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Clyde Plumauzille, *Prostitution et révolution: Les femmes publiques dans la cité républicaine (1789-1804)*. Ceyzérieu: Champ Vallon, 2016. 393 pp. Illustrations, maps, and bibliography. €28.00 (pb). ISBN 979-1-0267-0066-1.

Review by Jennifer Heuer, University of Massachusetts Amherst.

As Clyde Plumauzille notes, there is surprisingly little work on prostitution in the revolutionary era. Historians like Erica-Marie Benabou and Nina Kushner have looked at the commercialization of sex in the eighteenth century, and Alain Corbin's *Les Filles de Noces* (translated into English as *Women for Hire*) has influenced much research on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, the Revolution itself is often overlooked. *Prostitution et révolution* would thus be a useful contribution simply for providing an overview of the topic. But Plumauzille's book goes well beyond filling a gap. It combines a deep engagement with archives, sensitivity to the lives and experiences of those involved, and innovative conceptual frameworks for thinking about citizenship, gender, and power.

The book adopts a tripartite structure. Part one provides a social and cultural history of the people and places associated with prostitution during the Revolution. Part two, on "paradoxical decriminalization," explores the combination of the formal lifting of criminal penalties in October 1791, increased administrative intolerance, and new forms of policing, especially in the later 1790s. Part three develops the idea of "diminished citizenship" (*citoyenneté diminuée)* to investigate both how prostitutes were stigmatized during the revolution and how they claimed some forms of citizenship.

Plumauzille focuses on women throughout the book. This is largely a function of the archives; as she acknowledges, paid sexual transactions between men were not treated as prostitution. She is also aware of the relative archival silence around both pimps and clients although she has tracked down a few revealing exceptions. She draws on a remarkable variety of materials, including legislative debates, *cahiers de doléances*, police interrogations and reports, prison registers, citizen denunciations, erotic guides to Paris, letters from women protesting their imprisonment, and one "rediscovered" intimate journal. She also plays documents against one another, looking carefully at both what is said, and what may be assumed or deliberately passed over.

Choosing to start with people rather than laws or ideologies, Plumauzille emphasizes social relations and the agency of her subjects. The first chapter introduces us to the *femmes publiques.* Plumauzille paints a collective portrait: most were young (between fifteen and twenty-five), unmarried, and, like most workers in the city, in economically precarious straits. She does a careful job of showing the circumstances that led women to prostitution, without presenting them simply as victims; she refers often to "constrained choices" (*choix contraint*s.) She concentrates especially on their activities and identities as workers. Women associated with the textile trades writ large appear overrepresented in these records compared to the general population of working women in Paris. Conversely, servants are underrepresented, likely because their movements were more restricted, though they were vulnerable to sexual exploitation within the household. Many women cobbled together different forms of part-time work, of which prostitution could

be one. Though it is challenging to determine remuneration for sex workers, Plumauzille looks at a variety of sources, from arrest records to relatively upscale guides to sexual tourism, to suggest that it might have been equivalent to that of that average male day worker. The chapter is also intriguing in examining how these women claimed other occupations while occasionally presenting sex work as itself a profession.

Chapter two turns to the geography of prostitution. It will likely be of most interest to readers familiar with Parisian neighborhoods, especially the Revolution-era *sections*, but it also offers general insights. Plumauzille shows that prostitution, far from being relegated to the physical margins of the city, was part of the fabric of urban life. Though the spaces of prostitution were heterogeneous and changeable, the Palais-Royal (renamed Palais-Égalité) played a recurrent role, as a highly-publicized site that mixed myriad forms of leisure and sociability with sexual solicitation.

Chapter three, "Une culture sexuelle, populaire, juvénile, et dissidente," is particularly creative in its attempt to reconstruct a cultural universe, from the gardens and galleries deemed propitious for encounters to the distinctive whistle used by prostitutes to attract clients. Plumauzille reflects on the youth of both prostitutes and their clients, arguing that these women were not just sexual diversions but an integral part of youth culture. She traces a key transition from the eighteenth-century prevalence of large brothels run by madams, to more clandestine, temporary, and mobile arrangements, a transition that had begun around 1775, but accelerated with the Revolution. A new figure became increasingly important: a male *souteneur* or pimp who could sometimes also become a lover or partner. As France became engulfed in war, soldiers (often close to prostitutes in both age and class) grew especially prominent as clients, protectors, and potential pimps.

Plumauzille draws particularly on qualitative sources in this section. Most notably, she uses the diary of a young scientist, Alexandre Brongiart. An unusually timid and relatively impecunious bourgeois, Brongiart began to frequent prostitutes in the late Revolution. He hesitated to do so, for a combination of reasons including fear of losing face, nervousness about initial encounters, the cost, and the risk of venereal disease, but his desires eventually outweighed his hesitations. He developed a relationship with a particular prostitute, who provided him with the illusion of a sexually experienced but loyal consort. He was consequently dismayed to discover he had contracted gonorrhea, not just because of the physical effects of the disease but also because he felt betrayed. After a hiatus for convalescence and fear of renewed infection, he returned to his mistress for a while, but married at age thirty-one and seems to have ceased frequenting prostitutes afterwards. It is always risky to base too much on any individual account, and the young and awkward Brongiart is probably more sympathetic than many clients. But Plumauzille's close reading of the memoir does offer intriguing insights into contemporary attitudes and interactions.

Part two turns from people to policies and offers a chronological analysis of changing laws, attitudes, and practices over the course of the Revolution. The nicely titled chapter, "Murmures du peuple, silence des lois, 1789-1792," begins with the deputies' decision in October 1791 to exclude prostitution from the Penal Code while instituting the principle that individuals could only be condemned for crimes named in law. Plumauzille observes that there was no political or legislative debate over the decriminalization of prostitution or subsequent discussion of possible effects on policy, making it challenging to understand the motives behind these changes.

She thus tries to tease out attitudes more indirectly. After reviewing policies towards sex workers in the early modern period and eighteenth-century policing practices, she investigates the *cahiers de doléances.* A tiny proportion addressed prostitution although she notes that it is similar to those that addressed divorce, which would become a major national issue. Plumauzille identifies a wide range of approaches, noting that some *cahiers* by women touched on economic concerns around prostitution even while trying to distinguish themselves from prostitutes. Other writings in the early 1790s are similarly diverse although Plumauzille calls most attention to a fascinating synthetic text by the writer Jacques Peuchet. Peuchet argued for toleration, partly on the grounds that individuals had freedom over their bodies. At the same,

he called for severe penalties for public abuses, especially sexual exploitation of minors. Plumauzille then traces the "silent decriminalization" of prostitution in practice, contending that while the police continued to engage in efforts against it, they were often minimalist, focusing on the most critical aspects for maintaining order. She concludes with an analysis of why, if prostitution was seen as increasingly banal, thirty-five women, largely prostitutes, were killed during the September Massacres of 1792. She suggests that those branded with a *fleur de lys* or V (for *voleur*) were targeted as physically corrupt. The brand was inflicted on thieves and recidivist prostitutes during the Old Regime. Since women arrested during the revolutionary period were not marked, they were more likely to be released, even if accused of the same crimes.

Chapter five then turns to administrative attacks on prostitution in the later Revolution. The first half of the chapter focuses on the pivotal year of 1793. Plumauzille explores why prostitution became increasingly seen as a threat to moral and political order over the course of the year, until a decree on October 4, 1793 ultimately put into place new controls without formally recriminalizing it. The fall of 1793 of course marks the beginning of the "Terror" (following recent debates, Plumauzille uses the term in quotation marks; I am retaking her usage); historians also likely associate it with the closing of women's political clubs and Marie-Antoinette's execution. Some of the rhetoric and actors Plumauzille discusses (especially Chaumette, the author of the decree) may thus be familiar to readers, but she provides a fascinating analysis of how different rhetorics could overlap and reinforce one another. These varied from a means of stigmatizing militant sans-culotte women to concrete fears of the effects of venereal disease on the army to a general rhetoric of sexual and political corruption.

While the specific *arrêt* of October 1793 disappeared from view with the dismantling of legislation from the "Terror," Plumauzille sees its lasting resonance in the idea of prostitution as a social, medical, and moral danger. Prostitution remained technically legal although Jean-François Reubell tried in vain in June 1795 to get deputies to define it clearly. But the government entrusted a new police apparatus with increasingly centralized powers, including perceived threats to moral and public order. Here Plumauzille focuses on the development of the *Bureau Central*, an organization created in 1795 charged with overseeing the police. Her analysis is illuminating not only for the specific issue of prostitution but also for more general insights into the functioning of the police and their growing importance in the late revolution. She also touches on the use of medical exams to see if prostitutes were affected with venereal disease, a practice that would become a critical part of regulationism (the state-controlled system of brothels, registration, and medical inspections) in the nineteenth century.

Part three concludes by looking at logics of stigmatization and the operations of the police. Chapter six considers the opposition between "honest citizens" and prostitutes and explores how prostitution came to be viewed only as a "scandal." Although writers in the eighteenth century and the early Revolution had occasionally acknowledged economic and social causes, such references disappeared after Year II. The economic crises of the Directory combined with a structural crisis within trades dominated by women to make working women's position especially fragile, but for the police, prostitution resulted only from women's immorality. They thus had a duty to correct it. Much of the rest of the chapter explores how policing worked in practice. Plumauzille tracks arrests at different moments and provides a quantitative analysis, she also analyses the legal tools available for arrests, especially the charge of *délits aux bonnes mœurs*. This section is likely to be of interest to historians concerned with power and policing in the late Revolution more generally.

The concluding chapter looks at the process of arrest and ends with the voices of women themselves. Plumauzille explores how the police actually identified prostitutes and the deliberate spectacle of public roundups. She then returns us to the question of women's citizenship, drawing on twenty or so petitions from women in the hospital-prison of La Salpetrière in 1795. While small compared with many collections of petitions during the Revolution, it is illuminating. Plumauzille uses the letters not only to show the

plight of the women--often further isolated and impoverished by their imprisonment--but also the ways in which they tried to use revolutionary rhetoric to claim their rights as *citoyennes*.

Overall, the book is well written, if often dense. The absence of an index, though very common in books published by French presses, is regrettable. It would be very useful, not simply to locate specific references or actors, but also to track both recurrent themes and points that Plumauzille's work illuminates in passing. These range from concerns about the army to the question of clothing and social identity, or from the theater as an erotic space to the relative power of different parts of the police force. Overall, this is a rich, ambitious, and original volume. I hope that it will be translated into English so it can reach further sets of readers.

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