Les Mécontentes: Gender and Profession in Third Estate Women's Cahiers de Doléances on the Eve of the French Revolution

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Introduction

The French Revolution is often considered a turning point in the history of government and political institutions: a shift from a monarchy that favored aristocrats and clergymen to a republic that represented the will of the people, or at least the interests of the bourgeoisie. It is often portrayed as a rebellion by the common people against the injustices of the government. Under this grand, albeit simplified, theme fall the cahiers de doléances (lists of grievances). These cahiers, drawn up more or less systematically across France by each estate (clergy, nobility, Third Estate) outlined the reforms desired by that particular group. Each estate drew up one of these general cahiers through a process of assemblies with input from organizations such as monasteries and convents for the clergy and guilds for the Third Estate.\(^1\) The cahiers accompanied the deputies that were to represent each estate of that baillage (balliwick) in the Estates General of the summer of 1789. This process of assemblies, cahiers writing, and sending representatives to the Estates General was done at the bequest of King Louis XVI. The king hoped that the Estates General could pass measures to solve France’s debt crisis, even if that meant that he must accept other reforms, as well. The cahiers de doléances, then, were part of an official political process granted by the authority of the established government.

Women were generally excluded from this process. Some women’s—mostly widows’—signatures were present on documents created at the parish level before being sent on to the baillage assembly. Additionally, convents and landholding widows of noblemen were able to appoint male deputies to represent their interests at the baillage assemblies of the clergy and nobility, respectively. Some convents also drew up their own cahiers de doléances to be

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\(^1\) Guilds in the provinces were given representation in the local assemblies and had the right to elect delegates. In Paris, however, guilds were given no official representation, a decision which Parisian guild leaders strongly opposed.
considered at these assemblies. However, working class women were generally unable to participate in the official process of drawing up cahiers and choosing deputies to the Estates General. In a desire to have their interests represented, some groups of Third Estate women drew up their own cahiers that they then delivered to the Estates General or the king’s ministers. This act showed a desire by these women to not only influence reforms, but to do it through formal means. A cahier was essentially a petition, but it was a form of petition which the king not only condoned, but demanded, even if these women were excluded from the groups from whom the king demanded them. Furthermore, they were documents that were to be used to influence the decisions of the Estates General, an assembly convened to make reforms. These women’s choice of the cahier format showed a desire to be able to participate in the process; they wanted to have their cahiers read and their interests represented in the Estates General, much like the men that were allowed to participate at the assemblies could. While these cahiers written by women arguably did not have any real impact on the Estates General or other formal institutions—indeed, there is no indication that they were even read—these documents are nevertheless valuable for what they say about the women that wrote them and not just the reforms that failed to materialize.

Groups of Third Estate women were not the only ones to write unofficial cahiers. Other guilds and organizations wrote them, as did individuals—both men and women. Cahiers were written by anonymous authors, such as a “Madame B…B…,” or from individuals like Laurent-Pierre Bérenger, who called himself “a friend of morals.” A cahier purported to be from the “Women of the Third Estate” appeared, as did those that claimed to represent “the fair sex” and “unmarried women” as a whole. Some of these cahiers were sent to the Estates General. The authors of others, though writing in cahier form, published their work as pamphlets, wanting
instead to sway public opinion. Parody cahiers were also written to mock the process, such as the cahier pretending to be from the court prostitutes.

Scholarship on the French Revolution has often overlooked these unofficial cahiers and instead focused on the general cahiers drawn up at the assemblies. General cahiers are more cohesive and formulaic, making quantitative analysis like that of Gilbert Shapiro and John Markoff possible. As official documents, these cahiers are easy to authenticate, and the preservation of many of them, particularly those of the Third Estate, has made it easier to do regional comparisons or large overviews. The unofficial cahiers are more problematic: their authorship is sometimes unknown or contested, as is the motivation behind their creation. This does not necessarily mean that unofficial cahiers have been completely omitted from scholarship. Erica-Marie Benabou’s *La Prostitution et la Police des Moeurs au XVIIIe Siècle* (Prostitution and the Morality Police of the Eighteenth Century), for instance, makes many references to Laurent-Pierre Bérenger’s cahier written to the Estates General on the subject of prostitution. However, Benabou does not delve into the significance of such a document as an address to the Estates General nor does she analyze Bérenger’s social and economic status and how such status could influence his cahier. The unofficial cahier is treated simply as a document depicting an opinion on the current state of prostitution. The unofficial cahiers have been used as part of larger studies but, by and large, they have not been the main focus of an analysis.

Similarly, unofficial cahiers accredited to women have been mentioned in larger works, but they have not been giving much analysis, and, when they do, it is in a general sense. Paule-Marie Duhet addresses a handful of points from different women’s cahiers in her preface to a reprint of these cahiers as well as her *Les Femmes et la Révolution 1789-1794* (Women and the

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2 For an example of this, see my discussion of the Cahier de Doléances des Dames de la Halle in Chapter I. Other examples include the disagreement on the female authorship of the cahier by Mme. B.... B....
Revolution) and mentions authentic women’s cahier-writing as an economically-driven enterprise, but does not go deeper. Christine Fauré dedicates some of her article “Doléances, Déclarations et Pétitions, Trois Formes de la Parole Publique des Femmes sous la Révolution” (Complaints, Declarations, and Petitions, Three Forms of Public Speech by Women under the Revolution) to discussing women’s unofficial cahiers as part of a larger study of women’s political speech, but still groups these cahiers together and speaks about them in a very general sense. Her conclusion that these cahiers were an attempt at political involvement by women is significant in and of itself, but she does not look into the specific requests in the cahiers--specifically the economic ones—to determine how these women viewed themselves, nor does she discuss the differences between individual cahiers. Suzanne Desan’s The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France similarly mentions the implications of female cahier-writers and how the act of cahier writing showed women’s organization and participation in the emerging political system during the Revolution, but still in a very vague manner. Unofficial cahiers by women have been mentioned in the scholarship on women in the French Revolution, but they have not been given an in-depth analysis.

On a more global level, scholarship on women in the French Revolution tends to overlook these cahiers, instead focusing on public demonstrations by Third Estate women, the writings of noblewomen such as Olympe de Gouge, and influential salonnières that regularly came into contact with powerful men. Such a focus fails to account for the efforts of Third Estate women to contribute to officially sanctioned political processes such as the convening of the Estates General. While marches on Versailles and treatises on the rights of women should not be ignored by scholars, more research should be done on cahier-writing.
I will attempt to fix this oversight and give an in-depth analysis of three cahiers de doléances for groups of women. Although many cahiers accredited to women were written, the three cahiers that I will analyze are cahiers that claim to represent groups of working class Parisian women: fashion merchants, bouquet sellers, and the Dames de la Halle, the sellers of fruit and fish in the marketplace. Paris was not the only city whose working class women composed cahiers; the female laundresses of Marseille, for instance, also composed a list of grievances. However, in order to include that cahier in the analysis, I would have to consider the effects of regional differences, in addition to the effects of guild status and the specific products the women were selling. Such an additional analysis is too large to be adequately covered in this paper. Therefore, I have chosen to focus on Paris, for both its availability of multiple cahiers de doléances for working class women, as well as its status as the commercial and political center of France. These women’s nearness to the actual convention of the Estates General and, therefore, their ability to easily deliver their cahiers in person is a significant factor in an analysis of unofficial cahier-writing and should not be overlooked. Therefore, this analysis will focus on Paris’s Third Estate women and their cahiers de doléances.

I have also chosen to focus only on three cahiers that claim to represent the interests of groups of women identified by their occupation. There are numerous examples of cahiers that are written on behalf of larger groups of women, whether they be the “Women of the Third Estate,” “Unmarried Women,” or the “Fair Sex” as a whole. These cahiers, too, are often-overlooked contributions to the discourse on women and their role leading up to the French Revolution. However, I have chosen to focus on women that had a profession to analyze how they and their contemporaries viewed their position as both women and merchants. Other cahiers attributed to women, even those attributed to women of the Third Estate, are not necessarily the complaints of
women that had a profession. Unemployed women’s perceptions of women involved in trade would not be the same as those that are actively involved in commerce.

These other cahiers, too, present a problem in that they attempt to represent a large, diverse group of women, and, as a result, have less specific demands or focus solely on women’s issues and do not address economic issues. An omission of suggestions for more specific reforms, particularly economic reforms, does not necessarily mean that the cahier-writers and the groups they represented did not want such reforms, but, more likely, that those concerns did not reflect the concerns of the group as a whole. Women within a specific occupation are more likely to have similar interests. All three groups of women whose cahiers are being analyzed in this thesis had some semblance of a cohesive community, whether that be a guild or something less formal. The expression of the wants of the guild did not always reflect the wants of each individual, but, for the most part, it reflected ideas for what would be the best for the guild, and, by extension, a significant number of its members.\(^3\) Identification with such a group did not necessarily guarantee that all of the women had similar economic status. For example, even within the fashion merchants’ guild, there was a wide-disparity between those renowned merchants, such as Rose Bertin, who sold to the highest nobility and the queen and employed more than thirty workers in her workshop, and those merchants that employed only one or two workers and sold mostly to the lower classes. However, the women that participated in these occupations were all from the Third Estate and most, if not all, of the demands in their cahiers were for reforms that would benefit, or, at the very least, not hurt the members of their community, regardless of their personal wealth or the extent of their business.

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In this thesis, I will analyze the cahiers de doléances written by the fashion merchants and the bouquet sellers, as well as the cahier articulating the grievances of the Dames de la Halle to prove that all three tell us about the groups that are represented (the fashion merchants, bouquet sellers, and Dames de la Halle) and how others perceived them. I will focus on gender and profession and the extent of their influence on how these cahiers were written and what reforms were requested. This thesis is not meant to be an extensive analysis of women’s rights or feminist movements leading up to the Revolution. Rather, it will show how ideas of gender and profession, both personal and societal, influenced how two groups of women - the fashion merchants and bouquet sellers - attempted to influence the political discourse, and how the political involvement of the Dames de la Halle was viewed by a male author and the larger society.

Understanding these political documents that represent groups of working women gives us insight into how such women went about being politically involved, even if it was through an unofficial imitation of an official political process. All three of the groups had a dual identity as women, whose domain was the private, domestic sphere, and merchants, who were involved in the public sphere of commerce, and used both identities in an attempt to influence the emerging sphere of politics. The use of the groups’ status as women showed that this new political sphere was not an exclusively public sphere, but, instead, had the potential to be influenced by arguments originating from the private sphere of women. However, the justifications given by the authors for the cahiers showed that this influence from the private sphere had limitations. The emphasis on the women’s economic roles in the cahiers further this assertion. The authors, themselves, thought that both identities were important factors in political involvement,
expressing an idea that both the private and public sphere could be or should be represented in politics.

In Chapter I, I will give an overview of the bouquet sellers, fashion merchants, Dames de la Halle, and their position in Parisian society. I will also look at their cahiers on the simplest level—authorship, publication date, and format—before looking at their reliability as sources. In Chapter II, I will argue that the two cahiers written by women—the fashion merchants’ and bouquet sellers’—were primarily economic documents that showed that women in trade chose to make similar requests to those of their male counterparts. Likewise, the cahier for the Dames de la Halle contained this economic emphasis, and its arguments, too, were similar to those used by Third Estate men. Next, Chapter III will look at the ways the fashion merchants and bouquet sellers identified themselves as women and how the composition of their arguments referenced their status as women. I will show how the Dames de la Halle were similarly portrayed in their cahier. I will discuss how all three cahiers incorporated ideas about gender that were prevalent at the time. The next two chapters will not address the specific arguments listed in the cahiers, but, rather, other indicators of how the cahier writers viewed the identity of the groups they claimed to represent and how they thought their audience would view them. Chapter IV will analyze the different communities with which these groups of women identified themselves and how the communities of the fashion merchants, bouquet sellers, and Dames de la Halle were organized. I will show how these larger identities impacted how the women’s groups chose to appeal to their audience and how the cahier authors portrayed themselves as political representatives of fashion merchants, bouquet sellers, and Dames de la Halle, as well as the accuracy of this assertion. Finally, in Chapter V I will then look at what the cahiers said about how the cahier-writers and
the public viewed these groups’ political involvement with a focus on how the authors justified this cahier-writing by women.
Chapter I: Fashion Merchants, Bouquet Sellers, Dames de la Halle, and Their Cahiers

While the fashion merchants, bouquet sellers, and Dames de la Halle were all part of the Parisian working class, these three groups had different backgrounds and experiences which shaped their cahiers. In order to understand the cahiers, it is important to first understand the groups they claimed to represent and the perspective from which the author is writing, since both heavily influenced what was written. To whom the cahier was addressed and when it was written also had an impact on the author and how the arguments were framed in the cahier. Before one delves into the cahiers’ specific requests and subtle implications, one must first look on a broader level at the cahiers and the context in which they were written.

It is also important to understand what the cahiers can and cannot tell us about these groups. The cahiers are not a perfect snapshot of the groups they represent; they are documents written for an audience, and the author had the ability to choose which topics to discuss and which to omit. While one must look broadly at the context in which the cahiers were written, it is also important to look at the nature of the cahiers themselves to understand their potential as sources but also their limitations.

Fashion Merchants and Bouquet Sellers as Cahier-Writers

All three cahiers were written on behalf of a group defined by its economic occupation. However, of the three, the fashion merchants were the only ones to have their own guild. The guild was founded in 1776, following the reestablishment and reformation of the guild system, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter II. Before gaining guild status, the fashion industry had been growing for a century. In the late seventeenth century, fashion merchants were
involved in the industrious and consumer revolutions that were underway in France. As consumerism began to increase and goods became more affordable through increased production, demand for fashionable clothing and accessories increased. The mercers’ guild had the rights to the production and selling of clothing and accessories, but was unable to keep up with the increasing demand, particularly that by women. The mercers’ guild tried to combat the need for more fashionable women’s clothes and accessories by allowing female relatives of guild members to work as fashion merchants and by allowing other merchants to sell these goods if they paid a small rent to the guild. In neither case were women permitted to take part in the administration of the mercers’ guild.

The fashion merchants created a distinct enough niche that they were granted their own independent guild, which incorporated the small featherworkers guild and the producers of fake flowers as well. From 1776 to 1782, 452 individuals joined the fashion merchants’ guild. A thousand workers and 400 apprentices were employed by the guild members. By edict, the fashion merchants’-Featherworkers’-Flowermakers’ guild had the privilege to “make, decorate, dye, color, and sell all that concerns the profession of featherworkers” as well as make artificial flowers to accessorize an outfit or decorate a room. They also sold adornments for clothing such as lace and gauze and blended these materials together to “give them usage and fantasy, in the manner that the taste and caprice of the moment inspires and demands.” The art of the fashion

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5 Crowston, *Credit, Fashion, and Sex*, 146
6 Crowston, *Credit, Fashion, and Sex*, 148
7 For simplicity’s sake, I will refer to the fashion merchants’-featherworkers’-flowermakers’ guild as the “fashion merchants’ guild” from this point on, since this is a simplification seen in both current scholarship and 18th century documents.
merchant was not making a product, but “ingeniously furnishing a new look with all the varied and gracious ornaments of the other arts.”

In their profession, many fashion merchants designed accessories and dress adornments for the aristocracy and the wealthy bourgeoisie. As such, they were placed between two classes: on one hand, they were members of the working class, but they also regularly interacted with members of the upper classes and often collaborated with their powerful clients to develop a design for what the client wanted to wear. Unlike other groups of working class women, then, the fashion merchants interacted with the nobility and, in many cases, depended on them to advertise the merchant’s business by wearing her products. As such, the fashion merchants were not as adamant supporters of the Revolution.

The edict of 1776—the edict that reestablished the guild system and gave the fashion merchants guild rights—dictated that all guilds must allow both men and women, so men were permitted to join the fashion merchants’ guild. However, the trade and guild were overwhelmingly associated with women. Unlike traditionally-male guilds that were opened to women, women were in control of the administration of the guild. The public also appeared to view the guild as a female one, evidenced by frequent use of the feminine “marchandes de mode” when referring to the guild.

The writer, or writers, of the cahier also wrote that the cahier was from the “marchandes de mode, plumassières, fleuristes de Paris,” using the feminine form for merchant, featherworker, and flowermaker. Within the cahier, the author mentioned female merchants

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10Crowston, Credit, Fashion, and Sex, 12.
and their daughters, as well as female apprentices. Interestingly, however, the cahier was written at the office of the community of the "marchands de mode, plumassiers, fleuristes de Paris où se sont assemblés les syndiqués, adjoints et députés en exercice." In this case, the use of the masculine plural nouns "marchands," "plumassiers," "syndiqués," "adjoints," and "députés" and masculine plural verb "se sont assemblés" indicated that the guild was not all women, nor were the guild officers necessarily all women. However, the fact that the cahier was deliberated at the guild office in the presence of the guild administrators—syndics (syndiqués), adjuncts (adjoints), and deputies (députés)—and the cahier used the feminine forms of fashion merchants, featherworkers, and flowermakers to describe the composition of the guild, it follows that women were the majority and dominant in the administration of the guild. Unfortunately, no concrete data on the membership in the guild and its composition by gender remains.

The cahier de doléances written by the fashion merchants consists of an introduction and eight articles. The separation between different articles was the same format as those used by the official cahiers and many, although not all, of the unofficial cahiers written by other guilds. The first article begins with “Request of the community that” then named the first suggestion. The subsequent articles all begin with a form of “that” before naming the request, giving the cahier a uniform structure. The cahier was signed by ten people that identified themselves with their last names and, in five cases, their first initial.

Of the three cahiers being studied, the fashion merchants’ was the first written. It was written on 28 May 1789: 23 days after the convening of the Estates General and three weeks

13 The use of these terms in the specific requests of the cahier will be discussed in more detail in chapter IV
14 I have copied the French, since the distinction between feminine and masculine nouns does not exist in English in this case. « où se sont assemblés les syndiqués, adjoints et députés en exercice »= « where the syndics, adjuncts, and current deputies assembled themselves »
"Doléances des Marchandes de Mode, Plumassières, Fleuristes de Paris,” 42
before the famous Tennis Court Oath in which the deputies of the Third Estate, joined by some
members of the nobility and clergy, declared themselves the National Assembly and swore not to
disburse until a constitutional system was established.

The next cahier written was for the bouquet sellers. Their cahier was dated 23 June 1789,
which meant it was less than a week after the National Assembly was declared. Both the terms
“Estates General” and “National Assembly” were used in the cahier. In the first portion of the
body of the cahier, the author said that the cahier was presented “to the Estates General” on 23
June 1789. In an introduction addressed to the Director General of Finances, the author
asserted that the cahier would be submitted to the “National Assembly.” The introduction was
signed by “the flower merchants, florists, flowered headpiece makers in the person of Madame
Marlé syndic of the community, rue du Mouton.” The syndic was a member of a guild elected
by its members charged with upholding guild statutes, inspecting shops and workshops to insure
compliance, recruiting apprentices, controlling the employment of workers and access to guild
membership, and reporting any unqualified workers that were selling the guilds’ goods. The
address, “rue du Mouton,” and Madame Marlé’s claim to be the syndic seem to indicate that the
bouquet sellers still had some of a guild’s structure, even if their privileges were no longer able
to be enforced, although this could have also been Madame Marlé’s attempt to deceive the
National Assembly into believing such a structure still existed.

15 “Cahier de Doléances des Bouquetières” in Cahier de Doléances des Femmes et Autres Textes ed. Des Femmes
16 The bouquet sellers sent their cahier to both Jacques Necker, the minister of finance, and the National Assembly
Cahier de Doléances des Bouqueière, 31
17 The French term “fleuriste” has many meanings including “florist” and “artifical flower maker.” In the cahier by
the fashion merchants, “fleuriste” is given this latter meaning. However, the bouquet sellers addressed the
creation and sale of fresh flower bouquets and condemned those that used fake flowers in their art. Traditionally,
the term “bouquet seller” (bouquetière) referred to a seller of natural flowers, as well. So the term “florist” has
been used to better reflect the women most likely present.
18 Rene Marion, The Dames de la Halle : Community and Authority in Early Modern Paris (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins,
1994), 98
The body of the cahier made one main request—the reestablishment of the bouquet sellers’ guild—and, consequently, was not separated into articles. At the very end, the author did ask that, failing the reinstatement of the guild, laws should still control how early bouquet sellers are allowed to purchase flowers. The author’s first priority was obviously the reestablishment of the guild, but it seemed that they added on an additional, more modest request, on the chance that their primary request was denied. The entire cahier concluded with a similar signature to that of the introduction.

The bouquet sellers’ cahier was in response to the suppression of the bouquet sellers’ guild in 1776. Although the tradition of giving certain bouquet sellers the privilege to sell flowers in a certain area had existed in France since the Middle Ages, the bouquet sellers’ guild in Paris only dated from 1677, when the guild statutes were officially ratified by the government of Louis XIV. As part of these statutes, men were forbidden from joining the guild. The bouquet sellers’ guild was given the privilege of making and selling flower headpieces, wreaths, garlands of flowers, and bouquets. While the guild was recognized and privileges were technically granted, there was very little other legislation regarding the selling of flowers and bouquets.19 On 23 July 1735, Louis XV reinforced the guild’s status and made its privilege clearer by forbidding anyone that did not possess a membership in the bouquet sellers’ guild from selling, either in one place or door-to-door, flowers or bouquets in the city or suburbs of Paris. This law was promulgated through a patent-letter in September of 1736 and received parliamentary approval the following year. The bouquet sellers’ cahier criticized the influx of new bouquet sellers following the suppression of their guild in 1776, so their argument made many references

19Marion, Dames de la Halle, 34 n. 45
to this most recent edict and its focus on preventing non-guild members from participating in the bouquet industry.

The suppression of the bouquet sellers’ guild occurred as part of the same reforms that created the fashion merchants’ guild. In that year, 1776, the guild had around 80 members. In the following years, the trade in fresh flowers was organized into three distinct groups: the florist-gardeners which sold potted flowers, the merchants in la Halle (the central marketplace) that sold bundles of flowers, and the bouquet sellers who sold arranged bouquets and specially-grown flowers. The abolishment of the bouquet sellers’ guild, the main concern of the bouquet sellers’ cahier, made noticeable changes to the industry

The Cahier des Plaintes et Doléances des Dames de la Halle: A Problematic Source

The bouquet sellers that sold their wares in la Halle could have been considered members of the Dames de la Halle, which was the group represented by the third cahier. “Dames de la Halle” was a term used to describe the various women that sold goods in la Halle. These women collectively were given other, more negative, names as well, such as “fishwives” (“poissardes”). Interestingly, the author used both terms to refer to the group. While many Dames de la Halle did sell fish, some sold other foodstuffs like fruits, vegetables, and dairy products, and others sold flowers. Dames de la Halle sold these other products, the cahier de doléances was written from the perspective of a Dame de la Halle that “smelled of fish,” which she presumably sold.

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20 Alfred Franklin and Émile Levasseur, *Dictionnaire Historique des Arts* (W. Welter, 1906), 99
21 Franklin and Levasseur, 99
22 Marion, *Dames de la Halle*, 9 n. 12
23 “Cahier des Plaintes & Doléances des Dames de la Halle & Marchés de Paris” 1789. Gallica, 42. (Note: There are two editions of this document. My page numbers reflect the second edition with 59 pages, not the earlier edition that had 37)
Dames de la Halle would typically buy goods from wholesale merchants and resell them. These wholesale merchants were from both Paris and the provinces, and, through interacting with them, the Dames de la Halle “learned firsthand about the abundance of supplies and prices.”

The Dames de la Halle were not organized into a guild, despite being able to become nearly full members of the fruit sellers’ guild after the guild reformation of 1776. In Abbot Jaubert’s 1783 *Universal Reasoned Dictionary on the Arts and Professions*, the Dames de la Halle were classified as a “corps,” indicating that, even if they did not have guild status and privileges, they still had an informal association.

The Dames de la Halle were active supporters of the deputies from the Third Estate to the Estates General. On 19 May 1789, the Dames de la Halle asked to be able to speak to the deputies while they were assembled. Being granted permission, the women paid their compliments to the assembly and “[recommended] the interests of the people to the deputies.”

They then proceeded to sing a song that praised the Third Estate, the king, and Monsieur Necker, the minister of finance, and condemned the privileges of the other two classes.

The Cahier de Doléances des Dames de la Halle was not written by a woman and has been called, at best, only “half serious.” Furthermore, the cahier was a pamphlet written to be read by the public and not the Estates General. The author of the written text was a Monsieur Josse, who, according to the cahier, was a writer and businessman that was commissioned by the Dames de la Halle to write their cahier de doléances. “Monsieur Josse” was most likely a pseudonym, possibly chosen in reference to the character in Molière’s *L’Amour Médecin* that

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24 Marion, *Dames de la Halle*, 11
25 Marion, *Dames de la Halle*, 9
was a jeweler. While the real name of the author is unknown, scholars at the turn of the 20th century attributed the cahier to either Joseph Senties or Antoine Estienne, both of whom wrote other works addressing the position of women from the perspective of a woman. Senties was a lottery administrator. Antoine Estienne was a businessman and former abbot that wrote in support of the Revolution and was personally acquainted with revolutionary leaders such as the Marquis de Lafayette and Jean-Paul Marat. Regardless of whether Senties or Estienne was the author, most scholarship that addresses the authorship of this cahier concludes that it was written by a man.

There is some debate in the scholarship regarding the seriousness of this cahier. Maurice Tourneaux, in his 1890 *Bibliography of the History of Paris during the French Revolution* categorized the cahier under “satirical or facetious complaints.” On the other hand, his contemporary, Charles-Louis Chassin called the cahier “half serious,” giving some credit to the serious complaints mentioned within the cahier. More recently, Suzanne Desan has argued that the cahier was a “pseudo-feminist” cahier that mingled “licentious material or political lampoons with purportedly sincere feminist demands” and “[sat] on the hinge between the satirical and the serious” for both their original audience and historians.

The cahier attributed to the Dames de la Halle did indeed include political attacks on particular individuals, as well as commentary on such individuals’ extramarital affairs. The

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28 Molière’s Monsieur Josse was extremely commercialistic to the point of being amoral. Choosing that name for a pseudonym could have been the author’s way of criticizing the Dames de la Halle for being too focused on commerce. On the other hand, Molière himself ridiculed men that were afraid of women’s influence, particularly the hostesses of salons, so the author’s choice to make a reference to Molière could also be to ridicule those that were afraid of women’s political involvement on the eve of the Revolution. There is still a possibility that the connection to Molière was unintentional.


30 Chassin, *Génie de la Révolution*, 482

cahier also included an admission of the speaker’s\textsuperscript{32} lustfulness. It is considered a \textit{poissard} work, being written in the colloquial language of the \textit{poissardes} (“fishwives”) or Dames de la Halle, which was a style used in both literature and plays at the time. This style reflected rather faithfully the manners and customs of lower class Paris.\textsuperscript{33} However, many of the complaints articulated in this cahier were serious complaints that would have been supported by the Dames de la Halle, and this serious side of the cahier has not been given enough credit in the scholarship. While the cahier was presumably written without the knowledge of the Dames de la Halle themselves, it never the less was written on their behalf, since it reflected their interests. Unlike purely satirical cahiers such as \textit{Les Demoiselles du Palais-Royal aux Estates General}, supposedly written by the court prostitutes, the Dames de la Halle’s cahier aired some serious complaints that were similar to those articulated by real groups of Third Estate men and women. The speaker argued against high taxes and the privileges of the upper classes and argued for social reforms such as the improvement of hospitals. It is also possible that the author was expressing his own serious views but, to protect himself from either public scorn or legal repercussions because of his radical views, attached them to the Dames de la Halle, a group that plausibly held a similar view.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{32} I will use the term “speaker” to refer to the Dame de la Halle that is supposedly dictating the cahier, as compared to “author” which will refer to the actual writer of the document, “Monsieur Josse”\
\textsuperscript{33} Alexander Moore, \textit{The Genre Poissard and the French Stage of the Eighteenth Century} (New York: The Institute of French Studies, Inc., 1935), 1\
\textsuperscript{34} Christine Fauré makes a similar assertion about women’s cahiers that stand on the border between serious and satirical, much like the Cahier de Doléances des Dames de la Halle, although she does not mention this cahier explicitly. See “Dóleances, Déclarations et Pétitions” \textit{Annales historiques de la Révolution Française}, no.344 April/June 2006, 5-25\
Serious ideas being hidden amongst satire is also evident in other cahiers, such as that by the “most popular order in the kingdom,” the cuckolds which combined jokes about cuckolds with serious opinions on women’s frivolity and morality that were popular at the time. See Candice Proctor, \textit{Women, Equality, and the French Revolution} (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 132
While this cahier did reflect some serious concerns that the Dames de la Halle held, one cannot rule out that this cahier was intended to be satire. Its vulgarity and its lack of structure gave the cahier some comedic value. Two editions of this cahier exist. The first, a shorter edition, did not have many of the more overtly satirical components, such as the speaker’s elaboration on lustfulness and her informal comments addressed to the king, as if she were a personal friend. However, the second edition also included additions of serious subject matter as well, such as complaints on the cost of bread. One cannot say with certainty the intentions of the author in writing either edition. Suzanne Desan argued that poissarde works were a response to serious feminine claims that were “persuasive enough to strike a nerve and incite satire.”35 But, if the cahier was intended completely as satire, the author of this work would have presumably been clearer in his mockery and not run the risk of having the works be taken seriously, and, therefore, contribute another supposedly female voice to the discussion. One could argue that the addition of more satire into the second edition proved that the first edition was meant to be taken as satire but was taken seriously. Yet the addition of serious subject matter as well as the more satirical components weakens this claim. In the specific case of the cahier de doléances des Dames de la Halle, an author trying to mock the participation of women would not have portrayed them as using reasoned arguments and coming to the same conclusions as men in similar positions. This cahier is compelling for these similarities with the works written by Third Estate men, including cahiers, and also its similarities with the cahiers written the fashion merchants and bouquet sellers. This similarity to the other women’s cahiers showed the author’s awareness of the nature and intentions of working-class women, even if his intention was to mock them.

35 Desan, 22.
With this cahier, the author’s motive is not clear, nor is the accuracy of his claims that the cahier contained the requests of the Dames de la Halle. The cahier has both serious and satirical components interwoven with each other, and, with a male author seemingly unconnected to the Dames de la Halle, one does not know for sure whether he is accurately reflecting the views of the Dames de la Halle or even whether he is intending to accurately reflect them. According to Paule-Marie Duhet, the majority of cahiers credited to women but truly written by men showed “an excessive naïveté, a poverty of enunciated ideas…and often a collection of complaints that quickly raise the suspicion of the reader.”\textsuperscript{36} The Dames de la Halle’s cahier shows knowledge of reality, specifically economic reality, as well as naïveté about their relationship with the king, and well-enunciated ideas about tax reform alongside the poorly enunciated ramblings about maltreatment in hospitals. In some places, the cahier had a serious tone and reflected concerns that the real Dames de la Halle articulated when they visited the Estates General. In others, the cahier requested reforms that would have been in the self-interest of the Dames de la Halle. On the other hand, the cahier also contained requests on subjects the Dames de la Halle would not have been likely to be concerned about, such as the education of priests, and the speaker in the cahier often went off on irrelevant tangents that might not have been added to the cahier had a Dame de la Halle actually written it.

Because of the variety of interpretations possible, this cahier is a problematic source and has largely been ignored by historians, except for those that treat it as purely satirical. A problematic source is not a useless source. Documentation of the visit of the Dames de la Halle to the Estates General tells us about their interests, which could be compared to those articulated in the cahier. For a request not mentioned in that visit, a knowledge of the Dames de la Halle and

\textsuperscript{36} Duhet, Preface to \textit{Cahiers de Doléances des Femmes et Autres Textes}, 15
whether reforms would be in their interest can lead one to conclude that a request was at least plausible. The cahier also gives us an indication of one man’s-- the author’s-- perception of the Dames de la Halle and also, in many cases, shows a public perception of the Dames de la Halle and the reforms advocated in the cahier. Despite its male author and his ambiguous intent, the cahier de doléances for the Dames de la Halle still has merit as a historical source.

The fashion merchants, bouquet sellers, and Dames de la Halle all have cahiers that claim to represent their interests. These interests were a result of the group’s and author’s station in the economy and the larger society. Within the commercial sphere, the three groups have very distinct statuses: the fashion merchants had a guild in 1789, the bouquet sellers had recently lost their guild, and the Dames de la Halle had never been a part of a formalized guild. The authorship is also different for each of the cahiers, which perhaps speaks to organization of the group: the fashion merchants have ten signatures by guild officials on their cahier, the bouquet sellers’ has only one self-proclaimed former guild administrator, and the Dames de la Halle had an author unaffiliated with their group that claimed to be recording the words of one Dame de la Halle. What these three cahiers do have in common is that their requests are first and foremost economic ones, showing that groups of Third Estate women thought that the government should take into consideration their suggestions, since they came from merchants.

The Cahiers as Public Documents

All three cahiers were written to an audience. For the bouquet sellers and fashion merchants, that audience was the Estates General or other government officials. For the Dames de la Halle, the audience was the Parisian public. As public documents, the cahiers are not able
to tell us the same things as diaries or personal correspondences. Cahiers submitted to
government officials are more likely to argue for reforms based on what those officials believe
rather than the actual views of the writers. For instance, the image of a “mother of the family”
that was used in the bouquet sellers’ cahier could have been a reflection of the author’s real
belief of the role of women, or it could have simply been what she thought the deputies’ and
Monsieur Necker’s view of the role of women was. However, it is unlikely that these authors
would have been willing to further an image of themselves to which they were adamantly
opposed, even if they thought the Estates General believed such an image. A pamphlet like the
cahier for the Dames de la Halle would have also had to appeal to its audience and their views. In
all cases, censorship was still a genuine fear, preventing any extremely radical claims, although
censorship laws had been relaxed in the very recent past. There were tacit understandings on
what should not be said and how things should be phrased. The author of the Dames de la
Halle’s cahier could have been using the anonymous cahier overcome this obstacle and express
more radical views. However, even if he was reflecting his own views, he could have chosen any
group’s name to attach to them, but he chose to attach them to the Dames de la Halle, indicating
that these women could not have had views completely contrary to his own, or he would not
have chosen them. Using other knowledge about these groups of women and what would be in
their interest can also enable a researcher to make claims about the likelihood of one of the
cahiers reflecting the truth. These cahiers, therefore, are able to show snippets of the identities of
these three groups of women.

The cahiers also give us details on how others perceived these groups. The cahiers had to
be believable to their audiences; they had to reflect public perception enough that the audience

37 Gilbert Shapiro and John Markoff, “Officially Solicited Petitions: The Cahiers de Doléances as a Historical Source”
would believe that they were representative of the group. Even assuming that the cahier for the Dames de la Halle was satire, the author had to be mocking a quality of the Dames de la Halle that the public acknowledged, and he would have presumably been writing it to ridicule that which he feared. While public perception can sometimes be misled, its roots are often based somewhere in fact, or, at least, not obviously contrary to the truth. Although public perception of these women is relevant in and of itself, it, too, can give us some insight into the reality of these groups. While the cahiers, therefore, do not give a perfect image of the lives of the fashion merchants, bouquet sellers, and Dames de la Halle, they do have relevance.
Chapter II: Economic Concerns

The Dames de la Halle, the bouquet sellers, and the fashion merchants were part of a long and extensive tradition of women in the Parisian workforce. Since the Middle Ages, French law acknowledged the role of female shop owners by granting them status as public merchants (marchandes publiques). Under this law, any married woman exercising a trade had financial autonomy over her business affairs. A female merchant could buy supplies and sell her wares without her husband’s approval or interference. She could use credit in her own name, allowing her to have a degree of independence in regards to her business. Other married women worked alongside their artisan husbands in workshops or worked as shopkeepers to sell his products. Some women, married or unmarried, were involved in female-only and “mixed” guilds that allowed both male and female members. Many other women worked as seamstresses, domestic servants, laundresses, or street merchants selling food and old clothes. In 1789, French government records indicated that an estimated 16% of incomes were those of women.38

These working women, like their male counterparts, saw the potential of the Estates General to create economic reforms. The official cahier de doléances of the Third Estate of Paris illustrated this excitement with its wide-ranging recommendations; the cahier-writers believed that the Estates General would have the power to reform the land inheritance system, institute wide-ranging tax reform, and discover how to prevent pigeons from eating crops, among other things.39 The female cahier writers seemed to share this excitement. Although the bouquet sellers and fashion merchants had less diverse economic requests, the fact that they, like the author of the Dames de la Halle’s cahier, wrote their economic grievances in unsolicited cahiers showed that they believed the Estates General could institute these reforms on their behalf.

The cahiers for all three of these groups of women focused on economic demands. Considering that all three of the groups selected for this analysis were identified in the cahiers by their economic roles—bouquet sellers, fashion merchants, and Dames de la Halle—their request for economic reforms is far from shocking. However, the cahiers’ primary focus on issues related to the three groups’ commercial interests instead of the rights of women as a whole implied that the authors of the fashion merchants’ and bouquet sellers’ cahiers believed that the Estates General had a responsibility to listen to complaints as merchants. When choosing which complaints to put into the cahiers, these two authors prioritized those related to their public identity as merchants instead of their identity as women.

That is not to say that they completely ignored their gender in their cahiers. On the contrary, as will be shown in the next chapter, these two authors made arguments based on the perspectives of wives and mothers. Still, many of these arguments are actually economic arguments that are justified by references to women’s familial concerns. When choosing which arguments to put into their cahiers, the authors seem to choose those related to their own self-interest as merchants instead of those that would benefit all French women or even all the women of the Third Estate. Making divorce more accessible to women, for instance, an issue that was advocated by contemporary female and male writers, would have been in the interest to the fashion merchants and bouquet sellers as women, but they did not mention such issues, instead focusing on guild rights, lending, and price controls. It is possible that the authors or the groups they represented did not have an opinion on such matters, but it is more likely that they instead prioritized economic concerns, showing that they felt that it was more important to them that the government benefited them as merchants than as women.
Based on the economic concerns iterated in the cahiers, the fashion merchants and bouquet sellers’ experience in commerce made them knowledgeable about the larger economic system beyond their shop or industry. Both cahiers also show striking similarities to those cahiers written by men that had similar economic identities, showing that female merchants experienced some of the same problems as male merchants and that the conclusions they drew and the rationale behind them were those of merchants regardless of gender. Their economic opinions were rooted in their identity as merchants.

Because the author of the cahier for the Dames de la Halle had his Dame de la Halle speaker make similar connections to larger economic issues and make complaints similar to Third Estate men, he showed that he either perceived the Dames de la Halle as economically knowledgeable merchants that would, like the fashion merchants and bouquet sellers, prioritize their professional identity over their identity as women, or thought that the Dames de la Halle would perceive themselves that way. While the Dame de la Halle did mention marriage and female sexuality in the more satire-heavy portions of the cahier, she, too, stopped short of making any demands for the legal rights of women specifically. The grand majority of her demands originated from her status as merchant and consumer: her role in the public sphere. The implication of this being that the male author acknowledged the Dames de la Halle’s economic identity or their desire to have such an identity, regardless of whether he attempted to make fun of it or use it to accurately reflect their requests. The author would not have come up with this economic identity out of nowhere, so his acknowledgment of it shows that the Dames

40 There were, of course, problems exclusive to female merchants that were not experienced by men in similar professions, such as female guild members not receiving the same high social status as their male counterparts. Interestingly, these problems were not dwelt upon in the cahiers, although it’s unclear whether the fashion merchants and bouquet sellers omitted it because they did not consider it a priority or because they thought such social reform was out of the power of even the Estates General.
de la Halle, as a group, had an identity as merchants or were perceived to have one, enough to make their support of the economic requests in their cahier believable.

The extent of the actual economic recommendations varied. The cahier written by the bouquet sellers focused almost entirely on one economic concern-- that of receiving guild rights again-- while the cahier of the fashion merchants had more diverse requests, varying from abolishing pawn brokerages to making it easier for creditors to actually obtain payment. The Dames de la Halle’s cahier had perhaps the most wide-ranging requests and, unlike the other two, included extensive sections on political, social, and religious reform. However, economic concerns were what the speaker mentioned first and most frequently. Economic demands included taxation of the first and second estates (nobles and clergy), reduction of exportation, and an end to corruption of government officials in the enforcement of tax laws.

While the three cahiers represented three groups of Third Estate women that all had different priorities and different demands, some themes recur in two or sometimes all three cahiers. All three commented on guilds and their position in the economy. While the fashion merchants, who were members of a guild, and the bouquet sellers, who used to have the privileges of guild, supported the power of the guilds, the Dames de la Halle, who were not associated with a guild, had a much more ambiguous opinion in their cahier. The Dame de la Halle and the fashion merchants also mentioned the tax system, in both cases supporting the decrease or removal of taxes. All three cahiers addressed, in some form or another, abuses of the economic system for financial gains.

The economic concerns articulated in the cahiers show that these women had a deep awareness of the economic system in which they played a part. The Dames de la Halle, the seemingly least educated of the three, were portrayed as having a comprehension of not only
their personal domain of buying and reselling foodstuffs, but France’s economy as a whole and the long term effects of economic policies. The author did not make this economic knowledge so extreme that it would obviously be mocking the Dames de la Halle. The authors for the bouquet sellers and fashion merchants argued for their self-interested goals by using complex persuasive arguments about how their demands would help the common good. They all expressed knowledge of their particular expertise, but the cahiers also showed that the three groups of women could grasp more complicated economic concepts.

The specific demands of these cahiers show that these women’s economic demands addressed problems similar to their male counterparts. In many parts, the cahier de doléances of the Third Estate of Paris and the cahiers written by men’s guilds show a striking resemblance to those of the bouquet sellers, fashion merchants, and the Dames de la Halle. The economic problems themselves and the solutions the writers suggested seem to indicate that, in the markets of Paris, these women’s groups’ economic reality and their perspective on such issues were not so different from men in similar positions. The knowledge of the larger economic system and the requests similar to those of their male counterparts tell us that the three groups of women had strong and justified identities as merchants.

The Guild Debate

The 18th century marked a period of changes for the French guild system. During the mid-18th century, the physiocratic school of economic thought began to gain influence. This school of thought was based on the concept of laissez-faire and the application of scientific principles to the study of the economy. Anne Robert Jacques Turgot, a proponent of the school, became Controller General of Finances in August of 1774 and a month later liberalized the
provincial grain trade, allowing the market to determine the price instead of having government-issued price controls. Paris was not included in the initial decree, but Turgot planned to liberalize its own grain trade once an established free trade system existed in the provinces, although this never occurred. After liberalizing the grain trade, Turgot turned to the liberalization of all trades and the abolishment of the guilds.

In February 1776, Turgot issued an edict banning guilds and establishing free trade. This time, the edict included Paris. While Turgot himself viewed this move as “one of the greatest steps that is to be taken…toward the regeneration of the realm,” the edict was not met with resounding support. Supporters of the measure condemned guilds for reducing journeymen and apprentices to “serfdom,” establishing admittance fees that were too high for anyone except children of guild members to pay, imposing too many regulations, and fighting amongst themselves. Opponents of the edict included guild members as well as the community of Parisian magistrates, which opposed the measure because many of them thought the end of the strict social structure in trade would threaten “the very system of social taxonomy on which the traditional structure of France rested.” Others, like the fruit sellers of Paris, opposed the measure because it did not except grain from liberalization, and they felt that it was dangerous to allow a self-interest-dominated market to dictate prices on the means of survival.

The abolishment of the guilds also had some unpredicted consequences. Following the edict, journeymen and apprentices began abruptly (and illegally) leaving guild members’ workshops. Ex-workers overwhelmed Lieutenant General of Police Joseph d’Albert’s office with

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42 Kaplan, 179
43 Kaplan, 196-7
requests to establish businesses. Long delays in processing these applications and the refusal of many of them resulted in mass discontent. Eventually, the disorder forced Turgot to be dismissed in May of 1776. Louis XVI issued an edict reestablishing the guilds in August 1776, earlier than many expected, claiming that the decision was prompted by the opposition of the guilds and magistrates and a wish to undo the harm of the “confusion des états” caused by the abolition of the guilds. The edict, therefore, was a means to reinforce the necessity of a social hierarchy.

With Louis XVI’s edict, the guild system did not return to the same state it had before its abolishment. Those that managed to start a business during the months of abolishment were permitted to continue practicing their trade if they applied to the guild and paid a fee—some of which went to the guild and some of which went to the Crown. Former guild members were also obliged to pay the Crown to regain their status. Women were permitted to join any guild, as long as they possessed the necessary skills. However, in many cases, formerly all-male guilds created insurmountable obstacles to women attempting to enter the guild, essentially permitting only widows of guild members to join. Men also continued to dominate the administrative structure of these guilds. In addition, the guild system was streamlined. Some guilds were merged with other similar guilds. Fifty guilds were not reinstated. The bouquet sellers were one of these suppressed guilds. Guilds were also created, amongst them the fashion merchants.

By 1789, the guild system was once again an instrumental part of trade in Paris. The debate about what role they should play, however, continued. In their summary of the cahiers de

44 Kaplan, 210

While women were permitted to be members of the traditionally male-only guilds discussed in this chapter, due to their minority in numbers, particularly in leadership positions, and the fact that their cahiers were signed by all men, I will assume the ideas articulated in these cahiers reflect, by-and-large, the demands of the men in the guild more so than the women.
doléances written throughout France, Louis Marie Prudhomme, François-Silvain de Mézières, and Jean Rousseau noted that many cahiers included a request that “the guild masterships in arts and trades should be suppressed, and commerce declared free to all the kingdom,” although with exceptions including printers and apothecaries.\(^{46}\) Other requests included granting guild member status free of charge to those that had completed an apprenticeship, while still others advocated for allowing guilds to remain in their current state.\(^{47}\) The Third Estate of Paris, in its general cahier, sided with those opposing guilds, claiming that “all citizens have the right to be admitted to all employs [and] professions.” \(^{48}\)

Many Parisian guilds, in writing their own cahiers, took the opposite stance of the official cahier of the Third Estate of Paris. They also sought to correct what problems they saw in the system, mostly those that hurt the influence or success of the guilds, like privileged places (lieux privilégiés) where laws requiring a guild membership to practice certain trades were not applicable. According to their cahier, the Dames de la Halle, although not affiliated with any guild, seem in some cases to sympathize with their plight.

Compared to the liberalizing reforms suggested in the cahier for the Third Estate of Paris, the author of the bouquet sellers’ cahier, like the authors of many Parisian guild cahiers, were more conservative and supported price controls and privileges in trade. The bouquet sellers’ two demands were not for reform of the system but for the improvement of their personal situation. The author seems to believe that simply asking was not enough and, therefore, composed a

\(^{46}\) Louis Marie Prudhomme, François-Silvain Laurent de Mézières, and Jean Rousseau, *Resumé général, ou Extrait des cahiers de pouvoirs, instructions, demandes et doléances, remis par les divers bailliages, sénéchaussées et pays d’états du royaume, à leurs députés à l’assemblée des États-Généraux, ouverts à Versailles le 4 mai 1789* (Library of Congress), 265

Jean Rousseau (1738-1813), French revolutionary politician, should not be confused with Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), the famous French writer and philosopher.

\(^{47}\) Prudhomme et al, 265

\(^{48}\) Cahier du Troisième Ordre, 335
thorough argument in support of the reinstitution of the group’s guild rights. In order to persuade the Estates General to accept her request, the author referenced official government documents and the dates when they were issued, including the patent-letter issued on 20 September 1736 in which the guild rights were granted by Louis XV.49

The author also drew on more abstract economic concepts to argue her point. The main concern of the cahier was for the Estates General put an end to “the suppression of their community” and allow the bouquet sellers to once again have the power to police their industry internally, since the efforts of the Lieutenant General of Police’s office were “insufficient for maintaining good order.”50 The author openly acknowledged that this specific request was not an important or pressing issue for the Estates General, but she also argued that the case reflected a larger question: “that of knowing if it would be useful or not to let all individuals have indefinite liberty to yield themselves to all sorts of commerce.”51 Essentially, she implied that the Estates General’s decision on the bouquet sellers’ request was not only a response to a request by one guild, but, rather, a response to the debate on the merits of free trade versus organized labor.

The next portion of the cahier was dedicated to convincing the Estates General that the guild system and regulated trade was better than a more liberal policy and that, by extension, their guild rights should be returned. Control of commerce, according to the author, should be such that there is a balance between having enough merchants to supply goods and not having so many that the decline in price prevents any of them from being able to subsist. This balance is

50 Bouquetières, 33, 32
51 Bouquetières, 33
what brings about “the common good and commercial prosperity, [which] would be necessarily destroyed by indefinite liberty.”\textsuperscript{52}

The second argument against free trade in the cahier centered on a belief that the lack of a guild system would result in a decrease in the quality of merchandise. For this argument, the author cited personal evidence related to the bouquet trade, harshly condemning “girls without principles” that “[attach] branches of orange flowers with pins and fake flowers that they put on the branches, attach many carnations together…and sell them as one, which is contrary to good order.”\textsuperscript{53} While the cahier’s argument about prices showed that the bouquet sellers conceptually understood the relationship between supply and price, the latter argument, which focused on quality, proved that they could draw from their personal experiences in the industry to make a general observation about lack of regulation.

The arguments in the bouquet sellers’ cahier regarding free trade echoed some of those expressed in other cahiers of Third Estate merchants. The guild of fruit and grain sellers made almost identical claims in its cahier. The writers sought to prove to the king that “the guilds are necessary in the State” and that “each of them should have their own particular rights and rules.”\textsuperscript{54} The author of this cahier, too, argued that, with the guild system, a city will never have more merchants and workers than it needed. \textsuperscript{55} Like the bouquet sellers, the fruit and grain sellers claimed that the quality of goods would decrease with free trade, and guilds should be conserved since they are “the only ones that establish and cement confidence.”\textsuperscript{56} The wigmakers, like the

\textsuperscript{52} Bouquetières, 34
\textsuperscript{53} Bouquetières 35
\textsuperscript{54} “Mémoire au Roi et aux Estates General Pour la Communauté des Maitres Fruitiers, Orangers, Graniers des Villes, Faubourgs, et Banlieue de Paris” Chassin Tome II, 539
\textsuperscript{55} Fruitiers, Orangers, Graniers 540
\textsuperscript{56} Fruitiers, Orangers, Graniers 539
bouquet sellers, believed that all edicts and patent letters rendered in favor of guilds should be completely and entirely executed.57

The author of the bouquet sellers’ cahier, therefore, addressed concerns from the perspective of a merchant, which made these reforms similar in many cases to those proposed by men in similar trades. By connecting her argument to the larger concept of free trade and its effect on supply and demand, the author showed that she believed that the bouquet sellers as merchants had a role in, and therefore, should have a say in, the larger economic system. This argument shows that the author, as a tradeswoman, was knowledgeable about the larger economic system, but her need to justify her request by referencing the larger question of free trade hints that she was afraid of the Estates General ignoring her request as insignificant. Whether she felt that she would be ignored because of the lack of power the bouquet sellers had in the economic sphere or because of her gender is not entirely clear. It is likely that both played a role: she considered herself as part of the “most indigent class,” showing she had a lack of money and the influence that came with it, but, as will be discussed in Chapter V, the cahier also showed that the author had insecurities about it being seriously considered due to her gender which could have provoked her to make the connection with the larger system. The author showed her knowledge of broader economic concepts, but, at the same time, questioned whether her identity as a bouquet seller was enough to carry weight in the Estates General’s decisions.

The author of the fashion merchants’ cahier, representing a group of women that had guild membership as part of their identity, put more emphasis on extending the power and effectiveness of guilds. In Article I of the cahier, the author asked, on behalf of her guild, that the “privileged places” in Paris and its suburbs no longer be excluded from the jurisdiction of

57“Mémoire des Maitres Perruquiers de la Ville de Paris Contenant Leurs Demandes aux Estates General” Chassin Tome II, 530
guilds. These places were lands belonging to a particular noble or, in many cases, a religious institution, where artisans and merchants were able to sell their wares without possessing a guild membership. Artisans that made goods in privileged places could not transport them outside of that location. If they entered a non-privileged part of Paris, the guilds had the power to confiscate the goods. However, since those purchasing the goods were allowed to bring their purchases into the guild-controlled areas, guilds like the fashion merchants’ felt threatened by the competition.

This opposition to privileged places was a recurring one in other cahiers from Third Estate Parisians, showing that the fashion merchants shared similar interests with male merchants. The wigmakers made the same demand, listing as examples four of the same privileged places as the fashion merchants. The sugar merchants demanded “forbiddance should be made, under whatever penalties will be assigned, to all people that interfere in [the sugar merchants’] commerce and notably the religious institutions.” The cahier continued on to list various religious institutions that were privileged places. The fashion merchants’ cahier made similar requests to those in guildsmen’s cahiers because the author felt threatened as a merchant by the privileged places.

The cahier of the Dames de la Halle also mentioned the privileged places, although the term was not used explicitly. Rather, the author criticized the rich who “have the best jobs without having merited them, and without having paid for an apprenticeship.” The Dames de

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60 Perruquiers, 530
Marchandes de Mode, 40
61 ”Mémoire pour les Marchands Épiciers Confiseurs de la Ville de Paris” Chassin Tome II, 523
62 Cahier des Plaints & Doléances des Dames de la Halle & Marchés de Paris. Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Gallica, 47
la Halle, unlike the other two guilds, appear to be against privileged places not because they were outside the guilds’ control, but, rather, because they gave an advantage to some workers that were not available to others. The author also lamented the abuses suffered by “the poor merchants and craftsmen/women,” showing that guilds and guild systems were not viewed entirely with disfavor.63

However, the cahier of the Dames de la Halle was not unequivocally in support of guilds. The speaker in the cahier believed that the famine of 1788 was due not to a bad harvest but to a conspiracy amongst the bakers’ guild to increase prices.64 Such distrust—almost assuredly unfounded—portrayed the Dames de la Halle as a group that did not always trust organized trade and, unlike the bouquet sellers, did not believe that guilds always worked to the common good. Since the Dames de la Halle were not affiliated with any guild, their own self-interest did not compel them to be staunch advocates for the rights of guilds. The ambivalent tone of the cahier of the Dames de la Halle towards the guild question was, therefore, plausible, regardless of the cahier’s authorship. As the author did not address the guild system directly, but rather through inferences, the Dames de la Halle, as a group, most likely did not have a strong opinion on the matter which would have caused the author to mention it, whether in seriousness or in jest. The Dames de la Halle’s dual identity as members of the working class like those having to pay guild entrance fees, but also as merchants not affiliated with a guild, influenced the author’s view of the Dames de la Halle’s ambivalence. Their identity as merchants, therefore, was considered when the author wrote this cahier.

Three different groups of women had three different responses to the question of guilds, although some, like the bouquet sellers, were more in-depth and explicit about their opinion than

63 Dames de la Halle, 47.
64 Dames de la Halle, 31
others, such the Dames de la Halle. However, all three cahiers showed that these groups were aware of, and had comments on, the debate on guilds that was prevalent in 1789 and that these comments were influenced by their identity as merchants.

**Tax Reform and Cross-Boundary Trade**

In one of the many anecdotes in the cahier de doléances of the Dames de la Halle, the speaker described the vegetable sellers that came from the provinces to sell their wares on la Halle but were unable to afford to buy themselves something to eat while doing so. When the speaker questioned them, one vegetable seller responded, “When the harvest comes, after having paid la taille, le taillon, la capitation, le vingtième, la dîme, la censive, l’octroi, & the devil, we have barely enough grain to suffer through the whole year.”65 All of the taxes listed, except for the one to the devil, made up part of the complicated French tax system that existed in the last few years of the ancien régime. The system included direct taxes such as the taille, taillon, capitation, and vingtième and indirect taxes such as the octroi.

The same physiocratic spirit that prompted officials like Turgot to ban guilds in 1776 also propelled a debate on the role of taxes. Physicrats in France supported a simplification of the tax structure that included replacing the multitude of taxes on agricultural production with a single tax.66 Turgot even pushed for a simple tax on all landowners to replace the corvée which was paid for by peasants through compulsory labor to the build and maintain roads. However, since a tax on all landowners seemed to Louis XVI to be close to encroaching on the privileges

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65 Dames de la Halle, 48
of the nobility and clergy—namely, their exemption from taxes—this reform was not put into practice.67

The trade liberalization of the eighteenth century also provoked questions about France’s policy on exportation and its competitiveness with foreign economies. On 26 September 1786, the French signed a treaty with England that liberalized the trade between the two countries and resulted in an influx of British products in France.68 Some French people began to question why England was able to outcompete France in certain industries such as textiles. Vincent de Gournay speculated that this French weakness was due at least in part to the “insufficient role” of Paris in the “unification and impulsion of the domestic market.” London, by contrast, was efficiently connected to rural areas as well as ports.69

One of the ways that Paris was disconnected from the rest of the country was through the octroi tax. This indirect tax was charged on all goods entering the city of Paris to be sold. The tax was collected by the Fermiers Généraux (literally “farmers general”) that were essentially private contractors that worked for the Crown. They collected taxes from the merchants inside the walls as well as the octroi from those entering the city. Members of the Fermiers Généraux were often wealthy, since many of them collected more taxes from merchants than the king required and took the extra as payment for their labors.70 The height of their power occurred in the last few years of the ancien régime, when the “Wall of the Fermiers-Généraux” was built around the city to make the smuggling of goods into the capital more difficult. At the same time, the presence of Ferme Générale officials patrolling the city grew. 71 The increased presence of

67 Neely, 40
69 Gournay in Coquery, Tenir Boutique, 97
70 Charles Kindleberger, A Financial History of Western Europe. (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1984), 169
71 Garrioch, 211
the Fermiers Généraux in Paris and their role in raising the prices of goods and collecting taxes resulted in the poorer members of the Third Estate speaking out against them in their cahiers.

The speaker of the cahier of the Dames de la Halle viewed the reform of the Fermiers Généraux as one of the most necessary. She chose to begin her list of injustices with those committed by the Fermiers Généraux. She called the Fermiers scoundrels and called on the Estates General to “tear down this infernal wall” that the Fermiers Généraux had built. In regards to the octroi, the Dame de la Halle believed it was necessary to “shrink these barriers just to the devil.” She cited her own knowledge of the price of wine to defend her opposition to the tax, claiming that “one is obliged, in truth, to pay 12 sous for a poor bottle of wine when, without this despicable group [of Fermiers Généraux], I could have it for less than 6 sous.” Furthermore, the Fermiers Généraux themselves and those exempt from taxes (the nobility and clergy) only have to pay six sous for better quality wine.

The opposition to the octroi and taxes inside Paris was evident in other cahiers, as well. The sugar merchants noted that the fees on goods entering the city, particularly sugar, “convinced consumers to no longer buy their provisions from the merchants of Paris,” but to buy them outside the city instead. The spice merchants did not call for a complete suppression of the octroi but claimed that it should be reduced to a simple tax based on weight.

While the harsh language used in the cahier de doléance of the Dames de la Halle against the Fermiers Généraux and taxes detracted from the deeper argument against taxation policy,
such language was not uncommon for a group of women that had a reputation of being shrill and vulgar, so the cahier could be reflecting a complaint articulated by Dames de la Halle. As purchasers of wholesale goods from the provinces, the Dames de la Halle had reason to dislike the taxes that increased the price of goods entering the city, and, as consumers from the poorer levels of society, they had reason to dislike all taxes on everyday goods. The author was aware of this opposition, and it was reflected in the cahier de doléance. The author was also aware, therefore, of the Dames de la Halle’s status not only as merchants, but as Parisian merchants that would have opposed taxes like the _octroi_ because they bought and resold goods within the city.

In addition to mentioning the trade and taxation between the provinces and Paris, the cahier of the Dames de la Halle also addressed international trade. With free trade agreements, such as the 1786 treaty with England, the question of exportation versus selling domestically arose. The general cahier of the Third Estate of Paris supported international trade, but with limitations. The writer supported “the removal of all exit tariffs on national merchandise that is exported abroad,” although a small fee should be placed on foreign goods coming into France. However, the cahier also included an article that forbade “the exit outside the kingdom of the raw materials for our manufacturing industry.” These raw materials would also be “exempt from entrance tariffs,” if they came from abroad.

The Dame de la Halle in the cahier was not as concerned with the raw materials needed for industry since the Dames de la Halle were not in a trade that required such raw materials. The speaker instead commented on the effects that exportation had on herself and the other Dames de la Halle. With the recent famines in mind, the speaker argued against the exportation of grain.

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Moore, 1.
Résumé Summaire des Demandes que le Corps de l’Epicerie Propose de Joindre, pour le Commerce au Cahier du Tiers État de Paris, 520
Showing an understanding of the effects of current decisions on the long run, she opposed the “transport [of] wheat outside of France, to feed foreigners, that holds nothing for us,” because if one stored the extra wheat when the harvest was good, “it would go better to sell it…when the famine will come.”\textsuperscript{79} The Dame de la Halle called for a reform that she believed would help solve the recurring problem of famines in the long run by restricting trade in the short run. This argument does not appear to be satirical, leading one to conclude that either the Dames de la Halle made such a long term argument, or, at the very least, the author thought they had the mental capacity and economic knowledge to be capable to make such an argument.

The fashion merchants, while not addressing cross-border trade, did discuss taxation. The two taxes they focused on were the capitation tax and the inheritance tax. The author opposed the new form of collecting the capitation tax that was instituted in 1779. Under the previous system, the tax was based on an individual’s income. The new system assigned different trades and jobs different levels, and one’s level dictated the amount one would pay. The fashion merchants opposed this, since it did not reflect the fluctuation of a person’s fortune. It would be easier, according to the author, to “augment or diminish…the capitation of a merchantwoman from 20 to 40 \textit{sols} instead of making her pass from one level to another.”\textsuperscript{80} She tried to appeal to the Estates General by emphasizing how the old system could create more revenue than the new one—being able to charge someone 40 \textit{sols} instead of 20-- although the reverse was obviously true, as well. The fashion merchant’s desire was similar to that articulated by the fruit and grain sellers’ guild, which argued for the capitation tax to be “established without level, as it was before.”\textsuperscript{81}

\textsuperscript{79} Dames de la Halle, 38
\textsuperscript{80} Marchandes de Mode, 41
\textsuperscript{81} Fruitiers, Orangiers, Grainiers, 545
The fashion merchants’ second demand in regards to taxes involved the inheritance of a business following a spouse’s death. The author asked that “widowers and widows could continue the business without being held to pay any fees besides their annual fees.” Similar requests appeared in the cahier of the Third Estate of Paris, which requested that widows be able to inherit their deceased husband’s profession without having to pay an entrance fee, and in the cahier of the fruit and grain sellers, which asked that widows be able to inherit the husband’s guild membership free of charge. The most noticeable difference between the fashion merchants’ request and the requests by the men’s guilds is that the fashion merchants specified that widowers, as well as widows, should be able to inherit without fees. This distinction will be discussed in-depth in Chapter III. The consideration by the author of the fashion merchants’ cahier to widows and also widowers showed that, although the economic requests were those of a merchant, they were not completely disassociated from her identity as a woman.

While the bouquet sellers’ cahier was silent on taxes, the Dames de la Halle and the fashion merchants advocated for reforms. The cahier of the fashion merchants asked for small changes in inheritance and income taxes, while the cahier of the Dames de la Halle called for more sweeping and radical reform, including a call for the taxation of the privileged classes. It also mentioned reforms such as an end to the octroi tax on goods entering Paris and the storage of excess grain in France as a contingency for famine. While the views in the cahier for the Dames de la Halle were not identical to those advocated by guilds and the assembly of the Third Estate of Paris, they did share some similarities: the need to prevent France from losing certain resources and the need to improve the octroi. The fashion merchants’ cahier focused on taxation.

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82 Marchandes de Mode, 41
83 Troisième Ordre 347
Fruitiers, Orangiers, Graniers, 543
issues similar to those of other guilds: wanting their income--not their position in a guild--to affect the capitation tax and also wanting a spouse to be able to inherit a business after a tradesman or tradeswoman’s death. The Dames de la Halle and the fashion merchants both acknowledged that, for their own good and the common good, tax reforms should be enacted. The suggestions in these cahiers for tax reform and reform of cross-border trade were those that came from the fashion merchants’, bouquet sellers’, and Dames de la Halle’s perspectives as merchants.

**Corruption and Abuse of the System**

All three cahiers pointed out corruption, injustice, or misuse of the economic system. Leading up to the French Revolution, the ancien régime was not without its share of corruption. Part of this was due to the ability of wealthy citizens to buy government offices or the rights to collect taxes as Fermiers-Généraux. In other cases, the government established institutions with positive goals in mind, but, in practice, these institutions fell far short of these goals. Such was the case with the *monts de piétés*, which were state-run pawn brokerages. These brokerages were created in order to give an alternative to usury, which the Catholic Church still frowned upon. However, the *monts de piété* were accused in multiple cahiers of favoritism or hurting commerce.

Another area of corruption existed in the credit system. In 1789 France did not have a stable national bank, although the Caisse d’Ecompte, a government controlled “protobank” created by Turgot in 1776, was still in existence. However, throughout the 1780s, the royal government forced this protobank to give it loans to deal with the soaring national debt, which

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84 Kindleberger, 168-9
85 Garrioach, 211
made investor confidence falter and, therefore, made people less willing to risk using it.\textsuperscript{86} Most exchanges of credit were done informally. Merchants bought their supplies on credit, made goods that were sold on credit, then awaited payment for the goods so that they might repay their own debts.\textsuperscript{87} This informal system carried with it certain risks. While a creditor could take a debtor to court in order to get repaid or have the debtor declared bankrupt, this process was often difficult, since there were three overlapping and confusing jurisdictions that oversaw these cases and, often times, the creditor did not have enough evidence to get a favorable verdict.\textsuperscript{88} So, many merchants ran the risk of never getting paid back, getting paid back late, or only getting paid back in part.\textsuperscript{89}

The inability to get paid back for items bought on credit was criticized in both the cahier of the Dames de la Halle and that of the fashion merchants. The fashion merchants called for the end to privileged places in part because these places were asylums from prosecution and, therefore, a refuge used by people that wanted to avoid payment “after having made considerable purchases from the merchandise of manufactories, stores, and boutiques.” These debtors, then, forced their creditors to accept whatever the conditions or amount of repayment that the debtor suggested, since if the creditors did not accept, they risked the chance of “[losing] everything.” The author stressed that the wrong done by this trick was not just to their guild, but it “brought the largest prejudice to commerce and the rights of guilds and trade communities.”\textsuperscript{90} It appears others had similar problems, since the Cahier of the Third Estate of Paris called for the suppression of these “asylums of surety,” as well.\textsuperscript{91}

\textsuperscript{86} Clare Haru Crowston, \textit{Credit, Fashion, and Sex}, 329, n. 2,4  
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid. 140  
\textsuperscript{89} Crowston, \textit{Credit, Fashion, and Sex}, 20  
\textsuperscript{90} Marchandes de Mode, 40  
\textsuperscript{91} Troisième Ordre, 348
The focus of the fashion merchants’ cahier on injustices done to merchants shows that the author believed her group’s interests were those of producers. She linked the complaints of her guild with the interests of commerce in general to strengthen her argument, which shows that, like the author of the bouquet sellers’ cahier, the author was not completely confident that her guild’s image in the commercial world of Paris would be enough to sway the Estates General. The fashion merchants’ identity, then, as portrayed in the cahier, was one of merchants, but, either due to their gender or their guild’s lack of importance in the larger system, was not one of a very economically powerful and, therefore, politically influential guild. The requests in the cahier had to accommodate this identity.

Like the author of the fashion merchants’ cahier, the Dame de la Halle speaker also criticized those that did not pay their debts. While she did not reference the privileged places directly, she did mention, when discussing how the wealthy were able to succeed without buying apprenticeships, that they were also in the habit of always buying things and never paying for them.92 The cahier also focused on the clergy and how abbots and bishops could buy beautiful carriages “that they take on credit, never to repay.” The speaker cited the example of a certain Archbishop of N… who apparently made 800,000 livres in rents, but, instead of paying his debts, spent his money on expensive mistresses and illegitimate children.93

The Dames de la Halle also criticized the wealthy for reasons beyond their avoidance of debt repayment. The author claimed that the wealthy always found the means “to evade all fees through their exemptions, their privileges, and also the easiness they have in smuggling.”94 She accused the Fermiers Généraux of making themselves rich at the cost of those whom they tax.95

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92 Dames de la Halle 47
93 Dames de la Halle, 15
94 Dames de la Halle, 9
95 Dames de la Halle, 11
This last accusation was also iterated in the Cahier of the Third Estate of Paris, which accused the Fermiers-Généraux of taking revenues and “pressing and oppressing” the people.96

The Dame de la Halle’s mention of the archbishop’s illegitimate children seems to be satirical, although, if Antoine Estienne, a former abbot, was the author, it could also have been his way to very bluntly attack the clergy and its corruption while hiding behind a different name. All of these attacks on the privileged classes could actually have been the author’s own opinions that he wanted to accredit to the Dames de la Halle. To do so, however, a public perception of the Dames de la Halle as opponents of the privileged classes had to exist. Many of the Dames de la Halle were indeed opposed to how the privileged classes abused the system, which they sang about when they visited the Estates General in May of 1789.97 In this cahier, the Dames de la Halle were once again portrayed as buyers and resellers of goods that would be affected by the taxes and corruption of the Fermiers Généraux. Their attacks on the privileged class, though, came not necessarily from their position as merchants, but as their position as members of the Third Estate. In this cahier, the Dames de la Halle were portrayed as, and, in reality, did identify with the Third Estate. They supported reforms that reflected a Third Estate viewpoint of the corruption of the other two estates’ privileges, which was also evident in their cahier. Their economic requests, therefore, were not viewed by the author of the cahier as having to come out of their identity as a merchant specifically, but could also come out of their identity within a larger identity such as that of the Third Estate.98 The Dames de la Halle’s identity as a group of merchants was an important one in the author’s decision of what economic requests to attribute to them, but it was not the only identity used.

96 Troisième Ordre, 344
97 Chassin Iii, 252-3
98 This larger Third Estate identity will be discussed in more detail in Chapter IV.
Similar to the arguments found in the cahier for the Dames de la Halle, the bouquet sellers’ cahier used an argument of government officials’ disinterest in the good of the people in order to try to receive their guild rights back. The author of the cahier accused government ministers of responding to their request with threats and letting their subordinates “stifle the screams” of the women with “an offensive silence.” While this accusation of corruption seems likely to be exaggerated, the author also accused the soldiers that oversaw la Halle of tolerating the unprincipled girls “pillaging” through the flowers brought in by the gardeners, which resulted in chaos and destruction, and forcing the gardeners to accept whatever price they offered.

Here, the author reasserted that the bouquet sellers’ main concern was their guild rights and she felt that they deserved the attention of the ministers assigned to deal with such economic concerns. Since they were merchants, according to the author’s argument, they should not have been ignored by the authorities in charge of addressing merchants’ issues. The soldiers were corrupt, in the author’s eyes, because they permitted other flower sellers to change the system of buying flowers from the gardeners. The author felt that, as merchants, the bouquet sellers deserved to be able to appeal to the government’s ministers to resolve issues related to their trade and that corruption should not prevent them from effectively practicing that trade. Since she addressed this argument to the National Assembly, she felt that it was possible that, they, too, believed the bouquet sellers’ economic role gave them these rights.

The author of the fashion merchants’ cahier also condemned corruption in the commercial system. The cahier of the fashion merchants, like the cahiers by the spice merchants and the assembly of the Third Estate of Paris, requested the suppression of the monts de piétés, the state-supported pawn brokerages in Paris. According to the author, the establishments, at

99 Bouquetières, 33
100 Marchandes de Mode, 35
their origin, appeared to be a “security” for the public’s goods but had since created a number of abuses that “did a considerable wrong to commerce in general.” The spice merchants claimed that the institutions gave loans that were “very prejudiced to certain people,” and that the daily sales of the goods of those unable to pay back their loans were “very contrary to the good of commerce in general.” The general assembly of the Third Estate of Paris allowed that the monts de piété could keep functioning if the Estates General let them, but, at the very least, the abuses should be removed. The monts de piétés were created to try to give the French an alternative to a high interest loan but, according to these cahiers, they were too corrupt to be beneficial. Once again, the fashion merchants’ cahier emphasized how their requests reflected those of commerce in general, and the similarity between their request and those of guilds dominated by men showed that the author’s concerns reflected the concerns of people that had a similar identity as merchants but not the same gender identity.

The variety of corruption in French society on the eve of the French Revolution proved that all of these groups-- fashion merchants, bouquet sellers, Dames de la Halle, guildsmen, and members of the assembly of the Third Estate of Paris-- saw problems in the economic system. Some were due to the government’s inability to properly monitor and control their institutions, such as the monts de piétés, while in other cases, individuals were able to commit injustices, like refusing to pay debts, because the system was not able to create and properly enforce effective rules. However, representatives of these three groups of women believed the Estates General or its successor, the National Assembly, had the potential to solve these problems, since they put forth time and effort to record them in cahiers.

101 Bouquetières, 40
102 Épiciers. 522
103 Troisième Ordre. 350
The author of the bouquet sellers’ and fashion merchants’ cahiers also believed that the groups they represented should have these opinions on economic corruption heard by the Estates General since, as merchants, these groups were greatly involved with the economic system. They must have felt that there was at least a slight possibility that the Estates General would acknowledge this identity and agree with them. For the cahier of the Dames de la Halle, the author acknowledged that these women had an economic identity as merchants and members of the Third Estate and would argue against corruption from that perspective. This showed that such a perception of the Dames de la Halle was not completely unheard of in 1789, since the author would not have gotten this idea out of nowhere. In all three cases, the authors of the cahiers felt that corruption in the economy had the impact to harm their groups.

Unfortunately for the cahier-writers, the Estates General was not able to solve many of their problems. The bouquet sellers never got their guild rights back. All guilds were suppressed on 14 June 1791 by the Loi le Chapelier (Le Chapelier Law), in which the revolutionary government forbade citizens of the same profession from assembling to organize prices or regulations, since doing so was “against the principles of liberty and the constitution.” In 1791, the octroi was removed from goods traveling into Paris, but it was reinstated in 1798.

The Revolution did result in some demands being answered. The privileges of the nobility and clergy were revoked, and they were no longer exempt from taxes. The Ferme Générale was suppressed in 1791. The Church lands that were once privileged places and asylums from arrest were confiscated by the state and lost their special status.

104 Loi le Chapelier Art. 4, 14 juin 1791
It is important not to judge these cahiers based solely on the success or failure of their requests. Rather, one should also look at what the cahiers say about their authors and the groups they represented. The cahiers written by the bouquet sellers and fashion merchants were documents clearly written by groups that were involved in commerce, knowledgeable about the economic system, and considered economic reform a priority. Similarly, the cahier of the Dames de la Halle showed a public perception that these women were economically knowledgeable and had opinions that came from their economic identity. In many instances, the requests in all three cahiers were similar to those issued by men in similar positions, showing that, in the economic sphere, working women’s circumstances and commercial interests were not so very different from workingmen’s. As merchants, they had similar requests to other merchants, regardless of gender. In the case of the Dames de la Halle, this similarity between interests could have been a reason the male author sought to put their name on his own complaints, or he could have simply felt that, since the Dames de la Halle were merchants, they would have similar requests as other merchants. The economic requests that dominated all three cahiers show that these groups of tradeswomen had well-developed identities as merchants.
Chapter III: Women’s Concerns

“The most agreeable virtues…in a woman and those that win for her moreover the homage and respect of men…Are they not modesty, the care that she gives to nurse and raise her children, to watch over her home and to contribute to the happiness of her husband?” In the years leading up to and during the French Revolution, such a depiction of the idealized woman as domestic and moral was not uncommon. In Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s influential 1762 novel, Émile: Or On Education, Sophie, the ideal wife, was depicted as possessing these domestic qualities, in contrast to Émile’s natural education. As France moved towards revolution, an emphasis on the “good” and “virtuous” equated to a more domestic role for women, since many believed that women’s appearance in public, appetite for luxury, and desire for influence and power led to the corruption of the ancien régime. A better, reformed society, therefore, would consist of women possessing a “bourgeois” morality in which they focused their attentions on the private sphere of home and family.

Women, as well as men, evoked this feminine ideal in their writings. In a pamphlet written on behalf of the women of the Third Estate, for instance, the author argued that women should have free schools in which to learn “principles, the Religion, and morality,” and, “above all, practice the virtues of our sex, gentleness, modesty, patience, charity.” While a woman should learn the “agreeable arts,” she should not, the author argued, learn the sciences because such knowledge would lead women to “pedantry contrary to the voices of nature,” which would make them “mixed beings that are rarely faithful wives and more rarely good mothers.” While the author, who some scholars consider to be a woman, was advocating reforms that would

106 Proctor, 55
107 “Pétition des Femmes du Tiers-États au Roi,” Duhet, 29
expand education to more girls, the argument was framed within a context of women learning feminine virtues and becoming faithful wives and good mothers.

Such a context was also evident, albeit more subtly, in the cahiers written by the fashion merchants, bouquet sellers, and Dames de la Halle. These three groups of women were identified in their cahiers by their role as economic producers, unlike the more ambiguous “women of the Third Estate” and had a more economic emphasis in their cahiers. As working women, either through choice or, more than likely, necessity, they were involved in the public sphere as well as the domestic. Many of their ideas on taking care of their families reflected a working class ideal, in which wives were expected to help their husbands secure the financial stability of the household.108

While the reforms that the fashion merchants, bouquet sellers, and Dames de la Halle wanted to enact were primarily economic and similar to those proposed by men in similar positions, these three groups nevertheless were distinguished as women in their cahiers. Some cahiers emphasized this identity more than others: the cahier for the Dames de la Halle had more references to the speaker’s identity as a woman, while the fashion merchants’ made only a few subtle references. The author of the fashion merchants’ cahier seemed to want to emphasize her groups’ economic status instead of their status as women. Of the three groups, the fashion merchants had the most influential economic status, since they were an organized guild. Therefore, the fashion merchants were logically the ones most likely to emphasize their status as merchants relative to their status as women. The author did not feel the need to justify her economic suggestions by connecting them to the fashion merchants’ role as women. The cahier

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did, however, show the fashion merchants’ identity as women, although mostly through uses of the feminine form of “merchant” to refer to her guild and assumptions that all members were women, showing that the fashion merchants did have an identity as women, even if the author did not use this identity to justify her suggestions.

The other two cahiers addressed women’s issues more explicitly. Both articulated how the economic climate—the prices of goods and economic competition—affecting them not just as participants in the economy, but as distinctly female participants that were interested in how economic policies affected women’s roles as wives and mothers. Both groups also used the contemporary fear of prostitution to try to persuade the Estates General that reforms benefitting these groups of women would also benefit the moral climate of Paris, since fewer women would look to prostitution as a means to survive. In doing so, they took part in an ongoing debate on the cause of prostitution and how it should be resolved. While men as well as women discussed issues such as prostitution, the women’s connecting these issues to their own situation gave these cahiers a distinctly female perspective.

Whether either group truly opposed the practice of prostitution as strongly as they appeared is unknown, since the two authors could have just as easily been making such arguments because they thought it would appeal to their audiences. The author of the bouquet sellers’ cahier could have spoken her own opinion as a fellow woman or simply mirrored what the National Assembly would think their identity as women should entail. In the case of the cahier for the Dames de la Halle, it is probable that the author was articulating his own view of the identity of women and not how the Dames de la Halle viewed themselves. From all three cahiers’ references to their respective groups’ identities as women, therefore, we can gain insight into both private and public perceptions about how women were viewed and how some cahier
writers tried to use these perceptions in the sphere of politics to gain seemingly unrelated concessions, such as guild and tax reform.

**Prices, Taxes, and Guilds**

The cahiers for the fashion merchants, bouquet sellers, and Dames de la Halle made many suggestions regarding the economic system, including a request for tax reform and price controls, as has been discussed in the previous chapter. Their requests were similar to those addressed by men’s guilds and the exclusively male official assembly for the Parisian Third Estate. However, some nuances in how these arguments were articulated in the women’s cahiers stood in contrast to those by similar groups of men, showing that the authors were aware that their groups’ gender gave them an identity distinct from these men.

The fashion merchant’s specification that both widows and widowers should inherit a business from his/her deceased spouse is an obvious example. The fruit and grain sellers’ guild and the general assembly of the Third Estate of Paris both requested that widows should be able to take over their husband’s business without paying an entrance fee to the guild, but they made no mention of widowers. The fashion merchants’ inclusion of widowers in this request showed that they took into consideration guildswomen while their male counterparts considered only guildsmen. The motivation behind this could have been as simple as the fashion merchants thinking about the future of their own business, were they to die before their husbands.

However, they also included widows in their request, proving that they thought not only about their own trade, but men’s work as well. It was likely that a man whose wife worked was employed or seeking employment himself, so some of the fashion merchants’ husbands might have been members of others guilds. In that case, the author’s mention of widows could have
been in pure self-interest for herself and her guild. However, it is also possible that such a reference reflected a consideration by the fashion merchants of the plights of other women, which would show that the author of the fashion merchants’ guild viewed herself as an advocate for all working-class women, whether or not they were members of the fashion merchants’ guild. In the former, more self-interested case, the author would have portrayed her guild as one of tradeswomen who would want their husbands to inherit, but also as wives that would want to inherit their husbands’ businesses. In the latter, the author, as a woman of the working class, felt she had camaraderie with other working class wives. In either situation, the author showed that she viewed herself and her guild both as owners of a business and as wives or potential wives.

The fashion merchants’ cahier called for widowers to be able to inherit positions in their guild without paying an entrance fee, but, at the same time, it indicates that the author assumed that her guild was, and would remain, a guild of women. According to the laws issued in 1776 reforming the newly reestablished guild system, the fashion merchants’ guild had to, at least officially, accept male members. However, contemporaries usually referred to the guild with the feminine form of “merchant” (marchande). The fashion merchant’s cahier used this feminine form as well, indicating that the author, like many of her contemporaries, saw the guild as a women’s guild. The author further emphasized that the guild was one of women—almost exclusively so-- in Article IV of the cahier, when the author argued for a variance in the entrance fee to the guild, depending upon the individual’s experience in the industry. She argued that “apprenties” and “filles de marchandes” that have worked for the “maîtresses” for three years should pay 200 livres less for admittance than those without such experience. The mention of only female apprentices and daughters of merchants indicated that, according to the

109 “Doléances des Marchandes de Mode, Plumassières, Fleuristes de Paris,” Duhet, 40
author’s view, those gaining experience in the industry before entering the guild would be exclusively female; she made no mention of male apprentices (apprentis) or sons of fashion merchants. The author did not argue that female apprentices and daughters should have advantages over male apprentices and sons, but instead assumed that male apprentices and sons working in fashion merchants’ workshops did not exist. According to the author, there were only two categories of people trying to enter the guild: daughters and female apprentices, and people without experience (personnes sans qualité). Merchants’ sons and male apprentices would fall into neither category. The cahier also specified that the fashion merchants whose daughters should have privileges were exclusively female (marchandes instead of marchands) and that experience gained would be in the workshops of only female guild members (maîtresses with no mention of maîtres). When prescribing future reforms, the cahier by the fashion merchants indicated that they did not foresee that future consisting of male members in their guilds, despite requesting that widowers be able to inherit their guild memberships. In doing so, the author emphasized that the cahier was written on behalf of a female-only guild.

This reference to the guild’s female identity is perhaps more telling about the author and the group she represented than the overt references in the other cahiers, since the author was not using their identity as women to persuade the Estates General, a group of men, to support reforms, but was rather just stating how she viewed her guild. She did not try to hide the fact that they were all women, or she wanted to subtly exclude a male minority. She accepted and promoted identifying her guild with women. By asking for inheritance of guild membership for both widows and widowers, the author showed that she was writing on behalf of the interests of women that owned a business and perhaps on behalf of other Third Estate women, as well.
While not emphasizing the fashion merchants’ female identity, the author showed that such an identity did exist.

The cahier for the Dames de la Halle argued on behalf of women, as well, when the author argued for tax reform and the lowering of tobacco prices. The author opposed the high price of tobacco since “[the Dames de la Halle’s] husbands have taken up this bitch of a habit; it is necessary that they sniff it [and] smoke pipes of it, without which they stay with hanging arms all day. They would like more to pass off bread, wine, wife, and all that follows, than to not take out the nasal powder.”¹¹⁰ Their argument was directed towards the high price of tobacco, which the author described as a burden, since it was being sold “so expensively as if it is a drug from the apothecary.”¹¹¹ Since this complaint was juxtaposed between a condemnation of the price of salt and an opposition to Fermiers Généraux, the author more than likely blamed the price of tobacco on taxes, since tobacco, as well as salt, was subject to one of the five “great Fermes” or general taxes.¹¹²

Although working class women, like men, smoked, the author did not choose to focus on women’s use of tobacco, but instead on how their roles as wives were affected by men’s use of it. The author emphasized that the husbands chose to spend money on tobacco instead of caring for their wives and using the money for basic provisions such as bread and wine. This cahier implied that the Dames de la Halle had little control over their husbands’ purchasing of tobacco, and, as wives, their hope for improvement was based on an economic reform: that is, a decrease in the price of tobacco. In this argument, the purported Dame de la Halle that was dictating the

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¹¹⁰ Cahier des Plaines & Doléances des Dames de la Halle, 10
¹¹¹ Dames de la Halle, 10
¹¹² Iain Gately, Tobacco: A Cultural History of How an Exotic Plant Seduced Civilization (New York: Grove Press, 2001), 143
cahier spoke not from her experience as a woman involved in the economic system, but spoke about the experience of wives.

Under the assumption of this cahier’s male authorship, one can conclude that such an author perceived of the Dames de la Halle not only as economically-driven women, but also as women that had interests based on their identities as wives. While describing the habit of smoking tobacco as a “bitch” was probably the author’s attempt at comedy, the speaker’s feeling of anger and ineffectualness could have easily been reality for a Dame de la Halle. Such an argument reflected a common and socially acceptable complaint of a working class wife about her husband’s excessive spending and ineffective household management.113 The author also assumed that the wife had little influence over her husband’s spending habits. For the most part, this ineffectiveness accurately reflected the position of working class wives during the late eighteenth century, although such unnecessary expenditures could be used against a husband in court if a wife sought separate property or if the husband’s character or role as an effective provider was being questioned.114 Disapproval from the community—men and women alike—towards a man that could not properly manage his expenses also could persuade a husband from mismanaging his funds and was more easy to obtain.115 However, these regulations, both official and unofficial, would have come after the spending was already having a serious negative impact on the family. The speaker in this cahier suggested a way to preemptively prevent such detrimental spending by making tobacco less expensive, and, therefore, allowing husbands to keep their addictions without severely impacting the family finances. Such a request coming from a Dame de la Halle would not be entirely illogical. As a participant in the marketplace, it is

113 Hardwick, 120-121
114 Hardwick 121
115 Hardwick 120-1
very possible that a Dame de la Halle would look for a solution to the problem in the buying and selling of goods. Therefore, even if the cahier was written by a man, it is plausible that the Dames de la Halle actually had such a complaint.

Whether the Dames de la Halle would have used such an explanation to argue for tax reform is not clear. However, the author’s use of the term shows that he viewed the Dames de la Halle as wives that would have used such an identity to justify their reforms. Doing so could have been a reflection of a public perception of the Dames de la Halle as married women that had similar problems to other married women. The author also could have used it to devalue the Dames de la Halle’s professional role by reminding his audience that they are still women who had the same complaints as other women about how their husbands chose to support their households. If he did feel the need to remind his audience of the Dames de la Halle’s status as women, that would suggest that the Dames de la Halle were developing a strong professional identity that was threatening to give them more power than the author thought women should have. Such a fear was not unheard of at the time, since many writers began using the term “fishwife” (poissarde) to refer to the market women instead of “Dame de la Halle,” the latter of which highlighted their economic role in the marketplace of la Halle.116 Regardless of the author’s intent, the cahier implies that, at least in the minds of some, such as the author, the Dames de la Halle had an identity as married women.

Similarly, the bouquet sellers’ cahier mentioned their family role in its argument for the reinstatement of the guild. The author argued that “it was necessary to organize the guilds so that each individual that belonged to a profession can find in their work their subsistence and that of their children.”117 In this portion of the cahier, the author reflected the contemporary view that

116 Marion, Dames de la Halle, 7
117 “Cahier de Doléances des Bouquetières,” Duhet, 34
working class women, like their husbands, were responsible for providing financially for their children. Since the author of the bouquet sellers’ cahier attempted to persuade the National Assembly to reinstate her guild, she implied that women, as well as men, should be able to make enough money to provide for their families. Such an emphasis is also reflected in word choice: the use of the word “individual” instead of the general term “man.” In this instance, the author viewed the responsibilities of a mother as similar to those of the father: each “individual” had a responsibility to provide for his/her children. In another part of the text, the author specifically addressed mothers’ need to provide for their families. She argued that she saw female workers in the bouquet industry that were “mothers of the family that [business owners] sustain by paying only 30 sols and food.” The author evoked not only the mother’s need to care for her family, but also used the term “mother of the family” (mère de famille) which was a term often used at the time to describe an ideal woman who focused on and adequately fulfilled her duties to her family.\footnote{Proctor, 56}

The author of the bouquet sellers’ cahier either truly believed that providing for her family was one of the most important reasons why her guild should be reinstated, or she thought that the National Assembly, particularly the deputies from the Third Estate, would agree with that role of working class mothers and sympathize. It was presumably both. While making and selling bouquets did require expertise, and the bouquet sellers could have been proud of their skill—indeed, the author of the cahier seems to have such pride when she condemns the inferior work of the girls that entered the trade after the suppression of the guild—it is highly unlikely that they took up such a profession for intellectual stimulation or a passion for bouquet-making.

\footnote{In translating, I used the grammatically incorrect term “their” as a non-gender specific singular possessive to better reflect the French which makes no distinction on the gender of the person to which the possessive refers.}
More likely, they did it to make ends meet financially, and it follows that, if they had a family, that money would go to supporting that family. As the concept of “mother of the family” and the working woman’s role as supplementary provider to her family’s finances were very popular in the second half of the eighteenth century, it is also very likely that the National Assembly understood the identity and role the author was referencing. The author of the bouquet sellers’ cahier used the bouquet sellers’ identity as women and the roles that identity implied in order to make her economic arguments stronger.

The author of the bouquet sellers’ cahier used a woman’s role as mother and, therefore, provider for her children, in an attempt to persuade the Estates General to reinstate her guild, much like the Dames de la Halle’s status as wives was used to argue for tax reform. The fashion merchants’ cahier, on the other hand, did not make such arguments but did use language to further the interests of their business and keep her guild as a women’s guild. The bouquet sellers’ and Dames de la Halle’s cahiers had another similarity that was not shared by the fashion merchants’ guild: they insinuated that a mother’s inability to take care of her family through her business could make her desperate enough to become a prostitute.

**Prostitution**

The cahiers for the Dames de la Halle and the bouquet sellers were not unique in their reference to prostitution and the public fear of it to try to garner reforms, nor were they unique in tying financial desperation to some women’s resorting to prostitution. Prostitution was discussed in literature, pamphlets, and both official and unofficial cahiers. It was a subject debated by both men and women. The unofficial cahiers for the Dames de la Halle and the bouquet sellers both used this fear of prostitution to apply to their own situations. The author of the bouquet sellers’
cahier was careful to keep the former guild members’ identity separate from those in the bouquet profession that would stoop to prostitution, but she still argued that a benefit to her guild’s professional situation would reduce the necessity of prostitution. The author of the cahier for the Dames de la Halle shared multiple views of prostitution. In one presumably satirical instance, the Dame de la Halle commiserated with a courtesan, since as a woman, she understood the courtesan’s lust. In another, however, the speaker asserted the same argument as the bouquet sellers: that economic reforms that helped herself would help prevent prostitution. This argument showed that the authors thought that a group of women’s references to the risk of prostitution would carry weight with the cahiers’ audiences because of the Dames de la Halle’s and bouquet sellers’ statuses as women. Since they worked in professions dominated by women, the fear that not giving into their specific self-interested demands could increase prostitution would have been a lot more effective and a lot easier to justify than if such an assertion was issued by a group of men. The authors in both cases linked the groups’ identities as women with women’s potential to become prostitutes.

The possibility of women becoming prostitutes was a legitimate one: during the second half of the eighteenth century, an estimated 13% of Parisian women of reasonable age engaged in prostitution at least once.\footnote{Pierre Goubert, introduction to \textit{La Prostitution et la Police des Moeurs au XVIIIe Siècle} by Erica-Marie Benabou (Paris : Libraire Académique Perrin, 1987), 10} Many of the city’s men and women spoke out against the growing presence of prostitution and the increasingly public nature of it.\footnote{Benabou 448} Opponents of the current situation argued against the corruption of society’s morals, health, and finances. Opponents within the Catholic Church used biblical justification to condemn the practice, while other moralists feared that the increase in prostitution and libertine behavior would make men lazy and
unmotivated, causing France to fall into a decline, much like the Roman Empire. Other opponents feared an increase in venereal diseases. Still others feared the power of a high class courtesan to lead to a man’s financial ruin. During the second half of the eighteenth century, an increase in the public presence of prostitution led to a variety of arguments against it.

Why prostitution gained popularity and became more public during this time can be blamed on the economic climate of the period. Mercantile values and practices gained popularity. These values and practices empowered women that identified and acted like whores, since prostitutes embodied profit maximization and a willingness to exploit others for one’s own gain. The Marquis de Sade illustrated this in his 1787 work *Les Infortunes de la Vertu*, in which the character of Juliette, a libertine, was portrayed as economically-motivated and calculating. While every venal transaction “[brought] new acts of libertinage, it also [reaffirmed] Juliette’s keen understanding of what drives the production, multiplication, and preservation of wealth.” In this work, the Marquis de Sade presented a dichotomous worldview in which there were exploiters, like Juliette, and those they exploited. A successful libertine, like Juliette, embodied the same ruthlessness of a successful person in a capitalist society.

While commercial development contributed to the increasing presence of prostitution in Paris, fear for the disruption of the traditional social structure contributed to its condemnation. Courtesans were able to emulate the social class of their protectors. Women that were not a part of the noble class became wealthy and were able to dress and affect the habits of a noblewoman,

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121 Goyon de la Plombanie in Benabou, 451
122 Lena Olsson, “‘A First-Rate Whore’: Prostitution and Empowerment in the Early Eighteenth Century” *Prostitution and 18th Century Culture*. Edited by Ann Lewis and Markman Ellis (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012), 72
123 Olivier Delers, “The Prostitute as Neo-Manager: Sade’s Juliette and the New Spirit of Capitalism” *Prostitution and 18th Century Culture*, 127
124 Ibid, 127-8
although the woman came from a much lower social class. This pseudo-social mobility and their potential to have influence over their protectors separated courtesans from the “common prostitutes” that roamed the streets and accepted any customer that propositioned them. Moralists and satirists attempted to discredit these courtesans, particularly those that had social and financial success, by reporting actions by these women that unveiled them as “common whores.” Laurent-Pierre Bérenger called for the deputies of the Third Estate to the Estates General to “wither by demeaning distinctions, these courtesans famous for the traffic of their charms” In making such arguments, opponents attempted to discredit the idea that women could obtain social mobility, even if it was only in appearance, through prostitution. Even the “common prostitutes” were subject to attempts to maintain a rigid social structure towards the end of the ancien régime. Both Rétif de la Bretonne and Sébastien Mercier, prolific writers and describers of Parisian society, tried to give prostitutes their own social hierarchies.

Another concern in regards to prostitution was its increasingly public nature. Moralists such as Bérenger feared that the visibility of successful courtesans would tempt women and girls to enter the trade. Likewise, even the presence of poorer prostitutes would tempt the religiously devout, which would result in misery and disease. In the years leading up to the French Revolution, many opponents gave up hope on completely eradicating prostitution and instead turned to reducing it and making it less visible. An ordinance issued by Police Lieutenant General Lenoir on 6 November 1778 asserted that prostitutes “instead of hiding their infamous

125 In this analysis, I have chosen to focus on “street” prostitutes and courtesans, since they were the two categories of prostitutes discussed in the three cahiers. Other types of prostitutes, such as those that worked in brothels, did exist, despite not being given prominence in my analysis.

126 Olsson, 72


128 Cahier d’un ami des mœurs, 9-10, 27

129 Benabou, 457
commerce, had the boldness to show themselves in their windows during the day, where they signaled to passerby to attract them, and, in the evenings, go outside and stop people of all ages and classes.” Because of this, the ordinance forbade prostitutes from walking along the quays and public promenades. This ordinance reflected an emphasis by the police and legal system to focus more on the punishment of public prostitution while not seriously prosecuting more private forms. Another suggestion was that the state take over the prostitution industry and assign all prostitutes to brothels so that their trade could remain hidden from view. While many condemned the practice of prostitution, efforts were made to at least reduce and hide the prostitution that did exist.

The cahiers de doléances, both official and unofficial, advocated for reforms to prostitution. The cahiers of all three estates of Paris addressed the issue, an exceptional occurrence that proved how important prostitution was in discussions of reforms. Unofficial cahiers addressed prostitution as well. Bérenger's cahier, entitled “On Prostitution: cahier and doléances of a friend of morals, addressed especially to the deputies of the Third-Estate of Paris” focused exclusively on the issue of prostitution. Cahiers written by women or those that claimed to be written by women mentioned the issue, as well. The Complaints of the Women of the Third Estate, addressed to the Estates General and the Cahier de Doléances des Demoiselles both addressed prostitution and potential reforms. The cahiers representing the bouquet sellers and Dames de la Halle, then, were not unusual in their mentioning of prostitution.

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130 Benabou, 27
131 Benabou, 446
132 “Observations d’un citoyen habitant de Paris et membre du Tiers communiquées au district des Filles de Saint-Thomas” in Chassin II, 500
133 Benabou, 447
Within the debate about prostitution and reforms that could reduce it, the causes of prostitution were also in question. Bérenger mentioned three of the most commonly cited causes: women’s desire for luxury, social inequality, and economic hardship. He condemned the “insolent vanity” of courtesans and called on the Estates General to forbid courtesans from displaying their wealth for fear that other women might see them and, being greedy, try to emulate them.¹³⁴ In regards to social inequality, he argued that the evils of prostitution “necessarily followed from extreme inequality” and that improvements could be made through “honoring the merit of all professions, [and] banishing all privileges. Privileges corrupt the Nation; privileges discredit the honest sources of fortune and well-being.”¹³⁵ Viewed up close, a prostitute “often has on her face only hunger.”¹³⁶

While women’s desire for luxury was suggested as a cause for prostitution, it was a much less popular theory than that which blamed misery caused by the structures of society.¹³⁷ Rétif de la Bretonne, like Bérenger, blamed privileges for corrupting morals. In his argument, privileges corrupted the nobility, whose corruption inspired young women to do the same.¹³⁸ Others also associated prostitution with the aristocracy, contrasting the corrupt nobility and prostitutes with the superior bourgeois morals that they felt were present in the Third-Estate.¹³⁹

Attention was also given to the economic situation that allowed women to be so desperate that they were willing to become prostitutes. J. B. Moheau, in his Recherches and Considérations, stated that he “pitied the female sex, maltreated by nature on the side of means of subsistence, and often vexed by the laws, rules, and usages, I groan because men take

¹³⁴ Bérenger, 14-5  
¹³⁵ Bérenger, 6, 28-9  
¹³⁶ Bérenger, 22  
¹³⁷ Benabou, 462  
¹³⁸ Rétif de la Bretonne in Benabou, 466  
¹³⁹ Benabou, 467
professions from them…if the women live in cities, not being able to procure for themselves by
their work the means of subsistence, they search elsewhere and find it in sacrificing the morals of
the population.”  

Since the cahiers of the bouquet sellers and Dames de la Halle focused primarily on economic reforms, their discussion of prostitution focused mainly on this last premise: that prostitution was caused by poverty and women’s inability to get financial stability through other means. They both also mentioned the public presence of prostitutes and the temptations of wealth they presented to women employed in other occupations.

The cahier for the Dames de la Halle pointed out that, under the current economic system, their honest employment was less profitable than being a courtesan and that it was only because of their strong morals that they, too, did not become courtesans. The speaker “liked better to smell of fish than mercury, and [she has] more honor and honesty in [her] fingernails than these others have in all the sacred head of their person.” She acknowledged the high status of certain courtesans, those with “sacred heads,” but, like other critics, tried to attack their status by pointing out their immorality. She compared high class courtesans to herself and speculated that if she was a courtesan, she “could have, just as well as them, all these baubles” and promenade in the Jardin de Luxembourg or Tuileries, which she could not do with her current status. She also condemned the ridiculous manners the courtesans affected. In doing so, the author reinforced the idea that prostitution permitted a type of social mobility. In this portion of the cahier, the author portrayed courtesans as those given more status than other working women, but who possessed lower morals and were, therefore, not deserving of their high status.

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140 J.B. Moheau in Benabou, 460
141 Dames de la Halle, 42-3
142 Dames de la Halle, 42
The author of the cahier was therefore repeating an argument against courtesans that had significant male support. While such condemnation of courtesans appeared in unofficial cahiers from individuals such as Bérenger and official cahiers such as that from Paris’s Third Estate, women writers were generally less concerned. However, the threatening presence of such immoral courtesans was a common theme in a variety of documents claiming to be written by women but really written by men, such as the Cahier of the Representations and Complaints of the Fair Sex and the Petition of the Women of the Third Estate to the King. While it is certainly possible that a morally-upstanding Dame de la Halle was frustrated that a lack of morality was rewarded with financial gain, this fixation on courtesans was probably more of an expression of the author’s view than that of a Dame de la Halle. Such an example tells us little about the Dames de la Halle, since the author could have combined his own feelings on courtesans with an attempt to mock the Dames de la Halle: in other works in the poissarde style, a Dame de la Halle was often portrayed as immoral, meaning that the supposed Dame de la Halle’s claim to be moral could be a way to comically highlight their immorality.143

The Dames de la Halle’s cahier also had a more unique attack on courtesans, which referenced the Dames de la Halle’s status as women involved in trade. In addition to exalting her own morals in relation to those of courtesans, the speaker argued that “all our tatters belong to us, I have paid them…while those that go [to the Jardins de Luxembourg and Tuileries] are leased theirs.”144 The author implied that the Dames de la Halle had superiority over the courtesans since they were financially self-sufficient, while the courtesans relied on their protectors for their goods.

143 Rene Marion, “Political Ritual, the Citizen, and the Market Woman in Eighteenth Century France.” (Presented at the meeting of the American Historical Association, 1996), 11
144 Dames de la Halle, 42
The speaker seemed to believe that a woman selling goods in a marketplace and buying her own supplies had more financial security, and, therefore, was better off than a woman that was wealthier, but whose wealth was dependent on a man. The speaker was proud of her role as a woman involved in commerce and believed that it had value beyond just helping her family survive: a level of self-sufficiency was prized. At the same time, she argued against the injustice of courtesans being exalted while women that earned money through other means were unable to acquire such status. In doing so, the author made a commentary on the economic situation, as well.

This argument based on pride in financial independence was certainly not popular at the time, and one must question the author’s motives in including it. Such a pride in employment and its rewards could be a reflection of the actual feelings of Dames de la Halle, or the author could have added it himself, either because he thought the Dames de la Halle should be proud of their financial accomplishments or because he sought to mock them for it. Both possibilities have interesting implications. If the author thought the Dames de la Halle should commend themselves, he was acknowledging their economic competence and felt that women’s employment had an intrinsic value outside of its necessity to support a family. With such an intrinsic value, it follows that women should work outside the home, even if they do not have to for financial reasons. It also follows that women’s financial independence from men—being able to buy their own means of subsistence—was a possibility. If the author intended it as satire, it shows that a significant number of Parisian women in 1789 were proud of their ability to provide for themselves or that the public was starting to acknowledge their potential to do so, since the

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145 The author never mentioned this argument in relation to marriage. It is unknown whether the speaker would have similarly condemned women that were unemployed and sustained themselves with their husbands’ money or if the permanence and/or morality of marriage made such a situation better.
author would not have mocked something that was not happening or was not likely to happen. In either case, there is a perception that the Dames de la Halle had a professional identity of which they could be proud. Either they felt that, or the author felt that, their identity as women did not invalidate the financial success of their profession.

The cahier of the Dames de la Halle also suggested reforms to discourage prostitution in general, but, like many of her contemporaries, the speaker did not seem to believe that the practice could be eradicated. Instead, she, too, suggested laws that would make prostitution less public. She acknowledged that the Estates General did not have “long enough arms” to solve the problem of prostitution. Given the wide range of problems in this cahier that the Dames de la Halle apparently believed the Estates General could fix, this assumption shows that the problem of prostitution was viewed as very difficult to solve. The speaker demanded simply that the Estates General “hide these bad examples, so that our daughters will not see them in front of their eyes.” The author argued that prostitutes “poison our sons, sometimes also debauch our husband” and, in doing so, give “negative examples to our daughters.” The speaker attempted to curb public prostitution for its effects on their families. The speaker did not argue from her position as a merchant, but as a wife and mother that was worried about her children. While she reiterated an argument against the public nature of prostitution that was common at the time, she used her role as mother to try and persuade the Estates General to make prostitution more private.

While parts of the cahier de doléances written by the Dames de la Halle did condemn the morality of prostitutes, in other parts, the speaker seemed to pity and commiserate with them.

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146 Dames de la Halle, 41
147 Dames de la Halle, 42
148 Dames de la Halle, 40
The author loosely linked her complaint about the hospital system and treatment with a tale about a courtesan that went mad. The author condemned the actions of a nun taking care of the mentally unstable girl. When the girl, a former actress and courtesan, was in a fit of insanity, she called the nun offensive names. The nun sought vengeance and punished the girl instead of being compassionate. The nun berated the girl, claiming that “if one had the misfortune to heal her at the Hotel-Dieu, she would not profit from her good health. Since she is pretty, she would be an instrument of the devil to attract his next victim to the fire.” Therefore, the nun continued, “to avoid the scandal that she gives to the theater and the damnation of her spirit, it was necessary to let her insanity be fed and close her forever in the Petits-Maisons.”

149 The nun’s words and her sending the girl to Salpêtriere, an institution for the mentally unstable but also where convicted prostitutes were sent “wroth” the author of the cahier.150 While, in her complaint against the courtesans promenading in the gardens of Paris, the author attacked the morality of these courtesans, in this anecdote, she condemned the use of similar moral arguments against the mentally ill girl.

In the story, the author made no mention of dire circumstances provoking the girl to become a prostitute. Rather, the girl’s lustful nature was cited as the reason for her becoming a courtesan, and her lover’s infidelity and abandonment was the reason for her descent into insanity.151 Instead of condemning the girl’s lustful nature, the speaker commiserated with her, claiming that if every woman was punished for being lustful, a lot of women would be punished, herself included.152 While not condemning the girl, the author did make a suggestion about how such prostitution could be avoided. She suggested that the girl receive “some good doses of

149 Dames de la Halle, 27
150 Dames de la Halle, 27
151 Dames de la Halle, 28-9
152 Dames de la Halle, 28-9
marriage” to combat her lust, which, according to the author, was how many women, like herself, avoided such a fate as the girl.\textsuperscript{153}

The author, then, purported an idea that some cases of prostitution were caused by women’s sexual desires, and the speaker’s response to the mentally ill girl implied that this Dame de la Halle thought these desires were common and acceptable. This anecdote, with the Dame de la Halle admitting how lustful she is, obviously contains a decent amount of satire. However, on a more serious level, the author was also criticizing a commonly-held moralist view of the degenerate nature of courtesans by having the nun argue the extreme opinion that the girl cannot be reformed and should be left to die. This critique takes a completely different tone towards courtesans than is found in the other parts of the cahier that have been discussed. The author was obviously aware of a diversity of views towards prostitution and took a stance that, on one hand, condemned prostitutes for being immoral destroyers of families, but, on the other hand, ridiculed the idea that they were so inherently immoral that they should not be allowed in society. The mockery of the Dames de la Halle’s lustfulness indicates that the author found the actual Dames de la Halle’s earthiness and vulgarity amusing or that he feared an increasing acknowledgement of women’s sexual nature and therefore sought to mock it.

In regards to “common prostitutes,” the Dame de la Halle reinforced the idea that desperation and starvation compelled many women to enter the profession. She asked,

“How many poor mothers of a family that has nothing but misery to put between their teeth, were obliged to bring all to the Mont-de-Pitié (sic.) up to the virginity of their daughters, to finally buy a loaf of bread…and voilà, the reason why one sees lots of prostitutes on street corners: if the majority had bread, they would not put themselves there like that.”\textsuperscript{154}

\textsuperscript{153} Dames de la Halle, 29
\textsuperscript{154} Dames de la Halle, 39
She argued that allowing families to make—and keep—enough money to subsist on would prevent many women from being forced into prostitution. She portrayed the prostitute in these cases as a woman that was trying to be the ideal working class woman by finding a way to support her family by supplementing her husband’s income. She also invoked the concept of a “mother of a family,” arguing that these good women were forced into such a profession in order to try to perform this role. She connected the need for economic reform with the desire to limit prostitution.

The author invoked yet another argument about the nature of prostitution—a result of financial desperation—to add to the cahier’s complex, seemingly contradictory portrayal of the subject. In this part of the cahier, the speaker, a woman that has just asked for many economic reforms, implied that economic failure—the inability to make enough money to sustain one’s family—resulted in prostitution. The speaker did not connect herself to prostitution directly in this instance, but the audience would have been aware of the implied threat. As discussed earlier, this idea that financial desperation led to prostitution was supported by some men. It was also supported by other groups of women.

The bouquet sellers’ cahier also made this link between being able to provide for a family and reducing prostitution. According to the author, “as their position cannot feed them, they search in libertinage and the most shameful debauchery for the resources that they lack.” Therefore, she argued, “the cause of the [bouquet sellers] is also that of morals.” She saw the threat of increased prostitution as a way to argue for the reestablishment of the bouquet sellers’ guild and its supply-regulating powers. She extended her argument that free trade led to

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155 Bouquetières, 35
individuals being unable to support their families to specifically address how women’s inability to support their families had a negative impact on society.

Speaking as a woman and on behalf of a group of women, the author addressed how the lack of a guild could compel some women in their profession to turn to prostitution. The author did not state that this increase in prostitution would be visible in other industries were universal free trade to be established. While her assertions about individuals not being able to support themselves and the decline in prices, as discussed in the previous chapter, were not stated as specific to the bouquet industry, in referencing prostitution, the author only addressed her own industry. She claimed that “the lure of gain, as limited as it is, and even more a strong propulsion to idleness determines, however, a crowd of young women to do the profession of the suppliants; and, their profession cannot feed them.” The use of the word “their” referred to the young women that chose to practice the bouquet selling profession (that of the suppliants).

It is notable that the author made a distinction between established bouquet sellers and the young women that recently joined the profession. It was these new women, the author argued, that had the potential to turn to prostitution. There was some fact behind this assertion: Many inexperienced bouquet sellers, particularly those that roamed the streets and went door-to-door selling bouquets, were prostitutes. The author was also separating herself and the women she claimed to represent from this temptation of prostitution. Even though the majority of the cahier centers on how these experienced bouquet sellers were suffering from the liberalization of the industry, in this portion, it is the new bouquet sellers that were forced to pursue desperate measures. The author, then, believed that prostitution was still viewed as a result of moral weakness, and, even though she argued that desperation and a need to take care of one’s family

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156 Bouquetières, 35
157 Benabou 288
forced women to become prostitutes, she did not want her own morality questioned. Perhaps, since bouquet selling was already associated with prostitution, she did not want the negative views of the current situation to be applied to herself and the women she represented, which could have harmed their chances of getting the Estates General to accept their requests. As a woman, the author wanted to keep her identity separate from the tarnish of prostitution.

The fashion merchants, too, were often associated with prostitution. As a profession that involved interacting with the upper classes in a collaborative fashion while still flattering and catering to them, the fashion merchants were at the edge of the world of trade and the world of prostitution.\textsuperscript{158} Fashion boutiques had a reputation of being closely connected to prostitution, and in some cases, merely a front for it. According to Mercier, this reputation was deserved in many cases.\textsuperscript{159} Unlike the bouquet sellers, the fashion merchants did not address prostitution. Perhaps the fashion merchants, unlike the bouquet sellers, were unable to separate themselves from this stigma of prostitution. The author of the bouquet sellers’ cahier could imply that those bouquet sellers desperate enough to enter into prostitution were those that entered the industry after the guild was disbanded. The author of the fashion merchant’s cahier might not have been able to disassociate the guild from its reputation and did not want to bring it up for fear that it would hurt her own moral credentials and, therefore, make the Estates General less likely to listen to her complaints. Since the fashion merchants’ cahier did not stress their role as women nearly as much as the other two cahiers, the author might have also thought that her ideas should stand only on their economic merit and the guild’s economic reputation, and that the guild’s status as women should not affect how the complaints are received. It also could have been because an argument that fashion merchants were in poverty would not have been as credible. Although

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{158} Benabou, 285
\textsuperscript{159} Mercier in Benabou, 285
\end{footnotesize}
fashion merchants often did not get paid on time or in full, they were viewed as financially well-off tradeswomen, so such a complaint about starvation might not have been taken seriously.\textsuperscript{160} The fashion merchants left no real indication of such motives in their cahier. One is forced to speculate on why their cahier addressed women’s issues less than those for the bouquet sellers and the fashion merchants.

While the fashion merchants might not have intentionally highlighted their status as women, their cahier still gave evidence that the author wrote on behalf of guildswomen, and her complaints, therefore, reflected the interests of women. The bouquet sellers’ cahier and the cahier for the Dames de la Halle were more vocal about their gender. Both used arguments based on the women’s positions as wives and mothers and showed how the current economic system did not permit women to emulate the ideal wife and mother. Furthermore, the two cahiers made an argument that women in some cases were compelled to turn to prostitution to properly play their role in taking care of their families. Both cahiers’ commentaries on prostitution also showed how the authors’ gender influenced how they viewed the subject.

While in some cases, such as when the Dames de la Halle asked for the Estates General to make prostitution less public, the cahier authors were writing about how women’s actions should be regulated. In other cases, such as the bouquet sellers’ appeal for mothers to be able to feed their families, women were asking for a reform that would benefit anyone in a similar situation, male or female, but used the fact that they were women to try and strengthen their argument. Whether the cahier-writers really viewed the role of women as the one they set forth or not cannot be entirely known. Since the cahiers by the fashion merchants and bouquet sellers

\textsuperscript{160} Crowston, \textit{Credit, Fashion, and Sex}, 153.
were a means to persuade another group of people—a group of men—to accept their suggestions of reforms and the cahier for the Dames de la Halle was distributed to the public, the authors might have simply wrote what they thought would be most persuasive to their audience. In this sense, the cahiers cannot tell us too much about how the fashion merchants, bouquet sellers and Dames de la Halle viewed the role of women, although some inferences can be made, as I have argued above. The cahiers also tell us that the authors were aware of how women were viewed by the greater society and, presumably, the deputies of the Third Estate to the Estates General or, later, the National Assembly.
Chapter III: Expressions of Community

On the eve of the French Revolution, a Frenchman or woman had identities with multiple groups. One identified with one’s class: nobility, clergy, or Third Estate. One identified with one’s family and city or town. Within the Third Estate, there were divisions based on profession. There were sometimes even social divisions based on economic status that separated members of the same profession. There were divisions between neighborhoods and between genders.

The fashion merchants, bouquet sellers, and Dames de la Halle had identities on all of these levels. However, each group, according to their cahier, chose only certain communities with which to identify. All three identified with their profession, but, more than that, each author claimed to represent a whole group of women connected by profession. To do so, the author had to claim the similarity of group members’ wishes, asserting that an identity with that group implied certain desires. In some cases, this assertion seems likely to be true, while in others, it was more likely that the author expressed his/her personal wishes under the guise of representing a community. The cahiers indicate how the author viewed other aspects of his/her group, such as its exclusivity. This assertion of a trade community that was represented by a single cahier shows the identity these women had, or were perceived to have, with their profession and to what extent they identified with other women in the same profession. These professional groups had their own collective identities that were also apparent in the cahiers.

The three cahiers indicate the larger groups with which the fashion merchants, bouquet sellers, and Dames de la Halle had connections. Which larger communities the author chose to connect with his/her group shows which aspects of these women’s identities the author wanted to emphasize. In some cases, the authors used their groups’ status as working women to highlight the connection. In some cases, their identity as women affected these identities with larger groups.
In order to understand the communities with which the authors identified their groups, one must first understand the divisions within society. On the simplest level, French society was divided into three orders or estates: the clergy, the nobility, and the Third Estate. The first two were privileged classes that were subject to fewer taxes than the Third Estate. While the division between the three classes is often portrayed as very rigid, and this is certainly true to some extent, there did exist means for limited social mobility. The king could bestow a title, and, therefore, noble privilege on a family. Members of both the nobility and the Third Estates could enter the clergy. The high clergy, those with the most influence—bishops, archbishops, and abbots—was dominated by those clergymen that came from the nobility, although it was not impossible for a man of the Third Estate to achieve such a rank. Women could officially enter a different class through marriage.

Unofficially, the lines between classes could also be somewhat unclear. Wealthy and influential members of the bourgeoisie could occasionally be accepted into the social circles of the nobility, even if they did not receive the same privileges. Such an introduction into noble circles could be facilitated through an invitation to a salon. A bourgeois invited to a salon hosted by a noblewoman would learn the social mores and etiquette of the nobility as well as make the acquaintances of members of that class. As discussed earlier, courtesans from a lower class could interact with members of the nobility and emulate noble manners, as well. Sometimes members of certain occupations, such as the fashion merchants, stood balanced between two classes: expected to interact with and display some of the manners of the nobility, yet still working in a profession, a characteristic designating them as members of the lower classes. In occurrences such as the convening of the Estates General, the division between the three classes were
enforced and pride in one’s class identity, particularly among members of the Third Estate, was popular.

The community of the Third Estate was itself segmented. Wealthy urban professionals and poor rural peasants were both included in the overarching classification of “Third Estate.” Even within a single city, such as Paris, the Third Estate included lawyers and business owners as well as domestic servants, laundresses, and sellers of second-hand clothes. A hierarchy within the Third-Estate of Paris was well-established by the eve of the French Revolution. In the sphere of merchants and artisans, guild masters were at the top. Their female counterpart, guild mistresses, were able to develop a strong work identity and reputation within the commercial world like guild masters, but they were unable to obtain the same social status in public life.161 There was a hierarchy among working women, as well, with merchants and seamstresses of women’s fashion being considered part of the “aristocracy of female workers”162 The fashion merchants had a higher social position relative to the bouquet sellers and Dames de la Halle. The latter two, however, were not at the bottom of the hierarchy, as that position belonged to beggars and thieves.

Parisian workers identified with their specific community within the Third Estate as well as the Third Estate as a whole. A distinct bourgeois identity, with its own values and mannerisms, separated the highest class of the Third-Estate from the lower classes. The ideal domestic bourgeois woman was markedly different from the ideal working class woman. The ideal working class woman took care of her family financially, as well as by taking care of children and the household. For both men and women in the working class, one’s occupation played an important role in one’s place in society as well as the community with whom one

161 Garrioch, 113
associated. In many instances, members of a similar trade would be geographically close to one another. Since Parisian workers often lived near where they worked, oftentimes members of the same trade would be in close proximity to each other even when they were not working. Even if they were not, tradesmen and women would often meet informally with other members of their occupation to socialize. Some of the bonds shared by members of the same occupation were also reinforced by kinship or marriage bonds.

Occupations that were organized into guilds had their own structured communities. The guild had a bureau and officials to enforce its statutes. The guild officials were, theoretically at least, elected by all the guild members in a general meeting. Certain guild officials, jurés, were in charge of visiting workshops throughout the year to ensure that statutes were being followed by the members of the guild. They also assured that non-guild members were not illegally selling the wares for which only guild members had the privilege to sell. Guild communities had their own established government and policing capabilities, and were, therefore, very organized.

While the guild community helped shape the bouquet sellers’ and fashion merchants’ identities, the Dames de la Halle had a corporate identity as well, even if they were never officially organized into a guild. Contemporaries such as the abbot Pierre Jaubert did consider them an organized community. Such recognition of a community acknowledged “the capacity of these women to create a collective identity, and, therefore, the potential for collective action.”

The Dames de la Halle were near each other and often in contact, since they all occupied the

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163 Garrioch, 96
164 Roche, 246
165 Garrioch, 100
166 Marriage to a guildmen’s daughter or widow was often used by men to gain entry into an exclusive guild, giving these women a unique role in and identity with these guilds. See Clare Crowston “Women, Gender, and Guilds in Early Modern Europe: An Overview of Recent Research” The Return of the Guilds, edited by Jan Lucassen et al. (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2008) 19-44.
167 Garrioch, 99
168 Marion, Dames de la Halle, 9
marketplace of la Halle. While they were known to argue amongst themselves, they also cooperated by lending each other brooms or watching one another’s stalls or children.\textsuperscript{169} The bonds and strong work identity of the Dames de la Halle was even officially recognized through the king’s invitation to the “Dames de la Halle” to personally deliver their compliments to him.\textsuperscript{170} The Dames de la Halle, therefore, had a public identity based upon their activities in the market.\textsuperscript{171} Unlike women that were did not have a profession, those like the Dames de la Halle were able to use this public identity to form networks outside their neighborhood. They formed business relationships with other merchants from both within the city and without.\textsuperscript{172}

Regardless of official guild status, a strong corporate spirit reflected a strong collective mentality.\textsuperscript{173} The fashion merchants, bouquet sellers, and Dames de la Halle, as working women, had a corporate spirit that is evident in the fact that their cahiers identified them by their profession and not their gender or neighborhood. The collective mentality of these groups of women was present in their cahiers. The cahiers also showed that, beyond their corporate identity, these groups of women also had an identity within the larger Third Estate community.

**Trade Communities**

The cahiers of the fashion merchants, bouquet sellers, and Dames de la Halle all showed that these groups had their own specific communities with which they identified. Indeed, the fact that cahiers were drawn up claiming to articulate the wishes of the group as a whole indicates that the authors felt that these groups had their own collective identities with collective interests.

\textsuperscript{169} Marion, “The Dames de la Halle: Women and Community in late 18\textsuperscript{th} C. Paris,” 2
\textsuperscript{170} Garrioch, 117
\textsuperscript{171} Marion, *Dames de la Halle*, 8
\textsuperscript{172} Marion, “Dames de la Halle: Women and Community,” 2
\textsuperscript{173} Garrioch, 114
In each case, the author claimed that the cahier reflected the wishes of that group as a whole, despite the fact that no cahier claimed to have been written by all members of the listed community.

The fashion merchants’ community is perhaps the most easily defined, since it was a guild community. As such, it already had an organizational structure, including women with specific bureaucratic functions. The cahier gave no indication of the specific positions held by the ten signatories, but it did state that “[a]ll was deliberated at the office of the community of fashion merchants, feather workers, and flower makers of Paris where the syndics, adjuncts, and current deputies were assembled May 28th, 1789.” While the cahier did not specify which of the women held which role, it did imply that all of the women that signed the cahier were guild officers and were, therefore, the official representatives of the guild. The cahier indicates that the fashion merchants’ community was very official and well-organized: They had a guild office in which they met and were able to convene the guild officers for a meeting to draft the cahier.

The author, or authors, as the case may be, believed that she spoke on behalf of the entire community, or, at least, wanted to convince the Estates General that she did. In the introduction to the cahier, the author stated that “the community…does not want to reclaim against the convocation that is done by neighborhoods,” and that this community “hopes to be represented.” The author personified the guild as a single entity that had wants and hopes. She felt that she had the authority and the knowledge to articulate these wants and hopes for the guild.

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174 Marchandes de Mode, 42
175 Despite the possibility of multiple authors, I will refer to a single “author” as a writer, with non-written input from the other signatories being assumed
176 Marchandes de Mode, 39
While one cannot know for certain whether or not this cahier accurately reflected the wishes of all the members of the guild, it does not appear to make requests for reforms that would have been obviously disadvantageous to any subset of people within the guild. On the other hand, many of the reforms advocated did not appear to be universally beneficial to all members of the guild and, rather, reflected an opinion that could or could not have been shared by the other members of the guild. For instance, the request to put an end to the mont de piété, the state-run pawn brokerage, was not clearly beneficial to the fashion merchants’ guild. Working as a fashion merchant did not guarantee that one would come into contact with the mont de piété, and its closing would not directly affect the fashion industry at all. Therefore, the author asserted that the guild members had similar views, even on things that did not directly relate to guild. How the author justified putting such requests in the cahier is unknown: she could have been accurately reflecting the opinions of many fashion merchants with whom she came in contact, it could have been the consensus reached at the meeting of the guild officers, or a small but powerful minority of guild members could have supported the reform, leading to its inclusion regardless of the opposition or apathy of the majority. The last phenomenon was present in the official cahiers and could just as easily have been in the unofficial cahiers, as well. Regardless, it is important to note that the author believed she represented many guild members. Furthermore, the submission to the Estates General of a cahier claiming to represent the entire guild but containing only ten guild officers’ signatures shows this woman’s belief that the Estates General would accept the cahier knowing that the guild was a single community with enough unity of interest that these interests could have been accurately articulated at a meeting of only

177 Shapiro and Markoff, “Officially Solicited Opinions,” 91
ten individuals. Therefore, the fashion merchants’ cahier suggests that those inside, as well as outside, the guild acknowledged the guild’s communal characteristics.

The cahier also shows that the fashion merchants were not particularly interested in expanding their community and losing their own influence. Article IV expressed the guild members’ desire that the admittance fee for “apprentices and daughters of merchants” be less expensive than the fee for “other people without experience (sans qualité) that want to form establishments.” The author argued that this disparity would compensate those girls that had already worked in a fashion merchant’s workshop and would also give “advantages for the interests of the king, of the guild, and notably for the commerce of fashion,” and, indeed, this request probably was influenced, at least to a degree, by the guild members’ desire to maintain a high level of quality in goods that were sold. However, this also could suggest that the current guild members wanted to keep their own influence in the industry by making it less accessible to those that did not train under them. As the acceptors or deniers of apprentices, the current guild members could exert even more influence on the industry with this reform. By including daughters of merchants in this request, as well, the author indicated a desire by the guildswomen to help out their own families but also to ensure that many of the same families remained prominent in the guild. This article with its conservative demands has a tone of “us vs. them” in which the author separated the current guild community, including the daughters and apprentices that had spent considerable time in the community, and those outsiders that wanted to establish themselves. Therefore, the author emphasized that it was not just the practice of the fashion merchants’ profession that made a person a member of their community. Rather, spending time within the community prior to joining the guild was also important to being accepted.

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178 Marchandes de mode, 40
The flower sellers’ cahier indicates that they, too, had a mentality of “us vs. them” within their profession. The author made a distinction between women such as herself that were experienced flower sellers and had possibly been members of the guild before its suppression, and the “girls without principles” that entered the profession after the establishment of free trade. According to the author, it was also these new additions that would turn to prostitution as a means to provide for themselves when they could not do so through flower selling alone. As has been discussed in the previous chapter, the author used this method to threaten the Estates General with the possible consequences of continuing free trade in the industry while disassociating herself from the immorality connected with prostitution. While she was hesitant to associate herself with even the possibility of prostitution, she was willing to hint that these new flower sellers would do so. She was confident that those reading the cahier would accept that such a division between the two types of flower sellers existed. This leads to the conclusion that there was not a widely-held, strong belief that all flower-sellers were part of a homogenous group because of their profession. If there was such a belief, the author would presumably not have risked having herself associated with this scandalous behavior. The cahier, therefore, indicates that the author’s view of a flower-selling profession separated between the skilled and moral and the unskilled and unprincipled was not completely opposed to public opinion.

The bouquet sellers’ cahier also gives indication that, despite no longer having guild privileges, some semblance of guild order could have still existed. This is not a certainty, however, since the cahier was written by a single author, Madame Marlé, who described herself at the syndic of the corporation. It is entirely possible that Madame Marlé held no authority in the community of flower sellers and merely decided to call herself a syndic in order to deceive

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179 Bouquetières, 35
the Estates General into believing that the guild structure was still in place, and the guild could, therefore, be easily be reestablished. However, the other possibility is that some semblance of an unofficial authority structure still existed within the community. Since the author claimed, “We are always ready to exhibit the authentic titles that we reference,” it does seem that some organizational structure still existed by implying that these documents were readily accessible, although she also could have been bluffing.\textsuperscript{180} Regardless of the truth, the author believed that the Estates General would find it plausible that the former bouquet sellers’ guild still had some sort of structure and, therefore, was capable of being unified and organized.

Madame Marlé, regardless of the amount of actual authority she had within the flower selling community, did claim to speak on behalf of “the bouquet sellers, florists, floral headpiece makers.” The cahier was signed by all three of these groups “in the person of Madame Marlé”\textsuperscript{181} In the introduction to the cahier, she used “we” instead of “I” to express her hopes that the director of finances would hear their cause, saying, “In a moment when everyone calls for their rights, privileges, and property, we believed that we need to address our complaints to the Assembly of the Nation.”\textsuperscript{182} The author believed that she was speaking on behalf of the community as a whole. The accuracy of this statement is also unknown. She could have consulted with other flower sellers, wrote down what she thought all members of the former guild wanted, or she could have just expressed her own opinions, claiming that it came from a larger group. Whatever the reality, it would have to have been somewhat credible for the author to think the Estates General would believe that the requests came from a number of bouquet sellers.

\textsuperscript{180}Bouquetières, 31
\textsuperscript{181}Bouquetières, 31
\textsuperscript{182}Bouquetières, 31
Unlike the fashion merchants’ cahier, this cahier focused almost entirely on issues directly related to the author’s profession. The argument for the reestablishment of the guild or, failing that, the restriction on when flowers can be purchased, would be beneficial to any flower seller that was in the former guild. Therefore, it is plausible that the cahier reflected the wishes of the community the author claimed to represent, since the reforms would be in their best interest.

In the Cahier des Plaintes et Doléances des Dames de la Halle, the speaker, too, spoke on behalf of a group. She used the nominative first-person singular “I” (“je”), but verbs were conjugated according to the rules for the first person plural “we.” The first person plural was also used as the pronoun in cases other than the nominative. For example, she said, “Dames, c’est que je sommes du Third-Estate nous.” She used the pronoun “je,” or “I”, but also used “sommes” which is the conjugation of “to be” for the “we” form (“nous sommes”). In addition, she used the word for “us” (“nous”) at the end for emphasis, instead of the singular “moi.” She consistently followed this pattern throughout the cahier. Since the cahier was written in an informal, colloquial language, improper grammar is not unusual. However, the repetitiveness of this pattern and the fact that such phrasing was not common in eighteenth century France leads to a conclusion that the combination of first-person singular and plural was meant to indicate a single speaker arguing on behalf of a larger group. The author, therefore, wants to emphasize that the speaker in this cahier was speaking not only on behalf of her own opinions and experience, but also those of all Dames de la Halle collectively. It follows, then, that the author wanted his audience to believe the complaints and suggestions for reform were supported by the community of Dames de la Halle.

Of course, the ambiguity of the author’s intentions makes it difficult to ascertain whether these requests were the authentic requests of Dames de la Halle, or even if the author himself
believed that they were. The author could have written these complaints based upon what he understood was the majority opinion of the Dames de la Halle, based on what his limited contact with a few Dames de la Halle told him, or based on what he thought the Dames de la Halle should support, with no knowledge of their actual opinions. He could have even just expressed his own opinions and attributed them to the Dames de la Halle. However, many of these reforms were similar to those for which the Dames de la Halle advocated when they visited the Estates General, such as the suppression of the first two estates’ privileges. Also, many of the reforms, such as tax reform, were in the best interest of the Dames de la Halle, making it plausible that they did hold these views. Some issues, on the other hand, seem to be less reflective of opinions Dames de la Halle would have held. For instance, the complaint against the morally corrupting system of education for men preparing to enter to the priesthood was presumably not on the list of the Dames de la Halle’s most pressing concerns, although it might have been a major concern of Antoine Estienne, a former abbot and one of the possible authors of the cahier. The possibility of satire, too, means that the author could have exaggerated the concerns of the Dames de la Halle. However, like in the other two cases, the author’s use of one speaker to represent an entire community shows that there was probably a public perception that the Dames de la Halle had a community of their own, an idea that had, indeed, been expressed by the likes of Abbé Jaubert and implied by the king himself through his invitation of their community to visit him on special occasions.

The title of the cahier stated that it came from the “Dames de la Halle,” but, within the text itself, the speaker referred to the Dames de la Halle as “poissardes,” or fishwives.\textsuperscript{183} This term was applied to the same group of women, but had a much more negative connotation.\textsuperscript{184} In

\textsuperscript{183} Dames de la Halle, 52
\textsuperscript{184} Marion, Dames de la Halle, 7.
records of the Dames de la Halle’s visit to the Estates General, both the terms “Dames de la Halle” and “Dames poissardes” were used. 185 In the cahier, this contrast between the more respectful “Dames de la Halle” and the more derogatory “poissardes” leaves the author’s view of these women ambiguous. A satirical cahier would probably use “poissardes” while one that expressed the serious wishes of this group would presumably not try to degrade them. Interestingly, the use of the term “poissarde” only appeared in the later edition. 186 In this later edition, the author added many of the more obviously satirical parts into the cahier, so the use of the term “poissarde” might be part of the author’s attempt to make the cahier more satirical, despite a more positive initial view of the Dames de la Halle. Whether the author’s view of the Dames de la Halle was positive or negative, he appears to have at least acknowledged that they had their own community. Like in the two cahiers written by women, the cahier for the Dames de la Halle depicted a community connected by profession.

Third-Estate and Other Larger Identities

All three cahiers emphasized the connection between the group of women being represented and other members of the Third-Estate. The bouquet sellers emphasized their connection with the deputies of the Third Estate to the National Assembly. The author argued that “it is above all in the hands of the deputies of the Third that the suppliants depose their just reclamations,” although their cahier was officially addressed to the Estates General as a whole. 187 The author explained this choice by claiming, “They are still, more particularly than the others,

185 In Chassin vol. II, 252
186 According to the author, the latter editions was the 11th editions. However, there are only two extant, and the mention of eleven editions might have been for comedic purposes.
187 Bouquetières, Duhet, 37
The cahier is addressed to the Estates General and states that is to whom it was delivered, but, based on the date on the cahier, it would have actually been delivered to the newly named National Assembly
[the supplicants’] representatives, their friends, and their brothers, and it belongs to them to plead the cause of the indigents.” Since the bouquet sellers were members of the Third Estate, appealing to the deputies from the Third-Estate was more logical than appealing specifically to the representatives of the clergy or nobility. Yet, they added this appeal to the Third-Estate representatives specifically, although it was not technically necessary, since the cahier was already addressed to the Estates General as a whole. The author believed that the connection between the Third Estate deputies and the bouquet sellers would cause those deputies to be more likely to plead the bouquet sellers’ cause. This appeal to “their representatives” also shows that the author felt that the bouquet sellers, as part of the Third Estate community, deserved to have their interests represented by the Third Estate deputies, even though, as women, they were not allowed to participate in the assemblies that elected these deputies and drew up the official cahiers that guided these deputies in representing their estate’s interests. More on this political involvement will be discussed in the next chapter.

The bouquet sellers’ cahier’s appeal to the Third-Estate deputies invoked a connection not only between representatives and the represented, but also between friends and siblings. The author wanted to remind the deputies that they were connected to the bouquet sellers not only because the two groups were officially classified in the same estates, but they also had a more personal connection. The cahier writer implied that the Third-Estate was a real community, made up of men and women, not just a grouping of different people for political organizational purposes. The bouquet sellers’ membership in the Third Estate gave them metaphorical “brothers” and “friends” outside their small professional community. The author, therefore, used the bouquet sellers’ Third-Estate identity to try to sway members of the Estates General.

188 Bouquetières, 37
189 Bouquetières, 37
The fact that the author considered the connection between the bouquet sellers and the Third Estate deputies as an effective way to try to influence the deputies shows that an overarching Third Estate identity did exist, despite differences in profession and, presumably, wealth. The author thought that this identity extended beyond the barriers of gender, as well. She expressed a view that the deputies to the Estates General had a duty to represent all members of their communities, regardless of their participation (or lack thereof) in the official assembly process. The cahier from the bouquet sellers, therefore, shows this group of women’s identification with the Third Estate as a whole.

The fashion merchants did not make a direct appeal to the deputies of the Third-Estate like the bouquet sellers did. However, the author of this cahier, too, implied that her organization’s interests should have been represented in the Estates General. Instead of asserting that the deputies of the Third Estate should represent their interests, the introduction of the fashion merchants’ cahier implied that their guild should have participated in the assembly of the Parisian Third Estate. The author argued against the “convocation that was done by neighborhood (quartier) for the Estates General, when, in terms of rules, it should have been done by guild.”190 While the author did not explicitly state that this argument only referred to the convocation of delegates for the Third Estate, such an intention is obvious since guilds were only part of the Third Estate. In this way, the fashion merchants argued for an even stronger presence of their interests in the Estates General. The cahier, therefore, shows that the author believed that fashion merchants, as members of a guild, were an instrumental part of the Third Estate and consequently, their interests were representative of the interests of the Third-Estate.191

190 Marchandes du mode, Duhet, 39
191 The political implications of this statement will be discussed in greater detail later.
The fashion merchants’ cahier also showed that, as a guild, they had a larger identity within the guild system itself. They were not only part of the fashion merchants’ guild but also the community of guild members as a whole, regardless of profession. At the end of the cahier, the author stated, “These are the particular wishes and complaints in common for all the corps and guilds of arts and trades in Paris that these fashion merchants believed should be addressed to the Estates General.”

The author considered the fashion merchants as adequate spokeswomen for all the guilds and trade organizations. In doing so, she implied that there were interests common to all guilds, regardless of profession and the tradesperson’s gender. This assertion had obvious advantages for trying to persuade the Estates General to accept their suggestions; the Estates General was more likely to accept a suggestion for reform if it had wide-ranging support rather than if it was seen as one small group’s request on behalf of their own self-interest. For the author to think this line of argument would be effective, there had to be some basis in reality to make this assertion believable. Therefore, this cahier shows that at this time there was a concept of a commonality of interests for all guilds that transcended the barriers of specific profession and were shared by both men and women. It follows that a person’s identity with a guild implied certain interests universal to all guild members, and, therefore, an identity with this larger group.

Of the three, the cahier de doléances for the Dames de la Halle exhibited the strongest Third Estate identity. A significant portion of the cahier was concerned with the rights of the Third Estate in relation to the other two estates, unlike the cahiers from the bouquet sellers and fashion merchants which were focused only on the commercial world. The writer of the cahier argued for an end to the privileges, specifically in taxation, of the first two estates and a solution

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192 Marchandes du mode, 42
to the underrepresentation of the Third Estate in government. The speaker of the cahier, the Dame de la Halle of disputable existence, claimed to learn from Monsieur Josse how the nobles and clergy “enraged the poor people that they call, with derision, the Third-Estate, & put, as is custom, a foot on their back…to be ahead of and surpass those that feed them and maintain them from head to toe.” This explication that was apparently given to the Dame de la Halle seems to exclude the Dames de la Halle from the Third Estate. According to Monsieur Josse, the Third-Estate was enraged by the treatment they received by the other two estates, but, since Monsieur Josse had to tell the Dames de la Halle that the Third-Estate was enraged, they apparently did not know about it before, and, therefore, were not part of the enraged Third Estate. However, this passage in which the Dames de la Halle asked Monsieur Josse to explain the current political unrest seems to exist for the literary purpose of introducing the subject matter of the cahier and explaining how Monsieur Josse came to write the cahier, and is not an exact record of the Dames de la Halle’s discovery of the issues. The Dames de la Halle were already aware of the political unrest and were part of the enraged Third Estate. In their visit to the Estates General on 19 May 1789, they sang a song which began,

“If the clergy, if the nobility
My good friends,
Treat us with a lot of rudeness
And with contempt
Let them all be abused and deceived,
Lose the State
In waiting, we will drink
To the Third Estate.

Before the Supreme Justice
Not more than us,
That serves their artifice
And their ire?
Have they lost the memory
That their radiance
Is provided, same as their glory
By the Third Estate?”

193 Dames de la Halle, 4
194 “Compliments des Dames Poissardes a Leurs Frères du Tiers État.” Chassin vol. III, 252
While the author’s assertion that at least one Dame de la Halle did not know about the anger of the Third-Estate towards the other two estates cannot be completely disproven, the Dames de la Halle as a whole would have been aware of, and sometimes-- as the above verses indicate-- a part of the resentment of the Third Estate towards to privileges of the nobility and clergy.

Later in the cahier, the female speaker identified herself as a part of the Third Estate, showing that she was not merely an advocate for their cause. She said “Dame, it is that I are (sic.) of the Third Estate ourselves.” 195 This identity, too, is supported by the Dames de la Halle’s visit to the Estates General. They visited only the deputies from the Third Estate and asked those deputies alone to represent their interests, much like the bouquet sellers did in their cahier and with the same significance. In the this cahier, therefore, the Dames de la Halle were portrayed as members of and advocates for the Third Estate.

The statements in this cahier about the Dames de la Halle’s identification with the Third Estate must, of course, be judged with consideration for how much influence the author’s personal perception of the Dames de la Halle had on how the speaker expressed her identity in the cahier. On one hand, if this work was based purely on how the author perceived the Dames de la Halle without any knowledge of their own views, this cahier tells us that the author saw the Dames de la Halle as a part of the Third Estate and had such a strong identity with it that they would be inclined to argue on behalf of the estate’s interests. This assertion holds true even if the work was intended to be completely satirical; in that case, the author would be mocking the advocacy of these women, implying that such advocacy did exist. If the author did take into consideration, and properly interpreted, the Dames de la Halle’s own opinions on their identity,

195 Dames de la Halle, 11
the cahier shows that the Dames de la Halle had a strong identity as a member of the Third Estate and, therefore, felt inclined to argue for reforms to benefit the estate as a whole and not only Dames de la Halle. Whether intentional or not, the author of this cahier does seem to truthfully reflect how Dames de la Halle viewed their identity as shown by Dames’ visit to the deputies of the Third Estate to the Estates General. The Dames de la Halle had a strong identity that extended beyond their profession into their estate.

All three of these cahiers give the reader insight into the identities of these groups of women—both within their professions and in larger communities-- and how their professional communities were organized. Since the cahiers were intended as persuasive documents, they show not only how the author viewed the community but also how the author thought outsiders, like the Estates General, viewed it. Assuming that perceptions have at least a small basis in reality, one can make limited observations about the actual communities of the fashion merchants, flower sellers, and Dames de la Halle. As professional organizations, these communities, like the women that were a part of them, had their own professional identities with their own structures and representation through a cahier-writer. The women of these groups had identities with larger groups as well, such as the Third Estate, and the authors did not believe that the gender identity of these groups invalidated this identity. These connections with larger groups were one of the arguments used in the cahiers to justify these women’s attempts at political participation.
Chapter V: Political Involvement

Leading up to 1789, a new political system was emerging. The system of political power transitioned from one centered on privileged access and a narrow public space to one that was based in assemblies and proclaimed in the streets of Paris. Political influence that was once exerted in private, in the homes of the king and his government officials, was beginning to be exerted in a public sphere of assemblies and gatherings in the street. After the revolutionary process was underway, this transition continued. The king’s private sphere was no longer the political sphere. It was replaced by a public political sphere which elected deputies to the legislative assemblies and demanded explanations on the rationale behind laws. This emerging public sphere was not entirely inclusive, and some argue that the transition from a private to public sphere of politics excluded women, since, as woman, their role had traditionally been associated with the private sphere of family and domesticity. However, groups of women attempted to be involved in this new public sphere, regardless of those that sought to exclude them.

The cahiers de doléances represent a part of this emerging public sphere of politics: groups of individuals drew up lists of grievances that they wanted their representatives to consider when instituting reform. The unofficial cahiers, including those from the fashion merchants and bouquet sellers, had this same goal, despite not being the result of an official assembly, and were, therefore, a means of political involvement. While the simplicity of the cahier’s form and the presence of model cahiers could have played some role in encouraging women to write them, it is more likely that the cahier writers were less concerned with the easiness of the format and more concerned about having a say in the reforms of the Estates

196 Rene Marion, “Political Ritual, the Citizen, and the Market Woman in Eighteenth-Century France,” 8
197 See Joan Landes, Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988)
General and, more generally, this sphere of politics which was becoming more open to the public.¹⁹⁸ The authors of the bouquet sellers’ and fashion merchants’ cahiers wanted to be involved in this political system, but they were aware that their gender might prevent them from having the influence they wanted. Their cahiers reflect both an argument that their groups of women should be politically involved and a justification about why. These justifications go beyond those used by similar groups of men to justify their complaints and reinforce the image of a political climate that was not completely accepting of women’s participation. The two cahiers show that there were groups of women that felt that they should have a role in the political system—whether that role be as active participant in assemblies or as citizens whose interests should be represented by elected officials. This role was justified by the women’s identities with their profession or larger groups, such as the Third Estate. These female authors were aware of obstacles to political participation that were posed by gender, but they tried to overcome them by referencing their other identities.

Unlike the other two, the cahier for the Dames de la Halle was not an effort by a Third Estate woman to become involved in the public sphere of politics. Both potential authors, Senties and Estienne, had, in addition to their gender, professions that would have permitted them to have significant political influence. Estienne is known to have used this political influence. This cahier, however, can still tell us about women’s political involvement. It shows that some members of society accepted, or at least took seriously, the argument that women such as the Dames de la Halle should be allowed to have a voice in political decisions. If it was a satirical cahier, it shows that the author was concerned about an existent political involvement by the Dames de la Halle and felt threatened by their attempts at political participation and effective

¹⁹⁸ Desan, 22.
justification of this participation. If its intention was serious, whether to articulate the author’s own views or those of the Dames de la Halle, it still shows that such a political involvement by the Dames de la Halle was possible, but also implies that the author felt that it should be taken seriously and believed the public would accept it, as well. All three cahiers give insight into how groups of professional women’s identities influenced how some of them justified their political involvement and how the public was likely to perceive such involvement.

Under the ancien régime, women did not have much official power in the French political system, although some exercised unofficial influence. Under an absolute monarchy, the monarch’s private life had a strong impact on the public sphere of politics. The king’s wife, friends, and mistresses could all appeal to the king on specific causes and, in many cases, have the king consider the merits of their arguments. If the king could be swayed, it could be decreed. In this system, women close to the king were able to exert some political power. Men that wanted government reforms could first address them to these women, who would then advocate on their behalf to the king. This unofficial power at the highest level was obviously limited to only certain women, mostly of the noble class. However, the Dames de la Halle did have some limited influence on the king, since they were given the right to deliver flowers to the royal family on certain occasions, at which time they greeted and addressed the king and queen. They were seen as speaking on behalf of the common people, which made their speeches to have political importance. 199

Informal influence was also prevalent at the lower levels: gift-giving and paying visits to government officials was a common form of showing one’s support and trying to gain influence.

199 Marion, “Dames de la Halle: Women and Community,” 9
Women as well as men practiced this form of political involvement. The Dames de la Halle, for instance, were received in the private apartments of the local magistrates, the Parlementarians, that had just returned from exile in 1774, making clear their political support of these Parlementarians. Like the king, lower ranking officials were likely to take into consideration one’s political opinions if they had a personal connection with that official. As government became more representative and public, this system of intimacy and privilege lost its acceptability as a means of political involvement.

Although revolutionaries emphasized how politically powerful women were due to these personal forms of influence, it is important to recall that women were still largely excluded from the government and political processes. Because of Salic law, a woman could not inherit the throne of France. Women were not the king’s official ministers nor were they given government or judicial positions at the local level. While they could wield some unofficial power, their political powers were not unlimited.

Many women, even those that did not have or chose not to exert personal influence, were aware of the political system, had opinions on subjects related to it, and expressed these opinions. The writing of unofficial cahiers is an example, but was not the only way women tried to be politically involved. Many women expressed a desire for all the women of France to solve the king’s debt crisis by giving their jewelry and other baubles to the treasury to pay off the debt.

Other women argued specifically for reforms that would give women more rights, whether socially or politically. As France headed towards revolution and the restructure of the

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200 Marion, “Political Ritual, the Citizen and the Market Woman,” 6
201 For an example, see “Offre généreuse des dames françaises du Tiers-état; ou, Moyen de rétablir les finances en vingt-quatre heures.” Some artisans’ wives did actually give their jewelry to the government to help reduce the debt.
political system became eminent, a debate about the role of women in the new system grew. Some advocated for the rights of women to elect representatives or even be representatives, while others focused more on creating laws that benefited women by improving their education, giving women the right to divorce, or giving them more control over their property after marriage. Within this ongoing debate, female writers Olympe de Gouge and Mary Wollstonecraft crafted their arguments for the rights of women. Olympe de Gouge wrote in 1791 “Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen” as a direct response to the “Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen,” showing that the political repression that men of the Third Estate argued against was the same repression they were forcing on women. Wollstonecraft, though English, wrote her 1792 “Vindication of the Rights of Woman” as a response to the arguments in France on women’s education and the views of Frenchmen such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau in particular.

Late eighteenth century arguments against women’s involvement in politics centered on women’s nature, their role in the family, and how the revolutionaries viewed their role in the absolute monarchy of the ancien régime. Some Enlightenment arguments about the nature of woman stated that women were either naturally morally corrupt, weak-willed, or had a domestic nature that made them unfit for involvement in the political system. The ideal of the domestic bourgeois woman reemphasized the idea that an ideal woman should not be involved in the public sphere of politics. Furthermore, some revolutionaries viewed women and their ability to be a corrupting influence on the king as one of the main problems with the ancien régime. These revolutionaries felt that a new, improved government would prevent this corrupting influence from happening by restricting the voices of women. The excessive frivolity that many associated with women—most notably, Marie Antoinette—was also sometimes blamed for the financial
problems of the country. While some were arguing for the rights of women, others were arguing against it.

The fashion merchants, bouquet sellers, and Dames de la Halle were politically involved, as evidenced by their cahiers de doléances. The cahiers showed that the authors were aware of these arguments against women’s political participation that were held by some in French society, probably including members of the Estates General. The authors of the fashion merchants’ and bouquet sellers’ cahiers sought to justify their political involvement in order to persuade the recipients of their cahiers to listen to their suggestions. Their need to extensively justify the submission of their cahiers proves that they were aware that their identity as women might harm their chances of getting their cahiers seriously considered.

For the earlier edition of the cahier for the Dames de la Halle, the author did not give much justification for why a group of women should be politically involved. Rather, the speaker claimed that she was participating in the political discourse like everyone else. If the author was serious in this simple justification, the political activity of the Dames de la Halle, whether in his eyes or in their own eyes, should not be hindered by their gender. If it was satire, it implies that the real Dames de la Halle possessed political influence and potential. In the second edition, the addition of satirical justifications put the Dames de la Halle’s identities as women and their naïveté into prominence. Yet, this, too points to an acknowledgement that the Dames de la Halle had the potential for political involvement despite their gender, which would have provoked the

202 Landes, 26
The Dames de la Halle used this rhetoric when they attacked the women’s political club, the Society of Republican Revolutionary Citizens. They beat the club members, arguing that the misfortune of France had been brought about by a woman (Marie Antoinette). See Dominique Godineau, Les Femmes dans la Société Française 16e-18e siècle, 207.
satire. The cahier for the Dames de la Halle, like the two cahiers actually written by women, show an awareness of gender and its relationship to political involvement.

**Fashion Merchants**

The author of the fashion merchants’ cahier argued that the fashion merchants should have participated in the assembly of the Third Estate of Paris due to their status as a guild. The author asserted, “in terms of the rules, [the assignment of deputies to the assembly of Paris] should be done by guild,” although the fashion merchants would not contest that fact that it was instead done by neighborhoods. The “rules” that the author referenced were those of the royal edict of 24 January 1789, which stipulated that the Third Estate assemblies of the provinces should be comprised of guild representatives whose number reflected the size of the guild. On 19 April a new edict dictated that in Paris, the deputies to the assembly of the Third Estate should represent the neighborhoods instead of corporations. The fashion merchants knew about these two rules, and the author showed that she disapproved of the government’s decision, although she stated clearly that she was not going to formally protest.

The cahier-writer also justified the participation of her guild in the submission of cahiers by reminding the Estates General that “this numerous community, paying annually to the king a considerable sum both in fees and in payment for entrance into the guild (droit de maîtrise) and other powers, hopes to be represented.” The author argued that, in addition to having the right to submit a cahier because the guild was denied what she felt was its right to participate, the guild also should be given a say because it financially supported the king and his government.

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203 Marchandes de Mode, 39
204 Marchandes de Mode, 39
The author’s complaint about the different rules for provinces and Paris was not unique to the fashion merchants’ guild; it was used by male guilds, as well. In the case of the fashion merchants, the author assumed that her guild would be included were the assembly to be comprised of guild representatives, despite being an almost entirely female guild. In the author’s view, the fashion merchants’ status as guild members should give them representation in the assembly and permit them to have a political involvement from which women were excluded. The author seemed to believe that the fashion merchants’ status in the commercial world would be viewed as more important than their gender. Such a decision would have had precedent, since convents were allowed to send representatives to the assemblies of the clergy, although the actual representatives were male. The author of the fashion merchants' cahier made no mention of specifically how she assumed they would be represented, but she did show that she felt her guild should have had a say in the process of reform due to their official status in the world of commerce and regardless of arguments about gender.

The author further argued for her guild's participation by arguing that the government owed them the right to be involved, since they contributed money to the government that helped enable it to run. The author made an assertion about the king's and his government's accountability to taxpayers: those who contributed significant amounts of money should have influence on policy. In this case, as well, the author did not imply that the gender of the guild members should impact this influence. As a taxpayer, she wanted her suggestions for reform to be taken into consideration.

In both arguments for why the Etats-Generaux should listen to her guild's complaints, the author did not feel that her gender should prevent her from having the right to be represented. She offered two separate arguments for why her guild should have representation, showing that
she was worried that her guild's wishes would not be given consideration. In their cahiers, men's guilds offered only one argument for why they should be represented, if they gave such a reason at all. Even these explanations varied from what the fashion merchants argued, showing that men's guilds generally had more confidence that their requests would be heard. For instance, the goldsmiths, too, argued that representation to the assembly of Paris should be by guild, but their circumstances were different. As one of the Six Big Guilds, the goldsmiths would have been able to dominate the assembly of the Third Estate of Paris, even without the deputies being determined by membership in the guilds.\textsuperscript{205} Regardless, they chose to write an independent cahier which they drafted at a guild meeting that followed exactly the protocol of an official assembly.\textsuperscript{206} The introduction of their cahier reflected their importance: “But the almost innumerable arts that enrich this capital by uninterrupted exportation, that brings back without ceasing money necessary to consumption, have no direct and personal representative.”\textsuperscript{207} In this cahier, the author did not feel the need to specifically mention his guild and its individual contribution. He just cited the role of arts and trade and assumed that his audience would know of his guild's importance in this role. Given the goldsmiths’ status as one of the six dominant guilds, he had good reason. The author of the fashion merchants’ cahier, however, was more specific in justifying why the fashion merchants should be represented by referencing both their status as a guild and their guild’s specific contribution to the royal treasury. The goldsmiths’ cahier also mentioned how the guilds contributed to the government of France in a more abstract way-- showing how they helped the country's economy, which was an interest of the government-- while the fashion merchants' cahier stated how they contributed to the government

\textsuperscript{205} Chassin II, 502.
\textsuperscript{206} Chassin, vol. II, 517
\textsuperscript{207} Corps des Orfevres à MM. les Électeurs du Tiers État, Chassin II, 506
directly. This further shows the two groups’ different confidence levels on whether they would be given consideration in the political sphere.

The metal workers, as one of the Six Big Guilds, by nature of having a more influential guild, had more political influence than smaller guilds, which could lead one to conclude that the fashion merchants' trade was the main cause for their need to justify their political participation. However, other men's guilds that were not part of the Big Six Guilds still did not exhibit the lack of confidence that the author of the fashion merchants' guild possessed. The author of the wig makers' cahier, for instance, did not feel the need to give concrete examples about how his guild contributed to the state. Instead, he said simply, “The wig makers of the city of Paris, full of confidence in the bounty of His Majesty, take the liberty of presenting to him their respectful grievances, the supplicant very humbly has here a regard in ordaining anew the execution of their rules.” While the author said that the wig makers were taking a “liberty,” he did not explain why his guild justified their taking of such a liberty. The author, whether “very humbly” or not, seemed to feel that his guild's “regard in ordaining anew” the laws of the country needed no justification, either. The fashion merchants, then, were anomalous amongst Parisian guilds in giving two arguments for why they wanted the Estates General to consider their complaints. The specificity of their argument was also unique. Since guilds like the wigmakers, which had a similar standing in terms of type of good and official role within the guild structure, did not express these concerns about their requests being ignored, one concludes that the author of the fashion merchants' guild was worried that being a guild of women would make their participation in the political process of cahier writing be taken less seriously. The author showed that she also felt that this should not be the case.
Bouquet Sellers

Like the fashion merchants, the bouquet sellers were not confident that their cahier would end up being seriously considered. One way they attempted to combat this problem was to submit their cahier to as many different people and organizations as possible. They submitted it first to the assembly of the Third Estate of Paris, then to the city's judicial authority, then to Jacques Necker, Louis XVI's financial minister, and finally to the National Assembly itself. Another way the author attempted to justify her political involvement was by claiming that, by making the authorities aware of the bouquet sellers' problems, she was helping these authorities do their duty. The author argued in her address to Finance Minister Necker, “The acknowledgment that we need from you, sir, the protection that you condescend to give to the most indigent of citizens makes it so that we cannot hide from you the theme of our complaints. This is why we have the honor of addressing to you a copy of our report.” The author's connection between the bouquet sellers and the “most indigent of citizens” connected the bouquet sellers to those most desperate and needing aid, but also, to a concept of citizenship. The author connected the bouquet sellers to citizens, invoking an idea that the government had a responsibility to its citizens and should hear their complaints. This “indigent class” was composed of the people of France, like the bouquet sellers, that should be protected from economic hardship. According to the cahier, the bouquet sellers helped facilitate this by getting involved in the political process and informing the government about their problems.

The argument about being “the most indigent class” and its implications on the political influence of the bouquet sellers repeated within the body of the cahier. This time, the author argued, “They know, the representatives of the French people, that they have a duty most
particularly to the most indigent class. The more men are unhappy, the more their rights are sacred, their profession being all their fortune. Its conservation cannot fail to interest the deputies of the Nation.” Before this, the author had just claimed that the bouquet sellers “did not fear that they would be rebutted,” despite the fact that their request was seemingly inconsequential.211 By speaking specifically about the bouquet sellers' complaint right before mentioning the duty of the Third Estate representatives to the most indigent class, the bouquet sellers once again made reference to this duty that the government had to those in the most miserable situations. The author asserted the idea that she participated in cahier writing to insure that the government was able to perform its duty to its most miserable class.

The author also implied that the deputies of the Third Estate had a duty to the bouquet sellers, since these deputies were required to represent “the French people.”212 In doing so, the author emphasized how bouquet sellers were a part of the French people-- the community that formed the Third Estate. Their cahier, therefore, represented the wishes of a group that was part of the French people and, as such, should be considered.

In her arguments to justify submission of a cahier, the author focused on the bouquet sellers' positions in the most indigent class and the collective “French people.” She did not focus on gender and did not seem to believe that it should have an effect on how a cahier was viewed. She used the generic term “men” to refer to people that were unhappy, had sacred rights, and relied on their profession. Since this statement was in the larger context of her argument for the bouquet sellers' voice to be heard, the author implied that the bouquet sellers had these same “sacred rights.” She argued that women such as the bouquet sellers should have rights to a profession that gives them financial stability. In doing so, she asserted a view that the

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211 Bouquetières, 33
212 Ibid.
representatives of the French people should consider women's rights to financial security, as well. As a poor merchant, she identified with this indigent class that relied on its profession, and, through making that link, argued that her rights to financial security should be considered by legislators.

By using the term “men” to refer to the most indigent class, those whose professions “are all their fortune,” the author made clear that she classified the bouquet sellers in this “indigent class” not because they were women, but because of their professional identity. According to the cahier, then, the bouquet sellers' political involvement was justified because of the rights that they possessed as members of the Third Estate and, more specifically, members of an “indigent class” that was determined by status in the commercial world.

Dames de la Halle

In the Dames de la Halle's cahier, the Dame de la Halle that is speaking gave very little justification for political involvement at the beginning. She explained solely that “our bourgeois at Versailles permitted everyone to complain, & to make known to him all the requirements [which we have]. It is completely just…that I discharge our complaints.”213 The speaker assumed that the Dames de la Halle were included in the “everyone” that the king permitted to air their complaints, regardless of their inability to actually participate in the assemblies, the means through which the king wanted citizen to express their complaints. The author portrayed the

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213 Dames de la Halle, 6

The use of the term “bourgeois” here is interesting. The speaker is presumably referring to the king, although she also could have been referencing another official that she felt was particularly powerful at court. The connection to the Third Estate is unmistakable, however, and shows that she seems to identify this leader with the “leaders” of the Third Estate. Both potential authors would have been part of the bourgeoisie and could have wanted to promote the leadership by their class, but this theme of bourgeois leadership is only mentioned at one other point in the cahier, where the speaker refers to the deputies of the Third Estate as bourgeois.
Dames de la Halle as assuming that the king wanted to hear their opinions. The Dame de la Halle was portrayed as assuming that women such as she should be able to contribute to the political process. If the author’s intent was satirical, he could have used this assumption by the speaker to mock the Dames de la Halle. Such a desire to satirize implies that the author saw political involvement by the Dames de la Halle as a real possibility and was afraid of it and its potential influence. In such a case, the author would have assumed that his audience, the public of Paris, would have found it amusing that such a group of relatively uneducated, vulgar market women would consider that their opinions should be heeded.

If the cahier was intending to satirize the political involvement of the Dames de la Halle, it appears that it was not effective. In the second edition of the text, the author added a passage of ten pages in which the Dame de la Halle directly addressed the king. In this appeal, the Dame de la Halle addressed the king as if he was a personal friend: giving him advice on how he should curb the queen’s excessive frivolity and encouraging him to confide in them about his personal problems. When she commented on a rumor that the king had slapped one of his officials, she encouraged the king to “talk to me of this.” While the Dames de la Halle were allowed to personally compliment the king on special occasions, the idea of the king having a close friendship with and personally confiding in the Dames de la Halle would have been comical to its original audience. The author could have been playing off this relationship with the king, implying that the Dames de la Halle were naïve and felt that this official connection, most likely instituted to help the king’s image with the lower classes, was really a close personal relationship, and that such a friendship was even possible.

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214 Dames de la Halle, 53
This obviously satirical addition to the cahier hints that if the first edition of the cahier was indeed intended to be satirical, the audience took the political participation of the Dames de la Halle more seriously than the author thought they would. The idea of the Dames de la Halle wanting their political opinions heard was not as obviously comical as the author thought, so he felt the need to add an additional section to the cahier in which the Dames de la Halle gave a more obviously naïve and comical justification for their political involvement. If such was the case, it shows that a significant part of Parisian society on the eve of the French Revolution did not think that poor working women wanting political representation was inherently foolish. The author had to add a section in which the Dame de la Halle’s reasoning for their involvement was ridiculous and naïve, since the Dames de la Halle asking to be listened to by the king like everyone else was treated as a reasonable argument.

If the first edition of the cahier at least was intended to reflect the serious complaints of the Dames de la Halle, the author’s omission of any direct justifications about why the Dames de la Halle should be represented indicates that the author did not feel that such a justification was necessary.215 If that was the case, he felt that the Dames de la Halle had a right to give their political opinions and have them taken seriously. In addition, he would have felt that the public, too, would have acknowledged this right. Regardless of the author’s intent, then, the cahier for the Dames de la Halle showed that political involvement by the Dames de la Halle was taken seriously, at least by a significant number of literate Parisians.

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215 If the first edition was intended to be serious, the addition of the satirical portion in the second edition could have been an attempt to better mask the cahier’s serious message in humor, which would have reduced the possibility of public outcry.
The cahiers for the fashion merchants, bouquet sellers, and Dames de la Halle showed that a debate about the political involvement of women was ongoing in 1789. The authors of the fashion merchants’ and bouquet sellers’ cahiers both believed that their groups should be represented in the Estates General because of their identities as guild members or members of the Third Estate. The cahier for the Dames de la Halle could have been an articulation of the real Dames de la Halle’s belief that their voices should be heard in the discussion of reform. The cahier could have also been mocking the attempts of the Dames de la Halle to have political influence, but such a satire would indicate that the Dames de la Halle were either already exercising political influence or had the potential. The addition of more obviously satirical text also implied that a substantial number of the French public did not think that poor working women voicing their political opinions was inherently ludicrous. All three cahiers, as representations of women’s political involvement, gave insights into the authors’ views and public perceptions of this kind of involvement.

The two cahiers written by groups of women used their professional status to justify their political involvement. The fashion merchants were more direct about it than the bouquet sellers by asserting that their guild status should have given them representatives in the assembly of Paris. The bouquet sellers, on the other hand, implied that their reliance on their profession for financial stability made them members of an indigent class to whom the Estates General should pay particular attention. To what extent the Dames de la Halle’s identity as merchants contributed to how their political involvement was portrayed in the cahier is not known. The Dames de la Halle were women that worked in the central marketplace, where royal decrees were read aloud and political ideas were discussed. There, they could have come into contact with the idea that the king wanted to hear everyone’s complaints, which could have meant that
the cahier was accurately reflecting the Dames de la Halle’s own justification for their political involvement. If the author’s purpose was to satirize, the Dames de la Halle’s identity as merchants in the public sphere could have caused him to be afraid of their potential influence in the public sphere of politics, spurring him to write satire. All three cahiers portray groups of women as desirous of being politically involved.
Conclusion

The cahiers de doléances for the fashion merchants, bouquet sellers, and the Dames de la Halle are representations of three groups of Third Estate women that worked in trade. Their cahiers focused on economic issues and were written from a merchant’s perspective, proving that the fashion merchants and bouquet sellers had identities as merchants that spurred them to request economic reforms from the Estates General. The Dames de la Halle were perceived publicly as having such an identity. All three cahiers also showed that the three groups had identities as women which were visible in the reasons they gave for why they needed certain economic reforms or in how they articulated those requests. Beyond the specific requests, these cahiers show that, as women identified by their profession, the fashion merchants, bouquet sellers, and Dames de la Halle all had their own established communities which enabled the cahiers’ authors to believe that their intended audiences would accept that the cahier was representative of the entire group. The authors also connected the groups of women to larger communities, whether they be the Third Estate or the community of all who belong to guilds. The fashion merchants’ and bouquet sellers’ cahiers show how the authors viewed their own political involvement on behalf of a group of women and how they sought to justify this involvement which, because of their gender, they were unsure of. The cahier for the Dames de la Halle shows that they either had a growing political influence that the author found threatening or either the author or the real Dames de la Halle believed this group of women should have a say in politics. The cahiers, therefore, tell us about French merchantwomen—both individually and in groups—and how they were perceived on the eve of the French Revolution.
Women’s Work

As has been established, the fashion merchants, bouquet sellers, and Dames de la Halle all had identities as both women and merchants. Their cahiers showed that they shared similarities with men in similar occupations and, in some cases, thought that their professional identity justified political participation. While these women were unquestionably part of the public sphere of commerce, they were all involved in trades that were closely associated with women: designing women’s fashion, selling bouquets, and selling fruit and fish.

None of the cahiers made a distinction between these professions—women’s work—and male-dominated professions, nor do they indicate that the authors viewed women’s occupations as different from those of men. On the contrary, the similarities to men’s complaints in all three cahiers, the fashion merchants’ cahiers’ statement that they express the interests of all the guilds, the assertion in that same cahier that the fashion merchants’ guild would have been represented in the Parisian assembly if it followed the provincial law, and the bouquet sellers’ classification of themselves with men that relied on their profession for financial survival all highlight the similarities between women’s professions and those of men. Yet there were differences between the two: working women were not given the same social status as working men and, in some cases, women’s guilds were given opportunities that would not have been given to men’s guilds.²¹⁶

In the cahiers, a profession was treated as a profession, regardless of which gender had the monopoly on that profession. The two female authors and the female speaker, along with the

²¹⁶ When the seamstresses’ guild of Paris was established in the late 17th century, for instance, it was permitted to sell garments that traditionally only the tailor’s guild had the right to sell. While, unlike other guilds, the seamstresses did not have a monopoly on their sector of commerce, a male rival to the tailor’s guild would not have been permitted even these limited rights. See Crowston, “Women, Gender, and Guilds in Early Modern Europe,” 35-6.
groups of women they represent, had identities as merchants and as women, but these two identities remained separate. They reinforced ideas that poor women needed to work for pay in order to fulfill their obligation as mothers, so there was a connection between employment and gender. Yet, there is no indication that the groups had an identity as merchants in a women’s profession; they identified as workers in a profession and as women, but never workers in a women’s profession. Within the commercial sphere, this seems to imply that the authors saw no significant distinction between the merits of women’s professions and those of men’s professions: they were both merely professions. These cahiers show what identities these three groups of women had, but they also can show what identities they did not have.

The Revolution after the Cahiers

For this project, I have focused almost all of my attention on the years leading up to the summer of 1789: those events that would have impacted the authors of the three cahiers. There is no indication that the bouquet sellers’ and fashion merchants’ cahiers were even read by those to whom they were sent or that the cahier for the Dames de la Halle had any impact on future political discourse. If the reforms proposed in the cahiers were discussed and enacted, such as the end to the *mont de pieté*, there is no evidence that these cahiers helped contribute to that decision. In terms of political influence, these cahiers were largely ineffectual.

These cahiers represented something more than a collection of requests, however. They also represented women’s attempts to participate in the official political structure and their desire to influence politics. This is true even in the case of the cahier for the Dames de la Halle, which, though written by a male author, implied political awareness and activism by the Dames de la Halle in a desire to influence the political system. There is no evidence showing that these
cahiers inspired other women to attempt to become politically involved, or that any contemporaries saw these cahiers and acknowledged their significance as political involvement by Third Estate women. While both situations could be true, documentation proving it has yet to be found.

Yet these cahiers of 1789 were part of a larger story of women in revolutionary politics that continued on into the 1790s. Dames de la Halle would go on to play a significant part in the Revolution as part of the popular movement. On 5 October 1789, they made their infamous march to Versailles demanding a decrease in the price of bread. When they approached the king, one of the women, Louise Chabry, mouthed the words “some bread” before dramatically fainting at the king’s feet, showing that this group of women was willing to use the image of a “damsel in distress” to get the results they wanted.217 Some claim that the women purposely excluded men from this march because they wanted the protest to remain non-violent.218 Later, when the king gave no formal guarantees that the price of bread would decrease, men joined the mêlée, two palace guards were killed, and eventually both men and women forced the king to return with them to Paris.

In other situations, the Dames de la Halle were capable of committing violence on their own, even before the taking of the Bastille. In April of 1789, Marie-Jeanne Trumeau, a seller of fish, was condemned to hang for attacking a manufacturer’s house and provoking others to burn and pillage it by crying “Long Live the Third Estate!” (Vive le Tiers-Etat).219 In April of 1791, Dames de la Halle attacked groups of nuns because they felt the nuns were not properly

218 Hufton, 14
219 Kelly, 97
supporting the Revolution. The Dames de la Halle were a part of, or, in some cases, led the public movement of the Revolution.

There is little information about the bouquet sellers’ and fashion merchants’ roles in the Revolution. As a group, the fashion merchants, whose clients were oftentimes aristocrats, distanced themselves from the Revolutionary movements as a matter of practicality and self-preservation. The bouquet sellers could easily have been a part of the public movement. Some bouquet sellers were even classified as Dames de la Halle, so they could have made up the “Dames de la Halle” that marched on Versailles or participated in public protests. Since the author of the bouquet sellers’ cahier mentioned how they could barely afford to take care of their families, it is likely that they would have taken part in the mass protests to decrease the price of bread. In 1793, a group of bouquet sellers did attend the Parisian assembly that ratified the new constitution in order to offer their good wishes and support to the delegates.

The cahiers of the fashion merchants, bouquet sellers, and Dames de la Halle were part of a trend of Third Estate women’s political involvement that continued after the fall of the monarchy. Women continued to organize petitions and attend assemblies. Even if their voices were not given legal weight in these assemblies, they still attended as spectators and voiced their support for measures when a voice vote was called. Some women’s newspapers, such as the Courrier de l’Hymen, mixed articles on fashion with articles on politics and the debates in the National Assembly.²²⁰ Women continued to participate in unofficial political discourse by discussing their opinions with their families and neighbors. The opinions of working class wives and mothers had a significant impact on how their husbands and sons voted in assemblies.²²¹

²²¹ Chassin, Génie de la Révolution, 198
Third Estate women also participated in the political clubs that formed during the revolution. Women were allowed to watch or sometimes even speak at the meetings of some of the influential political clubs of the Revolution, such as the Cordeliers, although the Cordeliers, like many of these clubs, did not permit women to be full members. There were some mixed clubs that permitted both women and men to become members, some of which even dictated that a certain number of women must possess lower administrative positions, although these clubs were much less common than men’s only clubs. Political clubs exclusively for women also formed. The first, the Patriotic Society of the Well-Being of the (female) Friends of Truth was founded in March of 1791. This club was short-lived, lasting only a year. In May of 1793, the Society of (female) Republican Revolutionary Citizens was established. The club’s initial membership was estimated at over one hundred women, many of whom were tradeswomen. This club was much more influential than its predecessor. The Society of Republican Revolutionary Citizens opposed the Girondins, a Revolutionary faction that opposed popular sovereignty, and played a principle role in organizing the insurrection of 31 May-2 June 1793, which resulted in the resignation of duties or arrest of Girondin members of the Assembly. After the fall of the Girondins, the Jacobin faction cemented their power and no longer needed the aid of the women’s club. The club, having successfully helped defeat the Girondins, began to turn their attention to the Jacobins, criticizing them for being too slow and not thorough enough in their prosecution of political enemies and calling for the current Reign of Terror to be expanded. The club also became more and more associated with the radical enragés (the “enraged”) that supported executing all economic speculators and hoarders. They also supported

[222] Debate exists about exact numbers. Dominique Godineau estimated it at 170, while Olwen Hufton uses a much more conservative estimate of closer to 100.
[223] Godineau, Les Femmes dans la Société Française, 204
measures to force food producers to sell at a price that would give them no personal profit.

When the club’s leader, Madame Léon, became the mistress of a well-known enragé leader, Monsieur Leclerc, the personal link reinforced this connection in the minds of Parisians. Madame Léon’s private relationship with a political leader helped establish the popular belief in a public political alliance between the enragés and the Society of Republican Revolutionary Citizens, proving that, although any support for the enragés most likely stemmed from economic considerations, the gender of the club’s leader played an important role in establishing the alliance that would contribute to the club’s downfall. The club’s connection with the radical faction and their criticism of the current political system made Jacobin leaders worried, so they used the Dames de la Halle to get the club shut down.

The Dames de la Halle grew angry with the enragés, particularly their pillaging of shops and attack on small merchants instead of the large producers. With encouragement by the Jacobins, they began to see the Society of Republican Revolutionary Citizens with their ties to the enragés as too revolutionary. The Dames de la Halle and the Society of Republican Revolutionary Citizens disagreed on whether women should be forced to wear the revolutionary cockade. The women’s club supported this rule while the Dames de la Halle opposed it, arguing that wearing a cockade implied full citizenship which included the obligation to bear arms and fight, which they believed was contrary to their rights as women. The argument led to the Dames de la Halle attacking the Society of Republican Revolutionary Citizens on 28 October 225

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224 Hufton, 32  
225 Ufton, 35  
226 Ufton, 37  
227 Ufton, 36  
Godineau, Femmes, 207
1793 and petitioning for the club to be closed, which succeeded. Women were banned from having their own political clubs in late 1793.

While the real reasons behind the banning of women’s clubs was probably the Jacobins’ desire to curtail political opposition, arguments given in opposition to the club in the National Assembly centered on how these clubs violated the roles of women. A Jacobin deputy, Febre d’Englatine argued that “these clubs are not composed of mothers of families, daughters of families, sisters occupied with their younger brothers or sisters, but rather of adventuresses, knights-errant, emancipated women, amazons”\textsuperscript{228} Englatine stated that the women involved in the Society of Republican Revolutionary Citizens were those that did not fulfill their role as women: they were not the “mothers of families” that were so idealized and were used in the cahiers de doléances for the bouquet sellers and Dames de la Halle.

While the end to the political involvement of this women’s club was justified because of the gender of the club’s members, the female nature of the Society was what encouraged the enragés to attempt to get these women’s political support in the first place.\textsuperscript{229} Enragé leaders thought that they needed the support of women to stay politically relevant. In September 1793, Monsieur Roux, one such leader, argued that women “have the doubly advantageous attribute of conquering men through charm and fearlessness.”\textsuperscript{230} According to Roux, women would have been able to attract more followers to the cause of the enragés because, in addition to the “fearlessness” of their characters, they possessed a feminine “charm” that could persuade men to join the cause.

\textsuperscript{229} Hufton, 35
\textsuperscript{230} Roux in Hufton, 35
Women, because of their gender and the powers of persuasion associated with it, were sometimes valued by revolutionaries, although their gender also gave government officials an excuse to put an end to the threat of women’s political opposition. Women like the Dames de la Halle were used by political factions to bring about political reforms that a faction did not want to be seen as instigating entirely on its own. Politically involved women such as the Dames de la Halle and the Society of Republican Revolutionary Citizens did not feel an allegiance to each other because they were women, but rather were willing to argue and fight based on their own personal interests.

Despite their significant-- albeit restricted-- political involvement, women were declared “passive citizens” in the Constitution, which denied them the right to vote, despite being officially classified as citizens of the Republic. This exclusion from suffrage was reinforced in the Constitution of 1793, which was written shortly after the Girondins were removed from the Assembly. At the time these constitutions were being written, support for women’s suffrage was limited. The Marquis de Condorcet was one well-known supporter even before the Revolution, arguing that women had natural rights just like men do. This idea would be propagated by Olympe de Gouge, as well. Some women of the Third Estate supported suffrage. At the convention to ratify the Constitution of 1793, one woman argued, “You gave men a Constitution, they enjoy now all the rights of free men, but women are far from being at that level. We demand of you primary assemblies, and, as the Constitution reposes on the Rights of Man, today we call for its complete exercise.” Her declaration was met with applause.231 While such advocates existed, there were many more that either opposed women’s suffrage or were apathetic.

Even amongst Third Estate women, there was not widespread support for giving French women the right to vote. A majority did not favor the right to vote, and an even larger number endorsed the idea of a husband representing his household in local and national politics. The Society of Republican Revolutionary Citizens supported the Constitution of 1793 as it was and did not argue that women’s suffrage should be included. The bouquet sellers told the Parisian assembly that was convened to ratify the constitution that they were “tranquil in their places, they cherish their activity at an honest commerce, and want to return, full of satisfaction, to their duties as mothers and wives.” They identify with their role in commerce, but also show that, as women, they had an identity as wives and mothers, not as those actively involved in politics. While these bouquet sellers might not have been the same bouquet sellers that wrote or contributed to the cahier de doléances, like the author of the cahier, they showed a pride in their “honest profession.” They did not, however, think that their profession should give them suffrage or a have a political role that takes time away from their duties as wives and mothers. The bouquet sellers, like a majority of Third Estate women, were not advocates of increasing women’s political rights by allowing them to vote.

Even with the lack of a majority supporting women’s political rights, one must still question why advocates had no impact on the writers of the constitutions, especially when some advocates were as powerful as the Marquis de Condercet. Many theories have been proposed. Dorinda Outram proposed that the very nature of the Revolution made its leaders unable to give women political power: the Revolution defined its difference from the ancien régime by its lack of women in politics. The monarchy was corrupted by women and their informal influence. Leaders reinforced this idea to justify and cope with the guilt of killing the king and sanctioning

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232 Hufton, 22.
233 Bouquetières in Godineau, Citoyennes, 144
religion. Others argue that it was a belief in the nature of women: according to the thought of some revolutionaries, women were, by nature, too emotional, irrational, or lacked the mental capacity required to make political decisions. When arguing against the Society of Republican Revolutionary Citizens, a deputy, Monsieur Amar, claimed that

“...The private functions for which women are destined by their very nature are related to the general order of society: this social order results from the differences between man and woman. Each sex is called to the kind of occupation which is fitting for it...Man is strong, robust, born with great energy, audacity and courage...In general, women are ill suited for elevated thoughts and serious meditations”

The beliefs of the revolutionary leaders no doubt contributed to the inability of women to gain many political rights during the French Revolution, a period when men of the Third Estate gained many. Just because they were not allowed to officially vote, have their own political clubs, or be representatives in a legislative assembly did not prevent women from being politically involved. Just as women that were excluded from participating in the assemblies leading up to the Estates General wrote unofficial cahiers de doléances to have their voices heard, women in the following years continued to be involved in the political sphere.

Beyond the Revolution

The Revolution brought about reforms that gave women more legal rights, despite not receiving political rights. By a law issued in September 1792, divorce became legal, and women could divorce without their husband’s consent for reasons such as incompatibility of temperament. Under the ancien régime, they could only appeal to a court for a separation of property and residence due to a husband’s severe misuse of funds or horrible maltreatment.

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235 Hunt, 124.
236 Amar in Hunt, 124.
Women could contract debts in their own name and be witnesses in civil law without their husbands’ consent. They also received more rights to administer their own property while married and to have control over their children.\textsuperscript{237} These reforms did not outlive the Revolution by very long. Napoléon’s 1803 Code Civil took away many of these rights. Divorce was much harder to obtain, especially for women. For instance, a wife’s adultery was grounds for a husband to divorce his wife, while a husband had to move his mistress into his house for the wife to have grounds for divorce. Women could no longer contract their own debts or serve as witnesses without their husband’s consent. The father’s power over his family and the wife’s obedience were reinforced in sections of the code addressing the duties of husbands and wives and rights within families. Daughters did retain equal rights to inheritances, which had originated in the Revolution. While the Revolution gave women some limited legal rights, many of those rights were short-lived.

The Revolution did bring about ideas that outlived the First Republic. One such concept was that of republican motherhood, which claimed that women’s political involvement should be based in her role as mother and her duty to raise her children as good citizens. A proclamation in the newspaper 	extit{Le Moniteur} called women to this republican motherhood, “Women! Do you want to be republicans? Love, follow, and teach the laws which recall your husbands and children to the exercise of their rights…never go to the popular assemblies with the wish to speak there, but so that your presence may sometimes encourage your children.”\textsuperscript{238} While discouraged from actively participating in politics, women were encouraged to be politically knowledgeable and be good citizens in order to show a positive example to their children. In such a way, women were

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\textsuperscript{238} \textit{Le Moniteur, XIII, 29 brumaire} in Rendell, 52
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given a political role that complemented their private role as mothers. The idea of a mother
serving as an example of citizenry to her children continued on well into the nineteenth century.

The French Revolution also was a significant early step in the development of modern
feminism. The Revolution opened up possibilities of reshaping the social and political order.
Some Frenchman and women saw the drastic reforms of the Revolution and started to believe
that changing the relationship between the sexes was feasible. While those seeking to change
the political and social status of women were not strong enough to institute significant, lasting
reforms in either sphere during the Revolution itself, the idea lived on and continued to grow.
Eventually, this belief in the ability to change women’s position in politics and society spurred
on reforms that were successful.

Rendell, 33
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