The Pariahs of Yesterday
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Born in a *bretonnant* village by the north coast of the Finistère in 1864, Yvonne Yven knew poverty, paternal drunkenness, and family discord early on. The death of her beloved mother when she was twelve years old unleashed a chain of hardships: the displacement of the family, her father’s remarriage and the consequent dispersal of her siblings, and three years of inhumane employment as the servant of two miserly dowagers. Two personal interventions rescued her from this situation. Her mother’s sister brought her to the capital city of Brest, where she was less isolated and better fed, but constantly harassed where she worked in a bistro. Then a new friend—a widow in her thirties—saw that Yvonne was hired along with her, and the two traveled to Paris in 1882 as servants of a wealthy merchant family. As her son recalled, at eighteen she “packed her bag and joined the cohort of *Bretonnes* migrating toward Paris . . . to escape from the misery of the West.”1 She would stay on in the city, working as a domestic cook, and thirteen years later would marry another provincial introduced by mutual friends. In some ways Yvonne’s life is emblematic of the Breton story; in others it is distinct.

This chapter places Yvonne Yven squarely in the company of the first sizable crowd of newcomers from Brittany—those who arrived before the dawn of the twentieth century. Nearly 69,000 men and women from Brittany lived in Paris in 1891 (not counting their children born there), along with 3,600 in Versailles and 3,200 in Saint-Denis—over twice the number as from Normandy, for example.2 During this time, between 1880 and 1910, there was a fundamental change in the representation of Brittany and Bretons: they became objects of ridicule.3 Perceived in the nineteenth century as mystical and savage, then romantic and mysterious, Brittany previously had been the subject of a select few bourgeois literary
visitors. However, with the change in accessibility by rail and the flood of Bretons into Paris between 1880 and 1910, more tourists saw Brittany—at least its beaches and spas—and more Parisians saw Bretons in their city. It is no coincidence that Bretons at this time came to be seen as ridiculous, simple, and uncouth.

Bretons suffered by comparison with other provincials in Paris. Most notably the Limousins, who had worked in the Parisian building trades since the eighteenth century and been an important presence throughout the nineteenth, settled in skilled Paris occupations with decades of seasonal labor, housing, and networks of contact behind them. Auvergnats, whose work as water carriers, wood sellers, and then cafetiers and hoteliers going back to the eighteenth century, integrated into the urban life that was part of their occupational profile. In addition, the timing of their arrival worked against Bretons’ favor: they came to Paris when the need for artisans was not expanding but rather when large-scale centralizing industry grew, in need of an army of proletarian laborers. And they were a relatively small contingent at first, one without a critical mass of established contacts to protect and promote itself.

“The pariahs of Paris” was a phrase coined in 1898 by a cleric to describe Breton workers in Paris who did the jobs that no one else wanted: “he is yoked to the most unpleasant labors, sometimes even the most deleterious,” said Father Rivalin to a gathering of worker associations in Brittany. It was those who wanted to protect Bretons who articulated this status of pariah. Employers saw this as well, hiring them as unskilled laborers in the belief that Bretons were more rustic and less prepared than earlier provincials for the new tasks presented by city jobs. Men of science—sociologists and physicians—would weigh in on the disabilities of Bretons faced with urban life, as we will see. Finally, the literati would denigrate Bretons in a way that emphasized one fact setting them apart from other newcomers: the majority of Bretons in Paris were women.

Because young women were a majority of those who went to the city of Paris, this chapter opens with the profile of a domestic servant who would become a caricature of Bretons in Paris. Yet contemporary studies gave scant attention to women or gender. I turn to the most credible source for studies of Bretons in the 1890s from the budding field of social science, Jean Lemoine. His observations published in 1892 of Bretons throughout the Paris basin—systematic yet embedded in the notions of his time—take us to the industrial suburb of Saint-Denis, and then into
the city and its Fourteenth Arrondissement. For both locations I compare Lemoine’s observations with the marriage records of Bretons to sketch an intimate, although necessarily partial, portrait of this first important wave of Bretons in Paris.\textsuperscript{10} This chapter therefore offers views of Bretons before 1900 as well as an understanding of the reality of family, friendship, and working life for these newcomers. It sheds light on what migration scholars see as migration systems and networks of contact. Finally, it provides a dual perspective, juxtaposing published perceptions of Bretons as the mass migrations to Paris began with the realities of their lives in the Paris basin.

DOMESTIC SERVANTS

Yvonne Yven was in good company—or at least extensive company, because country girls had been coming to work in the cities for centuries. The households of medieval and Renaissance Italy, for example, clearly included young servants.\textsuperscript{11} Women particularly came to the city to work as domestics in the early modern period, and the scholarship of the last thirty years has deepened our understanding of the importance of the domestic servant in early modern and modern Europe.\textsuperscript{12} With the expansion of the middle classes at the end of the nineteenth century, a domestic servant became a figure even more crucial to the workings of the urban family.\textsuperscript{13} When Guy de Maupassant depicted the hardship caused by the loss of the family’s maid of all work in his short story “The Necklace” (1884), he drew a sharp portrait of the family of a clerk, whose status depended on having a domestic to do the rough work.\textsuperscript{14} The central irony of this situation rests in the contrast between the growing middle class—modern in that it was regular in its work hours, was salaried, and consciously limited its fertility—and its dependence on servants who had no contract, no regular work hours, and virtually no right to privacy, as abundant testimony reveals.\textsuperscript{15} Servants did not even own their own name: many, like Yvonne Yven, were asked to shed their name for one that the employer preferred.\textsuperscript{16} Domestics’ rights depended almost exclusively on the inclinations of their employers.\textsuperscript{17}

Nonetheless, domestic service was an attractive option for the newcomer in the city, and a huge serving class labored in Paris by the end of the nineteenth century, filled by crowds of willing newcomers.\textsuperscript{18} Once a job for men and women, domestic service became more feminized as it
increasingly called for a cook and a ladies’ maid, or even a sole bonne à tout faire—a maid for all the household tasks—rather than a staff that included valets, chambermaids, cooks, coachmen, and scullery maids. This expansion and reconfiguration of household employment meant that four of five domestics would be women at the beginning of the twentieth century.\footnote{19}

And servants’ quarters became a recognizable site in Paris, especially after Haussmannization established the “sixth floor” in new buildings and housing regulations in 1884 allowed some buildings to add another floor. With a corridor of single, unheated rooms under the eaves, lit solely by a ceiling window, glacial in winter and stifling in summer, the sixth floor often housed servants. The rooms were often unlocked and did not promise privacy, and there was no guarantee that servants had their own room at all—some slept in the kitchen or in a closet or cabinet. Nonetheless, the sixth-floor rooms quickly came to have a vivid place in the image of Parisian life for the domestic servant. They offered such poor conditions that the legislature discussed “la question du sixième,” and moralists regarded them as sites of vice and promiscuity.\footnote{20}

Enter the Bretonne, part of the newest stream of newcomers from the countryside, prized for her docility, simplicity, and in some cases her religious faith. She needed not only work but also a place to live and the apparent protection of a middle-class family. By every account, service in the city was preferred to the rural alternative that many young women like Yvonne had experienced, with the outdoor work, filth, and muck of barnyard labor, to say nothing of the special humiliation of being at the bottom of a hierarchy in which everyone knew one’s lowly status. As the city of Paris expanded from 1,991,000 to 2,700,000 people in the last twenty-five years of the century, Bretons came to the city, and the Breton women among them made up the freshest wave of new female domestics. They would be the last group of French women to enter this occupation in large numbers. After the Second World War domestic service passed to international immigrants, particularly Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese women. As French women entered more exalted positions in the labor force after the 1960s, they would increasingly hire domestic servants and cleaning women, like their counterparts in North America and throughout Western Europe. By the twenty-first century, domestic service would regain an important place for the middle classes and immigrants alike.\footnote{21}

Émile Zola spotted the Breton domestic and placed her at the bottom of the hierarchy in his novel Pot Bouille, published in 1882—the year of
Yvonne Yven’s arrival in Paris. Although this nasty portrait of servants and five bourgeois families on a quiet street in the Second Arrondissement is hardly one of Zola’s masterpieces, it reverberated in the Parisian understanding of master-servant relations for years to come, and painted an indelible portrait of the Breton maid Adèle, “fresh from Brittany, dull of wit and lousy.”22 The reader is introduced to Adèle when she throws rabbit guts out the window, to the disgust of all the other cooks whose kitchens share the rear courtyard. Abused by other servants and starved by her employers, she is also eyed and pinched by visitors as she serves the dinner; one nearsighted ladies’ man “thought she looked pretty with her heavy Breton features and her hair the color of dirty hemp.”23 Although he calls her a “filth-bag” to a confidante, both he and a married man in the building visit Adèle’s room in the night. Adèle’s response to the resultant pregnancy set the standard for portraits of Breton women ignorant of sexuality: “She became besotted by fear. Within her dullard brain surged up all the crude fancies of her native village. She believed herself lost, that the gendarmes would come and carry her off if she confessed that she were pregnant.”24 Hardly knowing what she is doing, Adèle gives an agonized birth in solitude one freezing December night in her sixth-floor room. She wraps the breathing infant in old cloth and newspaper and then deposits her in a nearby passageway in the cold dawn.25

The bretonne Adèle’s lack of hygiene, ignorance, and country ways are visible to her employers and fellow servants, but not her suffering. In Zola’s novel she stands in for the person with the least protection in bourgeois Paris. Yet in portraying the cruel, hypocritical, and miserly ways of the bourgeoisie, Zola also felt free to make a point of this character’s Breton origins and to draw a detailed portrait of her lack of hygiene, education, beauty, wisdom, and character, a portrait as vicious as the one he drew of her employers. The image of the Breton servant would proliferate and grow in importance in the twentieth century. Even before then, men of science—both social and medical—would take a close look at Bretons who left home for the Paris basin.

SOCIAL SCIENCE AND BRETON EMIGRANTS

By the 1890s Breton migration had attracted the attention of Jean Lemoine, who wrote in the new field of sociology and published in La science sociale in 1892.26 Lemoine lays claim to a systematic investigation of Breton emigrants in the tradition of Frédéric Le Play, and has been
taken at his word, understood as a careful observer by today’s historians of Paris and Saint-Denis. Lemoine wrote as a Breton who could gain the confidence of his interviewees. One of the many Paris dwellers who vacationed in Brittany, he saw country people boarding the train not as travelers but as emigrants headed for the factories of Paris, the market gardens of the Île-de-France, and the great farms of the fertile Beauce that lies between Brittany and Paris. The emigration phenomenon cries out for analysis, he wrote, because although Bretons had departed for centuries, into France and then to Canada, Brittany was currently “a site of intense emigration.”

Lemoine reported a collective migration, one that might be discussed today in terms of local practices, chain migration, or migration streams. Although the agricultural laborers on large farms are not the center of this story, they belong to the Bretons around Paris, and Lemoine saw their intense grouping—always together and ready to hurry home at the end of the season. “They’re not Frenchmen,” Lemoine reported, quoting those who saw them; when a Breton recalled to another French worker, “The first time I came to France . . . ,” the other replied, “You’re not French?,” and the answer came: “Oh no . . . I’m Breton.” Likewise, he saw the migration to Saint-Denis as a collective one, carried out in groups by people who had barely left home before and who in many cases went to the same destinations as their compatriots: “Ask 100 Bretons in Saint-Denis, and 70 will tell you they are from [the inland bretonnant commune of] Plougonver.” Perhaps laborers were hired one by one, but communications among them reflect lively networks. “When we have a vacancy in the factory” a director told Lemoine, “we are always sure that one of our Bretons will have three or four compatriots to recommend.”

He used the example of one former factory worker from the inland bretonnant commune of Bourbriac in the Côtes-d’Armor who brought his seven sisters and brothers to Saint-Denis, and after seventeen years had nineteen family members there, including children. These observations of strategic collective behavior, networks among migrants, interdependence, and a desire to return home echo in studies of emigrants to this day.

But for Lemoine these communal-minded habits reflected fundamental flaws in the Breton people rooted in disabling collective social norms. Bretons, he contended, counted on each other in times of need and were incapable of taking the initiative as individuals. Studying several groups of emigrants, he saw each as marked to a greater or lesser degree by a lack of
As he described Bretons’ fatalist and communal-minded habits, he based many of his observations on a longstanding and widely used source, Émile Souvestre’s *Derniers bretons*, first published nearly sixty years earlier, in 1835. If remaining among one’s own was a symptom of weakness, so was assimilation: “The Breton, once out of his primitive milieu, has an extraordinary tendency to lose himself in the new milieu in which he finds himself.” Bretons take on the habits of those around them—they speak inexpert French, but insist on speaking it all the same. One explained his absence from the Breton Easter service by saying, “Oh, me—I’m going with the French”—especially important, according to Lemoine, given Breton attachment to their religious practices. The transformation that began with parents was completed with children: Lemoine reported that several children born in Saint-Denis of Breton parents had nothing Breton about them, could not speak Breton, resembled all the other children, and looked at new arrivals with the same astonishment and curiosity that they displayed when they looked at foreigners. Lemoine observed that even though the Bretons who came to Saint-Denis were uneducated, unambitious, and even insular, they had nonetheless come to a melting pot. Understanding them to be fundamentally weak, he managed to be as critical of Bretons’ assimilation as of their insularity.

Lemoine called for more individualism, prescribing an English counter-scenario for the young woman of Brittany who became a domestic servant. He claimed that a single institution called women to leave for Paris: the Soeurs de la Croix, who placed young women, half of them Bretons, as domestics. Why domestic service? Rather than seek an explanation based in the structure of the Parisian job market, Lemoine attributed this practice to the extremely patriarchal nature of Breton society, which bred a need for protection and patronage once a woman was away from home. Breton women were so dependent, Lemoine stated, that they let friends and relatives influence their choice of Paris—indeed he knew one woman who had brought her five sisters to Paris, one after the other. And so dependent were these women that they imagined they only needed to present themselves to the Soeurs de la Croix to be taken care of. Here Lemoine drew a long contrast between the Bretonne and his imagined independent and ambitious “jeune girl anglaise,” a young woman with a proper upbringing who would scan newspaper ads, write letters to obtain information, save money before her departure, and take any job in the short term while living in a rented room and looking for a better job and a
fiancé, so that she could eventually own a shop and a home. Not so the young Bretons. According to the Soeurs de la Croix at their headquarters on the rue Vaugirard, Breton women suffered terribly from homesickness, and as Lemoine learned in Saint-Denis, they remained under the influence of their family. According to Lemoine, the remedy was for the Breton to be less collectivist and more individualistic. Like the English girl, the young Bretonne should leave home, save for herself, marry wisely, and build a good future. Lemoine did not show an appreciation of the networks that scholars have come to see as a support for newcomers, nor did he understand the Parisian job market or the constraints facing women like Yvonne Yven, who nonetheless was able to marry wisely.

Lemoine judged the railroad workers who left Brittany for greater Paris—*hommes d’équipe* and *manoeuvres*—as being a cut above those who went to Saint-Denis and nearly as numerous. Although railroad workers, like them, performed manual labor, they had a stable job. For Lemoine this made all the difference, because he considered the Breton emigrant perfectly capable of saving but unable to prepare for unforeseen problems. The railroad worker, unlike the others, usually had military service and some education behind him, as well as some resources to save him from the vagaries of misfortune. When he married, the railroad worker’s prestige as a state employee allowed him to attract a woman with a dowry. “You have to have lived in a little Breton town to understand the prestige enjoyed by those employed by the government,” he observed. Lemoine cites the example of a Breton woman in Versailles, wife of a *cheminot*, threatening to break relations with a younger sister who had married a peasant. Lemoine’s understanding of Breton women is threaded through his observations of men’s professions. Wives of *cheminots*, he observed, had usually left home in “the ambitious and pretentious desire” to move toward Paris. The railroad worker himself had given up his desire to return home, and as for the children, they had been raised entirely “à la française,” encouraged to go into administrative employment and indistinguishable from other children in greater Paris. In the case of these scrupulous workers, Lemoine approved of integration and assimilation.

Factory workers in Saint-Denis came in for special attention because a migration stream was established between two or three cantons of the Côtes-d’Armor and the workers of Saint-Denis—many more than the 3,218 Bretons enumerated by the census of 1891, which included neither their children born nearby nor passing workers. Lemoine considered
them more developed than the agricultural workers because they had the initiative to come to Paris on their own rather than in a team, then lodged together with compatriots and worked together. They did share their vice—drink: “To be Breton is to be a drunk, it’s the same thing,” Lemoine wrote, then recalling the unequivocal statement by the director of a large factory in Saint-Denis: “Our Bretons? Sober as camels during the week; on Sunday, as drunk as Poles!” And the “esprit de retour that marked nearly all Breton migration was keenly felt here.” To illustrate, Lemoine recounted his interview with an exemplary forty-three-year-old Breton in Saint-Denis, victim of tuberculosis after sixteen years of factory work and alcohol abuse, who held on to his sole pleasure—the promise of return to Plougonver.

Lemoine perceived a particular form to Breton marriages and households in Saint-Denis. Men went home to marry, and if they married in Saint-Denis almost always married a Bretonne, having come to the city alone at twenty-three or twenty-four years of age. Compatriots provided lodging because, once married, Bretons took in boarders while their wives did the housekeeping. Wives did not work outside the home in Saint-Denis, Lemoine contended, since the factories were “reputed to be dangerous,” but they rather made the meals and took care of the children in a rented room or small apartment.

The picture was completed by a portrait of the elite emigrants of Brittany, the exceptions who proved the rule that Bretons were neither farsighted nor sensible. Marchands de vins, or café owners, were the first and most important case, since Lemoine observed that they were found in every Breton community large or small, be it in Saint-Denis or Versailles. One did not find many café owners among Italians or Belgians: owning a café was truly a Breton specialty, he claimed. They had certain characteristics: never new arrivals, they were like the Breton in Saint-Denis, who had arrived seventeen years earlier and then gathered kin there. Lemoine believed that the collectivist Breton identity allowed café owners to succeed: their compatriots were both a source of capital, which they were more than willing to lend, and a ready-made clientele. The café owner played host to everyone; he organized dances on Saturday night, often served as a witness to weddings, cultivated friendships, and encouraged his customers’ fondness for the bottle. It was especially young people, newcomers, whom the café owner attracted, and Lemoine concluded that the café owner was the patriarch of emigration, his business rely-
ing on continued contacts with other Bretons. He sent for relatives and friends to work in his business for low salaries and was a friend to all. In the language of the migration scholar, the marchand de vin was a node joining networks of newcomers and longtime residents.

Lemoine’s valuable observations alert historians to the role of the café owner as a wedding witness, and more generally to the shape of the Breton community in Saint-Denis. He allows the reader, from the distance of over a century, to see how emigrant Bretons were employed and how they were perceived by employing the observations of budding social science, pointedly imbued with the values of his age. These are explicitly secular values—he does not see Bretons’ high fertility as part of faithful religiosity, for example, but rather as part of a trust that the community would care for children, and attributes emigration to the worldly causes of the railroad and army service, as did secular observers in the next century.

The finest recent historical study of Saint-Denis around 1890 corroborates Lemoine’s findings with the use of sources such as electoral lists and censuses. Jean-Paul Brunet first analyzed the problems of socialism and communism, then the integration of newcomers like the Bretons at the end of the nineteenth century, using the sources and methods of social historians of the 1970s and 1980s, as well as Lemoine’s work. Brunet found that 61 percent of the Breton electors worked as day laborers, with only 11 percent in metallurgy, which was so important to Saint-Denis industry, and 19 percent in various other branches of production. Brunet carefully traced the dwellings of the electors, placing them in certain neighborhoods and in scattered rented rooms. He also confirmed their rural origins, writing that certain small villages and little towns had been “bled white” by departures over a twenty-year period. Indeed, the Bretons of Saint-Denis offer a specific profile.

SAINT-DENIS AND ITS BRETONS

Saint-Denis is a banlieue of Paris that reaches north from the city borders in the shape of a tree. The long trunk of the tree is an industrial district crossed with railroad yards, the top an ancient city which became an industrial center. Saint-Denis was a mix of the very old and the industrial, of massive capital investment and poverty, of open fields and environmental degradation. Heavy industry came to the town over the course
of the nineteenth century. The area flooded with newcomers, especially workers, from the Île-de-France, from the north, and in the 1880s from Brittany, as well as from Belgium and Italy. More were to come from farther afield by the beginning of the twentieth century.

The plain of Saint-Denis stretched from the city limits of Paris to the historic city center. Industry began on the plain with a perfumery and producer of beauty products founded in 1827. The plain of Saint-Denis had an iron-bound future: a natural entrepôt and market location, it could receive coal and iron from the north and northeast by rail and materials from the sea via Le Havre and the Seine by ship to the canal Saint-Denis. The railroad came in 1873 with the creation of a passenger station and then a large freight station constructed between 1874 and 1878. The Société du Chemin de Fer Industriel de la Plaine Saint-Denis et d’Aubervilliers started with three lines in 1884 and was operating with twenty branch lines by 1890. Of the six freight stations supplying Paris, the one on the plain of Saint-Denis would be the largest. Connections to Paris were made by more rails: trains and tramways ran every quarter-hour from Paris to Saint-Denis beginning in 1888.48

Industries proliferated—many of them noxious chemical and fertilizer producers. In 1847 the Combes and Company Tannery opened, treating lamb- and goatskins. The family firm Coignet on the west side of Saint-Denis began producing glue and fertilizer in the early 1850s. Seven chemical factories opened that served the dye industry after 1860. François Dorvault, who bought the Pharmacie Centrale de France at the end of the 1860s, is the one who named Saint-Denis “the French Manchester,” a label that stuck.49 The vocation of Saint-Denis is clear from the Enquête Industrielle of 1872, in which large industries were simply categorized rather than listed individually. The largest industries, it reported, produced materials for rail production and steam engines. The second-largest employers produced a range of goods, from gloves, shoes, horsehair products, and mirrors to pianos. Next were the makers of candles, soap, perfume, chemical products, pharmaceutical products, and dyes. All in all large industry employed nearly 5,500 men, 900 women, and 400 child apprentices. Small producers of machine tools and dyes, laundries, and fabric processing facilities together employed several hundred workers. Only laundries fared badly, because as the report explained, they depended on the city’s water, which was being soiled by industry.50

Metallurgy was king: six metallurgy companies were founded in the
1860s and more in the 1870s. The jeweler Charles Christofle opened an annex for manufacturing nickel in Saint-Denis in 1875 and then adopted a technique for plating with silver or gold. A whole new class wanted silverplate; this was a great success because after 1880 it sold not only to individual clients but to trains, restaurants, hotels, spas, and casinos. Christofle thrived. Luxury industries had their niche as well: Dyonisians (as the residents of Saint-Denis call themselves) produced not only perfume, beauty products, and silverplate but also pianos. In 1897 the Austrian Ignace Pleyel, composer and music publisher, founded the Pleyel piano firm, which later turned out organs and harmoniums as well. Metallurgical plants took in nickel, copper, brass, and iron, making steam generators, wire, iron grills, metal bridges, rolling stock—every kind of domestic and industrial metal product. In the 1880s the gas industry developed, a new sector of production, processing the natural gas that furnished light for Paris. By the end of the century huge gas storage tanks were sited in Saint-Denis, where the Paris electric company located in 1903; all the plants were fueled by coal brought in by boat and by railroad. Thus Saint-Denis became the largest supplier of electricity and gas to Paris and the suburbs, and local historians claim that its plain became the premier industrial zone of continental Europe.51

The most industrial suburb of the Paris basin, Saint-Denis was a “glutton for unskilled labor.”52 In 1891 over 55 percent of people working in Saint-Denis were industrial workers. And this was big industry—in 1900 86 percent of factory workers toiled in firms with over one hundred other people. At this time one of the large metalworking firms employed over a thousand people, and metalworkers were the largest group of industrial workers; one of the large glassworks employed eight hundred workers, Christofle about eight hundred, and Pleyel six hundred. The original beauty products company employed three hundred workers year-round; one wire and grill company employed eight hundred men and women, a dye company up to thirteen hundred, and one tannery about a thousand workers in 1900, of whom two hundred were women.53 By 1902 Saint-Denis and the plain counted eighteen metallurgy factories, thirty-one chemical factories, and thirty-six manufacturers of paper, textiles, glass, and food.54 Most jobs were for men; nonetheless, women did find factory employment, especially in the perfume and clothing industries. Unlike in Paris and wealthy suburbs such as Neuilly, more men than women lived in Saint-Denis.55 This was the most populous suburb of Paris, with
51,000 people in 1891 and 60,000 in 1901. Nonetheless, there were crops of all kinds, vegetables and market gardens, because a fifth of the area was still under cultivation. Long before its industry developed, Saint-Denis was known for its distinguished history as the most ancient city in the Île-de-France, along with Paris. A second-century Gallo-Roman village, Saint-Denis thrived as a medieval market center. It became the burial place of the martyred first bishop of Paris, for whom it was named, and thereafter an important site of worship. Its extraordinary twelfth-century Gothic basilica houses the tombs of French royalty, including the elaborate tomb of Anne of Brittany and that of Louis xii. For its tombs and architecture, the basilica has long attracted visitors and continues to do so today.

Saint-Denis is also known for its political history. A proletarian commune, it would become socialist and then communist during the twentieth century, a light to what many believed would be the future. Its politics grew out of brutal working conditions and years of conflict well documented by historians including Brunet and Michelle Perrot. These conditions gave rise to anger, like that of the Breton Pierre Meubry, chauffeur for a chemical company, who put three bullets into his foreman after his salary was cut in 1885. Workplaces in the banlieue were known for their distance from Paris and hard working conditions. “It’s like Cayenne,” wrote the militant smithies in Paris in 1903, using the word bagne, a slang term for a French penal colony. Michelle Perrot is succinct: already in the 1880s, banlieues like Saint-Denis represented the “failure of urban history, and already terrifying the bourgeois.”

Saint-Denis was also known for its misery—for the wretched poverty and unsanitary housing endured by its inhabitants. In 1885 one journalist called it “the city of starving rats, scabrous factories, streets with greasy paving stones, dirty houses, of the muddy canal, its banks fouled by rotting carrion.” Two years later an inquiry on housing described this “anti-impressionist landscape” with equal distaste, and like many others emphasized the stench, quoting a worker who moaned about the ammonia that “seizes your eyes” when the odor would rise. The stifling odor came not only from the factory but from the notorious housing. Lemoine was looking at worker housing, he recalled, when he was stopped by a woman who threw herself in front of the concierge to prevent his seeing her place, because she had mistaken him for the management and was lodging seven men in a room intended for three. One household that he
did visit was a family of four lodged in one room. The son and daughter occupied one bed, the parents another; the wife had been bedridden with tuberculosis for two months.\textsuperscript{64}

The “Breton colonies” cited by Brunet were crowded indeed: the census of 1891 lists twenty-two households in the building at 10, rue de la Charronnerie. These included several people who lived alone—masons, day laborers, a dressmaker—but also households like the Breton family Le Cloarec, which included the day laborer head, his wife, and four children aged five to fifteen. Of the twenty-two heads of household, sixteen worked as day laborers. Closer to the canal, the building at 10, rue des Poissonniers housed sixty households, the majority headed by day laborers, many of whom were Bretons. One household gathered five single men with Breton names ranging in age from seventeen to forty-nine and another five men from twenty-three to fifty-two, but there were also a few solitaries and many couples. For example, the day laborer Robic and his wife, who was a cook, lived with their two babies, while the household of a shoemaker and his wife outnumbered all the rest with seven children aged six to twenty-five. Some households listed a lodger as a “friend.” Thus the dwelling at the rue des Poissonniers held every kind of household—single people, widows and widowers, male workers living together, young and mature families with and without boarders, and blended families like that of the hat maker, whose three eldest children bore the surname of his wife, now forty-six, while the younger children, two, four, and nine, bore his own.\textsuperscript{65}

Where exactly did the Bretons of Saint-Denis come from, and when? By all accounts the mass migration of Bretons to the Paris basin began only in the 1880s, and the dozen Bretons who married in Saint-Denis in 1875 were hardly typical of the mass migration that would come later.\textsuperscript{66} The men were skilled laborers for the most part, and came from other départements than the Côtes-d’Armor. They were coppersmiths, iron-workers, shoemakers, and blacksmiths. A widowed tinsmith from the town of Lorient in the Morbihan married the mother of his two children, ages five and three, herself a worker in the pearl industry; four metal-workers served as witnesses. A smith from the Ille-et-Vilaine married a dressmaker from Paris, and his two brothers—also ironworkers—stood up for him. The son of a shoemaker in Nantes, and himself a shoemaker, married the mother of their three young children who was herself a day laborer. Of the three women from the Côtes-d’Armor, one was a per-
fume worker, daughter of a single mother, who married a fellow perfume worker from the west the year after she had been widowed; two Breton friends from the nearby suburb of Pantin stood up for the bride. Another was a cook in Saint-Denis who married a coppersmith also from the Côtes-d’Armor; her brother-in-law, who lived in the same building as the groom, stood up for her. Marriages of compatriots like these would become very common by 1890 as the Breton community expanded.

BRETONS MARRY IN SAINT-DENIS

According to Lemoine, the Breton household in Saint-Denis was formed by a laborer who arrived in the banlieue as a single man, then found one compatriot to marry and another, a café owner, to witness the wedding. The marriages of Bretons in Saint-Denis during 1890 support some of Lemoine’s observations about Breton endogamous marriages, but they offer a more nuanced view of the Breton community because marriage records have a rich tale to tell. Marriage acts are valuable, because unlike conscription and electoral lists they bring women and families to center stage as brides and mothers. We know that Saint-Denis was a predominantly male place, with many jobs for men, and marriage records complement this understanding with a portrait of both men and women in the Paris basin. They identify the bride and groom by place and date of birth, occupation, and residence, as well as lineage—age, occupation, and location of parents, if living. In a list of four witnesses, they identify friends, neighbors, and often relatives by occupation, age, and address. In short, marriage records locate the bride and groom in the spaces of greater Paris and in its economic and social hierarchy, enabling us to link one generation to the other. As a consequence, marriage records allow a glimpse of the degree to which migration is a break from the past, a break with the family, and a break with family occupations.

The wedding experience of provincials provides a contrast with that of Parisians, and Bretons offer a special case. Maurice Garden’s revelatory analysis of a thousand marriages in and around Paris in 1885, including in Saint-Denis, discerns this general pattern, yielding a context for the Breton marriages in Saint-Denis five years later. Parisian weddings usually joined two young people under the age of twenty-five who both lived at home with their parents, and whose parents and family were in attendance; those of provincials joined two people several years older who
lived far from home and whose parents had in many cases long since passed away. The majority of marriage partners came from the provinces and, Garden wrote, nothing proved cultural mixing more than the lack of marriages among compatriots, since fewer than one marriage in five joined people from the same département. Most grooms were older than their brides, and brides who were born in the provinces were older than Parisiennes. Finally Garden, like Lemoine before him, found that café owners served as witnesses in nearly one-fifth of the marriages. He imagined the worker wedding, normally late on Saturday morning, to be followed with a drink at the establishment of the café owner, who was not only witness but friend and neighbor. Over one-eighth of these weddings in 1885 included the legitimization of a child, usually a baby born in the preceding year or two.

Breton marriages hold a distinct place: Breton brides were not only older on average by five years than Parisians, but also older than brides from any other province, marrying at about the age of twenty-eight. While 80 percent of Parisian women married before their twenty-fifth birthday, only 41 percent of Bretonnes did so. Yvonne Yven, whose story opened this chapter, married at thirty-one. In addition, Breton women were much more likely than Breton men to marry in greater Paris. Although marriages generally demonstrate that Paris was a melting pot, Garden found that some Bretons offered pockets of resistance to marriage with partners from other départements—those from the Côtes-d’Armor. Fewer than a fifth of the marriages were between provincials from the same département, but among those from the Côtes-d’Armor, it was over half.

Breton weddings in Saint-Denis were on the increase in the 1880s. Father Gautier counted twenty-seven Breton marriages in the parish of Saint-Denis-de-l’Estrée by 1884, recognizing Breton names: “des Le Gal, des Le Guilloux, des Le Goff, des Le Dantec, des Lecorre, etc., et puis des Yves-Marie, des Pierre-Marie, des Marie-Anne, des Marie-Jeanne, des Marie-Yvonne.” Nearly fifty couples from Brittany married in Saint-Denis in the year 1890; wedding parties gathered in the imposing new city hall that dated from 1883. In comparison to all couples, and even all Breton couples in the survey taken in 1885, the Breton wedding partners of Saint-Denis in 1890 constitute a distinct group that in many ways conforms to Lemoine’s impression. They were very likely to marry one another: the vast majority (two-thirds) of brides and grooms from Brittany married another Breton; likewise, two-thirds of the Bretons were
from the département of the Côtes-d’Armor, which at that time furnished the most Bretons to the Paris basin. Moreover, these were precisely the ones who married a fellow Breton; it was Bretons from the départements of French-speaking upper Brittany who married people from elsewhere in France (see Appendix, table 1).

Second, in this male banlieue men constituted the majority of Breton wedding partners. Moreover, as the cases below demonstrate, many of the Breton women who married in Saint-Denis made their living elsewhere in greater Paris. Neither men nor women demonstrate much education: only about two-thirds of the Breton brides and three-quarters of the Breton grooms could sign their names to the marriage act.

Finally, these brides were much younger than most Breton brides by a good five years, marrying on average at about twenty-three. And about a third of them resided with at least one parent who had also come to Saint-Denis, validating views like those of Lemoine that newcomers from Brittany tended to settle in Saint-Denis en masse. In 1890 unmarried co-habitating Breton couples seemed relatively rare, since they were unlikely to live with their partner before marriage. Consensual unions in Paris, which I will discuss below, were much more common but produced few babies before marriage. Breton marriage partners in Saint-Denis were therefore insular, usually marrying other Bretons. This proletarian group was minimally educated, but nonetheless resistant to the Parisian practice of consensual unions.

Witnesses to the weddings conducted in 1890 traced ties of friendship within and outside the community of Bretons. Family was often present in the Paris basin and in attendance at the ceremony—relatives counted for almost 60 percent of the identifiable witnesses in Saint-Denis, most often brothers, cousins, or uncles; neighbors counted for over 40 percent. Relatives in many cases lived very nearby or in the same building. The café owners indeed acted as friends to these Breton migrants, much more than to the average bride and groom in the citywide survey of marriages in 1885, serving as witnesses in eighteen of the forty-nine weddings of that year and sometimes serving in more than one wedding. The stories of emblematic couples demonstrate common patterns of sociability, work, and migration trajectories.

Marie Guillou and François Bernard were a couple from two inland villages of the French-speaking area of the Côtes-d’Armor, and when they married each had a brother who served as a witness. Other witnesses
were a friend (another worker in the same building as François) and Yves Barre, the café owner who was a witness to no fewer than three Breton weddings in 1890. The groom worked as a laborer in Saint-Denis, like his father and his brother; his mother had stayed at home in the Côtes-d’Armor but had sent her consent to the marriage, as the law required. François’s father and brother lived together nearby. This marriage reveals connections among Bretons across the Paris basin, since the groom, his brother, his father, and the bride’s brother, Alexandre, lived close together in Saint-Denis; the bride, however, lived in a more prosperous neighborhood north of the Opéra in central Paris, where she worked as a domestic servant. The couple may have met because the two brothers were friends or workmates; they probably lived in Saint-Denis after the marriage but not necessarily—after all, Yvonne Yven, kept on as a domestic after her marriage, did not live with her husband for years.πΩ

Other marriage records confirm that the Breton community, even that of unskilled laborers, stretched across Paris. Two laborer grooms twenty-six years of age, Yves Martin and Jacques Le Pierre, came from villages near one another in Brittany and lived in the same building. Both were sons of laborers. In the winter of 1890 they married Marguerite Parlouez and Marie-Louise Le Goaët, brides from two villages near their own. All four were born in Breton-speaking communes.∫≠ The two young women worked as nurses, not in Saint-Denis but rather in the huge psychiatric hospital called Vaucluse, south of the city near today’s Orly airport and very far from Saint-Denis; Vaucluse was built on the grounds of an estate and had opened in 1869 for a thousand patients. Nursing in such French hospitals did not require prolonged education; on the contrary, it was an occupation close to that of hospital aide, one that offered steady employment along with housing and a modest salary and attracted many women from Brittany.∫∞ The key location for the two weddings between laborers and nurses from the Côtes-d’Armor was a building in Saint-Denis, where both grooms and their brothers resided. Witnesses lived close by, except for one cousin who worked in Paris as a concierge. The men were tied to Saint-Denis, but the brides found their work elsewhere. Their courtships could have begun at home or at Sunday outings. In any case, we cannot assume that marriage allowed the couples to live together, for the women may have continued their jobs at least until the birth of their first child.

Breton grooms mirror the Breton electors in Saint-Denis.∫≤ Over two-thirds of the grooms were unskilled laborers, journaliers. Also young, they came from the same towns and villages. Correspondingly, the com-
mune that sent the most electors to Saint-Denis also sent the most marriage partners: Plougonver, an inland commune in the Côtes-d’Armor that was home to 2,500 people in 1891. When Lemoine wrote in 1892 that 70 percent of the Breton men in Saint-Denis were from Plougonver he was exaggerating, but not by much. This little town was the centerpiece for the pair of weddings described above, joining a groom from the town with people from three nearby villages; likewise, the wedding of François and Marie described above joined people from the same canton.

Participants in many of the weddings in 1890 match the portrait of Bretons in Saint-Denis: they were from the part of the Côtes-d’Armor in lower Brittany, of low status, and lived in poverty. For example, practically no one was able to sign the document at the wedding of Marie Yvonne Barenton and Auguste Le Gros, day laborers on a Breton street in Saint-Denis. Their wedding was witnessed by four friends, all of whom lived nearby and were day laborers. Of the entire party of six, bride and groom included, only two were literate, and they were witnesses.

To end a description of Bretons in Saint-Denis with such couples would be to make a caricature of this community. As homogeneous as it was, it also included others with more skills and more resources. As Brunet wrote, emigrants from the Morbihan and Finistère had a different profile and were more likely to be from towns. For example, Jacques Garel from Pontivy, an administrative center in the Morbihan, a café owner and son of a property owner, married Anne Le Joly in the spring of 1890. Anne was the daughter of fish sellers, born and raised in Saint-Denis. The witnesses were two bakers, another café owner, and a skilled laborer. Everyone could sign the document.

The burgeoning community of Bretons in Saint-Denis thus belongs to a quite homogeneous commune in that most industrial of banlieues. However, not all Bretons were alike, and those from the upper Breton départements of the Ille-et-Vilaine and Loire-Atlantique tended to have better jobs and more comfortable lives. As late as 1995 Brunet executed a stereotypical portrait of Bretons in Saint-Denis, drawing from Lemoine: “Unlike other immigrant groups, who seem to melt into what one could call the ‘Dionysian melting pot’ without losing their personality or their native strength, the Breton in Saint-Denis seemed uprooted, bruised by life, tossed at the mercy of circumstance.” A grim and damning portrait indeed, but one that reminds us that integration and community do not necessarily produce stability or prosperity.

The Paris basin offered other destinations as well that also had the
reputation as a destination for Breton newcomers, and so I now turn to
the city itself and to an area profoundly distinct from Saint-Denis: the
Fourteenth Arrondissement, which borders the railroad station where
Bretons debarked upon their arrival in Paris.

FOURTEENTH ARRONDISSEMENT AND ITS BRETONS

The Fourteenth Arrondissement covers a hilly plain that stretches south
from central Paris, created from a slice of southern Paris and rural com-
munes between the Boulevard Montparnasse and the fortifications sur-
rounding Paris until after the Great War. A premier result of the will of
Napoleon III and the urbanism of the Baron Haussmann, it shows all the
signs of Second Empire city planning. But the Fourteenth also possesses
an older history, a history of agriculture, of important institutions, and of
rural communes that shaped it well into the twentieth century.

From the beginning of the seventeenth century, religious institutions
were founded outside the city in what would become the Fourteenth
Arrondissement. The Capucins seated their novitiate in the middle of a
spacious agricultural domain early in the seventeenth century, part of
which would become a hospital for victims of venereal disease. Another
hospital, founded by the Prêtres de l’Oratoire, opened in the next year,
followed at mid-century by a hospital called the Santé for victims of the
plague, renamed Saint Anne after its founder Anne of Austria. It would
also serve the insane who were well enough to work the earth. The sisters
of Port-Royal founded a house which would be condemned as Jansenist
by Louis XIV and serve a number of functions before it was transformed
into la Maternité in 1796; it would function as a maternity hospital to the
present day. Subsequently a magnificent building was constructed from
which the arrondissement would take its official name: the Observatory.
And a few years before the Revolution, the Abbé Cochin built a hospital
for the poor; Cochin was particularly interested in the quarry workers
who were subject to so many accidents, an especially grave problem
because all these institutions were built from stones dug out of under-
ground quarries in the area—quarries which left dangerous subterranean
voids that occasionally collapsed.89 Some underground quarries were
filled upon implementation of the great Parisian health measure of the end
of the old regime: the emptying of the cemeteries and the creation of the
catacombs, where lie the bones of generations of Parisians. The final old
regime structure that shaped the Fourteenth was the Farmers-General Wall of 1787. Although it had no military value, this wall promoted development just inside its parameters, which ran south of and parallel to the boulevard Montparnasse; in the opinion of the historian René Cot
tard, this development marked the beginning of neighborhood life.90

With the Revolution came the founding of the communes of Vaugirard and Montrouge and the repression of religious institutions that became hospitals and asylums, although nursing religious orders remained to care for the sick, the pregnant, and foundlings.91 A firm foundation had been laid for hospitals and other institutions in what would become the Four
teenth Arrondissement. This complex space would be cut off from the south by the massive fortifications built to encircle Paris in the 1840s. These were ten meters high, and stretched to an enormous vacant area two hundred meters across, effectively creating a formidable divide be
tween the city and suburbs to the south. The barrier of the fortifications meant that when Paris was enlarged it would extend from the Farmers-
General Wall out to the fortifications, and indeed this is exactly what occurred in 1860.

The new Fourteenth Arrondissement founded in 1860 was home to some fifty thousand people, most of whom lived away from the fortifica
tions and closer to the boulevards, which had long been part of Paris. These were rentiers, workers, and members of the petty bourgeoisie, along with horticulturalists, market gardeners, and millers. Like many parts of Paris, the Fourteenth became a construction site for new urban works during the Second Empire, works that would open wide new streets, plant trees on boulevards and avenues, and create a system of water and sewers. One of the great creations was the enormous green zone of the Parc Montsouris, nearly forty acres of plantings, lawns, ponds, and a great reservoir. Old buildings were renovated; a new and spacious Saint Anne asylum was finished in 1867, as was the prison on the site of Santé Hospital that would also bear the name Santé, and a new façade for the foundling hospital. New bourgeois apartment buildings distin
guished the avenues and boulevards, and in neighborhoods like the Plai
sance little houses appeared, many occupied by worker newcomers who helped to construct the Universal exposition of 1867 on the Champ de Mars.92 They had arrived by the Chemin de Fer de l’Ouest (Western Rail-
road Line), which served Normandy and Brittany and whose rails bor
tered the arrondissement and ended at the Gare Montparnasse. Among
those who debarked in 1868 was the engineer Fulgence Bienvenüe (thir-
teenth child of a notary in Uzel, a French-speaking village in the Côtes-
d'Armor), the father of the Paris Métro. This arrondissement, in short, was one of the privileged fields of urban development during the Second Empire, and one where institutional life would clearly continue to be important. By 1870 seventy thousand people lived in the Fourteenth Ar-
rendissement: in the Plaisance (40 percent), the central neighborhood
called the Petit Montrouge (30 percent), Montparnasse, consisting of the
neighborhoods along the most central boulevards (23 percent), and the
neighborhood of La Santé, which reached out to the Parc Montsouris
(7 percent).  

Like most peripheral areas of the city, the Fourteenth Arrondissement
was a heterogeneous space that included residents of all kinds by the
late nineteenth century. Professionals and members of the bourgeoisie
lived on the boulevards, their servants and underlings in the same build-
ings (but up under the eaves), with shopkeepers and café owners doing
business on the ground floor. The densely populated Plaisance near
the busy Montparnasse railroad station and the railroad tracks housed
thousands of workers. Beyond the boulevards of Petit Montrouge, apart-
ment buildings gave way to villas and little houses, interspersed with
farms and gardens. The fortifications and the so-called zone beyond pro-
vided sites on the periphery for marginal people. Contemporary ob-
servers and Arget's photographs show us caravans of gypsies, commu-
nities of rag pickers, and a host of shady and not so shady characters
found throughout the city's periphery, including the famous delinquents
labeled Apaches. This was also an area for market gardeners, and as
family photographs and postcards attest, it was a great site for Sunday
outings, walks, and picnics. Émile Zola wrote that these illustrated
Parisians' "immoderate taste for the countryside" and had people reduced
to "going several kilometers on foot to go see the countryside from the
top of the fortifications." Such walks out of Paris to the countryside at
the end of the rue Vercingétorix be were part of the pleasant memories of
the quartier.

Leisure was hardly limited to the outskirts: there was also plenty to do
in the densely populated urban zone of the Fourteenth Arrondissement.
The celebration of the first Bastille Day holiday in 1880 included fire-
works at the Observatoire and a huge street dance at the Impasse du
Maine—celebrations that would become more widespread in the years
before the Great War. Notably, the rue de la Gaîté near Montparnasse became famous for entertainment. The Montparnasse Theater opened in 1819, followed by other theaters and music halls like the popular Gaîté Montparnasse and eventually by casinos and cinemas, so the rue de la Gaîté deserved its reputation as a party street. This was also a quartier known for its prostitutes on both boulevards and sidestreets. More closely bound to Parisian night life than Saint-Denis, the Fourteenth had a lot to offer.

Worker life developed especially in the Plaisance neighborhood, where the lodging trade developed, especially the trade in *garnis*: furnished rooms above a bar run by the proprietor, who was usually a café owner. To reach one’s room or apartment one had to pass through the bar, with its attendant demands and temptations. Industries expanded, bringing on new workers, many of whom were hired to work at the Gare Montparnasse or by the Compagnie de l’Ouest on the railroad. Some employers especially needed skilled workers, like the precision optics shop of Jules Charpentier that opened in 1878, the post office print shop, and the chocolatier Salavin, but the asphalt company that opened about 1880 and the workshops of the clothing manufacturer La Belle Jardinière hired men and women with less training. Nonetheless, in contrast to Saint-Denis, for the most part this was not big industry. Indeed, in the *Enquête Industrielle* of 1872 the Plaisance neighborhood was declared to have no large industry whatsoever. The largest industries in the arrondissement were a water piping company in the Montparnasse quarter with 250 workers, a cotton mill employing 130 women and 25 men, the Sceaux railroad, which employed about 120 men, and the company that made clothing for the gendarmerie, employing about 120 men and women. Machine industries, carpentry shops, and tanners employed 50 to 60 men, and the production of shoes, locks, hats, clothing, buttons, and carriages employed several hundred men and women in small workshops throughout the arrondissement. The population of the Fourteenth Arrondissement dropped with the Franco-Prussian war and the Commune, but then came back to 92,000 by 1881.

The Fourteenth has had the reputation of a home to Bretons, and the Montparnasse railroad station brought people directly from the countryside beginning in 1852 and connected with the westernmost city of Brest in 1865. Memorialists of the Fourteenth Arrondissement write that “if it were a province, the Fourteenth Arrondissement would wear sabots
and a round hat. Just as Auvergnats took over the Bastille, Bretons conquered Montparnasse. For the same reasons that explorers first settled in their landing port before going any further, Bretons set down their suitcases near station where they got off the train. At the end of the iron umbilical cord which tied them to their home country. This reputation is well deserved, for the Fourteenth Arrondissement, particularly around the Gare Montparnasse, has long been dotted with Breton cafés, hotels, crêperies, and other gathering places. Census and marriage records bear out a concentration of Bretons in Paris, but not exclusively in the Fourteenth. As Alain Faure has written, Paris has no real ghettos; its economy has been varied, vast, and strong enough to employ Bretons and other newcomers all over the city and in the banlieues. By 1875 Bretons had begun to come to the Fourteenth, some as distinguished as the engineer Fulgence Bienvenüe, but others as workers, many of whom were women.

We see some of these Bretons—a mere thirty-four of them, twenty of them women—in marriage records in 1875. What is most striking about these marriages is that in the majority of cases they joined a Breton bride with a groom who had been born somewhere else in France; these were marriages of women who were not going to return home. Most of the Bretonnes married men who had reasonably good jobs as housepainters, policemen, clerks, bus conductors, and railroad workers (only two married unskilled workers). Among these was the glove maker Victorine Bouget, from the Breton capital city of Rennes, who married a typographer from Alsace late in the year, and the dressmaker Héloïse Bruère, from a town in the Côtes-d’Armor, who married a housepainter from Paris in the spring. At Héloïse’s wedding only her husband’s relatives and workmates stood up for the couple, but Victorine had family at her wedding; her mother was present and her cousin, a locksmith, served as a witness. This was probably a case of family migration that had brought parents to the city with children in tow. A few of the newcomers were as fortunate as Victorine, because they had family in Paris and so were able to live with their parents and to hold the kind of skilled jobs normally preserved for Parisians. A few Breton women who came to Paris with their families were able to enter a marriage “sans profession,” with no job at all; only two of the Breton brides were domestic servants, and one worked as a cook. This is a bit surprising, because domestic service was primarily a job for the unmarried women, often newcomers, and espe-
cially because later on Breton women would become famous for their presence in domestic service.

Likewise, the Breton grooms had skilled or white-collar jobs, as carpenters, brush makers, bronze workers, machine operators, transportation workers, and clerks. Georges Tabour’s work was typical: he was a machine operator from Nantes who married an umbrella worker from the central Highlands in January. His father, also a machine operator, and mother lived nearby, in the Sixth Arrondissement, and they attended the wedding along with his brother, a wood carver. The bride’s brother, an umbrella merchant, and her cousin, an architect, stood up for her. Like their brides, Breton grooms reflected the heterogeneity of the Fourteenth Arrondissement, which offered employment to people in commerce, production, and services. Over half the brides and grooms were from upper Brittany, the départements where Rennes and Nantes were located and in which the Gallo patois rather than the Celtic Breton language was spoken. Many of the thirty-four Bretons came from cities (five from Rennes alone) and other towns rather than from the countryside. Only about 15 percent were from the Côtes-d’Armor, which would send so many Bretons to Paris later. The Bretons who married in the Fourteenth Arrondissement in 1875 were relatively skilled and urban, and came from parts of Brittany that were the most fully integrated into the life of the nation. Like the brides and grooms from Brittany who married in Saint-Denis in the same year, they hardly fit the image of the unskilled newcomer or country bumpkin.

Fifteen years later, in 1890, the Fourteenth Arrondissement was a fast growing neighborhood of over 100,000, on its way to 142,000 people by the turn of the century. The census tells us that the largest employers were clothing and toilette manufacturers, with over 13,000 women and 2,500 men workers. The building trades employed over 6,000 men; metallurgy, 2,500 men. But over 2,500 men and 3,000 women worked in a wide range of industries that “related to science, the letters, and arts;” including paper production, printing, binding, the making of print characters, and the publication of books, music, newspapers, and journals, as well as the theater, concerts, and the production of musical instruments and chemistry equipment. In the transportation sector nearly 1,400 men worked with horses (as coachmen and stable hands, and in carriage rentals), some 16,000 of which were required by the system of coaches, tramways, and omnibuses; another 700 worked with the railroad. Postal
workers numbered 600. Rentiers and propriétaires made up most of the 4,500 people listed in the “liberal professions” in the census, and they were served by over 1,500 domestics, the vast majority of whom were women. In addition, over 550 cooks worked in the arrondissement, along with 2,600 laundry and pressing workers, most of them women. Finally, there were 750 hospital workers in the arrondissement, two-thirds of whom were women. And 300 people worked the land. The Fourteenth Arrondissement offered an enormous variety of employment to rich and poor alike; it offered industrial work to men, but it was also an arrondissement that employed an enormous number of women in the needle trades and in domestic service, those classic areas of female employment, as well as in the new secular occupations of nurse and hospital attendant.

More heterogeneous than Saint-Denis, the Fourteenth Arrondissement was nonetheless marked by the railroad and the Gare Montparnasse. The novelist Georges Duhamel left a precious memoir of growing up by the railroad lines in the Plaisance neighborhood in the 1890s as part of his novel La chronique des Pasquier. His childhood home was on the fifth floor: “The staircase climbed, climbed across family upon family superimposed like geological layers. You could hear a mandolin here, a yippy little dog there, on the right the consumptive who breathed with such difficulty. And the fat lady with the eternal song ‘I love you, do you understand that word?’ . . . and the tap . . . tap . . . from the apartment of the monsieur who works at home on incomprehensible things. And everywhere, sewing machines and the patter of children in the hallways and the voices of men and women who talk about and quarrel about family affairs. All of that so clear to the acute and distracted ear of the little boy.”

This neighborhood, since demolished and rebuilt in urban renewal projects of the 1960s, was at the mercy of the railroad. When the trains came, “like a torrent of furious energies,” they beat the side of the buildings. With each passing train the entire building trembled, beginning in the cellar and working up each story. Bottles knocked against the wall of the kitchen, and fine powder rained on the balconies; the odor of coal came in with gusts of winds, “the smell of the trains.” The view from the windows of Duhamel’s childhood home was one of incoherent city rooftops—little houses in some areas, apartment buildings in others—marked by a partial view of the Eiffel Tower. Little hotels, stables, public baths, and a wash house marked his street. To Duhamel as a child, the most obvious sign of order and wit from this view was the railroad yards and workshops, roundhouses, and semaphores.
Bretons Marry in the Fourteenth Arrondissement

By 1890 the marriages of the Fourteenth Arrondissement were celebrated in considerably more beautiful surroundings than the apartments bordering the railroad tracks: in the town hall, enlarged and renewed in the late 1880s. Three frescoes decorated the walls of the marriage room, evoking the most beautiful locations in the arrondissement: the first, called the engagement, depicted a couple in the Parc Montsouris; the second, the wedding dinner on a restaurant terrace; the third, a family at ease, outdoors on the fortifications. Who were the people from Brittany who entered this room to marry in 1890, where did they fit into the society of the Fourteenth Arrondissement, and how did they fit with the citywide survey of marriages in 1885?

The nearly one hundred Bretons who resided and married in the Fourteenth are a distinct group, quite different from the Bretons who married in Saint-Denis and from those in the citywide survey. They reflect the late-century surge of migration from the Côtes-d’Armor, since about half are from that département and another quarter are from the upper Breton départements of Ille-et-Vilaine and the Loire-Atlantique. Continuing the trend set by the few Breton marriages in 1875, a clear majority are women (61 percent), so that they are a much more female group than the Bretons in Saint-Denis or the Bretons surveyed by Garden, reflecting perhaps the youth of newcomers and work available for women in the Fourteenth. The pattern of intermarriage is very different as well: it seems that these are the newcomers whom Garden was describing when he wrote that “coming to Paris is really a complete change of existence: young men and women don’t come to Paris to find themselves among natives of their home region, but to try a new adventure, to make their life as Parisians and not as transplanted provincials.” About a quarter married another Breton, but the clear majority of marriages joined a Bretonne with a man who had been born elsewhere. As in Saint-Denis, those who did marry another Breton were most likely from the Côtes-d’Armor. And these brides were much older than the Bretonnes in Saint-Denis; those who married for the first time did so at about twenty-seven years of age rather than at twenty-three—perhaps because they had been living and working in the Paris basin longer than the women in Saint-Denis and had come on their own, rather than with parents. Everyone was able to sign the marriage record (see Appendix, table 2).
About half the Bretons of the Fourteenth Arrondissement reported
the same address as their spouse at the time of the wedding, and so it is
likely—but not certain—that they were living in a consensual union. Although such an arrangement was common in Paris, no record reveals exactly how common. According to partial records almost a third of some groups lived in stable consensual unions, but in the working-class neighborhood of Belleville, for example, only one in six or seven marriages regularized a consensual union. Bretons in the Fourteenth were much more likely than those in Saint-Denis to be living with their partner than with a parent when they married. Although antibourgeois ideology sanctioned state marriage during the Third Republic, poverty is likely to provide more of an explanation than ideology. Consensual unions have been firmly tied to poverty and a lack of social resources on the part of the woman and man.

Also in contrast to those in Saint-Denis, many Bretons—a quarter of them—had borne or fathered a child before their wedding. This is a high proportion as well, in contrast with only about 15 percent of marriages serving to legitimize a child in Garden’s citywide survey of a thousand marriages in 1885, from which he concluded that consensual unions were an important social phenomenon, and that marriage after a child’s birth provided another significant pattern. Consensual unions and births to single mothers were common in Paris, but births out of wedlock were a rarity in Brittany, so shared addresses and children born before the wedding indicate that many Bretons adopted the courtship and cohabitation practices of the Parisian working class. The status of working-class women—especially newcomers without brothers or fathers in town to enforce a marriage promise—clearly made them more vulnerable to bearing children while they were single. Indeed the high proportion of Bretons with children born while they were single testifies to their social vulnerability, as well as to poverty and the difficulty of gathering all the requisite documents for marriage, such as birth certificates, notarized documents attesting to the consent of parents, and death certificates of deceased parents; Yvonne Yven undertook this considerable task after she and Jean Chabot agreed to marry. Yet poor women and men did marry, and among most who legitimized a child at their wedding, it seems that the groom was the father of a baby recently born in Paris.

Neighbors played a large role in these weddings. Of the witnesses who could be identified, most dwelt in the same building as the bride or
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The stories told by actes de mariage are worth recounting, for they tell us a good deal about the origins and trajectories of Bretons in Paris. In 1890 these marriages fell into three distinct groups: those which joined a Breton woman with a man born elsewhere, those which joined a Breton groom with a woman born elsewhere, and the marriages of two Bretons. Couples in every group were likely to have a child. Brief exemplary stories from each group of Breton marriage partners convey lived histories; I emphasize those of the Breton bride with a groom from another province because this pattern predominates.

The occupations and friendships of the bride and groom suggest that the weddings were embedded in a web of urban relationships and that the bride and groom looked to a future in Paris. Most seem to have resulted from a courtship in Paris. This is true for the women who married men born elsewhere, the majority of brides in the Fourteenth Arrondissement who married men in skilled and secure occupations. Yvonne Le Corre, a housewife, lived with her railroad worker husband François near the station in the Plaisance neighborhood when they married in January 1890, at the same time legitimizing their son Pierre, who had been born two years earlier. Yvonne was twenty-seven; her husband was thirty and from western France, where his widowed mother worked as a day laborer. Yvonne’s mother and her father, a shoemaker in her Bretonnant village in the Côtes-d’Armor, sent proof of their consent to the marriage, as law required. Who witnessed this wedding? Three men in the same building, and the café owner from around the corner. This wedding was a neighborhood affair, rooted in a crowded building near the railroad tracks. Like many couples in Paris, Yvonne and François had probably been living together for some time.

Marie Lesigne was a typical Breton bride in the spring of 1890, a cook from the bretonnant area of the Côtes-d’Armor. Marie married a policeman from northern France who lived in the same building as she—an avenue apartment building—and an assortment of men in the neighborhood witnessed the wedding. She and the groom were both twenty-eight years of age, and neither had a relative at the wedding; Marie’s parents
worked the land and sent proof of their consent. The origins of these relationships are ultimately mysterious, but that of Marie may well have originated in the avenue apartment building, in the neighborhood where she shopped for food, or at a street dance or other public gathering. In any case both Yvonne and Marie were likely to remain in Paris, where their husbands had a history of secure work.

The grooms from Brittany in the Fourteenth Arrondissement who did not marry women from their home area worked at a skilled trade. And like the Breton brides, they married later, in their thirties and forties. Among these was Jean Scolan, from the port town of Lorient in the Morbihan, a baker in Paris who at the age of thirty-nine married Zoë, a twenty-two-year-old florist from the Ardèche who lived and worked with her mother in the same building as Jean on one of the boulevards of the Fourteenth Arrondissement. Jean’s widowed mother was a rentière in his hometown who sent her permission for the union; although Zoë’s father had disappeared years ago, her mother attended. Two bakers stood up for Jean; a neighbor and a fellow migrant stood up for Zoë. It seems that Jean’s future looked bright for a man in his forties; his vocation and his comrades at the wedding suggest that it would be a future cradled not by the Breton community but rather by his comrades in the workplace.

The Breton couples who married in the Fourteenth Arrondissement probably met in Paris. When Jeanne Dupuis, a twenty-one-year-old typesetter from the Ille-et-Vilaine in upper Brittany, married Yves Le Roux, a twenty-four-year-old railroad worker from a town in the Côtes-d’Armor, she was living with her mother in the rue Daguerre, and Yves was in the same building. Yves’s parents were property owners at home, and Jeanne’s widowed mother was a day laborer. The witnesses to this wedding were three men who lived in the same building: a day laborer, a chauffeur, and a property owner; the other witness was a coachman who lived across the street. The couple had started their lives in Breton villages but had good urban jobs and an urban future. Like most of the Bretons who married in the Fourteenth Arrondissement that year, they had relatively few close connections to family, and seemed to be on the threshold of a shared urban life. These were newcomers in the melting pot that was Paris, deserters from provincial life and new citizens of the capital city.
The 1890s saw a surge in the number of Bretons in Paris basin—especially those from the Côtes-d’Armor, who increased their numbers from nearly 26,000 in 1891 to over 30,000 five years later and 36,000 at the turn of the century. At the beginning of the decade the Côtes-d’Armor was in twenty-first place among the départements that sent people to greater Paris, but by the turn of the century it ranked tenth, and 59 of every 1,000 people in the Côtes-d’Armor lived in the Paris basin.∞≥ The lack of work in Brittany provided a push and the possibilities of Paris the pull. It is no wonder that Lemoine wrote of some villages being “bled white” by emigration. Women especially left Brittany for Paris. The abbé Gautier ascribes the large number of Bretons in central Paris in 1896 to the presence of Breton women who worked in bourgeois homes as domestics.

Although the poorer men and women of Brittany were both subject to exploitation in Paris, but of course only women were at risk of pregnancy. This was especially true for migrant women, who were the most financially and socially vulnerable in this relatively new and very female migration stream. As George Alter has shown, these women did not have fathers or brothers in town to enforce a marriage when pregnancy occurred. They were the women who did not live with their parents but on their own in a rented room or garni, like most couturières in the city.∞≥∑ The domestic servant was perhaps even more sexually vulnerable, often housed in an unlocked room on the sixth floor, apart from both her employer’s family and her compatriots in an unsupervised and unprotected setting. There are many stories like that of the domestic who complained to the family of the adolescent son who had come to her room at night to have sex with her, a narrative greeted with laughter by the family. The social relations of nineteenth-century Paris meant that middle-class men expected to have unfettered access to working women—especially those close to hand. Indeed, over a third of the women in the maternity hospital for the poor were domestic servants in the 1890s. The “poor and pregnant in Paris,” as Rachel Fuchs has called the women who needed aid in the nineteenth century, numbered in the thousands.∞≥∏
tion of La Maternité, the primary free public hospital in the Paris basin, at the edge of the arrondissement on the boulevard Port-Royal. An estimated 200,000 women delivered babies there between 1830 and 1900, an average of 2,000 to 4,000 per year.\textsuperscript{137} Because women preferred the services of a midwife, only the poor delivered in this hospital, and an invaluable portrait of these women can be drawn from the hospital records.\textsuperscript{138} For the most part the women were between the ages of twenty and twenty-seven, with an average age of twenty-four for single mothers, and in the 1890s 72 percent of women who gave birth in La Maternité were single. Between 1870 and 1900 46 percent of the single mothers who delivered in La Maternité worked as domestic servants, and about 14 percent worked as seamstresses; others were day laborers, laundresses, linen menders, and cooks.\textsuperscript{139} Most important in this context, the mothers in La Maternité were overwhelmingly migrants to Paris, born outside the Paris basin (75 percent of the married women who gave birth in La Maternité in the 1890s, and 82 percent of single women, had been born outside the Seine). Yet the vast majority had become pregnant while living in Paris.\textsuperscript{140}

Moreover, just as there was a surge of Bretons to Paris in the 1890s, so there was also a surge of Bretons to La Maternité in the same period. The Côtes-d'Armor, which until then had provided under 3 percent of the patients to La Maternité, now sent the highest percentage of single women to the hospital of twenty-one regions—one out of seven. Between 1890 and 1900 they came especially from the Côtes-d'Armor (see map 3).\textsuperscript{141} And although over half the single mothers in La Maternité worked as domestic servants, nearly all the Breton mothers were domestics. The sudden appearance of Bretonnes in La Maternité is particularly striking, because other areas that gave birth to women in La Maternité, like the Nord and Alsace, had higher rates of illegitimacy in those home areas, whereas illegitimacy rates in Brittany itself were low throughout the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{142} The presence of Breton women in La Maternité signals not only the importance of women among Bretons in Paris but their acute social vulnerability.

Neither consensual unions nor bearing a child out of wedlock precluded marriage for women, including Breton women. The Breton brides in 1890s certainly show this. Many lived with their husband before marriage, sometimes for years. For example, when the postman Charles Taupin and the day laborer Marie Garel married in March they did so at
home, because Charles was on his deathbed at the young age of thirty-seven. They took the occasion to legitimize their daughter, born four years earlier, and their son, born the previous year, both in the Fourteenth Arrondissement. Charles was born in a French-speaking hamlet in the Morbihan, Marie in a hamlet in the Ille-et-Vilaine. Marie was not among the most highly skilled or highly paid of Breton emigrants.

Breton women were also part of the traffic in wet nurses (nourrices), foundlings, and mother’s milk that linked women in Paris and other cities to the women in the French countryside before the First World War. Families from the Côtes-d’Armor took in abandoned children from the hospice in Saint-Brieuc for a fee, just as rural families in many parts of

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**MAP 3.** Percentage of single mothers in La Maternité accounted for by each region, 1890–1900. Daniel Courgeau, “Three Centuries of Spatial Mobility in France,” *UNESCO Reports and Papers in the Social Sciences*, 51 (1982), 53; Archives de l’Assistance Publique, l’Hôpital Port Royal, Registres des Entrées, 1890, 1895, 1900.
France took in abandoned children. Women from the Côtes-d’Armor and the Morbihan, along with women from other rural areas of France, served as wet nurses in the city. Recently delivered women left their own newborns in Brittany while they went to serve as nourrices for Parisian babies, a practice that appalled the Breton Father Bourhy. He claimed in 1894 that nearly half the women from his parish of Hénon left for Paris as wet nurses, and then stayed on for two or three years to take care of the children they had nursed. Their appetite for gain was nourished by the 800 to 900 francs per year that they earned in Paris, and so, he claimed, the women wanted a new pregnancy right away so that they could leave again, encouraged by the eager recruiters who hired women with newborn babies. Bourhy emphasized the disastrous consequences of high mortality in his parish in 1894, when parish records recorded thirty deaths of children under the age of two (at a time when the mean number of births was seventy-two), and laid the blame on neglectful, departed mothers. According to Bourhy this disaster was not only demographic but social. Having left the laundry and cooking to the man of the house, returning women would be appalled at their situation back home after living in considerably more luxurious circumstances.

Today these conditions are understood quite differently as part of the “traffic in misery” linking migration, wet nursing, and deserted children. This traffic centered in the Morvan in Burgundy, which received hundreds of foundlings from Paris and furnished 302 wet nurses to elite families in the capital during the spring of 1901. Nonetheless, the Breton départements of the Côtes-d’Armor and the Morbihan were also engaged in this traffic—the Côtes-d’Armor furnished 165 wet nurses to Paris and 188 to the département of the Seine in 1901; for the Morbihan these figures were 95 and 111. Together the two furnished almost 11 percent of all wet nurses to Paris and the Seine. Yet this traffic was almost invisible to Parisians.

Much more visible to Parisians, and reputedly more Breton, was the nightlife behind the Boulevard Montparnasse and the railroad station, in the Plaisance neighborhood of the Fourteenth Arrondissement, understood as a party neighborhood and the place to find Breton streetwalkers. We can learn something of the vie du quartier from the hastily scrawled police blotters. They report the essence of various incidents, along with the careful identification of the characters involved, especially the accused. This impressionistic view from the Plaisance quarter in the mid-1890s reveals most importantly that Bretons played a very small role
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in disrupting the neighborhood: only 4 percent of some 1,650 neighborhood disputes and scandals mention a Breton. As several scholars have shown, it was Parisians rather than newcomers who committed most of the crimes of Paris. Nonetheless, those Bretons who appeared at the police station had a particular profile.

It was women who earned the attention of the police in the majority of cases. One-third of all the Bretons in question either were prostitutes or were brought in for clandestine prostitution (soliciting), petty theft, complicity in minor crimes, or disorderly conduct. The obstreperous Jeanne Rebillart, from a northern village in the inland Côtes-d’Armor, must have been best known to the officers, for she was brought in five times during 1896 for soliciting, as well as for simply throwing a bowl of water out her window and then two days later for public drunkenness. This last was usually a male crime, as was abusing the police in a drunken state: men in the prime of life would call the police vaches, sales cons, fainéants, and voleurs, then often recognize their error when they sobered up. But name calling was not the property of men alone: the Breton presence at the police station started one night in early January when a twenty-five-year-old dressmaker from the Ille-et-Vilaine, in her cups, angrily delineated her opinion of the police.

These nighttime scenes illuminate the toll exacted by urban misfortune. When Yvonne Saliou, thirty-seven, a widowed laundress with two children from an inland village in Côtes-d’Armor, was brought in on one February night, arrested for clandestine prostitution, it was the third time she had been arrested, and the second time that month. Drinking played a role, hospitalizing a thirty-three-year-old from a town in Ille-et-Vilaine for alcoholism during the summer and a melancholy twenty-one-year-old carpenter from an estuary port in the Côtes-d’Armor in the fall who had turned on his sister in an alcoholic rage. Poverty was endemic, certainly felt by the two women day laborers in their forties from the Côtes-d’Armor, one single, the other a widow, who were brought in during one week in January because they were out of work and in a state of complete indigence. Yet this is only a partial picture: other Bretons in the police blotters merely lifted groceries from a store, caroused with their spouse, or argued with a coachman over a fare or with a neighbor over a fallen flowerpot.

The records and writings of the 1890s suggest that Bretons had a rocky beginning in Paris. But neither the Bretons nor Paris offers a picture that
is homogeneous, or entirely congruent with contemporary opinion. Literature, social commentary, memoirs, historical scholarship, and marriage records each contribute to a complex of images and realities. They show that those who traveled to Saint-Denis were largely unskilled men from the villages and small inland towns of the Côtes-d'Armor who suffered in slum housing. Connected to family and compatriots, Bretons lived in a viable although poor community. Marriage records give life to the stereotype of rural origins and illiteracy—and for the men they are consistent with the hard-won findings of Farcy and Faure about the rural origins and scant educational level of the pioneering men who left the Côtes-d'Armor in the 1880s. On the other hand, marriages demonstrate that women’s experience was distinct: marriage came unusually early in the lives of the women of Saint-Denis. Moreover, many Saint-Denis brides worked at a distance from their sweethearts, whether as servants in the city or as what would today be called hospital aides, demonstrating that the Breton community, or Breton networks, occupied a wide arena early on, even before associational life or a Paris press for Bretons had much of a start. But the frequent references to the job of day laborer on actes de mariage indicate hardship on the job and perhaps disregard for accuracy, or lack of interest in it, on the part of municipal clerks. Lemoine’s portrait of Saint-Denis Bretons offers a clue to such attitudes.

A greater variety of work was available in Paris, where the Bretons of the Fourteenth Arrondissement cut a very different figure from those in Saint-Denis. Many men and women found work in the service sector, the men often in transportation, and both men and women were apparently successful in the search for an urban future. Yet records suggest that Bretons in the city suffered from considerable economic and social vulnerability, and that they did so less cradled by relatives and compatriots than their counterparts were in Saint-Denis. If marriage records give life to a stereotype here, it is that of the Breton servant who bears a child out of wedlock or otherwise cannot control her sexual life and its outcomes—perhaps a patient at La Maternité, and fodder for the literature of Zola. On the other hand, the brides of the Fourteenth Arrondissement are notably older and long gone from home. They are of an age and experience less like Zola’s hapless Breton servant perhaps than the determined “jeune girl anglaise” that Lemoine held out as a model for Breton girls in the city.
Finally, both in Saint-Denis and in the Fourteenth Arrondissement there were skilled Bretons among the unskilled. In addition, a community of notables from Brittany such as the philosopher and scholar Ernest Renan, who died in Paris in 1892, and Jules Simon, statesman and reformer who died in Paris four years later, were ignored by the social commentary of the day. Bretons at every level of society like Yvonne Yven managed to marry and form families, in some cases despite considerable previous hardship and dislocation. This pattern complicates literary evidence and the writings of social observers as well as the horrified reports of church personnel, who emphasized the pariah status of Bretons in Paris that stemmed from their lack of education and resources. Experts and observers from Lemoine to Zola, perhaps as well as the administrators of the Maternité hospital for indigent women, saw Bretons as country bumpkins ill suited to city life. Historical scholarship bears out the grain of truth in this stereotype, and shows that most Bretons, like newcomers to Paris and other west European cities today, began their careers in Paris in the least desirable occupations while they lived in crowded and unhealthy quarters. Nonetheless, there were also those who remained and carved out satisfactory lives in the capital despite the tainted lenses through which they were often viewed.

Their persistence came at a price usually overlooked today. Yvonne Yven’s twenty-five years of servitude demonstrate the ambiguities and difficulties of this kind of work. At the beck and call of her employers, Yven was unable to experience the conjugal life that others could achieve. After only a few hours’ break for her wedding in 1895, Yven lived separately from her husband—also a domestic—because neither employer would allow cohabitation. “Why do you want to marry?” asked her employer. If you are absent at night and “we are sick, who will go to the doctor?” asked her husband’s employer. This situation could not have been unique, since over 30 percent of female domestics in Paris were married by the beginning of the twentieth century. Moreover, the couple could not live with their son, so he was raised by the gardener’s family at her employer’s summer house in Barbizon, southeast of Paris. Their son reports: “It was out of the question that my mother raise me, she didn’t have time to take care of me, and the employers would not tolerate servants’ children.” It was not until their son was ten years old that the couple left the constraints of servant life for the concierge lodge in the city. The heavy emotional toll exacted by their separation is evocative
of and forecasts findings on the transnational family of today. Parents lived separately from their spouse, and children apart from one or both parents. This “deterritorialized” family, to use Arjun Appadurai’s phrase, contributes to the current global labor force, but it also makes very real sacrifices of intimate relations between spouses and between parent and child.

Yet Paris offered a chance—a chance that many Bretons were able to grasp. As we will see, at the dawn of the twentieth century booksellers, the medical profession, and the church would focus their gaze on the Bretons of Paris.