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IRIS Graduate Student Summer Fieldwork Award

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This spring, the International Institute Graduate Student Summer Fieldwork Award allowed me to complete my dissertation research on the role of ordinary actors in reshaping gender and sexuality norms in eighteenth-century France. My project focused on the crime of seduction – an umbrella term for unsanctioned marriage and other illicit relationships – as a means of examining how grassroots legal contests contributed to broader intellectual shifts. What could anxieties about seducers tell me about the politicization of masculinity, motherhood, and marriage on the eve of the French Revolution? Having presented papers on research conducted in 2013-2014, I was fortunate to receive feedback on my work that posed new and valuable questions. Was seduction solely a criminal charge, or was it the subject of civil disputes? Furthermore, what could judges' sentencing of seducers tell us about how dangerous they understood this crime to be? The International Institute award enabled me to return to France to consult new sources that might answer these questions. To this end, I spent May-June 2015 at the National Archives in Paris.

My first task was to locate and consult civil seduction disputes in order to compare them with criminal trials. As background, the majority of criminal cases in Paris proceeded as follows; an unwed mother-to-be filed a complaint against a man who had solicited sex under promises of marriage, only to renege those promises after she became pregnant. The police commissioner who transcribed her testimony would then call witnesses, order an interrogation, issue a decision, or forward the case to a higher court. (Alternatively, he might attempt extra-legal reconciliation between the couple.) If successful, the woman would win monetary damages for herself and an allowance for the upbringing of her baby. How then did these cases operate differently in civil court? I quickly realized that seduction rarely operated as a civil dispute. In a host of boxes, I found only one ruling. That absence valuably underscored the motivations and limitations of female complainants. For many, criminal proceedings offered the promise of financial reward. But more crucially, they allowed a woman of limited means to expose her lover's indiscretions to the community at large. The trial provided an opportunity for neighbors and acquaintances to publicly attribute blame for transgressions of sexual honor, whether or not judges ultimately ruled in the complainants' favor. In short, women used the law to recuperate their reputations.

The dead end I faced in pursuing civil suits allowed me to devote more time to locating sentences for seduction trials. On the whole, I discovered that judges seemed to care little for the type of women mentioned above: seamstresses, maids, and washerwomen who lobbied on their own behalf to win modest damages from men who had impregnated them. The paltry damages judges meted out to these women showcased the hierarchical nature of female sexual honor in this period; women deserved the protection of the law in proportion to their social status. The sentences I found suggest that this hierarchy only became more rigid over the course of the period under examination (1750-1790). Instead, judges devoted greater attention to cases in which couples that had absconded together to marry against the will of the young woman's parents. These elopements constituted grave contraventions of parental authority within a society that aligned the authority of fathers with that of the king. Punishing unruly young men who transgressed patriarchal control was requisite to maintaining both family hierarchy and social order at large.

Finally, I also consulted a wider range of seduction cases that led me to consider how Parisians increasingly considered sex in transactional terms over the course of the eighteenth century. Where marriage promises had once featured as seducers' key enticements, men increasingly won women over with job placements, rent payments, money, and gifts. Vulnerable women recognized sex as a

means of securing advantages from men of higher status, even if that exchange resulted in pregnancy and the public shame it incurred. Accordingly, victims of seduction bore close resemblance to *dame entretenues* or kept women, blurring the boundaries between seduction and prostitution. Strikingly, some young women lodged charges of seduction to claim they had been prostituted against their will. In one case, a nine-year-old girl was abducted from her convent school to become the sexual plaything of a nobleman. These kidnappings underscore how men in particular envisioned female sexual honor in monetary terms, a commodity to be bought and sold. More broadly, men and women alike divorced sex from marriage, envisioning its commercial possibilities instead.

On the whole, this research trip drew my attention to the gulf between discourses and practices around gender and sexuality in this period. Although period literature accentuated the threat of lascivious male seducers, local officials made little effort to punish men found guilty of unsanctioned sexual behavior. Judges effectively turned a blind eye to illicit relationships as long as lower class women bore the brunt of their consequences (namely, pregnancy and poverty). Judicial practice only accentuated the vulnerability of poor women within the context of rapidly disintegrating community networks and an expanding city. Grasping the centrality of social status in these cases allowed me to realize the importance of class within my research. Although the revolutionaries of 1789 would eventually lay claim to a more socially egalitarian society, my research suggests that gender and sexuality norms were - and would remain well into the nineteenth century - strictly variegated according to social status. Thanks to this award, my dissertation will better address the fundamental intersection of gender and class.