶ ADLA, L 862-887 and L 1739-1741.

"informations" made by plaintiffs in front of a justice of the peace. There was a possibility that the depositions of one or more witnesses would also be recorded. However, the examinations of the accused (prostitutes) never survived, except in one affair, where two prostitutes involved were questioned and the records kept. Similarly, the records of the deliberations of the jury or judges, of the preliminary work done before the trial or even sometimes the sentences given have been lost.

The disappearance of so many archives leads us to the examination of the nature of the court which produced these archives. As explained before, the archives for petty sessions and summary justice have all disappeared, which means that convictions given by justices of the peace on a daily basis in Bristol remain unknown. Only documents from the indicted cases that reached the Quarter Sessions or the Assizes in Bristol have been kept. According to the law, the accused was tried by one court or the other depending on the severity of the crime. Capital offences, which number trebled in the eighteenth century, were normally dealt with by the Assizes while minor offences were tried by the Quarter Sessions.⁸⁷ Capital offences included murder, infanticide, rape, highway robbery but also property offences of a value of or over one shilling. However the nature of the archives often prevents us from knowing which court tried the accused: the Newgate Calendar for example did not give information on the courts. Similarly, the archives have all been recorded under the generic name of Quarter Sessions.⁸⁸ Only the Gaol Delivery Fiats gave some indications of which court tried the accused. Although a comparative analysis of the crime, amount of money stolen and sentence should give enough information to indicate which court tried the culprit, it appears that in practice the Bristol Quarter Sessions often dealt with people accused of

⁸⁷ Bristol Record Society (ed.), *Bristol Gaol Delivery Fiats 1741-1799* (Bristol, 1989), p. x.

⁸⁸ This denomination will be used throughout the thesis when referred to the judicial sources.

"assault and robbery" whereas the Assizes sometimes tried women accused of petty larceny, which means that the amount stolen was less than a shilling. The interchangeability of Bristol courts may be explained by the fact that the aldermen who presided over both sets of courts were the same people and therefore, some prisoners may have been tried at the Assizes court between two Quarter Sessions. At another level, crime studies by Beattie and King have shown that the jury, which was present in every Assizes of the country, often tried to minimise the offence to avoid capital punishment of the culprit, especially in cases of theft, which became the most common offence after the mid-eighteenth century.⁸⁹ Therefore the boundaries between Quarter Sessions and Assizes seemed to have been blurred in a city like Bristol.

In order to "capture" these end-of-the-century *mentalités* towards prostitution, other primary sources were added to the judicial archives. Newspapers have been analysed to depict the main concerns of the bourgeois of the city of Bristol for the last twenty years of the century (Nantes newspapers at this time were not consequent enough to be of any use).⁹⁰ Bristol had three local newspapers at the end of the century but most of them were constituted by news from London and reports of parliamentary debates. Local news was limited to the last columns, reporting the ships and cargoes that entered the port, some criminal affairs and the results of the Assizes: overall, *Bonner and Middleton's*, *Sarah Farley's* and *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal* were very similar. *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal* also published some letters or rather comments sent by readers, which is very interesting as they give an idea of upper-middle class concerns and

⁸⁹ Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, p. 140. King P., 'Illiterate Plebeians, Easily Misled': Jury Composition, Experience and Behavior in Essex, 1735-1815', in Cockburn J. and Green T. (eds), *Twelve Good Men and True, The Criminal Trial Jury in England, 1200-1800* (Princeton, 1988), pp. 254-304, p. 255; see also Palk D., *Gender, Crime and Judicial Discretion 1780-1830* (Woodbridge, 2006), p. 17.

⁹⁰ *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal* from 1753 to March 1853 is available at Bristol Central Library, under the reference MF. 6. *Bonner and Middleton* and *Sarah Farley's* newspapers are also on microfilms at the Central Library.

opinions. References to prostitution were however quite rare, although concerns about the "immorality" displayed during St James's fair was often mentioned. Bristolian newspapers were not the main source for this study but they remain useful as they offered snapshots of prostitutes' representation by the upper-middle class.

In addition to the newspapers and judicial archives, primary sources created by charitable organisations in both England and France will be analysed. In Nantes, these sources include the registry of the Sanitat kept under the serie GG.⁹¹ The Sanitat was the first hospital to open in Nantes in 1572 and was subsequently converted into a workhouse in the middle of the seventeenth century.⁹² The Sanitat was organised under the rules of an *Hôpital Général* and was administered by officials named by the King's Council since 1725.⁹³ This institution, as a workhouse, was a result of the project of confining the poor, put in place by Louis XIV and from 1723, prostitutes were officially jailed in what was called the Refuge, which designated a part of the Sanitat.⁹⁴ Two other catholic institutions took care of prostitutes in Nantes in the eighteenth century: the convent Bon Pasteur, opened in 1694 according to Pierre Marie Grégoire, accommodated twenty-seven inmates and a few *pensionnaires* who rented a room in the establishment while the Pénitentes de Ste Madeleine, in the same parish, opened in 1672 and became a convent in 1729.⁹⁵ The registers of entrants of the Bon Pasteur are still available but it is impossible to know if these young women who were sent to this convent went willingly or were forced to enter it.⁹⁶ However it is possible to draw some statistics and compare them with the data available on women arrested for *tapage* or

⁹¹ Archives Municipales de Nantes GG 506.

⁹² Maître L., *Histoire administrative des anciens hôpitaux de Nantes* (Nantes, 1875).

⁹³ AMN, GG 736; the five directors were the bishop, a member of St Pierre Cathedral, a magistrate from the *Cour des Comptes*, a deputy from the *Présidial* and one from the *Hôtel de Ville*.

⁹⁴ ADLA, C 633.

⁹⁵ Gregoire P.-M., *Etat du diocese de Nantes en 1790* (Nantes, 1882), pp. 79, 124; ADLA, H 451-454.

⁹⁶ ADLA, H 457.

disorderly behaviour. Concerning Bristol, the archives available for charities and the workhouse are more difficult to use. Firstly, the records of St Peter's workhouse in Bristol were destroyed by fire during the Second World War, preventing an absolute comparison between the effects of the policy against the poor and beggars in both cities. Without these archives, it is impossible to know if justices of the peace confined prostitutes in the workhouse, and research can therefore only be based on indicted offences, which were often more serious offences. Secondly, the records of the Female Penitentiary, opened in 1801 to receive prostitutes, are lost too, for the period up to 1836. Only the status of the charity and a list of subscribers in 1804 are available. To compensate for this unfortunate lack of archives, the records of charities for orphans and lying-in women have been examined:⁹⁷ the idea was to look at the statutes of the charities to see how they discussed their concerns about immorality and if they referred to a gradual increase of "debauchery" in the streets of Bristol (rhetorically, they usually did). The analysis of their archives tends more, as for the newspapers, to give an insight into what was deemed important and into the moral values of the time rather than providing specific information on prostitutes. The moral and social values of these charitable women must also be understood to reflect one facet of contemporary attitudes towards "immorality".⁹⁸

One of the last types of archives that was analysed were the registers of the alehouses, inns and *auberges*.⁹⁹ Different types of establishments attracted different types of customers and different landlords. Restrictions on selling alcohol through the licensing

⁹⁷ Mary Ann Peloquin charitable association's registry for the year 1779 to 1810 is recorded under the reference 2002 at the BRO; Blue Maids Orphanage, 08823/1b.

⁹⁸ Most associations in Bristol were gender specific: the asylum for poor orphan girls for example was organised and directed by a committee of women. But then subscriptions would have included both men and women, as couples, widows or single maids. BRO, 35722, Maudlin Penitentiary records of subscriptions, 1801.

⁹⁹ BRO JQS/AK/11 (alehouses keepers); JQS/IK/1 (innkeepers); AMN I1 C50 D2 (*cabaretiers*); I2 Registres 29-31 (*logeurs*).

regulations created these different kinds of public houses.¹⁰⁰ From the shack on St James Back or in the Marchix to the large inns where coaches were leaving for Bath or Paris, the differences went deeper than just the variety of alcohol sold. Chartres insists on the fact that the most prestigious inns in England, at the end of the eighteenth century, became a *façade* for the new bourgeois morality and standards, which means that prostitutes were not allowed entrance: but as we will see, this was not always the case.¹⁰¹ The tavern (six only were allowed initially in Bristol) and *cabaret* in France usually sold wine for a "good" price, whereas alehouses and victuallers provided customers with local brews: the customers they entertained were therefore different, wine usually being drunk by richer members of the society.¹⁰² Inns offered food and lodging to travellers but were also opened to local customers, as the example of the Bush Tavern in Bristol showed.¹⁰³ These types of establishments in port cities were also open to mariners who could lodge there whilst waiting to re-embark. With a predominantly male clientele, these public houses would have appeared quite attractive to prostitutes and therefore their relations with the landlord or landlady became crucial to the construction of their network, which explains why the study of these archives is important. These references to prostitutes throughout the registers, complemented by the records of the police, allow one to recover a sense of the reality in which the prostitutes lived and how they experienced the city and its different districts, by offering a spatial boundary to their location.

The methodology chosen for this thesis is similar to the methodology used by

¹⁰⁰ See Hunter J., 'English Inns, Taverns, Alehouses and Brandy Shops: The Legislative Framework, 1495-1797', in Kumin B. and Tlutsy B. (eds.), *The World of the Tavern* (Aldershot, 2002), pp. 65-82.

¹⁰¹ Chartres J. in 'The English Eighteenth-Century English Inn: A Transient Golden Age?' in Kumin and Tlutsy, *The World of the Tavern*, p. 222.

¹⁰² Banks F., *Wine Drinking in Oxford 1640-1850* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 10 and 21.

¹⁰³ BRO, JQS/P/140: Elizabeth Vowles, notorious prostitute of Bristol, was accused of murdering a local customer at the entrance of the Bush in Tower Lane.

Henderson and by historians of crime. The research is of a qualitative and quantitative nature and therefore allows the construction of relational databases which record details on prostitutes' social background and locations. Information on prostitutes has been recorded under different categories including personal details on the woman, her relationships with the plaintiff (s) or culprit (s) and an extensive review of the French and English vocabulary used to refer to prostitution in these cases. The databases refer to women involved in different types of offences, from disturbing the peace to murder. From these, statistics were calculated relating to the average age of the prostitutes, to their marital status and to their occupational situation; it has also been possible to extract statistics on prosecutions and condemnations against prostitutes, to investigate whether the fact that they were prostitutes influenced the magistrates' decision. A more qualitative approach to the archives allowed me to understand the links between landlords, lodging-keepers and prostitutes. Similarly, the role and influence of the *commissaires* and agents of the law in prosecuting prostitutes have been examined in order to see if their attitude evolved. Finally, the spatial distribution of prostitution and its evolution has been made possible by the exhaustive listing of the different places mentioned. In order to accurately represent these data, two detailed maps of end-of-the-century Nantes and Bristol have been compiled. The division into districts for the analysis of prostitutes' spatial distribution depends on the city: in Bristol, the parish division has been chosen as the limits of the wards (which were attributed to constables) changed throughout the century. In Nantes, the division into police districts has been preferred, in order to facilitate the comparison between pre- and post-revolution maps. Most of the time, the comparative approach between Nantes and Bristol was well supported by the gathered information. However there have been times when comparison was not directly possible because of a lack of data. In these instances, I tried

to establish whether the conclusion for one city was applicable to the other by using a difference perspective. For example, I used the summary convictions from the Gloucestershire Quarter sessions which dealt with offences in St James outer walls and parts of St Philip and Jacob, parishes which were not attached to Bristol City at that time, to see if prostitutes were condemned to Lawford Gate, a workhouse at the limit of Bristol boundaries. If no comparable documents could be found, national statistics have sometimes been used to validate or challenge local specificities.

This thesis will be divided into six chapters, each considering the main aspects of prostitution in Nantes and Bristol in the eighteenth century. The arguments may sometimes overlap as relationships and human movements are a central theme in this thesis but hopefully this thematic division will render clearer the reality of prostitution in Bristol and Nantes.

The first part will refer to the legal context surrounding prostitution in eighteenth-century France and England. This broad approach will allow the reader to become familiar with the different legislations which dealt with prostitution in both countries and how they evolved during the century. Some comparisons with other cities, especially London and Paris, will be accentuated to emphasize potential differences with regard to the legal treatment of prostitution at a local level. The impact of the French Revolution on legislation and the imminent birth of the Napoleonic Empire will also be outlined. It will be shown that the national legislation remained extremely vague concerning prostitution and that even the Napoleonic civil and penal codes did not help to construct a legal definition of prostitution.

The second chapter will follow a local approach to the legal treatment of prostitution and it will analyse the legislations and the judicial practice put in place in Bristol and Nantes to deal with prostitutes. A study of the judicial system and of the means of repression will be conducted to decipher the importance of personal initiatives and the role of magistrates, as well as agents of the law in general, in condemning prostitution. In parallel, the offences and crimes committed by prostitutes will be categorised as well as the sentences, to determine whether the fact that these women were prostitutes had an influence on the judicial processes. Linked with the analysis of local responses to prostitution is the role of the community in condemning or, on the contrary, protecting these women. Witnesses and plaintiffs' origins will be examined to see if similarities (neighbours, family members...) could be found in people involved in prosecuting prostitutes.

The third chapter will focus directly on the prostitutes: their social background, their age and family situation will be looked at in order to understand why they might have entered prostitution. Of course it will not be possible to give the direct reasons that forced women into prostitution, but the analysis of the data will show a pattern for women who were more likely to become prostitutes. This chapter first aims at consolidating our knowledge of the origins of the prostitutes to determine the impact their place of birth and family ties had on the construction of their network. The issue of female migration from the labouring-class in the eighteenth century will also be analysed in this part: the aim is to give an idea of how the prostitute's network was built in relation to her family and neighbours. It is evident that the aim is not to construct a hypothetical history of a prostitute's daily life, as the archives do not allow this, but to understand what prostitutes' surroundings could have plausibly been or who they could

have met and interacted with. Gender specificities and issues relating to women in Bristol and Nantes in the eighteenth century will also be considered to understand if they had an impact on prostitutes or not. Again, the similarities between both cities will be emphasised to corroborate the argument that there was a common pattern of prostitution in port cities.

The next chapter will analyse in greater depth the social network of the prostitutes outside their families. It will be focused on the process of (re)constructing the social interactions of the prostitutes in order to reflect on their social experience of the port city. Following the analysis of their social origins, it will be necessary to look at the specific points of contact between the prostitutes and the people (men and women) who encouraged their trade. Different types of relationships will be examined: the relations with other prostitutes, with their customers, the landlords and lodging-keepers and finally, with the agents of the law. The aim is to analyse how interactions between prostitutes, customers and landlords were based, admittedly, on financial gains but did not involve social dependence on the side of the prostitute. It is paralleled with the idea of economy of makeshifts and the section argues that most of the women were prostitutes only for a short period of time, most likely due to economic necessities. Evidence of the extent and limits of their social networks in the city will also be provided.

In the sixth chapter, the relationships between prostitutes and the authorities will be discussed. These relations concerned mainly low-class officials such as watchmen, constables and *commissaires de districts* who had cause to interact with the prostitutes. This section attempts to define the influence these interactions with authority had on the

way prostitutes acted and experienced the port city. Were they restricted in their trade? The process of implementation of a professionalised police and more rigorous administration and the impact of the Revolution will be at the centre of the discussion: the comparison between Bristol and Nantes will show how local events, as well as the Revolution had an impact on the way prostitutes were considered. The analysis will focus on low-class officials and not on magistrates or justices of the peace because prostitutes interacted more often with these officials than with the magistrates: *commissaires* and watchmen often knew where certain women were living or if they had already committed an offence. I aim to examine the relations based on regular encounters that occurred in a social space where prostitutes were accustomed to be, and not in a tribunal, where their attitudes may have been influenced by the legal context of the location.

Finally the last chapter of this thesis will focus on the spatial distribution of prostitution in port cities in the eighteenth century. Returning to an urban history approach to the subject, this part will highlight the appropriation of certain places by the prostitutes and show any changes which might have occurred during the period studied. The notion of community and relationships will be a reference in this section as it interfered with the appropriation of space. The urban environment of these port cities will be divided into parishes and districts and it will be interesting to see how prostitutes appropriated the different urban spaces: the port, the poorest districts and the centres of entertainment. Thus this thesis will be punctuated by recurring questions on representation, networks and links with the urban environment. These themes present throughout the development of the thesis, are interlinked: representation, community, spatiality and gender issues, all of which have a role to play in the change of attitudes which

eventually led to the *mise en carte* of prostitutes.

I. National frameworks: legislation on prostitution in France and England

Delamare, commissaire of the Châtelet, the most important court of justice in Paris, wrote in his *Traité de Police* in 1722 "*la prostitution est la marque d'un état faible qui ne peut faire respecter les lois sociales, qui sont aussi les lois de Dieu*"¹ arguing that the existence of prostitution went against the social order and God's will. In his discourse he summarized the monarchy's perception of prostitutes, by describing them as a threat to society and to its morality. They threatened social order by interacting within the highest spheres of society² and threatened morality by their indecent behaviour. Fifteen years later, in England, an anonymous author complained that he was greeted in the streets by "twitches on the sleeves, lewd and ogling Salutations ... in spite of our Reforming Society we are more scandalously lewd",³ outlining the inefficiency of the official Societies for the Reformation of Manners. With the expansion of the press, the "risks" and annoyances linked with prostitutes' behaviour were also denounced by contemporary newspapers or magazines: fifty years later in the Bristolian *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal* of 27 August 1787, a correspondent reflected "on the dreadful enormities committed at [St James] fair" where "a number of abandoned females are entertained and suffered to molest every person who passes them and to seduce the

¹ Quoted in Grimmer C., *La femme et le bâtard* (Paris, 1983), p. 116.

² This was mainly the case for the courtesans, although masquerades were considered dangerous according to newspapers in both countries as prostitutes could hide themselves behind a mask and pretend to be of 'higher' birth; for instance, see the condemnation of masquerades by Gibson E., *A sermon preached before the Society for the Reformation of Manners, 6 January 1723* (London, 1724); see also Mudge B., *The Whore's Story: Women, Pornography and the British Novel 1684-1830* (Oxford, 2000), p. 29.

³ Anon., *Some Considerations upon Street-Walkers* (London, 1737), pp. 2-3.

unwary in the face of the day."⁴ The fair was notorious for its bush-houses, temporary ale-houses "where vice in all her form was permitted to a level uncontrolled". An entirely different document, found in Nantes archives and written by the priest of St Nicholas parish went further in the process of denunciation: along with the accusation of immorality, in 1777 the priest also blamed prostitutes for the (perceived) decrease in French population.⁵ References to prostitution in eighteenth-century France and England were neither rare nor forbidden. On the contrary, writers, journalists, essayists, politicians and even members of the clergy discussed issues linked with prostitution such as immorality, risks for married women and children born of prostitutes.⁶

However the legal situation of prostitutes in the eighteenth century remained vague and undefined. The term "prostitution" was not used in a legal parliamentary text before 1822 in England;⁷ in France, neither the Revolution, nor the Empire, produced a law to forbid or regulate prostitution on a national scale. Even the 1810 *Code Pénal* did not forbid prostitution; it condemned the act of procuring someone for this purpose.⁸ Therefore, during the period 1750-1815, prostitution was forbidden in neither France nor England; selling one's body, if it was not disturbing the peace, was not considered as a crime or an offence by the Quarter Sessions or the royal courts of justice. Church courts in England used to punish lewdness but in Bristol they had lost most of their judicial power after the Civil war. The legal situation of prostitutes in Nantes and Bristol and their social status were therefore rather difficult to define: were they considered as victims or offenders? Who decided their legal status? In order to understand the

⁴ Felix Farley's *Bristol Journal*, 27 August 1787.

⁵ Archives Municipales de Nantes (AMN), GG 258.

⁶ For examples see: Mandeville B., *A Modest Defense of the Publick Stews* (London, 1724); Restif de La Bretonne N.-E., *Le Pornographe* (Genève, reprint, 1988).

⁷ Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, p. 94. Prostitutes were usually referred as street-walkers or disorderly persons during the eighteenth century.

⁸ Code Pénal, 1810, art. 394.

dialectic between national and local legislations, this chapter will first focus on the main legal issues concerning prostitution in England and France, the evolution of the laws up to 1815 and their role in "defining" prostitutes' legal status.

1. Prostitution and vagrancy

One of the major concerns in the eighteenth century for both countries was the multiplication of vagrants and the annoyance which resulted from their constant movement: robberies, thefts and intensive begging became reasons for the British Parliament and the *Conseil du Roi*⁹ to reinforce or repeat former laws against rogues and vagrants. Prostitutes fell under the purview of the 1739-1744 Vagrancy Act in England and the 1724 *Ordonnance contre la Mendicité – pour le renfermement des mendians et gens sans aveu* in France as they could be seen as potential vagrants, moving from one parish to the other and sometimes originating from another county.¹⁰ These acts allowed magistrates to prosecute vagrants and to send them back to their parish of origin: but the definition of vagrants remained impossible to apply to prostitutes who had lodging or who were born in the city. Therefore, magistrates were still, according to Henderson, following "traditional usage" concerning the punishment of vagrancy, which relied on the condemnation for disturbing the peace.¹¹ However, women were also at risk of falling into poverty and therefore of becoming chargeable to the parish. Single women with one or two children were commonly found in archives relating to vagrancy: in both countries, since the mid-seventeenth century, the parish was allowed to send them back to their parish of origin if they became chargeable.¹² In

⁹ Legislative and executive body presided by the king.

¹⁰ Parliamentary Records: HL/PO/PU/1/1739/13G2n25; HL/PO/PU/1/1743/17G2n5; De Boug, *Recueil des édits, Déclarations, Lettres patentes, Arrêts du Conseil d'état et du Conseil Souverain d'Alsace, Ordonnances et Règlements concernant cette province* (Colmar, 1775), p. 47; see also Innes J., *Inferior Politics, Social Problems and Social Policies in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2009), p. 71.

¹¹ Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, p. 90.

¹² See for example the detailed study on Chelsea bastardy cases by Hitchcock: Hitchcock T., *Chelsea*

important cities like Nantes and Bristol, these laws also meant that the defendants might be sent to St Peter's workhouse (in St Peter's parish) or to the Sanitat, Nantes' *hôpital général*, where they were put to work for the city.¹³

Despite the disappearance of St Peter's archives, it is legitimate to infer that this workhouse was based on a similar model to other provincial institutions. From what has been recorded before the burning of the archives, St Peter's was first opened in 1698 to provide work for young girls in order to "keep them from idleness".¹⁴ Facing financial difficulties, the workhouse opened its door to all the poor who needed relief and made them work in thread works, in an attempt to make some profit.¹⁵ Cary, one of the first Guardians of the workhouse, reported that in the 1700s lunatics, infirm and aged patients were already being admitted to St Peter's.¹⁶ The workhouse accommodated on average 300 to 350 people but it was constantly accused of being overcrowded and dirty.¹⁷ According to Johnson, who wrote a report on the Corporation of the Poor in 1820, "The Court [in 1718] requested the Churchwardens of each parish, and the Guardians of each ward, to meet at eight o'clock in the morning, and seize all vagrants and take them before some justices of the peace."¹⁸ It is possible that prostitutes were accused of vagrancy and were held at the workhouse but the lack of archives allows more speculations than conclusions and the number of single women who were detained remains unknown. Therefore it is mainly only the secondary literature that makes me believe that the distinction between paupers, vagrants and prostitutes was already too

Settlement and Bastardy Examinations, 1733-1766 (London, 1999).

¹³ St Peter's Hospital (known first as the Mint) was chosen as a workhouse in 1696 when the Bristol Poor Act was implemented. Unfortunately the entire records for the eighteenth century have burnt down with the building during the Bristol Blitz in November 1940.

¹⁴ Butcher E. E. (ed.), *Bristol Corporation of the Poor, 1696-1834* (Bristol, 1932), p. 5.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁶ Cary J., *An Account of the Proceedings of the Corporation of Bristol* (London, 1700), p. 16.

¹⁷ Butcher, *Bristol Corporation of the Poor*, p. 12.

¹⁸ Johnson J., *Transactions of the Corporation of the Poor* (Bristol, 1826), p. 159.

important for the authorities to consider confining prostitutes in the workhouse. The notion of deserving paupers coupled at the end of the century with the idea that paupers should not be systematically institutionalised, and that they should rather be encouraged to be virtuous, had a certain impact on charitable minds.¹⁹ This would explain why prostitutes or disorderly women do not appear in the records still available. The dissociation between paupers, indigents and disorderly persons would explain why prostitutes were probably rather sent to Newgate, if ever convicted for vagrancy or disorderly behaviour, rather than to St Peter's workhouse.²⁰

The organisation of Nantes' *hôpital général* was quite similar to an English workhouse, and followed the pattern instituted by the *ordonnance* of 1654 which created the *Hôpitaux Généraux* in most French cities. The Sanitat received its new *lettres patentes* on 25 February 1725, referring to the organisation of its new *bureau*, dealing only with the arrival and admittance of rogues and vagrants.²¹ In 1760-1762, the *lettres patentes* for the Sanitat were renewed and section IV focused on the situation of the prostitutes and the mentally ill.²² The distinction between prostitutes and paupers is interesting and this division reinforces the fact that prostitutes were not considered paupers. According to the organisation of the Sanitat, the prostitutes could not have been lodged in the same part of the workhouse as the paupers; section IV explained the situation of the disorderly women:

Voulons que dans le lieu dudit Hôpital, appelé Refuge, soient renfermées à

¹⁹ Innes, *Inferior Politics*, p. 219-220.

²⁰ On the usage of bridewell in Gloucestershire see: Innes J., "Prisons for the Poor: English Bridewells, 1555-1800", in Snyder F. and Hay D., *Labour, Law and Crime, An Historical Perspective* (London, 1987), pp. 42-122, pp. 99-100.

²¹ AMN, GG 736 – Sanitat.

²² AMN, GG736 – Sanitat.

*l'avenir, comme ci-devant, le filles et femmes débauchées et de vie scandaleuse (...) et pendant la détention desdites Filles et Femmes, elles seront, comme ci-devant, nourries au pain et à l'eau, instruites et occupées au profit de la maison à des ouvrages convenables; et lorsque leurs parents, ou ceux des Insensés, Fous et Furieux seront en état de payer une pension raisonnable, ils en conviendront par écrit, ainsi que des autres conditions, avec les Administrateurs.*²³

Again, the similarities with England seem to be confirmed: the differences between disorderly people and paupers existed in magistrates' minds. Henderson's statement can thus also be applied to the situation in France: magistrates condemned according to traditions and made a distinction between confinement for disorderly behaviour and for poverty.

According to the incomplete records available for the Sanitat, only twenty-two prostitutes were held for three months in 1767. The next entry referred to 14 April 1769, when four "disorderly women" were imprisoned for three months in accordance with the police sentence of 6 April 1769.²⁴ The number of prostitutes incarcerated during these two years was therefore very low, and none at all appear to have been confined in 1768. On the other hand the number of poor women entering the Sanitat was much higher, and women were even more numerous than men: in 1773, 328 women or girls were in the hospital, whereas only 158 men or boys were accommodated there.²⁵ Prostitutes' incarceration in another part of the workhouse underlined the fact that

²³ AMN, GG 736 – Sanitat.

²⁴ ADLA - H dépôt 3- 2F2 -H794 - Listes des admissions au Sanitat; only their name, date of entry and release were recorded.

²⁵ ADLA - H dépôt 3- 2F2 -H794 - Listes des admissions au Sanitat. Already between 1680 and 1700, 60% of the admissions concerned women: Bois, *Histoire de Nantes*, p. 203.

officials did not consider them to be on the same level as beggars or paupers, as their activities and the reasons why they were confined differed greatly. The definition of the nuisance committed by the prostitutes reflected the moral approach taken by the government to tackle this problem. Even though it is not clearly said in the preceding extract why the prostitutes had to be imprisoned, the section probably refers to the *Déclaration du Roi* of 1656, which condemned women and girls who behaved in an indecent manner to be forced to work.²⁶ The women had to work, usually doing needle work, *broderie* or lace, as was the case in England.²⁷ They were not expected to pay rent; however the *lettres patentes* of 1760-1762 mentioned the fact that the family, if they so wished, could pay a pension for "disorderly women" to be kept in the Sanitat when their sentence was over.²⁸

2. Prostitution and morality

As defined by the *Encyclopédie*, "*une prostituée est celle qui s'abandonne à la lubricité de l'homme pour quelque motif vil et mercenaire*",²⁹ prostitution was thus linked with immorality, which mirrored the attitudes of the governing elite towards prostitution. Especially in England, the defenders of morality were vigorous in their condemnation of prostitution as a vice, and the members of the Societies for the Reformation of Manners (beginning of the eighteenth century) played a role in the condemnation of immoral behaviour.³⁰ In order to understand eighteenth-century attitudes towards morality, it is interesting to look at the influence of these societies, all the more as Bristol was one of

²⁶ Quote in Delamare N., *Traité de la Police*, livre III, titre V, chapitre IV (Amsterdam, 1729), p. 447.

²⁷ For more information on the organisation of workhouses in England: Dyson R., 'The Nature of Urban Poverty, an Oxford case study, c. 1760-1835', Ph.D. thesis (Oxford Brookes University, 2007); Fissel M., *Patients, Power and the Poor in Eighteenth Century Bristol* (Cambridge, 1991).

²⁸ AMN, GG 736 – Sanitat.

²⁹ Diderot and D'Alembert, *L'Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers*, 35 (Paris, 1775), p. 450.

³⁰ For the discussion held at the SRM in Bristol see Barry J., *Reformation and Revival in Eighteenth-Century Bristol* (Bristol, 1994).

the first provincial cities to follow this trend and that almost a century later, the same "denunciations" were to reappear. From the beginning of the reign of William and Mary, proclamations against vice were recurrent and were encouraged by the governing local elites.³¹ Bristol responded positively to the birth of the Societies for the Reformation of Manners (SRM) and created its own in 1698, supervised by aldermen and mayors. The involvement of the higher spheres of the municipal government was evident as the Bristol SRM was dominated by the "important citizens" from 1698 to 1715,³² comprising during its whole existence, nine mayors, ten aldermen, fifteen sheriffs and twenty-one common councillors, without mentioning the militia and the merchants who did not occupy a place as councillor or alderman. The making of laws and the execution of justice were therefore closely linked with the aims and activities of the Society.

The Bristol Society first followed the precept of the royal declarations by prosecuting and condemning profaneness and debauchery, that is to say, prosecuting men and women who did not respect the Sunday rest and hours of divine service or behaved violently and indecently.³³ In accordance with these precepts, in 1702 the Corporation of the Poor printed placards to be displayed on the walls of the city, summarizing their mission. This record, to be found in the Memorandum Book of the city, emphasizes the close link between the SRM and the city council:

We the Mayor and Aldermen Justices of the Peace for the County of the City of
Bristol, having taken into our serious consideration Her Majesty's gracious
Proclamation for the encouragement of true religion and virtue, and putting in

³¹ Bristow E., *Vice and Vigilance, Purity Movements in Britain since 1700* (Dublin, 1977), pp. 12-15; Claydon T., *William III and the Godly Revolution* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 115-116.

³² Barry J., *Reformation and Revival in Eighteenth-Century Bristol* (Bristol, 1994), p. 3-4.

³³ Bristol Reference Library, Bristol Collection n° 10162, fo. 1.

Execution the many good laws against all immoral, vicious and profane practices We think fit in this publick manner to signifie that we heartily and sincerely resolve to discountenance all the Neglect of the worship and Service of God on the Lord's Day, blasphemy, profane swearing and cursing, prophanation of the Lord's Day, excessive drinking, lewdness, Bawdy-houses, publick gaming-houses and places and other disorderly houses or any dissolute, immoral and disorderly practices, by executing most strictly the laws against all such offenders.³⁴

In the first couple of years the twenty-four subscribers quickly increased to fifty, clearly motivated by a "sense of justice", meaning that they actively sought out culprits, men or women, to bring them in front of a justice of the peace. For example, on 6 August 1700, from Redcliff Ward, two persons were identified as "loose and base" and were said to be living in lewdness. From Castle Ward, two women were listed as prostitutes; from St James Ward, Elizabeth Roach and Elizabeth Tayler were mentioned as living in whoredom, each of them having two or three "base" children.³⁵ These six persons were summoned at the next Quarter Sessions to explain their situation. This type of activity was similar to the enquiries made by London's SRM but Bristol SRM, after two years of existence, quickly took another route and decided to concentrate its efforts on educating poor children: common opinion, and eventually the Society itself, seemed to become more and more reluctant to participate in the process of accusation and punishment.³⁶ In 1729, according to Latimer, the condemnation of two men and a woman for lewdness was rather pitied by the population.³⁷ Public punishments against lewd behaviour fell

³⁴ BRO, 04217, Memorandum Book.

³⁵ Bristol Reference Library, Bristol Collection n° 10162, fo. 13.

³⁶ Barry, *Reformation and Revival*, p. 7.

³⁷ Latimer J., *The Annals of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century* (Bristol, 1893), pp. 169-170.

into disuse, at least according to the archives still available.

Studies of the Bristol SRM underline the specificity of the targets: unlike London's or others' Societies, Bristol members were careful not to accuse one of their peers, but chose to target the lower classes.³⁸ The parish of residence of the six men and women targeted in August 1700 is indicative of their social origin: St James was one of the poorest parishes of Bristol with St Mary Redcliffe and Sts Philip and Jacob. Castle Ward was in close contact with Sts Philip and Jacob and the city centre where the majority of inns and alehouses of the city were located; at the beginning of the eighteenth century, Castle Ward was inhabited by artisans. Besides, in only one case were the neighbours the plaintiffs: Jane Cobb from Durnstarr was accused of "entert[aining] lewd men"; the other accusations were always reported by spies or informants of the Society.³⁹ Dabhoiwala talks of a "disintegration of their judicial approach" as the members of the Society started to rely mainly on informants, a tactic which was not approved by their contemporaries.⁴⁰ Similarly, the revival of the Society for the Reformation of Manners through the Society for Suppression of Vice at the end of the century would suffer the same destiny: they employed semi-legal means to get their information and therefore did not succeed in engaging everyone on their side.⁴¹ The evangelical revival of 1780-1820 was based on similar concepts as the first proclamation against vice: evangelicals, mainly coming from the middling sort, aimed to redefine "the available cultural norms and to encourage a new seriousness and respectability in life", but with a moderate

³⁸ Hurl-Eamon J. 'Policing Male Heterosexuality', *Journal of Social History*, 37, n° 4 (2004), pp. 1017-1035, p. 1018.

³⁹ Bristol Reference Library, Bristol Collection n° 10162, fo. 13.

⁴⁰ Dabhoiwala F., 'Sex and Society for Moral Reform, 1688-1800', *Journal of British Studies*, 46 (April, 2007), pp. 290-319, p. 305.

⁴¹ Dabhoiwala, 'Sex and Society for Moral Reform', pp. 309 and 318.

success.⁴²

In France, the development of societies for the reformation of manners did not exist, but measures were taken at a national and Parlement level to "reduce immorality". Benabou argued that the repressive legal system put into place by Louis XIV lasted up to the Revolution and in 1713, under the rigorist end-of-reign of Louis XIV, a Parisian act specifically against prostitution was added to the policy of Grand Enfermement, which had been introduced in mid-seventeenth century and concerned all vagrants, beggars and disorderly people.⁴³ Women could be accused of debauchery on the basis of the testimony of her neighbours; *commissaires* and *archers* were allowed to throw her furniture in the street, sell it and give the profits to charity. Parisian laws were often imitated and adapted in the provinces: as will be shown neighbours in Nantes complained of *tapage* and not debauchery and the threat of throwing furniture in the street was mentioned only once in the Nantes archives, on 20 August 1778. Six women, all lodging in the same place near the Pont de la Madeleine, were asked to leave the place in three days or their furniture would be thrown out onto the street:⁴⁴ this was ordered after Louis XVI's councillors edited in 1778 a similar *ordonnance*. By its content, this *ordonnance* also underlined the inability of the royal policies to deal with the reality of prostitution. The *ordonnance* claimed that the scandal and the debauchery of these women were disturbing the peace and the morality of the cities. Instead of hiding their "*infame commerce*" they showed themselves at the window to attract passers-by.⁴⁵ Nothing in this *ordonnance* was in the prostitutes' favour nor did it give

⁴² Hall C., *White, Male and Middle Class* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 77; Innes, *Inferior Politics, Social Problems*, pp. 179-226.

⁴³ AMN, FF 271.

⁴⁴ AMN, FF 94 – Police; It is interesting to see that the court of justice enjoined the lodgers, who made a complaint, to make the prostitutes leave and did not ask the policemen to do it.

⁴⁵ AMN, FF 291.

them any alternative to being evicted from their room. Prostitution was forbidden on the grounds that it encouraged immorality and disturbed the peace, but the only local response to this statement was the multiplication of fines for the lodgers and innkeepers who favoured the trade. The discrepancy between the aim of the royal acts and the actual application of the law demonstrates that eighteenth-century people were not as keen on prosecuting immorality, and therefore prostitutes, as the King's councillors.

3. Prostitution and public order

Legislators seemed to believe in the existence of a "network" surrounding prostitutes, of people living on "the wages" of prostitution and the necessity of disentangling it appeared a priority in order to reduce prostitution. National legislation in France and England targeted people connected with prostitution and the places where they could live and work in an attempt to maintain the peace. Most of this legislation was not systematically against prostitution but was implemented to prevent disorder, as the two were often linked in eighteenth-century minds. The 1751 *Act for the better preventing Thefts and Robberies, and for regulating Places of publick Entertainment, and punishing Persons keeping disorderly Houses*, which was introduced in response to the riots sparked off in the bawdy houses of the Strand, is an example of legislation regulating the network surrounding prostitutes. Fines on tenants of disorderly houses would have prevented them from opening their doors to disorderly persons: in the records of charges brought against tenants, they were accused of encouraging tippling, whoring and illegal games.⁴⁶ Henderson argues that the majority of demands for new legislation concerning prostitution in England did not ask for toleration but on the contrary encouraged stricter rules against prostitutes and their networks.⁴⁷ Therefore it

⁴⁶ Parl. Records, HL/PO/PU/1/1751/25G2n28.

⁴⁷ Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, p. 100.

was suggested that places such as lodging houses and coffee-houses should be under the same regulations as licensed establishments such as inns and taverns, allowing justices of the peace to pursue and condemn these tenants for keeping a disorderly house. These demands reflect the extent of the understanding of prostitution and disorderly behaviour in general: in order to maintain the peace, the locations where disorderly behaviour could develop had to be supervised, suggesting that the focus of the regulation shifted from the disorderly persons to the disorderly places. In France, the householders were bound to keep a register with the names of their lodgers and to have it readily available to show to the police: the *ordonnance* was repeated, with few changes, throughout the eighteenth century: in 1718, 1738, 1752 and 1756.⁴⁸ Between 1751 and 1790 in Nantes, 165 contraventions were recorded,⁴⁹ but when the records are studied in more depth, it appears that although the *commissaires* fined the tenants of the house for not keeping their books accurately, significantly they did not arrest or prosecute the prostitutes found lodging in the inn. This laissez-faire attitude went against the *ordonnance* of 1713 which enjoined police to make the prostitutes leave.

During the Revolutionary period in Nantes, the measures against innkeepers and alehouse keepers increased as their establishments were designated as potential places where riots and especially plots against the Revolution could be organised. Therefore the 1791 *Réglement de Police Administrative*, displayed on the walls of the city in Frimaire An V, forbade any unlawful games and required the innkeepers and alehouse keepers to refuse to serve food or drink after 10.00 pm. More importantly, the rules insisted on keeping the lodging books up to date and to notify the authorities of any

⁴⁸ AMN, FF 64; FF 216-217.

⁴⁹ AMN, FF 219-220.

foreigner coming to Nantes.⁵⁰ However, these regulations had been issued by the city council, as the national Parlement was too busy to deal with these issues. This inconsistency in the application of the laws in England and in France and the absence of a new legislation against prostitutes during the Revolution highlights a point which will be thoroughly discussed: the appropriation of the national laws by local police and agents of the law and the reality of their implementation in these cities.

The French Revolution and the Empire had obviously a great influence on English attitudes; the fear of invasion or of popular riots was widespread amongst the English population.⁵¹ But as Wilson explains, "invasion anxieties manifested themselves in other worries: of health and morality and religion".⁵² These worries did not spare Bristol inhabitants: political rifts between the elites, popular riots linked with the Bristol Bridge toll and discovery of French plots for invasions challenged the stability of the city.⁵³ It cannot be said that this atmosphere or the political tensions directly influenced the way prostitutes were treated in Bristol or at a national level in terms of legislation; however an evolution in the development of charities and social control was clearly perceptible. The growth of charities to help the poor and eventually to install a form of control was not born with the Revolution and was part of a longer process, but it is possible that local anxieties also had a role to play in this development. The last decade of the century in Bristol saw a rise in the number of charitable societies created to help the children, the old, the sick or the poor lying-in women, organised by women from the

⁵⁰ AMN, 3I97 -police municipale; I2 C2 d.11 -police générale.

⁵¹ On moral panics and crimes see King P., 'Moral Panics and violent Street Crime 1750-2000 : a Comparative Perspective', in Godfrey B., Emsley C., Dunstall G. (eds), *Comparative Histories of Crime* (Cullompton, 2003), pp. 53-71; Lemmings D., *Moral Panics, the Media and the Law in early modern England* (Basingstoke, 2009), especially pp. 195-266.

⁵² Wilson, *Decency and Disorder*, p. 9.

⁵³ Poole S., 'Popular Politics in Bristol, Somerset and Wiltshire, 1791-1805', PhD Thesis (University of Bristol, 1992); Jones P., 'The Bristol Bridge Riot and its Antecedents: eighteenth-century Perceptions of the Crowd', *Journal of British Studies*, 19, n° 2 (Spring, 1980), pp. 74-92; Harvey A., *Bristol, a Historical and Topographical Account of the City* (London, 1906), p. 220; Poole S., 'To be a Bristolian: Civic Identity and the Social Order, 1750-1850', in M. Dresser and P. Ollerenshaw (eds), *The Making of Modern Bristol* (Tiverton, 1996), pp. 76-95, pp. 83-84.

elite or middle-class, in an attempt to control the morality of the labouring sort and make the poor less susceptible to be influenced by radicals.⁵⁴ Hannah More's *Cheap Repository Tracts*, published between 1795 and 1798 were another form of social control "imposed" upon the poor and these tracts repeated moral condemnations of the beginning of the century: they denounced drunkenness, debauchery, idleness, gambling and riotous assembly.⁵⁵ Upper-middle classes' anxieties over the behaviour of the labouring classes in Bristol were quite patent. In 1804, the Bristol Female Penitentiary, which had opened four years earlier, counted 168 subscribers: twenty of them were from the clergy, seven subscribers were "Ladies" (three single or widowed and four married to a subscriber), and fifty-nine of the female subscribers were married women, eighteen of them were single women and the rest of the subscribers were men.⁵⁶ On the basis of their titles, it seems that the Bristol penitentiary attracted members of the gentry, as did the London Magdalen Hospital when it opened: fifty-four gentlemen (esquires) and gentlewomen donated to the hospital, which accounts for 32% of the subscribers.⁵⁷ However of the men and ladies' committees which supervised the Penitentiary each being respectively composed of twenty-eight men and seventeen women, the gentry represented only 14% and 6% respectively, or four male members and one lady. Relatively speaking, the only Bristolian charity for prostitutes was mainly supervised by the upper-middle class, as was the London Magdalen Hospital forty years

⁵⁴ Fissel M., *Patients, Power and the Poor*, p. 91; Cranidge J., *A Mirror for the Burgesses and the Commonality of the City of Bristol* (Bristol, 1818); Some earlier charities: the Somersetshire charity for blind boys and poor lying-in women existed since 1774, as well as Mrs Ann Thurnston's charity for the relieved of nine poor pregnant women per year which was founded in 1754: BRO, AC/JS/13/8 Smyth Family of Ashton Court, Jarrit Smith Papers, Personal miscellanea, Annual report of the Somersetshire Society; BRO, 04190 – 04191, Mrs Ann Thurnston's charity; after her death, the sum was to be managed by the mayor and mayoress, which emphasizes once again the close link between charity and municipal governance.

⁵⁵ Pedersen S., 'Hannah More Meets Simple Simon: Tracts, Chapbooks, and Popular Culture in Late Eighteenth-Century England', *Journal of British Studies*, 25, n° 1 (Jan., 1986), pp. 84-113.

⁵⁶ BRO, 17567 (7).

⁵⁷ Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police*, p. 117.

earlier.⁵⁸ The official director of the penitentiary was the mayor, and the two sheriffs were chosen as vice-presidents: Bristol common council, in this charitable institution, as in many others, was clearly represented by its official members and by the families of merchants who shared official and charitable positions.

The asylum for the poor orphan girls, opened in 1794 aimed to "rescue them from this danger [moral corruption] by a proper education, instilling early principles of religion, morality and industry".⁵⁹ At the female penitentiary for "fallen women" which opened in 1801 in Bristol, the committee praised the "objects of compassion" and designated some of them as "true penitents".⁶⁰ The hatred and fear of immorality, which historians suggest was born from an end-of-the-century "moral panic", were constantly at the core of the debate: articles 14 and 15 of respectively the statutes of the Protestant Providential Society and Female Clubs, threatened any member who swore, drank or behaved immorally with exclusion.⁶¹ In the same vein, the Bristol Female Misericordia Society for poor women and women in child-bed, which relieved up to 340 women from June 1804 to June 1805, refused to help some women who had however been recommended as potential beneficiaries: a visit of a female guardian at their home had apparently proven the immorality and lies of the young women.⁶² The committee of the Female Penitentiary approved without reservation the fact that the inmates "were considered the outcast of the society" but that they would eventually be reinstated

⁵⁸ As subscription was £1 1s pa, it seems possible to believe that only the upper middle-class could afford it.

⁵⁹ BRO, JQS/Friendly Societies/ 13-14 (PPV and Female Clubs); 08823/1a - Asylum for Poor Orphan Girls.

⁶⁰ BRO, 17567 (7) - Bristol Female Penitentiary: unfortunately most of the earliest records of this Magdalen hospital have disappeared, either stolen or burnt. The data mentioned were extracted from a report of 1804 which listed the aims of the penitentiary and the names of the subscribers. However no penitent name is to be found in the remaining archives before 1835.

⁶¹ Hall, *White, Male and Middle-Class*, p. 81 and Dabhoiwala, 'Sex and Societies for Moral Reform', p. 318; BRO, JQS/Friendly Societies/ 13-14.

⁶² It is to be regretted that no more information can be found about these cases.

within the community as industrious women and not as consuming agents.⁶³ However, it is unknown if women were indeed freed after some times: a document mentions the death of an inmate who was "very repentant" until her death but there is no reference to women being allowed to leave the penitentiary. Even the London Magdalen Hospital at the end of the eighteenth century had gradually abandoned its initial aim of rehabilitating these women into society: at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the women allowed inside the hospital were confined within its walls in a process of redemption that was then supposed to last till the end of their life.⁶⁴

It is true that "by 1800 it had become much harder even to prosecute notorious prostitutes and brothel keepers than it had been a hundred years earlier"⁶⁵ and the legal frameworks in France and England had various weaknesses that prevented the arrest or control of prostitutes. Although prostitution was quite openly discussed by some legislators, the vagrancy acts and disorderly houses act in England did not target prostitutes specifically; in France, the legal acts concerning prostitutes were not always adapted to the local situation. The political torments of the Revolution and Empire left aside the lack of legislation against prostitution at a national level in both countries: only the study of the legal interpretation of this thin canvas at a local level can give the historian an idea how prostitution was perceived.

⁶³ BRO, 17567 (7) - Bristol Female Penitentiary; Batchelor J., 'Industry in Distress': Reconfiguring Femininity and Labor in the Magdalen House', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 28, n° 1 (Winter, 2004), pp. 1-20, pp. 10-11 about London Magdalen hospital's aims. However a question arises from this statement, as to whether the prostitutes were indeed considered as outsiders in their own community or if this point of view was relevant only for the middle and upper classes.

⁶⁴ Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police*, p. 172.

⁶⁵ Dabhoiwala, 'Sex and Societies for Moral Reform', p. 291.

II. Local frameworks: the prosecution of prostitution in Bristol and Nantes.

Henderson in *Disorderly Women in the Eighteenth-Century London* concludes his study by insisting on the vagueness of the statute law relating to prostitution, which was "by no means clear", but the metropolitan laws were, according to him, "unambiguous" and clearly focused on the eradication of streetwalking.¹ This distinction in the legal system between local and national legislation was noticeable in both countries and in Bristol and Nantes the city councils had to implement and adapt national policies against vice to the local situation. When analyzing prosecutions and laws against prostitution in the eighteenth century, one must understand them as being part of a legal strategy against the poor and vagrants introduced in both kingdoms.² Nevertheless, the adaptation of this strategy at a local level left space for personal interpretation of the law, which must first be analysed. Secondly the means of "repression" put in place to lessen prostitution will be examined: from confinement to eviction, the role of the police and magistrates will also be underlined. Finally the crimes committed by prostitutes will be compared to the crimes and offences committed by women on a national scale to show if differences in types of crimes, forms of prosecution or condemnation can be highlighted.

1. Bristol and Nantes' interpretation of the national policies against vice.

Bristol legislation throughout the eighteenth century was influenced by different proclamations against vice, by the Society for the Reformation of Manners (the one in London as well as its own) and of course, by the acts of Parliament against vagrants and disorderly houses. As expected, Bristol followed the national trend, adapting the

¹ Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, p. 139.

² Briggs J., Harrison C., McInnes A. and Vincent D., *Crime and Punishment in England, an Introductory History* (London, 1996), p. 198.

national laws at its own level. Justices of the peace but also the Corporation of the Poor, created in 1696, were two legal bodies, in addition to the common council, which dealt with and adapted national laws. The Corporation of the Poor, incorporated the seventeen parishes and the district of Castle Precincts in an attempt to establish a pauper manufactory and therefore "to send for such Rogues and Vagrants Sturdy Beggars or Idle and disorderly persons unto they shall cause to be apprehended in order to be there corrected and kept at labour."³ Since the creation of the Corporation, closely linked with the SRM, the legal system put into place should have made prostitution difficult. Already in 1697, one year after the creation of the Corporation, the committee examined Elizabeth Hall and Ann Bell, both originating from outside Bristol, for singing lewd ballads in the streets: they were discharged upon the promise to leave the city.⁴ There is a strong possibility that these women were prostitutes and the Corporation, without openly targeting prostitutes (as such), clearly aimed to reduce the immorality and disorder in Bristol. In 1698, the committee looked for methods to prevent "strange poor" or vagrants from coming into the City and they did "report that the advantages designed by the Lawes made against Idleness and Vagrancy [were] very great as they tend to suppress the former and root out swarms of vagabonds".⁵ In consequence, the committee inform the mayor and aldermen that they wished the constables of each ward to inspect and list all the single women and strangers "living at their own hands" and who might have become chargeable to the parish.⁶ The lists were to be given to the justices of the peace each month: they would have constituted a valuable source for this research, but either they disappeared or they were never written, there is no further

³ Bristol Record Society (ed.), *Bristol Corporation of the Poor, 1696-1834* (Bristol, 1932), pp. 53-54; see Johnson J., *Transactions of the Corporation of the Poor in the City of Bristol* (Bristol, 1826).

⁴ BRS, *Bristol Corporation of the Poor*, p. 57.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁶ They were both guardians of the poor for four years each. Jacob was an apothecary and it is possible that Andrew was in the militia.

mention of these lists in the records again. It remains interesting to highlight how the Corporation managed to target the prostitutes without naming them. The same process was at work throughout the eighteenth century and it was fortified by the amendment of the acts of parliament against vagrancy in 1744 and 1780 but the general impression coming from the perusal of the archives is that the Corporation was less and less concerned about the condemnation of disorderly persons and tended to focus exclusively on poor relief. Embedded in its financial problems, the Corporation made a point in 1793 of underlining the inefficiency of the amendment voted by the Parliament to reduce the number of vagrants: public whipping and a seven-day stay at the house of correction for the vagrants before being sent back to their parish of settlement were conditions clearly refused by Bristol Corporation. But the cost, rather than human considerations, was taken into account when this debate occurred.⁷

Aside the Corporation of the Poor stood the justices of the peace whose mission was "to keep and cause to be kept all the ordinances and statutes for the good of our peace" and "to chastise and punish all persons that offend against the form" of those ordinances and statutes.⁸ The Quarter Sessions records offer an insight on the process through which the justices of the peace prosecuted vice or disorderly behaviour at a local level. The records are rarely complete and research is made difficult by the absence of the "whole prosecution", that is to say the examination or inquiry of the culprit, the sentence he suffered and if he benefitted from a pardon or not.⁹ Bristolian justices of the peace, when a quarter session was held, did not deal with cases of vagrancy but focused on

⁷ BRS, *Bristol Corporation of the Poor*, p. 124.

⁸ Elizabethan commission 1590, quoted in Moir E., 'Local Government in Gloucestershire 1775-1800, A Study of the Justices of the Peace and their Work', Ph.D. thesis (Cambridge University, 1955), p. 65.

⁹ However the calendars of the prisoners of Newgate have been preserved and they offered a precise report twice a year of each prisoner jailed for the last twenty years of the century. The calendars can be found under the references JQS/P.

crimes against the person or the property; but cases of misdemeanour (disorderly behaviour) or the keeping of a disorderly house fell under their jurisdiction. Complaints were usually made by neighbours against the tenant of a public-house, accusing him or her of "keeping an ill-governed house" where people suffered drinking, tippling and whoring.¹⁰ The number of landlords accused of keeping such a house was equalled to twenty-four for the last twenty years of the century, which seems quite low if compared with the number of inns and alehouses (around 370) recorded in Bristol at that time.¹¹ The number of prosecutions was constant, which shows that justices of the peace were not particularly eager to condemn tenants, if no one complained. In the case of prosecution against disorderly houses, the prostitutes were not include in the condemnation and were let free to go somewhere else. In fact, justices of the peace more frequently faced prostitutes in court when a robbery or a theft was committed against a customer or in an alehouse. The case of Susannah Milledge reflects the leniency with which prostitutes were treated. Susannah Milledge was in custody for the first time in 1785 for having stolen with Ann David a tankard from Robert Beauchamp, alehouse keeper. Apparently discharged after a few months (the record is missing), she was arrested again in September 1786 for stealing money from her customer and was sent to prison with a new accomplice, Elizabeth James. She was sentenced to death on 16 September 1786 but after spending a year in gaol, she was granted a pardon on 8 October 1787, on condition of being transported for fourteen years to New South Wales.¹² On 25 June 1788, she was recorded under the gaol delivery fiats, waiting to be

¹⁰ BRO, JQS/P/812.

¹¹ BRO, JQS/P/63; 71; 95; 106; 107; 108; 123; 127; 128; 129; 153; 156; 162; 165; 190; Bristol Record Society (ed.), *Gaol Delivery Fiats* (Bristol, 1989), pp. 41 and 80; Registers of the alehouses and inns: BRO, JQS/AK/11; JQS/IK/1.

¹² Susan Milledge's case: BRO, JQS/P/99; 101; 106 and BRS, *Gaol Delivery Fiats 1741-1799*, pp. 65 and 67.

transported.¹³ Probably not an isolated case, Susannah Milledge was not at any moment threatened by the fact that she was a prostitute: the justice of the peace and mayor John Cross did not take into account her "trade" when he sentenced her, nor when he questioned her, which shows that Henderson's argument on "tradition" is probably less effective in case of serious offence. Justices of the peace, constables and watchmen had regular contacts with prostitutes; however it does not seem that their judgment or behaviour was influenced by the knowledge of the women's trade. This suggests an important shift from the national legislation to the local application of the laws in Bristol. Whereas part of the Parliament's *leitmotiv* at the end of the century revolved around the concept of morality and the necessity of reducing vice, the reality of the concern was less clearly defined in the attitudes of the legal agents in the provinces.

A similar situation prevailed in Nantes until the Revolution: the *réglement des logeurs*, which was repeated throughout the century, often put *commissaires* and prostitutes face-to-face. Indeed, when *commissaires* came to verify the books and therefore the number of lodgers present in the inn, they also met the prostitutes who were living there. They may have already known them or they deduced their trade by the fact that men were with them in the room. The reality was that in their report they wrote down their presence as "*filles du monde*" and lodgers but did not pursue their investigation. Being a prostitute was not recorded as an offence and the *commissaires'* behaviours lead us to believe that these women did not fall under the royal declarations of 1724 or 1778. This could be explained, regarding the *ordonnance* of 1724, by the fact that they were not begging in the streets nor could they be considered as vagrants as they had lodging. However this leniency, which is found again in the analysis of the prosecutions against

¹³ For a comprehensive study of convicts transported from Bristol, see Mackeson J., *Bristol Transported* (Bristol, 1987).

inhabitants who did not close their gates after 10 o'clock, was a characteristic commonly shared with Bristol's justices of the peace. The *lieutenant général de police* of Orleans himself said in his letter dated 1785 to the mayor of Nantes, chosen as a new *lieutenant général*:

*Quant aux filles, libertins et compagnons je leur fais plus de peur que de mal
... Souvent je donne ordre de les arrêter lorsqu'il y a trouble et je les en fais
prévenir, le tout comme si je n'en étais pas informé; ils quittent la ville et je la
purge ainsi.*¹⁴

No such measure was recorded for Nantes but this piece of anecdote given to the new *lieutenant général* of Nantes by his confrere is relevant for the consideration they had for the national laws (for example the 1778 royal declaration which allowed the policemen to throw the prostitutes' furniture in the street) and the reality of their application at a local level.

However, once the Revolution started in France, the attitudes of the police towards prostitutes and the legal system underwent a gradual change. The first years of the Revolution did not see any particular changes in the legislation but the intensification of the riots in Vendée and the presence of Carrier in Nantes were sufficient to create and maintain an atmosphere of suspicion.¹⁵ In a war context, different concerns and problems influence the modification of the legislation, one of them was the spread of

¹⁴ AMN, FF 112 - Police.

¹⁵ Carrier was a lawyer and deputy at the Convention; he was sent to Nantes in September 1793 to stop the Chouans riots: he is particularly remembered for the thousands of drowning of people suspected by the Republic. See for instance on Carrier and collective memory: Gomez-Le Chevanton Corinne, 'Le procès Carrier. Enjeux politiques, pédagogie collective et construction mémorielle', *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, n° 343 (2006), pp. 73-92. For studies on Carrier's political actions in Nantes see: Lallié A., *Etudes sur le Terreur à Nantes* (Cholet, 2009); Brégeon J.-J., *Carrier et la Terreur nantaise* (Paris, 1987).

venereal diseases.¹⁶ Already in 1764, Choiseul, *secrétaire d'état à la guerre*, had ordered infected prostitutes to be locked in the *dépôts de mendicité* opened in provincial cities (in Nantes the Sanitat took this responsibility) and to encourage officials to comply with the new legislation, he affirmed that the *Extraordinaire de Guerre* would pay for the lodging and treatment of these women.¹⁷ But nothing in Nantes archives proves that the new legislation had an impact on the imprisonment of prostitutes in the *hôpital général*. At a local level, military surgeons and *chefs d'état major* in Brittany were concerned about the spread of venereal diseases more than thirty years before the first law was passed in Nantes to order medical visits: in Brest, the count of Langeron claimed in 1779 that the prostitutes were being jailed only for a few days, therefore they could quickly start again to infect 'every troop in the surrounding countryside'.¹⁸ As Goubert shows, the mortality due to venereal diseases was very low: only one soldier died, out of 195 infected between January 1785 and July 1785 in Brest. Nevertheless military officials remained worried about the state of health of their soldiers;¹⁹ Major Teydieu in his report to Nantes' city council on 1 August An II claimed that:

Une prodigieuse quantité de filles prostituées se trouvent à Nantes, qui étant presque toutes gâtées du mal vénérien, infectent les défenseurs de la République...l'impudence de ces prostituées est à son comble, elles raccrochent et attirent vers elles les militaires non seulement de leur fenêtre mais aussi au

¹⁶ On venereal diseases and political actions see Andreski S., *Syphilis, Puritanism and Witch Hunts* (London, 1989); Quérel H., 'Syphilis et politiques de santé à l'époque moderne', in *Histoire, Economie et Société*, 4, n°3 (1984), pp. 543-56; Dutour O. (dir), *L'Origine de la Syphilis en Europe avant ou après 1493 ?* (Paris, 1994).

¹⁷ Quérel, 'Syphilis et politiques de santé à l'époque moderne', p. 551.

¹⁸ Goubert J.-P., 'Le phénomène épidémique en Bretagne à la fin du XVIIIe siècle', *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 24, n° 6 (1969), pp. 1562-88, p. 1577-8.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 1578. See also: Biraben J.-N., 'Le rôle des maladies sexuellement transmissibles en démographie historique', *Population*, 51, n°4-5 (1996), pp. 1041-57, pp. 1051-3.

*milieu des rues et en plein jour.*²⁰

The fact that prostitutes were considered as the source of corruption (and not the men who went to see them) was a common figure of rhetoric and this argument was pervasive throughout the eighteenth century, especially when the health of the soldiers was mentioned.²¹ With the start of the Revolutionary wars and the Chouan uprising and the Vendée war the number of soldiers increased around Nantes and their state of health was a major concern to the military command. To prevent the soldiers from being "*hors d'état de servir la chose publique*", the major offered to "*détruire la cause [de l'infection], en faisant enlever pour être enfermer à Rennel ou ailleurs, cette quantité de filles qui provoquent nos jeunes militaires à la débauche.*"²² Prostitutes were clearly represented by the military command as the source of infection which weakened the army. The Major went further in his demand by asking the city council to list the prostitutes and give them treatment if they were infected by any venereal diseases; however it was not until 1804-1806 that the municipality decided to impose visits and a monthly census on prostitutes. Up until then, complaints against prostitutes multiplied and in 1804 (an XII) the general Carrois, commandant of the Loire-Inférieure, deplored the fact that prostitutes met at a place called Bastringue Les Planchers,²³ near the barracks of St Clément in Nantes and infected the soldiers.²⁴ The *commissaire* of the arrondissement knew of this "*maison publique*" but it had been left open as the city

²⁰ AMN, 1D8.

²¹ For different popular and scientific explanations of the origins of syphilis in the eighteenth century see Mcallister M. E., 'Stories of the origin of syphilis in eighteenth-century England: science, myth, and prejudice', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 24, n° 1 (2000), pp. 22-44. See also Quétel C., 'Syphilis et politique de santé', *Histoire, Économie et Société*, 3 (1984), pp. 543-556, p. 549; Siena K., 'Pollution, Promiscuity and the Pox: English Venereology and the Early Modern Medical Discourse on Social and Sexual Danger', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 8, n° 4 (Apr., 1998), pp. 553-574.

²² AMN, 1D8.

²³ A *bastringue* in French is a place where it was possible to drink, listen to music and dance.

²⁴ AMN, I1 C52 D12.

council expected the police to keep an eye on it and prevent disorder linked with the soldiers.

In an attempt to prevent the spread of syphilis and to improve social control, the city council also enjoined the magistrates and the *procureur de la commune* to reinforce the rules against prostitutes, to ban foreigners from the city and to lock up the women from Nantes in a new establishment but this last proposal aborted.²⁵ At the same time, *commissaires* Couprie and Renaud were chosen to write a new policy against the "*femmes debauchées*": this task led to the amendment of the 1790 and 1791 *ordonnances* against mendicity. These policies, amid other measures, forbade the entry of foreign beggars and organised mendicity inside the city, forbidding "*gens sans aveu*" to beg and loiter in the streets.²⁶ The amendment of these laws led to the prostitutes being listed under the category of "*gens sans aveu*" which meant that a prostitute could be condemned to jail for up to one year if the police was "*convaincue qu'elle favorise la débauche*": ambiguous terms which could lead to arbitrary arrests.²⁷ In addition to this ambiguity, the amendment of 14 Germinal an II forbade any beggar to "*circuler ou s'arrêter aux portes des spectacles, sur les promenades publiques, quai de la Bourse, comme d'entrer dans les allées des maisons*"²⁸, which obviously targeted the places where prostitutes could work. Despite these flaws in the policies, it was not before 1806 that the city council voted a new policy against them. The arrests of *femme de mauvaise vie* multiplied between 1792 and 1806, as well as complaints about venereal diseases, which eventually led to the publication on 19 December 1806 of an *arrêté concernant les femmes publiques*, stipulating:

²⁵ AMN, I1 C61 D5.

²⁶ AMN, I1 C61 D5

²⁷ AMN, I1 C61 D5.

²⁸ AMN, I1 C68 D1.

La Mairie de Nantes, considering that one of the most powerful causes of the degeneration of the human species is without any doubt the syphilis, so common amongst the *filles dites publiques* ... decides what follows: from the 1st of January 1807, any common woman, without any distinction, will have to submit once per month to a medical visit to a designated surgeon.²⁹

This *arrêté* announced the beginning of legal regulation in the treatment of prostitution by the municipality: this policy obliged the police to draw up a detailed listing of the women and who were required to submit to a monthly visit to the surgeon.³⁰ A report for one *arrondissement* had already been made in 1804, probably as an attempt to see if the law could be easily implemented.³¹ Under these regulations, the prostitutes were clearly defined as a specific category of offenders who needed specific legislation. Although there existed some lacunae in the *commissaires'* registers (i.e. no reports were recorded for the period 1814 to 1816), this act was the basis of the nineteenth century oppressive legislation against prostitutes.

2. The means of prosecution: the Watch system in Bristol and the police in Nantes

Despite similar legislation in Nantes and Bristol, the means used to implement this legislation differed from one city to another. Indeed the introduction of a professional police force in Nantes at the beginning of the eighteenth century made a difference in the number of records available as the policemen left important written trace of their daily tasks. The particular relationships between policemen, *commissaires*, constables,

²⁹ AMN, I1 C61 D5.

³⁰ AMN, I1 C61 D5.

³¹ *Recensement des filles publiques*, AMN, I1 C62 D1.

justices of the peace and prostitutes will be analysed in depth later but it appears necessary to pave the way by highlighting the structural differences between both police forces in Bristol and Nantes. Cities in England, except London, did not develop a professional police force until the mid-nineteenth century: Newcastle, at the end of the eighteenth century, had also installed a pseudo-professionalized police force, but the number of policemen was fairly limited compared to London.³² Therefore most of the cities in England were supervised by the "old police",³³ which consisted in Bristol of two sheriffs, the mayor, the town clerk and the justices of the peace (aldermen) who dealt with the legal aspects of the procedure; to whom were subordinated the chief-constables and constables who arrested and brought to court the suspects and who were seconded by the watchmen who were meant during night and day to patrol the street and prevent any trouble. It was generally believed that constables, before the implementation of the new police force, were inefficient at preventing crimes and offenders were usually arrested "by chance".³⁴ However this simplistic argument claimed by the police reformers in the eighteenth and nineteenth century misrepresented the tasks of the constable and their implication to his daily-life. Constables were chosen to undertake these duties for a certain time and went unpaid, which meant that each arrest or transportation of a vagrant from one parish to another was often synonymous with a loss of money to the constable. They were not supposed to be a preventive force but were the link between the offender and the court of justice.³⁵ Watchmen and night-watches on the contrary, were employed to render the streets safer by their presence and, hopefully, to deter possible criminal activities. However their efficiency was often questioned by the population: on 17 January 1784, the editorial of *Felix Farley's Bristol*

³² Emsley C., *Crime and Society in England, 1750-1900* (London, 2nd ed., 1996), p. 64.

³³ See Emsley C., *Crime and Society*, pp. 216-247 or Taylor D., *Crime, Policing and Punishment in England, 1750-1914* (London, 1998), pp. 71-88.

³⁴ Emsley C., *Crime and Society in England*, p. 217.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

Journal published a caution to watchmen to be more vigilant in the city centre.³⁶

Similarly on 9 August 1788, a journalist reported the following incident to denounce the flaws of the Bristol watchmen and the "dangers" faced by the population in Bristol's streets:

Monday night at 10 pm, a gentleman was knocked down on high street to be robbed; he alarmed a shopkeeper who made the two lads go away. When they went to see the watchman, the guard said that they were not in his round so he did not do anything.³⁷

The incident was said to have been discussed by the chief-constable of St Mary-le-Port but nothing further was reported in the newspapers. Because the city was divided into wards, watchmen were assigned specific rounds to patrol and supervise and the council finally relented to improve this system by slightly augmenting the number of watchmen at the end of the century.³⁸ However Bristol was not the only city suffering from insufficient patrols in a newly-built area: any city undergoing rapid urbanization in eighteenth-century Europe had to face this situation.³⁹ Again on 3 January 1797, a complaint was published against the watchmen and their inefficiency in the city centre and in the ever-growing suburbs which, besides a lack of watchmen and constables, had poor lighting, making the streets unsafe.⁴⁰ Through the medium of newspapers, an appeal was made for an improvement to the watch and therefore of the security in Bristol streets. Citizens advocated, like they did in January 1783, the introduction of

³⁶ The sample of newspapers analysed is constituted by January and August publications of Felix Farley's, Sarah Farley's and Bonner and Middleton's *Bristol Journals* from 1780 to 1800. Bristol Reference Library, *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 17 January 1784.

³⁷ Bristol Reference Library, *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 9 August 1788.

³⁸ BRO, Town Clerk's box, 1799.

³⁹ Paley R., 'An Imperfect, Inadequate and Wretched System'? Policing London before Peel', *Criminal Justice History, An International Annual*, 10 (1989), pp. 95-130, p. 103.

⁴⁰ BRL, *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 3 January 1797.

watchmen at specific places, such as Brandon Hill, in St Augustine's parish: it seems that after seven or eight o'clock at night, it was said to be dangerous to be in these streets. According to the town clerk's records, St Augustine did not have any watchman in 1779.⁴¹ But the city council failed to respond to the citizens' calls and in twenty years, from 1779 to 1799, the number of watchmen in the whole city increased from only 76 to 101 watchmen (and night-watches).⁴² The greatest improvement was in the parish of St James, the most populated parish of the city, which counted seven watchmen in 1779 and fifteen in 1799, but St Phillip and Jacob, the second most populated parish of Bristol obtained only two more men, increasing the initial number to seven. St Augustine was allocated twelve men to share with St Michael's parish.

According to Matthews, each ward had a chief constable, twelve constables and "a proper number of watchmen"; his statement apparently went against common views on the subject, which is not surprising as his directory aimed at attracting "tourists" to Bristol.⁴³ However if compared to certain parishes of London, it appears that the number of watchmen in Bristol was not so low: for example in 1811, Bethnal Green counted over 33,000 inhabitants but had only eighteen watchmen, two inspectors and one beadle.⁴⁴ The main issue in the organisation of the watch in cities related to the rapid urbanization of certain areas, mostly plebeian, which therefore demanded the exercise of greater social control as recently arrived populations were generally located in the suburbs. Bristol, as most of the cities in England, had to rely on a predominantly unwaged police force to assure the security of its streets and the convictions of offenders; as a consequence, legal actions were usually started by private parties as the

⁴¹ BRO, Town Clerk's box, 1779.

⁴² BRO, Town Clerk's box, 1799; the number of watchmen changed every year.

⁴³ Matthews, *New Bristol Directory*, p. 49.

⁴⁴ Paley, "An Imperfect, Inadequate and Wretched System?", p. 104.

first duty of the constables was not to prevent crimes but to ease their prosecutions. The role of the justices of the peace was therefore essential for the good administration of justice, as their duty was to record the case and sometimes to take a rapid decision to either close the case or bring it to court. As Shoemaker noted in his study of Middlesex records, many cases involved "informal mediation", which included summary convictions, each ward having one alderman who could act as a justice of the peace.⁴⁵ Minor offences such as misdemeanour or exposure were not always brought to court and unfortunately, they were consequently not always recorded.

In France the police system was based on a semi-professionalized police force, with officials –*commissaires*– seconded by the *garde bourgeoise* who worked under the same system as the watchmen. This police followed the order of the *lieutenant général de police* (Parisian model) who worked in partnership with the *procureur du roi* and the city council to promulgate and implement the laws. A letter written in 1785 by the *lieutenant général* of Orleans Miron to M. De la Pervenchière, mayor and new *lieutenant de police* of Nantes explained his responsibilities.⁴⁶ The *lieutenant général de police* had the authority to publish *ordonnances* or *édits* and had to supervise the proper organisation of the police. Supervised by the *lieutenant général* were the *commissaires*, whose functions in Nantes were varied and are difficult to decipher. According to the 1699 act organising a more professionalized police in France, the *commissaires* in Nantes had the same duties as the Parisian *commissaires*: "*à faire executer les ordres et mandemens des lieutenants généraux de police et généralement toutes les autres fonctions que font en fait de police les commissaires de nostre Chastelet de Paris.*"⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Shoemaker R., *Prosecution and Punishment, Petty Crime and the Law in London and rural Middlesex, c. 1660-1725* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 81-85.

⁴⁶ AMN, FF 112 - Police.

⁴⁷ ADLA, C 630.

Williams' study of Parisian police shows that the forty-eight *commissaires* of Paris had extensive functions in the eighteenth century such as "inventorying properties, hearing criminal complaints, conducting searches" and that they could also act as a judge if necessary.⁴⁸ Kaplan also distinguished different "missions" attributed to *commissaires*, who were sometimes seconded by inspectors in their investigations: for instance, these missions could focus on beggars, morality or religious affairs.⁴⁹ The situation in Nantes was however quite different: the relatively small size of the city compared to Paris explains the distinctiveness of provincial *commissaires*.

Since the beginning of the eighteenth century, Nantes had been divided into districts to improve the security of the city: the office of *commissaire* was created to supervise each district and they were rapidly asked to keep records of their visits to people on a "*carnet portatif*".⁵⁰ From six districts in 1722, the city was then restructured into four districts in 1751 and it was not until the Revolution that the six *arrondissements* were recreated.⁵¹ This new division seemed necessary as the population had greatly increased in the suburbs of St Nicolas and the Marchix. The *commissaires*' role was indeed to apply the rules and decrees of the *lieutenant général* (the mayor in Nantes) but they were also asked to conduct investigations for the *lieutenant criminel* (as did the inspectors in Paris) and report complaints. The only *commissaire* in Nantes who had a specific mission was the *commissaire* in charge of the foreigners in the city. His duties extended over the whole city and he was not restricted to one district. Their duties as a magistrate were quite limited. Admittedly the *commissaires* could impose fines on the citizens and imprisoned disorderly people but eventually these persons had to go to court to be

⁴⁸ Williams A., *The Police of Paris 1718-1789* (Baton-Rouge, 1979), pp. 120-121.

⁴⁹ Kaplan, "Notes sur les commissaires de la ville de Paris", p. 679, Williams, *The Police of Paris*, p. 101.

⁵⁰ These *carnets portatifs* are unfortunately not recorded in the archives.

⁵¹ AMN, FF 112; 1 BA br 601.

sentenced as seen in the *écrous de la police municipale*.⁵²

The Revolution and Empire put the *commissaires* under the supervision of the mayor and the newly created prefect, but their role and duties in Nantes in the period under study did not seem to change drastically.⁵³ The basic administration of the police was similarly organised, although the *comité de sûreté générale* took over its direction in 1793.⁵⁴ The Revolutionary municipal police organisation was reiterated by the *ordonnance* of 1791 which assigned its tasks and at the same time defined the role of the *police correctionnelle* (criminal police). Under the 1806 policy on visits to the surgeon,⁵⁵ *commissaires* were clearly identified as the first judicial contact for the prostitutes. This aspect of their duties, which will be analysed again later, shows how closely involved they could be with the prostitutes: on certain occasions, they ended up protecting or pleading in their favour. On 12 Prairial An 13 (or 31 May 1805), a *circulaire* was sent to suspend the visits as the surgeons Hubert and Olivier were behaving indecently towards the prostitutes. The surgeons were prosecuted thanks to the fact that a *commissaire* listened to the complaint of prostitutes and reported them to the head of the police.⁵⁶ Again on 7 February 1807, Guillet, *commissaire* of the district wrote to the mayor to deplore the arbitrary measures taken by police agents (his subordinates) when transporting the prostitutes to the surgeon and their violent behaviour towards women; the organisation of the visits was finally delegated to Guillet alone by the mayor on July 1807.⁵⁷

⁵² ADLA, B 8756-8759.

⁵³ Merriman J., *Police Stories - Building the French State, 1815-1851* (Oxford, 2006), p. 8.

⁵⁴ The *comité de sûreté générale* was created by the Convention to supervise the installation of *tribunaux révolutionnaires* in province and to ensure the security of the nation.

⁵⁵ This policy was extended in 1806 to every district, but some *commissaires* had already implemented it in their district.

⁵⁶ AMN, I2 R57.

⁵⁷ AMN, I1 C61 D5.

The interpretation of national laws varied from the beginning of the century to its end and officials prosecuting vice had a wide range of possibilities when implementing laws. We know that England and France eventually followed a similar legal pattern against prostitutes (regulationism) in the nineteenth century but it appears that the criminalisation of prostitutes started earlier in Nantes than in Bristol, probably because of the revolutionary and imperial restructuring of the nation.

3. **Prostitution and types of crime**

In order to describe the character of Bristol and Nantes prostitutes, the only archives that can be used are the judicial archives, offering testimonies and details from a snapshot of a prostitute's life and relationships. By their very nature, these archives do not always show them in the best light. In the sample which forms the basis of this analysis, the complaints and judicial actions taken against prostitutes revolved around two main issues: theft and disturbance of the peace. At this stage of the analysis, a distinction should be made between Bristol and Nantes cases against prostitutes: references to prostitutes accused of stealing were more common in Bristol than in Nantes; the municipal police in Nantes was rather dealing with disturbance of the peace, "*tapage*" and "*scandale*". The reason for this discrepancy might reside in the fact that Nantes police was already becoming professionalised in the eighteenth century, which allowed a better follow-up of the cases and the possibility for policemen to take preventative action against crime.⁵⁸ The professionalisation of the police concerned however only the *commissaires* and the *archers de la ville*; the *milice bourgeoise* was acting as a watch and was an official duty for the bourgeois of the city and not a professional function. Nevertheless, the preventative role of both was underlined by the

⁵⁸ For further references: archives relating to criminal affairs may be found in the Archives Départementales de Loire-Atlantique under the entry B 8674 - 8746 I – IX.

city council and studies by Perreon and Danet show that Nantes police's success was funded on close relationships with the community and responsiveness to its complaints.⁵⁹ The city council, facing complaints about the police, claimed that "*c'est à ces officiers ministériels, aides des archers de ville et à l'activité de leurs recherches qu'on doit la capture de presque tous les malfaiteurs*".⁶⁰ As will be shown later, *commissaires* were the principal agents who arrested prostitutes and prevented disturbance of the peace. Bristol officials on the contrary were not meant to act as a preventative force and the watchmen's efficiency was often put into question by the inhabitants.⁶¹ Finally, the fact that summary convictions were not always recorded, for instance against disorderly behaviours, is another factor which distorts our view of prostitution in these two cities: Bristol was no more a city of thefts than Nantes a city of *tapage*.

Attempted larceny in Bristol mainly concerned the theft of small portable objects and money. The nature of the object stolen was clearly linked to the situation and context the woman was in when the theft occurred: a tankard in a public-house, a watch or a purse from a customer's pocket.⁶² The crime was not planned in advance but was opportunistic; the victim was not chosen beforehand but was targeted once he agreed to

⁵⁹ Danet V., 'Les *commissaires* de police de la ville de Nantes au XVIII^e siècle (1720-1792)', *Annales de Bretagne et des Pays de l'Ouest*, 116, n°4 (2009), pp. 39-72; Perreon S., 'Guet professionnel, bataillon d'infanterie ou garde bourgeoise? L'échec des tentatives de réforme de la police de Nantes en 1786-1788' in Milliot V. (ed.), *Les Mémoires Policiers (1750-1850). Ecritures et pratiques policières, du siècle des Lumières au Second Empire* (Rennes, 2006), pp. 151-167, p. 164.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Perreon, 'Guet professionnel', p. 157.

⁶¹ For instance: *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal* 16 March 1760; 11 July 1761; On watchmen's unreliability: Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, p. 106; Harris A.T., *Policing the City: Crime and Legal Authority in London, 1780-1840* (Columbus, 2004), p. 12; Paley R., 'An imperfect, inadequate and wretched system'? Policing London before Peel', *Criminal Justice History, An International Annual*, 10 (1989), pp. 95-130, p. 104.

⁶² The cases of stolen tankards are sometimes ambiguous as the culprit was usually a woman, alleged to be a drunkard and to live in debauchery: but even this expression did not always referred to prostitution, rather to a life of vagrancy and begging. BRO, JQS/P/100.

have a drink with the woman or to "go upstairs".⁶³ Stealing was quite a "female offence" according to historians of crime compared to violent crimes: men did steal or rob but opportunistic theft seems to have been something more often committed by women.⁶⁴ In Nantes and its department, theft between 1800 and 1830 accounted for 35.5% of all the prosecutions against women, making theft the most common female offence. In contrast, 19.5% of the prosecutions against men were related to theft, while 24% of them were for physical violence.⁶⁵ In England, theft by women was also a very common offence: in Newcastle for example, women accused of theft at the Quarter Session equalled 55.1%.⁶⁶ In Bristol, between 1780 and 1805, sixty prostitutes were accused of theft (some of them twice) who were on average 24.5 years old.⁶⁷ What makes the theft committed by prostitutes so distinctive is that it was intrinsically linked with the prostitutes' trade: the public-house, a room or a dark alley were places where stealing was made possible by the relationship created between the two (or more) persons present at that time in this specific place. Thus the magistrates' perception of the crime could have been biased by the connection to prostitution, and therefore this may have had an influence on the way prostitutes were treated by the judicial system in Bristol. However the moral character of the prostitutes does not appear to have weighed heavily in the sentences given by the justices of the peace. Likewise, the prostitutes did not attempt to disguise their trade when they faced the justices of the peace: when examined in October 1786, Susannah Milledge and Betty James blatantly said that the silver

⁶³ BRO, JQS/P/267.

⁶⁴ Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, p. 238. Beattie J., 'The Criminality of Women in Eighteenth-Century England', *Journal of Social History*, 8, n° 4 (Summer, 1975), pp. 80-116, p. 81; See also Shoemaker R., 'Print and the Female Voice: Representations of Women's Crime in London, 1690-1735', *Gender and History*, 22, n° 1 (April 2010), pp. 75-91 for a study of the beginning of the eighteenth century.

⁶⁵ Desmars B., 'Hommes et Femmes dans la délinquance. L'exemple de la région Nantaise au début du XIXe siècle', *Annales de Bretagne et des Pays de l'Ouest*, 102, n° 102-2 (1995), pp. 43-57, p. 44.

⁶⁶ Morgan G. and Rushton P., *Rogues, Thieves and the Rule of Law: The Problems of Law Enforcement in North-East England, 1718-1820* (Florence, 1998), p. 67.

⁶⁷ BRO, JQS/P/63; 65; 71; 73; 76; 79; 80; 85; 95; 99; 100; 101; 104; 107; 110; 112; 114; 115; 123; 127; 128; 129; 132; 140; 142; 153; 162; 164; 169; 172; 190; 221; 224.

buckles and money they owned were given to them by "some gentlemen".⁶⁸ As explained earlier, Susannah was accused and found guilty of stealing money from a farmer of Devon but her death sentence was commuted to transportation for seven years, a year after her imprisonment: eventually, the fact that she was a prostitute did not prevent the royal pardon from being granted in 1787.⁶⁹ The fact that she was a prostitute could have also influenced the jury in her favour if they considered the victim unworthy of respect.⁷⁰

Thefts were rarely accompanied by violence and were in most cases tried as petty or grand larceny, for "having feloniously stolen from". Beattie has explained that in the eighteenth century the differences between grand and petty larceny disappeared and indeed, by studying the convictions of women between 1780 and 1799, it appears that the only difference between petty and grand larceny was the risk of transportation for women being accused of grand larceny. In terms of amount stolen, this characteristic was not as relevant as in the seventeenth century. Pickpocketing, a capital offence, is recorded only once in the Gaol Delivery Fiats available for the period 1741-1799. Beattie noted that in Surrey this crime was more often committed by women than men (two to one) which he explained by the fact that although many prostitutes were convicted of such offences, in reality the courts in Surrey "dealt relatively leniently with pickpockets, especially women".⁷¹ Deirdre Palk gives the example of Margaret Kennedy who was tried for pickpocketing in London in 1797: it was established that "there having been no fraud used by the prisoner in making the prosecutor drunk, but he

⁶⁸ BRO, JQS/P/101.

⁶⁹ BRO, JQS/P/106. On leniency and royal pardon see King P., *Crime, Justice and Discretion in England, 1740-1820* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 297-333.

⁷⁰ Beattie *Crime and the Courts*, p. 180.

⁷¹ Palk, *Gender, Crime and Judicial Discretion*, p. 18.

having fallen into that state by his own default".⁷² She was therefore discharged. Giving evidence for pickpocketing appeared to have been a difficult case to defend and in Bristol, it seems that in all known cases of prostitutes having stolen from their customers, the court or maybe the plaintiff chose to try the accused for larceny and not pickpocketing.

A certain pattern can be drawn from the prostitutes' method of theft: it usually started with an invitation to drink and after a while (sometimes a whole evening), the theft was committed. The victims were either met in the streets or in the public-house: Jane Thompson, wife of an Irish mariner, met Samuel Palmer in Bristol city centre on Saturday night, 25 March 1779, and invited him (or rather asked him to pay) "for a can of ale" at the Bull on High Street.⁷³ From there they went to another public-house on Nicolas Street and finally they went to Rope Yard or Walk near the Lower Green where "the informant laid with the said Jane Thompson". He soon afterwards missed his leather purse which contained twenty-seven guineas in gold, a gold ring and a silver watch. Jane was tried by the Assizes for Petty Larceny and sentenced to be whipped and to be sent to the house of correction for hard labour for a period of six months "only", despite the high amount stolen. A similar adventure occurred to John Bray and his friend John Roberts, who were encouraged by the sound of a fiddle to enter a bush-tavern on St James Back at the time of the fair (September 1786).⁷⁴ There they were accosted by Susannah Milledge and Betty James around eight o'clock and it was not before twelve that the said Susannah left the room with a purse containing £130, the value of Bray's cattle, sold the same day at the fair. In the case of Susannah Haines's theft of a watch, two pints drunk in a public-house on Tucker Street, Temple were enough for her to steal

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁷³ BRO, JQS/P/63.

⁷⁴ BRO, JQS/P/101.

William Young, labourer in November 1779.⁷⁵ More than twenty-five years later, unsurprisingly the process was still the same: in 1806, between seven and eight o'clock, William Norton, yeoman from the County of Somerset, was invited by Mary Jones and Sarah Simmonds to drink some gin in a house on Tower Lane, where he was eventually lighter of £16 in bills.⁷⁶ In these instances, force and violence were neither needed nor sought for. In most cases, prostitutes tried to go unnoticed and a theft rarely became a robbery: in only one case in thirty years (1780-1810) in Bristol did a prostitute use a knife as a potential weapon, at least according to the plaintiff. On 7 June 1810, John Hinder of Watton, Gloucestershire, "went up stairs into a bedroom [with Elizabeth Davis] when she locked the door and threw the informant upon the bed and took his knife out of his pocket and cut open the knee of the informant's breeches where were concealed the notes".⁷⁷ She stole the money and then left the room. Arrested by the constable, she declared on her examination that she was "not guilty of robbing the said John Hinder." She was jailed and sentenced guilty but it is questionable whether Elizabeth Davis really knew where Hinder's knife, and more importantly his hidden notes, were. Having a purse in his pocket was common but even then, the women usually took their time to be sure of their moves: Susannah and Betty were assured of finding money in Bray's pocket as his friend warned him and Bray kept checking his pocket, according to the witnesses' testimonies. Even the much-sought after watches were usually taken out of their pocket or case by the owner before being stolen.⁷⁸ Thus it seems difficult, but not impossible, to believe Hinder's testimony regarding Davis's violent robbery.

⁷⁵ BRO, JQS/P/63.

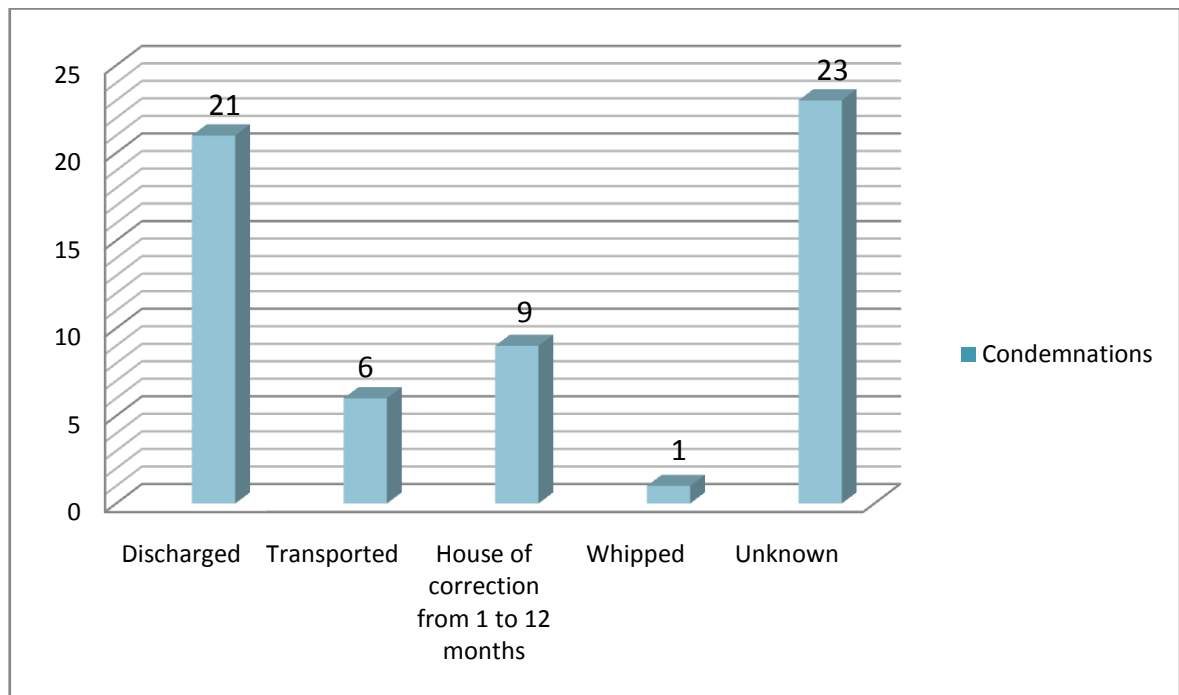
⁷⁶ BRO, JQS/P/221.

⁷⁷ BRO, JQS/P/267.

⁷⁸ BRO, JQS/P/ 63; 221.

Some common characteristics arise from the analysis of these thefts: they usually happened without the use of violence and they were unpremeditated, they occurred in a place where prostitutes were used to being and the time at which the crime took place was usually between the early evening and midnight at the latest. These cases also give details on their relations with customers: they met in a public-house or in the street but usually rented a room or went to a private lodging to have sexual intercourse. Information is also given on people who met in public-houses: children, mariners, soldiers and other women. Prostitutes accused of theft were caught either by the plaintiff or by the constable and watchmen and they were then discharged, sentenced to prison or transportation. These sentences are biased by the importance of the Quarter Sessions and Assizes archives to study Bristol prostitution; they only reveal what sentences prostitutes were subjected to when they faced the court for theft. In the case of prostitutes who were confined in the workhouse or Bridewell without being presented to the Quarter Sessions, it is not possible to know how they were sentenced, if they were whipped or confined for a short or long period. Similarly, the size of the sample casts a doubt upon its value, however by comparing the results to the sentences received by female offenders in Bristol at the end of the century, it is possible to show some similarities and discrepancies between female convictions in general and condemnations of prostitutes. A close analysis of the Quarter Sessions, assizes and the calendars of Newgate for the period 1780-1805 gives the following results:

Figure II-1. Condemnations of prostitutes for thefts, Bristol 1780-1805



Sources: BRO, JQS/P/63; 65; 71; 73; 76; 79; 80; 85; 95; 99; 100; 101; 104; 107; 110; 112; 114; 115; 123; 127; 128; 129; 132; 140; 142; 153; 162; 164; 169; 172; 190; 221; 224.

Both Assizes and Quarter Sessions in Bristol could order transportation, the most "severe" sentence after death, and as only one prostitute in the period studied was sentenced to death (then commuted into transportation) it was decided not to try to distinguish which court tried these women as the judges were most likely the same. Another detail making it difficult to draw a distinction between the courts is that the Newgate Calendars did not record the type of court the prisoner was tried by. The data were taken from the calendars of Newgate prison and the gaol delivery fiats, where the sentences were sometimes recorded after judgment, which explains the important number of unknown condemnations. It is also necessary to emphasize that even if the women were discharged (32% of them), they had usually already spent few months to a year in prison waiting for their trial. But the high number of women acquitted should not be a surprise: the average number of prisoners (male and female) acquitted in

Newgate between 1780 and 1789 was 48%, therefore 32% cannot be considered extremely high.⁷⁹ The sentence of being whipped, in this case privately, was not as common as it used to be forty years earlier: in Cornwall Quarter Sessions whipping only for property offence decreased from 72% of the sentences (against men and women) between 1740s and 1750s to 4% between 1780s and 1800s, which is a figure comparable with the only case (2%) of private whipping in Bristol.⁸⁰ As mentioned by King, the judicial archives of Bristol are composed of "intermittently surviving assize and quarter-sessions calendars which are less inclusive than indictment series" however the comparison with the Gloucestershire archives (Bristol's parishes excluded) on women indicted and the national trend offers interesting results.⁸¹ It appears that the statistics on women offenders in Gloucestershire equalled 16% between 1789 and 1793, and then increased during the Napoleonic wars (up to 24%) to finally fall drastically during the post war years (10%).⁸² However the references to prostitutes in judicial cases in Bristol constantly decreased during this period:

Table II-1. References to prostitutes in Bristol Quarter Sessions records, 1780-1805

	1780-89	1790-1799	1800-1805	Total
Number of Prostitutes accused of theft	35	17	8	60

Sources: BRO, Quarter Sessions records, 1780-1805.

Even at a closer range, the number of prostitutes accused between 1789 and 1793 was

⁷⁹ BRO, 11168-70; there is a strong possibility that the true number of prostitutes acquitted reached a similar value to 48%, if we consider the high number of unknown sentences.

⁸⁰ King P., *Crime and the Law in England, 1750-1840* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 269.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 204-5.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 205.

more significant than between 1794 and 1805: thirteen women were accused during the four years before the Revolutionary wars and "only" sixteen between 1794 and 1805. Different explanations can be given for this discrepancy: either the overall number of women indicted in Bristol did not increase as significantly as the national trend or the policy of charitable control put in place by upper-middle classes in Bristol (female penitentiary, control over poor lying women) started to have an impact on young women.

The study of the evolution of sentences against theft given to prostitutes between 1780 and 1800⁸³ clearly shows a decrease in condemnations against prostitutes:

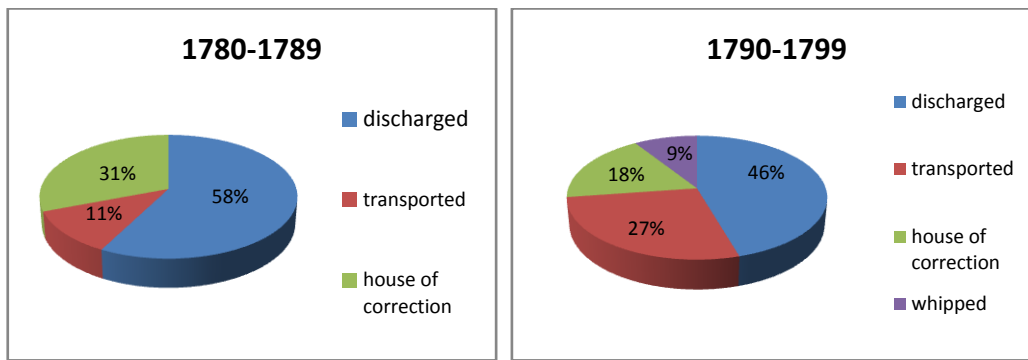
Table II-2. Sentences against prostitutes, Bristol, 1780-1799

	1780-1789	1790-1799
Discharged	15	5
Transported	3	3
Jailed - House of correction	8	2
Whipped	0	1
Total	26	11

Sources: BRO, Quarter Sessions records 1780-1799.

⁸³ I have decided not to include the period 1800-1805 in these statistics as only two sentences out of eight are known: one woman was discharged and a second woman was transported for seven years.

Figure II-2. Percentage of sentences against prostitutes per decade, Bristol, 1780-1799



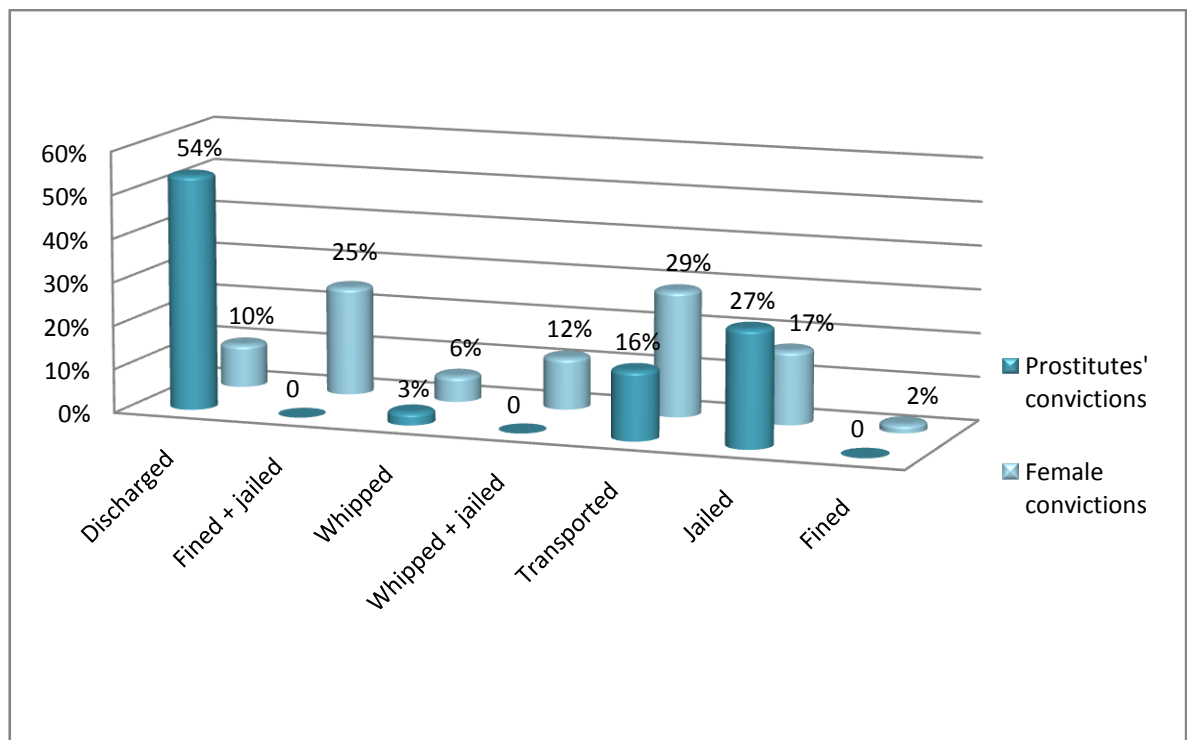
Sources: BRO, Quarter Sessions records 1780-1799.

The use of percentages to compare both periods increases the preponderance of transportation but gives a distorted image of the Quarter Sessions' and Assizes' sentences. The relative increase of transportation during the second period can be explained by the start in 1787 of transportation to Australia but in reality, transportation concerned only three women between 1790 and 1799. Two of them, Mary Williams and Sarah Gill were recidivists and had already been sentenced to the house of correction during the past ten years and Hester Lowle was convicted of Grand Larceny, which was a step further than simple larceny. The number of women discharged remains quite important and it can be explained by the fact that no prosecutor or no true bill could be found. In the case of Susannah Haynes for instance, the gaol delivery fiat gives this information: "Committed for larceny. No prosecution being against her. Let proclamation be made. Proclamation is made. Let her be discharged."⁸⁴ The high number of women being discharged may be explained by the fact that, as it will be shown later, some of the plaintiffs were not from the city and therefore did not remain in Bristol long enough to prosecute the woman.

⁸⁴ BRS, *Bristol Gaol Delivery Fiats 1741-1799* (Bristol, 1989), p. 46.

The importance of aborted cases is underlined when compared with the statistics taken from the Gaol Delivery Fiats between 1780 and 1799 of female offenders accused of theft. The sample is based on the thirty-seven cases of prostitutes accused of theft, for which we know the outcome of the affair, and on the trials of fifty-two women in jail for stealing in Bristol between 1780 and 1799.⁸⁵

Figure II-3. Comparison of female convictions for theft in Bristol, 1780-1799



Source: BRO, Quarter Sessions Records, 1780-1799; Gaol and Delivery Fiats, 1780-1799.

King has already shown that female offenders were most likely to receive more lenient treatment than their male counterparts,⁸⁶ but it is interesting to question the possibility of a difference of treatment between women. It appears that there was a clear discrepancy between the number of women discharged and the number of prostitutes

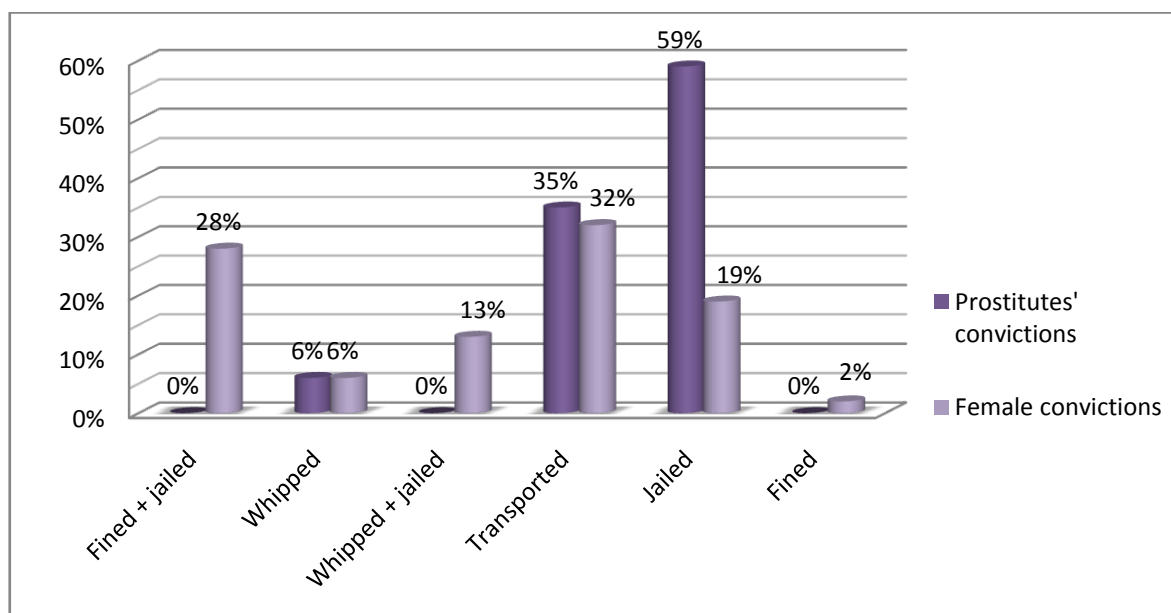
⁸⁵ In terms of recidivism, the average is rather low: one female offender was condemned three times for theft and another one a second time. Two other women were condemned again for a different offence. The four of them were eventually transported.

⁸⁶ King P., "Gender, Crime and Justice in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century England", in Arnot M. and Osborne C., *Gender and Crime in modern Europe* (London, 1999), pp. 44-74, p. 55.

discharged. This may be explained by two arguments: first, the absence of a plaintiff (as mentioned above) meant that the case had to be dropped by the court. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to calculate the number of "missing" plaintiffs, leaving this explanation unconfirmed. Secondly, the high numbers of accused being discharged seems to confirm the hypothesis that judges and juries were more lenient when a prostitute was convicted of theft, maybe because of her economic situation and the condition of her victim: however the different character of the records must be considered as an important variable in the analysis of these sentences.

In order to analyse the remaining convictions in details, the same data can be compared but without including women who had been discharged (seventeen prostitutes/forty-seven female offenders).

Figure II-4. Comparison of female convictions for theft in Bristol, 1780-1799 (discharged excluded)



Source: BRO, Quarter Sessions Records, 1780-1799; Gaol and Delivery Fiats, 1780-1799.

This figure has the advantage of showing both important differences and similarities

between female offenders and prostitutes, information which tends to support the argument of judges' leniency in terms of fines, but also shows that prostitutes were jailed as often as other female offenders. Regarding the punishment received by prostitutes, it seems indeed that the poverty of women was taken into account when given a sentence: whereas 30% of the female offenders had to pay a fine (and were sometimes jailed), no prostitute in Bristol was fined. It is therefore possible that the judges considered the economic situation of the women before sentencing her. On the other hand, similarities appear: the number of female offenders jailed ("jailed", "whipped and jailed", "fined and jailed") reached 60% as opposed to 59% for prostitutes. Besides, the percentage of prostitutes transported equalled the percentage of women transported, as well as the number of women being only whipped. Therefore, if leniency can be seen in the number of cases dropped and in the non-imposition of a fine, it is however necessary to put this statement into perspective when analysing the statistics on condemned prostitutes and female offenders. As King has noted, prostitutes were not treated in a harsher manner than female offenders, but once convicted and tried for theft (grand and petty larceny), prostitutes and other women were treated in a similar manner by the judges and juries, and there were no "absolute preconditions for achieving a better trial outcome".⁸⁷ This analysis goes against D'Cruz and Jackson's assertion that "where prostitutes have also committed theft, fraud, or other offences the criminal justice system has been more ready to assume them guilty"⁸⁸. What may have been the case in late nineteenth century London cannot be applied without caution to an earlier period. This also reaffirms the importance of provincial studies to understand the different attitudes towards prostitution and their evolution, attitudes shaped by both the historical context and the type of environment.

⁸⁷ King, "Gender, Crime and Justice in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century England", p. 64.

⁸⁸ D'Cruz S. and Jackson L., *Women, Crime and Justice in England Since 1660* (New York, 2009), p. 66.

In Nantes, judicial cases involving prostitutes reflected another approach. Whereas in Bristol the charge of theft was usually a one-off case followed by imprisonment, cases involving prostitutes in Nantes were mostly based on long-standing complaints and denunciations from the neighbours and the family. These reports of disturbance of the peace or "*tapage*" and "*scandale*" included the testimonies of neighbours who "knew for a long time that this woman was living in lewdness" or of members of the family who feared for their children or the loss of the family honour.⁸⁹ These complaints about noises and "*scandale*", which usually referred to the fact that the lodger received company at any time of the day and night, are similar to a certain extent to the complaints of Bristolian neighbours who lived near a "disorderly house". However complaints heard in Nantes must be divided into two categories: the complaints of the neighbours against noises, broken windows and swearing resulting from the presence of "*libertins et libertines*" at the prostitute's place and the reports of the members of the family, seconded by neighbours' testimonies, of the debauchery of the woman. The motivations of these two forms of complaints differed: the neighbours mainly wished the girl to leave her flat, the building or the *cour* where she was staying, in order for them to feel "safer" and be less disturbed. The complaints of the family, on the contrary, sought the imprisonment of the woman in the Sanitat, under the pretence that she was a risk to her family: as was the case in Marseille, the family usually tried to correct the behaviour of the woman first before denouncing her to the police.⁹⁰ The *commissaire* would have then either arrested the women or threatened her to be jailed if she did not move somewhere else. Before the Revolution, twenty-six cases were brought to the

⁸⁹ Cases involving prostitution are scattered throughout the judicial archives in Nantes record office, but there are three sets of records FF 269, 270 and 272 which specifically refer to *affaires de moeurs*.

⁹⁰ Cattelona G., 'Control and Collaboration: the Role of Women in Regulating Female Sexual Behavior in Early Modern Marseille' *French Historical Studies*, 18, n° 1 (Spring, 1993), pp. 13-33, p. 18.

commissaire by the family who wished to see the woman jailed but the majority of the cases involving prostitutes were linked with "*tapage*" and disturbance of the peace: in forty instances *commissaires* were called by the neighbours to evict one or more prostitutes from their rooms. After the Revolution, no complaint made by a family was recorded, but the police went to forty-seven different places after neighbours complained of "*tapage*". Nevertheless, in both cases the results were usually quite similar: the women settled somewhere else in the city. Confinement in the hospital general (three months on average) or exclusion from the city if they were not born in Nantes remained the only punishments against prostitutes for "*tapage*" or for disorderly behaviours.⁹¹ When held in the Sanitat, if the family could not pay the "rent", the woman could be kept for up to six months maximum and then freed. It must be remembered that before the Revolution, there was only one prison in Nantes, called the Bouffay. This prison was used for serious offences and crimes and in 1790, there were 129 prisoners in the Bouffay: 114 men and only 25 women, it was therefore unlikely that prostitutes were confined in this prison only for *tapage*.⁹² Prostitutes also appeared in the *registres d'écrous de la police municipale*, which recorded the arrests of prostitutes made by *commissaires*: prostitutes were in this case sent to the Bouffay or the part called *conciergerie* but only till their trial and could not be considered as "long-term" prisoners.⁹³ They remained on average two days in the prison before being sent to a court of justice to be tried or they were released.⁹⁴ The number of arrests increased throughout the second half of the century, up to 1791, when police appeared less concerned with prostitutes:

⁹¹ ADLA, C 633.

⁹² Lallié A., *Les Prisons de Nantes pendant la Révolution* (Nantes, 1883), p. 10.

⁹³ ADLA, B 8756-8759, from 1761 to 1793.

⁹⁴ Lallié A., *Notes concernant l'Histoire du Bouffay de Nantes, 1625-1794* (Nantes, 1865), p. 25.

Table II-3. Registres d'écrous de la police municipale, Nantes 1761-1793

	1761-1770	1771-1780	1781-1790	1791-1793
Number of arrests	53	72	82	2

Sources: ADLA, B 8756; 8757; 8759.

It seems that the police targeted more and more often prostitutes even though the legislation on prostitution had not changed. However these results must be confronted to the reality of record keeping and need to be put into perspective. First, these archives or *écrous* are quite difficult to use as most of the time the names of the *filles du monde* were not recorded, nor was the offence they committed. Therefore it is impossible to know if the women arrested were recidivists or if each case was related to a different woman. Similarly, these records do not give information on the final condemnation, nor if the women were freed after spending only one night in jail, as their case could be judged summarily the following day. And more importantly, the number of prostitutes' arrests must be compared with the grand total of the decades: for example, between 1781 and 1790, 1627 arrests (one or more people) were made but only eighty-two mentioned prostitutes. Therefore, only 5 % of the arrests concerned prostitutes, which put into perspective the previous results.

If a prostitute was evicted from her apartment or from the city if she was not born in Nantes, she usually looked for another place to stay in Nantes, as no one would take responsibility for conveying her to the gates and checking that she left the city. For instance, in 1755, Navare, "*femme débauchée et de mauvaise vie*" lived with her daughter Julie for fifteen days at *rue Bignon L'Estand* in St Nicolas before the neighbours started complaining about noises. It was reported that before living at this

place, she used to live at *rue des trois marins* in the district of La Fosse, then at "*petite rue près de la croix des capucins*", and then *rue Chouerie*, from where she had already been evicted once.⁹⁵ She was finally taken into prison and confined in the Sanitat for six months. In 1761, La Couillaud and her mother were evicted from their flat but the *commissaire* then learnt that they had already been banned from the *Cour des Richards*, *rue du Puit D'argent*, *rue du Moulin* and "*autres endroits*".⁹⁶ As a consequence the daughter was sent to the Sanitat for three months and the mother was warned that it was her responsibility to supervise her daughter when she was released. These sentences were harsher because the woman was a recurring offender, but as "first offenders", Perette, Des Jardins, Poitou and some unnamed prostitutes were simply asked to leave their place *rue des Halles* in twenty-four hours or their goods were to be put on the pavement. The sentence was signed on 28 April 1787 but it was not until 3 May that they were evicted from their flat by force.⁹⁷

A common reproach made against prostitutes and their company was based upon the noise they made and their behaviour. Indeed neighbours were not unwilling to claim that they feared for their life, as men armed with swords and pistols came along during the night.⁹⁸ Windows were broken, people were hurt: in 1753, a young *compagnon teinturier* received "*un coup de broche*"; in 1755, "*un coup de pistolet tiré sur un voisin*" could be heard from the *cour* where Navare used to live.⁹⁹ Again in 1787, Marry, landlord of a cabaret, was coming home with a widow named Boucachard, renowned in her street for her "debauchery", when he assaulted the man who opened the door of the

⁹⁵ AMN, FF 272.

⁹⁶ AMN, FF 272.

⁹⁷ AMN, FF 272.

⁹⁸ AMN, FF 272.

⁹⁹ AMN, FF 272, both cases.

alley.¹⁰⁰ These bursts of violence always occurred at night and were often accompanied with swearing and drunkenness. Every complaint about noise against a prostitute reported in Nantes included mention of swearing and obscene language. They were not arrested or tried for swearing but plaintiffs must have been thinking that mentioning swearing and insults would go against the accused.¹⁰¹ Some of the insults and threats made by the prostitutes or their customers were sometimes reported by the police: "*garce*", "*maquerelle*", "*elle lui vomit mille sottises*", "*je foutrai le feu dans ton foutu taudis*" are examples of the sort of language used in these tense situations. The accusation of swearing can also be found in cases brought to the police by members of a family; when the prostitute had been heard insulting her husband or a relative, it was underlined by the plaintiffs in order to establish the extent of her debauchery. For instance, Françoise Estève was heard saying with reference to her sister-in-law: "*cette chienne là ne veut pas m'habiller*" and she threatened to set their house on fire.¹⁰² The wife of Pierre Rolland, Louise Guillermot, was swearing and blaspheming so much while in company with her husband that "*il en rougit de honte*".¹⁰³ Women who were identified as disorderly and threatening the honour of the family were often targeted as drunkards: "*morte ivre*", "*on l'a vu dans un cabaret*", "*à boire dans un cabaret...avec cinq ou six matelots*" or "intoxicated by liquor" were common complaints about their behaviour.¹⁰⁴

Because of the nature of the records available, the image of prostitutes appears distorted

¹⁰⁰ AMN, FF 272.

¹⁰¹ Going to court in France or England for swearing was not unusual, although it was more common in the earlier period: in Nantes between 1800-1830, only four men and 2.5 women were condemned for 'violence verbale' Desmars, 'Hommes et femmes dans la délinquance', p. 44; Amussen S., 'Féminin/Masculin: le genre dans l'Angleterre de l'époque moderne', *Annales. Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 40, n° 2 (1985), pp. 269-287, pp. 277-279. Hanlon G., 'Les rituels de l'agression en Aquitaine au XVII^e siècle', *Annales. Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 40, n° 2 (1985), pp. 244-268.

¹⁰² AMN, FF 269.

¹⁰³ AMN, FF 269.

¹⁰⁴ AMN, FF 269 and BRO, JQS/P/101.

and these women seemed to be fundamentally linked with crimes. However the accusations of theft and of morally reprobate behaviour like drunkenness, swearing and disturbance of the peace reveal another aspect of the life of prostitutes in port cities: the reality of their relationships with their neighbours, family and the police and how these relations influenced their appropriation of certain parts of the cities.

4. Community and prostitution: roles within the legal process

The preceding sections introduced the legislations of both cities, but left aside the daily activities of the inhabitants, their encounters and daily organisation. Nevertheless it seems necessary to introduce the question of relationships between plebeian men and women with reference to the subject of prostitution. Eighteenth-century European cities usually showed a preponderance of women over men and for different reasons. It was partly due to the fact that female infants tended to survive their tender years more easily than boys. But it was mainly through migration that cities gained a surplus of female inhabitants: studies of domesticity by Fauve-Chamoux or of population in England by Razell, Szreter and Garrett show that in the eighteenth century, female domestics tended to be more numerous than their male colleagues.¹⁰⁵ Nantes records on illegitimacy indicate that out of 8,000 pregnant women in the eighteenth century, 40% of them were

¹⁰⁵ Fauve-Chamoux A., 'Le surplus urbain des femmes en France préindustrielle et le rôle de la domesticité', *Population*, 53, n°1-2 (1998), pp. 359-77, p. 364. For a comprehensive study on the French female population in the nineteenth century see Van de Walle E., *The Female Population of France in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, 1974) and for a study of the population in countryside close to Nantes Blayo Y. and Henry L., 'Données démographiques sur la Bretagne et l'Anjou de 1740 à 1829', *Annales de Démographie Historique* (1967), pp. 91-171; Razzell P.E., 'Population Change in Eighteenth-Century England. A Reinterpretation', *The Economic History Review*, 18, n° 2 (1965), pp. 312-332, p. 328; Szreter S. And Garrett E., 'Reproduction, Compositional Demography, and Economic Growth: Family Planning in England long before the Fertility Decline', *Population and Development Review*, 26, n° 1 (Mar., 2000), pp. 45-80, pp. 67-68. Peter Earle wrote an excellent article on London female employment at the beginning of the eighteenth-century, showing an important discrepancy in spinsters' employment between domestic service and other types of work. However the differences between London and other provincial cities, especially concerning the extent of domestic service, make it difficult to use such data in comparison with Bristol: Earle P., 'The Female Labour Market in London in the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries', *The Economic History Review, New Series*, 42, n° 3 (Aug., 1989), pp. 328-353, p. 339.

born outside the city.¹⁰⁶ From the marital records, it appears that between 1783 and 1787 only 21.6% of the men and 38.5% of the women were born in Nantes.¹⁰⁷ In England, Honeyman insists that the decrease of employment in agriculture in the eighteenth century initiated large scale female migration towards English cities.¹⁰⁸ These studies suggest that the women who migrated towards the city were young and were either employed in unskilled labour or were looking for employment. The high number of young women in a city leads to many questions, particularly about their financial resources and their relations within the community they were living in, especially for recent migrants. In a similar manner to Amanda Vickery's study of middling and gentry women, the question of the reality of the concept of public and private spheres for women in eighteenth-century port cities has to be defined, to decipher the urban context in which women, and ultimately prostitutes, lived.¹⁰⁹

The port cities were divided into wards or parishes, Nantes having fourteen parishes and Bristol twelve wards (for eighteen parishes).¹¹⁰ The evolution of these parishes, their extension or creation and renewal during the eighteenth century demonstrated a gentrification of certain parishes whereas others, such as St Mary Redcliffe or St James city became poorer and poorer.¹¹¹ The port and the city centre became a more popular place to live whereas the districts close to the port and new centres of economic

¹⁰⁶ Depauw, 'Amour illégitime et société', p. 1162.

¹⁰⁷ Bois, *Histoire de Nantes*, p. 178; See also, Depauw J., 'Immigration féminine, professions féminines et structures urbaines à Nantes au XVIII^e siècle', *Enquêtes et Documents*, 2 (Nantes, 1972).

¹⁰⁸ Honeyman K., *Women, Gender and Industrialisation in England, 1700-1870* (London, 2000), p. 28.

¹⁰⁹ Vickery A., 'Golden age to separate spheres? A review of the categories and chronology of English women's history', in Shoemaker R. And Vincent M. (eds), *Gender and History in Western Europe* (London, 1998), pp. 197-225; See also Backscheider P. and Dykstal T. (eds), *The Intersections of the Public and Private Spheres in Early Modern England* (London, 1996).

¹¹⁰ It is interesting to note that the number of parishes in Nantes differs according to the sources: The record office counted fourteen of them, Ange Guépin in his book *Essais Historiques* only thirteen. This difference is due to the fact that the rural parish of St Jacques, the only one in the eighteenth century to be entirely on the south bank of the Loire, was contested in 1790 between Nantes and St Sébastien des Prés, but was finally attributed to the city.

¹¹¹ Baigent E., 'Bristol Society in the Later Eighteenth Century with special reference to the handling by computer of fragmentary historical sources', Ph.D. thesis (Oxford University, 1985), p. 194.

importance (for example the new exchange in Nantes) were remarkable for their concentration of wealthy citizens. The urban development of Bristol was described by Matthews in his *Directory*: in the first two decades of the eighteenth century, Bristol's economy was flourishing as the record of urban construction demonstrates. Queen's square, St James' square, a new custom house and port improvements were examples of urban renewal: the mercantile high-bourgeoisie appropriated the land near the port.¹¹² The willingness of the merchants to live close to their trade could be seen in Nantes as well. The great *marchands-négociants* who used to live in the city centre (Ste Croix and St Saturnin), moved towards La Fosse and its quays. They eventually decided to construct their mansions on Feydeau Island and to drain Gloriette Island and the Prairie-au-Duc to facilitate cargo trade.¹¹³ In both cases, these structural changes necessitated important financial investment. As a consequence, the newly built lands commanded high prices and obliged the lower classes either to leave (as in the main street of La Fosse in Nantes) or to withdraw towards areas formerly inhabited by the bourgeoisie.¹¹⁴ Therefore, urban development in the eighteenth century led to spatial mobility between parishes; thus Bristol and Nantes experienced the birth of new socially defined districts and at the same time, the reinforcement of social distinctions in the old parishes.¹¹⁵

These social distinctions have been studied for example through the analysis of the registers of capitation in France and the poor rates in England.¹¹⁶ But it would be a mistake to consider each part of a city as socially homogenous: the domestic

¹¹² Matthews, *New Bristol Directory for the Year 1793-1794 and New History, Survey and Description of the City and Suburbs of Bristol or, Complete Guide* (Glasgow, facsimile, 2003), p. 18-19.

¹¹³ Bois P. (ed.), *Histoire de Nantes* (Toulouse, 1977), p. 163.

¹¹⁴ Perrot, 'Rapports sociaux et villes au XVIIIe siècle', pp. 253-54.

¹¹⁵ Social exclusivity was never absolute in any part of either city, as will be discussed later, simply because even the richest homes also housed domestic servants, originating from labouring classes. However, it is still possible to define social characteristics of the different districts.

¹¹⁶ The capitation was implemented in France in 1695 by Colbert and was considered as an *impôt par tête*, which means that nobles and clergy were bound to pay. However the clergy redeemed itself by a *don gratuit* of 4 millions of *livres* per year.

representation and the *monde des commis* were both closely related to the upper-middle class and bourgeoisie, interfering with the concept of a clear social partition of the city. However certain parishes can be associated with certain professions: in Nantes, St Nicolas and Ste Croix were inhabited mainly by merchants, St Laurent, St Denis and Notre-Dame were of a more aristocratic and clerical nature.¹¹⁷ In Bristol, around College Green, Park Lane and Queen's square dwelt the rich merchants who had not moved to Clifton to follow the gentry.¹¹⁸ St Mary Redcliffe and St James were renowned for being less wealthy parishes as well as St Similien, the Marchix and St Leonard in Nantes. The poorest population (often the most recently arrived as well) withdrew to the suburbs or remained in the medieval city centre. This movement of population from one parish to another accelerated during the eighteenth century but it was counteracted by the daily movement of the population on the streets and around the ports. "You first come to Old Wells, over a bridge built on both sides like London bridge, and as much crowded with a strange mixture of seamen, women, children, loaded horses, asses and sledges with goods, dragging along together, without posts to separate them" explained Alexander Pope in his letter to Mrs Martha Blount in November 1712.¹¹⁹ This description of the busiest bridge of Bristol offers the reader an image of Bristolians' interactions on a daily basis. The highly crowded feeling which emanates from this description appears for Pope and for the reader a characteristic of the relationships between citizens. "Without posts to separate them", even though in this case it may refer to the transport of goods and pedestrian journeys, the posts could also symbolically mean that Bristol people, notably seamen and women, and by extension, children, were in constant interaction (or at least juxtaposition) by sharing the same urban space.

¹¹⁷ Bois, *Histoire de Nantes*, p. 182.

¹¹⁸ Aughton P., *Bristol: A People's History* (Lancaster, 2000), p. 86.

¹¹⁹ Pope A., *The works of Alexander Pope*, vol. 8 (London, 1812), p. 161.

The concept of private and public spheres is difficult to use in an eighteenth-century context because of the constant interaction between people and genders, especially amongst the lower classes. Farge in *La Vie Fragile*, gives the reader an interesting approach to the eighteenth-century "court" dwelling: she describes the inner court of buildings inhabited by the lower classes, where seamstresses met markets sellers and laundresses and mingled with the other sex on a daily basis, be he carpenter, domestic or coachman.¹²⁰ The doors were open between the flats and the rumours of what happened between the walls ran fast. The architecture of these courts naturally encouraged gossip and rumours, rendered easier by the thinness of the walls and the open space that was a necessary passage toward a more private and intimate space. Therefore the entire concept of public and private has to be redefined to suit the notions of the time. It was unlikely that a dispute or a fight would have past unnoticed in densely populated areas: the study of witnesses interrogated to supply evidence against domestic abuse in both Nantes and Bristol archives reveals that the neighbours were the most commonly called to account for the plaintiff.¹²¹ The specificity of the "inner court" as a place of living, of exchange of goods and knowledge between neighbours, becomes particularly important in judicial cases. In 1749 in Nantes, a young girl of twelve years old was kidnapped from a church by a woman named Venotte and a builder named Tuant: the parents with the help of the police found the girl after enquiring in the vicinity of the church.¹²² Neighbours of Venotte confirmed that she was living "near a court" and that she was "*une femme de débauche*". In 1785, the neighbours of the Sieur Latour, who rented

¹²⁰ Farge A., *La vie fragile, violences, pouvoirs et solidarités à Paris au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1986), p. 18-19.

¹²¹ For cases of assaults: AMN, FF 269 –Police which lists thirty-four judicial cases involving familial issues (seduction, adultery, violence); for Bristol, it is more difficult to find information about violence than thefts: some interesting cases exist however: JQS/P/129, in 1793, Eleanor Bennet was violently assaulted by Ann Bray who was jailed; Thomas Mason was jailed for assaulting Sarah Ricketts: in both cases they were waiting for their judgement at Newgate prison.

¹²² AMN, FF 270.

rooms to prostitutes rue du Puits d'Argent, St Nicolas, complained that the customers of these women often entered the wrong doors and threatened the women who went through the inner court of the house.¹²³ In Bristol, Betty Pillinger from Temple Gate, was raped by Henry Bishop, a pinmaker who was living "in which house is opposite to an house with the same entry".¹²⁴ In the first half of the nineteenth century, the houses in the Lewins' Mead area "were built on the steep river bank, typically in blocks of about twelve around a narrow courtyard".¹²⁵ The existence in the sources of this sometimes confrontational relationship between genders was relatively common and is indicative of the disappearance of some of the privacy barriers. But at the same time these sources reveal another form of privacy, which was more appropriate to the living conditions of the lower classes.

The immediate proximity between the inhabitants of a plebeian suburb like the Marchix in Nantes or of a crowded centre parish such as Christ Church led to the creation of different forms of privacy: the concept of privacy should not be understood as relying on the couple or the nuclear family but on the close community. By community I am referring to the inhabitants of the courts or of the short alleys that characterised the backyard of popular streets. This "forced" interaction was emphasized by the delimitation of "private" streets, at least in Nantes: from 1780 to 1788, in more than 1,540 cases, the police knocked on doors to notify the inhabitants that the gates of the streets (alleys) had been left opened during the night, whereas these gates should have been closed at 10.00 pm.¹²⁶ The *ordonnance* to close these street gates was put in place on 4 January 1770 by the city council to prevent criminals, robbers and disorderly

¹²³ AMN, FF 270.

¹²⁴ BRO, JQS/P/108.

¹²⁵ Aughton, *Bristol: A People's History*, p. 149.

¹²⁶ AMN, FF 231 to FF 248 – Police municipale: each case was recorded by the *commissaire* of the district after his night patrol with the *garde bourgeoise*.

persons in general from escaping the police and its infringement was punishable by a twenty livres fine, to be divided between the inhabitants of the alley.¹²⁷ It clearly appears, in the face of so many recorded cases, that people in Nantes never got used to closing these gates. However by this division of the urban landscape, the city council delimited a new form of community associated with a specific location. It is possible to argue that this law simply put into legal terms what was already considered as a reality: people's appropriation of alleys or courts to eventually form a community, where everyone knew each other and had daily contact with his neighbours. This legal seclusion, superadded to the closing of the city gates, created a specific form of privacy which was more defined by the division of the city into small communities than by the boundaries of blood or walls. This explains why complaints against prostitutes were mostly reported by neighbours: the instinct of the community to preserve its unity tended to target the person who disturbed it. A prostitute could be targeted because she invited disorderly men in her room but if her transaction did not cause a disturbance, no complaint was registered and her character could even be defended by her neighbours as was the case for Veuve Joly: the police came to enquire about this woman but, although her neighbours agreed that she received a man every day, they defended her respectability saying that she was "*une fille sage et méritée*".¹²⁸ This example shows how the concept of privacy influenced the representation of morality and respectability: repeated positive interactions with neighbours allowed her to continue frequenting this man without the risk of being arrested. This phenomenon was noted by Cattelona in Marseille as well: women refused to corroborate a father's complaint about his daughter to have her imprisoned.¹²⁹ They knew the relationship was illegitimate, as was probably

¹²⁷ AMN, FF 88 – Police municipale.

¹²⁸ AMN, FF 269.

¹²⁹ Cattelona G., 'Control and Collaboration: the Role of Women in Regulating Female Sexual Behavior in Early Modern Marseille' *French Historical Studies*, 18, n° 1 (Spring, 1993), pp. 13-33, p. 28.

the case for Veuve Joly, but they did not consider it "disorderly" or threatening the order of the community.

In these communities women played a role as important as men, they may even have had more responsibilities in the creation and continuity of this prevailing sense of community. Indeed, men's sociability has been recently rediscovered by historians and analysed through the lens of gender studies but men tended to meet more often at the public house than in the court (however women did go to the pub as well, it was not distinctly gendered).¹³⁰ Besides, in this context of proto-industrialisation, the clothing industry being the most common remunerated work for women at home, more women than men could work from home while looking after the children. These circumstances led to the construction of a space of social interaction around and in the lodging: as Hill explains, women, and especially single women, "lived in far greater proximity to other members of their sex; they lived and worked together, their relations with other women were carried on from day to day."¹³¹ Gowing's *Common Bodies* put the role of female groups and the help they got from each other under a new light:¹³² these situations were more likely linked with familial problems than with work: marriage, birth or widowhood were occasions for female interactions. In relation to prostitution and the condemnation of disorderly behaviour, these interactions can be reproduced through the analysis of the structure of witnesses' gender: Cattelona insists that women had a role in condemning disorderly behaviour in Marseille; it is interesting to establish whether this

¹³⁰ For more information on men's sociability, see Hitchcock T. and Cohen M. (eds), *English Masculinities 1660-1800* (London, 1999) and the works of John Tosh, for instance: Tosh J., *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain : essays on gender, family, and empire* (New York, 2005).

¹³¹ Hill, *Women Alone*, p. 163.

¹³² Gowing L., *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (London, 2003); Walkowitz J. And Walkowitz D., "We are not Beasts of the Field': Prostitution and the Poor in Plymouth and Southampton under the Contagious Diseases Acts", *Feminist Studies*, 1, n° 3/4 (Winter-Spring, 1973), pp. 73-106, p. 84.

also applies to Nantes and Bristol. At another level, this study shows how important the role of women was in the community and in the maintenance of order.

The following tables indicate the number of male and female witnesses in both cities in four different types of offence or crime: in Nantes, the witnesses recorded here were asked to testify by the police against "disorderly women" after the family made a request to confine the young woman in the Sanitat: in eleven cases between 1750 and 1760 the name of the witnesses was given, members of the family excluded.¹³³ The second figure represents the number of witnesses following complaints by the neighbours for "*tapage*" between 1750 and 1789 (twenty-one cases with witnesses' names). The average number of witnesses in family affairs was 4.7 and 5 in case of "*tapage*".¹³⁴

Table II-4. Witnesses' gender and types of complaint, Nantes 1750-1789

Nantes witnesses:	Male	Female	Total
- for confinement	23	26	49
- for <i>tapage</i>	65	41	106
Total	88	67	155

Sources: AMN, FF 269; 270; 272.

The gender analysis of the witnesses in Nantes reveals two important points: first that when the family tried to have their daughter, sister or wife gaoled, they relied as much on male witnesses as on women to denounce the behaviour of the young woman.

¹³³ 1760 was the last time members of a family asked for a woman to be sent to the Sanitat.

¹³⁴ The statistics do not include cases of *tapage* after the Revolution: this can be explained by the fact that the records available for this period do not include testimonies of witnesses but only petitions of neighbours against prostitutes. These petitions did not record the name or gender of the plaintiffs on a regular basis, therefore making it impossible to give precise statistics.

Therefore the arguments of Cattelona can also be applied to Nantes, when it concerned a family matter. However in cases of *tapage*, the judicial action was started by the neighbours and women were asked to testify slightly less often than men. This may be explained by the fact that men might have been more likely to start a judicial process than women. Palk also underlines this fact when she said that "women's access to the court as prosecutors was highly constrained".¹³⁵ However, women still had an important part to play in the condemnation of disorderly behaviour: overall, 43% of the witnesses against disorderly behaviour or *tapage* in Nantes were female.

In Bristol, the statistics are based on two different types of accusations: the tenancy of a disorderly house (24 cases) and the accusation of theft (57 cases) between 1780 and 1805. The average number of witnesses for theft was 2 and for keeping a disorderly house, 1.5. The discrepancy between these averages and the ones for Nantes is due to the difference in the judicial system: the money spent to prosecute and give evidence often prevented the recourse to many witnesses in Bristol. Besides, the justices of the peace and the constables were not in charge of finding witnesses, which in Nantes was the role of the *commissaires*.

Table II-5. Witnesses' gender and types of complaint, Bristol 1778-1805

Bristol witnesses:	Male	Female	Total
- for keeping a disorderly house	20	15	35
- for theft	77	32	109
Total	97	47	144

Sources: BRO, Quarter Session records, 1778-1805.

¹³⁵ Palk, *Gender, Crime and Judicial Discretion*, p. 13.

The statistics on the gender of the witnesses who were asked to testify against tenants of disorderly houses are slightly lower but comparable to Nantes average: 42% of people testifying were women. The analysis of the plaintiffs' reports according to their gender did not reveal a particular distinction in the accusatory discourse: this could be explained by the formality of the police or justices of the peace's reports, which would encourage the repetition in writing of common formal expressions. Besides, the vocabulary and the accusations given by male and female neighbours remained rhetorically similar. The statistics on theft are largely distorted by the fact that the witness and plaintiff were also the customer of the prostitute who robbed them: therefore in cases of theft, male witnesses counted for 70% of the total. But the fact that 30% of them were women reveals an interesting point: most of these women must have been in the public house or close to prostitutes to have been able to witness the theft (if we consider that their testimonies were true). Fourteen of these female witnesses were also prostitutes (44% of the total of the female witnesses), which means that 56% or eighteen of them were not known or recognised as "lewd women": this shows that, far from being outcasts, prostitutes and "respectable" women met and shared the same public places.

Thus the concept of private sphere may be a relevant lens through which to examine women's life and interactions in an eighteenth-century port city, if its boundaries integrate relationships with the neighbours and are extended beyond the walls of the rented room. Women's sociability was linked with the main events of a woman's life and it was possible that in a sea-trade port city, as sailors were away for a longer time, this sociability was even stronger. Besides this female culture stood the interactions with men, which from conflict to intimacy, as well as friendly relations, occurred on a daily-

basis. The archives quoted already have mainly shown cases of interactions which asked for judicial help. This choice of archives emphasizes the connection between women and justice: they knew how to use the judicial system and they were often to be found in front of the magistrates, as plaintiff or defendant. They also took an active part in maintaining respectability at a local level and in deciding of the appropriate manner to deal with certain behaviours.

III. Social origins and family ties of prostitutes.

Hogarth, Cleland and Restif de le Bretonne used the character of a naive country girl to depict woman's "fall into prostitution" because of the wickedness of a procuress.¹ Both writers and painters highlighted the role of the procuress: she forced, convinced and seduced the young women to enter this trade whilst always keeping an eye on her *protégées'* relationships and behaviour, leaving them with scarcely any liberty. But this image, usually drawn in a London or Parisian setting, misrepresented the reality of prostitution by shifting the decision to enter into prostitution from a young and innocent woman to an older and uglier one. Prostitutes in the eighteenth century appear to have been much more willing to admit their trade (usually as casual) than was portrayed in literature. For example, Sarah Leach admitted in a deposition that she had been living with Mary Morris, a single woman, in St Michael parish "for nearly a month last past for the purpose of prostitution".² Similarly, young women arriving from the neighbouring countryside sometimes felt obliged to go to the city to hide an unwanted pregnancy and some of them might have already been prostitutes before arriving in the

¹ See Webster M., *Hogarth* (London, 1979); Cleland J., *Fanny Hill: Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (London, 1963); Restif de La Bretonne Nicolas-Edme, *Le Pornographe* (Genève, 1988).

² BRO, JQS/P/156.

city.³ However not every woman coming to Nantes or Bristol to hide her pregnancy turned into a prostitute and to find out if a pattern of prostitution existed in these two cities (i.e.: if the women were from a similar background and experienced the same kind of social history), it is necessary to look at the social origins of these women.

The data used in this analysis highlight the sometimes meagre resources available in Bristol: the only references which can be used to trace the origin and age of the women are the quarter session archives but these personal details were not always recorded. Comparing the examinations and information on cases of theft and disorderly houses with the calendars of Newgate prison, the gaol delivery fiats and on-line records on transportation are the only means to decipher the social origin or the age of prostitutes in Bristol. Generalisations have to be avoided but as the amount of data is sometimes meagre, extrapolations may be needed when discussing prostitutes' living conditions and daily routine. The research on Nantes prostitutes on the contrary is based on more extensive sources: the period pre-revolutionary is well-documented in terms of trials and since 1804 censuses of known prostitutes in the different districts of the city were carried out.⁴ It is necessary however to keep in mind that these censuses only listed women who were known to receive men at their place or to sell their body in a public house or in the street; therefore women practising prostitution but who were not recognised as prostitutes were not registered on these lists.⁵ In addition to these censuses, the *declarations de grossesse* offer an important source for establishing

³ Studies on illegitimate pregnancies in France clearly show that the majority of women who declared illegitimate pregnancy were not prostitutes, even though similarities between both situations can be drawn: Depauw, 'Amour illégitime et société à Nantes', p. 1174 and *passim*; Lottin A., 'Naissances illégitimes et filles-mères à Lille au XVIIIe siècle', *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine*, 4 (1970), pp. 278-322; Chapalain-Nougaret C., 'Les filles-mères du diocèse de Rennes au XVIIIe siècle et la prostitution' *Justice et répression : actes du 107e congrès national des sociétés savantes (Brest, 1982)*, (Paris, 1984), pp. 101-116, pp. 108-109.

⁴ AMN, II, C62, D1.

⁵ This expression refers to either women acting hidden from their neighbours and on an irregular basis, or women just arrived in the city and who had not been reported to the police yet.

information on their place of birth: in 1972, Jacques Depauw and his students analysed 8,000 cases of illegitimate pregnancy in Nantes, recorded from 1725 to 1788 (1767 to 1771 missing) using punched cards and codes to decipher these archives.⁶ He concluded that on average 40% of the single pregnant women migrated from the surrounding countryside, and as will be shown, this figure is similar to the number of the prostitutes born outside Nantes.⁷ Finally, *commissaires'* archives can be a fruitful source of information: they sometimes noted down interesting facts concerning how a woman chose or was forced to become a prostitute, in addition to details about her personal life and origins.

1. The socio-economic background of prostitutes

In twenty-five years, from 1780 to 1805, 105 different prostitutes were recorded in the Bristol Quarter Sessions archives, as offenders or as witnesses (some women committed multiple crimes and were recorded more than once). Their age was only mentioned in twenty-six cases; the age of the witnesses was never recorded which accounts for twenty-four cases where prostitutes were quoted as witness against the tenant of a disorderly house or were present during a theft. Similarly, the age of the prostitutes who came to trial was noted only in the Newgate calendars in some exceptional cases (it seems that it depended on who updated the calendars) and only once in the information and examinations of prostitutes.⁸ Examinations of the defendants are rarely available and leave us with no precise details with regard to their age or place of birth. The lack of information about their place of birth is even more patent than their age: only in the case of Milledge and James were the prostitutes' origins recorded.⁹ This lack of detail is

⁶ Depauw J., 'Amour illégitime et société à Nantes au XVIIIe siècle', *Annales. Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 27, n°4 (1972), pp. 1155 – 1182.

⁷ Ibid., p. 1173-1174.

⁸ BRO, JQS/P/104; 110, Susannah Milledge and Betty James' case.

⁹ BRO, JQS/P/104.

exacerbated by the fact that the bastardy records have disappeared as well as the workhouse registers: each potential prostitute who was sent back to her parish of origin because she had become chargeable to a Bristol parish, possibly because she became pregnant, is unknown. In addition, the registers of entrants of the Female Penitentiary have disappeared from the records too.¹⁰ However, with the meagre data available, it has been possible to draw statistics that are very similar to the statistics built on Nantes' archives.

From the records available in Bristol, it has been possible to demonstrate that the women caught for the first time and tried for theft or for keeping a disorderly house were on average 26.5 years old.¹¹ The youngest one tried and recognized as a prostitute was Sarah Stringer, who was 19 years old when she was convicted for theft.¹² She had already been convicted for assault when she was 17 and again when she was 21 for robbery. It is true that cases of younger girls can be found in the archives, like those of Catherine Morgan, Catherine Martin and Elizabeth Morris who were 14, 17 and 15 years old respectively when they stole a cotton gown from a house.¹³ Delinquency could lead to prostitution but their names were recorded only once in the archives. It is impossible to know whether they became prostitutes or not and therefore they were not included in this analysis.¹⁴ Women got arrested at quite a "late" age of 26.5 years old¹⁵ (almost the age of marriage) which shows that they either managed to live without

¹⁰ The archivist at BRO informed me that it has been lost since 1992.

¹¹ BRO, JQS/P/73; 76; 80; 95; 99; 101; 104; 106; 107; 108; 110; 114; 123; 128; 132; 140; 169; 172; 190; 224.

¹² Quarter sessions records on Sarah Stringer: BRO, JQS/P/128; 129; 132; 140.

¹³ BRO, JQS/P/111.

¹⁴ BRO, JQS/P/95-1; King P., 'Destitution, desperation and delinquency' in Gestrich A., King S. and Lutz R. (eds), *Being Poor in Modern Europe, Historical Perspectives 1800-1940* (Bern, 2006), pp. 157-178, p. 168.

¹⁵ The average of 26.5 years old includes the age of Mary Jones, who was 55 years old when she was denounced for keeping a disorderly house (BRO, JQS/P/107). If excluded from these calculations, the age of the first arrest drops at 25.4 years old.

being arrested beforehand or they resorted to prostitution and theft only in a period of particular crisis. Indeed, as they were not recorded earlier, it seems possible that opportunity and necessitous circumstances combined to encourage theft from a customer. In contrast, King's study of London female offenders gives a lower age: 35% of the offenders were between 18 and 23 years.¹⁶ Henderson also noted that prostitutes were mainly in their early twenties when they were arrested for the first time.¹⁷ The difference between London and the provinces may be explained by the economic situation of young women in London who may have faced unemployment and solitude at a younger age than in Bristol. The sphere of attraction of London was larger than Bristol and could lead to more young female migrants being left without any contact with their family. A second explanation can be understood in terms of authority and the legal system: single women were more easily convicted for property offence than married women who, in theory, were still "protected" by the status of *feme covert*.¹⁸ According to King the median age of marriage in London was 21 years old for London women and 25 years old for immigrants.¹⁹ In cities like Bristol or Nantes, the average age of marriage was higher, in the late twenties rather than early twenties.²⁰ This could therefore partly explain the age difference between prostitutes in provincial cities and in London.

Theft was the most common offence; from these twenty-six women whose age was recorded, only five were accused of keeping a disorderly house: their age varied from 22 to 55 years old, the average being 35 years old. Keeping a disorderly house (or an

¹⁶ King P., 'Female offenders, work and life-cycle change in late-eighteenth-century London', *Continuity and Change*, 11, n° 1 (1996), pp. 61-90, p. 64.

¹⁷ Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, pp. 20-26.

¹⁸ King, 'Female offenders, work and life-cycle change', p. 68.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

²⁰ Blum A., 'Rouen aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles. A propos de l'ouvrage de J.-P. Bardet', *Population*, 40, n° 3 (1985), pp. 528-540, pp. 529-530.

inn in general) appears to have been more common for older women who may have inherited the business from their husband or who inherited enough money at the death of a relative to buy a licence.²¹ The case of Elizabeth Churchill, who was 22 years old and single and who received disorderly men and women at her lodgings on Tower Lane remains unique.²² The average age in cases of theft was 24.5, which emphasized the age distance between the two types of accusations: theft was a younger prostitute's resource whereas at an older age, she would have rather had the opportunity to keep a public-house and encourage prostitution. This age difference also shows a change in the economic status of the woman, which will be discussed in a further section.²³

Table III-1. Summary of prostitutes' age in Bristol, 1780-1805

	Average Age	Age Range
Accused of theft	24.5	17 - 45
Accused of keeping a disorderly house	35	22 - 55
Average/Total	26.5	17 - 55

Sources: BRO, JQS/P/73; 76; 80; 95; 99; 101; 104; 106; 107; 108; 110; 114; 123; 128; 132; 140; 169; 172; 190; 224.

The analysis of the age of prostitutes from Bristol shows that women might have entered prostitution in their twenties and were subsequently arrested for theft: the irregularity of this trade might also explain the necessity to steal from their customers if the opportunity arose.²⁴ Women accused of keeping disorderly houses were usually older, around 35 years old and were charged with disturbing their neighbours. It seemed to have been less a case of necessity than a willingness to keep a disorderly house for

²¹ Hill B., *Women Alone, Spinsters in England 1660-1850* (Yale, 2001), pp. 46-47. Peter Earle in 'The female labour market in London in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries' in Sharpe P. (ed.), *Women's Work, The English Experience 1650-1914* (London, 1998), pp. 121-148, p. 130, notices that for fifty-three women employed in the catering and victualling trade between 1695 and 1725, only three were single women, or spinsters.

²² BRO, JQS/P/107.

²³ See chapter 2.2.1 for more detailed information on tenants of disorderly houses.

²⁴ Sixty prostitutes were arrested in Bristol for theft between 1780 and 1805.

their "own lucre and gain".²⁵ The fact that they were only likely to be charged if their customers were disturbing the peace highlights neighbours and officials' own interpretation of the law. Whereas it seemed that the thieving prostitutes were more often motivated by necessity and opportunism, tenants of disorderly houses appeared to be clearly motivated by mercenary considerations, encouraging prostitution in their house, notably by letting rooms, in order to increase their revenues.

The Nantes 1808 census listed 179 prostitutes' names for the eight *arrondissements* or divisions of the city.²⁶ It is the most complete census between the year 1804 and 1815 and these lists were recorded by the *commissaires* in accordance with the police decree of 1806 organising visits to the surgeon.²⁷ The average age of the prostitute was 25.7 years old, which corresponds with the age of the prostitutes charged at the Quarter Sessions in Bristol. The youngest prostitutes listed were 17 years old and the eldest one was 56 in 1808. These data are very similar to the Bristol ones but it should be noted that the eldest woman in Nantes was listed as a prostitute and not as a tenant of a disorderly house, as was the case in Bristol. The classification of prostitutes by age is shown below:

Table III-2. Representation of Nantes prostitutes in 1808 by age range

Age Range	17-19	20-29	30-39	40 +
Number of listed women	16	125	29	9

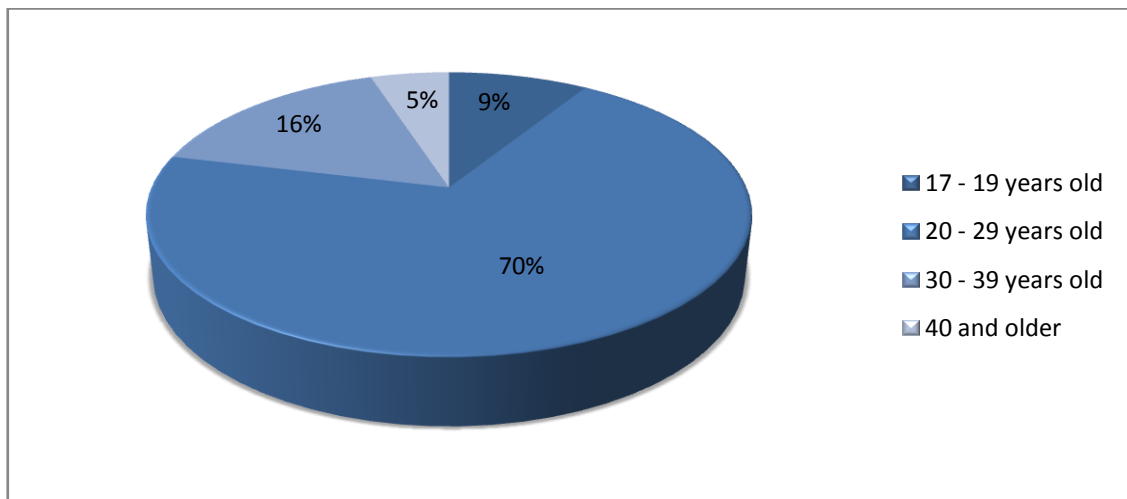
Source: AMN, I1 C62 D1.

²⁵ This expression was common in the information against tenants of disorderly houses. For examples: JQS/P/107; 108; 123.

²⁶ AMN, I1 C62 D1. Note: the *commissaires* from the divisions of the *Agriculteurs*, *Marchés* and *Ponts*, wrote to the head of the police to confirm that there were no known prostitute in their districts.

²⁷ AMN, I1 C62 D1. Interestingly enough, the 1808 census is the most complete census for the period but it was also the year when the visits had to be suspended as the surgeons were accused of treating the women indecently.

Figure III-1 Average age of prostitutes in Nantes, 1808



Source: AMN, II C62 D1.

According to these figures, 122 prostitutes out of 179, in other words 68% of them were under 27 years old, the average age of marriage for women in France at that time.²⁸ These figures clearly show that young women, probably before getting married, were more likely to become prostitutes (and known as such by the police and neighbours) in order to earn money rather than older, possibly married women. The census did not record the civil status of the women, therefore it can only be guessed that most of them were still unmarried. Similarly, younger casual prostitutes under 17 years old might not have been known as such to the police and therefore would not have been recorded.

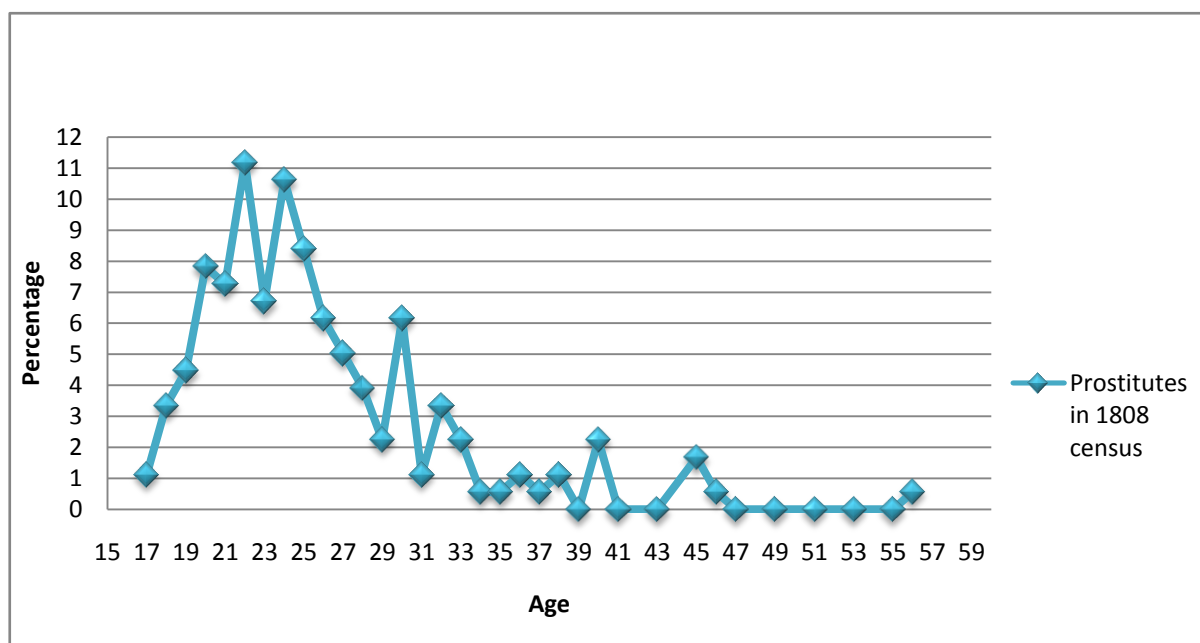
A detailed graph of their age gives the following curve and highlights the preponderance of young women, under the age of 27. The median age is 24, which is again higher than the London or Parisian median age for prostitutes.²⁹ Again the characteristics of the provincial urban environment can explain this discrepancy: by offering a tighter

²⁸ Between 1740 and 1789, the average age of marriage for women in an urban environment was 27.3 years old. See Blum A., 'Rouen aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles. A propos de l'ouvrage de J.-P. Bardet', *Population*, 40, n° 3 (1985), pp. 528-540, pp. 529-530 which draws a map of women's average age of marriage by department.

²⁹ Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, p. 24; Benabou, *La prostitution et la police des mœurs*, p. 267.

network both within the districts and with the close countryside, the development of prostitution may have been slower than in the more anonymous urban environment of the capital.³⁰

Figure III-2. Age structure of Nantes' prostitutes in 1808 census



Source: AMN, II C62 D1.

Police censuses also offered important data on prostitutes' origins as they listed their place of birth: therefore the migrations of women can be traced.³¹ Seventy women out of 179 were said to be born in Nantes, which means that less than half of the prostitutes listed in 1808 were actually from the city. However, the number of prostitutes coming from the neighbour villages of Loire-Atlantique (formerly called Loire-Inférieure) shows the migratory pull of Nantes for women in this region: ninety-two women were born in Loire-Atlantique (seventy from Nantes and twenty-two from the surrounding villages) slightly more than half of them were thus from the same department. In addition, forty-five women came from the ex-dukedom of Brittany, thirteen of them

³⁰ See King, 'Female offenders, work and life-cycle change', p. 71 on migrations towards London.

³¹ Note: in five cases, the place of birth is missing.

from Rennes, whereas the region on the south and east of Nantes, including the more agricultural departments of Maine-et-Loire and Vendée sent only sixteen women in Nantes. The remaining twenty-two women came partly from Normandy or from other departments and ex-colonies.

Table III-3. Regional distribution of prostitutes' place of birth, Nantes, 1808³²

Place of birth	Nantes	Loire-Atlantique (Nantes excluded)	Angers	Maine et Loire (Angers excluded)	Rennes	Ille et Vilaine (Rennes excluded)	Lorient	Morbihan
Numbers of prostitutes	70	22	10	5	13	12	5	8

Place of birth	Vendée	Finistère	Côtes d'Armor	Calvados	Manche	Other departments	Ex-colonies	Total (both tables)
Numbers of prostitutes	1	1	6	2	2	18	4	179

Source: AMN, II C62 D1.

This discrepancy in the female migration to Nantes in 1808 can be explained by two main reasons: the historic links between the Brittany departments and Nantes and the division between Nantes and the rural department of Vendée, born with the counter-Revolution. Besides, Angers in Maine-et-Loire was also attractive for women as the city was well-developed and offered sufficient work to women from the countryside in search of domestic employment in the city, as well as in a rural environment.³³ An analysis at a larger scale of the departmental distribution reveals an interesting pattern of migration: most of the women who came to Nantes were born in villages or towns

³² See appendix n° 1 for a cartographic representation of the regional distribution.

³³ Champaud P., 'La route de Rennes à Nantes', *Norvis*, 19 (Juillet-Septembre, 1958), pp. 267-285; Courgeau D., 'Étude sur la dynamique, l'évolution et les conséquences des migrations II, Trois siècles de mobilité spatiale en France', UNESCO report (1982), pp. 17-19.

situated along the main rivers.³⁴ Of course the "natural" development of urbanisation explains that the largest cities such as Angers and Rennes were located on rivers; however concerning the women migrating from villages, as well as the cities, this pattern highlights the importance of the fluvial route. Prostitutes from other departments were more likely to be born in a place where maritime or fluvial trade had some importance and where therefore migration to the near cities must have occurred quite regularly. This distinction weakens again the literary idea that women who fell into prostitution once in the city were naive country girls. They were most likely women who were aware of their regional environment and who already had experienced an urban environment, even if this was only through the testimonies of other migrants.

Women who migrated to Nantes were probably in search of work when they first arrived and the reasons why they fell into prostitution often remain unclear. But it is noticeable that, even though they were listed as prostitute, most of them insisted on having their occupation recorded. "*Les professions qu'elles se donnent*", category used in the censuses, show that they had been trained or at least learned at home to work in a specific trade: *les métiers du fil* (thread work) were the most commonly cited, from seamstress to lace-maker.³⁵ Some unexpected trades were also listed: one hairdresser and one *tapissière*, which demanded more expensive and skilled training than most female trades.³⁶ Forty-nine women said they had no occupation and in contrast thirty-seven of these women said they were tailors (*tailleuse*) and seventeen of them claimed to be seamstress (*couturière*). In addition to these common trades involving skills in

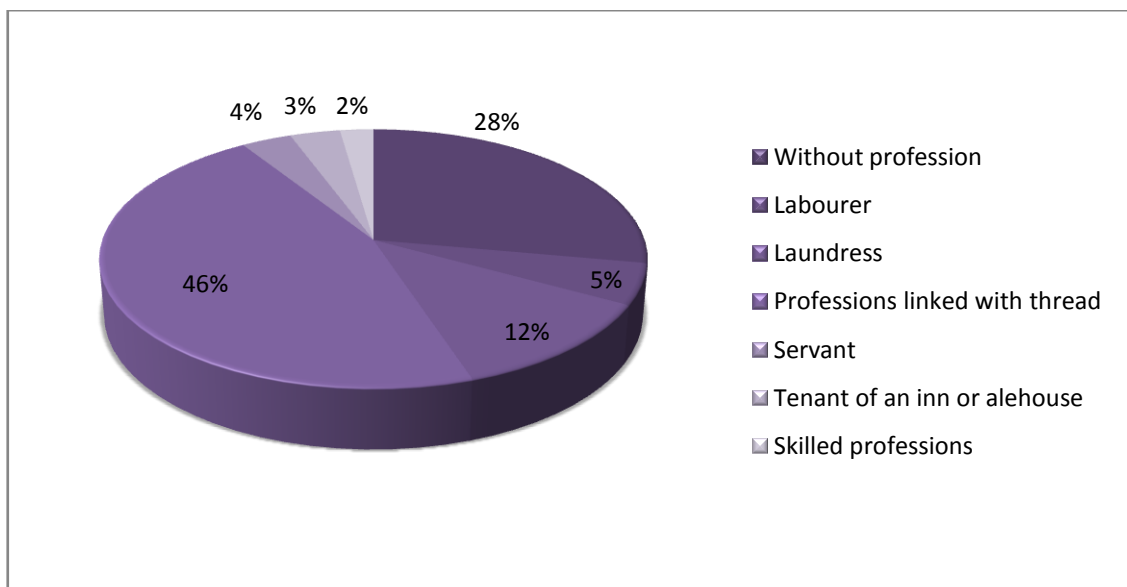
³⁴ See appendix n° 2.

³⁵ Only two occupations out of 179 remain unknown.

³⁶ References on women's work and training in the eighteenth century are numerous, I will only quote Lane J., *Apprenticeship in England, 1600-1914* (London, 1996) and Krausman Ben-Amos I., 'Women Apprentices in the Trades and Crafts of early modern Bristol', *Continuity and Change*, 6, n° 2 (1991), pp. 227-252 on feminine apprenticeships. See also, Benabou, *La Prostitution et la Police des Moeurs*, pp. 286-287.

sewing, sixteen women declared they were thread-maker (*fileuse*), four said to be menders (?) (*ravaudeuse*), three weavers (*tricotteuse*) and two lace-makers (*dentellière*). Twenty-one women were laundresses, one of the less skilful employments for women but only six of them were listed as domestic servants (two of them were the domestic of other prostitutes).

Figure III-3. Prostitutes' qualifications in Nantes, 1808



Source: AMN, I1 C62 D1.

Whereas it was commonly believed by employers that domestic servants could be "lewd and disorderly" and risked falling into prostitution because of their lack of education and bad behaviour, it appears in reality that service in the eighteenth century led very few women to prostitution.³⁷ Alain Corbin's analysis of nineteenth-century Parisian prostitutes shows a preponderance of servants however the reality in the eighteenth century was widely different, even more so in a port city where, relatively speaking,

³⁷ Fairchilds C., *Domestic Enemies, Servants and their Masters in Old Regime France* (Baltimore, 1984), p. 75; Browne Alice, *The Eighteenth-Century Feminist Mind* (Brighton, 1987), p. 35. In Strasbourg, 1726, a decree was passed against procuresses trying to debauch young servants: '*On fait pareille deffense (sic) de subordonner les filles, servantes et domestiques et de les débaucher de leur condition soit par promesse de plus grands gages, récompenses ou autrement.*', Archives Municipales de Strasbourg, X 502.

fewer servants were needed compared to the capital.³⁸ Fairchilds has already underlined this difference between the discourses on servants³⁹ and the reality of prostitution: in Toulouse, only one woman out of fourteen claimed to be a servant.⁴⁰ However in cities such as Pau or Montpellier, the number of servants being prostitutes reached 49% and 40% respectively.⁴¹ Benabou indicated that in Paris in the eighteenth century, 11% of the prostitutes arrested gave "domestic" as their employment.⁴² It appears that in Nantes, the discrepancy with the other towns and cities was very large: only 4% of the women listed in 1808 said they were domestics. An explanation for the low figure of 4% of domestics in Nantes may reveal a thriving domestic market in a city whose economic development, although slowed down, was still strong, meaning that more and more people could employ domestics. As seen, even prostitutes could employ a servant.

Unskilled or low skilled women were most likely to turn toward prostitution to earn a better living than their training could provide. It is true that the wages earned through prostitution could be irregular but so too was the work of a *fileuse*, who was paid by piecework and who could easily face unemployment, if there was a fall in demand.⁴³ The financial difficulties and the irregularity of employment between both trades must have looked the same for certain women and living in an inn or public house had the advantage of being near potential customers, whereas finding customers as a seamstress

³⁸ Corbin A., *Les filles de Noce, Misère sexuelle et Prostitution au XIXe et XXe siècle* (Paris, 1978), pp. 79-80.

³⁹ See for example Stave S., 'British seduced maidens', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 14, n° 2 (Winter, 1980-1981), pp. 109-134, which clearly explains how the character of the fallen servant was created or Ganev R., "Milkmaids, ploughmen and sex in eighteenth-century Britain", *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 16, n° 1, (2007), pp. 40-67.

⁴⁰ Fairchilds C., *Domestic Enemies*, p. 75.

⁴¹ Desplats C., 'Pau et le Béarn au XVIIIe siècle, groupes sociaux, attitudes mentales et comportements', Thèse de doctorat (Université de Pau, 1978), p. 918; Jones C., 'Prostitution and the ruling class in eighteenth-century Montpellier', *History Workshop* (Autumn, 1978), pp. 7-28, p. 16.

⁴² Benabou, *La Prostitution et la police des mœurs*, p. 300.

⁴³ Again, the references on women's clothing trade are numerous, I will quote only Pinchbeck I., *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850* (London, 1969), pp. 111-235, as a preliminary study on female clothing and thread work.

or tailor may have been more difficult.

Despite an obvious discrepancy between the data available in both cities, it is possible to extrapolate certain information from Nantes and apply it to Bristol. Prostitutes in both cities were around the same age and probably entered prostitution in their twenties. More than half of the prostitutes in Nantes came from the department and it was likely the same for Bristol and the neighbouring counties: important cities, like Angers or Bath, also acted as a magnet to women looking for employment and were therefore counteracting the attraction of Nantes or Bristol to some extent.⁴⁴ However it is important to notice that women coming from outside the department of Loire-Atlantique were usually born (and presumably raised) in towns or cities rather than villages. Thus they had experience of the urban environment before they arrived in Nantes and contrary to the literary representation of prostitutes, they were not naive country girls. Therefore, their involvement in prostitution was probably their own choice (in the sense that they were not forced by a third party) and was motivated by familial or personal reasons that have now to be analysed.

2. Prostitutes and family: civil status, occupation and children⁴⁵

Historians of prostitution never devote much attention to the family situation of prostitutes; Henderson mentions their social origins and family history but avoids a particular analysis of their marital status.⁴⁶ Benabou, writing on Paris prostitution, highlighted the subject by giving the following figures: out of 2,069 women arrested in

⁴⁴ On Bath see for instance: Horn P., 'Georgian domestic Servants and Poor Law Settlement: Bath in the 1760s and 1770s', *Genealogists' Magazine*, 27, n° 9 (2003), pp. 399-405; Davis G., 'Social Decline and Slum Conditions: Irish Migrants in Bath history', *Bath History*, 8 (2000), pp. 134-147.

⁴⁵ For an easier analysis of prostitutes' network, this section will follow the modern pattern of a close family, meaning husband and children first; the next section will look at their relationships with their next of kin.

⁴⁶ Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, p. 14-16.

Paris in 1765, 1766 and 1770, 87% of them were single, 7 % of married women, 5% of widows and 1% of unknown status but she did not mention the occupations of the husbands.⁴⁷ These characteristics however need to be underlined for two reasons: firstly, to fathom the impact of women's familial situation on their reasons to turn towards prostitution and secondly to give an idea of their economic independence as single or married women. The nature of the archives in Nantes and Bristol does not allow a strict comparison between both cities: the censuses on prostitution did not mention their marital status. In Bristol however, the judicial records were often more explicit about the status of women: the foundation of the common law explains this difference. One reason for this may have been that the status of *feme covert*, even though it had been seriously challenged in the seventeenth century, could still be part of the judges' mental representation of women's legal responsibility.⁴⁸ However it is unlikely that the principle of marital coercion could have been applied to prostitutes who were accused of stealing: indeed it would have been necessary for the husband to be present to be accused of coercing his wife.⁴⁹ Besides, it seems that the mention "single woman" was given the peculiarity of referring to both the marital status and the occupational situation. Indeed in Bristol court records, the occupations of "single women" were not recorded, whereas if compared with the other women who took part in the judicial process, it appears that their occupations were most definitely mentioned.⁵⁰ This particularity was already mentioned by Amy Erickson, researching the Old Bailey's

⁴⁷ Benabou Erica-Marie, *La prostitution et la police des mœurs au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1987), pp. 270-272.

⁴⁸ Beattie J. M., 'The Criminality of Women in Eighteenth-Century England', *Journal of Social History*, 8, n° 4 (Summer, 1975), pp. 80-116, p. 86; Feeley M. and Little D., 'The Vanishing Female: The Decline of Women in the Criminal Process, 1687-1912', *Law & Society Review*, 25, n° 4 (1991), pp. 719-758, pp. 738 and 750; see also Rowe G. S., 'Femes Covert and Criminal Prosecution in Eighteenth-Century Pennsylvania', *The American Journal of Legal History*, 32, n° 2 (Apr., 1988), pp. 138-156; Greenberg J., 'The Legal Status of the English Women in the Early Eighteenth-Century Common Law and Equity', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 4 (1975), pp. 171-181.

⁴⁹ Palk, *Gender, Crime and Judicial Discretion*, pp. 21-32.

⁵⁰ For a discussion on the expression 'singlewoman' in the earlier period, see Froide, *Never Married*, pp. 159-160.

records: according to her findings, women's occupations were more often quoted in criminal records than in church courts' reports.⁵¹

From the statistics drawn in the previous section, it has been established that women who engaged in prostitution and who got caught for stealing or for disturbing the peace were on average in their mid-twenties and were therefore, in England or in France, at an age when they would have usually got married. As Cissie Fairchilds notes, marriage was a necessity for a woman of low class to secure a decent living.⁵² Most of the women recorded as prostitute in the 1808 census in Nantes came from a low social background, mainly working in the clothes trade and were on average earning a third less than a man for the same work in the textile industry.⁵³ Their occupational situation was likely to be unstable and based on temporary contract and the weekly average earning must have been rather low, especially if they did not have a husband to bring money in the household: thus the prospect of marriage could have had some advantages for these women originating from the lower class. The study of Bristol prostitutes at the end of the century reveals that out of 108 different prostitutes in the archives, twenty-two of them were married when they appeared in the archives for the first time, four were widows and eighty-two were listed as single, between 1778 and 1806. In four cases, Ann Swan, Elizabeth Smith, Martha Reed and Margaret McCarthy were first listed as single and were later in the decade recorded for a second offence as married.⁵⁴ According to the prostitutes' average age (respectively 26.5 and 25.7 years old in Bristol and Nantes), it is not too surprising to see that the majority (76%) of those involved in

⁵¹ Erickson A., 'Married women's occupations in eighteenth-century London', *Continuity and Change*, 23, n° 2 (2008), pp. 267–307, p. 270.

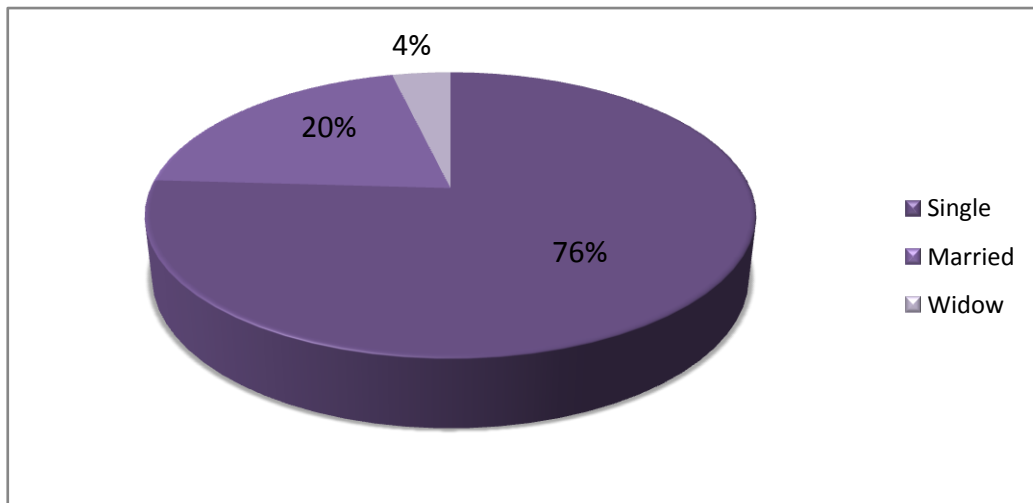
⁵² Fairchilds C., 'Female Sexual Attitudes and the Rise of Illegitimacy: A Case Study', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 8, n° 4 (Spring, 1978), pp. 627–667, p. 641.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 627.

⁵⁴ BRO, JQS/P/73; 76; 132 for Ann Swan; JQS/P/107; 140 for Elizabeth Smith/Vowles; JQS/P/95; 108; 114 for Martha Reed/Bradford; JQS/P/115; 127 for Margaret McCarthy.

prostitution were single women.

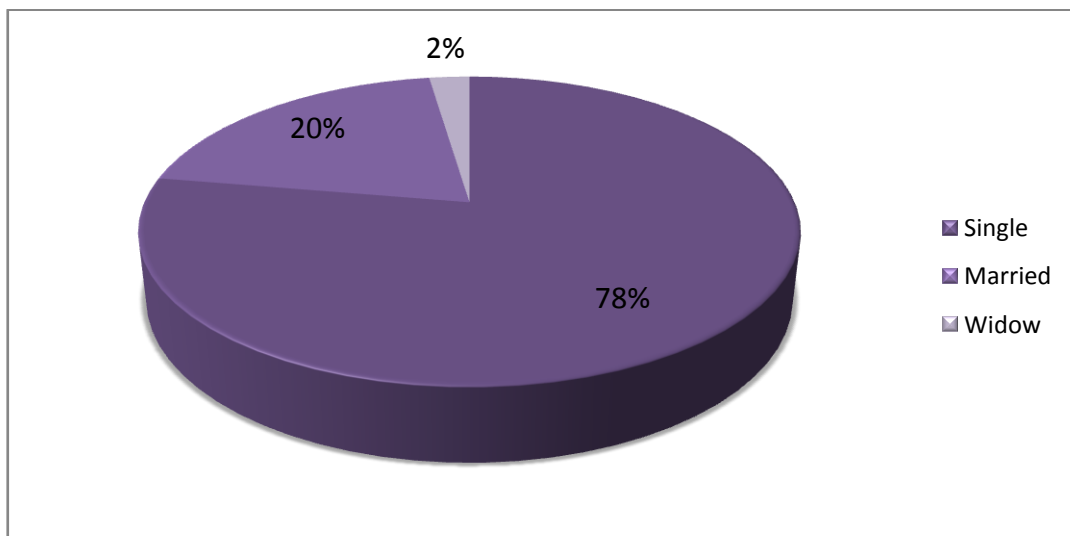
Figure III-4 Marital Status of Bristol Prostitutes



Sources: BRO, Quarter Sessions records, 1780-1805; Bristol Record Society, *Gaol Delivery Fiats 1741-1799* (Bristol, 1989), pp. 41 and 80.

By differentiating the women who were recorded as keeping a disorderly house and the women arrested for thefts or recorded as being present during the robbery (tenant of the place excluded), it appears that the percentage of married women remained constant:⁵⁵

Figure III-5 Marital Status of women accused of robbery and female witnesses, Bristol 1780-1805

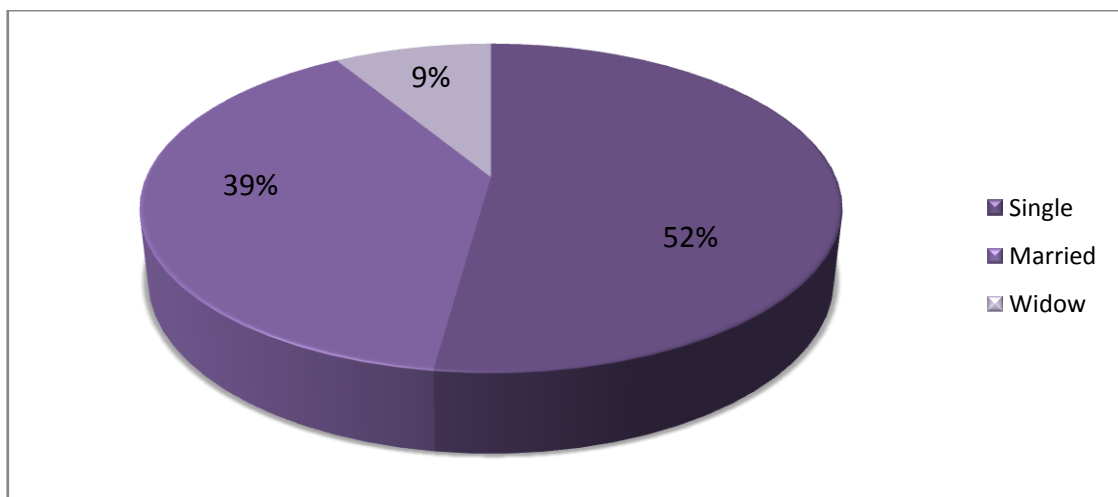


Sources: BRO, Quarter Sessions records, 1780-1805.

⁵⁵ Out of 108 women, twenty-three were condemned for keeping a disorderly house.

The statistics show that in a port city like Bristol, the percentage of married women accused of keeping a disorderly house was indeed higher (39%) than the percentage of married women recorded as prostitutes (20%) (see figure III.6). But more than 50% of women who kept an inn or a public house were single. If widows are added to this percentage, more than 60% of women who kept a disorderly house, supervised their own place of work without the "legal presence" of a man. This shows an evolution compared to Clark's study on alehouses: in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the women who owned an alehouse were mainly widows; in this case it was mainly single women.⁵⁶ A further comparison between the average number of widows owning a public house and the number of single women prosecuted for keeping a disorderly house would show if the accusations made were linked with the marital status of the tenant, however the registers for alehouse and inn keepers do not include the women's marital situation.⁵⁷

Figure III-6 Marital status of the tenants of disorderly houses, Bristol, 1780-1805



Sources: BRO, JQS/P/63; 71; 95; 106; 107; 108; 123; 127; 128; 129; 156; 162; 165; 190; Bristol Record Society, *Gaol Delivery Fiats 1741-1799* (Bristol, 1989), pp. 41 and 80.

⁵⁶ Clark P., *The English Alehouse: a social History 1200-1830* (Harlow, 1983), p. 79.

⁵⁷ BRO, JQS/IK/1; JQS/AK/11, registers available from 1794 to 1811.

These results, especially concerning the number of single women being tenant of an inn or tavern, put into perspective the relative independence enjoyed by women who lived in "promiscuous" relationships: maybe less inclined to marry or with fewer possibilities to do so, it seems that they managed to live a relatively independent life, without the need of a man to complete their wages to survive.⁵⁸ Concerning prostitutes tried for theft, the prominence of single women seems to indicate that their earnings were too low for them to be economically independent, underlining the link between poverty and prostitution. However this assertion must be compared with the low percentage of recidivism (concerning mainly thefts of opportunity): it shows that these single women must have been able, most of the time, to live independently.⁵⁹ Indeed out of eighty-one women who were summoned before justices of the peace between 1780 and 1805, only fifteen committed another indictable offence in the decade following, which is equal to a ratio of less than two out of ten.⁶⁰ Of course the money they earned from prostitution may have been added to wages they received from other occupations, done on a casual basis. Nevertheless, it seems that by choosing prostitution, even on a casual basis, single women were able to earn relatively enough money to survive, making prostitution an important part of eighteenth-century economy of makeshifts for single women.⁶¹

In comparison, the cases of married women who were caught for theft or summoned as

⁵⁸ Wright S., 'Holding up Half the Sky': Women and their Occupations in Eighteenth-Century Ludlow', *Midland History*, XIV (1989), pp. 53-74, pp. 56; Hill B., *Women Alone, Spinners in England, 1660-1850* (New Haven, 2001), p. 47; see also, Simonton D., 'Claiming their Place in the Corporate Community: Women's Identity in Eighteenth-Century Towns' in Baudino I., Carré J. and Revauger C. (eds), *The Invisible Woman, Aspects of Women's Work in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Aldershot, 2005), pp. 101-116.

⁵⁹ It is not always easy to differentiate casual prostitution (once or twice per month) and more regular sexual intercourse in exchange for money: it is therefore difficult to know what her other income would have been if she was not a regular prostitute.

⁶⁰ These statistics include women who were accused and prosecuted but discharged as their case was judged as 'No true bill' but these figures do not include women who appeared before court as witness.

⁶¹ Shore H., 'Crime, criminal networks and the survival strategies of the poor in early eighteenth-century London' in Tomkins A. and King S., *Poor in England, 1700-1900: An Economy of Makeshifts* (Manchester, 2003), pp. 137-165, pp. 150-153.

witness against tenants of a disorderly house reveal a distressing economic situation, which is more evident than in single women's prosecutions. The ten cases involving married women accused of keeping a disorderly house will be put aside for the purposes of this discussion as their economic situation presupposes some financial independence at some point, which enabled them to secure a tenancy.⁶² Fifteen married women were recorded for having committed a theft or assault and two of them were witnesses in court against the person who employed them as a prostitute.⁶³ The occupation of their husband was not always mentioned but the men mainly came from low social categories with irregular wages: they were soldiers, mariners or labourers. The occupation of the husband may explain the recourse to prostitution to compensate irregular wages (mariners and soldiers were paid when they came back ashore). Jane Thompson, convicted on 25 March 1779 for stealing a leather purse from Samuel Palmer, represented the archetype of the casual prostitute in need of money.⁶⁴ She was married to an Irish mariner from Londonderry, when she approached Samuel Palmer on a Saturday night. She asked Palmer if he wished to have "a can of ale" and they went on drinking a couple of pints before going to the Rope Yard, a small alley near Lower Green⁶⁵ where "this informant lay with the said Jane Thompson and gave her six pence". Many details from this story underlined the social instability and the uncertainty of her situation: she was married to a foreign mariner, probably at sea at that time and therefore was left with no known resources. Furthermore the Irish community in Bristol was reputed to be violent and rebellious and its members were disliked by the local

⁶² BRO, JQS/P/63; 95; 107-108; 123; 127-129; 162. Bristol Records Society (ed.), *Bristol Gaol Delivery Fiats 1741-1799* (Bristol, 1989), p. 41. But even convicted female tenants of inns and public-houses were married to low-class professionals: Elizabeth Connelly wedded a labourer; Hannah Hargrove and Mary Shorn were married to mariners. Only Martha Norman and Bridget Philpot could be differentiated from their co-accused: they were married respectively to an inn-keeper and a hair-dresser.

⁶³ BRO, JQS/P/63; 65; 73; 79; 85; 99; 104; 107-108; 110; 114-115; 127; 129; 132; 140; 162; 164-165. The relationship between tenants of inns or public-house and prostitutes will be discussed in a subsequent section.

⁶⁴ BRO, JQS/P/63.

⁶⁵ See appendix 1.

population, maybe influencing her occupational situation, even though she was not herself Irish.⁶⁶ The fact that she was alone to ramble the streets,⁶⁷ combined with the choice of an alley to have sexual intercourse and not a private or rented room highlight deprivation of both money and social connections. This situation probably reveals a case of occasional prostitution, through necessity, rather than a woman committed to this trade on a long term basis. Besides, the money given by Samuel Parker would have only bought half a loaf, which also reflects the way Samuel saw Jane;⁶⁸ he had twenty-seven guineas in gold in his purse, as well as a silver watch and a ring, but he only gave her six pence, underlining his own opinion of the low value of this woman and of their sexual intercourse. Compared to the three half-crowns Ann Spencer received when she slept with James Hall, mariner, the amount given to Jane Thompson seems very little.⁶⁹

Irregularity of wages and unstable social conditions (day-to-day work, absent husband) seem to have been good arguments for women to turn to prostitution. By comparing Bristolian women to Nantes prostitutes,⁷⁰ this pattern is verified when compared with the training or occupation the French women said they had had: any worker in the clothing trade during this period, especially if they were employed outside a factory, was submitted to weekly contracts that could easily be put to an end and could lead to serious financial difficulties if the woman did not have another source of revenue or a husband who earned some money. These women were used to facing hard times and

⁶⁶ For an account of the relations between the Irish community and Bristolians at the end of the eighteenth century, see Poole S., 'Popular Politics in Bristol, Somerset and Wiltshire, 1791-1805', PhD. Thesis (University of Bristol, 1992), pp. 112-123 and *passim*.

⁶⁷ It will be shown in a subsequent chapter that prostitutes were usually accompanied by friends.

⁶⁸ Oaxley D., *Convict Maids: The Forced Migration of Women to Australia* (Cambridge, 1996), p. X-XI; Panckoucke Charles-Joseph (ed.), *Encyclopédie Méthodique, Commerce-III* (Paris, 1784), p. 232; For an analysis of the weekly spending of a labourer family during this period, see Curtler W.H.R., *A Short History of English Agriculture* (Oxford, 1909), p. 202-254.

⁶⁹ BRO, JQS/P/127; James Hall spent the whole night at Ann's, which adds to the reason why he paid more.

⁷⁰ AMN, I1, C62, D1.

casual prostitution could be seen as a good opportunity to earn money punctually.⁷¹ This social and economic reality of instability also highlights the fact that many poor women could have turned casually to prostitution, but historians are unable to figure out how many this might have involved. As a consequence, the vulnerability of low-class life invited women to become a prostitute, as the cases of Sarah Leach or Hannah Jones indicate.⁷² Sarah Leach confessed in 1798 that she lived with Mary Morris, single woman in St Michael's parish, "for nearly a month last past for the purpose of prostitution and the said Mary Morris has frequently permitted men to sleep with her". Hannah Jones' story was comparable: brought up with some education (she was the only Bristol prostitute in the archives to be able to sign her name at this period), she was married to Thomas Jones, soldier in the Pembroke militia. But she had "several times cohabited with men within [Ann Maria Gregory's] knowledge" on Temple Street, to earn some money while her husband was away. These testimonies outline the fact that prostitution was often considered casual for the women themselves who probably did not see themselves as prostitutes: admittedly, their testimonies could have been distorted to sound more pathetic. However the time line given by these women shows that they went into prostitution for a month, or when their husbands were away, which gives the impression that they still avoided considering themselves as "full-time" prostitutes. It is comparable to the Nantes census of 1808, where women described their occupation as thread maker, seamstress or domestic servant whereas they were listed as prostitutes.

Besides the presence of a husband, children may have been included in the family pattern, as inevitably, prostitutes' pregnancies must have been common. According to Flandrin, "on average eight out of a hundred acts of intercourse result in pregnancy", but

⁷¹ Simonton D., *A History of European Women's Work, 1700 to the Present* (London, 1998), p. 67.

⁷² BRO, JQS/P/156; 165.

this figure relates to modern women.⁷³ The reality in the eighteenth century must have been much lower, as malnutrition and health problems would have reduced fertility and increased the chance of miscarriage. It is believable though that these women, especially married women, had had some children (dead or alive) but that they were omitted in the information and court records, as being irrelevant for the prosecution. There is also the possibility of infanticide that needs to be considered:⁷⁴ however, for the period 1750-1815 in Bristol and Nantes, no correlation between women who killed their infant and names of prostitutes could be made. Of course there were also cases of infants' deaths for which no one was condemned: for example in Nantes, between 1796 and 1811, seven inquests on dead infant bodies were made, after the corpses were found in the street, but in only one case the police mentioned "*une fille*", a domestic servant in an inn, who was denounced as the mother of the child.⁷⁵ However in the six other cases, there was no indication of the mother's identity. This difficulty in researching links between prostitutes and infanticide may explain why historians usually avoid a comparison: for example, Beattie justly underlines the threats pregnancy caused for a servant (risk of losing her job, but also of being considered by other members of the household as promiscuous) but did not mention the possibility of becoming a prostitute.⁷⁶ The links between prostitution and infanticide are even more complicated to study when looking at records in Nantes after the Revolution, as *déclarations de*

⁷³ Quoted in Fairchilds, 'Female Sexual Attitudes and Illegitimacy', p. 658.

⁷⁴ On infanticide see: Jackson M. (ed.), *Infanticide, Historical Perspectives on Child Murder and Concealment, 1550-2000* (Aldershot, 2002); Jackson M., *New-Born Child Murder: Women, Illegitimacy and the Courts in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York, 1996); Malcolmson R. W., 'Infanticide in the Eighteenth Century,' in Cockburn J. S. (ed.), *Crime in England, 1550- 1800* (New York, 1977), pp. 187-209; Hoffer P. and Hull N.E.H., *Murdering Mothers* (New York, 1981); Trumbach R., 'Sex, Gender, and Sexual Identity in Modern Culture: Male Sodomy and Female Prostitution in Enlightenment London', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 2, n° 2, Special Issue, Part 1: 'The State, Society, and the Regulation of Sexuality in Modern Europe' (Oct., 1991), pp. 186-203. Hufton O., *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France, 1750-1789* (Oxford, 1974), pp. 349-351; Tillier A., *Des Criminelles au Village: Femmes infanticides en Bretagne, 1825-1865* (Rennes, 2001).

⁷⁵ AMN, II C74 D16; II C74 D17.

⁷⁶ Beattie J.M., 'The Criminality of Women in Eighteenth-Century England', *Journal of Social History*, 8, n° 4 (Summer, 1975), pp. 80-116, pp. 84-85.

grossesse stopped being compulsory.

Studies of illegitimacy in France and England insist on the increase of illegitimate pregnancies at the end of the eighteenth century, differentiating them from antenuptial conceptions.⁷⁷ According to this prediction, it is very surprising that children were rarely mentioned and in Bristol, no prostitute was said to have children. In Nantes, only the *déclarations de grossesse* and some sparse information reported in the judicial records could offer details about their eventual pregnancies.⁷⁸ Later reports from surgeons, when prostitutes had to submit to a monthly visit, could be a good source for this subject but none were found during the period studied here. In 1757 a pamphlet was published in Nantes "*sur la nécessité à l'Hotel-Dieu de Nantes de recevoir tous les Enfants-Trouvés et d'abolir l'usage des déclarations des filles enceintes*" which denounced the *déclarations de grossesse* as "*une formalité ridicule, inhumaine, barbare*."⁷⁹ While criticising the process, comparing it to a criminalisation of an act that is not a crime, the author insisted on the differences between lewd women, who were known as such and who had "nothing to lose" and the other pregnant women, who had a

⁷⁷ See Lottin A., 'Naissances illégitimes et filles-mères à Lille au XVIIIe siècle', *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine*, 4 (1970), pp. 279-322; Shorter E., 'Illegitimacy, Sexual Revolution and Social Change in Modern Europe', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 2 (1971), pp. 237-272; *The Making of the Modern Family* (New York, 1975); Fairchilds C., 'Female Sexual Attitudes and the Rise of Illegitimacy: A Case Study', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 8, n° 4 (Spring, 1978), pp. 627-667; Phan M.-C., 'Les déclarations de grossesse en France (XVIe-XVIIIe siècles): Essai institutionnel', *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine*, 1 (1975), pp. 61-88; Depauw J., 'Amour illégitime et société à Nantes au XVIIIe siècle', *Annales. Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 27, n°4 (1972), pp. 1155 – 1182; Fuchs R. and Moch L., 'Pregnant, Single and Far from Home: Migrants Women in Nineteenth Century Paris', *The American Historical Review*, 95, n° 4 (Oct., 1990), pp. 1007-1031; Flandrin J.-L., *Familles: Parenté, Maison, Sexualité dans l'Ancienne Société* (Paris, 1976); Lebrun F., 'Naissances illégitimes et abandons d'enfants en Anjou au XVIIIe siècle', *Annales. Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 27, n° 4 (1972), pp. 1183-1189. The data used in this part concerning Nantes, Lille or Aix en Provence are all issued from Depauw, Lottin and Fairchilds' articles.

⁷⁸ AMN, GG 757-759; as explained above, courts records in Nantes were filed against prostitutes either by the family or the neighbours. When the family was involved, they sometimes mentioned the welfare of the children to encourage the imprisonment of the woman; for example, FF 269: 11 August 1752, Pierre Rolland, rope maker complained about his wife ' [qui] s'est dérangé et abandonnée à courir ça et là en compagnie de libertins et filles publiques' and he had to send his child out of the home as, when she came back, she was always so drunk that she risked to put the house on fire. But these cases, with children involved, represented less than 5 % of the whole affairs.

⁷⁹ AMN, GG 735.

good reputation. However even *declarations de grossesse* are full of lacunae and for example, the death or abandonment of a child after its birth was not recorded, therefore it is impossible to know if the prostitute kept the child or not. Similarly, the recording of these declarations underwent some changes and whereas in the sixteenth century the moral conduct of the woman influenced the way the declaration was recorded, in the eighteenth century this differentiation was nonexistent and the judge did not give any indication of the woman's daily behaviour.⁸⁰ Lottin's article on illegitimacy in Lille in the eighteenth century indicates the same lack of information on women's behaviour.⁸¹ Furthermore, the tradition of declaring pregnancy for unmarried mothers fell into abeyance after the Revolution and the administrative modifications that followed the change of regime. The constant criticism found throughout the eighteenth century concerning the humiliation associated with these declarations finally put an end to the practice.

Three methods of deduction to analyse the declarations can be used to collect laborious data on prostitutes: if a woman declared more than one illegitimate child in her fertile life from different fathers, there was a possibility that she was a prostitute. Similarly, if she gave multiple names to the putative father or if she said that she slept (especially if more than once) with the father for money, there was a significant chance that she was *une fille du monde*. Jacques Depauw and his students worked on Nantes 8,000 *déclarations de grossesse* and they came to the conclusion that the declarations were not useful to study prostitution: in the records between 1780 and 1787, he listed only 2% or twenty-eight declarations out of 1,380 that could have been made by a prostitute.⁸² His

⁸⁰ Phan, 'Les déclarations de grossesse en France', p. 67.

⁸¹ Lottin A., 'Naissances illégitimes et filles-mères à Lille au XVIIIe siècle', *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine*, 4 (1970), p. 317.

⁸² Depauw J., 'Amour illégitime et société à Nantes', p. 1166.

comments on Nantes are corroborated by Fairchilds for Aix en Provence (seventy-one cases out of 1,602 from 1750 to 1789) and by Lottin for Lille (no figure given).⁸³ Despite these unambiguous findings, similarities can be identified between women giving birth to an illegitimate child and prostitutes: first, their age was similar; most of the unmarried mothers were between 20 and 29 years old, as were Nantes and Bristol prostitutes. However their average age was around twenty-four years old, which was younger by almost two years than the average age of Nantes and Bristol prostitutes. Thus there is a strong possibility that women who declared an illegitimate pregnancy for the first time were not prostitutes; nevertheless it is also possible that some of them turned towards prostitution after their infant was born, as the difference in average age leads us to believe.⁸⁴ A woman quoted by Fairchilds argued: "the first step having been taken, I no longer dreamed of resisting".⁸⁵ In addition to a similarity in age between women, prostitutes' geographical origins in 1808 corroborated the geographical pattern of the women who came to Nantes or Lille to give birth to an illegitimate child: in Nantes, half the women came from outside the city, two-third out of Lille and these figures can be compared to the census of 1808, when more than 50 % of Nantes prostitutes were born outside the city.⁸⁶ These statistics and comparisons demonstrate the vulnerability of migrant women and highlight the likelihood, for some of them, to go into casual prostitution to earn a living.

Details of prostitutes' relationships with their own children are almost non-existent and it is only possible to imagine that some of these women, notably married women or

⁸³ Fairchilds, 'Female Sexual Attitudes and Illegitimacy', p. 665; Lottin, 'Naissances illégitimes et filles-mères', p. 316-317.

⁸⁴ There is no *déclaration de grossesse* after 1787 in Nantes, which makes a statistical analysis between the censuses after 1806 and illegitimacy impossible.

⁸⁵ Fairchilds, 'Female Sexual Attitudes', p. 657.

⁸⁶ See section II.1.1.

widows may have had children to support and had to turn to prostitution in the absence, or after the death, of their husband. If considered in relation to the relief available, it appears that in Bristol and Nantes, mothers in need who did not originate from the city, could not risk begging or asking for poor relief as they would have been sent back with their children to their parish of origin, disrupting their entire social network.⁸⁷ Women born in the city, could, however, apply for external poor relief as a widow or a woman with children was more likely to get some relief than a single woman.⁸⁸ In Nantes they could receive formal support from the *Hopital Général* and ecclesiastical bodies, who would distribute bread to the poor.⁸⁹

However my aim in this section is not to underline the possibility or necessity for poor mothers to get into prostitution to feed their children as it has been shown that the documentation on Nantes and Bristol prostitutes' children is missing. Only the petition of Letitia Williams, widow, was explicit about her financial situation: she was indicted for keeping a disorderly house for three months and a fortnight with a friend now dead

⁸⁷ On local studies on poor relief see King S., *Poverty and Welfare in England, 1700-1815, A Regional Perspective* (Manchester, 2000), pp. 141-226; Ripley P., 'Poverty in Gloucester and its Alleviation 1690-1740', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucester Archaeological Society*, 103 (1985), pp. 185-199; Fissel M., *Patients Power and the Poor in Eighteenth-Century Bristol* (Cambridge, 1991); Johnson J., *Transactions of the Corporation of the Poor* (Bristol, 1826); On the Sanitat and assistance publique in Nantes and Brittany in the eighteenth century: AMN, GG 736; 745. Jaouen Y., 'Les enfants de police à Nantes dans la seconde moitié du XVIII^e siècle', *Mémoire de Maîtrise, Histoire*, (Université de Nantes, 1971); Maître L., *Histoire administrative des anciens hôpitaux de Nantes* (Nantes, 1875); Maître L., *L'Assistance Publique dans la Loire-Inférieure avant 1789. Étude sur les Léproseries, Aumôneries, Hôpitaux généraux et Bureaux de Charité* (Nantes, 1879); Meyer J., 'Pauvreté et assistance dans les villes bretonnes de l'Ancien Régime', in *Actes du 97^e congrès national des sociétés savantes* (Nantes, 1972), pp.445-460.

⁸⁸ Froide A., *Never Married, Singlewomen in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2005), p. 41.

⁸⁹ Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France*, pp. 133-176; On young widows and poverty: Beauvalet-Boutouyrie S., *Etre Veuve sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris, 2001); Froide A., 'Marital status as a category of difference: singlewomen and widows in early modern England' in Bennett J. and Froide A. (eds), *Singlewomen in the European past, 1250-1800* (Philadelphia, 1999), pp. 236-269; Evans T., 'Unfortunate Objects': *Lone Mothers in Eighteenth-Century London* (Basingstoke, 2005); Sharpe P., 'Survival strategies and stories : poor widows and widowers in early industrial England' in Cavallo S. and Warner L. (eds), *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe (Women and Men in History)* (Harlow, 1999), pp. 220-239.

"to gain a livelihood".⁹⁰ She had a daughter of twelve years old, "whom she has constantly kept in the country out of the way of temptation" and since her indictment she had been "supporting herself and her child by the produce of her household furniture", which I believe means that she pawned or sold her articles of furniture. Therefore, despite the lack of general information, there are hints that show that some women with children must have chosen prostitution or the keeping of a disorderly house as a temporary aid. However, what is interesting is the *contre-pied* chosen by local commentators in the newspapers: they never mentioned the fact that these women might also have been mothers; they warned the readers of the debauchery which was displayed in front of children's eyes in the streets but did not consider whether the prostitutes were mothers themselves.⁹¹ This may put the common attitudes towards prostitution held by the end of the century upper-middle classes in a different light: to deserve redemption, for example in the Female Penitentiary in Bristol or the Magdalen Hospital in London, the women had to be young, unmarried and implicitly, without children.⁹² Although from the mid-century onwards, the "wretchedness" of a woman's life was increasingly discussed to explain a woman's fall into prostitution,⁹³ the common description, following the literary conventions of the time, focused on a poor single woman without any family or help and who had to find refuge in prostitution to survive. The answers of the upper-middle class to women who had fallen into prostitution, like the Female Penitentiary in Bristol, did not seem adequate to provide shelter for a prostitute and her child, maybe because they believed that sufficient relief was available for poor widows or abandoned women with a family. On the contrary, they avoided mentioning the

⁹⁰ BRO, JQS/P/190.

⁹¹ *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 10 August 1799; BRO, 008823 (1) a: statutes of Foundation of the Asylum for Orphan Girls.

⁹² BRO, 17567.

⁹³ See Fielding John, *A Plan for a Preservatory and Reformatory for the Benefit of Deserted Girls and Penitent Prostitutes* (London, 1758).

possibility that prostitutes could also be mothers. As Gowing explained in her conclusion, "the redefinition of femininity in the eighteenth century has been particularly associated with a new ideology of female passivity, in which women are naturally chaste and where the biological functions of maternity provide their greatest fulfilment and their natural role".⁹⁴ Under this frame of mind, it becomes apparent that the upper-middle class tended to focus on the young and "saveable" girls, these "young creatures", who could be re-educated and after some time, as the Grand jurors of Bristol expressed it, "might be restored to their families and friends".⁹⁵

3. The role of family in a prostitute's life

The two previous sections dealt with the social and geographical origins of prostitutes from Bristol and Nantes as well as their marital status as they appeared in the archives. This section will look at the more extensive family, including parents, siblings and the third degree or more of kinship. The aim is to further understand the role of family in determining whether a woman chose, or was forced to enter into prostitution or, on the contrary the role played by family in assisting or forcing the woman to give up prostitution. Although Bristol archives offered adequate material on the marital status of the women working in prostitution, the data that survives relating to their extended family, or even to their parents, is more limited and therefore any analysis could only be based on a few cases. In Nantes, more details could be gathered as examinations of culprits and information from witnesses were systematically taken for cases of disturbing the peace (*tapage*) and debauchery and these usually survived in the archives.

References to prostitutes' close family relations in Bristol and Nantes were linked with

⁹⁴ Gowing L., *Common Bodies, Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven, 2003).

⁹⁵ BRO, JQS/P/95.

its role in the prosecution: in Bristol only six women referred to their family in relation to their situation in any greater detail than in the common phrases "wife of" or "daughter of".⁹⁶ In pre-revolutionary Nantes, thirty-four cases (including one or more women) referred to kin as having played a role: either because relatives had encouraged women into prostitution and lived on their earnings, or by contrast, because they had tried to prevent their wives or daughters from behaving "*de manière scandaleuse*". In order to find information about these familial influences on prostitutes' lives, it has been necessary to look at archives recorded before the end of the century, as the upheavals of the Revolutionary period in Nantes rendered the construction of judicial cases more difficult: suspicions and rapid sentences were preferred to the fastidious task of recording testimonies.⁹⁷ Therefore the analysis is based on six women from Bristol and forty-three women in Nantes who were recorded as guilty of debauchery and disturbing the peace from 1747 to 1779 and whose family was involved or mentioned in their condemnation or sentencing.⁹⁸ The absence, from 1780 onwards, of any mention of kinship in Nantes is a peculiarity that will have to be explained further.

Three main types of familial interference appear in the archives and, as mentioned above, the close family could either try to put the "immoral" woman in jail or, conversely, they could live on her earnings gained from prostitution. In addition, familial absence could also have an impact on women's life: the death of the father or both parents, or maybe if the young woman had run away from an abusive parent, were factors that could have facilitated her entrance into prostitution.⁹⁹ Between these three categories there were clear gender divisions that influenced the actions taken to court

⁹⁶ BRO, JQS/P/101; 108; 115; 123; 190.

⁹⁷ Lallié A., *Les Prisons de Nantes pendant la Révolution* (Nantes, 1883), pp. 7 and 16.

⁹⁸ AMN, FF 269; 272: forty-three women were condemned in thirty-four judicial cases.

⁹⁹ AMN, FF 269; 270; 272.

and the prostitutes' eventual prosecution. As Shoemaker emphasises in *Prosecution and Punishment*, women were eager to use the court on their own terms and they were not slow in giving a statement against a disorderly woman,¹⁰⁰ but it is important to note that prosecution and condemnations for debauchery and immorality in Nantes or Bristol against a woman of the family were rarely started by a female member of the family. In Nantes between 1747 and 1760, eleven legal actions were initiated in an attempt to sentence a "promiscuous" woman to jail.¹⁰¹

Table III-4. Family accusations of debauchery, Nantes, 1747-1760

Plaintiff(s)	Husband	Husband and Wife	Parents	Cousin	Total
Accused	Wife	Sister	Daughter	Cousin	N/A
Number of cases	5	3	2	1	11

Source: AMN, FF 269.

In five cases, the husband was the plaintiff, writing to a judge or going to visit a *commissaire* to complain about his wife and ask for the court to sentence her to the house of correction or Sanitat. These cases relate only to patent prostitution or "lewdness" and not to adultery.¹⁰² Prosecutions involving the husband as primary plaintiff were always linked with other testimonies of women and men who saw the wife behaving in an "indecent" manner with different men. These testimonies were original because of the fact that they each brought some new information about the woman, and were not a simple repetition of hearsays (which can be found in other situations). In three cases, wives and husbands joined in their complaints to accuse a sister, while in two cases the parents were the plaintiffs, lamenting the behaviour of

¹⁰⁰ Shoemaker R., *Prosecution and Punishment, Petty Crimes and the Law in London and Rural Middlesex, c. 1660-1775* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 214-16. An analysis of the plaintiffs, not pertaining to the prostitutes' families, will be made in the next chapter.

¹⁰¹ AMN, FF 269; 272: only ten women were sentenced to jail, as Pierre Rolland twice brought legal proceedings against his wife, in 1747 and 1752. In both cases she was sentenced to the house of correction for six months.

¹⁰² Cases of adultery or '*concubinage*' when the woman was said to be living with a man other than her husband, were recorded as well, however they were not included in this study as in the information against the woman, no mention of money or different sexual partners was made.

their daughter. Finally, there was one case where a female cousin, a single woman, started legal proceedings against her relative: presumably because Jeanne Cherneau's cousin suffered from Jeanne's behaviour and she felt she had to confine her to stop her behaving in "such an indecent and dangerous manner".¹⁰³ The behaviour of Jeanne threatened the financial situation of her cousin (Jeanne pawned the latter's apron) but also her reputation: while the cousin went in search of Jeanne, she was insulted by young men who "*traitèrent la ditte Cherneau de fille de putain et autres mots que la bienséance ne permet pas de dire*". The impact of slanders and rumours on the immediate family was as important as an economic threat: the risk of being considered promiscuous and unreliable by association with a family member, could lead to disgrace, insults and sometimes, unemployment.¹⁰⁴ Letitia Williams in Bristol, already mentioned, said she knew she should have left her friend who kept a disorderly house as soon as she realised it, because she risked being accused of favouring debauchery.¹⁰⁵

Slanders and "lewd" behaviour affected the whole family: even though women (wives or mothers) were involved in certain cases, it appears blatant that actions in court to confine a female member of a family were started, controlled and supervised by men: ten times out of eleven cases a man was complaining against a female relative and requested her imprisonment. These statistics reflect the reality of married life in the eighteenth century: the husband was legally responsible for his wife, and if unmarried, the father was then lawfully in charge of his daughter, especially if she was under 25 years old.¹⁰⁶ But husbands also asserted the right to complain and to direct a judicial

¹⁰³ AMN, FF 269. A family feud could also be the result of this accusation.

¹⁰⁴ Gowing L., 'Women, Status and the Popular Culture of Dishonour', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6 (1996), pp. 225-234, p. 234.

¹⁰⁵ BRO, JQS/P/190.

¹⁰⁶ Greenberg J., 'The Legal Status of the English Women in the Early Eighteenth-Century Common Law and Equity', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 4 (1975), pp. 171-181; Stone L., *The Family, Sex and*

action against their sister or sister-in-law as proved by the cases of Marie Favero, Anne Bossis and Françoise Estève (thirty-five years old).¹⁰⁷ They arrogated the right to control and judge the morality and behaviour of female relatives, to the point of taking them to court. The language used in these records offers an eloquent explanation of the concerns suffered by the male relatives:¹⁰⁸ they complained about the women's "*vie scandaleuse*", about the fact that they ran away "*pour avoir plus de liberté et pour consumer [leurs] débauches*", "*qu'elle menoit une mauvaise vie de déréglée*" or that they were in "*un dérangement continuel*".¹⁰⁹ These testimonies remain a transcript of the legal terms and pathetic expressions used to argue a case but it has to be acknowledged that they were used as a means to degrade the woman's life and by extension, to insist on the moral consequences on the honour of the husband or father. Capp explains that "male sexual values were related to age, and marital and social status, and among the middling sorts and honest poor sexual reputation formed a significant component of male honour": honour and therefore the risk of losing it because of the "disorderly behaviour" of a woman, motivated the complaints addressed to officials.¹¹⁰ These women, according to their accusers, could not be controlled and kept running away, abandoning their home and not respecting their husband's injunctions. Besides, they were known to be sleeping wherever they could and were apparently living off the money they earned through prostitution or begging:¹¹¹ the husband or father's complaints mainly insisted on the women's debauchery and immorality to persuade the judges of their guilt. But they were not alone in their complaints: *commissaires*

Marriage in England 1500-1800 (London, 1977); Rizzo T., *A Certain Emancipation of Women: Gender, Citizenship and the 'Causes célèbres' of Eighteenth-Century France* (Selinsgrove, 2004).

¹⁰⁷ AMN, FF 269.

¹⁰⁸ On masculinities, see as preliminary reading: Hitchcock T. and Cohen M. (eds), *English Masculinities 1660-1800* (London, 1999).

¹⁰⁹ AMN, FF 269.

¹¹⁰ Capp B., 'The Double Standard Revisited: Plebeian Women and Male Sexual Reputation in Early Modern England', *Past and Present*, 162 (Feb., 1999), pp. 70-100, p. 72.

¹¹¹ AMN, FF 269.

requested other testimonies and both male and female neighbours were asked to testify.¹¹² However the decrease of this kind of complaint by families throughout the second half of the century suggests that Morris' argument concerning female reputation needs to be reassessed. Morris claims that women's reputation (and by extension, the reputation of the family) was becoming increasingly linked with sexual probity as the century went on.¹¹³ It seems nevertheless that in Nantes, the families stopped using confinement and legal proceedings to control female reputation. The evidence discussed here is not opposed to Morris' theory but it questions who the persons were who assessed the women's reputation: it appears that the family made diminishing use of their right to judicially and morally condemn a woman's behaviour, implicitly leaving the responsibility to do so with their neighbours.¹¹⁴

The second type of case where family was involved in the prosecution relates to the members of the family living with the prostitute. They were either presumably living on her earnings or, if they were women, they may have followed the same occupation. This category excludes the cases of married couples who kept a disorderly house, as the woman was less likely to be still considered as or to act as a prostitute. Even if she was a prostitute, as Elizabeth Connelly in Bristol in 1785 or La Vignaud in 1765 in Nantes were reputed to be, it was likely that the amount of money earned from keeping a disorderly house was greater than what the woman could have earned through

¹¹² See chapter 1 for a discussion on female/male witnesses. See also Cattelona G., 'Control and Collaboration: the Role of Women in Regulating Female Sexual Behavior in Early Modern Marseille' *French Historical Studies*, 18, n° 1 (Spring, 1993), pp. 13-33; Capp B., *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family, and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England*, (Oxford, 2003).

¹¹³ Morris P., 'Sodomy and Hale honour: the Case of Somerset, 1740-1850' in Gerard K. and Hekma G. (eds), *The Pursuit of Sodomy: Male Homosexuality in Renaissance and Enlightenment Europe* (New York, 1989), pp. 383-406. See also Dabhoiwala F., 'The Construction of Male Honour, Reputation and Status in Late Seventeenth- and Early Eighteenth-Century England', *Transactions of the Royal History Society*, 6 (1996), pp. 201-214.

¹¹⁴ It may also reveal a crisis in the judicial system of confinement for disorderly behaviour in French *hôpitaux généraux* and mistrust from the population: further comparative research is necessary to ascertain this fact.

prostitution;¹¹⁵ therefore her situation cannot be considered under the same light as the cases of women living mainly (as far as we know) from the resources of prostitution. According to the records in Nantes which refer to women prosecuted as prostitutes and disturbers of the peace, in four cases out of eight the woman was living with a sister or sister-in-law, who was also a prostitute. In the other four cases, the women were living with either their children or parents and were supporting them through their earnings.¹¹⁶ Neighbours complained that the widow Jacquette, in 1753, kept a disorderly house on the place Ste Catherine, St Nicolas parish, where her daughters worked as prostitutes and where mariners and soldiers continuously assembled at night. La Couillaud, in 1761, was sentenced to the house of correction for six months after being denounced by her neighbours for living a debauched life and disturbing the peace in a flat on rue du Bois-Tortu, St Nicolas parish, where she was living with her father and mother. In both cases, the daughters played an active part in the family economy; La Couillaud seemed to have been the only member of the household to earn any money. Their occupation was therefore essential to the maintenance of their family unit. In addition to these cases of parents living off their daughter, there were situations where the women had children and kept them at their side: La Navare lived with her young daughter Julie (age unknown) who was sharing her small flat; Anne-Marie Bourgeaud was staying in an inn in Richebourg (suburb of Nantes) where she met some customers while her son was also staying at the inn.¹¹⁷ He was around 14 years old, declared himself a "pimp", but confessed that he had stopped this occupation a year ago.

Finally, the absence of family ties in the city could also be a reason why women entered

¹¹⁵ BRO, JQS/P/95; AMN, FF 272: accused by '*la clameur publique*', the wife '*passe pour une prostituée*' and '*est ivre en presence de son mari*' which underlines according to the neighbours' discourse the immorality of this woman and the nonchalance of her husband.

¹¹⁶ AMN, FF 269; 272.

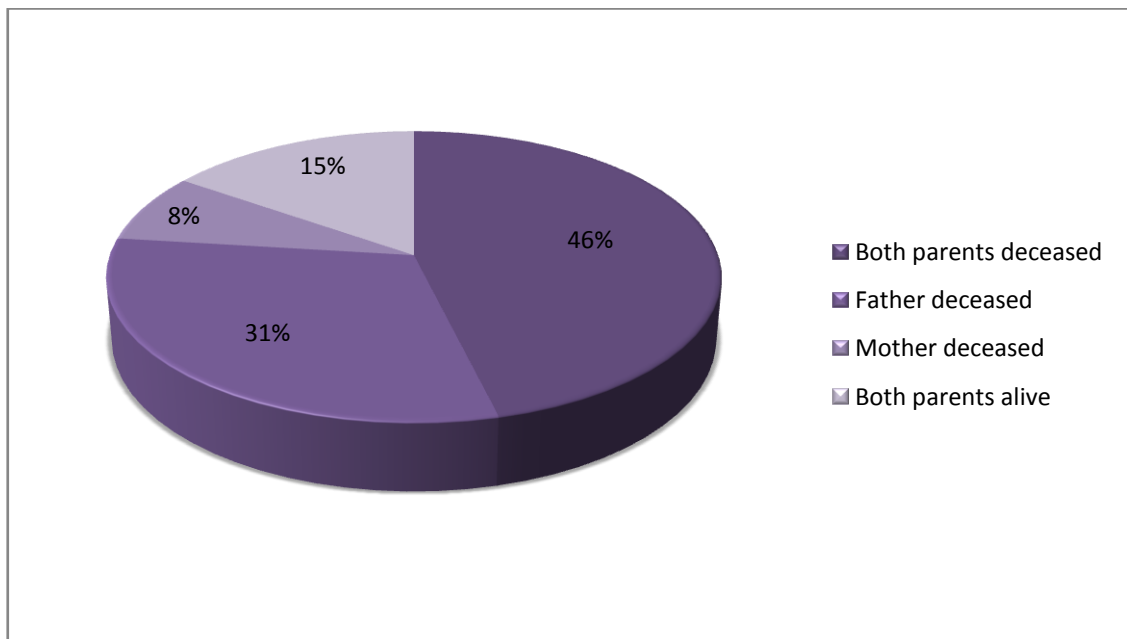
¹¹⁷ AMN, FF 269.

prostitution. As studies on illegitimacy or domestic work proved, single women living in a city without close family in the eighteenth century were more at risk of becoming paupers and more likely to suffer from male domination than single women with family.¹¹⁸ Indeed close family ties created a degree of protection from poverty and sexual predation. However the study of prostitutes' marital status has already proved that they were more likely to be unmarried, as they may have earned a sort of economic independence and the social reality of "woman alone" was accentuated by the fact that these young women, as will be shown, were more likely to have lost their parents and therefore had to create new social networks in order to survive. The women caught disturbing the peace and living in "lewdness" were asked about their parents only if they were unmarried. If they were married legal responsibility for their conduct would have shifted from their father to their husband, and therefore the status of their parents was not mentioned. For instance, in 1778 and 1779 in Nantes, fourteen single women were accused of immorality and were examined by the *conseiller-juge* Antoine Chiron Le Jeune: in six cases, both parents were dead, in four cases, only the mother was alive; in one case, the father was still alive and in three cases both parents were alive.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Fairchilds C., 'Female Sexual Attitudes and the Rise of Illegitimacy: A Case Study', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 8, n° 4 (Spring, 1978), p. 636; Fuchs R. and Moch L., 'Pregnant, Single and Far from Home: Migrants Women in Nineteenth-Century Paris', *The American Historical Review*, 95, n° 4 (Oct., 1990), p. 1009.

¹¹⁹ AMN, FF 272.

Figure III-7. Fragility of the family network, Nantes 1778-1779



Source: AMN, FF 272.

Their backgrounds underlined social difficulties and although this situation was not uncommon at this time, the lack of social protection could lead them into prostitution.¹²⁰ As we have seen male relatives tended to accuse women of debauchery more often than female relatives, therefore the absence of a father or husband created greater freedom to do what they wished. But it must not be forgotten that the absence of a male breadwinner (for example the death of a father) jeopardized the financial state of the family as well as its moral economy:¹²¹ 77% of these women were without any male control over them, which forced them to construct new kinds of relationships to fill in this lack of social protection.

The fragility of the familial background can also be seen in the analysis of the archives of the Bon Pasteur, a catholic establishment in Nantes which was opened in 1694 to

¹²⁰ Juratic S., 'Solitude féminine et travail des femmes à Paris à la fin du XVIIIe Siècle', *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome. Moyen-Age, Temps modernes*, 99, n° 2 (1987), pp. 879-900, p. 899.

¹²¹ See Hufton O., 'Women and the Family Economy in Eighteenth-Century France', *French Historical Studies*, IX (1975), pp. 1-22.

female penitents. The incentive to open this establishment came from Mademoiselle Gaudin, a washerwoman and Mr Barbot de la Périnière, deacon.¹²² Few archives were kept from this establishment: the particulars to enter this *maison de charité* for example are unknown however a local historian in the nineteenth century quoted a document apparently written by the *intendant* in 1770 which claimed that "no young woman could be received *à perpétuité* and none could be forced to remain in the establishment if they wished to leave".¹²³ It is difficult to say if the women who became "sisters" were doing it willingly or if they were forced by their family. No judicial sentence could force a woman to enter the Bon Pasteur, but it is also difficult not to make a parallel between this establishment and the Refuge in the Sanitat. The family could ask for the confinement in the Refuge of a woman for disorderly behaviour, but it is to be wondered if they did not also try to confine young women in the Bon Pasteur, where it was apparently free of charge.¹²⁴ Similarly the conditions and reasons for leaving the establishment are unknown: marriage was usually one reason for letting young women leave a convent but no mention of marriage was made in the archives. Death was the only reason that was given for a woman "leaving" the *maison de charité*: for the other women, when a date was recorded, no reason was given, but most of the time, a cross on the register was the only sign of their exit. Between 12 February 1736, date of the first entry recorded and 10 November 1790, 119 young women entered the Bon Pasteur as "sister": their average age was 24.6 years old, exactly the same average age of Bristol prostitutes when arrested for the first time. The age range is however larger: the youngest one was 13 years old when she entered the convent and the oldest was 45

¹²² Meuret J.C., *Annales de Nantes, Tome II* (Nantes, 1830), p. 245; see also Gourmeau J.,
15 avril 1717
(Bruxelles, 1734) which mentions stories of ex-prostitutes and the help they received from the priest.

¹²³ Verger F. J., *Archives curieuses de la ville de Nantes et des départements de l'Ouest, Tome I* (Nantes, 1837), pp. 267-268.

¹²⁴ Meuret J.C., *Annales de Nantes, Tome II*, p. 317.

years old. The analysis of the date of entrance reveals the possible partiality of the register: one woman entered the convent in 1736, a second one in 1738 and another one in 1741. It is unclear if the reason why the convent could not admit more women during these years was because they had no room. However it is interesting to notice the evolution of the number of women per decade:

Table III-5. Number of entrants to the Bon Pasteur per decade, Nantes 1736-1791

	1736-1750	1751-1760	1761-1770	1771-1780	1781-1791
Number of entrants	4	17	21	40	37

Source: ADLA, H 457.

The number of entrants per decade shows a constant increase up to 1780, and the decade 1781-1791 lost only three entrants, which is still an important figure. The Revolution transformed the convent into a prison and the nuns stayed in order to help the prisoners. It is impossible in most cases to know precisely when the women left the convent but we know that twelve of them died inside the house, while thirty-three of them seem to have simply left the convent. The increasing number of women who enter the convent show that it had a certain influence, however it is unclear if the women were all repentant prostitutes who "lived in vice" for a long time, the youngest one being just 13 years old.

Before 1777, only four women did not have a referee to enter the convent, whereas between 1777 and 1791, twenty-four women were accepted without any references. Usually the referees seemed to be from the upper-middle class: even a marquise was known to have helped a young woman be accepted. Priests also gave their consent as well as other nuns. Out of ninety-one women who had a referee, only sixteen of them

had a member of her family as referee, and only in four cases was a member of the family a man (three times their father and once an uncle), leaving an important role to the aunts, mothers and sisters to act as referee. The situation seems very similar to the social situation of prostitutes who were often without any parent, or had their father or mother missing: however this data must be used with precaution as, if the family had a role to play in the entrance of the woman in a convent, they would have probably preferred to be referred by someone higher up the social order, to be sure that the young woman was admitted.

The analysis of the familial structure and its role in a prostitute's life highlights different points: first, their links with their family seemed to have been in most cases, broken. The low number of women whose family was mentioned during their prosecution indicates social disruption and independence from the original household. Similarly, the fact that the number of male relatives initiating legal action against a woman for debauchery dropped considerably before 1780, which may suggest that young women had less contact with them and may have been migrants, as plaintiffs were then neighbours rather than members of the family. However, with the available sample being so small, it is important to regard this only as a hypothesis. Returning to the studies of the *déclarations de grossesse*, it was shown that many of these women were in a situation of social distress and denied any kind of "natural" protection as most of the time both their parents, or at least their father (who could have ensured some kind of economic stability in certain cases), were dead. The sample analysed here shows the same family disruption: socially unprotected by a male presence, unable to work in a skilled trade, these young women had few means to survive by themselves; in order to compensate for this lack of family support, they created a new form of community

which involved neighbours, friends and people whom they met where they worked.

IV. A widening sphere? The construction of prostitutes' social networks

1. Prostitutes and their customers

Prostitutes' customers have often been pursued by historians throughout studies of prostitution but their identity usually remains a mystery.¹ This lack of information is mainly due to the legislation against prostitution: despite its aims (the suppression of vice), the principal laws left the men who created the demand untouched. Similarly, when a customer used violence against a prostitute, the woman rarely had the opportunity to bring him to court, one reason being the expense of prosecution fees, which were easily as high as a labourer's weekly wages.² Therefore what can be gathered from the archives in Bristol and Nantes about the customers relies on them having been involved in a judicial affair, either as a plaintiff or as a witness; but it is likely that most upper-middle class customers or *bourgeois* preferred not to be involved in any of these affairs. Indeed, the inn and tavern customers that appeared as witnesses in judicial affairs were mostly from the labouring-class. However a silversmith and a bookbinder were recorded drinking at Sophia Taunton's on 10 November 1792, when a mob attacked her house.³ Therefore it is likely that inns and public houses where prostitutes could be found in Nantes and Bristol were not restricted solely to mariners or the labouring classes but also attracted artisans and yeomen. As Peter Clark claims "the

¹ Benabou E.-M., *La prostitution et la police des mœurs*, p. 399.

² Shoemaker R., *Prosecution and Punishment, Petty Crimes and the Law in London and Rural Middlesex, c. 1660-1775* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 140. Similarly, because of the financial burden that prosecution could impose, some customers might not have started a prosecution for theft if the sum stolen was too low.

³ BRO, JQS/P/221; 129.

alehouse was clearly becoming more respectable" compared to its seventeenth-century reputation, which means that its customers were much more varied in terms of occupation.⁴ Studying the social status of customers will highlight the environment in which prostitutes lived and how their network was built.

In studies of the great cities like London and Paris, historians have succeeded in constructing trends in prostitution and the services offered by women: thanks to popular culture (pamphlets, songs and ballads) historians have depicted the unusual mores of some members of the aristocracy and for example, the existence of a *police du clergé* in Paris, suggesting a recurrent problem of immorality amongst the members of the clergy.⁵ However in Nantes and Bristol these patterns are difficult to apply: aristocrats were absent from the city and the members of the upper-middle class were less likely to get involved in a public affair of debauchery.⁶ For instance, the pursuit of sodomites in Bristol in the mid-eighteenth century may have made the merchants wary of being accused of any scandal.⁷ The story of the Chevalier de Rossy, however, offers a rare opportunity to witness the relations of a member of the nobility with prostitutes in Nantes: in March 1785 the Chevalier asked Babet, a common prostitute known by the *commissaire* Clément de La Mare, to dress up as a man.⁸ The policeman recognizing the woman asked her to get changed: cross-dressing in the streets was considered an offence as it prevented immediate recognition. But the Chevalier and one of his friends threatened the *commissaire* and it was only after an evening altercation at the Variétés⁹ that the *commissaire* learnt through his colleagues the name of the Chevalier and his

⁴ Clark P., *The English Alehouse: a Social History 1200-1830* (London, 1983), p. 225.

⁵ Benabou, *La prostitution et la police des mœurs*, p. 121-154.

⁶ Hall C., *White, Male and Middle Class* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 77; see also Roberts M. J. D., *Making English Morals* (Cambridge, 2004) on bourgeois precepts on morality.

⁷ Poole S., "Bringing Great Shame upon this city': Sodomy, the Courts and the civic Idiom in eighteenth-century Bristol", *Urban History*, 34, n° 1 (2007), pp. 114-126, p. 120.

⁸ AMN, FF 272.

⁹ Popular theatre in Nantes.

social status. Although the *commissaire* reported the incident, the Chevalier was let free and undisturbed. His social status prevented any condemnation or sentence being made against him but this anecdote also reveals that some customers did originate from the nobility. By contrast, the social status of the prostitute was quite low: she probably came from the labouring classes, living in rue Bignon-L'Estand and renting a room from another "*femme publique*". Besides, she was recognised by the *commissaire*, which is indicative of the fact that the police was well integrated in its district. There is no trace in this story of a nobleman getting in contact with a prostitute who was "reserved" to the higher social classes. It is true that the Chevalier asked for more than just sexual intercourse as he could probably pay her more than a "common customer", but this remained the only difference between him and a casual customer from the labouring classes. As for the clergy, there was no specific police to control their mores and Nantes bishop's may have tried to keep any problems under his own jurisdiction. Therefore, it was mainly plebeian men that appeared in judicial archives. They were to be found in Bristol and Nantes in the houses described by Clarkson; in the bush taverns flourishing during St James fair;¹⁰ or wandering to their usual public-house or through the streets of the city centre.

Either out of ignorance or as a means of protection (for the customers), the names and descriptions of the customers were not recorded. The most common example remained the standard deposition used against the tenants of a public-house in Bristol: "doth keep a disorderly house and suffers Men and Women to come drinking and whoring".¹¹ No information was given about the customers and prostitutes who met there. Sometimes

¹⁰ Clarkson T., *The History of the Rise, Progress and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade by the British Parliament*, 1 (London, 1808), p. 323; *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 10 August 1799.

¹¹ BRO, JQS/P/165.

the denunciations were emphasized by a couple of qualifying adjectives which underlined the immorality of the persons present in the house: for example, Bridget Philpot was accused by two night constables of the wards of St Ewin and Trinity of keeping an ill-governed and disorderly house and that she "permits loose and disorderly persons of both sexes to frequent and come together in the said house drinking, tipling (*sic*), misbehaving themselves and making great noises".¹² In Nantes, the descriptions of customers and visitors of prostitutes lacked details as much as the ones from Bristol: the neighbours complained about "*libertins*" who gathered in the entrance of the alley or they mentioned some "*jeunes gens*" who kept disturbing the peace.¹³

Gathering information about prostitutes' customers is thus complicated by the ignorance of the neighbours or the unwillingness of officials to record the name of someone using the services of a prostitute: for instance, in July 1769, Augustin Albert, *commissaire*, went to a cabaret called Le Petit Hermitage after neighbours and customers complained about the disorder that reigned in the inn. When he arrived with the *garde bourgeoise*, the *commissaire* found on the first floor "*un particulier connu comme marchand de cette ville avec deux filles, l'une desquelles se relevait de dessus un lit et se raccrochait les jupes de son corcept*".¹⁴ The prostitutes who were present in the inn were arrested and interrogated but the merchant was free to go and he was not asked to testify. The *commissaire* deliberately avoided noting the name of the customer; he may have been someone with a reputation in Nantes, as it seems that the *commissaire* knew him already. The way the *commissaire* recorded the presence of this merchant without giving his name is similar to the information recorded against tenants of public houses and inns which did not close at the appointed hour: *commissaires* noted the presence and number

¹² BRO, JQS/P/123.

¹³ AMN, FF 269; 272.

¹⁴ AMN, FF 272.

of *compagnons*, for example, but did not quote their names.¹⁵ The explanation may be that the law condemned only the landlords and not the customers but in the case of disturbing the peace (the offence most commonly recorded against prostitutes in Nantes), it is surprising that the police did not target the customers as well. According to neighbours' complaints, they often "feared for their life" because of the violent behaviour of the customers rather than the prostitutes.¹⁶ However it remained easier to condemn a prostitute for disturbing the peace because of noises coming out of her flat, than a customer who could pretend that he had only been in the flat once and therefore could not be held responsible for the repeated complaints. The same observation applied to the tenants of disorderly houses in Bristol: it was easier for the constable and justices of the peace to condemn the landlords than the customers and prostitutes who met there occasionally, although both watchmen and constables recorded recurrent complaints.

So who were the men who used the services of a "common woman" in the eighteenth-century port city? A declaration signed by Bristol justices of the peace to the Grand Jurors in 1785 stated that the men who "created" prostitutes were "void of every principle of honour and humanity" and this statement was later echoed in a poem written by a reader of *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal* and published in 1799.¹⁷ But in both texts, the identity of the men guilty of pushing women into debauchery was left unspecified; the authors were reluctant to give any clue as to the social origins of the supposed culprits, even though it is possible that they excluded the upper-middle class from this kind of offence. In Nantes the *ordonnance de police* of 6 November 1778 claimed that prostitutes "*arrêtent des personnes de tout âge et de tout état*", suggesting that any man from any class could be preyed upon by a prostitute: the vagueness

¹⁵ AMN, FF 216-220.

¹⁶ AMN, FF 272; BRO, JQS/P/63.

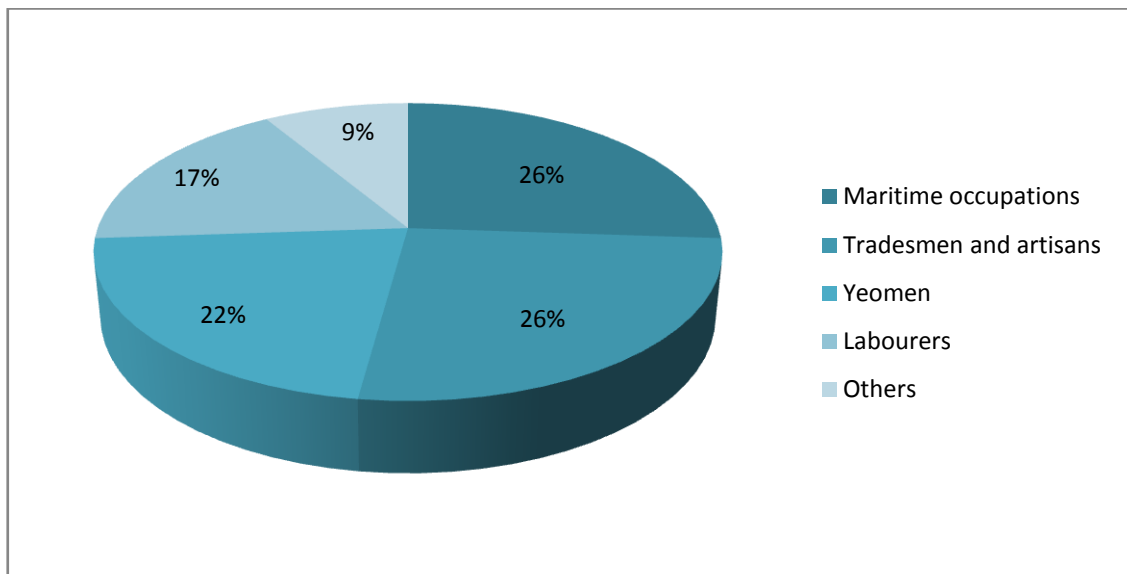
¹⁷ BRO, JQS/P/95-1; *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal* 10 August 1799.

concerning the customers' identity in official documents remained.

Even though customers' names were often missing, details of their relations with the prostitute and their occupation were sometimes recorded, especially if the customer was the person complaining about a prostitute. Details of their identity could also be reported by the neighbours in their complaints about a woman: the names of the customers were usually not known but they were sometimes spotted wearing a sword or threatening people with a pistol. The nature of the archives means that the non-violent customers or the rich and important ones who did not want to be known, would always remain in the dark and their situation left undocumented. But a social pattern emerges from what can be gathered about customers of "common" prostitutes. Indeed, comparing plaintiffs' occupations and neighbours' complaints, it seems that men from low social classes were the most common customers of prostitutes. As Elizabeth Baigent notes in her thesis, occupations such as labourers, mariners, coalminers and men from the clothing-trade (unskilled) represented the lowest occupational classes of Bristol (*pauvres de structure* - *pauvres de conjoncture* excepted) and they were also the ones who appeared most often as plaintiffs.¹⁸ Out of forty-three cases of theft reported between 1780 and 1805 in Bristol, involving sixty prostitutes overall, the occupation of twenty-four of the plaintiffs was known. Transferred into a pie chart, these data show the predominance of lower-class plaintiffs.

¹⁸ Baigent E., 'Bristol society in the later eighteenth century with special reference to the handling by computer of fragmentary historical sources', PhD Thesis (Oxford, 1985), p. 166.

Figure IV-1. Plaintiffs' Occupations, Bristol 1780-1805



Sources: BRO, JQS/P/63; 71; 73; 100; 101; 110; 112; 115; 123; 129; 132; 153; 162; 221; 267.¹⁹

Mariners were the most common plaintiffs: they were mostly English but some foreigners were also involved in the prosecution of prostitutes for theft in Bristol, notably a Rascal (Indian mariner) and a Dane who were both mariners. But the status of mariners, bound to leave the port sooner or later, might have prevented some of them from starting a judicial action for theft: the ambiguous legal position of mariners, especially foreigners, was a double-edged sword, which protected them from local prosecutions but also prevented them from initiating them. Information from summary justice may have outlined more significantly the predominance of mariners as prostitutes' customers.

In addition to the labouring classes (in the category "Others", the occupations recorded

¹⁹ In order to allow a further comparison with the records of the Essex Quarter Sessions, 1760-1800, the categories of occupational status have been grouped as such: 'tradesmen and artisans' includes a mason and a wool-winder; 'labourers' includes a gardener, as in King P., 'Decision-Makers and Decision-Making in the English Criminal Law, 1750-1800', *The Historical Journal*, 27, n° 1 (Mar., 1984), pp. 25-58, p. 29.

are a servant and a coalminer),²⁰ there were some men who had a skilled occupation or who had the status of small merchants and dealers of specific goods: for example, a "toyman" and a "dealer in fish".²¹ The social status of the yeomen, the third most numerous category of plaintiff, has been discussed by Baigent and she claimed that she struggled to put them in one of her Bristolian social categories.²² The amount of money stolen from yeomen by prostitutes was indeed higher than what was stolen from labourers or even mariners: yeomen like Bernard Luzardi had sixteen Louis d'or, one guinea and three silver coins stolen by a prostitute whilst William Norton had sixteen pounds in bills taken.²³ Sixteen pounds in 1806 was considerably more than the annual wage of a female servant which leads one to believe that Bristolian yeomen were quite "well-off". But their good financial situation might have been only temporary: John Bray for example, who had been robbed by Susannah Milledge, had £130 in cash on him; however this sum had been gained during the last days spent at St James fair where he sold his entire cattle stock.²⁴ This suggests that their financial situation may have been quite vulnerable due to the fact that they insisted on prosecuting the accused and seemed to carry a lot of money on their person, suggesting that they had just acquired it. This situation was similar to mariners who had just come ashore and received their wages: for instance, Serang Adam from India accused Ann Swan of robbing him of thirty-two pounds and two shillings as well as his silver watch.²⁵

But the social status of the customers who started an action in justice against a prostitute was rarely higher social level than the lower middle-class, as the amount of money and

²⁰ Baigent, 'Bristol society in the later eighteenth century', p. 149.

²¹ BRO, JQS/P/127; 267.

²² Baigent, 'Bristol society in the later eighteenth century', p. 144-145.

²³ BRO, JQS/P/115; 221.

²⁴ BRO, JQS/P/101.

²⁵ BRO, JQS/P/73.

goods stolen by prostitutes suggested: small amounts of money, shoe buckles, watches and metal or silver cases were goods most commonly stolen. Especially in cases involving labourers, the highest amount of money stolen by a prostitute equalled eight shillings and six pence: a tobacco or watch case in silver was worth around fifteen to twenty shillings and therefore was a better catch than the loose change in a labourer's breeches pocket. These statistics also show who was most likely to use the court to denounce theft by a prostitute.²⁶ As from the mid-eighteenth century the expenses of a prosecution had great chances to be paid by the court, even if the case failed, lower-classes had probably more inclination to use the court and the process of indictment to condemn a thief than before, as there was less chance for them to lose money.²⁷ If compared for example with the occupational status of prosecutors for felony used by King to analyse Essex Quarter Sessions records between 1760 and 1800, some specificities in Bristol prosecutions appear.²⁸ First the absence of gentry and professionals as prostitutes' common customers and plaintiffs is noticeable: as expected, it was quite unlikely that an upper-middle class Bristolian, if robbed, would have gone to a justice of the peace to complain against a low-class prostitute. This is confirmed by the fact that yeomen, who could also be wealthy, were not the main prosecutors against prostitutes: it suggests that the richest of them were either not going to see these prostitutes, or on the contrary refused to complain if robbed. Moreover, they may have known the magistrates and they may also have been aware of the juries and magistrates' tendency to be lenient with young women, giving them another reason to avoid the long process of a trial.²⁹ Another discrepancy highlights the specific nature of Bristol urban

²⁶ Beattie noticed the same 'absence' of gentlemen and esquire in his general study of prosecutors against simple larceny: Beattie, *Crime and Courts*, p. 193.

²⁷ Emsley, *Crime and Society in England*, p. 187.

²⁸ King, "Decision-makers and Decision-making", p. 29.

²⁹ King P., "Illiterate Plebeians, Easily Misled": Jury Composition, Experience and Behavior in Essex, 1735-1815', in Cockburn J. and Green T. (eds), *Twelve Good Men and True, The Criminal Trial Jury in*

environment compared to the county of Essex: only 3.4% of plaintiffs were from a maritime occupation in Essex, whereas in Bristol, 26% of them were mariners or working on a ship, underlining the predominance of mariners as prostitutes' customers. Thus, the customers who appeared in the archives were more often from the labouring or lower-middle classes and their social status was close to that of the prostitutes in general.

The situation in Nantes corroborates these conclusions: the information given by *commissaires* in their reports on landlords who did not observe closing time reveals the social status of the customers present in the inn or tavern with the prostitutes. They were mariners, *compagnons*, labourers or foreigners and represented the labouring classes.³⁰ *Compagnons* and apprentices were often suspected of being part of the prostitutes' networks and of disturbing the peace. Indeed, in both Nantes and Bristol, officials considered it necessary to legislate against the behaviour of apprentices or *compagnons*: in 1779 in Bristol, in a notice of indenture, the terms of the contract reminded the apprentice that he was not allowed to go into taverns or to have sexual affairs or to get married before the end of the contract.³¹ This restriction applied to apprentices in Nantes too where they were forbidden to go to inns and taverns.³² The letter from M. Miron, *lieutenant général de police* in Orléans dated 1787 to M. de la Pervençère, mayor and *lieutenant général de police* in Nantes mentioned earlier, confirmed the links between prostitutes and apprentices as well as the troubles which were imputed to them.³³ They had the reputation of being troublesome and of living in debauchery even though their

England, 1200-1800 (Princeton, 1988), pp. 254-304, p. 255.

³⁰ AMN, FF 286; 290.

³¹ BRO, JQS/P/73.

³² AMN, FF 256-259: these records concerned only *compagnons* and apprentices who did not respect the *règlements* and provoked riots and violence between 1750 and 1789.

³³ AMN, FF 112.

wages were rather low: thus if they had any intercourse with a prostitute, it is to be supposed that the woman would have been paid very little. More importantly, the study of apprentices as customers reveals their tendency to act in groups according to a specific type of sociability centred on the links developed between young men in a similar social context.³⁴ In 1757, the family of Jeanne Cherneau complained about her disorderly behaviour claiming that she was constantly running about the streets, "*jour et nuit, ivre comme elle étoit, journellement suivie par plusieurs garçons*". In 1759 in Nantes, Anne Pellerin, daughter of victuallers, rented a room from Coupé, shoemaker, rue Juiverie and she was said to have been the source of a lot of scandals where she lived.³⁵ Indeed Coupé's and Marchaix's (his neighbour) apprentices were constantly going into her room and one of them "*la fréquentoit si particulièrement qu'elle tomba enceinte*". However, despite numerous legal restrictions against apprentices, they were probably not the most frequent customers due to their lack of money.

In accusations against prostitutes for disturbing the peace (*tapage*), neighbours usually complained of the presence of soldiers and men carrying weapons, swords or pistols. The plaintiffs probably exaggerated when they said that they were constantly "in fear for their life" but it appears from the archives that soldiers were often denounced as violent and disorderly. In 1760 in Nantes, the family of Renée Lemerle complained about her behaviour and, after some enquiries, the *commissaire* found out from a surgeon of Pont Rousseau that "*elle couchoit très souvent dans des auberges et s'ennivroit avec des soldats dans des cabarets audit Pont Rousseau*" and three soldiers

³⁴ See Cavignac J., 'Le compagnonnage dans les luttes ouvrières au XVIIIe siècle, l'exemple de Bordeaux', *Bibliothèque de l'école des Chartes*, 126, n° 126-2 (1968), pp. 377-411, p. 398; Favot A., 'Le bonheur des canuts ou le bonheur des humbles', *Histoire, Economie et Société*, 5, n° 2 (1986), pp. 217-221; Depauw J., 'Amour illégitime et société à Nantes au XVIIIe siècle', *Annales. Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 27, n°4 (1972), p. 1180; Martin Saint-Léon E., *Histoire des Corporations de Métiers : Depuis leurs Origines jusqu'à leur Suppression en 1791* (Paris, 1977); In England: Griffiths P., 'Meanings of Nightwalking in early modern England', *The Seventeenth Century*, 13, n° 2 (1998), pp. 212-238.

³⁵ AMN, FF 269.

told him that they had slept with her.³⁶ Renée was known to stay "*dans des lieux mal notés et qu'elle changeoit de temps en temps d'un mauvais endroit à un autre*", she seems to have been quite poor as she could only rent a room in inns and cabarets and did not have a flat of her own. Besides, the "choice" of soldiers as customers also suggests that she was a low-class prostitute. The common opinion on soldiers in Nantes was usually critical of their behaviour and social rank: when Françoise Ferrant's father accused her of debauchery, he claimed that people had told him that she was seen with "*toutes sortes de gens, des soldats et jusqu'à un nègre*".³⁷ His declaration emphasized the "immoral" behaviour of his daughter by referring to the fact that she had been with soldiers and with a black man. The juxtaposition of his daughter's customers showed how "despicable" the fact of being a common woman for soldiers was perceived at this time. Similarly, in 1780, between ten and eleven in the evening, the inhabitants of an alley between rue du Château and Haute-rue des Jacobins were woken up by an invalid soldier shouting that he came to "have fun" ("*il venait s'amuser*") with the servant of the widow Marc, who lived on the ground floor.³⁸ When the *commissaire* came to arrest him, the soldier declared that "*il devait savoir que les soldats cherchaient à se procurer du plaisir et qu'il sait où s'en procurer*". In this case the proximity of the Château (of the Duke of Bretagne) where soldiers and guards lodged, explained the fact that this servant's trade was quite prolific. But soldiers were not only found near their barracks:³⁹ they were seen on rue Bignon-L'Estand, where a shot coming from a pistol was heard and a man "*avec un plumet et une épée*" was seen; they were known to frequent the cabaret of the widow Jacquette, Place Ste Catherine, "*où toutes les nuits s'y rassemblent*

³⁶ AMN, FF 269.

³⁷ AMN, FF 269.

³⁸ AMN, FF 272.

³⁹ The last chapter will focus on the localisation of prostitutes and their customers in order to question a possible link between them.

des matelots et des soldats".⁴⁰ In Bristol in 1778, four men dressed like soldiers were "drinking and carousing" with four or five women in the public-house of Elizabeth Davis on Lewin's Mead at two o'clock on a Sunday morning.⁴¹ Even though references to soldiers were found in the Bristol archives, it seems that there were fewer complaints about soldiers or from soldiers in Bristol than in Nantes, but this difference can be explained by the fact that there were no barracks or garrison in Bristol.

In addition to mariners, soldiers, apprentices and others, prostitutes also frequented criminals and offenders, at least according to their neighbours' complaints. "*Des filoux et des brigands*", thieves and vagabonds, were said to keep close company with prostitutes. A witness named Julien Sages, went as far as claiming that the men and women who met in Lebeau's house "*sont des gens flétris et des repris de justice*".⁴² However it seems improbable that he could have known about these marks, (although one or two of them may have been visible), therefore his accusations are likely to have been exaggerated. Indeed, even in the case of Susannah Milledge and Betty James, their friend Thomas Davis who used some of the stolen money to buy a new coat and waistcoat was reported to be a labourer and not a notorious offender.⁴³ However, Susannah used a type of cant when she shouted "Send!" (i.e.: run away) after she stole from John Bray.⁴⁴ Similarly, Elizabeth Vowles, after having stabbed John Meeks, exclaimed "he is marked".⁴⁵ These suggest that they had some knowledge of a type of cant but it does not imply that they were directly linked with any gangs. Even though links with groups of offenders might have existed, the cases studied here do not

⁴⁰ AMN, FF 272.

⁴¹ BRO, JQS/P/63.

⁴² AMN, FF 272.

⁴³ BRO, JQS/P/101.

⁴⁴ 'Send' in cant meant 'run away'. See Wilson B., *Decency and Disorder, The Age of Cant* (London, 2007) and Coleman J., *A History of Cant and Slang Dictionaries*, vol. 1-2 (Oxford, 2004).

⁴⁵ BRO, JQS/P/140.

corroborate these assumptions. Both Sorensen and Berry demonstrate that cant or flash talk evolved during the eighteenth century and became the language of "common people" rather than only a language for criminals.⁴⁶ Therefore there is no instance in this case of links between these prostitutes and some sorts of organised crimes: on the contrary, women who were jailed and sentenced both in Bristol and Nantes for taking part in grand larceny and organised thefts, were never reported as prostitutes. It does not mean that they never made a living from this trade but the women who got caught and who formed the sample studied here seem to owe their appearance in the archives due to an offence linked with opportunism rather than an organised and premeditated crime. This argument also questions the existence of a criminal underworld in eighteenth-century port cities (London excepted) and the role of prostitutes in relation to this "underworld":⁴⁷ they were in regular interaction with labouring classes but their link with a eventual criminal underworld is less distinct. The *Oxford Dictionary of English* defines the archaic use of the word flash as 'of or relating to thieves, prostitutes, or the underworld, especially their language'⁴⁸ but the low percentage of recidivism, and the quick turn over in prostitution in Nantes and Bristol suggest on the contrary that they were not naturally part of a potentially organised criminal world. Ultimately, prostitution in provincial cities was still legal and as it has been demonstrated, these women were more likely to be from the labouring-classes and trying to survive than unredeemable criminals.

⁴⁶ Sorensen J., 'Vulgar Tongues: Canting Dictionaries and the Language of the People in Eighteenth-Century Britain', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 37, n° 3 (Spring, 2004), pp. 435-454; pp. 447-448; Berry H., 'Rethinking Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England: Moll King's Coffee House and the Significance of 'Flash Talk'', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series, 11 (2001), pp. 65-81, pp. 79-80.

⁴⁷ For a discussion on the definition of 'Underworld' see: Shore H., 'Criminality, Deviance and the Underworld since 1750' in Kilday A.-M. and Nash D., *Histories of Crime, Britain 1600-2000* (Basingstoke, 2010), pp. 120-140; See also Hill R., 'Criminal Receiving: The 'Fence' as Marketer', *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 11, n° 2 (Fall, 1992), pp. 126-134, for an example of the links between prostitutes and criminal world.

⁴⁸ *OED*, (Oxford, 1998), p. 698.

The relationships between prostitutes and customers were logically based on a money exchange but even though Matthews said that prostitutes in Bristol could be bought at any price, it is rare to find mention of the monetary transaction.⁴⁹ From "six pence" to "one shilling and six pence"⁵⁰ paid to a prostitute for a sexual intercourse, the typical fee did not seem to be very high, even though it was higher than a female domestic servant daily wage, which was on average 4s 7d per week.⁵¹ In addition, if the transaction occurred in an inn or public house, the prostitute had to give a certain sum to the landlord for renting the room.⁵² But the transaction was rarely limited to sexual intercourse and a ritual seems to have taken place to seal the transaction. Indeed, prostitutes and customers usually drank together before having sexual intercourse. This form of sociability highlights the place of women in a tavern or inn: men accosted by women in the streets were asked to have a pint and if they agreed, it seemed to be understood and implicitly accepted that they were going to have sexual intercourse. This practice clearly linked prostitution with public-houses and alcohol. In the case of John Bray and John Roberts who were victims of Susannah Milledge and Betty James, they explained in their depositions that they were passing along St James Back when they heard a fiddle playing in one of the houses: they ordered some beer and were soon joined by some girls "who drank with them particularly".⁵³ According to Brennan, the sound of a violin or music from a tavern was an open invitation to enter the house.⁵⁴ Bray and Roberts complacently added to their enjoyment of the music, alcohol and women, thus creating an atmosphere propitious to entertainment. On 25 March 1779

⁴⁹ Matthews, *New Bristol Directory for the Year 1793-1794*, p. 90.

⁵⁰ BRO, JQS/P/63; 110; 156.

⁵¹ Oaxley D., *Convict Maids: The Forced Migration of Women to Australia* (Cambridge, 1996), p. x.

⁵² See next section on the relationships between tenants of an inn or tavern and prostitutes.

⁵³ BRO, JQS/P/101.

⁵⁴ Brennan, T., *Public Drinking and Popular Culture in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Princeton, 1988), p. 262.

Jane Thompson accosted Samuel Palmer in the street and asked him if he wanted to have a can of ale at the Bull. From there they went to a public house on Nicholas Street where they drank another pint and then went on Rope Yard where they slept together.⁵⁵ In 1806, Mary Jones convinced William Norton to go into one of the public houses on Tower Lane where she asked her friend Sarah Simmonds "to go and get some gin" for one shilling (which he paid).⁵⁶ These examples can be multiplied and even though in Nantes it is less clear in the judicial archives if any of the customers were "lured" to drink beforehand, it is noticeable that plaintiffs usually denounced the excessive drinking of the customers or the presence of prostitutes in taverns.⁵⁷ It is possible that sexual intercourse happened without any form of preliminary agreement but these were not recorded in the archives for the period studied and it may have concerned only the poorest of the streetwalkers who could not afford to loiter in public houses.

Prostitutes seemed to have regularly frequented the inns and taverns, but going there with a man may have eased their situation in the public house: as Clark mentioned, female visits to the alehouse were regulated by social conventions but unmarried women "might visit the alehouse with a boyfriend if they were courting".⁵⁸ Even though the real situation of a woman/prostitute who accosted a man in the street and took him to the public house was known, the social conventions were respected *de façade*. Besides, prostitutes may also have pre-empted accusations of disorderly behaviour and lessened the likelihood of accusations of being promiscuous by going to the alehouse with other women, which was considered more respectable than going on their own.⁵⁹ It also created a feeling of security, to be with other women, for the women who had

⁵⁵ BRO, JQS/P/63.

⁵⁶ BRO, JQS/P/221.

⁵⁷ AMN, FF 269; 270; 272.

⁵⁸ Clark P., *The English Alehouse*, p. 131.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

contacts with men on the streets, in the pubs and in the rented rooms and who could be vulnerable: throughout the archives, prostitutes were seen in company of other women, who were most likely prostitutes as well. Brennan explained that in Paris the violence done to women in taverns "was of a decidedly sexual nature", which tended to reduce them to a subordinate position, reflecting, according to him, a confusion over the woman's place in a tavern.⁶⁰ This would explain why they used to go to the public houses with their friends or *connaissances* instead of alone. For instance, in 1796, Sarah Stringer went through the streets with Mary Drumer and Mary Day accompanied Elizabeth Vowles on Tower Lane when they stopped at the Bush tavern to meet Sarah Spencer, Mary Yeoman and Jane Young.⁶¹ The same situation occurred in Nantes where women used to live and receive customers together. Babet, mentioned previously, used to live in 1785 with Victoire or La Belle Vaudoise while Louise Guillemot was seen "running the streets with lewd women."⁶² When Jeanne Galleard, Magdelaine Chaillou and Julienne Henette were arrested, they were together, "*couchées avec des militaires de garde*".⁶³

This habit of going to the alehouse also underlined the links between prostitution and offences regarding disturbance of the peace: drunkenness and violent behaviour could easily be targeted with the same weapons as debauchery. However as Brennan's study of Parisian taverns shows women were comparatively more often prosecuted for theft than men (23% of women to 9% of men) whereas crimes of violence were mostly committed by men, with journeymen and artisans being the most inclined to start a fight, despite

⁶⁰ Brennan, *Public Drinking and Popular Culture*, p. 149.

⁶¹ BRO, JQSP/P/140.

⁶² AMN, FF 269; 272.

⁶³ AMN, I2 R54.

the bad reputation of soldiers.⁶⁴ Intoxication was often linked with fights and disorderly behaviour in taverns but it does not appear from the archives that prostitutes were reputed drunkards. The only cases where women were in a continuous state of intoxication were reported by families who wished to see their relative in jail: the wife of Pierre Rolland for example was reported to the police for being "*ivre morte dans les huit à neuf heures du soir, couchée sous une boutique dans la rue des Halles*" and five weeks earlier she was said to be "*saoule dans le milieu de l'après-midi, rue du Bois*".⁶⁵ The difficult situation of the woman seems to have been linked with her dependence on alcohol, at least according to the declarations, but in general, prostitutes were not arrested or denounced for being drunk, contrary to some of their customers, but for being noisy. Neither in Nantes nor in Bristol did the figure of the bully appear in the archives: an explanation for this might be that the prostitutes in these two cities enjoyed more independence than in capitals cities such as Paris and London.⁶⁶ By independence, I suggest that they were not attached to a specific brothel that employed bullies and were on the contrary on an almost equal footing with the tenants of places of entertainment.

2. Landlords, landladies, lodging-keepers and prostitutes.

The presence of prostitutes in public houses is undeniable: thefts from potential customers have been analysed, and it was shown that they were often committed in public houses or in the lodgings adjoining a drinking place. Besides, it has been explained that prostitutes, especially in Bristol, used to share a drink with their customer

⁶⁴ Brennan, *Public Drinking and Popular Culture*, pp. 31-37.

⁶⁵ AMN, FF 269; for a detailed analysis of Parisian female drunkenness linked with families' accusations, see Farge A. and Foucault M., *Le Désordre des Familles, Lettres de Cachet des Archives de la Bastille* (Paris, 1982).

⁶⁶ Henderson mentions the 'bullies' but he also insists on the fact that most of the prostitutes were independent: Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, pp. 30-31.

before sexual intercourse, in order to "seal the deal".⁶⁷ Their presence in these drinking places must have been known by the tenants and as a consequence, the tenants' relations with these women must be defined as important: did they overlook the presence of prostitutes or did they rather encourage them to come into their pubs? Three types of archives can be used to decipher the reasons why prostitutes were allowed or even encouraged to frequent certain places: the accusations of keeping a disorderly house in Bristol, the police reports against *cabaretiers* who did not close their establishment on time and finally, the *livres des logeurs* which recorded each person paying rent under one roof in Nantes.⁶⁸ Without saying that prostitutes were always known as such, it was possible and usual for a landlord to know sufficient information about his regular patrons. Being in a public house for a woman at the end of the eighteenth century was not as disreputable as it would be a century later:⁶⁹ it is true that women from the middle-class usually avoided going to such places but labouring women were still quite commonly found in taverns, usually going there with other female friends, as discussed in a previous chapter. As Clark explains, plebeian women "could not indulge in libertinism as easily as artisan men could, for their respectability was much more fragile, based on sexual reputation rather than skill."⁷⁰ In other words, it was not so much the fact that women were in a public house that made them prostitutes but it was their behaviour in the public house and outside, as well as the local rumours, running fast in their community, which defined them as prostitutes. The complaint of Pierre

⁶⁷ They may also have been waitress in the establishment, as in Patoy's tavern, where he employed his sisters as waitresses and prostitutes (AMN, FF 272) and as Clark mentioned in *The English Alehouse*, p. 206. However in Nantes and Bristol only two cases of women being employed as waitress and prostitute have been recorded and in each case, it has to be considered as familial issues, as it involved a mother and her daughters and a brother and his sisters; see also Jennings P., *The Public House in Bradford, 1770-1970* (Keele, 1995), pp. 103-105, for a later account (1850s) of the links between prostitution and beerhouse in a provincial city.

⁶⁸ Lodging-keepers had three days after the arrival of a new lodger to inform the local *commissaire*.

⁶⁹ Kumin, 'Public House and their Patrons', in Kumin and Tlutsy, *The World of the Tavern*, pp. 56-58.

⁷⁰ Clark A., *The Struggle for the Breeches, Gender and the Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1997), p. 35.

Rolland, *cordier journalier*, about his wife revealed the fact that all the neighbours knew that she was living "in lewdness".⁷¹ This "common knowledge" spread round and must have been shared with landlords, in whose houses she was seen "*à boire avec dans un cabaret, à environ six heures du soir avec cinq ou six matelots*". Landlords also gave testimonies about the behaviour of certain neighbours: Jean Hardy, innkeeper, claimed that he had "*une parfaite connaissance que laditte Renée Lemerle a demeuré un an dans des endroits mal nottés et qu'elle changeoit de temps en temps de mauvais endroit à un autre*".⁷² Rumours were also created and fuelled by patrons in the public house, like Jacques, a *portefaix* in Nantes who claimed in La Rousseau's house that "*il a jouy [de Françoise Ferrant] au milieu de la chambre*" in front of La Rousseau and other lodgers.⁷³

No official complaints against prostitutes were made by tenants of public houses: only one complaint was recorded in Nantes and none in Bristol. It is true that some prostitutes must have been refused entrance in certain places but this sanction did not have to be recorded. However the judicial and legal systems (police, constables and justices of the peace) were aware of their presence in places of entertainment and in a few instances, it is possible to see that the prostitutes were unwelcome guests. In Nantes, after the Revolution, anyone who wished to open a *salle de danse* had to make a legal request to the *commissaire*. It appears from the study of these requests that the tenants constantly promised that their place would not be open to any "*personne debauchée*".⁷⁴ The official nature of the request called for such language, which could thus be deemed misleading, but yet the police still refused to grant certain

⁷¹ AMN, FF 269.

⁷² AMN, FF 269.

⁷³ AMN, 269; See also Clark A., *The Struggle for the Breeches*, pp. 52-56, on gossips and insults towards women.

⁷⁴ AMN, I1 C52 D12.

authorizations to open these dancing establishments. The reason was that they were too far from the guards and therefore could not be easily supervised and controlled. Dancing establishments were described as "a veritable manufactory and rendezvous of thieves and prostitutes" by Mary Carpenter, but it seems that the police were more concerned about the *tapage* made by the customers (especially soldiers) than by the presence of prostitutes.⁷⁵ Similarly, prostitutes could not be prevented from frequenting the theatre without great difficulty and therefore their presence had to be regulated. In Bristol, a theatre opened in Jacob's Well in 1729, on the outskirts of Bristol, and was reputed for attracting a dangerous crowd: the road to Clifton, where the theatre was situated was left in the dark and thieves were said to attack the people attending the plays.⁷⁶ The opening of the Royal Theatre in King Street in the 1760s lessened this problem; however, it is likely that being so close to the port and the city centre it may still have attracted a crowd of pickpockets, prostitutes and other petty criminals outside its doors. The price for a ticket to the gallery was between one shilling and one shilling and six pence, which, in this case, would have prevented labouring women from gaining admittance; however it would have been possible for them to loiter outside the entrance.⁷⁷ In Nantes, access to the new Vauxhall for prostitutes was regulated from 1795, for its grand opening: in accordance with the *commissaire principal's* order, the *filles publiques* were allowed to enter the theatre but they had to remain on the left hand side of the first floor.⁷⁸ Therefore, although their presence was not always wanted, it was recognized by laws that they were, despite the complaints, appropriating this public space. And in each case, the prostitutes' attitude shows how a specific place became a

⁷⁵ Mary Carpenter, quoted in Taylor D., *Crime, Policing and Punishment in England, 1750-1914* (London, 1998), p. 53.

⁷⁶ McGrath P. (ed.), *Bristol in the Eighteenth Century* (Newton Abbot, 1972), p. 33.

⁷⁷ Barker K., 'The Theatre Royal in Bristol', in McGrath Patrick (ed.), *Bristol in the Eighteenth Century* (Newton Abbot, 1972), p. 67; Latimer, *Annals of Bristol*, p. 64.

⁷⁸ AMN, I1 C52 D6.

continuation of what happened in the streets: as it will be shown in depth in a subsequent chapter, prostitutes were located at a very close range to the theatres and other places of entertainment and they appropriated these places as well as the adjoining streets.⁷⁹

The relationship between tenants of public house and prostitutes was ambiguous because of the legal status of prostitution. But as stated by McInnes, prostitution was "stigmatized for the danger [it] posed to civilization at large and for the harm [it] might do to families, innocent bystanders or the perpetrators themselves", especially since the revival of evangelicalism in England in the later eighteenth century and the fear linked with the Revolution and riots in Nantes.⁸⁰ Therefore, letting in prostitutes could be seen by higher classes as a dangerous business. However local police and constables tended to condemn tenants for keeping a disorderly house in more pragmatic terms as a matter of public order, when the neighbourhood was disturbed by what happened in the public house (screams, games, drunkenness and violence). Tenants of public houses in England could be condemned under the 1751 bill for "Regulating places of publick entertainment and punishing persons keeping disorderly houses":⁸¹

Any house kept for publick dancing, musick, or other publick entertainment of the like kind, without a licence for that purpose ... shall be deemed a disorderly house ... And it is hereby further enacted and declared that any person keeping a public-house or selling wine, brandy, punch, ale, or other liquor, by retale, in any house, outhouse, cellar or other place, who shall permit tippling at

⁷⁹ See also D'Cruz and Jackson, *Women, Crime and Justice in England*, p. 69.

⁸⁰ Briggs J., Harrison C., McInnes A. and Vincent D., *Crime and Punishment in England, an Introductory History* (London, 1996), p. 193.

⁸¹ Parliament Records, HL/PO/PU/1/1751/25G2n28.

unseasonable hours in the night, or shall permit any lewd women, or other dissolute and debauched or disorderly persons, to frequent such house, outhouse, cellar, or other place, shall be deemed to keep a disorderly House.

Because of the definition of this bill, it is difficult to know what type of establishments was kept by the accused. Indeed it is sometimes unclear if tenants were condemned for not having a licence and letting disorderly persons frequent their place or if they were duly licensed but kept entertaining the "wrong" clientele. Clark noted that in Bristol only 10% of the public houses were unlicensed but the grand jury complained that these publicans had "lost all motives to maintain even a semblance of regularity in their house".⁸² The available alehouses and innkeepers registers for Bristol at the end of the century started in 1796 and 1802 respectively, and during this period, only five women were accused of keeping a disorderly house; none of them, however, was recorded as licensed.⁸³ As for the accusation of keeping a bawdy house, Shoemaker claims that the "decline in indictments for keeping a bawdy house may have been due to the practice ... of summarily convicting madams of the related offence of selling ale or liquor without a licence".⁸⁴ In other words, prosecuting tenants who did not have a licence (presented before the following quarter session) was much quicker and easier than the longer process of condemning someone for keeping a bawdy house: as a consequence, no accusation of keeping a bawdy house was reported at the end of the century in Bristol.

In Nantes, police targeted tenants of public houses and lodging-keepers under two similar accusations: disturbance of the peace and none presentation of their book of

⁸² Clark, *The English Alehouse*, p. 261.

⁸³ BRO, JQS/AK/11; JQS/IK/1.

⁸⁴ Shoemaker R., *Prosecution and Punishment, Petty Crime and the Law in London and rural Middlesex, c. 1660-1725* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 134.

lodgers. Public order was to be respected and complaints from the neighbours were duly recorded for further actions. It is interesting to notice that legal actions against *cabaretiers* and lodging-keepers were filed under the same reference in the archives: this method of cataloguing followed the laws and *réglements* on lodging and drinking places which, throughout the century, were considered under the same rules.⁸⁵ It would therefore be inconsistent to consider lodging-keepers and *cabaretiers* differently when analyzing their relationships with prostitutes, even though lodging-keepers (except innkeepers) were not supposed to sell alcohol. Neighbours' complaints always referred to the same problem: Jacquette, a widow keeping a cabaret Place Ste Catherine, was accused with her daughters of living in lewdness and a witness claimed that "*toutes les nuits il s'y fait un tapage continuel, des inconnus se sauvent par les fenêtres et insultent sa femme et lui disent des sottises*".⁸⁶ Similarly, in 1778 women living in the houses of Sieur Mime and Mrs Merlet were arrested by the police for throwing stones at people and for letting in soldiers and rogues.

Judicial actions were quite commonly started against tenants of disorderly houses and the result of these prosecutions could lead to imprisonment, however it does not seem to have decreased the number of disorderly houses.⁸⁷ Nevertheless when facing the justices of the peace or the police, tenants were often recorded arguing in favour of their respectability and moral principles. Again the case of Letitia Williams, a widow who sent a request to the justices of the peace to lessen her sentence, comes in mind. She tried to convince the magistrates of her honesty and respectability.⁸⁸ She was convicted

⁸⁵ *Déclarations* against *cabaretiers* and lodging-keepers were made in 1718, 1724, 1738-39, 1752 and 1772; AMN, FF 57; 59; 65; 73; 216.

⁸⁶ AMN, FF 272.

⁸⁷ Margaret Manning for example was jailed for two years: Bristol Record Society (ed.), *Gaol Delivery Fiats 1741-1799* (Bristol, 1989), p. 65.

⁸⁸ BRO, JQS/P/190.

by indictment in 1802 and she defended herself by rhetorically swearing that she was not in the habit of keeping such a house and that she had been a tenant of the house only for three months and a fortnight before being convicted. She promised to leave the city as soon as possible, if the justices of the peace would pass upon her sentence. What happened to Letitia Williams is unknown; however her letter gives clues to the reality of keeping a disorderly house. It seems that she was offered this opportunity when she was in a difficult financial situation: a "friend" used to support her but he/she apparently died. Without any other financial assets (her family lived in Wales), she chose to take the tenancy of a disorderly house. This situation underlines the fact that an establishment could have a reputation for being a disorderly house and keep it even if the tenant changed. Helen Berry's work shows that the coffee-house of Moll King in London kept its reputation even after the death of its landlady: customers and newspapers remained attached to the name of Moll King more than six years after her death but also to the stories of drunkards and prostitutes who attended her coffee-house.⁸⁹

In Nantes, the situation was the same: on the road to Rennes, the inn called Le Petit Hermitage was known in the 1760s to entertain customers and prostitutes: when in 1769 Jumel took the tenancy over, he explained to the police that "he was very unhappy because he was not master in his own home", as prostitutes and boisterous customers kept coming in his drinking place.⁹⁰ However his testimony seemed suspicious as his complaint was made only after the police arrested three women and a boy in his inn: no report or complaint under his name had been made before this one. Similarly Nantes

⁸⁹ Berry H. in 'Rethinking Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England: Moll King's Coffee House and the significance of 'Flash Talk'', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series, n° 11, (2001), pp. 65-81, p. 73.

⁹⁰ AMN, FF 272.

and Bristol lodging-keepers were often aware of the fact that their lodger was a prostitute. Nevertheless, lodging-keepers continue to rent rooms (sometimes to more than one prostitute), despite neighbours' complaints. Neighbours claimed that "*les maisons du Sieur Mime et de la femme Merlet n'ont jamais passé en bonne reputation*", insisting on the fact that they were reputed to have disorderly persons as boarders. In 1779, Pascal, maître chapellier, was denounced by his neighbours rue de Couëron for letting his rooms to prostitutes: "*il n'y a cessé d'y avoir des filles et des femmes du monde qui insultent journellement les passants*".⁹¹ The magistrate fined him and gave him five days to evict these women from his flat. The question of the respectability of the lodging-keeper or proprietor of the house was thus put into question by his neighbours as he was favouring debauchery and more importantly, encouraged the disturbance of peace. But in reality, it appears that the question of "respectability" was more a rhetorical question than an important one: even in the Bush, one of the largest inns in Bristol, prostitutes could be found loitering. The relations between lodging-keepers or landlords of drinking houses and prostitutes must therefore be understood in terms of financial benefits and losses rather than in terms of morality.

Despite the threat of being fined or even of being jailed for up to two years, some lodging-keepers and tenants of public houses were not deterred from letting prostitutes come into their establishments or houses.⁹² Potential financial gain seems to have been the main reason why any tenant or lodging-keeper would have had contact with prostitutes: for instance, John Bayly, on 7 June 1790, was accused by Lucy Yeates of keeping an ill-governed and disorderly house in St James.⁹³ She explained that

⁹¹ AMN, FF 272.

⁹² Bristol Record Society (ed.), *Gaol Delivery Fiats 1741-1799* (Bristol, 1989), p. 65.

⁹³ BRO, JQS/P/123; he was subsequently sentenced two hours on the pillory and house of correction.

About three months since the person now in custody whose name is John Bayly asked her to come to his house to go with men. That last Friday, as [she] was going long the street called Lewin's Mead near the house of the said Bayly, he called [her] in. That whilst she was in the house a man whose name she doth not know came in and sent for half a gallon of ale. That [she], the said man and some other persons drank the ale. That afterwards, she and the said man that came in went up stairs to bed. That he gave [her] one shilling for lying with her, that when she came down the man gave said Bayly six pence for the use of the room and bed.

This case shows that Lucy was a "regular" at John Bayly's public house: she herself said that "she hath several times both by night and day seen several people both men and women come into said Bayly's house and hath seen them paid said Bayly for the use of rooms and beds" and that he called her in when he had customers. He gained money from the rent of the bed, which was paid directly by the customer (whose name was never mentioned). In the case of Sarah Learch and Mary Morris in 1798, Mary Morris received four times in one month one shilling and six pence "as and for the wages of this informant's prostitution and for permitting men to go with this informant in her house" and half a guinea for her lodging and boarding.⁹⁴ Mary Morris must have been a lodging-keeper who encouraged prostitution, as Sarah said that she lived with her "for the purpose of prostitution". It seems that Mary did not have direct contact with the customers, as she received some money from Sarah after she had lain with a man. However, "the said Mary Morris knew from where the money was coming from and came regularly to collect it when any man has been with her", proving that she was well

⁹⁴ BRO, JQS/P/156.

aware of who was coming in and out of her house and she may even have asked for money from the customers as well. Although the environment was different, the process followed by the publican and the lodging-keeper was identical. They offered the possibility for a woman to have remunerated intercourse by providing a space to "work" and may have provided customers for them as well. This leads to the question of the nature of their relationship: were prostitutes dependent upon these people or were they rather on an equal footing, as they provided them with extra money?

The *OED* defines "procuress" as a woman who procured people, usually women, as prostitutes or as illicit sexual partners for other.⁹⁵ In this definition, the financial aspect is played down whereas in the cases discussed above, the main component of the relationship relied on the money exchange between the prostitute and the procuress or the compliant publican.⁹⁶ Therefore the gender ratio of the tenants has to be considered to answer this question: literary and graphic representations of the eighteenth century gave a definite female character to the role of bawd, who would encourage and live on the benefits of prostitution.⁹⁷ The definition in the *OED* reveals the same feminization of the word bawd which, since circa 1700, had been used only for women.⁹⁸ But a close study of public house tenants and lodging-keepers who were prosecuted for keeping a disorderly house or for disturbing the peace by encouraging prostitution in Nantes and Bristol reveals an interesting fact: thirty-seven men were accused of keeping a disorderly house or of lodging prostitutes, compared to fifty-one single women, which

⁹⁵ *OED*, http://dictionary.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.le.ac.uk/cgi/entry/50189282?single=1&query_type=word&queryword=procuress&first=1&max_to_show=10 [assessed on the 14th of November 2010].

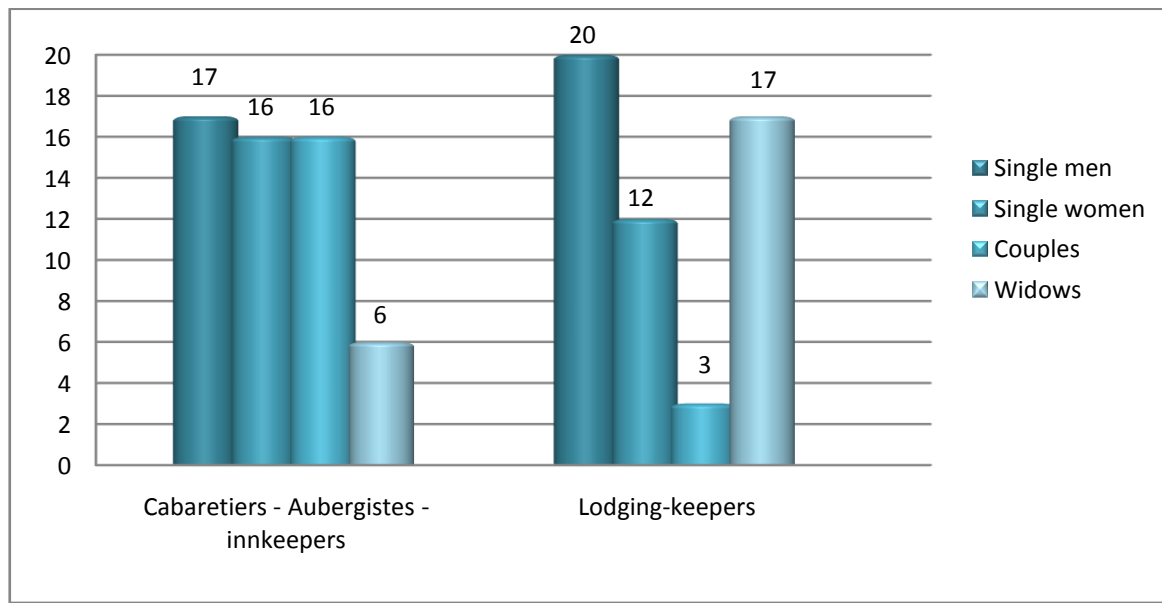
⁹⁶ The word 'pimp' because of its heavy modern sense will not be used in this work.

⁹⁷ Carter S., *Purchasing Power, Representing Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century English Popular Print Culture* (Aldershot, 2004), pp. 105-128.

⁹⁸ *OED*, http://dictionary.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.le.ac.uk/cgi/entry/50018586?query_type=word&queryword=bawd&first=1&max_to_show=10&sort_type=alpha&search_id=2XIa-dVqCwy-7265&result_place=2 [assessed on the 15th of November 2010].

means that 42% of the accused were men.⁹⁹ Therefore, despite a literary culture which insisted on the figure of the cruel procuress, it appears that relatively speaking, men were as inclined as women to benefit from this trade.

Figure IV-2. Gender and marital status of tenants of public houses and lodging-keepers in Nantes and Bristol, 1750-1805



Sources: BRO, JQS/P/63; 71; 95; 106; 107; 108; 123; 127; 128; 129; 153; 156; 162; 165; 190; BRS, *Gaol Delivery Fiats*, pp. 41 and 80; AMN, FF 215; 219; 220; 243; 269; 272; AMN, II C66 D1.

Davidoff and Hall identified 6% of women as lodging keepers in the national census sample of 1851¹⁰⁰ and in Bristol in 1802, the number of women keeping lodgings was similar: 5.5% of the 396 innkeepers of Bristol were female.¹⁰¹ The 1802 registers counted 396 innkeepers and 369 alehouse keepers in the twelve wards of the city. The

⁹⁹ The civil status of the woman is not always clear but when no husband's name was quoted in the archives, they were considered as single. The eight couples recorded as tenants or lodging-keepers were not included in this comparison. The data include twenty-six prosecutions for disorderly house in Bristol and eighty-one prosecutions in Nantes for *tapage*.

¹⁰⁰ Davidoff L. and Hall C., 'The hidden investment': women and enterprise' in Sharpe P. (ed.), *Women's Work, The English Experience 1650-1914* (London, 1998), pp. 239-293, p. 269. See also, on women's business: Barker H., *The Business of Women, Female Enterprise and Urban Development in Northern England 1760-1860* (Oxford, 2006); Erickson A., *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (New York, 1993); Honeyman K., *Women, Gender and Industrialisation in England, 1700-1810* (London, 2000); Kowaleski-Wallace E., *Consuming Subjects, Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1997); Bristol Record Society (ed.), *Bristol Probate Inventories part III: 1690-1804* (Bristol, 2008).

¹⁰¹ BRO, JQS/AK/11; JQS/IK/1.

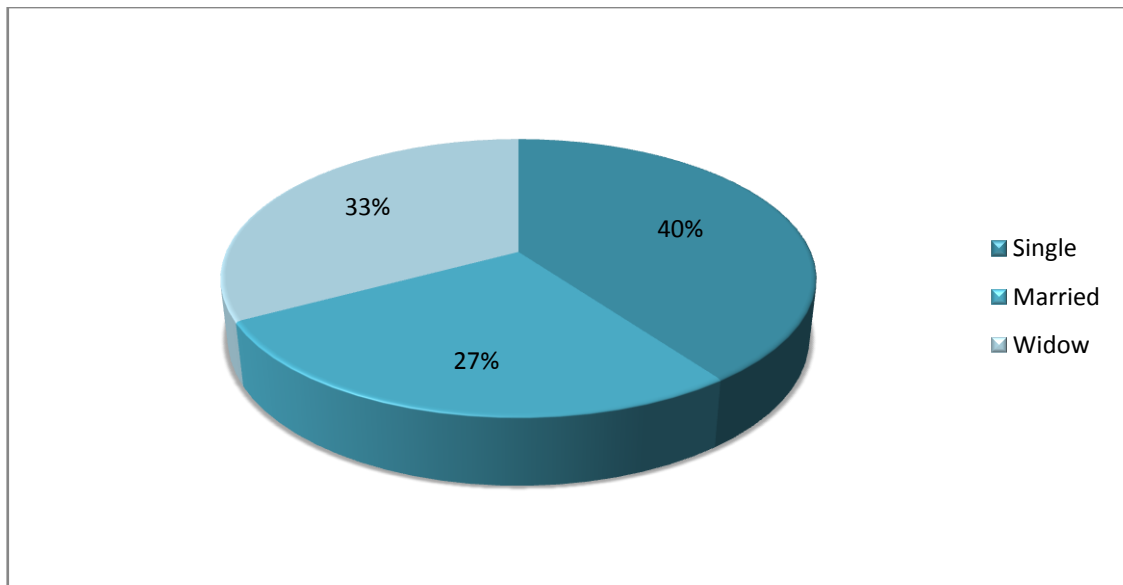
names in both registers are identical, minus twenty-seven innkeepers who did not buy a licence to sell alcohol. Keeping lodgings or a public house was a good alternative for women to secure revenue and it allowed them to be fully integrated into the economic life of the community.¹⁰² The fact that they kept a disorderly house was therefore not surprising. Shoemaker notices that widows were usually condemned mainly for offences that could not be committed by other women who did not own a property in their own right, keeping a disorderly house being one of them.¹⁰³ However the study of female tenants and lodging-keepers' civil status in Nantes and Bristol suggests that single women in these two cities were able to get hold of a business, either a cabaret or some rooms, and to make a profit from it. As mentioned earlier, female tenants of disorderly houses were usually older than the average prostitute and Erickson underlines the fact that women were more likely to inherit cash, rather than land, which might explain why some of these women were able to secure a tenancy.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Hill, *Women Alone*, p. 39.

¹⁰³ Shoemaker, *Prosecution and Punishment*, p. 215.

¹⁰⁴ Erickson, *Women and Property*, p. 94.

Figure IV-3. Marital status of female tenants and lodging-keepers in Nantes and Bristol, 1750-1805



Sources: BRO, JQS/P/63; 71; 95; 106; 107; 108; 123; 127; 128; 129; 153; 156; 162; 165; 190; BRS, *Gaol Delivery Fiats*, pp. 41 and 80; AMN, FF 215; 219; 220; 243; 269; 272; AMN, II C66 D1.

The story of Jeanne, sixteen years old, who was encouraged into debauchery by La Brisson, reveals inter-gender connections in procuring women.¹⁰⁵ The young Jeanne disappeared on 29 January 1764 from St Laurent parish and her parents received the information on 6 February that she was staying at rue du Bouvet, St Nicolas parish. They went to M. Fortin, lodging keeper, with the *commissaire* to find their daughter but she was not there. From there, her parents and the *commissaire* had to go to rue Bignon L'Estart, to the Sieur Couder who had initially taken Jeanne to Fortin, to have him confess that he then took her to Place St Nicolas, at La Caille's, widow, who lodged prostitutes. Once they found their daughter, she explained that her roommate, a young woman who was also at home when they arrived, was not the one who had debauched her but La Brisson, who was living on the fifth floor of the house of Sieur Beaulieux, who was also tenant of a café at the pillory. The first point to note is that in order to

¹⁰⁵ AMN, FF 270.

encourage the girl to fall into prostitution, two women and three men were involved in the space of a week, highlighting the fact that both men and women were a part of this trade. Secondly, the intricacies of the subterfuge rendered the trade "unproductive": the fact that she was living in a nearby parish probably made it very difficult for them to hide her from her parents and to prevent her from leaving the area (the report did not specify whether Jeanne was willing to stay or not).

A possible dependency on tenants or eventual "procuresses" does not appear clearly in the archives: on 21 May 1779, Bernier, widow and La Rétoré, married to a domestic, were accused of "[retirer] chez elles des jeunes filles qui désertent de leur famille pour suivre le libertinage par les sollicitations de ces dernières".¹⁰⁶ Renée Vivant and Marie Le Breton were both present at their house when they were arrested: Renée was twenty-one year old and Marie said she was sixteen, but apparently looked more like a girl of thirteen or fourteen years old, according to the *commissaire*. They were interrogated as to whether they knew that these two women received *libertins* at their place: they both denied knowing anything about any noise or insult, which were reported by the neighbours who complained. Renée, from Angers pretended to be in Nantes "*pour voir la ville*" and Marie explained that she left Rennes because her mother got remarried and her step father threw her out as she could not find a job. Both woman and girl denied being prostitutes when they were asked, which meant they could not be sent to the Sanitat. Their testimonies may have been untrue but they were also common: the young women never accused either Bernier or La Rétoré of being a procuress and this situation was not unusual. Even the police may have sometimes felt that there was no relationship of dependency or constraint between prostitutes and lodging-keepers or tenants of disorderly houses, as quite often they let the prostitutes go without even asking for their

¹⁰⁶ AMN, FF 272.

testimony or even their name. This situation could be seen in Bristol where prostitutes testified against landlords: ten out of twenty-four cases when landlords were condemned (men and women) were prosecuted under the testimony of a prostitute. It is unclear what they gained from this judicial action, but financial gain should not be ruled out. This information always referred to the same accusation (of keeping a disorderly house) and did not indicate any violence or imply that the prostitute had been forced into a state of dependency: on the contrary, the fact that some dared prosecuting the tenant shows that they were rather independent.

This analysis allows us to reflect on the character of the prostitute in Nantes and Bristol: far from being young and naive women seeking "motherly" attention, they seem to have had quite loose links with the persons who provided them with lodging and customers. Indeed, in both Bristol and Nantes, prostitutes were seen leaving their lodging-keeper and tenant of disorderly house without too much trouble. The common advice from the police in Nantes to prostitutes who wished to avoid being tried, was to leave their room in the next twenty-four hours to three days: as many of them were not householders, it also means that they had to leave their lodging-keeper, who had no possibility (if they had paid their rent) to forbid them to leave. La Gardon's for instance in July 1783 rented rooms for three prostitutes who were asked to leave by the police: the day after the *commissaire* came back and noticed that they were gone.¹⁰⁷ The risk of being jailed for not respecting the police's order remained; therefore it was unlikely that a lodging-keeper forced any prostitute to stay, as he would have lost his money in any case. In Bristol, pressure on tenants was increased by the possibility of being denounced by prostitutes for keeping a disorderly house, leaving tenants with even less power over these women. It has also been explained earlier on that prostitutes had some connections

¹⁰⁷ AMN, FF 272.

with other prostitutes and lodgers: La Moreau for instance, went to live in the cellar of Bernier and La Rétoré.¹⁰⁸ In Mime and Merlet's houses there were thirteen women who were living together.¹⁰⁹ The extent of these networks may have prevented them from being under the yoke of only one lodging-keeper: they left their homes easily once they had been tipped off the police and they also sometimes complained against the tenants of disorderly houses.

¹⁰⁸ AMN, FF 272.

¹⁰⁹ AMN, FF 272.

V. Prostitutes and their relations with the agents of the law.

In France or England, lower officers of the law suffered criticism at the end of the eighteenth century. Patrick Colquhoun in 1796 suggested that the system of the watch and constable was not always as active as it should have been:

Security [of property] does not proceed from severe punishment, for in very few countries are they more sanguinary than in England. It is to be attributed to a more correct and energetic system of Police, joined to an early and general attention to the education and morals of the lower orders of the people; aided by a system of industry and sobriety.¹

Louis-Sebastien Mercier in Paris claimed that:

Trop souvent le commissaire est absent; il est allé à ses plaisirs, ou apposer des scellés: car ils en sont tous friands (...) Le guet promène souvent un délinquant avec les menottes de quartier en quartier, faute de rencontrer le commissaire chez lui (...) Un commissaire emploie un autre commissaire pour faire la police dans son quartier, de crainte de se faire jeter la pierre par ses voisins. La plupart abandonnent le balayage des rues, la visite des marchés, la vérification du poids du pain, comme s'il était avilissant d'y veiller.²

¹ Quoted in Neocleous M., 'Social Police and the Mechanisms of Prevention', *British Journal of Criminology*, 40 (2000), pp. 710-726, p. 711.

² Mercier L.-S., *Le Tableau de Paris*, chap. CDLXXXIX, (J. C. BONNET, ed.) tome 1 (Paris, 1994), p. 1334-1335.

Mercier and Colquhoun's criticisms drew attention to the negligence and discretionary justice which undermined the authority of the low-class agents. But their harsh judgements omitted to highlight the importance of the local context in which these agents operated and how this proximity was experienced positively by the community. As mentioned earlier,³ the judicial system in Nantes and Bristol differed in nature, as the English system was rather a reactive system and the French model was a preventative one.⁴ The creation in 1699 in French cities of a police based on the Parisian model of 1667, which included the functions of *commissaires* and of *lieutenant général de police*, permitted the development of a professionalized police more than a century before England. At a basic level, the Nantes police was composed of four to six *commissaires* (the number changed over time) for the whole city and one *commissaire-inspecteur* who dealt only with the "*logement des étrangers*" before the Revolution.⁵ The *commissaires* were assisted in their duty by the *archers de la ville* or *milice bourgeoise*, who were authorized to carry weapons and were dressed in black and white, the colours of the city.⁶ The Maréchaussée, soldiers under the order of the king, was not allowed to exercise any control within the limits of the city unless asked to by the mayor and was therefore quartered outside its boundaries. However with the extension of suburbs like the popular Marchix, the extent of the Maréchaussée and *commissaires*' responsibilities was sometimes disputed. It is however certain that the soldiers of the Maréchaussée were located outside the city and were not always recruited in Nantes,

³ See chapter I, part 2.2.

⁴ The dichotomy however is not strict and historians of crime have proved that there was a 'proactive' police in England before the nineteenth-century, especially in London. On English 'police' before 1829 and the Metropolitan Act see Beattie J.M., *Crime and the Courts in England, 1660-1800* (Oxford, 1986); Beattie J.M., *Police and Punishment in London, 1660-1750: Urban Crime and the Limits of Terror* (Oxford, 2001); Reynolds E., *Before the Bobbies: The Night Watch and Police Reform in Metropolitan London* (Basingstoke, 1998);

⁵ AMN, FF 216 on *commissaire-inspecteur*.

⁶ Mellinet C., *La commune et la milice de Nantes, livre sixième* (Nantes, 1840-1843), p. 382; Merlin M. *Répertoire universel et raisonné de jurisprudence* (Bruxelles, 1828), pp. 55-56.

therefore their links with prostitutes will be ignored in this section, as it went beyond the municipality's activities.⁷

1. The role of the Watch in prosecutions against prostitutes in Bristol.

In England the judicial system was assisted by rather than based on the presence of watchmen and constables. The duties of watchmen revolved around calling the hours while patrolling the streets and helping victims of crimes to bring the culprit before a constable. However sometimes victims had no support from watchmen: Edward Panting for example, had to follow Elizabeth Moody to Bath to finally catch her and bring her back to a justice of the peace in Bristol.⁸ Watchmen were asked to regularly patrol the streets and in Bristol they had watch boxes where they could be found at night.⁹ The constables' duties, when someone was brought into his office/house, were twofold: they could detain the culprit till the morning when a justice of the peace could see him, or attempt to sober him up, or they could try to mediate the situation between both parties, according to the severity of the crime. Unfortunately this way of giving justice left few records, unless the case was to be proceeded against at the Quarter Sessions, particularly as the justice who saw the culprit in the morning could also decide to let him go with a fine or try to mediate again between culprit and victim.¹⁰ Matthews in his *Directory* described the summary sessions thus: "the mayor or some of the aldermen hold a daily sessions in the council house, to hear complaints and accommodate differences, make

⁷ For more information on the Maréchaussée: Bertin-Mourot E., *La Maréchaussée en Bretagne au XVIIIe siècle, 1720-1789* (Rennes, 1969); Sturgill C. C., *L'organisation et l'administration de la maréchaussée et de la justice prévôtale dans la France des Bourbons: 1720-1730* (Vincennes, 1981); Hestault E., *La lieutenance de maréchaussée de Nantes, 1770-1791* (Maisons-Alfort, 2002).

⁸ BRO, JQS/P/107.

⁹ BRO, Town Clerk's box 1784-85.

¹⁰ King P., 'The Summary Courts and Social Relations in Eighteenth-Century England, *Past and Present*, 183 (May, 2004), pp. 125-172, p. 126. For a French example of summary justice see Castan N., 'La justice expéditive', *Annales. Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 31, n° 2 (1976), pp. 331-361.

orders, take bails and commit offenders.”¹¹ In Bristol especially, neither petty sessions nor summary courts have left any records for the end of the century.¹² There is one register available from 1728 to 1795 and it seems to record summary judgements made by justices of the peace (not constables) who condemned men and women to "light" sentences: a fine or the stocks.¹³ These people were tried most commonly for swearing or being drunk in the streets: the register lists 588 names of people committed (two or more people may have been involved in the same affair), out of which 64 of them were women. The number of women involved is quite low compared to the number of men and although most of them were condemned for swearing and being drunk, none of them were sentenced for lewdness. The cases recorded at the Gloucestershire petty sessions (parts of the northern and eastern suburbs of Bristol were attached to Gloucestershire: Clifton, parts of St Philip and Jacob and St James) did not include any reports of indecent behaviour in Bristolian pubs between 1781 and 1810 or of thefts committed by a prostitute: Quarter Sessions records remain so far the best source to analyse the relations between agents of the law and prostitutes.¹⁴

In *A Letter to Archibald Macdonald, Esq. on the Intended Plan for Reform in what is called the Police of Westminster*, the authors claimed:

Permit me, Sir, from my prejudices as an Englishman and let me add from my knowledge as a lawyer to express my objection to the word *Police*. The term is established under a government which it cannot be your intention to imitate. It

¹¹ Matthews, *New Bristol Directory*, p. 47.

¹² The first available record in BRO for the Court of Petty Session was written in 1821: BRO, JQS/I/3. The docket books, which recorded minutes and information on Quarter Sessions, have disappeared for the period 1753 to 1808.

¹³ BRO, JQS/C/2.

¹⁴ The Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society (ed.), *Summary Convictions at Petty Sessions 1781-1837*, 22 (Bristol, 2008).

is too closely connected with French system, to be admitted hastily into a system of English jurisprudence.¹⁵

It is true that the structure of the judicial system was different from one city to the other. However, instead of insisting on their differences, the similarities observed between both systems and therefore the impact they had on the relationships between prostitutes and judicial agents will be the focus of this section. The interactions between the plebeian world of these women, their networks and the judicial organisation in provincial cities still need to be studied, as both Milliot in France and Shore in England confirm in their work on *commissaires*, constables and justices of the peace.¹⁶ Watchmen, constables, *commissaires* and *archers de la ville*¹⁷ were usually the first persons to come into contact with prostitutes in a legal environment, followed by the magistrates. It also becomes quickly apparent that the most active period of their duty occurred during the night or early in the morning when for example, in Nantes, they went to expel someone from his flat or house at either seven or eight o'clock in the morning.¹⁸ The role of the beadle, so important in London in controlling the patrols of the watch and arresting vagrants, left few records in Bristol.¹⁹ Either his duties were confined to keeping the accounts of the Society of Merchant Venturers or his responsibilities and notes in arresting disorderly people have disappeared in the fire of St Peter Hospital; his role and relationship with prostitutes remains quite a mystery for

¹⁵ A Letter to Archibald Macdonald, Esq. on the Intended Plan for Reform in what is called the Police of Westminster, Second Edition, much enlarged (London, 1786), p. 7.

¹⁶ Milliot V., 'Saisir l'espace urbain: mobilité et contrôle des quartiers de police à Paris au XVIIIe siècle', *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine*, 50, n° 1 (Jan. – Mar., 2003), pp. 54-80, p. 80; Shore H., 'The Reckoning': disorderly women, informing constables and the Westminster justices, 1727-33', *Social History*, 34, n° 4 (2009), pp. 409-427, p. 410.

¹⁷ The archers having only a threatening role to play in an arrest, and therefore restricted to a minimum, their relationships with prostitutes in this situation will not be looked at.

¹⁸ AMN, FF 272.

¹⁹ About the relationships between the beadle and prostitutes see Henderson A. R., 'Female Prostitution in London, 1730-1830', Ph.D. Thesis (University of London, 1992), pp. 21-23 and *passim*.

Bristol. Even James Johnson in his *Transactions of the Corporation of the Poor* was unclear about the duties of the beadle(s). He proclaimed that in 1726 "a court" ordered the beadles A. Derrick and J. Churley to "make it their chief business to walk the streets of this City, and take up all vagrants that they meet with".²⁰ He also added that the hospital kept numerous memoranda on their beadles, which, nowadays, can be considered lost. However he also hinted that the duties of the beadles "or constables" had now (1836) changed from the initial court order of 1726: unfortunately he did not give more detail on this point.²¹

Both watchmen and constables appeared in prosecution against prostitutes in Bristol. Despite numerous complaints in Bristolian newspapers about watchmen's negligence, they appeared in the archives of the Quarter Sessions as witnesses against prostitutes, notably in case of thefts. It seems that watchmen, at least in London were usually under forty years old and capable men.²² Their wages went from ten pence to one shilling and two pence per night, depending on the season and the parish they were attached to.²³ In all likelihood the situation was the same in Bristol: aldermen controlled watchmen and constables and in 1801, two night constables were dismissed for misbehaving while "in office".²⁴ Their knowledge of the area and of the people living there could be a decisive advantage or disadvantage for the culprit in front of the JP: for example, Robert Trivett, night watchman of St Thomas, Bristol insisted on the fact that he knew Mary Jane, a 55 year old widow accused of keeping a disorderly house, and that "he has divers times

²⁰ Johnson J., *Transactions of the Corporation of the Poor in the City of Bristol* (Bristol, 1826), pp. 43-44.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

²² This figure refers to London watchmen however Bristol being a rich city, it is possible to believe that their watchmen were not, as could happen in poor parishes, old men who would have become chargeable to the city; Paley, "An Imperfect, Inadequate and Wretched System?", p. 115; see also Reynolds E., *Before the Bobbies* (Basingstoke, 1998).

²³ Reynolds E., 'Sir John Fielding, Sir Charles Whitworth, and the Westminster Night Watch Act, 1770-1775', *Criminal Justice History, Policing and War in Europe*, 16 (2002), pp. 1-20, p. 6.

²⁴ BRO, 1719/1.

driven out both men and women out of the said house at unreasonable time at night".²⁵ The system of watchmen, if implemented efficiently, was "an extremely flexible instrument of policing" as explained by Paley, thanks to the men's knowledge of the area and the quick response they could offer to victims. However in Bristol, it is true that the watch remained mainly as a link between victims and magistrates, unlike London where, already in 1774, the Night Watch Act gave an incentive to watchmen to act "more" as a preventive police (however their duties were still based on a reactive system).²⁶

Alongside the watchmen were the constables, nominated for a year in their ward, who worked unpaid and were sworn into office by the magistrate, and who therefore had the power to arrest and detain any culprit.²⁷ They acted as magistrates, deciding if the culprit had to go to jail, until a JP could see him, or if he could go home after a mediation between the two parties. Constables were second in line, after the watchmen, in confronting prostitutes if they had been caught stealing, and the women were usually brought before the constables either by the victim or by the watchman. Their duties however remained manifold: they were meant to check, for example, the weights and measures used during the market or the cleaning of the streets and even record cases of bastardy.²⁸ The constables lived in their ward which accentuated the links they had with the population of the district. This proximity to the population had its disadvantages: corruption and the partiality of the constables came in for frequent criticism. Heather Shore explains how proximity to the local community could ruin officials' liability when

²⁵ BRO, JQS/P/108.

²⁶ Paley, 'An Imperfect, Inadequate and Wretched System?', p. 105.

²⁷ They did not receive a wage *per se* but they received some fees from different duties they performed (i.e.: control of the weight and measures on the market).

²⁸ BRO, JQS/P/45; see also Colquhoun P., *A Treatise on the Functions and Duties of a Constable* (London, 1803).

accusations of bribing became public.²⁹ The necessity for both watchmen and constables to earn other wages in addition to what they received for their duty explains the fact that they usually had two or three jobs at the same time. Because of the elective nature of the post of constable it usually meant that the man who was nominated already had a source of income and therefore the role of constable could be seen as a burden. The habit of employing another man to perform these duties was quite common in London and probably in Bristol too.³⁰ Joshua Gardner, night constable of the ward of St Evans, was probably in charge for more than nine years (it remains a supposition), as he was recorded as night constable and asked to testify in 1787, when William Harvey from Lympson in Somerset was robbed by Ann Roberts, and was again called as a witness in 1790 and in 1796 for the murder committed by Elizabeth Vowles.³¹ It is unclear if Joshua Gardner was a substitute or duly nominated for the charge of constable but he remained many years at this post, giving the impression that the functions of constable became part of his professional career as well as his civic duty.³² Making a career of the office of constable was not unrealistic: Joshua Gardner was preceded by Henry Humphries who first appeared in a case against two prostitutes in 1782, as a watchman of St Stephen ward.³³ William Humphries gave a statement on Rebecca Farell's and Ann Swan's robbery of an Indian mariner in 1782. He was then asked to give information on Jane Powell who kept a disorderly house in St Stephen's ward in 1785.³⁴ In 1789, he had become night constable of St Stephen ward and was a witness in a robbery committed by Mary Peters and again in 1792 against Hannah Hargrove.³⁵

²⁹ Shore H., "The Reckoning", p. 425. See also, King P., *Crime, Justice and Discretion in England, 1740-1820* (Oxford, 2000).

³⁰ Reynolds, 'Sir John Fielding', p. 4.

³¹ BRO, JQS/P/104; 110; 123; 140.

³² The night constable of Trinity ward in 1790 was Joseph Gardner (BRO, JQS/P/123) and was possibly a kin of Joshua. However the lack of studies on constables in provincial cities leaves us without answers.

³³ BRO, JQS/P/73; 76.

³⁴ BRO, JQS/P/95.

³⁵ BRO, JQS/P/115; 127.

Henry Humphries' career as a "police officer" reinforces the argument that the watchmen and constables were closely linked with their district and had a deep knowledge of the people and affairs that occurred in these parts of the cities.

For the last twenty years of the century, constables and watchmen were asked twenty-two times to appear as witnesses against prostitutes or tenants of disorderly house, out of eighty-eight cases. It should be noted that the amount received to give evidence went from £10 to £40 in certain cases, which is more than a week's wages, which explained why it could be lucrative for them to be summoned as witnesses. However if the case was dropped and the accused discharged, as happened in seven of these cases, the witnesses did not receive any money. Their testimonies were in most cases similar to the ones of the neighbours if it concerned the prosecution of tenants of disorderly houses; Catherine Webb, who was a prostitute in Hannah Hargrove's house on Silver Street said herself: "the constables and watchmen have frequently gone thither to put an end to such disturbance".³⁶ In cases of robbery, they were usually on the side of the victims: Samuel Bryant, night constable of Trinity ward and Thomas Chilcot claimed that they heard a man crying murder and a woman cursing and swearing "damn his eyes, bundle him downstairs".³⁷ The victim was Thomas Cole, servant, who was said to have been robbed by Mary Jenkins, Sarah Kuhn and Elizabeth Vowles. According to the constable, he was not much in liquor and the contrary would not have been, according to Shore, favourable for the victim.³⁸ The three women were taken to the Bridewell however, and despite the constable's and watchman's testimonies, the women were discharged by the magistrate.

³⁶ BRO, JQS/P/127.

³⁷ BRO, JQS/P/110.

³⁸ Shore, "The Reckoning", p. 413.

Watchmen and constables could be summoned as witnesses in cases of theft committed by a prostitute but also against tenants of disorderly houses. Although judicial actions against disorderly houses were periodically ordered by the magistrates, their efficacy remained limited. Actions against disorderly houses were carried out throughout the eighteenth century: under the Society for Reformation of Manners at the end of the seventeenth century, again in 1749-1752 and in 1767.³⁹ Again in 1786-1788, Robert Trivett of St Thomas' ward was a witness in three prosecutions against tenants of disorderly houses.⁴⁰ These actions against disorderly houses may have been in response to a need for the aldermen to unite the inhabitants against a common enemy. However these campaigns were rarely successful, if the final sentences given to tenants and the continuous existence of disorderly houses in Bristol are taken into account. In 1749, 1750 and 1752, when raids were launched against disorderly houses, it appears that the houses were emptied of all women but no further action was taken.⁴¹ In 1767, in St Stephen's parish, houses were raided in search of prostitutes. But only twenty women were caught and most of them were released the day after their arrest, except six of them who were sent to the Bridewell for a month.⁴² It was difficult for constables and justices of the peace to condemn prostitutes if they were not caught in the act of being "lewd", therefore they tended to sentence the tenants of the house instead of the female customers or lodgers. As Peter King has explained, London was the only place where constables and watchmen were specifically asked to look for prostitutes. In the Essex sample he analysed (Colchester being the biggest town in the sample), the number of women condemned to the house of correction by a justice of the peace in summary court for being lewd (in this case it referred to the number of bastards they bore) in

³⁹ BRO, Town Clerk's box, 1748-50; BRL, *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 16 September 1752, 20, 27 June, 4, 11, 18 July and 8 August 1767.

⁴⁰ BRO, JQS/P/99; 108; Town Clerk's box 1788-9.

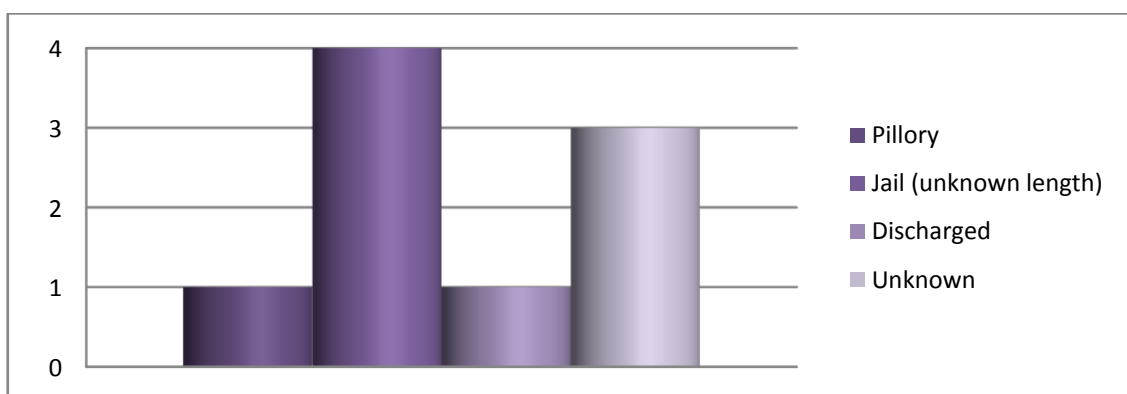
⁴¹ BRO, Town Clerk's box, 1748-50; BRL, *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 16 September 1752.

⁴² BRL, *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 20, 27 June, 4, 11, 18 July and 8 August 1767.

1753-4 and 1788-93 did not exceed three out of 302 cases.⁴³ Bristol was at least eight times larger than Colchester at the end of the eighteenth century and it would have been interesting to be able to compare these statistics; however, it remains important to underline the fact that prostitutes, with the exception of London, were not targeted on account of their trade but for having multiple bastards.

According to the number of times (twenty-two) that constables or watchmen were asked to be witness, it appears that prosecutions concerning disorderly houses (nine cases) were almost equal to prosecutions for robbery (eleven cases).⁴⁴ The two other affairs were linked with a riot that occurred in the city centre in 1792 and with a case of murder in 1796.⁴⁵ The sentences given against the culprits are sometimes unknown and it is difficult to draw relevant statistics from the proceedings. Nevertheless, out of nine cases against tenants of disorderly house between 1778 and 1792 which involved constables or watchmen, three tenants were jailed for "want of sureties", one was sent to the pillory for an hour, one was sent to jail, one discharged and three sentences remain unknown.

Figure V-1. Convictions against tenants of disorderly house in Bristol, with officers of the law as witness, 1778-1792



Sources: BRO, JQS/P/63; 95; 107; 108; 110; 123; 127.

⁴³ King P., 'The Summary Courts and Social Relations', p. 159.

⁴⁴ BRO, JQS/P/63; 71; 76; 95; 99; 104; 107; 108; 110; 115; 123; 127.

⁴⁵ BRO, JQS/P/129; 140.

In consequence, it seems that the presence of an agent of the law as a witness did not have an important impact on the decision taken by the JPs and it accentuates the fact that they were testifying for the potential money they could gain out of it. Their effectiveness could sometimes be doubted: in 1778 Matthew Good, night constable of St Michael ward (or watchman, the record is unclear), was refused entry to the house of Elizabeth Davis, whose neighbours had complained of disturbances.⁴⁶ Good's recourse to find out what was going on inside the house was to look through the keyhole. He then testified to seeing men and women "going upstairs", but he confessed that he did not know if there were beds in any of the rooms, which meant that he had no proof that they were "lewd people". Elizabeth spent some time in jail till she found "Sureties" and was then released.

2. The role of the police in prosecutions against prostitutes in Nantes

The duty of *commissaire* in Nantes covered both constable and watchman's roles.⁴⁷ Because of the legal framework within which they operated, *commissaires* in Nantes left numerous archives, notably reports of their activities during the night. Since 1708, the office of *commissaire* and *huissiers de police* had been attached to the Bureau (city council) of Nantes, whereas initially these offices had been under the control of the king: they were bought by the mayor and aldermen for eighteen thousand *livres*.⁴⁸ The office of *lieutenant général* was also bought by the Bureau but it took longer to be accepted by the king: the *lettres patentes* of 1775 confirmed that "*l'exercice de la police de la ville de Nantes, sera fait à l'avenir par le maire*", finally uniting supervision of the

⁴⁶ BRO, JQS/P/63.

⁴⁷ AMN, FF 112-113.

⁴⁸ AMN, BB 171.

police and political considerations.⁴⁹ According to Danet, Nantes' *commissaires* came from the middling sort: two socially important groups formed the *commissaires* during the eighteenth century, "*le monde de la basoche*" (legal offices) and "*le monde de la boutique*".⁵⁰ The *commissaires* were paid three hundred livres per year and these wages did not increase till the Revolution, despite inflation and the complaints of the policemen. The professionalisation of the police was not complete till mid-eighteenth century, when *commissaires* were ordered to have only one job. Indeed, even after 1752, *commissaires* needed to find other revenues to have a decent income, which was comparable to the situation of constables in England: their wife for example could be supervising a shop, increasing therefore the revenues of the household. Similarly, two *commissaires* between 1722 and 1735 resigned their office because they were too busy with their own affairs.⁵¹ However after 1736, Danet notes that the candidates for the office of *commissaires* explained that they wished to become *commissaires* to be able to support their family.⁵² The duty of *commissaire* started to be considered as a full-time job. But like the constables in England, they received some money by performing other duties as well as a quarter of all fines received by the courts (the remaining amount went to the hospitals of the city).⁵³ As a consequence, their integrity was put under suspicion. L.-S. Mercier claimed with acerbity: "*de là, les plaisanteries populaires, qui attribuent à leurs mains la faculté de recevoir à la fois la chair, le poisson, le vin, l'huile et l'écu de la raccrocheuse.*"⁵⁴ This quotation criticized their honesty but it also puts under a new light the role of the *commissaire*, according to popular culture: "*raccrocheuse*" was another word for prostitute, and therefore it implies that the

⁴⁹ AMN, BB 169.

⁵⁰ Danet V., 'Les *commissaires* de police de la ville de Nantes au XVIII^e siècle (1720-1792)', *Annales de Bretagne et des Pays de l'Ouest*, 116, n°4 (2009), pp. 39-72, p. 42.

⁵¹ Danet, 'Les *commissaires* de police de la ville de Nantes', p. 44.

⁵² Ibid., p. 44.

⁵³ AMN, FF 65; 91 on their duties.

⁵⁴ Mercier L.-S., *Tableau de Paris*, tome 9 (Amsterdam, 1782), p. 129.

commissaire received some money from these women, probably to leave them in peace. However this form of corruption has not been proved so far in Nantes.⁵⁵

In 1761, Jean Moreau, master currier and neighbour of La Couilliaud, a single woman who was living in rue du Bois-Tortu in St Nicolas parish, complained to the Nantes magistrates about the behaviour of the young woman.⁵⁶ He explained that she behaved in a 'very disorderly manner', receiving 'men and other lewd women' in the apartment she shared with her mother and father. As he and the other neighbours were constantly in fear for their life, he requested that the magistrates should order her expulsion from the building. In response to this plea, the *procureur du Roi* asked the *commissaire* Bar to look into the situation and the latter interviewed her neighbours. It quickly became apparent that La Couilliaud had already been evicted from other places for the same reason: she had formerly lived in the Cour des Richards, rue du Puits d'Argent, rue du Moulin, rue des Petits Capucins, near the Hôtel de Ville "and in other places" in the preceding years. Each time she was ordered to leave by a *commissaire* and each time the same complaints were made by her new neighbours. But it was only on 13 August 1761 that she was finally sentenced to three months imprisonment in the *hôpital général*. This anecdote highlights two important aspects of prostitution in a port city: rarely in eighteenth-century Nantes did prostitutes openly confront the authority of the *commissaires*, the main figures of law enforcement in the districts of the city. Relations between the young women and the police never reached the point of "open war", and they easily complied with the order of expulsion of the *commissaires*. On the other hand, eighteenth-century *commissaires* did not actively pursue prostitutes: they mainly limited their sentences to eviction from their apartment, if complaints against them were

⁵⁵ AMN, FF 282 for their requests in 1751 and 1784 for increased wages.

⁵⁶ AMN, FF 272.

too numerous. But this attitude of laissez-faire would change towards the end of the century: the Revolution, and more importantly the beginning of the civil war in Vendée and *Chouannerie* in parts of Brittany in 1793, were the starting point in Nantes for a campaign of suspicion against prostitutes, which would eventually lead to the first lists of prostitutes in 1804-1806.⁵⁷

Historians interested in French port cities in the early modern period such as Poussou for Bordeaux, considered prostitutes as being part of the 'vagrant category' and did not distinguish them from the study of the poor and/or criminals of these cities, expecting them to be treated as such by the police.⁵⁸ However, both Benabou and Conner argue in favour of a change of mentality leading to the criminalisation of prostitutes during the eighteenth century, in Paris.⁵⁹ Conner in particular articulates her arguments about the revolutionary period and claims that the national government avoided dealing with the issues linked with prostitution and that in response, the police decided to 'eliminate its visibility'. But her arguments can only be applied with restrictions to the city of Nantes, as there was much less direct surveillance of the prostitutes, and no large purpose-built institutions to deal with them. This section will therefore analyse and underline the evolution of the attitudes of the police and especially the *commissaires* towards prostitutes after the start of the Revolution and demonstrate how changes at a local/district level led to a city-wide listing of the prostitutes at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This shift in attitudes towards prostitutes is not only perceptible in

⁵⁷ About the riots in Vendée: Martin J.-C., *La Vendée et la Révolution: Accepter la mémoire pour écrire l'histoire* (Paris, 2007); Gérard A., *Par principe d'humanité: la Terreur et la Vendée* (Paris, 1999); Dupuy R., *La Bretagne sous la Révolution et l'Empire (1789-1815)* (Rennes, 2004); Dupuy R., *De la Révolution à la Chouannerie, Paysans en Bretagne 1788-1794* (Paris, 1988).

⁵⁸ Poussou J.-P., *Bordeaux et le Sud-Ouest au XVIIIème siècle: Croissance économique et Attraction urbaine* (Paris, 1983), pp. 151-81.

⁵⁹ Benabou E.-M., *La Prostitution et la Police des Mœurs à Paris au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1987); Susan Conner, 'Politics, Prostitution, and the Pox in Revolutionary Paris, 1789-1799', *Journal of Social History*, 22, n° 4 (Summer, 1989), pp. 713-34, p. 729.

Nantes; it announces the regulation and eventually criminalisation of prostitutes in western countries in the nineteenth century.

The relations between *commissaires* and prostitutes were structured around two different categories of prosecutions. The *commissaires* responded to complaints from neighbours or family about the women's behaviour as well as carrying out routine patrols that brought them into direct contact with prostitutes. Patrols were made daily in order to check that the gates of alleys were shut, that taverns and inns closed on time, that no alcohol was served during Mass and that lodging-keepers kept their book up to date.⁶⁰ The reports of these patrols offer an interesting insight into the attitude of the *commissaires* towards prostitutes: even when meeting prostitutes and their customers in their home, or in a tavern, *commissaires* simply reported their presence but did not take any action against them.⁶¹ In most cases they did not even take their names.

These attitudes reveal two characteristics of the mentality of Nantes *commissaires* in the eighteenth century. Firstly it appears that prostitution was not considered a crime, if no one was offended by it or in other words, if no complaint was filed. *Commissaires'* duties concerned public order and by definition, if the order was not disturbed, their action was not required. Secondly their attitude towards prostitutes did not reveal any 'unprofessionalism'. Of course their reports recorded only one side of the story, and it is possible that they behaved differently on the spot, but it remains interesting to notice that they did not blame or stigmatise prostitutes for having received money for sexual intercourse. The reports of their patrol were read by the clerk and possibly by a

⁶⁰ AMN, FF 216-220; the gates had to be closed for security reasons to prevent beggars and vagrants to sleep in these alleys but also to prevent criminals in general to withdraw in these places and be out of sight after dark.

⁶¹ AMN, FF 217-220.

magistrate if the affair was to go to court and it is plausible that these people from the upper middle-class would have been sympathetic to the condemnation of immorality. *Commissaires* nevertheless limited their writings to expressions like '*femmes du monde*' or '*filles publiques*' and no derogatory term was recorded. Admittedly, the expression '*femme du monde*' did not carry positive connotations and it implied lewd and disorderly behaviour,⁶² but rather than targeting the women for such behaviour, the reports underlined the fact that the neighbours had rather been disturbed by noises and drunken visitors.

Neighbours' testimonies were usually with very similar content from one testimony to another, probably reflecting the clerk's mediation of their testimonies. The number of witnesses rose from four to thirteen in an important affair involving thirteen women (without counting the information of the accused).⁶³ If the *commissaire* was convinced of the necessity of either sending a woman to the Sanitat usually at the request of the family, or asking her to leave her house, he would then arrest or interrogate her. It seems that in most cases, prostitutes were willing to behave in accordance with the *commissaires'* orders. If asked to leave, they would do so without protest, probably because they knew that they risked jail sentences if they resisted. In only one instance did the prostitutes and the tenant of the house try to escape through the back door: La Galard and her sister were renting a house in St Nicolas parish but a neighbour complained of their behaviour: "*elle mène une vie désordonnée et faisoit une maison publique dudit lieu de Belain*".⁶⁴ When Augustin Albert, *commissaire*, went at seven o'clock on 11 February 1772 to remove them, the servant refused to open the door while

⁶² Shoemaker R., 'Print and the Female Voice: Representations of Women's Crime in London, 1690–1735', *Gender and History*, 22, n° 1 (April 2010), pp. 75–91, p. 77.

⁶³ AMN, FF 272.

⁶⁴ AMN, FF 272.

La Galard and two or three other women flew away. Workers of the Corderie told the archers that "*les pigeonnes sont sortie avec des paquets sous les bras*": the *commissaire* ordered the sister and the servant who both stayed behind to leave, which they readily agreed to do but when he checked the inventory of the place he noticed that "*il manque deux rideaux blancs, six couverts d'argent, six cuillers en argent, une montre d'or, huit douzaine de serviettes, vingt nappes de table et quatre taies d'oreillers*". Because of the importance of the inventory, it appears that the house was not only a flat but was meant to accommodate, at least for dinner, some guests. Unfortunately the outcome of the case is unknown and I have failed to find any follow-up of this robbery.

Rarely did the prostitutes confront the authority of the constables or *commissaires* and "incidents" in response to the actions of these officers remained generally on a "lighter" level. In 1767, when the constables of Bristol raided different houses considered as disorderly in the centre of the city, witnesses related how prostitutes were "rescued" by men who caught them jumping from the upper window and carried them away.⁶⁵ However, more violent cases of insults were recorded, notably in Nantes where the landlady of a tavern told the police to "*aller se faire foutre*" or when Matthew Good was refused access to Elizabeth Davis' house and she shouted at him that "she did not care a damn for [him] nor the mayor" and finally "damned [him] for a son of a bitch".⁶⁶ But the persons insulting and refusing access to the officers were in each case landlords of the premises and, in parallel to Shore's comments on London, it appears more like "a householder protecting [his] home, rather simply a prostitute or a disorderly housekeeper, or indeed a criminal offender, resisting arrest."⁶⁷ But overall, the relationships between officers of the law and prostitutes or tenants of disorderly houses

⁶⁵ BRL, *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 20th, 27th of June, 4th, 11th, 18th July and 8th August 1767.

⁶⁶ AMN, FF 286; BRO, JQS/P/63.

⁶⁷ Shore, "The Reckoning", p. 416.

seem to have been more or less cordial. In Nantes as well as in Bristol, officers remained in position for more than a year and therefore, as they lived in the district they controlled, they had close connections with the inhabitants and a detailed knowledge of the different public houses and inns and their tenants. These constant interactions, it may be argued, must have eased the judicial process by encouraging mediation and summary justice between the different actors and reducing the number of affairs going to court.

3. Impacts of the Revolution on the attitudes of the police

However this situation was mainly characteristic of the period under monarchy, especially in Nantes. The Revolution, and the violent Chouans uprisings in Brittany and the civil war in Vendée, were the starting point in Nantes for a campaign of suspicion against prostitutes, which would eventually lead to their *mise en carte*. The contrast here between Bristol and Nantes becomes apparent. England faced a crime wave in the 1780's after the War of Independence in America was over and troops were discharged back in Britain.⁶⁸ However after 1792-93 and the start of the French wars, crimes, especially against property, decreased whereas suspicion against foreigners increased.⁶⁹ But, contrary to what happened in Nantes, Bristol constables and watchmen do not appear to have stepped up their search and condemnation of disorderly behaviour or suspicion of prostitutes. Admittedly, this is based upon inferences drawn from the only available surviving records of the Quarter Sessions and what is known about the condemnation for disorderly behaviour. A bill was passed in the Parliament in 1792 against rogues and vagabonds and disorderly people but it does not seem to have had an impact on Bristol policy. If the records of St Peter's hospital were still available, they

⁶⁸ Reynolds, 'Sir John Fielding', p. 111.

⁶⁹ For example, 29 Messidor An III: a law against Englishmen was passed in Nantes; AMN, I2 C37 D11.

might have offered more precise information on the number of women jailed in the workhouse for disorderly behaviour.⁷⁰ But the actions taken by the Corporation of the Poor against vagrants in the 1790's did not undergo any change and it appears that the Corporation was not as responsive to the evangelical revival and Wilberforce's campaigns as they were a century before, with the creation of the Society for the Reformation of Manners. A Society for the Suppression of Vice was apparently created in Bristol at the beginning of 1800 and an important religious revival was experienced in the decade 1810's but it did not influence the Corporation's politics.⁷¹ What should be underlined is the fact that Bristol did not see an increase of prosecution against prostitutes or tenants of disorderly houses after the beginning of the Revolution, even though some members of the upper middle-class and nobility might have been interested in a revival of a form of Society for the Reformation of Manners. At a lower level, from watchmen to local justices of the peace, the number of prosecutions against prostitutes remained equal to what they were during the ten years preceding 1790, or decreased.

In Nantes however the relations between prostitutes and police officers took a turn for the worse. The upheavals of the Revolution led to the reform of the municipal

⁷⁰ However this supposition is to be moderated as Johnson explained that vagrant and idle and disorderly were seldom mentioned in these records and Butcher insisted on the fact that, at the end of the eighteenth century, the workhouse was more considered as a hospital than a workhouse in which able-bodied men and women were confined. According to Butcher, 'the proportion of 'impotents' increased, until in 1820, 128 of the 436 inmates were classified as past work, 81 as children, and 97 as sick or insane', making a total of only 130 able bodied in the workhouse. Johnson J., *An Address to the Inhabitants of Bristol, on the Subject of the Poor-Rates: with a View to their Reduction, and the Ameliorating the Present Condition of our Poor* (Bristol, 1820), p. 73; Butcher E. E. (ed.), *Bristol Corporation of the Poor, 1696-1834* (Bristol, 1932), p. 10.

⁷¹ See Barry J. (ed.), *Reformation and Revival in Eighteenth-Century Bristol* (Bristol, 1994); Dresser M., 'Protestants, Catholics and Jews: Religious Difference and Political Status in Bristol, 1750-1850', in Dresser M. and Ollerenshaw P. (eds), *The making of Modern Bristol* (Tiverton, 1996), pp. 96-124; Brown F. K., *Fathers of the Victorians: The Age of Wilberforce* (Cambridge, 1961), p. 436. The society against vice is also discussed in Roberts M. J. D., 'The Society for the Suppression of Vice and its Early Critics, 1802-1812', *The Historical Journal*, 26, n° 1 (March, 1983). I have been unable to find archives of this society.

institutions and the reorganisation of the police from 1789 onwards.⁷² On 28 July 1789 a committee of thirty-one members "whose duties refer to order, security and public peace" was created.⁷³ The new spatial division of the city into districts, instead of parishes, and an increase in the number of *commissaires*, from four up to eighteen before 1800, allowed the police to control the various districts more thoroughly, under the general supervision of an inspector; the police was meant to follow the orders of the mayor.⁷⁴ On 22 July 1791, the King and the Assemblée Nationale promulgated a law on the organisation of the *police municipale* and *police correctionnelle*: this law defined the role and functions of the *commissaires* and officers of justice, notably the new *juge de paix*, who acted to some degree as a justice of the peace.⁷⁵ *Commissaires* were ordered to keep records of the inhabitants of the city and to maintain public order; they had therefore, as indicated in Article X of the law, free access at any time '*dans les lieux livrés notoirement à la débauche*', implying that common knowledge of debauchery gave them access to private houses.

Overall their duties, according to this law, changed little from what they had formerly been; however in Nantes, the city council seems to have put an emphasis on the control and supervision of 'foreigners' and beggars, highlighting the atmosphere of suspicion which reigned in the port city. Indeed, whereas the early years of the Revolution did not

⁷² The Carrier episode, from September 1793 to February 1794, which saw the massacre of thousands of people from Nantes and its surroundings, will not be considered in this section as a parenthesis from the rest of the decade. This can be explained by the fact that the *tribunal révolutionnaire* instituted by Carrier, which condemned potential traitors of the Republic, quickly stopped keeping records and used summary justice, making it impossible to know the names, professions or circumstances in which people were arrested. Therefore, rather than looking closely at this violent period, it is the atmosphere of the decade that will be taking into account to explain the change of attitudes towards prostitutes. On Carrier's actions in Nantes see: Dupuy R., *La Bretagne sous la Révolution et l'Empire (1789-1815)* (Rennes, 2004); Lallié A., *Etudes sur le Terreur à Nantes* (Cholet, 2009); Brégeon, J.-J., *Carrier et la Terreur nantaise* (Paris, 1987).

⁷³ AMN, BB 112.

⁷⁴ Danet, 'Les *commissaires* de police de la ville de Nantes', p. 54.

⁷⁵ AMN, II C1 D1; on the new role of the *juges de paix*, see Petit J.-G. (dir.), *Une Justice de Proximité: la Justice de Paix 1790 - 1958* (Paris, 2003).

bring any national regulation of prostitution, diverse police regulations were to have an impact on it and gradually changed the attitudes of the police towards prostitutes. On 19 October 1790, an *ordonnance de police concernant les mendiants* was published by the Bureau: passports for poor foreigners and non-native people living in Nantes for less than six months or a year, whether from the kingdom or not, had to be collected from an officer and the beggars had to follow a specific route to go back to their place of birth.⁷⁶ Similarly, the poor held in the *hôpital général*, who were of another nationality or had lived in Nantes for less than six months before being sent to the Sanitat were to be excluded from the hospital and sent back home. Because of the harshness of this *ordonnance*, it is likely that the women who did not want to be sent away from Nantes lied about their profession and means of living: lists of poor sent back to their parish of origins can be found in the archives, they were arrested for begging and vagrancy but none confessed being a prostitute.⁷⁷ In addition, on 27 June 1792, the Convention Nationale proclaimed some '*mesures pour l'extinction de la mendicité*' which forbade begging in the streets, under the sentence of being arrested and jailed.⁷⁸ Again in August 1791, the municipality, following the example of Paris, lamented the fact that the city "notices an important increase in foreigners. Nantes sees a vast number of unknown faces coming into her bosom on a daily basis. This would not be an issue if, at these moving times, they did not disappear from the police administration."⁷⁹

Landlords had to keep a register of their lodgers and they had to declare them to the *commissaire* within twenty-four hours; however it seems that, according to the same document, some people did not stay more than twenty-four hours in one place in order

⁷⁶ AMN, I1 C68 D1.

⁷⁷ AMN, I1 C68 D1.

⁷⁸ AMN, I1 C68 D1.

⁷⁹ AMN, I2 C6 D1.

to avoid being registered. The municipality claimed that they feared these people would prepare some '*secousses contre-révolutionnaires*' or in other words, 'anti-revolutionary troubles', and targeted these 'foreigners' as a potential danger. In order to solve this problem, *commissaires* had to check the registry of the lodging-keepers twice a day and if the latter had not conformed to the law, they were fined and sentenced to prison for twenty-four hours. The Bureau also encouraged denunciations under Article VI of this *ordonnance*: citizens were encouraged to come and give the name or description of anyone who "did not look like" an inhabitant of the city and they were not asked to give or sign their name in doing so. These regulations were published again in 1797 (An V), insisting on the need for the *commissaires* to look for suspicious people, when one of the last threatening upheavals of the Chouans occurred.⁸⁰ Even though *commissaires* and magistrates often complained of their lack of time, or of the inefficiency of the people working under their supervision, some lists of '*brigands*', or so assumed, linked with the riot have survived, as well as lists of prisoners jailed for being nobles and nuns.⁸¹ Admittedly, these lists have little to do with the prosecution of prostitutes, as not enough information has been recorded against these labourers or seamstresses who were jailed as '*brigands*'. But the significant number of women jailed in the prisons of Nantes during the first five years of the Revolution shows how dramatic the situation was and how easy it was to be arrested: there were up to seven hundred women in 1793 in the prison of the Bon Pasteur alone, whereas it could accommodate only two hundred people.⁸²

⁸⁰ AMN, I2 C2 D11; for a comprehensive chronology of the events, see Secher R., *Le Genocide franco-français, La Vendée - Vengée* (Paris, 1986).

⁸¹ Archives du Département de Loire-Atlantique, 2 Y Registre des prisonniers du Bon Pasteur et du Sanitat; AMN, I2 C2 D11.

⁸² Lallié A., *Les Prisons de Nantes pendant la Révolution* (Nantes, 1883), p. 45.

Commissaires in charge after 1789 were not always new officials.⁸³ A certain amount of structural continuity remained, given that out of six *commissaires* in 1792, two had already been in charge before 1789 and the *commissaire-inspecteur* Louis-Charles Bar (junior) who supervised the *police municipale* was chosen in 1790, after a career of twenty years as a *commissaire*.⁸⁴ Therefore, despite the attempts of the Revolution to sweep away the monarchical organisation, it appears that there was continuity in the administration of the police. But despite this continuity of members in the police, the pace quickened and the number of arrests or at least of interrogations of prostitutes increased during the first years of the Revolution. On 29 Prairial An II the municipality decided to open a house of correction for prostitutes only: "*il sera établi dans la commune de Nantes, une ou plusieurs maisons de correction pour y renfermer les femmes et filles convaincues de mauvaise vie, pour les rappeler à leur devoir, à la pudeur et aux bonnes mœurs*", in an attempt to "re-educate" these women to be good citizens and "to remind them of morality and good manners".⁸⁵ A replica of the model of the workhouse or *hôpital général*, proposed by the city council, it seemed to be an attempt to rationalize the work of the monarchy by confining prostitutes and making them work.⁸⁶ The citizens Bridon and Jollin were sent to find a house to accommodate Nantes prostitutes and on 8 Thermidor An II provided the city council with an ancient nunnery, the *Maison des Pénitentes*, which at that time had already been converted into a prison.⁸⁷ The city council seems to have anticipated a large number of prostitutes, as initially it raised the possibility of "one or many houses" in which to jail these women. However it appears that despite the fact that the *Maison des Pénitentes*, which had

⁸³ Danet, 'Les *commissaires* de police de la ville de Nantes', pp. 57-8.

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 57-8.

⁸⁵ AMN, I1 C61 D5.

⁸⁶ AMN, 1 D11.

⁸⁷ AMN, I1 C61 D5.

originally been inhabited by twenty-four ex-prostitutes,⁸⁸ was never used for prostitutes only. Indeed on 30 Vendémiaire An VIII (1799), the Bureau ordered the *commissaires* to send to the Bouffay prison any woman "who would be seen soliciting in the streets or behaving in a disorderly manner".⁸⁹ Unfortunately the registers of the prison, although still available, do not give any information on the reason why the prisoners were jailed; therefore it has not been possible to identify the prostitutes or to produce statistics on the number of prostitutes incarcerated as a result of this order.⁹⁰

In addition to new laws or debates concerning prostitutes, actions "on the field" intensified: the number of women who were arrested and interrogated for vagrancy and accused at the same time of living in debauchery rose compared to the situation before the Revolution. Indeed before 1789, prostitutes recorded in the archives were usually found in their lodgings, therefore they were not arrested for vagrancy. It is true that they were asked to leave the city if they were accused of being disorderly and had not been born in Nantes, however it seems that this sanction was rarely respected, according to contemporary reports. Nevertheless, because of the risks of vagrants coming into Nantes to foment a riot after 1789-92, at least according to the municipality, any person who was not an inhabitant of Nantes could be targeted as suspect.⁹¹ In consequence, twelve prostitutes appeared in the records alongside vagrants and were recorded not only as beggars, but also as "lewd women" and were sent back to their parish of origin.⁹² This is interesting as it shows that being a prostitute was superimposed onto the charge of vagrancy, whereas before the Revolution, women were arrested and sent to the Sanitat

⁸⁸ Twelve of them initially chose to become nuns and the other twelve were imprisoned there because of their families; Grégoire P., *Etat du diocèse de Nantes en 1790* (Nantes, 1882), p. 68.

⁸⁹ AMN, I1 C61 D5; this declaration by the Bureau is very similar to the English Contagious Disease Act of 1864-67 as it gave to the police the possibility to arrest almost any woman if they judged her behaviour immoral.

⁹⁰ ADLA, 2 Y Registre d'écrou de la prison du Bouffay.

⁹¹ AMN, I1 C68 D1.

⁹² AMN, I1 C68 D4; I1 C68 D5.

under the sole category of "vagrant".⁹³ Although Peuchet claimed in 1789 that prostitution is a "blight very similar to begging", in the prosecution archives before the Revolution, these two denominations were often dissimilar.⁹⁴

In parallel with the designation of some of the female beggars as prostitutes, the *commissaires* recorded the names and details of foreigners lodging in inns and rented rooms in some parts of Nantes.⁹⁵ The duty of checking the '*déclarations des logeurs*' by the *commissaires* was not an innovation of the Revolution; however, instead of limiting their job to fining the lodging-keepers who did not update their books, the *commissaires* made two lists (one in 1791 and one in 1795) not only of the lodging-keepers but also of the lodgers; it is this latter requirement which should be considered as an innovation.⁹⁶ However the shortness of the lists underlined the inefficiency of this system. Indeed in this important register, only a hundred names were recorded and mainly over just one month (Ventôse). It becomes clear that the task asked of the *commissaires* was soon viewed as impossible by the officers and therefore forgotten. Nevertheless on the short list of 1791, seventeen names of prostitutes appear out of fifty-six names in total (only twenty-three were female names): for example, at 87 rue Bignon Lestard, in Jeanne Uriolle's house, lodged Renée Mommier, Perrine Ugost, Anne Pélagie Vion, Jeanne Landell and Jeanne Prou, all of them registered as '*femme du monde*'.⁹⁷ These lists are particularly interesting as no official attempt had been made at this time to record

⁹³ Similarly, Benabou's study on Parisian prostitutes does not include vagrancy as a crime commonly linked with prostitution when recording the reason why prostitutes were jailed: Benabou, *La Prostitution*, pp. 30-39 and pp. 65-72. See also Lorgnier J., 'Malheureuses et importunes à renfermer. Les femmes dans les premières procédures administratives de mendicité diligentées par la maréchaussée à Lille (1768-1772)', *Histoire, Economie et Société*, 2005, 24, n°3, pp. 399-410, who recorded only five begging women out of 136 arrested for being *femme de mauvaise vie* between 1768 and 1772.

⁹⁴ Quoted in Juratic S., 'Solitude féminine et travail des femmes à Paris à la fin du XVIIIe siècle', *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome. Moyen-Age, Temps modernes*, 99, n° 2 (1987), pp. 879-900, p. 897.

⁹⁵ AMN, I1 C68 D5.

⁹⁶ AMN, I2 R31.

⁹⁷ AMN, I2 R31.

prostitutes. Their names were followed by twelve others, who also lived in lodging-houses in the same street. Despite the fact that this list does not reflect the reality of the number of prostitutes in Nantes, nor their location, it highlights the fact that prostitutes were beginning to be seen as suspects: indeed, five of them were recorded in this register as foreigners, whereas they claimed to be natives of Nantes.

4. Towards the process of regulation

Overall, the condemnation of prostitutes for disorderly behaviour intensified and the need for their control was made more and more explicit; the inspector's registers on *commissaires'* daily routine accumulated observations on the behaviour of prostitutes: between 29 January to 17 July 1806, eight women were described as "*femmes du monde*" and were ordered to leave the city or to respect the peace.⁹⁸ The duty of the inspector was to supervise the *commissaires* but by getting involved in daily tasks, the inspector's attitude highlights the importance put on controlling prostitutes' behaviour. Another example, on 8 July 1806, the inspector wrote to the *commissaire* of the *section* 14 to order him to arrest prostitutes who were not declared in the book of two female tenants, Catton and La Boure.⁹⁹ These two women were considered by the inspector to have "*aucun droit à votre confiance ni à celle de la Mairie*" as they were known to be disorderly and without any respect for the police or the law. He concluded by saying that "*c'est avec cette fermeté, qui sera continuée par l'établissement d'un corps de garde dans la rue Rubens, que nous parviendrons à mettre des bornes aux contraventions trop longtemps tolérées dans la 14^{ème} section.*" In addition to this advice given to the *commissaires*, supervision of prostitutes was gradually implemented. The evolution of the listing of prostitutes corresponded with an increasingly suspicious attitude but also a

⁹⁸ AMN, I2 R55.

⁹⁹ AMN, I2 R55.

more methodical approach to the control of the population by the administration and the police.¹⁰⁰

In 1804, the first attempt to list prostitutes by districts was made: only the lists for the sections 13 and 14 survive, sections which were located along the right side of the Loire, in the busy port district of La Fosse.¹⁰¹ In these tables twenty-one names for section 13 and forty-seven for section 14 are recorded, which can be compared to the 139 names reported two years later, in 1806, given to the inspector by eight *commissaires*.¹⁰² According to these reports, almost half of the prostitutes were lodging in sections 13 and 14 whereas the other half was dispersed throughout the city. But *commissaires* clearly explained that many occasional prostitutes were not registered in these lists, because these women tried to keep their trade a secret.

Soon after the listing of their place of abode, some prostitutes were asked to undergo a medical examination each month. In 1805, local visits, probably ordered by the inspector, had to be stopped because the two surgeons, Hubert and Olivier, who were employed to examine the prostitutes, were behaving in an indecent manner and were therefore fired.¹⁰³ On 1806, the visit to the surgeon became compulsory for all the prostitutes listed by *commissaires*.¹⁰⁴ On May 1807, six months after the *arrêté* was

¹⁰⁰ On the evolution of the administration under the Revolution and Empire: Mestre J.-L., 'Administration, justice et droit administratif', *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, n° 328 (2002), pp. 61-75; Badinter R. (dir), *Une Autre Justice : Contributions à l'Histoire de la Justice sous la Révolution* (Paris, 1989); Berger E., *La Justice Pénale sous la Révolution: les Enjeux d'un Modèle judiciaire libéral* (Rennes, 2008); Lafon J., *La Révolution française face au Système judiciaire d'Ancien Régime* (Genève, 2001).

¹⁰¹ It is unclear if only the *commissaires* of these two districts of the city had to do it or each *commissaire* was asked to do so, but their lists subsequently went missing. Sections 13 and 14 of Nantes were close to the port and were known to be very populated and with many lodging-houses.

¹⁰² AMN, I1 C62 D1.

¹⁰³ AMN, I2 R57; I have been unable to locate an official *arrêté* for the whole city that ordered visits on prostitutes before 1806, it seems to have been restricted to a specific area.

¹⁰⁴ See Chapter II for more details.

published, a *commissaire* complained about the irregularity of the examinations and the difficulty in "forcing" women to go to the surgeon.¹⁰⁵ It seems that the 1806 *arrêté* was considered a means for the *commissaires* to keep an eye on the women and to be informed of their change of location if necessary: despite a difficult start, these compulsory visits to the surgeon became a powerful tool of control, in spite of the large numbers of occasional prostitutes who were not on their lists. As Walkowitz explained with regard to the Contagious Disease Acts in England, the implementation of monthly visits to the surgeon became part of a politics of supervision and control of women.¹⁰⁶ However the specific experience in Nantes was that the momentum was given by the inspector and the *commissaires* themselves, without any official and recorded incentives from the municipality or from the national government (neither the Empire nor the Restoration).¹⁰⁷

This chapter has tried to address the evolution of attitude towards prostitution to highlight how the personal concerns of the *commissaires* had a specific influence on the development of the *mise en carte* at a time when national and local legislation remained silent on the topic. Whereas before the Revolution relationships between police and prostitutes were limited to cases of disturbance of the peace, the upheavals of the Revolution, the atmosphere of suspicion - that can be "felt" when looking at the archives - and the pressure put on the police to conform to the new system led to a new approach to prostitution. Indeed, making a living from sexual intercourse became suspicious to *commissaires*, as the multiplication of mentions of prostitutes in the

¹⁰⁵ AMN, II C61 D5.

¹⁰⁶ Walkowitz J. and Walkowitz D., 'We Are Not Beasts of the Field': Prostitution and the Poor in Plymouth and Southampton under the Contagious Diseases Acts, *Feminist Studies*, 1, No. 3/4, (Winter - Spring, 1973), pp. 73-106.

¹⁰⁷ See Vincineau M., *Proxénétisme, débauche ou prostitution depuis 1810* (Bruxelles, 2006) for an analysis of the Code Penal of 1810 and its impact on prostitution.

archives show. It was not prostitution in itself that became a problem in the eyes of the *commissaires*, but the fact that prostitutes could be in contact with *brigands*. Therefore, supervising them, being aware of their location and possible encounters, felt as a necessity for the police in Nantes.

Susan Conner shows how, in Paris, "revolutionary government had remained unable or unwilling to deal with the grim ties between poverty and prostitution and ... the policing of prostitution became increasingly harassing and arbitrary" but she fails to explain who the persons responsible for policing prostitution were.¹⁰⁸ As historians like Hufton and Benabou said, the legislation concerning prostitution always remained unclear and did not give a chance to define the characteristics of a prostitute.¹⁰⁹ Therefore changes of attitude towards prostitution and their explanations have to be found in the study of local officials and of their influence on districts. By looking at Nantes *commissaires*, at Bristol watchmen and constable and their relations with prostitutes, this chapter has also aimed to focus on the history of these agents of the law, their role and influence, a field of research which is still little developed, notably in French history. Indeed, as Milliot explains, a systematic perusal of their archives is needed to use them to their full extend.¹¹⁰ The study of *commissaires'* and constables' (if possible) archives goes further than the history of crime. They were the first agents of the law in contact with the plebeian world and their archives often offer much more than just short reports on prosecutions and crimes: they show how networks were built between the different communities of one district and how through mediation, the problems of a district were dealt with on a daily-basis. Admittedly, the police in Nantes and the system of

¹⁰⁸ Susan Conner, 'Politics, Prostitution, and the Pox in Revolutionary Paris, 1789-1799', p. 730.

¹⁰⁹ Hufton O., *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France* (Oxford, 1974), p. 306; Benabou, *La Prostitution*, p. 21.

¹¹⁰ Milliot, 'Saisir l'espace urbain', p. 80.

constables and watchmen in Bristol were different by nature. However in both cities these agents had a role to play in the transformation of the attitudes towards prostitutes as they took part in the judicial process against prostitutes: they were plaintiffs, prosecutors or they arrested and confined these women. As a consequence, when the local situation changed, their attitudes evolved as well.

The impact of the armed uprisings in the countryside around Nantes should not be understated, even though it is evident that a cultural change such as the representation of prostitutes has not been sourced only by the local events. It seems to me that the role of these riots and war in creating an atmosphere of suspicion and fear and in encouraging a stricter control of the labouring-classes, is highlighted by the comparison between Nantes and Bristol. Historians such as Henderson and Benabou had already noticed a change in attitudes towards prostitution before the Revolution, but at a local level, the French Revolution and the following rationalisation of the administration had a real importance in accelerating the evolution of prostitutes' representation. In Bristol although the French Revolution posed an ideological threat and might have generated increased anxiety, it was not sufficient of itself to change patterns of behaviour. Historical local causes have their importance in the study of behaviour and cultural evolution and in the understanding of a shift in attitude, in this case towards prostitution:¹¹¹ it is not only a matter of discursive practice, and when looking at such an evolution both long and short terms changes must be taken into account to sustain the argument.

¹¹¹ Adair R., *Courtship, Illegitimacy and Marriage in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 1996), p. 9.

VI. Spatial distribution of prostitutes and socio-economic contexts in port cities

"Rencontrées dans la rue exerçant leur métier", "courant les rues", "ils la portent par les rues" are common expressions in Nantes archives describing the behaviour of prostitutes: according to these testimonies, they were seen roaming the streets, making the streets of the city their own and disturbing the peace of the other inhabitants.¹ The royal ordonnance of 1778 represented them almost as a wave of immorality submerging the city's streets: they were accused of having *"la hardiesse de se montrer pendant le jour à leurs fenêtres d'où elles font signe aux passants pour les attirer; de se tenir le soir sur leurs portes et même de courir les rues où elles arrêtent les personnes de tout âge et de tous états"*.² Again during the An II, the major Teydieu, complaining about the spreading of venereal diseases among the soldiers of the Republic, claimed that prostitutes could be seen *"au milieu des rues, en plein jour"*.³ All these expressions remain vague in terms of geography and localisation and seem to express a common opinion that prostitutes could be found anywhere in the city. However, when looking at the archives, patterns of spatial distribution within the cities appear and it can be argued that there were links between prostitution and certain districts. Arlette Farge and Gaetano Cozzi highlighted the limits of "violent districts" in Paris, which were reconstructed by looking at social and economic criteria: as explained in their article, the maps of offences and crimes are very similar to the boundaries of the "active Paris", the plebeian and working class districts.⁴ Concerning prostitution, although prostitutes in Bristol were mainly found in Quarter Sessions records and therefore linked with crimes

¹ AMN, FF 269; 270; 272.

² AMN, FF 291.

³ AMN, 1D8.

⁴ Cozzi G. and Farge A., 'Les théâtres de la violence à Paris au XVIIIe siècle', *Annales. Economies, Sociétés, Civilisation*, 34, n° 5 (1979), pp. 984-1015, p. 989.

or offences, the same criteria cannot always be taken into account: in Nantes, when officials and especially *commissaires* started listing these women, they repeatedly stated that not all prostitutes could be registered as many of them were poor workers who sold their bodies casually in times of dire hardship.⁵ Therefore it should not be assumed that the mapping of crimes in Bristol and Nantes would conform to the geographical representation of prostitution. Admittedly, prostitution was linked with poverty and plebeian world, but other factors must be taken into account. Daniel Roche explains that "a geographical knowledge of authorized places, tolerated streets and profitable locations" was necessary for the poor to receive charity.⁶ It can be argued that the possibility of finding customers, the "type" of prostitution followed by these women and their economic situation were the criteria that defined the spatial distribution of prostitutes in Nantes and Bristol.

The topography of prostitution in Bristol and Nantes has been reconstructed from the information gathered in different types of archives: besides the Quarter Sessions records and the reports of *commissaires*, newspaper articles from *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, censuses sent to the general inspector and private correspondence between officials were used as sources for drawing these maps. Each address mentioned linked with prostitutes has been recorded in a database, which reveals three main types of "place" on the maps of Bristol and pre-revolutionary Nantes:⁷ prostitutes' lodgings, places of sociability and places where *commissaires*, watchmen or constables were called for "*tapage*" or disturbing the peace. These places of "*tapage*" were usually also prostitutes'

⁵ See the letters of the *commissaire* division des Agriculteurs to the general inspector: AMN, I1 C62 D1.

⁶ Roche D., 'Paris capitale des pauvres: quelques réflexions sur le paupérisme parisien entre XVIIe et XVIIIe siècle', *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome. Moyen-Age, Temps Modernes*, 99, n° 2 (1987), pp. 829-859, p. 859.

⁷ This refers to appendices n° 3 and n° 4 (Bristol and Nantes pre-Revolution).

lodgings or a *maison de débauche* but they differ from the first "lodging" mentioned as, in these cases, officials openly described them as places of "*tapage*" and ill-governed houses. Most addresses relate to a case brought in front of a *commissaire* or a constable, but these did not always involve prostitutes directly: for example, if a *commissaire* found the gate of an alley open after ten o'clock, he would inform the first lodger or landlord living in the alley and it might happen that the lodger was a prostitute; similarly in Bristol, lodgings addresses were given if prostitutes were asked to testify as witnesses. In this case, their presence on the "crime scene" was acknowledged, even if they were not guilty of any offence: thus these sources also reveal their places of sociability, where they used to drink, maybe dance and meet customers and friends. These were usually pubs and inns, but places of sociability were not defined by walls: prostitutes and their friends or customers could be found in certain streets, on the quays, near a watchman's booth or near the barracks where soldiers rested. Concerning the maps on post-Revolution Nantes, the data consist of police reports but also of censuses recording prostitutes' lodgings.⁸ These censuses from 1804 to 1808 are incomplete (not every section or district of the city was recorded, nor was every year represented), but they offer however interesting and precise pieces of information on women who were considered by the police to be prostitutes. Maps can be drawn from these data revealing where prostitution was important, common and regarded as such. The maps used, published in 1794 and 1795, represent with good accuracy the structure of both cities at this time.⁹ Certain parishes and districts are highlighted by the presence of prostitutes

⁸ See appendices n° 5 and n° 6.

⁹ Some of Nantes' streets names took another name during the Revolution, and in order to remain accurate, the study of Pied E., *Notices sur les rues, ruelles, cours, impasses, quais, ponts, boulevards, places et promenades de la ville de Nantes* (Nantes, 1906), has been widely used. In Bristol, when only the parish was mentioned, it has been represented on a map by a dot near the parish church (i.e. St James and St Michael).

whereas others seem completely untouched by it: these differences and the importance of the relations between prostitutes and the districts will be analysed now.

1. Topography of Bristol and Nantes

The Bristol map of prostitution encompasses the references to prostitutes from 1778 to 1805, or in other words, ninety-three addresses more or less precise that have been represented on the map. There still exists a discrepancy between the number of prostitutes found in the archives and the number of locations, but this can be explained by the nature of the archives: addresses were not always considered necessary pieces of information in the course of the prosecutions. From these ninety-three addresses, twenty-four were associated with a disorderly house, twenty addresses indicate the place of lodging of prostitutes and forty-nine can be linked with places of sociability such as the White Lyon or the Bush, popular inns of Bristol, or open public space such as the Bristol Bridge.¹⁰ What is revealed when looking at the map is that Bristol prostitutes were mainly located in the old streets of the city centre and its quays. Prostitution seems to have remained a trade confined to the city centre; but these assertions need to be confirmed by a closer analysis of their place of lodging.¹¹ The possibility that this spatial distribution only reflects that surveillance was concentrated in the city centre is another variable that must be considered. Similarly prostitution appears to have been absent from the more select residential areas such as the newly built Queen's Square and Park Row on the south and west of Bristol.

¹⁰ BRO, JQS/P/107; 123; 140.

¹¹ It has to be kept in mind that Clifton for example was not part of Bristol yet and therefore was not included in this research.

However, Bristol at the end of the eighteenth century counted nineteen districts,¹² and in this survey it appears that prostitutes were at least mentioned once in every parish or district except in St Mary Redcliffe and St Werburgh.¹³ It is also rapidly noticeable that, where tenants were accused of keeping disorderly houses, it was usually in the same streets or districts where prostitutes lived or were seen. It is not always clear whether the women were living in the disorderly house or not, and there are only three cases, on Leek Street, Bridewell Lane and St Stephen Quay, where tenants were accused of keeping a disorderly house and these streets were never mentioned again. However even these disorderly houses remained at a close walking distance from the places where prostitutes lived. It is true that the medieval parishes of the city centre were more likely to see prostitutes living there, as well as Temple Street, Temple, and the inner part of St James, but places of sociability and lodgings extended beyond the old city centre: although there is an obvious centralisation of prostitution in Bristol, when looking at the map, it cannot be said that prostitution was specific to certain parishes.

The topography of prostitution in Nantes¹⁴ has been represented through three maps, in an attempt to avoid over-representation of information and in order to be able to compare the periods pre- and post-revolution to see if any change occurred in the spatial distribution of prostitutes in the city. The first map was constructed on the same principle as the Bristol map: 130 names of places were recorded between 1752 and 1789 where prostitutes were seen, heard, were known to live or were disturbing their

¹² Seventeen ancient parishes, plus St Paul which was created in 1794 on the east side of the city (see appendix n° 7) and Castle Precincts, that was not considered as a parish. The city was also divided into twelve wards but to follow the addresses given in the records, the division into parishes has been preferred to the division into wards.

¹³ Possible explanations for these discrepancies will be given subsequently.

¹⁴ See appendices n° 4; 5 and 6.

neighbours.¹⁵ It appears that the parishes at the north of the Castle, between rue Brutus and quay Raynal, were largely untouched by prostitution: no problem was reported to the police. This can be explained by the fact that the parishes of Ste Radegonde, St Laurent and St Jean en Pierre were mainly populated by clergy and aristocrats, and accordingly the prices of room were higher than anywhere else in Nantes.¹⁶ But except these parishes (three out of nine inside the walls), the inner city was not exempt from prostitution. As at Bristol, prostitutes were not to be seen at the extreme western limit of the city, occupied mainly by warehouses and fields. In the south of the city, the isle Gloriette/Prairie de la Madeleine was still mainly covered by marshes and was not submitted to an official project of urban development before 1835, except near the hospital, the bridges and the quays.¹⁷ The growth in population of the city in the eighteenth century encouraged inhabitants to settle on the island and to drain some of its marshes but the Prairie remained an open place of recreation (horse riding and *haute-voltige*) till the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁸ Unfortunately, the map illustrated by Coulon and engraved by Bouclet, does not represent the extreme south of the Prairie au Duc whose parish St Jacques was attached to Nantes in 1790. This part of the city was already well developed as the Pont Pirmil was one of the first bridges put in place, already in the ninth century, to cross the different arms of the Loire from Nantes.¹⁹ Similarly, the eastern extension of the city (the *faubourg* of Richebourg) is left aside by the cartographer, which is regrettable as these areas were quite densely populated and were places of social transition, subjected to migrations and with an important influx of

¹⁵ Eight places have not represented as they were either too far from the city boundaries (i.e.: le Bois St George) or could not be found on the map or in studies cross-referencing the streets of Nantes (i.e.: rue Marlouis or Pont de la Gaye).

¹⁶ The analysis of the capitation in Bois, *Histoire de Nantes*, p. 182, reveals this specificity of the northern city parishes.

¹⁷ Société Académique de Nantes et de Loire-Atlantique, *Les Annales de Nantes et du Pays Nantais: L'Isle Gloriette* (Nantes, 1985), p. 24.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹⁹ Guépin A., *Nantes au XIXe siècle* (Nantes, 1835), p. 81.

population throughout the eighteenth century.²⁰ Prostitution in Nantes before the Revolution appears to have been less centralized than in Bristol, if we consider the district of the Château, one of the oldest parts of the city, as the centre. On the contrary, the distribution of prostitutes emphasises the new economic centre of the eighteenth century: the Quai de la Fosse and its extension to the Place de la Bourse to the Place Egalité. In parallel, the newly-built isle Feydeau (its urban development started in 1723) had already attracted prostitution within its walls, despite trend to social zoning in urban development of the time.²¹

When looking at the map representing the results of the censuses during the Empire,²² most of the lodgings of prostitutes followed the same pattern as before the Revolution, but a shift to the west is noticeable. Indeed rue Bignon Lestard, already well-known for its prostitutes in the eighteenth century (there was a theatre in this street), extended towards rue Rubens and the district near the theatres (Variétés) and new places of entertainment such as the Vauxhall.²³ In the south, on the Prairie de la Madeleine, two streets parallel to the southern quay attracted some prostitutes, whereas the Pont Rousseau and Pirmil were not mentioned. Of course it is necessary to keep in mind that censuses were not recorded for each district, which eventually distorts the map. But a quick comparison between cases of "*tapage*" recorded before and after the Revolution

²⁰ The concept of parish in transition is taken from the work of E. Baigent on Bristol and reflects the social and economic developments of the parishes which at this specific time, were not strictly defined by an urban function. Baigent E., *Bristol Society in the Later Eighteenth Century with special reference to the handling by computer of fragmentary historical sources*, PhD Thesis (Oxford, 1985).

²¹ On architectural changes in Nantes in the eighteenth century see: Lelièvre P., *Nantes au XVIII^e siècle. Urbanisme et architecture* (Nantes, 1942); Bodet F., 'The Suburb of la Fosse', *Travail de fin d'études*, Ecole d'Architecture de Nantes (1993).

²² Appendix n° 6.

²³ See Destranges E., *Le théâtre à Nantes depuis ses origines jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris, 1893).

(up to 1808),²⁴ shows that the places of debauchery remained located in the same streets or very close to the ones before the Revolution, although the number of cases brought to the knowledge of the *commissaires* increased dramatically: from thirty-seven cases between 1752 and 1789 (thirty-seven years) to forty-seven between 1790 and 1808 (eighteen years), which means that the number of cases per year had almost tripled. It has already been explained that the atmosphere of suspicion that emanated from the Chouans upheavals and the Vendée war probably led to this rise in prosecutions. But it is interesting to understand where the prostitutes were living and in which community to see if the increase of prosecutions could also be due to a change of attitude in their neighbours.

2. Localisation of prostitutes: Bristol

The explanations of the spatial distribution of prostitutes in both port cities are built on different criteria: the socio-economic context of these districts, the importance of the links between prostitutes and the communities living, even for a short time, in these districts and the role of historical continuity in the usage of urban space in the evolution of attitudes towards prostitutes. The social structure of Bristol was fairly similar to that of Nantes as the parishes had a mixed population; even in the wealthier streets, domestics were living with the families they served and upper rooms could be rented cheaply as seen for example at the Isle Feydeau. As mentioned earlier, prostitutes in Bristol could be found in almost any parish of the city, but it is true that some parishes had a larger concentration of prostitutes, at least according to the number of cases found in the archives. Out of the ninety-three addresses recorded in Bristol, the spatial division by parishes can be summarized as follows:²⁵

²⁴ Appendix n° 5.

²⁵ The order of the parishes in this table follows the order originally given by Matthews, plus Castle

Table VI-1. Location of prostitutes by districts, Bristol 1778-1805

St Augustine The Less'	St Michael's	St James's	St Paul's	St Stephen's	St Nicholas's	St John The Baptist	St Ewen's
1	2	15	2	9	2	2	5

All Saints	Christ Church	St Mary Le Port	St Peter's	St Philip's	Temple	St Thomas	St Leonard's	Castle Precinct
1	31	1	2	1	10	6	1	2

Sources: BRO, Quarter Sessions records, 1778-1805.

The discrepancy between the parishes is obvious, and it is to be noticed that this is not due to the size of the parishes: indeed the smallest parishes of Bristol are the most central ones such as All Saints, Christ Church, St Ewen and St Mary Le Port, but they accounted for thirty-eight references to prostitutes, or 40% of the total of addresses given for the period 1778 – 1805. Size-wise, St Augustine the Less, St Paul or Temple were some of the largest parishes of the city but overall counted only thirteen references of prostitutes, or 14% of the total. Therefore it cannot be said that the number of prostitutes was relative to the size of the parish.

However the density of population may have had an impact on the localisation of prostitutes. Leech's study of the topography of Bristol in the early modern period

Precincts. St Werburgh was a very small but rich parish where merchants were living which extended from Small street to Corn street. Because Corn Street was divided between three parishes, it is possible that in the records, prostitutes were located in the wrong parish: for instance, St Werburgh did not have any prostitutes but St Ewen, which is the smallest parish of Bristol (see appendix n° 7), counted five; see Leech, 'Bristol: The Hearth Tax as a Decodable Street Directory' in Barnwell P.S. and Airs M. (eds), *Houses and the Hearth Tax: the later Stuart House and Society* (York, 2006), pp. 83-94, p. 85 and Sacks D., *The Widening Gate: Bristol and the Atlantic Economy, 1450-1700* (Oxford, 1991).

underlined the density of population in the old central parishes: these parishes were still structured around the old medieval street plan, with narrow streets and houses overlooking what resembled the pavement.²⁶ The opening of Clare Street in St Leonard and St Mary-Le-Port's parishes in late 1760 remained the only important change in the spatial organisation of the central parishes before the nineteenth century.²⁷ Extra-mural parts of St James and St Philips and Jacob grew steadily during the eighteenth century and nineteenth centuries, until they were finally incorporated into the boundaries of the city.²⁸ It seems that a link between density of population and prostitution existed: Christ Church, St Stephen and St James' followed this rule.²⁹ However St Philip's counted only one case related to prostitution in the Quarter Sessions, whereas it was one of the largest parishes of the city with 10,000 inhabitants, already in mid-eighteenth century.³⁰ But this may be explained by two reasons: first the majority of the population fell outside the scope of the city Quarter Sessions, as they were not yet included in the city boundaries. However the Gloucestershire archives do not mention cases of theft by prostitutes in St Philip and Jacob.³¹ The second explanation can be linked with the socio-economic context of the parish and the types of migration that occurred within its boundaries: the study of the 1775 Poll book by Baigent, which recorded the poor rates, becomes then essential to understand the social background of the population of the parishes and their links with prostitution. Baigent explains that only 60% of the households of Bristol in 1775 were included in her study, as the other 40% were too

²⁶ Leech R., *Topography of Medieval and Early Modern Bristol* (Bristol, 1997), p. xviii. It is to be noticed that a century later, in a town like Gravesend, prostitutes were also found in the old parishes, where the traffic was; see Lee C., "Regulating prostitution in nineteenth century Kent: beyond the Contagious Diseases Acts", PhD Thesis (Open University, 208), p. 182.

²⁷ See appendix n° 7.

²⁸ Baigent E., 'Bristol Society in the Later Eighteenth Century with special reference to the handling by computer of fragmentary historical sources', PhD Thesis (Oxford, 1985), p. 180.

²⁹ Fissell M., *Patients, Power and the Poor in Eighteenth Century Bristol* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 7; Baigent, 'Bristol Society in the Later Eighteenth Century', pp. 64-65; p. 180.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

³¹ The Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society (ed.), *Summary Convictions at Petty Sessions 1781-1837*, 22 (Bristol, 2008).

poor to pay this tax: yet trends relative to the locations of diverse occupations can be distinguished, giving a good insight into the economic context of the parish. Although it is necessary to remember that rich and poor mingled constantly in Bristol,³² it is noticeable that certain parishes inside and outside the city walls underwent gentrification during the eighteenth century: Clifton, the south of St Nicholas and Queen Square, as well as St Michael and St James outer walls.³³ If compared to the table recording cases of prostitution, it appears that both in St Nicholas and in St Michael the number was rather low (two cases each), which supports the argument linking poor district and prostitution.

Baigent also showed that the south east of the city was less fashionable and therefore attracted fewer wealthy merchants and industrialists.³⁴ Alexander Pope, who visited the Hotwells in 1739, recorded that "you come in sight of Bristol, the river winding at the bottom of steeper banks to the town, where you see twenty odd pyramids smoking over the town and a vast extent of houses red and white."³⁵ These "pyramids" or glasshouses were mainly in the parishes of St Mary Redcliffe and Temple.³⁶ Nearly sixty years later, 1793, Messrs Ibbetson, Laporte and Hassell reported that "the smoke issuing from brass-works, glasshouses, etc. keeps the town in an almost impenetrable obscurity".³⁷ According to Baigent, these parishes were some of the poorest, alongside the parishes of St James City and St Philip and Jacob whose

³² Baigent, 'Bristol Society in the Later Eighteenth Century', p. 202.

³³ Aughton P., *Bristol: A People's History* (Lancaster, 2000), p. 86 and Leech R., *The St Michael's Hill Precinct of the University of Bristol* (Bristol, 2000).

³⁴ Baigent, 'Bristol Society in the Later Eighteenth Century', p. 192.

³⁵ Quoted in Minchinton W., 'The Port of Bristol', in McGrath P. (ed.) *Bristol in the Eighteenth Century* (New Abbot, 1972), p. 141.

³⁶ Matthews, *New Bristol Directory*, p. 40.

³⁷ Ibbetson J.-C., *A picturesque guide to Bath, Bristol Hot-wells, the River Avon and Adjacent Country* (London, 1793), p. 155.

population was mainly composed of artisans; all of them were peripheral except St James.³⁸ An 1825 report from the Commissioners for Paving, Cleansing and Lightning denounced the state of the banks of the Frome near Lewin's Mead as "too loathsome to describe. When the tide comes up, matters are, for a time, still worse; for it comes loaded with the filth discharged from the sewers that open further down. The stench then becomes almost intolerable".³⁹ It appears that the correlation between prostitution and poverty can be verified in three parishes out of four: there was a significant concentration in the number of prosecutions or complaints against prostitutes in Temple (ten cases), St Thomas (six) and St James (fifteen), but the parish of St Mary Redcliffe was never mentioned in the Quarter Sessions records. This discrepancy between parishes is central for understanding the spatial distribution of prostitution and will be explored further in this chapter.

Aside from the "richest" and "poorest" parishes of the city there remain what Baigent calls transitional parishes, in which a very diverse population was concentrated, indigent and wealthy merchants, but also middle-class artisans and professionals. The medieval and central parishes of All Saints, St Ewen and St Werburgh, along with St Augustine and St Michael, were the parishes which had the highest proportion of gentry, professionals and "distributors": the adverts from bookbinders, doctors and inn-keepers in *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal* and in *Bonner and Middleton Bristol Journal* filled the columns of the newspapers and underlined this idea of mixed population.⁴⁰ Neither rich nor poor, the streets of these parishes, such as the newly built Clare Street, must have

³⁸ Baigent, 'Bristol Society in the Later Eighteenth Century', p. 194.

³⁹ Aughton P., *Bristol: A People's History*, p. 149.

⁴⁰ For example: Mary-Ann Long, bookbinder on Tower Lane, published an advertisement in *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal* on 23 August 1783.

represented the model of the pre-industrial cities: "the known pattern of rich front houses and squalid back courts".⁴¹ Christ Church, St Leonard, Castle Precinct and St Peter were very similar to the previous parishes, with a clear predominance of professionals, tradesmen and distributors but fewer gentry.⁴² Leech also shows that Castle Precinct had a relatively high number of tenants and was therefore, according to Baigent's category, a parish in transition.⁴³ However St Leonard, Castle Precinct and St Peter saw only five cases involving prostitution but Christ Church surprisingly had a significant number of prosecutions or references to prostitutes: thirty-one cases, which goes against the assumption that poor districts would always be the nest of prostitution.

So far in this chapter the significance of the port in the explanation of the spatial distribution of prostitution has been put aside and it is now necessary to look at it as a useful tool for migration, engendering movement of population and goods, facilitating contacts between established population in the city and sea-goers, and therefore making certain districts more active than others. The importance of the maritime trade for Bristol is not to be discussed here, but rather how the port created more attractive districts for prostitutes. As seen earlier, at the end of the century many mariners were amongst the customers of the prostitutes in Bristol; however the importance of the port for prostitution also lay in the number of people who lived near it, who earned from it and who became part of the port culture. The Avon could still accommodate most of the largest ships and the quays and docks were places of continuous movement with a mixture of poor and wealthy people. The mariners coming ashore after six months at sea or the sailors from Ireland mixed on the quays with the porters, the customs officers, the

⁴¹ Baigent, 'Bristol Society in the Later Eighteenth Century', p. 65.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 193.

⁴³ Leech R. H., 'Bristol: The Hearth Tax as a Decodable Street Directory', p. 87.

merchants supervising their cargoes, the vagrants and foreigners looking for a one-off job and mariners going back on board.⁴⁴ The expansion of maritime and local traffic in the eighteenth century created a need for a rational organisation of the city: the markets were close to the quays in order to facilitate the sale of perishable goods. Indeed, along with the men coming from the sea, Bristol attracted many farmers and yeomen from its hinterland, being the commercial hub of south west England which benefited from the different markets of the city. In addition, for a month in September, St James' fair attracted thousands of people, of all social background, to sell cattle, while linen and everyday goods were sold at good prices.⁴⁵ Articles or complaints by readers in *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal* denounced the multiplication of bush-houses during this fair, small covered stalls and temporary alehouses where alcohol was sold cheaply and where "vice in all her form was permitted to level uncontrolled". According to the article, "a number of abandoned females are entertained and suffered to molest every person who passes them and to seduce the unwary."⁴⁶ The economic importance of Bristol created a market for prostitution: the numerical importance of men travelling to and from the port city increased the possibility of finding customers.

The influx of men ashore and the migration of men from the countryside in such an important city all year long also created an important demand for beds and lodgings. Mariners were not allowed to stay on board and farmers and yeomen coming to St James's fair often stayed more than a day to sell all their goods, to enjoy the fair and because their journey back home could take several days. Inns in Bristol were mainly

⁴⁴ Michinton, 'The Port of Bristol', p. 141.

⁴⁵ See the painting of Samuel Colman, *St James's Fair*, Bristol, 1724, Bristol's City Museum and Art Gallery.

⁴⁶ *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 27 August 1787.

located in the city centre, where business was concluded and where those who had arrived by boat would set foot first. Therefore inns, pubs and victuallers multiplied in the parishes surrounding the quays: Denning counted 358 hostelries, inns and victuallers in 1775 Bristol.⁴⁷ Some of these inns offered coaches to other cities like Bath and London, being therefore closely linked with the business world, transporting worthy people and worthy goods. But these links with the world of the gentry and wealthy did not mean that there was no place for prostitutes: The Bush, for example, was one of the most renowned inns of Bristol, situated near the Corn Exchange where coaches left every day for the main cities of England.⁴⁸ It was on the doorstep of the Bush that Elizabeth Vowles attacked a man and killed him and two of the witnesses who testified against her were single women who were inside the inn when the attack occurred.⁴⁹ However the proliferation of inns and pubs was also linked to the price of the rent, therefore it is probable that inns near Lewin's Mead and St James' church yard were cheaper than the ones in the city centre, therefore attracting lower paid men and offering cheaper rooms to them and to prostitutes, which would explain why prostitutes were also found there.⁵⁰ But as shown by the example of Vowles, the presence of prostitutes in inns was not always synonymous with a bad reputation: as Beat Kumin shows, prostitutes were found in inns and taverns in the early modern period where respectable female travellers also stopped.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Denning C. F. W., *Old Inns of Bristol* (Bristol, 1943), p. 10.

⁴⁸ Matthews, *New Bristol Directory*, p. 91.

⁴⁹ BRO, JQS/P/140.

⁵⁰ On eighteenth-century English inns and their multiplication: Chartres J., 'The English Eighteenth-Century English Inn: A Transient Golden Age?' in Kumin B. and Tlutsy B., *The World of the Tavern* (Aldershot, 2002), pp. 208-211.

⁵¹ Kumin B., 'Public Houses and their Patrons in Early Modern Europe' in Kumin B. and Tlutsy B., *The World of the Tavern* (Aldershot, 2002), pp. 58-60.

Two exceptions, Christ Church and St Mary Redcliffe's parishes, which do not corroborate these explanations, must be analysed, keeping in mind that the nature of the sources greatly restricts the depiction of an accurate image of prostitution in Bristol. Thirty-one references to prostitution, or a third of the cases, in a small parish such as Christ Church are rather surprising. It is true that the parish was not far from the quays and Bristol Bridge, however this is still more than both parishes sharing the Bristol Bridge or all the old medieval parishes together. This specificity may be explained by the historical development of the city and attitudes towards prostitution. Firstly, the houses in Tower Lane and Silver Street were once described in the newspaper *Bonner and Middleton Bristol Journal* as decrepit and dangerous, threatening to fall down.⁵² The writer went on, comparing the feelings of the women living there and the wretchedness of the place: "What can be said of the unhappy prostitutes who inhabit this miserable place? If a picture of their misfortunes and situation is to be drawn from the wretched tottering pieces of dwelling houses they there reside in, how horrible, how shocking to every moral and human feeling must it appear!" Baigent also demonstrates that the owners of the houses or apartments often changed, probably preventing any important reconstruction or modernisation to be made.⁵³ Similarly, some of the houses were owned by the Corporation and the bishop, leaving the tenant without any interlocutor when repairs were needed. Admittedly, the rent for a room must have been rather low considering the state of the houses, which explains why many prostitutes could afford to live in this area. In addition to this, I believe that there is also an historical explanation for the presence of prostitutes in these streets. There is a possibility that in the Middle Ages or the beginning of the early modern period, prostitutes were confined in this parish in an attempt to supervise them. Matthews

⁵² *Bonner and Middleton*, 10 November 1792.

⁵³ Baigent, 'Bristol Society in the Later Eighteenth Century', p. 65.

quoted William of Worcester who wrote in 1486 that the streets near Broadmead were inhabited by common women, but this explanation needs to be verified.⁵⁴ Nevertheless this specific location shows an interesting case of historical continuity in the usage of urban space and it emphasizes the importance of the concept of appropriation of urban areas by prostitutes.

St Mary Redcliffe was mainly inhabited by workers and artisans and its inhabitants had access to the quay, however, no prostitute was ever mentioned. This could be explained by the number of warehouses and glasshouses, which would have transformed the parish into an industrial space, with fewer public houses or lodging houses where prostitutes could generally be found. It is also possible that the goods delivered on St Mary Redcliffe's quay were not of a nature that required the labour of many mariners, who would have then been freed ashore: timber for example was discharged further away from the city and sailors would have gone ashore too.⁵⁵ The nature of the economic and social development of this parish may have been the reason why no prostitute was recorded there. Even if mariners came ashore on this quay, they would have moved towards busy places of entertainment, such as the streets near the Bristol Bridge (St Thomas) or Temple where the local breweries and closest pubs were located, as well as in the city centre. Denning claimed that nineteen inns were located in Temple Street in 1775 while seventeen were counted in St Thomas Street, both streets being at a walking distance from the quay.⁵⁶ The study of the Hearth tax confirms that these parishes had many inns for travellers, alongside Christ Church, St John and St Mary Le Port, where mariners would have stayed after coming ashore.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Matthews, *New Bristol Directory*, p. 30.

⁵⁵ Michington, 'The Port of Bristol', p. 138.

⁵⁶ Denning, *Old Inns of Bristol*, p. 10.

⁵⁷ Leech, 'Bristol: The Hearth Tax as a Decodable Street Directory', p. 92.







3. **Localisation of prostitutes: Nantes pre- and post-Revolution**

The spatial distribution of prostitutes in Bristol was therefore determined by different criteria: the density of population, the socio-economic development of the districts and the importance these districts had in the general movement of population in such a large city. These arguments worked for Bristol but it is necessary to verify that they can be adapted to Nantes' situation. It has been explained in the introduction that Bristol and Nantes underwent a similar economic development thanks to the maritime trade and the industries which grew in the periphery of their port. Nantes' extension in the eighteenth century concentrated on the south and west of the city, where marshy islands and fields were transformed into habitable land. The isle Feydeau became the facade of the wealth of Nantes merchants while the two other larger islands of the Prairie au Duc and Prairie de la Madeleine were gradually converted into quays and warehouses. Nantes' merchants were keen on showing their commercial success and the urban renaissance of the city profited from their wealth. The *quartier Graslin*, west of the city centre, was constructed in the 1780s and represented the cultural quarter of the city, with a new theatre and wide avenues. Manufactures and glasshouses were located further west, near the fields, whereas the new immigrants and workers populated the north of the city, the district of the Marchix (St Similien), and the eastern suburbs of Richebourg. The suburb of the Marchix, one of the poorest districts of Nantes, was on the road to Rennes, the main road to the north of the country and it is important to note that both cheap lodgings and places of entertainment were offered to prostitutes in this district before the Revolution.⁵⁸ The district of St Jacques – Pirmil (legally attached to Nantes in 1790), in the extreme south of the city, was already well integrated into the economy and trade of Nantes because of the ships unloading some of their cargoes on its quays, but also

⁵⁸ On poverty in the Marchix, see Bois, *Histoire de Nantes*, p. 216.

because it was historically the main road and bridge to Nantes from the south of the country. The number of inns and taverns multiplied to accommodate migrants from the sea and land and, as shown on the map, prostitutes were also living in this parish. As mentioned earlier, the spatial distribution of prostitutes did not change drastically before and after the Revolution and can be summarised in a slight move towards the west where theatres and public amusement could be found, at least according to the 1804-1808 censuses. These censuses recorded the names of 348 prostitutes and their address, but forty-one of them were recorded twice, reducing the total to 307 prostitutes and their place of abode. The location of prostitutes in Nantes districts between 1804 and 1808 can be summarized as such (the women who were recorded twice are counted under the district they were first recorded living in):

Table VI-2. Location of prostitutes by districts, Nantes 1804-1808⁵⁹

Division Impériale (1804 and 1808)	Division des Marchés (1806- 1807-1808)	Division des Boulevards (1806-1807- 1808)	Division du Commerce (1807 and 1808)	Division de la Préfecture (1806 and 1808)	Division du Lycée (1807- 1808)
					
129	10	30	71	55	12

Source: AMN, II C62 D1.

As in Bristol the spatial distribution of prostitutes in Nantes was determined by different socio-economic criteria, as well as historical reasons which varied according to each division. The divisions of the Préfecture and Lycée followed an historical pattern: the expansion of Nantes had taken root on the western side of the Castle, and the former parishes of Ste Croix, St Pierre and Ste Nicolas were located inside the ramparts. Part of the land near the river Erdre used to be quite marshy and therefore cheaper than the rest

⁵⁹ See appendix n° 6.

of the city centre: cheap inns and taverns were opened in this section of the city and became places where prostitutes lived and solicited, as they did in Silver Street and Tower Lane in Bristol. In addition, the river Erdre was navigable, and was therefore widely used to ship goods from the hinterland to the city, with ships discharging their cargoes on the quays near the taverns and inns. The similarities between the pre- and post-Revolution maps accentuate the idea of continuity in the appropriation of the district by prostitutes, especially rue Fontenelle and rue Folard. On average in the city, there were two prostitutes per "bawdy house" and the division of the Préfecture follows this pattern with on average 1.9 women per disorderly house.⁶⁰ However, in reality the houses counted from one to seven women who were listed as prostitutes giving the houses the appearance of "bawdy houses" offering "a choice of" different women: but these numbers are still lower than in the case of Sieur Mime, who rented a house to thirteen prostitutes in 1778 rue Bignon L'Estand.⁶¹

The attraction of Richebourg and the eastern part of the city (division du Lycée) can be explained by the fact that the boundaries of the city used to be along the Cours de la Liberté and the Cours de la Fédération, meaning that Richebourg was a suburb during the Middle Ages and therefore not subject to the taxes and laws of the city. Besides, Richebourg remained an interface between Nantes, the neighbouring countryside and Angers being on the main road to the East. Wine and wood were also discharged on its quays, making it a very busy suburb. The proximity of the soldiers and guards in the Castle may have also encouraged the opening of places of entertainment. In 1780, an infirm soldier said to neighbours who tried to make him leave that "*il venait s'amuser*

⁶⁰ The average number of prostitutes per house (they were not always considered disorderly houses) was thus calculated: number of prostitutes between 1804 - 1808 / number of different addresses recorded.

⁶¹ AMN, FF 272.

*avec la domestique de la Marc et qu'ils devaient savoir que les soldats cherchaient à se procurer du plaisir et lui-même sait où s'en procurer".*⁶² The *commissaire* of the district on 23 vendémiaire An IV, was called out to deal with complaints about "*tapage*" at 19 rue Richebourg where three prostitutes were living: he found twelve soldiers in their house and invited them to leave the place and go back to their lodging.⁶³ In 1807, the average number of prostitutes per house reached three, whereas in 1808 it had fallen to 1.4 women per address recorded: different hypotheses can be made to explain this discrepancy. It may highlight a slight financial improvement for some of the women, as fewer of them had to share a place with another prostitute: it is unlikely that the price of lodgings dropped significantly in the space of a year, particularly as Nantes had received numerous migrants from the former colonies, increasing the demand for lodgings. The number of prostitutes in this division did not diminish drastically: from nine prostitutes in 1807 down to seven in 1808, making it difficult to blame record keeping or to explain this change by a specific legal action against prostitutes in this district. By comparing the precise addresses given to the *commissaires*, it appears that 7 rue Rabelais remained a "favourite" for prostitutes but the two other addresses given in 1807 were not inhabited by prostitutes anymore in 1808: on the contrary, Marie Gilaiseau left her previous lodging to live at 28 rue Richebourg, "*chez elle*".⁶⁴ This suggests that these figures show, in some cases, an improvement of the prostitute's economic situation. However it is true that the type of room that was rented or owned was not described, therefore it is unclear if the lodging necessarily became more expensive. Similarly, few women remained in the same place and the background of the "new" prostitutes that moved in in 1808 is unknown: they may have already owned or rented a place district du Lycée before becoming prostitutes and stayed there while

⁶² AMN, FF 270.

⁶³ AMN, I1 C66 D1.

⁶⁴ AMN, I1 C62 D1.

shifting to the trade of prostitution. The possibility of impoverishment on the part of new prostitutes, rather than financial improvement of their situation can paradoxically also be considered as an explanation for this drop in the number of prostitutes per house.

Going westward, the numbers of prostitutes in the division Impériale and division des Boulevards was surprisingly high: 159 prostitutes were recorded living in this district between 1804 and 1808 (excluding 1805) that is 52% of the women listed by the police. Why were these two districts so attractive to prostitutes? Different explanations can be given. The proximity of the quays, especially La Fosse, which was the most important part of Nantes port, made it possible and easy for mariners and people coming ashore to reach these parts of the city: at Place Ste Catherine (or rue Delorme, St Nicolas), the widow Jacquette was tenant of a tavern and the neighbours claimed that "*toutes les nuits s'y rassemblent des matelots et des soldats*".⁶⁵ But the attraction of these districts remained in the entertainment they provided for inhabitants and migrants: a *salle de concert* in rue de la Fosse was mentioned as early as 1753 and in 1788, the Comédie opened and along with two theatres of Variétés in the vicinity and a Manège, it attracted crowds of wealthy merchants and their families but also plebeians.⁶⁶ Indeed, even if plebeians could not always afford the entrance of the new theatre, they could take pleasure in the taverns which surrounded the main places of entertainment.⁶⁷ The streets close to the new district of the Comédie offered the pleasure of mixing with a wealthy

⁶⁵ AMN, FF 272.

⁶⁶ Destranges, *Le Théâtre à Nantes*, p. 37.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 78; p. 109; According to Destranges, the entry prices went from twelve sols to three livres in 1788 but with the start of the Revolution and the lack of gold and silver, the prices increased dramatically, making it impossible for plebeian to attend.

crowd, which was not possible in the northern suburbs of St Similien.⁶⁸ The importance of entertainment and places of sociability in the development of prostitution becomes clear when looking at the maps of Nantes: before the Revolution, the first theatre opened on rue Bignon Lestard around 1743 (Variétés) and in the 1750s this street was already a place where prostitutes lived.⁶⁹ With the opening of the Comédie, prostitutes moved slightly westward, as did the main places of entertainment: thus the presence of inns and taverns close to theatres was expected. The growth of the average number of women in the division des Boulevards is unsurprising: from 1.5 women per house in 1806 it increased to 1.6 women in 1808. The evolution in the division Impériale appears very similar to the change in the adjacent division: from 1.7 women in 1804 it reached 1.6 in 1808, emphasizing the shift to the west side of the city and the newly-built district.

The last two divisions to be analysed, du Commerce and des Marchés were similar in their nature: indeed both of them were structured around the port and quays and the bridges of La Fosse and of the Prairie de la Madeleine respectively, which specialised in maritime traffic.⁷⁰ The constant movement of people in these districts could explain the presence of prostitutes, however their similarities did not go further. La Fosse was "preferred" to La Madeleine: seventy-one prostitutes were recorded living in the district du Commerce whereas only ten were living on the island. It should be remembered that the district of La Fosse was newly-built and renovated in the eighteenth century as it became the business centre of the city and the place of residence for the merchants.

⁶⁸ See Gatrell V., *City of Laughter, Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-Century London* (London, 2006), pp. 82-110 on Covent Garden and the middling-sort.

⁶⁹ Destranges, *Le Théâtre à Nantes*, p. 38.

⁷⁰ Bois, *Histoire de Nantes*, p. 160.

Therefore, as explained by Bois, there was no social segregation in this district, as both wealthy and poor lived in this busy place.⁷¹ In addition, the kind of prostitutes who lived in the division du Commerce and des Marchés differed. Indeed the prostitutes in the Marchés section in 1806 and 1807 were financially more secure than the prostitutes in the Commerce district as all of them were householders.⁷² Whereas the average number of prostitutes in the Marchés section decreased down to one woman per lodging,⁷³ the situation was the opposite in the district of du Commerce: the average was 2.1 women per house in 1807 but reached 3.1 in 1808. Commerce and Prefecture offered the largest houses for prostitutes with up to seven women for a house which could be shared by at least twenty people.⁷⁴ According to Bois, the district from the Quay Tourville (Place du Commerce) to rue Bignon L'Estart, counted 123 houses for 3022 inhabitants, which makes it an average of twenty-five inhabitants per house.⁷⁵ In the streets perpendicular to the quays, rue d'Ancin, de la Nation or des Trois Marins, the women were usually renting a room or sharing a room at a cheap price: women were sometimes listed living with their domestic who was also considered a prostitute.⁷⁶ These streets were reputed to be dirty, crowded and *mal-fréquentées*: already in 1761, the police tried to evict prostitutes from a courtyard close to the quay, they said that "*La cour des Richards est un lieu qui sert d'azile à quantité de femmes et filles débauchées ; et comme si c'étoit pour elles un lieu de franchises, sitost qu'on les a chassées d'un endroit de la ville elles*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

⁷² The police recorded them as '*dans leurs meubles*'.

⁷³ In 1806, the average number of prostitutes was four per house, however this is distorted by the fact that seven women were living in one house and one woman was living alone.

⁷⁴ The figure of fifteen lodgers per house is taken from the case of Sieur Mime in 1778 and the complaints made by the twenty neighbours (presumably they had children) of prostitutes living in two houses rue Rubens, an II. AMN, FF 272; I1 C66 D1. If we follow Matthews' figures for Bristol in 1757, the number of people living in a house was seven on average, but local discrepancies should be taken into account. Matthews, *New Bristol Directory*, p. 31.

⁷⁵ Bois, *Histoire de Nantes*, p. 164.

⁷⁶ AMN, I1 C62 D1.

vont s'y réfugier."⁷⁷ This comment reinforces the idea that the district of La Fosse was also being appropriated by prostitutes. According to the archives, between 1750 and 1789, *commissaires* were called four times for "*tapage*" and in six cases prostitutes were seen on the quay or in the streets perpendicular to the port. After the Revolution, between 1789 and 1806 complaints were recorded four times against prostitutes on this quay.⁷⁸ Mariners were probably the main customers of the taverns which multiplied on these streets: the wife of Pierre Rolland for example was seen "*à boire dans un cabaret, vers six heures du soir avec cinq ou six matelots*".⁷⁹ However the records show that despite a significant number of prostitutes and mariners renting rooms and seeking entertainment in the taverns, the population of the district remained varied: a *sage-femme* for example was recorded living on the quay de la Fosse as well as tailors and *négociants*.⁸⁰ The marquis de Caraccioli, while describing Nantes, claimed that "*on diroit que c'étoit le quartier des blanchisseuses*", referring to the clothes and linen that were constantly hanging from the windows.⁸¹

The economic independence of the women in the different districts can also be analysed by looking at the censuses, as the type of lodging was recorded. The information given in cases of "*tapages*" are not continuous and do not always mention if the woman was renting the room furnished or not, making it more difficult to draw significant conclusions. However the close analysis of the place of living of these 302 women

⁷⁷ AMN, FF 272; See also Bodinier J.-L., *Le quai de La Fosse* (Rennes, 1997), p. 40, who quotes a short report of the municipality in 1852 on the state of these streets: '*des cloaques, une humidité constante, pavage défectueux, les eaux ménagères et matières excrémentielles s'y écoulent*', which reminds us of the description of Lewin's Mead in Bristol at the same period.

⁷⁸ AMN, FF 269; 272; II C66 D1.

⁷⁹ AMN, FF 269.

⁸⁰ Bois, *Histoire de Nantes*, p. 182.

⁸¹ Carraccioli, Marquis de, *Voyage de la Raison en Europe* (Paris, 1772), p. 346.

reveals how independent they were financially.⁸² On average 21% of the prostitutes listed in the censuses were recorded as living "*dans leurs meubles*", meaning that they were householders and owned their furniture. The financial value of the furniture is difficult to ascertain, but it is certainly indicative of a measure of economic independence and represented the possibility of pawning such items in a strategy of survival. A 1755 report from *commissaire* Turpin gives an example of furniture owned by a prostitute: La Navare was evicted from her lodging in the house of the widow Armancourt rue Bignon L'Estand after complaints from the neighbours and the landlady.⁸³ A list of the items in the room was recorded while the prostitute and her young daughter were sent to the prison; the list includes:

Un petit lit au tombeau garni de serge rouge, un lite de plume avec un petit oreiller, deux très mauvais draps, une mauvaise couverture de toile peinte avec un mauvais tapis, une armoire de bois de fouteau,, une petite boîte de toilette, une petite coiffure, quantité de mauvaises guenilles, un fauteuil et huit chaises de paille, un soufflet, une brochet et un trois pied avec un triangle, un grand poêlon de cuivre rouge, deux chandeliers, une paire de mouchettes et un porte-mouchette de Pottain Jeanne, un pot à eau couvert, une cuvette, un plat ovale, deux saladiers, huit assiettes, deux soucoupes, deux pots à confiture, le tout en faïence, une mauvaise table en bois de sapin avec son pliant et un petit coffre de sapin, trois vergettes de fer, un fer à repasser, trois cuillers d'étain, une terrine de faïence brune, un petit miroir de toilette.







⁸² The census of 1808 for the division de la Préfecture (forty-six women) does not specify whether they were renting the room or owned it.

⁸³ AMN, FF 272.

This description of the items owned by this single woman and her daughter shows that she was not living in dire poverty, however the general picture remains rather dull. The repetition of the adjective "*mauvais*" and the fact that her wardrobe and little chest were empty demonstrate the poverty in which they were living. The wood and fabric used for the furniture underline the same idea: pine and beech, as well as the serge textiles, were cheap materials available for poor people. Similarly, the expression "*une quantité de mauvaises guenilles*" shows that La Navare did not have any good and valuable clothes. Therefore, it seems that despite a certain economic independence, women owning their furniture still lived in poor conditions and this must be kept in mind when analysing the degree of economic independence of prostitutes.

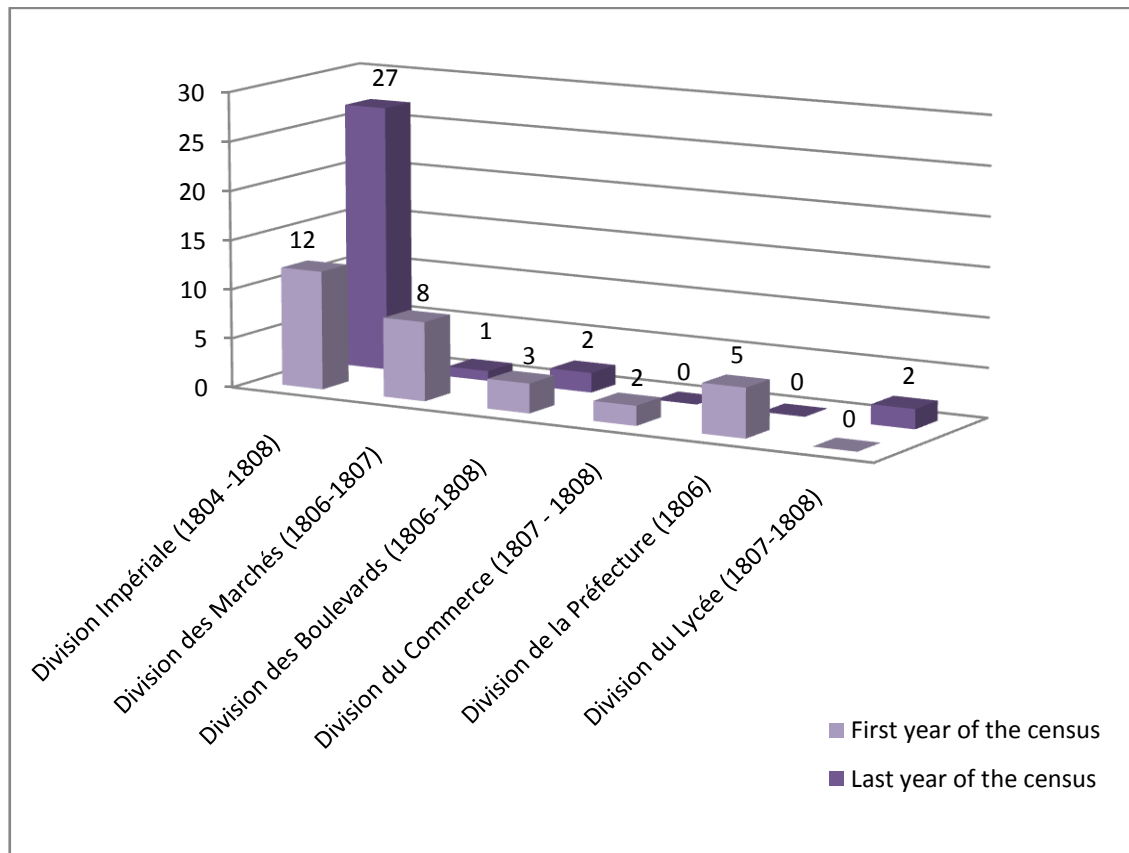
It is interesting to compare the number of women who owned their furniture with the average number of women per house to see if it supports the argument that a relationship between poverty and a high number of prostitutes existed.

Table VI-3. Evolution of the number of prostitutes living "*dans leurs meubles*" per district, Nantes 1804-1808

	Division Impériale (1804 - 1808)	Division des Marchés (1806-1807)	Division des Boulevards (1806-1807-1808)	Division du Commerce (1807 - 1808)	Division de la Préfecture (1806)	Division du Lycée (1807-1808)
						
Women living " <i>dans leurs meubles</i> "	12 – 27	8 – 1	3 – 1 - 2	2 – 0	5	0 – 2
Percentage	18% - 37%	100% - 50%	20%-20%-13%	5% - 0%	24%	0% - 29%

Source: AMN, II C62 D1.

Figure VI-1. Evolution of the number of prostitutes living "*dans leurs meubles*" per district, Nantes 1804-1808



Source: AMN, II C62 D1.

The highest figures of the division des Marchés corroborate what has been explained before, that the women in this district were more independent financially than the other listed prostitutes. The drop to 50% in 1807 is not surprising given that only two women were recorded. Similarly, the district of La Madeleine was in development and was not suffering from poverty compared to older districts such as the suburb of the Marchix or the section du Commerce. Although the district of the port was rich in principle, the living conditions of prostitutes seem to have been less attractive: from 2.1 women per house, it increased to 3.1 women in 1808, accentuating the problem of poverty. Besides a more crowded environment for prostitutes, it appears that the number of prostitutes who were "*dans leurs meubles*" fell, meaning that all the prostitutes were therefore







lodgers and could be evicted more easily for "*tapage*" than if they were in an unfurnished lodging. The districts des Boulevards and de la Prefecture followed the average number of "independent women", being what Baigent would have called parishes in transition, with a mixed population. The fall to 13% of women owning their furniture in 1808 cannot be considered as conclusive as the average number of women per house did not change significantly. However, the increased number of prostitutes "*dans leurs meubles*" in the Impériale section and the division du Lycée is quite interesting because of the differences between both sections. In the division du Lycée, a clear fall in the average number of women appears between 1807 and 1808: from 3 women to 1.4 women per house. Along with the fact that in 1808 29% of the women were now able to own their furniture, it seems that the financial condition of prostitutes in this district improved, but as explained previously, it is likely that some women owned a place or some furniture and then became prostitutes, which would therefore highlight a shift to poverty in the condition of these women. A similar rise occurred in the Impériale division: from 18% to 37% women who owned their furniture, it is more than double the initial number in four years. Although the number of women per house did not fall sharply as in the section du Lycée (from 1.7 to 1.6), it appears that this figure of 1.6 was already below the average number of women per house. Therefore, it seems possible that the number of independent women and the average number of women per house were linked, indicating that certain districts, mainly the poorer areas, were districts where fewer prostitutes could afford a place of their own and where the density of prostitutes per house was higher. What remains to be analysed is whether there was continuity between the women who were once renting a room and the ones who then became more independent financially: when they appeared in the records, were they being listed for the first time or on the contrary, were they already known by

the police as prostitutes, meaning that their way of life allowed them to earn sufficient money to become householders?

4. Prostitutes' movement and migration of prostitutes in Nantes

Looking at the changes over the years according to the number of women listed in each district, some discrepancies are noticeable:

Table VI-4. Prostitutes' migration between districts, Nantes 1804-1808

	Division Impériale 	Division des Marchés 	Division des Boulevards 	Division du Commerce 	Division de la Préfecture 	Division du Lycée 
1804	68	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
1806	N/A	8	15	N/A	21	N/A
1807	N/A	2	5 ⁸⁴	40	N/A	9
1808	73	0	16	46	38	7
Loss or Gain	+5 +7%	-8 -100%	+1 +7%	+6 +15%	+17 +81%	-2 -22%

N/A: No record available.

Source: AMN, II C62 D1.

Whereas the division de la Préfecture gained 81% or seventeen prostitutes in two years, the division des Marchés "lost" all its prostitutes between 1806 and 1808: two of these women who were in the division des Marchés in 1806 and 1807, Perrine Clouet and Renée Beaudoin, were listed in the division Impériale in 1808. Both of them were owners of their room in the same house (maison Juat) which was *selon toutes apparences* a type of bawdy house, as seven prostitutes were recorded living there in

⁸⁴ It seems that this sudden drop of the number of prostitutes in this division is due to a problem with the records and not an actual diminution of prostitutes; indeed, the *commissaire* seemed to have updated the inspector on the situation rather than giving him a new detailed account of prostitutes.

1806: the question of their eviction arises and is difficult to answer. Renée Beaudoin was able to afford a new place rue Rubens but Perrine Clouet had to rent a room from Guichard, another prostitute who owned a bawdy house in rue Rubens. Her situation may be explained by financial difficulties, which tends to argue in favour of the theory of an eviction but no records of complaints or of eviction by the police have been kept, leaving the answer to this question unknown. The figures representing the changing pattern in the number of prostitutes in each district start to make sense only when compared with the number of women who remained in the same district, moved to another or disappeared from the lists. As mentioned earlier, only forty-one women were listed twice, that is only 13% of all the listed prostitutes were still recognized as prostitutes a year or two later: in other words, the increases in districts such as the Prefecture or Commerce were mainly due to the arrival of "new prostitutes" in the district, between 1806 and 1808, allowing an important turn-over of 87% of the women categorised as prostitutes from one year to another. Again, this figure puts into question the common opinion that prostitutes were submitted to *maquerelles* or pimps who forced them to work. Although evidence of "pimping" existed, in the sense that men or women encouraged prostitution, as shown by the fact that some persons rented up to seven rooms to prostitutes only, the number of "new prostitutes" each year shows that a certain freedom existed for these women. When analysed in greater depth, the censuses offer conclusive results in favour of this argument. The socio-economic status of the forty-one women listed twice can be summarised as such: twenty-nine of them were renting a room when recorded for the first and second time; eight of them went from a rented room to have their own place; two of them were already "*dans leurs meubles*" when listed for the first time and remained in this situation; and finally two of them had a property but lost or sold it and were found renting a room in the succeeding census.

Table VI-5. Prostitutes and types of lodging, Nantes 1804-1808

Status 1804-1808	Number of women	<div> L: Lodger H: Householder </div>
L → L	29	
L → H	8	
H → H	2	
H → L	2	
Total	41	

Source: AMN, I1 C62 D1.

It appears therefore that in general for women straying into prostitution, their economic situation did not improve significantly, except in eight cases out of forty-one, that is 20% of them. The question of their staying in the same district and earning sufficient money to buy their own furniture can be answered by further calculations. Thirteen women out of the forty-one previously cited changed district between censuses: eight of them continued to rent a room, three of them became proprietor of their place, one kept her status and another one lost her place and was then listed in a rented room.

Table VI-6. Prostitutes changing district and types of lodging, Nantes 1804-1808

Status 1804-1808	Number of women who changed district	<div> L: Lodger H: Householder </div>
L → L	8	
L → H	3	
H → H	1	
H → L	1	
Total	13	

Source: AMN, I1 C62 D1.

Therefore it does not seem that changing district was a sign of personal success or of an improved economic situation: 23% of the women who changed district became proprietors of their place, a figure similar to the average (20%). Finally, the analysis of the women who stayed in the same district between 1804 and 1808 reveals a very similar pattern:

Table VI-7. Prostitutes remaining in the same district and types of lodging, Nantes 1804-1808

Status 1804-1808	Number of women who remained in the same district
L → L	21
L → H	5
H → H	1
H → L	1
Total	28

L: Lodger
H: Householder

Source: AMN, II C62 D1.

According to these figures, 18% of the women who stayed in their district managed to gain sufficient money to become a householder and it should be noticed that the figure is 5% less than in the case of women leaving their first known place of prostitution. On a smaller scale, the analysis highlights the discrepancies between the districts: it was explained earlier that women in the division du Commerce were rather poor and indeed, none of the women who remained in this district between 1807 and 1808 succeeded in securing lodgings for themselves. In the division Impériale and the division du Lycée however, respectively three and two women (or 33% and 66%) of the women who remained there managed to get their own lodging, underlining the socio-economic difference of the districts, and probably of the customers who went to see the prostitutes.

Another important point appears when looking at the precise addresses of the women staying in the same district: out of twenty-one women who rented a room, only six of them remained with the same tenant at the next census. Again this figure highlights the common misconception of prostitutes being forced by their landlord to work for him/her, which was taken for granted by Bodinier in his study of the district of La Fosse.⁸⁵ Only six women out of forty-one, that is 15 % of the women who were listed twice (but only 2% of all the prostitutes listed between 1804 and 1808), remained in the same place over the years. Despite the existence of houses which could be seen as bawdy houses, considering the number of prostitutes living there, it does not seem possible to talk of the professionalisation of prostitution: prostitution being rather a casual means to earn money at the beginning of the nineteenth century, a decision made by the woman herself and not by a third party.

One point remains to be covered considering the spatial distribution of prostitutes in Nantes. It is surprising that when comparing the maps of Nantes pre- and post-Revolution, prostitutes seem to have disappeared from the main road to Rennes and from the ex-parish of St Similien in general: the *commissaire* Durand of the division des Agriculteurs wrote to the general inspector in 1806, 1807 and 1808 to inform him that there were no prostitutes in his division whereas before the Revolution, a dozen references to prostitutes were recorded.

⁸⁵ Bodinier J.-L., *Le quai de La Fosse* (Rennes, 1997), p. 58.

*Le commissaire de police de la division des Agriculteurs certifie après informations prises dans les dites sections, qu'il n'y existe aucunes femmes notoirement reconnues publiques. Il peut exister de la débauche parmi quelques ouvrières qu'on ne peut par leur état qui est leur moyen d'existence qualifier de filles reconnues publiques.*⁸⁶

M. Durand claimed that no "*femme notoirement reconnue publique*" was to be found in his district and a year later, he explained that "*dans le cas de libertinage ou de concubinage, c'est clandestin et non apparent*".⁸⁷ This *commissaire*, by interpreting the law, introduced a distinction between casual prostitution by *ouvrières* and prostitution "as a trade", on a daily basis. In 1807, he also differentiated prostitutes "*raccrochant visiblement*" and "*femmes entretenues, qu'on ne peut atteindre sans risqué à se faire prendre à partie attend qu'elles ont des états, qu'elles sont domiciliées et payant les taxes de l'Etat.*" His comment indicates that the police could not and did not want to prosecute certain women, despite the fact that it was public knowledge that they were selling sexual favours. These women definitely had financial independence as they "paid taxes" and probably owned their place and these signs of economic independence differentiated them from the poorer prostitutes. In comparison, when analysing the censuses, two distinctive characteristics of prostitution appear: first in the division des Marchés, most of the women were owners of their place. These women may have been "*femmes entretetenues*" but the *commissaire* in this district thought it necessary to include them in the census, which shows a discrepancy in the interpretation of the law according to the *commissaires*. As mentioned earlier, the need for surveillance and

⁸⁶ AMN, I1 C62 D1.

⁸⁷ AMN, I1 C62 D1.

control of the poorest women and those most likely to move from one place to the other ("*raccrochant dans les rues*"), encouraged the creation of lists of prostitutes, much more than the risk of venereal diseases. The second characteristic that appears while studying the censuses and which goes against the interpretation of the *commissaire* Durand (Agriculteurs) is that only forty-one women were recorded twice, that is 13% only of these women were still considered as prostitutes one or two years later. This figure clearly shows that what could be defined as "casual prostitution" by the *commissaire* of the division des Agriculteurs, young *ouvrières* engaging in prostitution only when really necessary and not openly soliciting in the street, is a definition that was still unclear for the police and that needed to be defined more clearly.

This argument for casual prostitution follows and supports the analysis of prostitutes' occupation in chapter III: although officials listed their occupation under the category of "*profession qu'elles se donnent*", I believe that these occupations reflect both the training they received when younger and the occupation they would be doing if they had the opportunity to make a living from it. It cannot be said that all the women who were not repeatedly listed went back to their original trade: migrations, death, maybe hiding from the *commissaire* or simply an omission in the following census may have been reasons why they disappeared from the lists. But the eventuality that they went back to their initial employment remains a possibility and it demonstrates that prostitution in Nantes, at the beginning of the nineteenth century was very different from the "professionalised" prostitution in Paris. Both Benabou and Conner argue that at the end of the eighteenth century in Paris, "a class of women who resigned themselves to prostitution was created": they were recorded being without any employment nor qualification and they were said to be living from the trade of

prostitution.⁸⁸ However women in Nantes did not yet conform to this definition of their occupation. The number of women who admitted being "*femmes du monde*" in police reports did not exceed twelve between 1750 and 1789. In 1808, 28% of the prostitutes listed in the census said that they were without occupation;⁸⁹ however it has been shown that less than 13% of prostitutes were listed a second time, meaning that it is unlikely that they would still have been listed as prostitutes in 1809.⁹⁰ Cases in Bristol, when women openly said that they earned money from "kind gentlemen" or that they stayed in a disorderly house for a month to meet men, also corroborate the argument that prostitution in these port cities remained a means to earn money on a casual basis, for a variable duration and not their main occupation. Peter King confirms this hypothesis by insisting on the different survival strategies that needed to be put in place by men and women "to fend off complete destitution".⁹¹ Prostitution could therefore be a means to prevent a fall into complete destitution, a "quick fix" when facing an economic struggle.

Thus, the spatial distribution of prostitutes in Bristol and Nantes followed a similar pattern which can be summarised around three main points. The localisation of prostitutes was characterised by the density of population, the socio-economic level of the district and by the number of places of sociability, of movement of inhabitants and travellers. Although prostitutes were seen and lived in parishes where the movement of population was quite intense (for example near the quays), prostitution remained located in these same areas for decades and did not move away. Unaffected by the interventions of the city council or the complaints of inhabitants, the spatial distribution of prostitutes

⁸⁸ Conner S., 'Politics, Prostitution, and the Pox in Revolutionary Paris, 1789-1799' *Journal of Social History*, 22, n° 4 (Summer, 1989), pp. 713-734, p. 714; Benabou E.-M., *La prostitution et la police des mœurs à Paris au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1987), p. 270.

⁸⁹ See chapter II.

⁹⁰ The census of 1809, if it ever existed, has disappeared.

⁹¹ King P., *Crime, Justice and Discretion in England, 1740-1820* (Oxford, 2000), p. 167.

in both cities was marked by an appropriation of certain streets by the prostitutes themselves according to what might be termed entrepreneurial strategies: this was particularly noticeable in Nantes where the localisation of prostitutes moved slightly westward after the opening of new places of entertainment, but also in Bristol where prostitution was particularly active in parishes reputed to have numerous inns and taverns. The definition of prostitution or lewdness for these women went against the definition of the upper-middle class and clergy who tried to "help them" in both France and England. Both the Female Penitentiary in Bristol and the Refuge in Nantes cast these women apart as repentant, underlining their "lewdness" and the importance it had in their life before entering these establishments. The directors considered the fact that "they fell into immorality" because of their character and their economic situation but they also believed that these women would have been too weak to stop earning a living from prostitution by themselves "being [the objects] the most depraved of the human kind".⁹² Donna Andrew shows that the directors and subscribers of the Magdalen Hospital, London, at the end of the century followed a similar attitude towards their penitents: "the Magdalen had cast off its earlier hopes for economic and moral rehabilitation of its charge, and saw its new function to be a house of quarantine."⁹³ Fewer women were released each year since 1780s and the upper middle-class was disillusioned about the capacity of these women for rehabilitation; a later address to the Guardian society from 1817 clearly explained what many subscribers seemed to have come into terms with: "I am convinced that that woman who has lost, not merely the delicacy, but the feelings of her sex so far, as to wander the streets, offering her person indiscriminately to every man she meets ... can never again become fit to be a member

⁹² BRO, 17567 (7).

⁹³ Andrew D., *Philanthropy and Police* (Princeton, 1989), p. 191.

of the society from whence she has been expelled."⁹⁴ However for most women at that time, at least in port cities, prostitution remained casual and was part of their economy of makeshifts,⁹⁵ underlining the discrepancies between the upper-middle class discourse and the economic reality for plebeian women. Therefore, despite the attempts by the police after the Revolution to categorise these women as "full-time" prostitutes, who were known by the inhabitants as being "*femmes publiques*", their occupations remained varied and subject to change over time. Women who sold their bodies in Nantes and Bristol in this period did not consider themselves as prostitutes but probably defined this occupation as a necessity and still regarded it as casual.

⁹⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 189.

⁹⁵ See Shore H., 'The Reckoning': disorderly Women, informing Constables and the Westminster Justices, 1727-33', *Social History*, 34, n° 4 (2009), pp. 409-427, p. 423 for the relationship between crimes and strategy of survival.

Conclusion

In the introduction, it was noted that the historiography of Bristol and Nantes has not yet dealt thoroughly with the history of the poor, of women and even less of prostitutes. This thesis, therefore, has tried to fill part of this gap in the social history of these cities by looking at the social origins of prostitutes, their networks, their relations with the judicial and legal systems and finally their appropriation of urban space. The thesis has also followed a comparative methodology in an attempt to underline the similarities and differences in the treatment of prostitution in two provincial cities in two different countries.

The study started with an analysis of the legal system in place in France and England which targeted, indirectly, prostitutes. This analysis was considered necessary as the archives mentioning prostitutes were mainly judicial archives. It appeared that French and English legislation against vagrancy and bastardy was quite similar during the eighteenth century, leaving us with the expectation of finding the same type of archives concerning prostitutes. The upheavals of the Revolution and the administrative changes of the Empire did not provoke a rapid change in French legislation against prostitutes. Nor did it influence national legislation in England; however the moral panic that grew at the end of the century, fuelled by the fear of riots linked with the French Revolution, encouraged the growth of charities, notably for poor women and young orphans. This attitude was motivated by an attempt to lessen immorality and impose social control on the poorest classes, to overcome the risk of radicalisation of the labouring classes. Overall, the national frameworks looked "patchy" and displayed some weaknesses: prostitutes were not legally defined, despite the numerous complaints of

Parliamentarians and pamphleteers, and this situation did not change after the Revolution. However prostitutes were not considered in the same way as the poor, as they were excluded from the charitable relief offered to them.

In order to understand the position of prostitutes in a port city, the interpretation and implementation of national legislation at a local level had to be examined. The main difference between Nantes and Bristol lay in the judicial system put in place in these two cities. Bristol's municipality relied on the traditional system of watchmen, constables and justices of the peace whereas Nantes relied on a more organised police force with *commissaires* being full-time agents. Although similarities could be found between the two systems, the archives they produced were of a different nature and the *commissaires* had a far more important and active role than the constables in maintaining the peace and in arresting the culprits. At another level, the legal archives left by the justices of the peace do not reveal their opinion on prostitution and without the records of summary justice, it is impossible to know for definite if they were complacent about prostitution or if, on the contrary, they chose to confine prostitutes in the house of correction. Their role as magistrates and their attendance at the Quarter Sessions differed greatly from the role of the *commissaires*, who did not participate in the condemnation of the culprits.

The differences between the two judicial systems are therefore quite clear and this had an impact on the information recorded and on the pattern of prosecution of prostitutes. In Bristol, prostitutes appeared as three different "characters" in the judicial archives: as a culprit when accused of theft, as a witness for offences usually committed by another prostitute and as a plaintiff against tenants of disorderly houses. The judicial system in

Bristol did not permit the prosecution of a woman for lewdness (the practice fell into disuse) and these women were rarely recorded as "lewd" or "disorderly": they were only said to be "single women". In Nantes, the judicial process against prostitutes was quite different: they were often arrested for disturbing the peace and were clearly recorded as "*femmes du monde*". Nantes police, despite the absence of clear legislation, recorded them as prostitutes when they were involved in "*tapage*" and denounced by their neighbours. They were condemned either to the Sanitat or made to leave the city. But the length of their sentences was short (maximum six months) and if caught "on the spot" for disorderly behaviour, they were often freed after a few days as being "*insolvable*", or in other words, unable to pay for their prison fees. There seems to have been a similar situation in Bristol, where most of the prostitutes arrested for theft were freed after the Quarter Sessions examined their case. However the difference from Nantes is that they had already spent a few months or sometimes up to a year in prison waiting for their trial. The analysis of these archives in both Nantes and Bristol gives nevertheless a distorted image of women in prostitution as they seem to be always linked with crimes or offences. However in both cities, these crimes were mainly minor offences, such as opportunistic thefts and disturbance of the peace, excluding prostitutes from a potential organised criminal world.

The study of legislation and of the crimes in which prostitutes were involved in some way in Nantes and Bristol shows an array of differences: the police system in Nantes was better organised and prostitutes were recorded as such when they committed an offence whereas in Bristol the clerk used the ambiguous word "singlewoman". However similarities can be found, notably in the type of crimes committed by prostitutes: prosecutions for theft seem to have been a common extension of a strategy of survival

and an economy of makeshift. In order to verify this theory, the social background and the familial environment of prostitutes were examined and the similarities between Nantes and Bristol became more evident. Prostitutes were commonly in their mid-twenties, from a low social background, unskilled and without any regular source of revenue. This precarious situation had also been highlighted by legislators in both countries: in November 1780, an *ordonnance* of police in Nantes claimed "*la débauche, qui n'est souvent que la suite de la misère, seroit moins excessive si elle ne trouvoit les moyens de se produire dans l'intérêt et la cupidité de ceux qui la favorisent*".¹ This introductory comment to the *ordonnance* demonstrated an important change in attitude towards prostitutes: the poverty and difficult economic situation in which these women used to live was taken into account to explain their prostitution; sins and immoral character were not used as arguments to legislate. This distinction was also reflected in the change of attitude towards prostitutes in the English Parliament and amongst the social and political elite in England. In *Plan for a Preservatory and Reformatory for the Benefit of Deserted Girls and Penitent Prostitutes* (1758) Fielding insisted on prostitutes' poor background and the necessity for some women to sell their body: "What must become of the daughters where poverty and illiterateness (sic) conspire to expose them to every temptation? ... they become prostitutes by Necessity".²

The necessity of adopting strategies of survival was accentuated by the fact that these women were often living in a disrupted familial environment: either their father or mother was dead, and if married, their husband was most likely in an employment which would take him away for a long period of time (i.e. mariners or soldiers). In addition, approximately half of these women were from outside the city, thus living

¹ AMN, FF 291.

² Fielding J., *Plan for a Preservatory and Reformatory for the Benefit of Deserted Girls and Penitent Prostitutes* (London, 1758), pp. 5-6.

without their close family. However it has been shown that they were mostly migrating from villages and towns which were on the main road to cities such as Nantes or Bristol, meaning that they were probably not totally ignorant of the life in the city, thanks to the news they received from friends, peddlers or people from the village who had already migrated there. The role and attitude of the family when a woman became a prostitute shows an evolution, at least in Nantes, where data were available: members of the family stopped asking for the young women to be confined in the Sanitat after 1760. This change may reflect a change of attitude towards the perception and usage of the law: a comparison with other cities would enlighten this specificity and show if families still tried to use the law in this case. The study of the Bon Pasteur and judicial archives indicated that female members of the family often had close relations with these young women, probably playing the role of moral substitute to the mother.

In addition to their family, prostitutes had close links with the surrounding community: they had friends or other prostitutes who accompanied them in the streets and public houses, possibly for security, and they often shared a room with another woman. The customers they met were mostly from the same background: mariners were the most common customers, as well as labourers. Some yeomen complained of being robbed but it is difficult to define their social status: overall, the customers were mainly from the labouring classes in both cities. Prostitutes also had some links with the tenants of inns, public-houses and lodging-house, as tenants seem to have benefitted from their presence, in the sense that they were prepared to rent rooms to the women and their customers, for a short time. The gender ratio of tenants renting rooms or letting prostitutes come into their establishments showed that in both cities, almost as many men as women were encouraging this trade. It seems that prostitutes were not bound to

stay in one place: on the contrary, they had little attachment and tenants probably had few possibilities to force them to stay, especially if the police had asked the women to leave. The fact that some prostitutes in Bristol prosecuted tenants also demonstrates that they had more freedom in their relationships with tenants and greater agency than was usually depicted in literature or in the newspapers.

Prostitutes' relations with the agents of the law and their evolution were also analysed. In this case, the situation in Nantes and Bristol differed greatly. It has already been emphasised that the police system was constituted differently and that the role of the *commissaires* was very important in the treatment of prostitution by the judicial system. It has also been shown that most of the police officials in place in Nantes before the Revolution remained in charge subsequently. Their influence at a local level was therefore crucial in the treatment of prostitutes: indeed, without any national incentive, they started listing prostitutes by districts from 1804. By encouraging the listing, which became compulsory in 1806, the police formalised the social category of "*filles prostituées*", whereas most of these women did not consider themselves prostitutes but rather seamstresses, thread makers or servants. As D'Cruz explains "the criminalisation of prostitution impacted on recognised social, sexual and material economies in working-class communities".³ This acceleration in the process of criminalisation and this willingness to increase the control over the labouring classes in Nantes appear to be due to the years of suspicion and the anxieties born with the Revolution and the local upheavals. It thus shows the importance of studying local events to understand the long process of changes in *mentalités*. The comparison with Bristol highlights the same conclusion: the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars created many anxieties but they

³ D'Cruz and Jackson, *Women, Crime and Justice in England*, p. 67.

were not directed, at least in Bristol, towards a change of legislation but towards an increase of social control over the labouring classes through the development of charities, notably Bristol first "Magdalen Hospital" in 1801.

The comparison between Nantes and Bristol prostitutes appears conclusive on many points: they were of similar age and background, they had the same type of "amicable" relationships with other prostitutes, the same types of customers and they based their exchange with the tenants of inns and public houses on financial gain, with no clear dependence on the tenant. Even the study of their relations with the judicial and the charitable systems indicates that the Revolution years had an impact on both Nantes and Bristol, although they were of a different nature. These conclusions regarding social similarities between prostitutes in Bristol and Nantes led to a comparison of the spatial distribution of these women in these two cities. Bristol and Nantes' developments were very comparable, with districts of similar social composition and a similar economic growth. The first comparable point lies in the fact that prostitutes were dispersed in every district of both cities; even the richest districts or parishes had prostitutes living or at least "parading" on their streets. The second point concerns the important number of prostitutes in both the city centres and the ports: this is probably a result of continuity in the historical usage of space, at least for the city centre, although further research is advisable to sustain the argument more thoroughly. The presence of possible customers in these parts of the city is of course another argument to explain their location. Prostitutes were also found near places of entertainment such as public houses, theatres and promenades. The evolution of prostitutes' location in Nantes showed how they moved towards the new *quartier Graslin* where a theatre opened and a whole new district was built. But it is not possible to say that there was a district specifically for

prostitutes in these cities: the social composition of the streets where prostitutes lived was varied and overall, it seems that they were well integrated in their respective communities. It is interesting to note that Lee's study of Kent prostitution a century later reveals the same attitude towards prostitutes in terms of "inclusion" or assimilation into the neighbourhood,⁴ underlining the fact that the periodisation of social segregation is relative to each urban or rural environment.

The aim of this thesis was to study and analyse prostitution in provincial cities in order to determine specificities in prostitution in this particular type of urban space and to highlight the differences and similarities between two port cities in the eighteenth century. So what does this thesis bring to the historiography and current debates on prostitution in the eighteenth-century? Did prostitution in Bristol and Nantes differ greatly from Parisian or London prostitution at that time? The first point to underline is that this thesis remains for the moment original in its comparative approach to the subject. Even prostitution in Paris and London, which are more commonly studied, has never been compared in depth to understand the main differences in the representation and treatment of prostitutes in two different countries. By studying provincial prostitution, it is possible to frame a timeline of changing attitudes towards prostitution and throughout the comparison, it was also possible to demonstrate the importance of local events. What happened in Bristol and Nantes was part of a long time process and my aim is not to say that the Revolution or the moral panic of the end of the century were the only reasons for a shift of attitudes: this would award too much importance to local events and local "atmosphere". However it would also be a mistake to see in Bristol and Nantes a simple transposition of what happened in London and Paris.

⁴ Lee C., "Regulating prostitution in nineteenth century Kent: beyond the Contagious Diseases Acts", PhD Thesis (Open University, 2008), p. 240.

Personal initiatives and local specificities proved to be as important as the national and legal framework and national events in the understanding of the gradual criminalisation of prostitutes.

The methodology followed in this thesis also highlights the relationship between provincial and capital cities and the extent to which these port cities were able to act autonomously. It is evident that Bristol and Nantes were influenced by Paris and London (for example, the Magdalen Hospital) but their independence in terms of legislation and social control appears conspicuous when studying prostitution. The autonomy of officials and the importance of personal initiatives in the treatment of prostitution show that Nantes and Bristol were responding to prostitution in a manner that they judged more adequate to the local problem, using the national legislation, often constructed with the capital cities in mind, as a very loose framework for their own practice. The police system in France was by nature more developed than in England and it became an efficient tool to impose social control. In England, at the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth century, the elites relied more systematically on their abilities to strengthen their network, for example through Vice societies and to multiply establishments to help or confine the poor and potentially disorderly people. This was particularly the case at a provincial level, where the means employed to develop a police system were far less important than in London. The political divisions in France during this period also prevented the development of a rational system of charity or poor relief, as proven by the different projects, most of them aborted, of the Republican governments.⁵

⁵ Forrest A., *The French Revolution and the Poor* (Oxford, 1981), p. 55.

Although the types of social control differed between both countries, social commonalities in prostitution existed, which transcended national differences. First of all, there is the social background of the prostitutes, which can easily be compared to the social background of London or Parisian prostitutes. Poverty and prostitution were linked and prostitution can be considered as part of the economy of makeshift in both countries. It was a recourse mostly used by young unmarried women in their twenties, and not younger: child prostitution does not appear to have been much developed; at a provincial level it was not even recorded in the archives. The general attitude also seems to follow a common evolution between both countries: women selling sex as a strategy of economic survival were gradually identified solely by their prostitution. It has been shown that Nantes police already used specific expressions for these women when they were arrested: however this was in a penal context, after the women had committed a crime or an offence. With the start of the listing of *filles publiques*, the police categorised these women not as occasional prostitutes but as women living only from the earnings of prostitution. To some extent, the confinement of women in a female penitentiary or a Magdalen hospital can also be compared to a form of categorisation: the women were not considered as free citizens but as ex-prostitutes who had to redeem themselves in order to be allowed into society again. This shift of attitudes is neither specific to a city nor a country (France and England), only the means put in place to address this change of attitudes differed.

The wider implementation of a legal system similar to Nantes's eventually led to the regulation of prostitution in French cities, as would be the case in some English cities, sixty years later when the Contagious Diseases Acts were passed. The difference in timing between the two countries and between cities deserves further study but it would

also be interesting to ask what role the Victorian understanding of progress, the geography of prostitution and control of diseases had to play. The roots of the CDA partly lay in the stigmatisation of prostitutes through charitable institutions and as Catherine Lee shows in her thesis on prostitution in Kent, the implementation of these acts did not dramatically change the daily-life of prostitutes in terms of the number of arrests and condemnations.⁶ What changed with the passage of the CDA were the legal definition of prostitutes and prostitutes' judicial categorisation as potential offenders. Overall, the importance of the discursive practice used to justify this change in the law has to be underlined and would deserve more research.

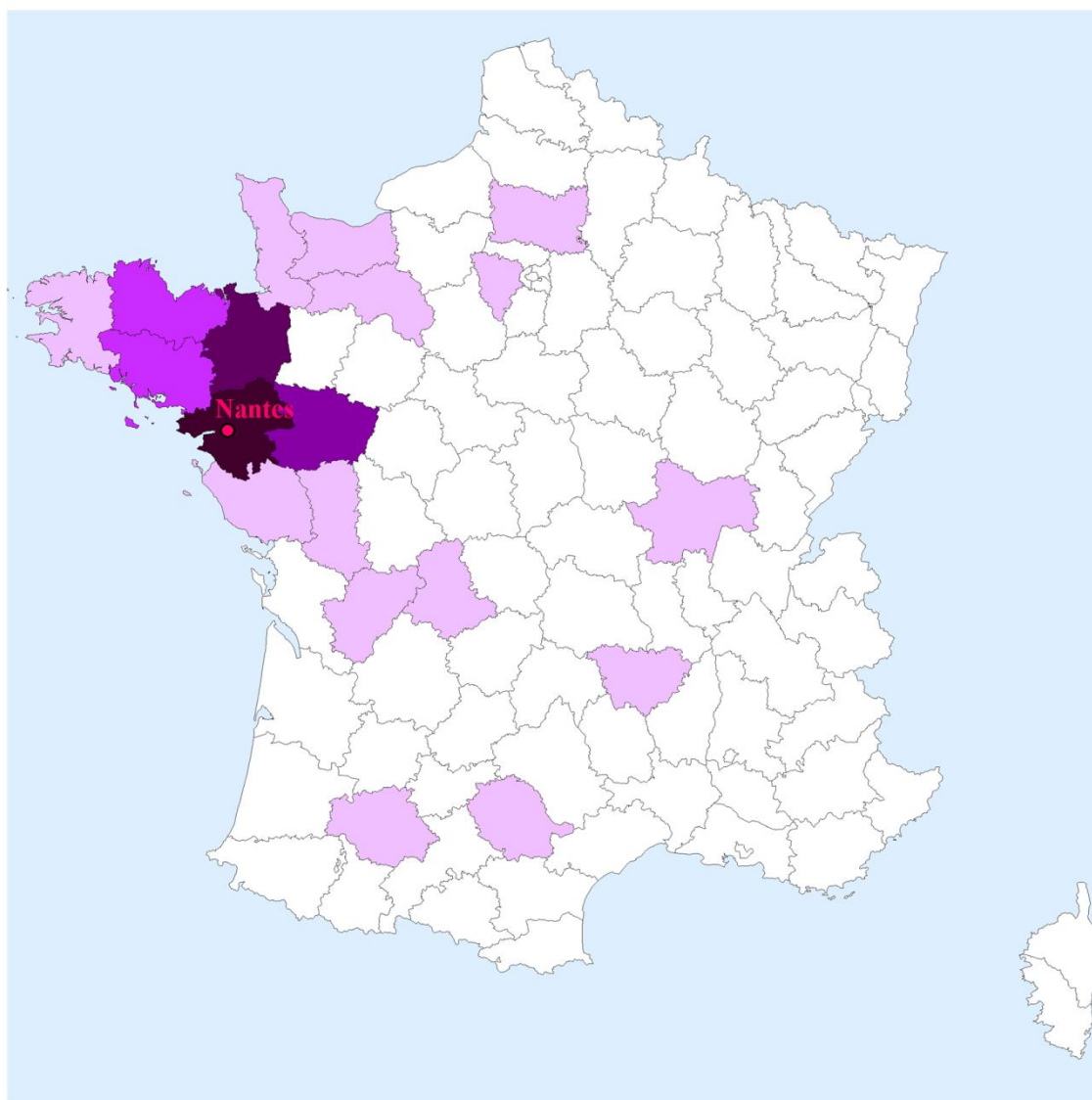
It is to be hoped that more comparisons in women's history at the national level or at the local level, will be developed in an attempt to map an eighteenth-century European view of the subject. Studies at a European level on women's work, culture or education have been written since 1990s but none yet on marginal women, and I believe that the methodology used here could be extended to the study of eighteenth-century "marginality" in order to consider the impact of both national and local legislation. It would increase our understanding of women's history, strategies of survival and economies of makeshift by showing the extent of the similarities and differences between cities or regions.⁷ Moreover this thesis also leaves some questions unanswered which I hope will lead to further research. For instance, the role of charities or religious establishments in helping prostitutes could be analysed in the light of a wider network, by extending spatial and temporal boundaries. The Bon Pasteur, for instance, was also

⁶ Lee, "Regulating prostitution in nineteenth century Kent", p. 320.

⁷ Hufton O., *The Prospect before Her: a History of Women in Western Europe / Vol.1, 1500-1800* (London, 1995); Simonton D., *A History of European Women's Work : 1700 to the Present* (New York, 1998); Whitehead B., *Women's Education in Early Modern Europe : a History, 1500-1800* (New York, 1999); Hyde M., *Women, Art and the Politics of Identity in eighteenth-century Europe* (Aldershot, 2003); Whaley L., *Women and the Practice of Medical Care in early modern Europe, 1400-1800* (Basingstoke, 2011). It is to be noticed that Reformation studies and early modern history works in general tend more often than eighteenth-century works to look at women from a European point of view.

opened in towns such as La Rochelle or Rennes and these institutions had contact with Nantes' establishment. Similarly the role of the SRM and Vice Societies in Bristol could be studied through a systematic analysis of newspapers to see how the prosecutions and arrests were represented and put them into perspective with other Vice societies in different cities. If these were then compared with the Quarter Sessions records, it would be possible to show more thoroughly if the level of prosecutions increased and whether the Quarter Sessions' sentences were influenced by these societies or on the contrary, if their impact was limited. In terms of criminal history in France, it would be interesting to look in more depth at the role of the first *préfets* in the process of implementing legislation encouraging a stricter social control at a city level. Nantes' archives on criminal behaviour still have a lot to offer: a close analysis of the records of the tribunals could show how prostitution and crimes were treated by the highest jurisdictions. Such research would give the opportunity to look at prostitution not in terms of network or relationships but in terms of the upper-classes' definition of social control, as opposed to the arguments of this thesis, which focused more on the relationships between prostitutes and the middle and labouring classes.

Appendix 1. Place of birth of listed prostitutes in Nantes, 1808



Number of prostitutes born in each department	
None	
< 5	
5-14	
15-24	
25-49	
50 +	

Appendix 2. Regional distribution of prostitutes' place of birth, Nantes, 1808



Number of prostitutes per place of birth	Loire-Atlantique	Maine et Loire	Ille et Vi-laine	Morbihan
Nantes	●	N/A	N/A	N/A
5 +	●	●	●	●
< 5	●	●	●	●

CHURCHES.

A Clifton Church	I St. Werburgh's	Q St. Peter's
B Cathedral	K St. Nicholas	R St. Philip's
C St. Marks	L St. John's	S Temple Church
D St. Augustine's	M St. Ewen's	T St. Thomas's
E St. Michael's	N All Saints	U Redcliff Church
F St. James's	O Christ Church	
G St. Paul's	P Mary Port	
H St. Stephen's		

CHAPELS & MEETING-HOUSES.

a Hotwells Chapel	i Bridge Street Chapel	f New Jerusalem Church
b Lady Hope's Chapel	k Pitney Meeting	s Temple Chapel
c French Chapel	l Broad mead Meet	v Friends Meeting
d Catholic Chapel	m Wesley's Room	u Synagogue
e Portland Chapel	n Friends Meeting	w Wesley's Chapel
f Moravian Chapel	o Whitfield's Tabernacle	
g Lewins mead Meeting	p Castle Green Meet	
h Huntingdon's Chapel	q George's Street Chapel	

PUBLIC BUILDINGS &c.

1 Equestrian Theatre	10 Excise Office	18 Welch Market	34 Taylors Alms Ho
2 Grammar School	11 Custom House	19 Leather Hall	35 St. Peter's Hospital
3 Colston's School	12 Mansion House	20 Exchange Market	36 Newgate
4 Eldridges School	13 Merchants Hall	21 Exchange	37 Ald. Stephen's Hosp
5 Colston's Alms House	14 Merchants Alms Ho	22 Post Office	38 Trinity Hosp
6 Eosters Alms House	15 City Library	23 Council House	39 Friends Work Ho.
7 City School	16 Theatre Royal	24 Guild Hall	40 Traders Bridge
8 Great Crane	17 Coopers Hall	25 Taylors Hall	41 Philip's Work Ho
9 Assembly Room			42 De Poudre Court

EXPLANATION

Lines drawn across a River denote a Bridge, thus ...

Dots across a River express a Ferry for Foot Passengers only, thus ...

Round Black Spots denote Glass Houses, thus ...

Accusations of theft

1-2 cases	●
3-4 cases	●
5-6 cases	●
> 6 cases	●

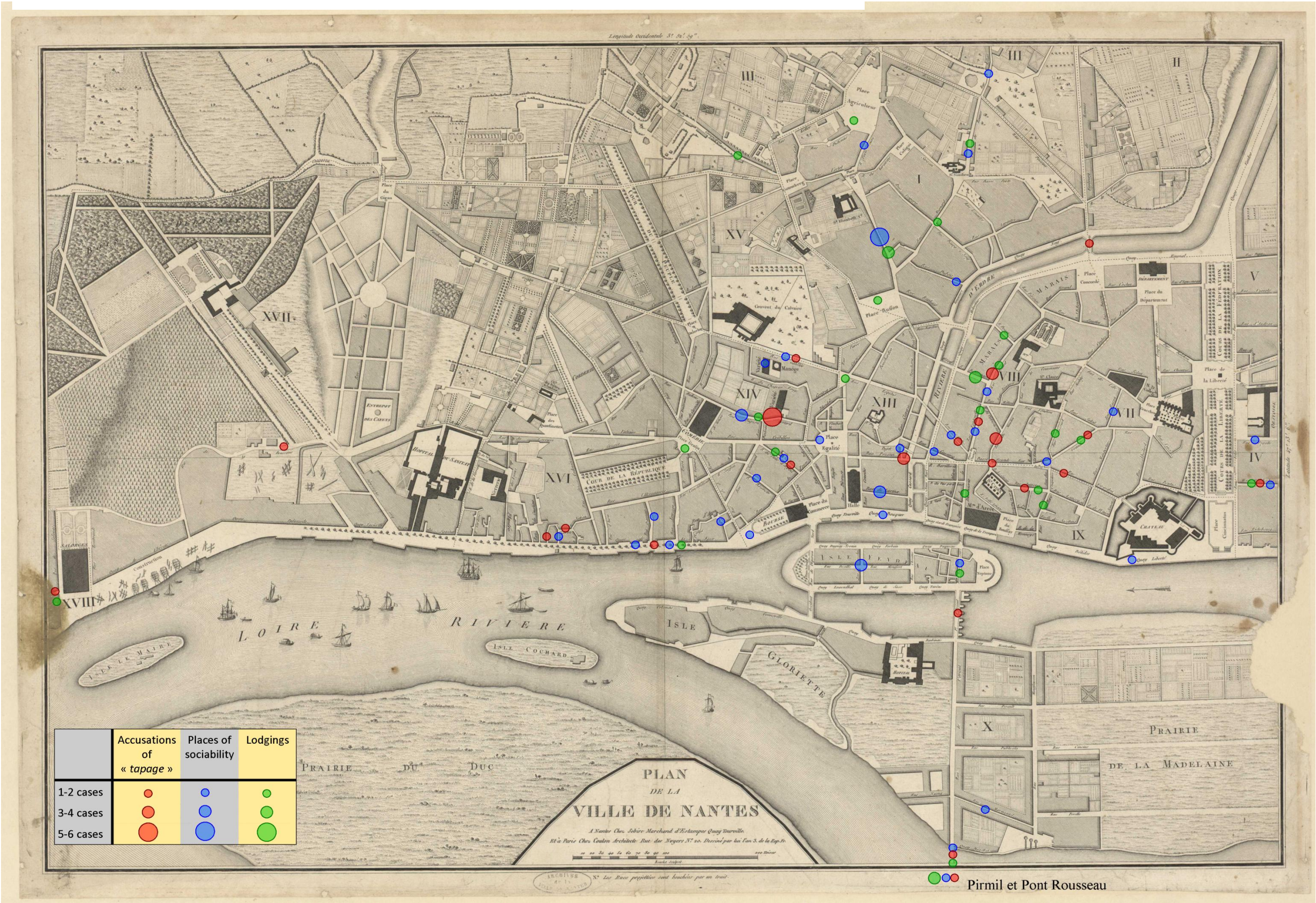
Places of sociability

●
●
●
●

Lodgings

●
●
●
●

Appendix 4. Spatial distribution of prostitutes in Nantes, 1750-1789





Appendix 6. Spatial distribution of prostitutes according to censuses, Nantes An III - 1808

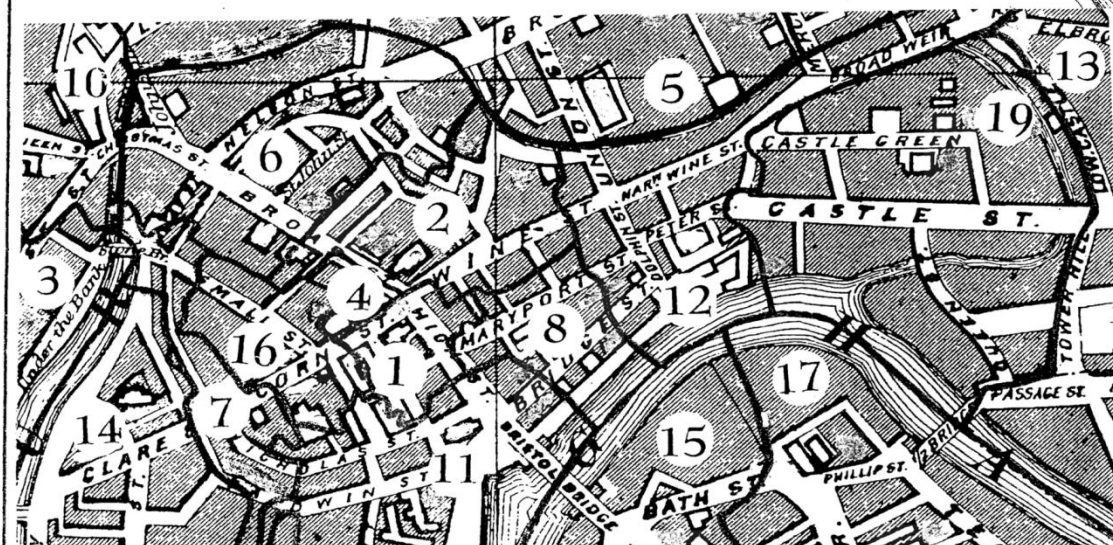
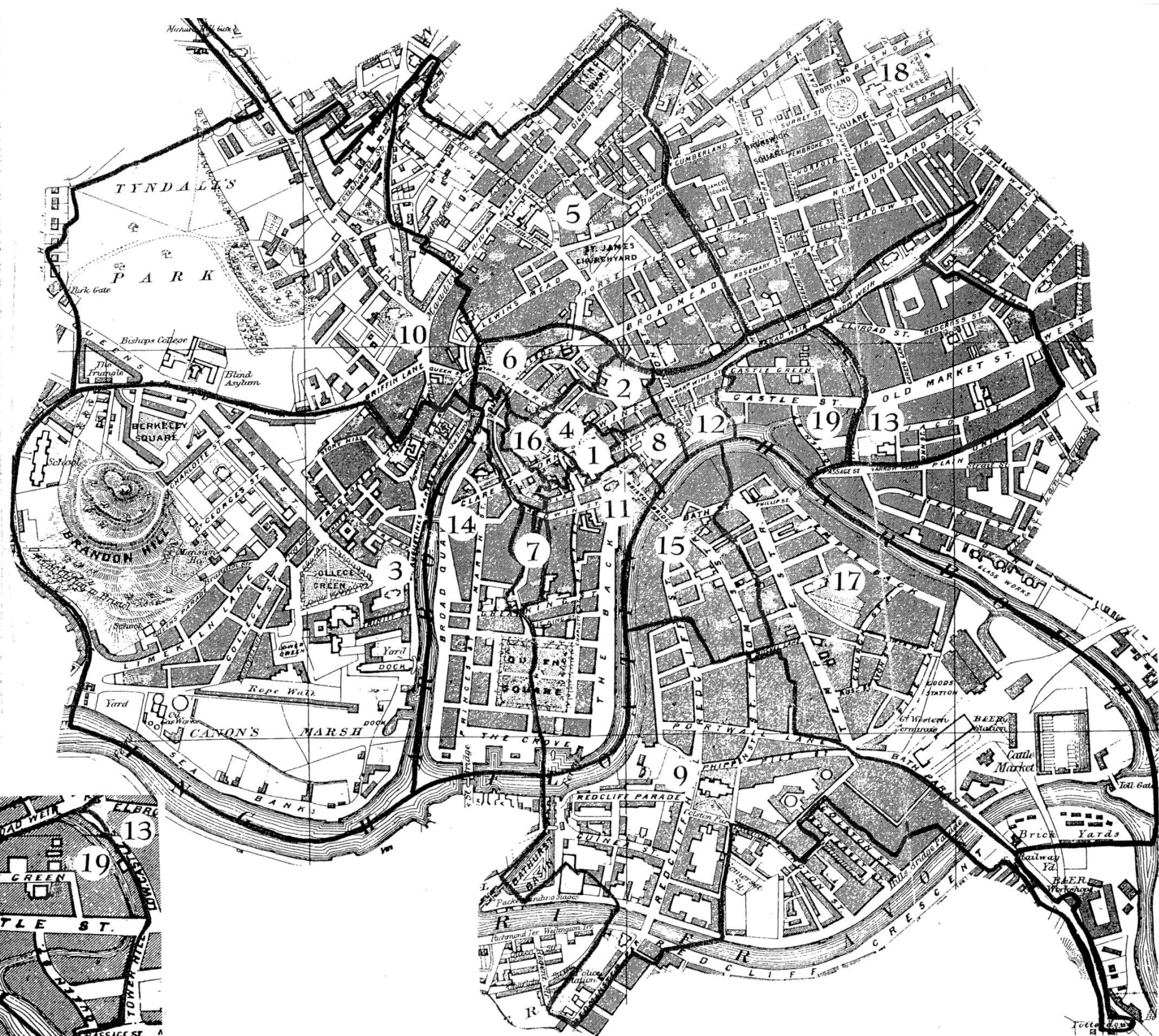


The Ancient Parishes of Bristol

Number on map	Parish
1	All Saints
2	Christ Church
3	St. Augustine-the-Less
4	St. Ewen
5	St. James
6	St. John the Baptist
7	St. Leonard
8	St. Mary le Port
9	St. Mary Redcliffe
10	St. Michael
11	St. Nicholas
12	St. Peter
13	St. Philip and Jacob
14	St. Stephen
15	St. Thomas
16	St. Werburgh
17	Temple

Also shown:

18	St. Paul (church opened in 1794)
19	Castle Precincts (not an ecclesiastical parish)



City centre parishes enlarged

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AMN I1 C50 D2 – Poursuite contre des Cabaretiers.

AMN, I1 C52 D12 – Police Locale – Salles de Danse.

AMN, I1 C52 D6 – Police Locale – Règlements concernant les filles publiques au théâtre.

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AMN, I1 C68 D1 – Décrets pour l'extinction de la mendicité.

AMN, I1 C68 D4 – Vagabondage.

AMN, I1 C68 D5 – Mendicité.

AMN, I1 C74 D16 – Enfants abandonnés.

AMN, I1 C74 D17 – Enfants exposés.

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AMN, I2 C6 D1 – Ordonnance contre les logeurs et cabaretiers.

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