LOCAL LIFE IN WORKING-CLASS PARIS AT THE END OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Alain FAURE
Université de Paris X-Nanterre
afaure@u-paris10.fr

What is meant by "local community life" (*vie de quartier*) ? Many historians, sociologists, even urban geographers and ethnographers have described working-class life in French cities and towns in the nineteenth century and in the first half of the twentieth[1]. The places discussed in these works are most often old cities transformed by immigration and industrialization – Paris particularly– or else cities which have grown up around old centres, creating industrial suburbs. In some cases, notably in historical works, the period studied is clearly defined, but in others it remains vague, particularly in the discussions by sociologists and other present-oriented studies which nevertheless refer to the past. From this body of work we get a fairly consistent portrait of working-class life which, despite all the changes in the urban environment, apparently changed little from one end of this long period to the other.

This way of life, simultaneously imposed on and constructed by the inhabitants themselves, is represented first and foremost as entirely oriented outwards, towards the neighborhood and the street. Working-class habitations were too small and too poorly furnished, it is suggested, *[761]*to keep people at home. Privacy did not exist. Collective life had its advantages and its disadvantages, but most authors place more emphasis on the positive aspects.

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[1] Among the most important work by historians, see : David Garrioch, *Neighbourhood and Community in Paris, 1740-1790 (*Cambridge University Press, 1986) ; Jean-Paul Burdy, *Le Soleil noir. Un quartier de Saint-Étienne (1840-1940)* (Lyon, Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1989) ; Patrick Gervaise, *'Les Passages' à Levallois-Perret. Quartier populaire, quartier de la 'Zone' (1826-1972)* (doctoral thesis University of Paris VII, n.d. [1986]) 2 vols. Some of the most importants works by .sociologists are Henri Coing, *Rénovation urbaine et changement social : l'îlot n° 4, Paris 13e* (Paris, Éditions ouvrières, 1966, 2nd ed. 1976) ; Suzanne Rosenberg, "Vivre dans son quartier... quand même", *Annales de la recherche urbaine*, n° 9 (Fall 1980), 55-74 ; and of course the classic by Michael Young and Peter Willmot, *Family and Kinship in East London* (London, Routledge ans Kegan Paul, Harmondsworth, 1957). Some of the most importants works by geographers are : Bernard Bastien, *Saint-Denis : évolution urbaine, évolution du mode de vie et de la sociabilité populaire (*thèse de 3° cycle de géographie, University of Paris VII, 1984) ; and finally, Daniel Terrolle, *Le quartier de Cayenne à Saint-Ouen. Mémoires, continuités, métamorphoses (*thèse de 3e cycle d'ethnologie, University of Paris X-Nanterre, 1987). See also Alain Faure, "Le local : une approche du quartier populaire (Paris, 1880-1914)", *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Italie et Méditerranée*, 105 : 2 (1993) 489-502.

In particular, they stress its sociability, the ease and warmth of contacts between individuals, or solidarity and mutual assistance. But above all, the primacy of the community in daily life was supposedly accompanied by a strong sense of locality. On the one hand, the immediate area, the local, ruled the behaviour of the poor. If there was residential mobility, it remained local. People worked in the vicinity. Their horizons were thus limited, confined within a single quarter. On the other hand, this parochialism supposedly gave rise to a strong sense of quarter: people loved their quarter, identified with it, and had a sense of themselves as belonging to an authentic and homogeneous community, despite the often violent conflicts between neighbors.

This way of life, the story goes, was first undermined and then finally destroyed by changes to urban life in the second half of the twentieth century: the destruction of old working-class areas in the name of public health, as happened in Paris ; the huge growth of cheap housing in the suburbs and in new towns; the division of life into two parts, with the separation of home and work; a growing awareness of the outside world with the development of leisure activity, etc. Henceforth the private, the intimate, displaced collective life, just as home took the place of the street. As the workers won housing that was at last decent, so they abandoned the sociability and the values implicit in local community life. The poor had gained a home, but lost the neighborhood.

While it is sociologists who have most often adopted this somewhat nostalgic narrative, many historians too—at least until recently—have tended to regret, if not the disappearance of often deplorable housing, at least the loss of a lively community life.

Such a master narrative, seductive as it may be, leaves many unanswered questions. How could such a way of life continue, apparently unchanged, for a century and a half ? What connection might there be between an existence entirely based on the locality and participation in the political life of the city ? Is there not a contradiction, at least in the case of Paris, between being enclosed in a single quarter and the immigration, from the provinces and from other countries, which drove urban growth ? And in any case, is it true that working-class life was collective to such an extent, or that the neighborhood had such power ? Was the sense of belonging to a particular quarter a bond strong enough to unite all those who supposedly shared it ?

This short article does not aim to cover this entire period, even for the single city of Paris. It looks primarily at the period from 1860, when Paris annexed many of the surrounding municipalities and the city's population went from 1.1 to 1.6 million, to the First World War, the usual end-point for studies of the nineteenth-century world. It was in the newly annexed zone that most demographic growth was to occur, and there too that most industrial work was to be concentrated. The largest proportion of the industrial workforce lived in these areas – Belleville, Montmartre, La Villette, La Chapelle, Plaisance *[762]*, Grenelle, the present 13th arrondissement, now turned into suburbs of the city.

These huge new suburbs were anything but "the anonymous city", to take the cliché often used of today's large agglomerations : a communitarian, externalized way of life is certainly what emerges from the documents of the time—from photographs, life stories, police reports, court cases[2]. But what if we examine the evidence more closely, and ask whether the hold of the local community on the lives of families and individuals prevented privacy ? We will

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[2] These are the principal sources used for this study.

then focus on a form of behavior which is often presented as one of the pillars of this way of life – solidarity – and ask whether, in these working-class suburbs, there was a real sense of community.

Intimacy and community

In discussions of the local community and its formation, the habitat itself is often forgotten. Or rather it is assumed from the outset that poor people's lodgings were no more than a shelter, with no attraction and no value. Yet in the working-class families of this period, private life most certainly existed, and all kinds of practices and customs operated to create an inhabited space that was highly prized. This is not an argument that will be developed here, but it is important to note it from the outset[3].

Admittedly, it is clear that in working-class housing the shared facilities, the shoddy materials, and the cramped accommodation forced people into contact with those around them. Neighbors talked to each other through the thin walls. There was the chore of fetching water : by this date most houses had piped water, but in the courtyard or at best on the landings, so people had to queue at the tap, particularly because landlords, fearing "wastefulness", only turned on the water for a few hours each day. Similarly, if certain descriptions are to be believed, the doors of flats were left open much of the time. The historian can thus gain the impression that people lived in such promiscuity, without even being aware of it, that no line of demarcation existed between the individual lodging and the surrounding society.

The contradiction with the attachment to private space, mentioned earlier, is only apparent. In reality, just as in the physical environment much effort was devoted to combating the intrusion of outsiders into private life, so too each family attempted to protect itself against the external world, and in the first instance against the neighbors. Gossip was exchanged in collective spaces, on the stairs and in the courtyards, because each apartment was reserved for family or for friends – those directly invited by the man, the woman, or the couple, since the different friendship networks were quite distinct. The door was more generally open to children, and this brought adults into contact with each other, but in general one did not simply walk into a neighbor's dwelling. There were customs and conventions, rituals that had to be obeyed. If a visitor *[763]* arrived, it was good manners to call out to someone from the courtyard rather than taking the newcomer directly to their door: this protected their privacy and made it easier to pretend not to be home.

It is also true, on the other hand, that gossip and networks were an important part of local life. If one reads the documents carefully it is clear that people knew a great deal about their neighbors. Through gossip, the local people censured any behavior that was unusual or which deviated from neighborhood norms, or even from the norms within each house, since every one had to some degree its own character, its own feel.

However, the issue here was not simply one of enforced conformity or of community control over individuals : for the gossips, the verbal chronicle of catastrophes and misadventures that happened to neighbors – deaths, accidents, unemployment, thefts, money lost, what one might call a reiteration of the woes of the world – was above all a way of avoiding some perils.

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[3] See Alain Faure, 'Comment se logeait le peuple parisien à la Belle Epoque', *Vingtième siècle,revue d'histoire*, n° 64 (Oct-Dec 1999), 41-51.

Discussing the misfortunes of others was a means of diverting them from oneself. But recounting these evils was also a way of affirming one's attitude to life : either resignation, the idea that one could do nothing to change the order of things, or indignation in the face of injustice and misery.

There were nevertheless considerable variations in the involvement of different individuals in local life and in its affairs : women were more a part of it, not only because they were less likely to work outside the home, but also because when they did, they sought a job that was as close to home as possible, so as to combine housework and paid employment that supplemented the family income. Work they could take home was the most convenient (though also the most exploitative) way of combining these tasks, and produced a greater investment in the neighborhood than that of the men. A certain number of men, furthermore, artisans or factory workers, deliberately put a certain distance between employment and home, caught up in the companionship of workmates. We should also note that different work rhythms and timetables meant that some neighbors had few opportunities to meet or to get acquainted.

But above all, discussing the affairs of others is one thing, while interfering in their business is quite another. Here too, there were codes of behavior, often subtle. For example the neighborhood women often had a kind of duty of care towards the children living in the house : the oldest gave advice, and groups of mothers had no hesitation in commenting on the way children were brought up. But the right to punish a child, and particularly of corporal punishment, was strictly reserved for the parents. Transgressing this rule was a sure way to provoke a violent quarrel.

In practice people were very discreet where the neighbors' domestic affairs were concerned[4]. The unspoken rule was, don't meddle in my business, and I won't meddle in yours. As a result, the neighborhood was loathe to intervene when someone behaved, in their own home, in a way that working-class morality reproved or condemned. It depended, admittedly, on the nature of the behavior : people were slow to intervene in defense of a woman beaten by her husband *[764]* or partner, even by her children. There was certainly solidarity between female neighbors in such cases, but this did not put a stop to the brutality. Other men felt that the only thing wrong about a husband beating his wife was to go too far in exercising his legitimate authority. On the other hand, if a child was beaten – especially by its mother – the sense of scandal was so great that complaints, sometimes anonymous and sometimes signed, even by everyone living in the house, were much more common. And as for sexual abuse of children by their father, that was the issue that most divided people between respect for private life – in this case a monstrous use of paternal authority – and assisting the helpless victims. The most frequent response was, it seems, to remain silent[5].

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[4] This is noted by Garrioch, *Neighbourhood and Community*, 78-9.

[5] Among the few studies that deal with these questions are three recent dissertations at the University of Paris X-Nanterre : Anne-Cécile Bras, *Le viol à Paris : le crime secret d'une capitale (1862-1894)*, (1994) ; Liza Chaboussant and Gaëlle Dupont, *La violence au quotidien dans Paris et sa banlieue (1872-1896)* (1996) ; Delphine Moisson, *La déchéance de la puissance paternelle* (1997). See also Anne-Marie Sohn, "Les attentats à la pudeur sur les fillettes en France (1870-1939) et la sexualité quotidienne", *Mentalités,* n° 3, (1989), 71-111 ; Jean-Jacques Yvorel, "La justice et les violences parentales à la veille de la loi de 1898", *Le Temps de l'histoire*, n° 2 (May 1998), 15-45 ; Michel Kiener, "Enfances et violences dans la France de 1880 à 1900", in Paul d'Hollander, ed., *Violences en Limousin à travers les siècles* (Limoges, PULIM, 1998), 197-234.

We must remember, though, that these observations are based on police and judicial sources, and we do not know whether in certain cases the neighbors did intervene to prevent violence against women or children. It is possible, though unlikely. Ordinarily so curious, the neighborhood could in this way avert its eyes from the terrible distress of certain of its members.

The character of neighborhood solidarity

Nevertheless, despite these "failures", local solidarity and the assistance that people could receive from the neighborhood or from others living in the same house was an everyday reality. It extended beyond the exchange of small services between housewives, such as lending a pan or minding a child while someone went shopping. There were many cases of money being collected to assist a family who had fallen on hard times; of providing shelter for neighbors expelled from their hope; even the adoption, without any legal formalities, of children who suddenly found themselves alone in the world.

But it is important to understand what this solidarity meant. The priests and lay Catholics who ran the numerous social welfare agencies in the working-class *faubourgs*, working to improve the religious and family education of people living in what was believed to be a state of nature, held up these examples of kindness as evidence of spontaneous Christian charity. This was a profound misunderstanding, since such solidarity was first and foremost a form of mutual aid : I will help you so that when I am in distress you will assist me. There was no question of 'compassion', of the tender-heartedness of the affluent. In working-class generosity towards others there was a profound sense of the precariousness of life, in a period when no worker was immune from sudden accidents that could throw him into poverty, along with his family. As a result, anyone who resorted too often to the assistance of the neighbors, or who continually took without every giving, developed a reputation as a useless, lazy scrounger, and he would in the end find himself out in the cold. There were the "bad poor", even among the poor themselves.

But what of those solitary, worn-out individuals, those who needed assistance but could give nothing back, the old especially, both men and women ? *[765]* Their fate was very varied. They were sometimes taken care of by the house as a whole, their coming and going discreetly watched to check that all was well. Elderly women scraping a living by sewing at home were invited in by the neighbors to help them economize on lighting and to attenuate their loneliness. Yet others were left to fend for themselves, and one even finds complaints by neighbors against bed-ridden paupers whom they accused of infecting the entire floor ! Such contrasting attitudes among the neighbors are difficult to interpret. It is possible that some old people, out of pride, refused any assistance and thus little by little found themselves isolated. But this does not explain every case. I evoked earlier the different atmosphere of different apartment buildings. Could it be that in "well kept" buildings, those that laid claim to a certain respectability, the spectacle of such misery was intolerable ? Even so, in some cases the neighborhood remained completely blind to the misery of some of its inhabitants.

Divisions within the quarter

This leads us to consider the divisions within working-class areas, the cracks in the façade of the local community. It is important to point out that,

however proletarian a quarter may have been, workers were not the only inhabitants. Many landlords, often of modest social origins, lived in the properties they owned. The courtyards of the apartment buildings were nearly all occupied by workshops, small businesses whose owners lived in the vicinity. As already suggested, there were some addresses that considered themselves superior to others, better run : a result of the presence of white-collar workers who wished to mark themselves off from a neighborhood they felt to be too proletarian, too dirty, noisy, and gossip-ridden. Small shopkeepers, too, often had a similarly ambivalent relationship with their neighbors. On the one hand, they were integrated into the neighborhood—it was customary, for example, for everyone to chat at the door of the apartment building in the evenings, shopkeepers and tenants alike, some standing and others on chairs brought outside—yet shopkeepers were also the objects of suspicion and resentment. They were suspected, for example, of cheating their customers on the weight or quality of the goods they sold, and above all they were dispensers of credit. Every family, at some point, had recourse to what was called "local credit" (*le crédit du quartier*) : that is, getting an extension of time to pay the local shopkeepers. Working-class indebtedness was a significant social reality that historians often fail to take into account. It led, in cases where credit was refused or judicial proceedings undertaken, to feelings of injustice and even hatred against these greedy, profiteering neighbors.

But working-class society also contained strong internal tensions. Both written testimonies and interviews with former inhabitants of the 13th Arrondissement of Paris reveal that in streets where the apartment buildings *[766]* were in appearance indistinguishable, peopled with working families in very similar economic conditions, invisible boundaries divided the quarter, some refusing to have anything to do with others[6]. Parents sometimes told their children not to play with those of a neighboring house or from a nearby cul-de-sac, which they looked down on. Professional hierarchies no doubt played a key role in this pronounced fragmentation of local society: thus in "respectable" tenements, workers in more prestigious or more skilled occupations lived alongside white-collar workers and local artisans. The owner of a tiny individual house, for example, who worked at home making boots, preferred to frequent only the shopkeepers in his street, and his wife, although the mother of ten children, never mixed with the other women in the street. The reputation of some apartment buildings, peopled with day-workers and families in the deepest poverty, was very low: the famous Cité Jeanne d'Arc, a run-down block of tenements in the 13th Arrondissement, served for a long time as a kind of counter-model for the neighbors, though they too were extremely poor. Families were sometimes the source of these divergences. It sometimes happened that the members of a single extended family lived in the same quarter, sons and especially daughters grouped around the habitations of their mothers, who often played an organizing role[7]. In this archetypal case, family solidarity could be as strong and lasting as quarrels and hatreds were frequent.

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[6] Interviews undertaken by the author and other historians between 1974 and 1980 : see "Camille et Jeanne, ouvrières à la raffinerie Say", in *Bulletin du Centre d'histoire de la France contemporaine* [Université Paris X-Nanterre], n° 11, 1990, 93-102. This interview has also been published electronically at www.maitron.org

[7] On family networks among contemporary working-class families, see the fine work of Olivier Schwartz, *Le monde privé des ouvriers. Hommes et femmes du Nord* (Paris, PUF, 1990).

Physical proximity between people who were socially very similar thus in no way implied their fusion into a united local community, whose internal disagreements were in a sense the best evidence of the closeness of the ties that bound it together. I am not suggesting that local communities did not exist. Shared values, common enemies, economic circumstances and political conflicts could unite these divided villages—but this in itself points to the existence of an entirely separate area of collective existence. These ties that bound were external to the quarter, transcending it. The quarter was only one dimension of life.

Horizons

One way of testing this is to look at levels of mobility. If local life was so powerful, each working-class quarter should have been integrated and in a sense closed, holding its inhabitants and encompassing the bulk of their activities. Was this in fact the case?

This idea seems to presuppose that a significant part of the people concerned were born locally, in Paris. Yet we know that this was not so: in 1911 the population was nearly a million higher than in 1872, and of that increase just over three quarters was due to migration. Just under a third of Parisians, across all age groups, had been born in the city. One statistic, the higher proportion of native-born among the working-class population – a product of the *[767]* industrial character of the city – does seem to support the idea of strong local communities that this article is contesting[8]. Let us take, for example, the marriages celebrated in 1911 in the 11th Arrondissement, covering the Faubourg Saint-Antoine and the proletarian district of Popincourt. The proportion of Paris-born among wood- and metal-workers, who were numerous in these areas, was 43.9 percent, compared with 32.9 percent among office workers and 26.8 percent among those from higher social groups. The same was true of the women : 44.3 percent of Paris-born among seamstresses, compared with 34.1 percent among those "without occupation", a signifier if not of affluence, at least of belonging to a milieu where salaried female work was not indispensable. These differences between social groups were large enough to represent significantly different levels of implantation in the city. Nevertheless, the proportions of Paris-born were so low, overall, that this implantation – measured only by birth – could not provide the basis for local community life.

Furthermore, being born in one quarter of the city did not necessarily mean growing up there. Even before looking at adult mobility, we must consider what might be called the family mobility of the child. One way of measuring this is to compare the number of live male births in each arrondissement with the number of those born in the same arrondissement in the military conscription lists drawn up twenty years later. After 1872, all male French nationals, in theory without exception, had to undergo military service. As the locality where each young man was registered was that where his parents lived, this is a way of measuring family migration. Without going into detail on the results of this analysis, covering the conscripts of 1880 (born in 1860), let us retain the figure of 10-20 percent of twenty-year-olds who

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[8] I focussed on this question in "Formation et renouvellement du peuple de Paris. Aspects du peuplement de Paris de la Commune à la Grande Guerre", in *Recherches contemporaines*, n° 5 , 1998-1999, 143-160.

remained in the arrondissement in which they were born. In other words, there was a huge attrition rate, exceeding that of other cities, and which can be accounted for by two factors, whose relative importance isunfortunately impossible to calculate : infant mortality, and the movement of the parents out of the arrondissement in which their son was born, either to a different part of the city, into the suburbs, or to other parts of France.

This raises the whole question of residential mobility, an aspect of the social and demographic history of modern France that has given rise to much work.9 Many studies stumble on the difficulty of establishing complete itineraries – tracing all the movements of individuals, or better still of families, from birth to death – in the hope of elucidating the choices they made and the constraints which governed their lives. The time-frame over which these observations are made is critical to obtaining accurate results. This can be demonstrated by the misleading conclusions of a study I undertook on mobility in a densely populated street in the 13th Arrondissement, the rue Nationale[10]. I had proceeded by taking from the electoral lists the names of all the men living in the street in 1897, then tracing these same names in the electoral lists for the following ten years. The proportion of the original inhabitants who were still listed in 1907, who had therefore never moved, *[768]* was 10 percent. I also deduced, on the basis of what later turned out to be inadequate information, that the majority of those who had moved had nevertheless remained in the same quarter, in the vicinity of the rue Nationale. My conclusion, if I may be forgiven for citing myself, was that local implantation did not take

> "the form of attachment to a house, to the four walls of a dwelling, but was characterized by fidelity to a small corner of the city whose narrow frontiers delimited what the inhabitants themselves termed their "quartier", and which for some of them constituted the limits of the known world."

It was a nice conclusion, but not true. Since then, I have undertaken a much larger investigation, in conjunction with Jean-Claude Farcy, studying migration to and within Paris at the end of the nineteenth century[11]. A sample of 48,000 French nationals, all born in 1860, was created from the military conscription lists mentioned above – once again just males, therefore. One of the advantages of this source is that it lists each change of residence of all the conscripts who are considered suitable for military service, from the age of 20 until they reached 45. Just over 8,000 conscripts were born or lived in Paris between 1880 and 1906. What does this reveal about local implantation ? Once we take out those who died during this period, the proportion of stable individuals, those who never changed their address, was 7 percent – a similar figure to that of the rue Nationale (10 percent) if we recall that the earlier study was based on only ten years. By contrast, in the larger sample the proportion of

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[9] See in particular Jean-Luc Pinol, *Les mobilités de la grande ville : Lyon fin XIXe-début XXe siècles*, (Paris, Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1991) ; Claire Lévy-Vroelant, "Un espace ouvert : usages sociaux du logement en ville entre 1830 et 1880", *Recherches contemporaines*, n° 3 (1995-1996), 63-90 ; *Stratégies résidentielles. Actes du séminaire organisé par Catherine Bonvalet et Anne-Marie Fribourg*, (Paris, INED et Ministère de l'Équipement, 1990).

[10] Alain Faure, "Les racines de la mobilité populaire à Paris au XIXe siècle", O. Benoit-Guilbot ed., *Changer de région, de métier, changer de quartier. Recherches en région parisienne* (Paris, Université de Paris X-Nanterre, 1982),103-119.

[11] Jean-Claude Farcy and Alain Faure, *La mobilité d'une génération de Français. Recherche sur les migrations et les déménagements vers et dans Paris à la fin du XIXe siècle* (Paris, INED, 2003), with accompanying CD-Rom.

mobile individuals who moved only within their quarter – estimated at half the conscripts from the rue Nationale – was only 10.1 percent. The better quality of the source and above all the longer time-frame enables us to conclude that the overwhelming majority of those who moved in fact left their original neighborhood at some stage in their wanderings. In other words, the general pattern was not stability – reflecting fidelity to the same quarter – by dispersion.

This result is all the more conclusive in that the level of mobility appears to have been greater among working-class conscripts than among other groups: an average of 4.8 changes of address between the ages of 20 and 45 for the former, compared with an average of 3.8 changes for those of higher social status. We also note that the workers were far more likely to move within the city, less attracted by the suburbs, by the provinces, or by other countries. It is safe to say that the world of these workers was above all Parisian, in that they were less willing to leave their city than were other social groups. This characteristic confirms the socially differentiated implantation observed earlier, but in no way means they were anchored in a single quarter.

Why did these high levels of working-class mobility exist ? There are cases of individuals who moved ten or more times. This instability was above all a result of poverty : when an accident suddenly reduced the resources of a household, they looked for cheaper lodgings, even sometimes ending up *[769]* in one of the depressed tenements mentioned above. If the rent was slow coming in, landlords moved quickly to expel their tenants, seizing whatever furnishings they could. In 1901 alone there were more than 3,200 expulsions ordered by the justices of the peace, somewhere between 6,000 and 10,000 people forced onto the street with next to no notice. For the households concerned, expulsion was a disaster, and many tried to avoid having their effects seized by quietly moving out beforehand. The practice was widespread enough to have a slang name : moving out "à la cloche de bois" (literally, at the sound of the wooden bell – without noise). By slipping off in this way many also escaped the debts they had run up with the local shopkeepers : at the point when their credit had finally run out they were forced to leave the quarter. This proletarian practice, very common but felt to be shameful, was a factor in residential mobility.

Did a similar process operate in reverse, that is to say movement in search of better premises by families who were in a favorable situation, perhaps even upwardly mobile ? Did they seek out a better apartment, one suited to the number of children, or in order to separate the boys from the girls ? The "good houses", which offered such accommodation, were not to be found on every corner (so to speak), and one often had to search far afield. It is noticeable that this quest for better housing led a small number of families, from this period on, to leave Paris proper and move to an individual house in the suburbs, close to transport that enabled the members to keep working in the city[12].

This leads us to the question of the relationship between home and work, a factor often evoked by historians as if it were self-evident, almost a fact of life. It is presented as an argument in favor of local implantation, the need to stay in the quarter so as to keep one's job. But was this true? In late nineteenth-century descriptions of working-class Paris, in the literature of the period for example,

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[12] See Alain Faure, " 'Les couches nouvelles de la propriété'. Un peuple parisien à la conquête d'un bon logis à la veille de la Grande Guerre", *Le Mouvement social*, n° 182 (January-March 1998) 53-78, and especially Annie Fourcaut, *La banlieue en morceaux. La crise des lotissements défectueux en France dans l'entre-deux-guerres* (Grâne, Créaphis, 2000).

the picture is rather of people who walked long distances each day. Emile Zola's novel *L'Assomoir* of 1887 opens and closes on the picture of a crowd on foot, the workers of La Chapelle walking down to Paris in the morning and climbing back up the hill in the evening after the day's labor. But there is also the evidence of the workers themselves. If we listen to their voices, we have the impression that proximity between work and home was an ideal rather than a reality. Many of them deplored not being able to return home for lunch, while others complained of the fatigue they suffered from the interminable daily journeys on foot, a result of precarious employment. The machinists, for example, arguing for a nine-hour working day, wrote in March 1848 that[13]

> "Often we must walk for an hour before reaching our workshops, and an hour in the evenings to return home… Do you think this leaves us ample time to devote to education? Do you ask why were do not live in the neighborhood of our workshops? No doubt we could if we could be sure of always finding employment in these workshops, but we start work in the morning, and often the same evening we cannot be sure where we will work the next day: with such a system, we would need to have houses on wheels."

[770] For the period that concerns us here, a detailed examination of the relationship between home and work would point to a great variety of situations. There is no single pattern, for Paris industry was too diverse and the workers themselves too varied. A significant part of the factory workforce did in fact live nearby, but this was impossible for workers in unstable trades like the construction industry. The precise location of businesses often played a determining role. Thus, while the central quarters of Paris remained the key areas of employment in certain sectors, in these same quarters the amount of working-class housing was shrinking steadily : the workers necessarily came from some distance. The problem was quite different according to whether the worker was married, or whether he was single and living in a rented room. If the mothers of proletarian families often sought work as close as possible to home, this was not a possibility for all women : for the young seamstresses, for example, whose workshops clustered around the Bourse and the Opera, areas where there was simply no accommodation for working-class families. When things were busy, and the young women were forced to keep working well past the normal hour, they had to make their way home afterwards, late at night, to lodgings more often than not located in a distant faubourg. The appearance of modern mass transport, when it was accessible to the working population – in the case of Paris the *métro*, after 1900 – was far from being the cause of the much-cited separation between home and work. This division had already existed for a long time.

Local neighborhood life was thus not a given in late nineteenth-century Paris. Nor was it necessarily either a burden or a benefit for the working population, whose lives were far more multi-dimensional, far more open to the outside world than historians have allowed. The combination of 'localism' and of openness – we might say "Parisian-ness", for it seems to have been confined to the city proper – is the key to understanding working-class participation in the social and political life of metropolis. *[771]*

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[13] *Demande dans un but d'humanité. Réponses aux objections*,25 March 1848, signed jointly by the employers Ch. Derosne and Cail and by worker delegates from the Cail, Drevet et Coiffier factory, (Bibliothèque nationale de France Lb [53] 757).