

# ***Authority and Illegitimacy in New France: The Burial of Bishop Saint-Vallier and Madeleine de Verchères vs. the Priest of Batiscan***

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*This article addresses the question of authority in the colonial society of New France. The study first focusses on an unseemly struggle among authorities, in 1728, over the body of Bishop Jean de la Croix de Saint-Vallier. In this struggle, the Intendant Dupuy was opposed by the Governor Beauharnois and the canons of the Cathedral Chapter of Quebec. A related event unfolded at the local level, in 1730, eventually involving the Priest of Batiscan and Madeleine de Verchères in a scandal and trial. In each case, the adversaries questioned the legitimacy of authority often by way of insults to influential women. These case studies reveal the limits of absolutism in the colony.*

*Ce travail pose le problème de l'autorité dans la société coloniale de la Nouvelle-France. L'intendant Dupuy dispute la préséance au gouverneur Beauharnois. En 1728, la mort de l'évêque déclenche un conflit où le Chapitre de la Cathédrale et le gouverneur s'opposent à l'intendant. Ce conflit se poursuit au niveau local, en 1730, lors du procès entre le curé de Batiscan et Madeleine de Verchères. Dans chaque cas, les adversaires mettent en cause l'illégitimité des clientèles, souvent par l'entremise d'injures dirigées contre des femmes puissantes. Ces conflits révèlent les limites du pouvoir absolutiste dans la colonie.*

Rumours ruled New France. That was the complaint of Mère Duplessis de Sainte-Hélène in late 1729: "La médisance et la calomnie regnent en Canada ..."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, for a few years after 1728, colonial rumour-mongers had a hey-day. Two major scandals gave them an opportunity to gossip about some of the leading figures of authority in the colony. In the winter of 1727-1728, the Intendant Claude-Thomas Dupuy and the canons of the Cathedral Chapter of Quebec waged an unseemly struggle over the body of Bishop Jean de la

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1. Letter of 25 November 1729 in A.-Léo Leymarie, ed., "Lettres de Mère Marie-Andrée Duplessis de Sainte-Hélène, Supérieure des Hospitalières de l'Hôtel-Dieu de Québec", *Nova Francia* 3, 1 (1927-1928): 50.

Croix de Saint-Vallier. The scandal reverberated through the colony as gossip and invective cast aspersions on many government and ecclesiastical officials. The dismissal of Dupuy only partly calmed the situation. A related event took place on a local level in 1730. Gervais Lefebvre, the priest of Batiscan, a thriving parish on the outskirts of the Royal Government of Trois-Rivières, huddled in a canoe with the neighbouring parish priest, Joseph Voyer (the accusation would read), and chanted lewd comments about the local seigneur's wife and her friends. The ensuing scandal and trial worked its way through the Provost Court of Quebec to the Superior Council of the colony and finally to the royal court in France.

Generally, these scandals have been interpreted as mere personality conflicts, examples of the participants' headstrong characters.<sup>2</sup> But another way to view such disputes is as stories the society tells about itself.<sup>3</sup> Within their arguments, the participants revealed and established cultural precepts, which may help understand similar cases. The theme I shall explore in these two stories is the legitimacy of authority. Contemporaries had a similar interpretation of the incidents. In both cases, the main participants perceived that the disputes were not merely personal attacks, but also attacks on the rank that they personified.

To this point, historians have not closely examined the cultural meanings of authority in New France. In his succinct discussion of the nature of social power in New France, Dale Miquelon contends that "clientage clusters", or groups of supporters, not rumours, ruled New France.<sup>4</sup> In fact, in the arguments over legitimate authority in these two cases, there was a close connection between clientage clusters and the calumnies that mere Duplessis decried. Through their invectives and fulminations, the opponents revealed standards which could render the exercise of social power illegitimate. They exposed

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2. For the funeral: S. Dale Standen, "Charles, Marquis de Beauharnais de la Boische, Governor General of New France, 1726-1747" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1975), p. 167; Dale Miquelon, *New France, 1701-1744: "A Supplement to Europe"* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987), p. 254; and to a much lesser extent, Jean-Claude Dubé, *Claude-Thomas Dupuy: Intendant de la Nouvelle-France, 1678-1738* (Montréal: Fidès, 1969). For the libel case: Pierre-Georges Roy, "Madeleine de Verchères, plaideuse", *Mémoires de la Société royale du Canada* [hereafter *MSRC*] 3<sup>e</sup> série, xv (1921), p. 63; Jean Bruchési, "Madeleine de Verchères et Chicaneau", *Cahiers des Dix*, 11 (1946), pp. 27-29; Jan Noël, "New France: Les femmes favorisées" in Alison Prentice and Susan Mann Trofimenkoff, eds., *The Neglected Majority*, vol. II (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985), p. 34. In this paper, I do not claim that the personalities are irrelevant, only that they are a *sine qua non* of the struggles.

3. Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight", *Daedalus* (winter 1972), pp. 26-29.

4. Miquelon, *New France*, pp. 245-248. This paper uses the concept of "clientage clusters" more loosely than Miquelon does, in the attempt to discern the alliances that operated at a local level, as well as those at the top of the social hierarchy. Implicit in the term are elements of support, patronage and often kinship.

their opponents' clientage clusters, criticising "corruption" and impugning the role of women. Their arguments developed intriguing sub-plots about the nature of women's power. Furthermore, in their confrontation with "rumours", the cases expressed fear of insubordination, both from the opponent and from "the people". In these ways, the two cases can be studied in order to address the issue of what conditions could de-legitimize established authority in New France.

Was there a crisis of authority in New France? On the one hand, the colony operated under firm royal control and patronage after 1663. On the other, local authorities and French visitors continually complained of the independence and insubordination of the habitants of New France. Newly arrived Intendant Claude-Thomas Dupuy, for example, reported of the colony: "C'est un pays où tout respire l'indépendance."<sup>5</sup> Despite this alleged sentiment of independence, frontal attacks on authority figures were quite rare and generally small-scale.<sup>6</sup> Compared with eighteenth-century Languedoc, where disputes were common and violent, authorities at all levels led a very secure life.<sup>7</sup> Why then should the authorities worry so much about the colonials?

Much of the problem stemmed from the weaknesses of colonial absolutism. But before examining these weaknesses, it is necessary to explore the nature of metropolitan absolutism. In recent studies of political change in early modern France, historians have shown that absolutism was not the "revolutionary" change that scholars have often suggested. Rather, absolutism, in enhancing the power of the monarch, did not undermine the existing social hierarchy, but rather reinforced it. The appointment of venal officers and, more importantly, of intendants served to create systems of patronage which could benefit both the king and the elite. Although the king's delegates largely won control of financial, judicial and police powers, they used this authority to fit into the existing patrimonial framework of clientage clusters and run it according to the royal interest.<sup>8</sup> Absolutism did not imply the eradication of clientele in favour of direct royal control. Rather it meant the subordination and co-optation of those clientele to the king's desires.

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5. Cited in Dubé, *Dupuy*, pp. 131-132. Many other examples can be found in Robert-Lionel Séguin, "L'esprit d'insubordination en Nouvelle-France et au Québec aux XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles", *L'Académie des sciences d'outre-mer*, xxxiii, 4 (1973), pp. 573-588.

6. Terence Crowley, "'Thunder Gusts': Popular Disturbances in Early French Canada", *Historical Papers - Communications historiques* (1979), pp. 11-32.

7. Compare the examples included in Olwen Hufton, "Attitudes towards authority in eighteenth-century Languedoc", *Social history*, 3, 3 (October, 1978), pp. 281-302.

8. See, for example, Robert Harding, *Anatomy of a Power Elite: The Provincial Governors of Early Modern France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978); David Parker, *The Making of French Absolutism* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983); William Beik, *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth-Century France: State Power and Provincial Aristocracy in Languedoc* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

It would be too easy to see these shifts in authority as being imposed on the French masses. As David Sabeau has argued in his study of Württemberg, absolutistic authority must be won as well as imposed.<sup>9</sup> The unequal relationships in early modern society must be legitimated in some fashion. Although this legitimization of authority could theoretically take place in a number of different ways, historians are paying increasing attention to the role of signs in achieving understanding between the dominant and the dominated.

Symbols, rituals and words are all types of signs.<sup>10</sup> They are all forms by which people communicate; historically, they are also the object and tools of struggles between classes, races and sexes.<sup>11</sup> For some historians, such symbols provide the key to the “master fictions” which govern all regimes.<sup>12</sup> Research on royal ceremonials in France, for instance, indicates how the kings conceived of their own rule. Beginning with Henry IV, French monarchs submerged all ritual references to the elective kingship, thus emphasizing their dynastic right to reign.<sup>13</sup> Louis XIV went even further by eliminating the ceremonies which brought him into contact with the public.<sup>14</sup> As one should not gaze upon the sun, the people should not gaze upon the Sun King. This was Louis XIV’s expedient in dealing with the problem of the legitimization of authority. The semi-religious cult of the divine right of kings helped overcome the many contradictions inherent in the king’s attempt to centralize power.<sup>15</sup>

Bolstered by these symbols, state power did not merely rely on surveillance, nor on the state’s appropriation of violence. In fact, policing was restricted primarily to the cities. In the countryside, the local community

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9. Sabeau, *Power in the Blood: Popular culture and village discourse in early modern Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

10. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (St. Albans: Paladin, 1973), pp. 109-159.

11. See, for example, William Sewell, Jr., *Work and Revolution in France: The Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Michael Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

12. Sean Wilentz, “Introduction” in Wilentz, ed., *Rites of Power: Symbolism, Ritual and Politics since the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1985), pp. 1-10.

13. Richard Jackson, *Vive le Roi!: A History of the French Coronation from Charles V to Charles X* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), pp. 126-127.

14. Ralph Giesey, “Models of Rulership in French Royal Ceremonies” in Wilentz, ed., *Rites of Power*, p. 62.

15. Parker, *Making of French Absolutism*, p. 150.

regulated itself to a large extent.<sup>16</sup> In this, the colony did not differ greatly from the mother country.<sup>17</sup>

In other ways, however, it did, mostly to the benefit of absolutistic control. With the colony under direct royal control since 1663, the king's power was in theory unrestricted. Both of the leading officials, the governor and the intendant, answered to him and held office at his pleasure.<sup>18</sup> The king's officials had few entrenched liberties to subdue, no Parlement, no municipalities, no personal fiefdoms as in France. The military establishment, the fur traders and to a lesser degree the agricultural economy all relied on royal patronage and prerogatives. Religious unity was not a serious problem, as the few Protestants in the colony remained isolated even within the mercantile sector.<sup>19</sup> Institutionally, the colony exhibited centralized traits that the king might only dream about for France. As John Dickinson demonstrates for the civil court system, at least in the area nearest Quebec City, "la Prévôté de Québec semble avoir un siècle d'avance sur son homologue métropolitain."<sup>20</sup> Perhaps, from the point of view of the monarch, this greater degree of unity was what was "new" about New France. If there existed a model of absolutistic rule, then, New France should have approximated it. Yet there was obviously something vitally different about the colony. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when the master fiction of absolutist France relied so much on the king, and when no royal person ever visited the colony, the distance between New France and Old distorted the nature of authority. Colonial officials received their legitimacy from the communications that the king's minister sent each year. Royal approbation provided the symbolic legitimization for local authorities. But communications between Quebec and the royal court were often exceedingly difficult. Shipwrecks sometimes severed the link between colony and mother country. Even in more fortunate times, more than a year could pass between the time an event occurred and was reported, and the time when the royal court authorised the decisions of local officials. In this ambiguous context, the representatives of the king often waged struggles for power.

The governor occupied the position of leading authority figure in New France. He led the military forces and conducted diplomatic negotiations. Yet

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16. Iain Cameron, *Crime and Repression in the Auvergne and the Guyenne, 1720-1790* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

17. John Dickinson, "Réflexions sur la police en Nouvelle France", *McGill Law Review*, 32 (1987), pp. 496-522.

18. André Vachon, "The Administration of New France", *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), vol. II, pp. xx-xxii.

19. J.F. Boshier, *The Canada Merchants: 1713-1763* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 109-111.

20. Dickinson, *Justice et Justiciables : La procédure civile à la Prévôté de Québec, 1667-1759* (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1982), p. 43.

the intendant wielded broader powers over policing, finance and patronage. Since both officials received direct orders from the minister, neither was institutionally subordinate to the other. Given the division of the executive powers, jurisdictional problems often occurred.<sup>21</sup>

The king's minister probably favoured, to a certain degree, the ambiguity of the power structure, which allowed him better to control the distant colony. As Guy Frégault points out, the only way the minister could acquire balanced views of the affairs of the colony (outside the official reports) was to encourage gossip and slander.<sup>22</sup> Only a steady stream of information about the authority figures could assure him that no personal fiefdoms were being created overseas, challenging the king's authority.

At the same time, on the parochial level, seigneurs, priests and state-appointed officials served as the main figures of authority. Ultimately, their legitimacy also found sustenance in links to the hierarchy of colonial and metropolitan society.

Between 1728 and 1730, two conflicts scandalized the colony. These two case studies allow us to examine how one could attack the authority of authority figures. One of the most damning criticisms to make of an authority figure was that he or she was building up an illegitimate clientage cluster. While legitimacy flowed from the king under absolutistic theory, one needed supporters in order to exercise power. But because a well-supported individual might utilize his or her allies to defy higher powers, in certain situations such clientage clusters might prove to be a liability. Ironically, what enhanced an individual's power could also be turned against him or her. One could report the clientage cluster, or one could attack its internal legitimacy. Gossip and calumny provided the texts in the stories the society told about itself during the struggle between Dupuy and Governor Charles de Beauharnois de la Boische, as well as, on a local level, between Madeleine de Verchères and Father Gervais Lefebvre. Whether or not these battles posed serious threats to the social order, what frightened authority figures most was the potential these disputes created for public revolt.

This paper focusses on the rhetoric and actions employed in the conflicts. Public pronouncements and complaints to the king's ministers and the courts provide the main sources for this study. But the relevant materials include both "learned" discussions and "popular" insults. The actors would have used both

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21. Guy Frégault, "Politique et Politiciens" in *Le XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle canadien : études* (Montréal : Éditions HMH, 1968), pp. 170-178; S. Dale Standen, "Politics, Patronage, and the Imperial Interest: Charles de Beauharnois's Disputes with Gilles Hocquart", *Canadian Historical Review*, lx, 1 (March 1979), pp. 38-40.

22. Frégault, "Politique et Politiciens", p. 230.



in their attacks on each other, and they would not have made the distinctions between them that we might be prone to do.<sup>23</sup>

The struggle over the body of Bishop Saint-Vallier touched off a complex web of conflicts. Initially a disagreement over which canon should preside over the Bishop's funeral, the conflict took the form of a "constitutional" challenge to civil authority in ecclesiastical matters, followed by a hasty burial conducted by Archdeacon Eustache Chartier de Lotbinière and Intendant Claude-Thomas Dupuy. As various public figures lined up on either side of the issue over the next few months, recriminations flew back and forth as to the legitimacy of the various authorities' actions.

Within the clergy itself, opinion split over the question of whether or not the Bishop's death occasioned the vacancy of the seat. Lotbinière, the Jesuits in Quebec City as well as many Nuns argued that the Coadjutor in France had automatically succeeded to the position. The Chapter canons, the Recollets and the Montreal clergy claimed that the seat was vacant until the Coadjutor took possession, and that the Chapter canons should exercise the Bishop's authority until the act of possession took place. For his part, Governor Beauharnois sided with the Chapter, partly out of enmity for the Intendant, with whom he had been waging a struggle for position ever since their arrival in the colony in 1726.

The previous issues the governor and the intendant had argued over demonstrate the importance of symbols in struggles over authority. Dupuy had begun the argument in church. He claimed the right to receive incense at mass and to have an honorary guard of two armed yeomen accompany him to the Cathedral.<sup>24</sup> That both arguments should involve the Cathedral is not surprising, since, given the illegality of political assemblies in eighteenth-century France, churches served as the principal public spot for disputes over precedence.<sup>25</sup> By demanding incense, not only was Dupuy attempting to acquire a privilege one former intendant had once enjoyed; he was also trying to capture some of the religious sanction of the king's power. By requesting an honorary guard, Dupuy wanted to appropriate a quasi-military symbol.

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23. On this question of the closeness of learned to popular culture, see Robert Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), chapter VI. The juxtaposition of rude songs and learned commentaries in one of the source materials used for this paper provides further evidence for this view. Bibliothèque municipale de Montréal, Salle Gagnon, J. Chassé, Lot 76 [hereafter BMM, Chassé].

24. "Lettre de M. De Maurepas à M. Dupuy, intendant, au sujet de ses différends avec M. De Beauharnois (18 mai 1728)", *Bulletin de recherches historiques* [hereafter BRH], 35 (1929), pp. 11-14.

25. John McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment: Changing Attitudes to Death among Christians and Unbelievers in Eighteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 277.

Beauharnois reluctantly permitted these two privileges. But when Dupuy requested the appointment of a drummer to aid in the publishing of his edicts, Beauharnois refused. Without a drummer, it was less likely that Dupuy's edicts would attract the listening public necessary to propagate his orders. The drum would also provide a military punctuation to the civil decisions. Beauharnois suppressed Dupuy's own edict appointing the drummer, and all relations between the two officials ceased. Dupuy subsequently refused to obey the governor's summons to his palace. By the time of the Bishop's death, the governor and the intendant were barely speaking. His burial served as a catalyst for the ultimate power struggle between the two men.<sup>26</sup>

Following Saint-Vallier's death in the early morning of 26 December, the members of the Cathedral Chapter, the Bishop's council in which Lotbinière served, elected Étienne Boullard capitular vicar, entrusting him with the Bishop's powers. Lotbinière, as ranking cleric in the colony, and Boullard, as capitular vicar, both claimed the right to preside over Saint-Vallier's funeral.

Lotbinière appealed to the civil authority of Dupuy and the Superior Council. Dupuy summoned both parties, but Boullard and the Chapter canons refused to appear, citing ecclesiastical jurisdiction for the issue and appealing to the king. Dupuy interpreted the refusal as an attack on his authority as leading judicial officer of the colony. Furthermore, the appeal was rather inconvenient, since the burial had to take place long before the appeal to the king could settle the matter. Believing disquieting rumours that the Chapter might steal the Bishop's corpse for their own funeral service, Dupuy and Lotbinière convened the Mother Superior and nuns of the Hospital in the church where Saint-Vallier had requested burial. In the presence of the infirm and poor of the Hospital, Lotbinière proceeded with the ceremony.

Astonished by the fact that the expected parade of the corpse would not take place, the Chapter canons ran to the Hospital. They sounded the alarm under the pretext that the building was on fire, and so attracted a large crowd. Forcing his way into the parish church, Boullard discovered that the burial was already finished, and using his authority as capitular vicar, he suspended the Mother Superior and placed the church under interdict.

In the aftermath of the hasty burial, the intendant, the governor and the Chapter canons all justified their participation in the struggle in similar ways. First, they argued, the opponents were trying to lead the "people" astray.

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26. The following relies most heavily on Dubé's account. Other summaries of the incident may be found in Miquelon, *New France*, pp. 253-254; Cornelius Jaenen, *The Role of the Church in New France* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1976), pp. 58-59; Micheline D'Allaire, *L'Hôpital-Général de Québec, 1692-1764* (Montréal: Fidès, 1971), pp. 199-206; and S. Dale Standen, "Beauharnois de la Boische", pp. 161-233.



Thus, Dupuy publically claimed that the Chapter's pastoral of 4 January which rejected civil jurisdiction,

ne tend qu'à séduire le peuple à la faveur de sa simplicité et de la connaissance qui lui manque pour distinguer la puissance ecclésiastique d'avec la puissance séculière.<sup>27</sup>

On 27 March, Dupuy would raise the fear of a manipulation of the people even more prominently in yet another ordinance: "On fait partout de nouveaux efforts pour abuser de la simplicité des peuples, pour les obséder entièrement, se rendre maître de leur parler seuls."<sup>28</sup> Beauharnois' response to Dupuy's threats against Boullard made a similar appeal. The action, he stated, "jette un trouble général dans la colonie, et y excite des murmures dont nous ne sentons que trop les dangereuses conséquences."<sup>29</sup> Even the canons would later accuse Dupuy and his friends of leading the people astray:

... par une fausse lumière et autres motifs ce même petit nombre s'est rendu rebelle et a causé un dérangement scandaleux dans le public préjudiciable au Salut et à la tranquillité des consciences d'un grand nombre de personnes.<sup>30</sup>

After the governor attempted to exile two of the members of the Superior Council, Dupuy made the clearest statement on the possibility of public revolt:

... Ces deux écrits partis d'une autorité tout à fait illégitime et Impuissante au fait de ce qui y est ordonné ne doivent être considérés par tout bon sujet du Roy, que comme une nouvelle entreprise de Mr le Marquis de Beauharnois contre le service et l'autorité de sa Majesté.

... Le Conseil [supérieur] suppliant Sa Majesté qu'il luy plaise en vengeance l'insulte faite à son Conseil supérieur, assurer sa propre autorité contre les Efforts que l'on fait icy Journallement pour soulever les peuples et les dégager de l'obéissance à sa Justice ...<sup>31</sup>

Boullard, Beauharnois and Dupuy all agreed that the opposing party was troubling the people's consciences, allowing them to question authority.

What frightened all of them, also, was that the people were gossiping about **them**. Each took the rumours seriously, even if it was only to decry them. They also reacted to these "avis de toutes parts", "bruits communs", "murmures" and "rumeurs". In the absolutist society, rumours were the only

27. "Ordonnance ... du 6 janvier 1728" in *Arrêts et Règlements du Conseil Supérieur de Québec et Ordonnances et Jugements des Intendants du Canada* (Québec : E.R. Fréchette, 1856), p. 327.

28. "Ordonnance ... du 27 mars", in *Arrêts et Règlements*, p. 335.

29. Cited in abbé Auguste Gosselin, "Charles de Beauharnois", *BRH*, 7 (1901), p. 296.

30. National Archives of Canada [hereafter NAC], France, Archives des Colonies, MG1 Série C11A, Correspondance générale, Canada, Transcriptions, vol. 106, p. 222, "Mandement de Messieurs les Vicaires Généraux", 12 septembre 1728.

31. Archives du Séminaire de Québec, Documents Faribault, n<sup>o</sup> 136a, "Ordonnance de M. Dupuy du 29 mai 1728 ..."

way in which most people could voice their opinions. As an historian of colonial India has pointed out, rumours flourish during times of conflict and unrest. They “emerge purposively rather than accidentally as they represent the preoccupations of a ‘public’ seeking to comprehend the exigencies of their precarious situations.”<sup>32</sup>

It is surprising perhaps that “the people” should enter so often into this debate over authority and should form an important element in the calumnies that the groups would spread about each other. New France functioned, after all, within an absolutist framework, where legitimacy came from above, not below. In fact, the references to “le peuple” betrayed a deep fear of popular will, of rebelliousness and of clandestinity. The people were sensible and wise, according to Dupuy, only insofar as they ignored the rebelliousness of the Chapter. But for Dupuy, Boullard and Beauharnois, the people were always in danger of being duped by ill-intentioned leaders. None of the parties could actually admit that the people had been insubordinate, for in doing so they would have admitted that they themselves had failed in their role as authority figures. But they could easily accuse others of “exciting” them.

In this way, the authorities’ real fear was not so much of popular revolt, but of a manipulated public. This manipulation, led by the opponent, also implied the participation of his supporters. The next stage, after decrying the public rumours which threatened authority, was to expose and attack the opponent’s supporters.

Étienne Boullard’s first contribution to the struggle was to suspend the Mother Superior and to place the Hospital chapel under interdict because of the nuns’ role in the Bishop’s burial. He later suspended two other participants, Jesuit Fathers Pierre de La Chasse and Claude Dupuy. The Governor summoned lieutenant-general Pierre André de Leigne and threatened him if he disobeyed him, that “dans quelques tems yl nous métrroit si bas, que nous ne nous en relevrions jamais.”<sup>33</sup> Dupuy was no less punitive. The Superior Council’s bailiff and Quebec’s militia captain both refused to publish Dupuy’s edicts, and the intendant had them arrested. Beauharnois’ deputy forced open the prison to free the two men. Subsequently, Beauharnois tried to expell two of Dupuy’s partisans on the Superior Council from the city, but they took refuge in the intendant’s palace.

Thus, each side in the struggle sought to defeat the other by punishing its supporters. In appeals to superiors, the participants contented themselves with

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32. Anand A. Yang, “A Conversation of Rumors: The Language of Popular *Mentalités* in Late Nineteenth-Century Colonial India”, *Journal of Social History*, 20, 3 (spring 1987), p. 485.

33. NAC, Landes Collection, MG53, n° 47 : Comte de Phélypeaux, Copie de procès-verbal envoyé par Pierre André de Leigne, 24 janvier 1728.

exposing the opponents' supporters, because these could comprise a cabal to subvert the king's wishes.

In his 1730 memoir, written to justify a request for an indemnity for his troubles and to attempt one last time to discredit his enemy, Dupuy attacked Beauharnois' loyalty and claimed that the governor had been trying to crown himself. He had encouraged the popular cry "Vive le Roy et Beauharnois", and his cabal tried to overthrow the king's justice. The Recollets, for instance, had seditiously opposed the intendant's authority by threatening the Superior Council members with violence and by preaching dangerous sermons:

Rien donc de plus inouï et de plus téméraire que ce que ces religieux et les autres ecclésiastiques ont proféré dans les chaires, mais rien aussy n'était plus capable de démasquer les desseins qu'avait Monsieur de Beauharnois ...<sup>34</sup>

Other supporters of the governor had ignored the Intendant's rulings in order to make personal fortunes. Dupuy explained their actions by exposing their family ties. François Foucault, the king's storekeeper who seized Dupuy's belongings in payment of bad debts in October, was a relative of the governor. The king's storekeeper in Montreal was Beauharnois' brother-in-law's brother's father-in-law. The governor's butler's sister-in-law had married the Controller.<sup>35</sup> This sort of attack should not surprise us, given the political, economic and social importance of the family in early modern society. To contest one's opponent's legitimacy, one often struck first at his or her family ties, for these could distract one from obedience to the king.

The importance of family ties raises the question of the woman's role in authority relations. People acquired allegiances within and between generations through marriage bonds. The marriage instantly provided a nexus of new relations, while the children born of it served eventually to widen the family's connections. This social system, though patriarchal, allowed certain women to wield a great deal of power. And it also implied that they could become targets of attack. Thus, according to the author of the ironic poem, "Les Troubles de l'Église du Canada en 1728", the idea of the clandestine burial of the Bishop's body originated with M<sup>me</sup> Dupuy, Marie-Madeleine Lefouyn: "... cette chère moitié Dont le coeur fut toujours nourri dans la pitié Du droit de décider se croyant investie ..."<sup>36</sup>

Another verse which appears to have circulated at the time accused M<sup>me</sup> Dupuy of tyranny. Yet a third compared her to Medea.<sup>37</sup>

34. "Mémoire de M. Dupuy, Intendant de la Nouvelle France, sur les troubles arrivés à Québec en 1727 et 1728, après la mort de M<sup>gr</sup> de Saint-Vallier, Évêque de Québec" in *Rapport de l'archiviste de la province de Québec*, (1920-1921), p. 88.

35. *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

36. Cited in P.-G. Roy, "Un poème héroï-comique", *BRH* 3 (1897), p. 120.

37. BMM, Chassé. Most of the verses in this collection are cited in Aegidius Fauteux, "Bataille de Vers autour d'une Tombe", *MRSC* 3<sup>e</sup> série, xxv (1931), pp. 47-60.

The ability to attack the wife stemmed from cultural precepts. It was at the point of creating family ties that women's power seemed dangerous to men. In other words, women's sexuality, if it were exercised illegitimately, could weaken authority. If women engaged in illegitimate sexual relations, their family's whole clientage nexus might crumble, for their alliances would have been false ones.<sup>38</sup> In an eighteenth-century text of jurisprudence, François Dareau discussed the consequences of suspected adultery:

Le mari ... a-t-il lieu de suspecter la vertu de sa compagne, les noirs soucis l'obsèdent, tout l'inquiète, tout lui déplaît. Il ne se sent plus ces tendres mouvemens qu'inspire une paternité certaine. Ses enfans, auparavant si chers, n'ont plus les mêmes charmes à ses yeux.<sup>39</sup>

In fact, very few women had illegitimate children in New France.<sup>40</sup> Nonetheless, the male fear of being a cuckold represented a weak point at which to attack authority. This interpretation explains why so much of the invective directed at male figures of authority in the eighteenth century actually focussed on the wife.<sup>41</sup> Another of the rude songs which circulated after the funeral blamed her charms (her sexual charms?) for bringing Dupuy's supporters to ruin:

Les appas de son épouse  
Foibles pour des gents d'honneur  
Vous (Dupuy's supporters) ont jetté dans la blouse<sup>42</sup>

Perhaps this focus on gender stemmed from a third element of the debate between the parties. In addition to hurling accusations of rebelliousness and family connections, both sides accused the other of letting "passion" get the better of them. Dupuy claimed that when the Chapter vicars rejected all secular justice, "En faudrait-il davantage pour faire connaître la passion ... ?"<sup>43</sup>

38. Sabeau, *Power in the Blood*, pp. 137-138.

39. Dareau, *Traité des Injures dans l'ordre judiciaire* (Paris : chez Prault père, 1775), pp. 295-296.

40. Between 1700 and 1729, about 1.5 percent of all children were born of illegitimate relations. Lyne Paquette and Réal Bates, "Les naissances illégitimes sur les rives du Saint-Laurent avant 1730", *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, 40, 2 (automne 1986), pp. 239-252. For a discussion of the different attitudes towards women and men who had non-marital sexual relations, see Marie-Aimée Cliche, "Filles-mères, familles et société sous le Régime français", *Histoire sociale — Social History*, Vol. XXI, n° 41 (May 1988), pp. 39-69.

41. See, for example, Robert Darnton, "Workers Revolt: The Great Cat Massacre of the Rue Saint-Séverin" in *The Great Cat Massacre And Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), pp. 98-99; Dorinda Outram, "Le langage mâle de la vertu: Women and the discourse of the French Revolution" in P. Burke and R. Porter, eds., *The Social History of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 125.

42. Cited in Fauteux, "Bataille de Vers", p. 55.

43. "Mémoire de Dupuy", p. 94.

Beauharnois blamed Dupuy's supporters on the Superior Council for having been blinded: "La Justice ne se rendait qu'autant que la passion les conduisait."<sup>44</sup> And the ironic poet likewise saw Dupuy's passion as the cause of his downfall: "Dans ses opinions Dupuy passionné / Montre à ceux qu'il rencontre un visage effréné."<sup>45</sup> The problem with passion, women and supporters was that they distracted the authority figures from their proper dedication to their superiors. Also, they created potential for questioning authority.

During this conflict between authority figures in New France what would happen if "the people" began to disregard the king's representatives? In fact, some people did just that. Dupuy reported the scandalous questions that people were spreading: "A-t-on jamais vu le Roy en Canada ? l'y verra-t-on jamais ? y en a-il d'autre que celui qui y commande ?"<sup>46</sup> Though these questions allowed one vice-regal figure to claim precedence, other authorities had lost prestige. In addition to their laughter and ribald songs, some colonials showed their lack of respect for the intendant in even more overt fashion. A few citizens of Quebec threw snowballs at the archers Dupuy had ordered to stand guard over his posted ordinances.<sup>47</sup> Less playfully, habitants in nearby Beauport as well as in the more distant seigneuries of Saint-Pierre and Sainte-Anne de la Pérade refused to obey the intendant's rulings.<sup>48</sup> As for ecclesiastical authority, one Jesuit in Montreal reported that the scandal had emptied the churches and that the clergy were afraid to go into the street because of the public's disdain and disrespect.<sup>49</sup> Probably even more widespread disrespect surfaced in ephemeral gossip about the authority figures. In one of the few surviving examples, an anonymous composer wrote new lines to what was probably a drinking song, which expressed doubt about the intendant's legitimacy: "De tout il écrit au Roy / Il le connoist comme moy."<sup>50</sup> All authority figures had reason to fear this public laughter. For even if the laughter was directed at the opponent, it could easily turn against themselves.

44. NAC, Nouvelle France, Correspondance officielle, MG8 A1 3<sup>e</sup> série, Lettre de Beauharnois au ministre, 1<sup>er</sup> octobre 1728, pp. 2 116-2 117.

45. Archives nationales du Québec à Québec [hereafter ANQ], P-1000-1374, Collection abbé Étienne Marchand, "Chant II, Les Troubles de l'Église du Canada en 1728". This is a more complete copy of the poem published in the *BRH* in 1897.

46. "Mémoire de M. Dupuy", p. 104.

47. NAC, Diocèse de Québec, MG18 E12, Anonyme, "Mémoire de ce qui s'est passé en Canada depuis le départ des vaisseaux de l'année dernière 1727", p. 23.

48. NAC, MG8 A1, vol. 11, pp. 2 022-2 023, "Déposition des habitants de Beauport", 7 avril 1728; "Exécution contre le nommé Brisson meunier ...", pp. 128-129 and "Ordonnance qui déclare les offres faites par Pierre Lanouette ...", pp. 162-164, both in *Pièces et documents relatifs à la Tenure Seigneuriale* (Québec : É.R. Fréchette, 1852).

49. BMM, Chassé, "Lettre écrite au père Lachasse Jesuite par un père de la même Compagnie [Rene Carbara] au sujet des affaires du tems", no date.

50. Cited in Fauteux, "Bataille de Vers", p. 54.

It would not appear at first glance that Madeleine de Verchères' accusation that Father Lefebvre had insulted her had any connection to the funeral affair. Yet, by its nature, it too pitted two authority figures, in this case at the parochial level, against each other. More importantly, the forms of the arguments betrayed many similarities and consequently provide further indications of the cultural meanings of authority in New France. This section explores the "political" implications of insults.

On 22 March 1730, Marie-Madeleine Jarret de Verchères, wife of the seigneur of Sainte-Anne de la Pérade, Pierre-Thomas Tarrieu de La Pérade, wrote to the new bishop's coadjutor, complaining of the actions of two local priests. She charged that Father Gervais Lefebvre, curé of Batiscan, and Father Joseph Voyer, curé of Sainte-Anne, along with another man in a canoe on the Sainte-Anne River, had chanted a lewd and insulting litany:

Sancte Sacrebleu, ora pro nobis  
 Sancte tout au monde, ora  
 Sancte voyes bien ça, ora  
 Sancte la grande vache rouge, ora  
 Sancte Mme avec ses petites citrouilles, ora  
 Sancte niandier, ora  
 Sancte mon fils aîné, ora  
 Sancte Lolotte, ora  
 Sancte Sacrebleu, ora  
 Sancte Sacrebleu, iras-tu panser les vaches, ora  
 Sancte Touranyeux foutu bougre ira tu voir si le moulin tourne, ora  
 Sancte le bonnet a Boilleu soubs le chevet a Mde la Pérade, ora  
 Sancte sa naissance, ora  
 Sancte sa nature, ora  
 Sancte la femme à Portail, ora.<sup>51</sup>

Verchères requested that the acting bishop put an end to such calumnious activity and that he ensure "une Justice exemplaire" (pp. 211-218).

This was no minor, hot-headed accusation. Insults were taken seriously in New France, as in other early modern societies. In the eighteenth century, 44 percent of the individuals brought before the royal courts were accused of verbal or physical violence, the one often connected to the other.<sup>52</sup>

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51. We have two complementary, though somewhat different records of the trials. A photocopy of many of the pieces is available at the ANQ (and will be referred to in the text as 'q' followed by the page number). ANQ, Verchères/Naudière — Procès avec le curé de Batiscan, ZQ27. At the NAC is a transcription (which will be referred to in the text as 'p' followed by a page number). NAC, Nouvelle France, Archives judiciaires, MG8 B4, Transcriptions, vol. 1, p. 218. Each collection contains material lacking in the other, though both include most of the pieces. Hereinafter, page references will be included in the text.

52. André Lachance, *Crimes et criminels en Nouvelle France* (Montréal : Boréal Express, 1984), pp. 25-26.



Furthermore, insults not only reflected cultural norms,<sup>53</sup> they also often represented a means of bringing more protracted disputes to a head.<sup>54</sup> For this reason, one could not easily ignore an insult. As the French expert on the matter wrote, insults could even destroy the majesty of kings: they “rendent quelquefois l'état d'élévation insupportable au Monarque lui-même, & le font descendre du Trône à la vie privée.”<sup>55</sup>

But Verchères had not merely accused Lefebvre of insulting her; she implied that he had committed the worst type of insult, blasphemy, because he had profaned the litany.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, she claimed that he had convinced a parishioner to make a false deposition. Mgr Dosquet ordered the dean of the Chapter to write to Lefebvre, compelling him to clear his name or make reparations. Father Lefebvre arraigned Verchères before the Provost Court in Quebec. The case would drag through first the Provost Court, then on appeal to the Superior Court, before Verchères sailed to France to plead her case to the king. In the meantime, calumny would pile upon calumny, as each party and his or her supporters criticised the other.

Although much of the litany is difficult to decipher (and even was so for contemporaries), many lines appear to be attacks on Verchères, her family, and her social circle. Naudière and Tarrieu, for example, were surnames of the La Pérade family. M<sup>me</sup> Portail was her friend. The litany also cast aspersions on the local priests. In addition to its blasphemous character, it questioned Lefebvre's own celibacy. Furthermore, in some versions, such as Arnould-Balthazar Pollet's, homonyms for the name of Father Voyer appear in almost every line.

At the trial, Father Lefebvre denied having sung the litany. But he found that he had even more accusations of impurity to answer for. Verchères' five witnesses, all residents of Batiscan, told stories of the priest's unrestrained misconduct. Two of them, Daniel Portail, sieur de Gevron, and his wife Marie-Anne Levrault de Langis, had already had difficulty with Lefebvre two years previously when they married “à la gaumine” while he was celebrating Mass.<sup>57</sup> They added to the testimony about the litany that the priest had called Verchères a whore and M<sup>me</sup> Portail a wench (“gueuse”). Furthermore,

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53. Peter Moogk, “‘Thieving Buggers’ and ‘Stupid Sluts’: Insults and Popular Culture in New France”, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> series, xxxvi, 4 (October 1979), pp. 546-547.

54. Peter Burke, *The historical anthropology of early modern Italy: Essays on perception and communication* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 101; David Garrioch, “Verbal Insults in eighteenth-century Paris” in Burke and Porter, eds., *Social History of Language*, p. 115.

55. Dareau, *Traité des Injures*, p. ix.

56. Compare *ibid.*, pp. 116-120.

57. H. Charbonneau and J. Légaré, dirs., *Répertoire des actes de baptême, mariage, sépulture et des recensements du Québec ancien* (Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1982), vol. 12, p. 108.

Lefebvre had threatened that he would “screw” (“baiserais entre les deux jambes”) M<sup>me</sup> Portail. Finally, the cure had nicknames for his religious brothers and superiors, and he called himself “Grande Brague” and would lift up his soutane, saying “Voyez ma grande brague” (pp. 242-248).

Joachim Sacquespée informed the court that Lefebvre had told him that if he had a child, he should not worry about being punished. Conceivably, he suggested, this was a possibility since the priest believed that Verchères, M<sup>mes</sup> de Langis, de Bellecourt and de Champlain were all in love with him. The priest had nonetheless criticized, according to the witness, sieur Langis’ son’s illicit involvement with the de Brieux daughter. Worse, the La Bissonnière son facilitated the liaison by acting as pimp (“maquereau”) (pp. 248-251). Louis La Bissonnière also had heard the latter allegation from Lefebvre, except that he claimed that the priest had called M<sup>me</sup> Brieux the pimp (“maquerelle”), not himself (pp. 251-253).

Undoubtedly, in such a trial, where the only evidence possible is hearsay, Lefebvre would find it difficult to prove that he had not insulted Verchères. First, he proved that Verchères had accused Lefebvre of slandering her. He summoned three witnesses connected with the Church. All three testified that they had heard Verchères make public statements about Lefebvre’s alleged insults.

A few days later, two habitants of Batiscan and a goldsmith from Quebec who had been visiting Lefebvre declared that the litanies were false. They agreed that Pollet had admitted that Verchères had forced him to write the litanies. Furthermore, one added, Pollet admitted having been bribed: “Je me f. de cela, J’ay toujours eu 25 minots de bled” (pp. 562-563).

Over the next three weeks, Lefebvre and Verchères both submitted their reproaches against the witnesses, a process we shall examine later. When the Provost court delivered its sentence on 29 August 1730, Lefebvre had lost. He was ordered to pay 200 livres in damages as well as the costs of the trial; he was also to submit to canonical punishment for his crimes (p. 336). Lefebvre immediately appealed to the Superior Council.

With the new trial, Lefebvre requested eight witnesses, Verchères three. Lefebvre’s witnesses, most of them residents of Quebec, claimed to have overheard Verchères’ first witnesses reneging on their testimony. Four of them testified that Pollet and Sacquespée had tried to convince the third man in the canoe, Beaussac, to speak. “Si tu ne soutiens pas le certificat que J’ay donné”, Sacquespée allegedly threatened him, “Je passerai pour un Jean Foutre.” Beaussac nonetheless refused to discuss the matter with Verchères (p. 518). Other witnesses argued that M<sup>me</sup> Portail regretted her involvement and had warned Lefebvre previously about her husband’s “mauvaise langue” (p. 630). Furthermore, one habitant of Batiscan said that his wife and M<sup>me</sup> Portail had nicknamed Lefebvre “grande brague” (p. 634). Finally, one witness submitted that Verchères’ son had questioned the wisdom of the judges and the Coadjutor

in not restricting Lefebvre from celebrating Mass. Obviously, through his witnesses Lefebvre was succeeding in questioning the reliability of the original witnesses, while at the same time placing in doubt the integrity of Verchères' family.

Verchères' witnesses tried to reaffirm the testimony about the litany while casting new aspersions on Lefebvre's morality. Pollet repeated a shortened version of Lefebvre's litany, placing the event not in a canoe on the Sainte-Anne River, but rather in the sacristy, when Pollet was attempting to steal the chalice (pp. 612-613). Pierre de La Croix de Villeneuve corroborated this evidence, while Augustin Trottier made new accusations. Lefebvre did not always follow proper liturgy, he affirmed. Worse, he once touched a women "jusqu'aux genoux chair nue". Lefebvre had also bragged to him that he had fathered two illegitimate children (pp. 613-615).

Of course, there is no way for us to be certain whether any of the individuals actually said what they were accused of saying. The most we can do is assume some degree of verissimilitude for these accusations. In other words, we examine why this particular rhetoric was considered unacceptable by the other side.

Some elements of the rhetoric in the funeral imbroglio are apparent in this case. Illegitimate sexuality was a major theme of the accusations. These accusations focussed on women as well as on Father Lefebvre. Lefebvre had impugned Verchères' and M<sup>me</sup> Portail's sexuality, accusing them of being whores. As in the case of M<sup>me</sup> Dupuy, to question a women's sexuality cast into doubt her husband's control over her and the legitimacy of her family bonds and alliances. Even if the alleged insults had previously never occurred, at the trial itself, Lefebvre used an analogy which attacked Verchères' sexuality. When she complained to the Coadjutor, the priest affirmed, Verchères was "semblable à cette femme laquelle tenant en sa main le manteau de l'innocent Joseph, demandait justice du crime qu'il n'avait pas fait" (pp. 396-397). This reference to 39 Genesis 7 compared Verchères to the Egyptian lord's wife who had tried to seduce the slave Joseph and, when she failed, had publicly accused him of attempting to rape her. In other words, Verchères was not only a liar but a whore as well.

Likewise, given his particular position as a necessarily celibate male, the slander directed at Father Lefebvre stressed his illegitimate sexuality. From his virile nickname to his threats against M<sup>me</sup> Portail and his alleged fathering of two illegitimate children, the gossip about Lefebvre threw his own networks of support into disarray. Could his parishioners still trust him in their day-to-day dealings with him?

In themselves, these accusations of illegitimate sexuality threatened the supporters of the two individuals. But Lefebvre and Verchères attacked their opponents' supporters in other ways, too. In part, the nature of the legal system encouraged denunciations of one's opponent's witnesses. According to legal

custom, before delivering testimony, each witness had to swear to not being a relative, ally, servant, or employee of the parties. The opposing party had the right in each instance to contest the impartiality of the witness. In this trial, the challenges seemed endless. Not only did Lefebvre and Verchères oppose the other's witnesses, each replied to the charges, and in some cases the challenger responded to this reply. These reproaches provided numerous occasions for attacking each other's supporters.

For example, Verchères claimed that Rivard and Herbec fils were inadmissible as witnesses because they worked for Lefebvre (p. 490). Lefebvre had promised Joseph Gaillou money in his will and Herbec père was an intimate friend (pp. 665-666). Furthermore, Herbec was not worthy of attention, as she had indicated to him herself when she told him that "elle ne s'amusoit pas à une canaille comme luy" (p. 664).

Lefebvre made similar charges concerning Verchères' economic power over her clientage. Pollet, in his position as notary and clerk of court, was "par conséquent à leur solde" (p. 366). (In fact, shortly after the first trial, Pollet had received a commission as royal notary for Batiscan, Champlain, Sainte-Anne and Les Grondines seigneuries.<sup>58</sup> Pierre de La Croix de Villeneuve lodged with the La Pérade family and acted as a private tutor to the children (p. 692). Both therefore had economic ties to the seigneurs.

But the most revealing accusations were based on family ties. In such a battle over alliances, the priest's knowledge of parish records afforded him a great advantage. Daniel Portail was the son-in-law of Verchères' brother-in-law. Louis La Bissonnière was the son of her brother-in-law's father-in-law's nephew. Joachim de Sacquespée had married Verchères' brother-in-law's father-in-law's niece. Augustin Trottier was of course related to everyone, being first cousin to Verchères' brother-in-law (pp. 367, 709). And as if marriage bonds were not capable of creating enough alliances, Verchères also used fictive kinship.<sup>59</sup> Not long before the trial, she acted as god-mother to Arnauld Pollet's child (p. 271).<sup>60</sup> Because of Verchères' control over her clientage of relatives and lackeys, Lefebvre suggested, their testimony was invalid.

It is important to note the true nature of the allies of the two parties. Verchères' witnesses came from her extended family, and local military personnel and royal officials. Parish registers indicate that in the ten years previous to the trial, the La Pérade family only signed the registers at

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58. NAC, Nouvelle France, Ordonnances des Intendants, MG8 A6, vol. 10, Hocquart, "Commission de notaire Royal ...", 12 septembre 1730, pp. 345-346.

59. Compare Sabeau, *Power in the Blood*, p. 12.

60. Charbonneau and Légaré, dirs., *Répertoire des actes ...*, vol. 23, p. 95.

the baptisms, marriages and burials of a restricted circle in Batiscan and Sainte-Anne.<sup>61</sup> This circle also almost exclusively comprised family members and officials, especially militia officers. Thus, Lefebvre was correct. This clientage, of which the witnesses were part, seemed very much to be composed of local nobles and officials. On the other hand, Lefebvre's witnesses from Batiscan were all habitants and were his immediate neighbours in the parish.<sup>62</sup>

As Lefebvre saw the accusation and the trial, it was very much a question of Verchères' social network combining against him. "Il n'y a pas de semaine depuis l'ynstance", Lefebvre claimed, "qu'on ne les ayt vue les uns chez les autres pour combiner la perte du s. Lefebvre" (q. 199). Moreover, a local cabal was at work, trying to destroy Lefebvre: "La Cour est trop penetrante pour ne pas sapercevoir de la caballe concertée entre parents; alliés; et amis pour perdre le sieur Lefebvre" (q. 13).

But Lefebvre would not make any detailed attempt to explain why so many people wanted to cause his downfall. He claimed merely that Verchères' "passion" and "fury" hindered her from dealing with the issue in a more reasonable, quiet manner. Lefebvre claimed that Verchères' problem was that "sa passion l'a emporté audessus de la raison" (p. 294). Speaking of Verchères and her husband, Lefebvre suggested that, "La Religion auroit deu leur imposer silence mais la fureur la passion les ont emporté et aveuglé" (q. 181).

As in the funeral affair, loyalty to superiors was an important issue, and passion could threaten proper social hierarchies. If Verchères had indeed united a cabal against Lefebvre, she would be opposing royal justice. Thus, Lefebvre accused Verchères and her husband of placing themselves higher than they should: "[ils] se disent noble comme le Roy" (q. 189). They "se croyent au dessus de tout le monde et agissent en souverains" (q. 8). Unlike them, Father Lefebvre knew exactly his place in the social hierarchy, and he went to pains to make this clear:

Lefebvre reconnoit pour Superieur dans ce pays que Mr le Marquis de Beauharnois qui luy represente la personne de notre Ynvisible Monarque, yl a pour Superieur Monseigneur de Samos coadjuteur de quebec qui luy represente la personne sacrée de son Evecque Mgr de Mornay eveque de Quebec, Yl a pour Superieur Mr Hocquart Yntendant de toute la Nouvelle France a la Teste de Tout le Conseil Supr de Quebec; Yl a pour Superieur Mr La Tour grand vicaire de ce Diocese, Yl a pour Superieur Mr de Lotbiniere archidiacre dans ses visites, yl a pour Superieur Mr le Gouverneur des Trois rivieres dans le Gouvernement Duquel sa paroisse est scituée (q. 183-184).

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61. *Ibid.*, vol. 12.

62. NAC, National Map Collection, NMC-1725, "Plan Cadastral de Batiscan" [1725].

Despite this display of humility, both Lefebvre and Verchères were quick to accuse the other of rebelliousness, of opposing their superiors. For example, Verchères argued that the dean of the Chapter de La Tour's testimony should not be permitted since she had spoken to him in confidence. Lefebvre saw in this reproach an attack on de La Tour's sincerity. Since de La Tour was "une personne aussi honorable que l'est le premier du pays, tel qu'est Monsieur le marquis de Beauharnois", Verchères had blackened his reputation in suggesting that he had invented his testimony (p. 385). Similarly, when Lefebvre criticized Verchères for having given twenty-five minots of wheat to Daniel Portail, she riposted that she was only following the orders of Governor Beauharnois (p. 476). Furthermore, she pointed out, in questioning the means by which Portail and Sacquespée came to Canada, Lefebvre insulted the governor's judgement: "Lefebvre attaque s'il le juge à propos mon dit seigneur le gouverneur-général" (p. 671). Each party thus accused the other of disrespect for superiors. Along with alliances and sexuality, hierarchy provided the metaphors for the arguments.

But as in the funeral affair, the public also entered into the issue. It was not merely the insults which had bothered Verchères. Rather, it was the fact that they were so widespread. When Verchères came to complain to the acting bishop, the litany was already well known: "alors public dans toute la ville" (q. 131). Likewise, because Verchères' accusations against Lefebvre were so well known, he had to defend himself: "le sr Portail et la dame la Pérade prononcent tant dinormités aux cotes et à la ville" (q. 31). Consequently, with the struggle so widely spread and so widely discussed, Lefebvre could not see the case as merely involving himself. His rank was in danger of losing respect. This was especially true for a priest, since a scandal was even more threatening when one held that position: "Un pasteur ou curé, dont la vie doit être le model de son peuple, et dont les mauvais exemples causent un scandal universel dans toute l'Église" (p. 309). In fact, much of the clergy had asked Lefebvre to defend himself in order to protect the status of the churchmen (q. 2). Lefebvre went so far as to term the La Pérades "ennemis des prêtres" (p. 368). For the priest, the accusations threatened the legitimacy of the clergy.

Clearly, what had begun as a trial of slander towards Madeleine de Verchères ended with slander towards Father Lefebvre. It was a difficult case, and the solution was even harder to reach. On 23 December 1730, the case was thrown out of court, the procedure suppressed and Verchères condemned to pay expenses.

Madeleine de Verchères had reason to be dissatisfied with the result. Not only was she condemned to pay the expenses of the trial, her integrity was in question. As a result, she appealed to the only possible place left, the king's court. Her voyage to France was not entirely successful. She interested the minister in the rather peculiar judgement, but he refused to re-open the matter. Instead, judging the case already "trop eclaté", he requested that Beauharnois



and Hocquart try to conciliate Verchères and Lefebvre.<sup>63</sup> On 21 October 1733, the two parties reached an agreement. Verchères would not have to pay the expenses of the trial. Lefebvre agreed to keep silent: "Qu'il ne soit plus parlé ny question des différents."<sup>64</sup>

But in the meantime, the authority of both seigneurial and clerical figures had been challenged. Habitant Pierre Lanouette, despite an order from Intendant Dupuy, persisted in refusing to pay seigneurial dues for the land that he occupied in Sainte-Anne.<sup>65</sup> In Batiscan, a long-standing tradition of elected church-wardens paying for an exemption from office was broken when those elected refused both to pay and to serve.<sup>66</sup> Lefebvre's replacement in the parish had to appeal to the intendant for a ruling on the matter. Priests and seigneurs could not take attacks on their persons too lightly.

Beyond the fact that people took insults very seriously in eighteenth-century New France, why did Madeleine de Verchères travel to France to complain that a priest had called her a whore? And why had Claude-Thomas Dupuy risked his position over a funeral? We turn from the rhetoric, from the inner significance of the struggles to the broader forms that they took.

In the trial, Lefebvre succeeded in casting doubt on many of Verchères' accusations against him. In fact, there was little to corroborate the litany which began the whole affair. Lefebvre agreed in the end that someone had indeed chanted bawdy litanies, but he claimed that that person had died in the course of the trial (q. 200). It is not clear from the trial just what Lefebvre had done. Moreover, Verchères and her husband had attempted to head off the trial on 26 June 1730 by presenting a certificate to Lefebvre indicating that they did not believe that he had composed the litany (q. 100).

Nonetheless, it would appear that Lefebvre had done something, for despite the Superior Council's finding, Church authorities were less generous to Lefebvre. Summoning the priest, the Coadjutor "lui dit les connoissances qu'il avoit de ses crimes d'Impureté, d'Yvrognerie et d'impiété." He asked Lefebvre to resign his post, on the condition that he be allowed to return to his Church for three months "afin que les peuples ne soupçonnassent rien ..." Although Lefebvre carried out duties in Batiscan from at least 3 February to 25 June 1731, the Coadjutor added that "il n'a pû garder le secret".<sup>67</sup>

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63. NAC, France, Archives des colonies, MG1 série B, *Lettres envoyées*, vol. 59-1, folio 458 1/2, "Lettre du ministre à MM. de Beauharnois et Hocquart", 12 mai 1733.

64. Cited in Roy, "Verchères, plaideuse", p. 69.

65. "Ordonnance qui déclare les offres faites par Pierre Lanouette ..." in *Pièces et documents*, pp. 162-164.

66. NAC, MG8 A6, vol. 13, "Ordonnance pour faire cesser un abus dans l'élection des marguilliers de Batiscan", pp. 13-16.

67. Charbonneau and Légaré, dirs., *Répertoire des actes ...*, vol. 23; NAC, MG1 série C11A, vol. 106, pp. 232-236, "Lettre de M. le Coadjuteur", 29 septembre 1731.

Perhaps the origins of the struggle are a bit more obscure than a response to name-calling. Let us not forget that Father Joseph Voyer, Verchères' parish priest, was supposed to be in the canoe with Lefebvre the day they chanted the rude litany. If we examine Voyer's and Lefebvre's earlier problems, perhaps we can come closer to the origin of the conflict.

Since 1726, Father Lefebvre had battled with his civil and ecclesiastical superiors over the splitting of Batiscan parish.<sup>68</sup> The proposed division would drastically reduce his tithe revenues as well as his payments for services. The priest later claimed that he spent 500 livres in fighting for his parish (q. 1). He signed the final agreement in the dispute only a few days before Verchères launched her attack on him.<sup>69</sup>

For his part, Father Voyer's struggles in the 1720s primarily involved the local seigneurs. He cut down trees on Isle du Sable for firewood, maintaining that the island had traditionally served as a commons.<sup>70</sup> In 1728, Voyer and some of the habitants refused to grind their grain at the seigneurial mill, thus contravening their obligations. When taken to court, the habitants claimed that the sieur de La Pérade's mill was dilapidated, that the miller was a knave, and that he gave preferential treatment to other customers. They also requested that some kind of scale be available at the mill. Verchères, who represented her husband in court, took this case very seriously. She accused the habitants "d'un esprit de mutinerie et de désobéissance."<sup>71</sup> She argued that the mill was in fine condition, that she had already replaced the miller fourteen times in the previous eighteen years, and that a previous experiment with scales at the mill had led to innumerable disputes. As a result of the tenants' refusal to follow their duty, Verchères had seized the grain from the mill they visited at St. Pierre across the St. Lawrence.

Intendant Dupuy's judgement in this case declared the seizure of grain valid and required the habitants to take their grain to La Pérade's mill in the future. To add prestige to the economic gain, the intendant also ordered that the seigneur should serve as arbiter in any questions of measurement.

This case was not the only occasion in these years where the La Pérades attempted to acquire the intendant's affirmation of their prestige. On 10 July 1728, the same day the previous ruling came down, Dupuy rendered a second

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68. NAC, MG8 A6, vol. 9, pp. 37-45, "Ordonnance qui enjoint aux habitants ... de payer les dixmes au Sieur Joriant curé", 6 juillet 1726; NAC, MG8 A1, vol. 11, pp. 2 071-2 073, "Lettre de Maurepas à Beauharnois et Dupuy", 11 mai 1728.

69. NAC, MG8 A6, vol. 10, pp. 102-104, "Accord entre les R.P. Jésuites et le sieur Lefebvre", 22 mars 1730.

70. NAC, MG8 A6, vol. 9A, pp. 87-96, "Ordonnance entre le sieur de La Pérade et le sieur Voyer", 22 février 1727.

71. "Ordonnance qui déclare bonne et valable la saisie ..." in *Pièces et documents*, pp. 120-124.

favourable judgement. Dupuy condemned the co-seigneur of Sainte-Anne, sieur François Dorvilliers, to pay dues to La Pérade for eight arpents on l'Île Saint-Ignace, following a long-standing disagreement concerning ownership of the island.<sup>72</sup> Without a doubt, Pierre-Thomas Tarrieu de La Pérade and Marie-Madeleine Jarret de Verchères benefitted greatly from the Dupuy regime so far as their social status in the seigneurie of Sainte-Anne was concerned.

After Dupuy's recall, their striving for social prominence persisted, though they were less successful. In 1729, La Pérade submitted his candidacy for the post of chief road officer, along with six others, but the colonial officials did not recommend him to the minister.<sup>73</sup> The following year the Court likewise turned down the suggestion that la Pérade should receive a military promotion.<sup>74</sup> In the midst of her legal battles with Father Lefebvre, Verchères requested an increase in the royal pension that she had been awarded for her youthful military prowess.<sup>75</sup>

At the same time that the La Pérades were seeking favour and were fighting with their parish priest, the latter received tenure in an unorthodox manner. During the period when the Chapter canons claimed the powers of the bishop, they named six "cures inamovibles", that is, posts from which it would be very difficult to remove the priest. Traditionally in New France, unlike the mother country, the Bishop had the right to withdraw a priest from his post. Only in a few parishes, one of which was Batiscan,<sup>76</sup> did the priest have secure tenure. The colonial bishops generally tried to retain their power over priests. Coadjutor Dosquest later described the problems fixing posts involved for his authority in a memoir to the minister: "Un titre ne sert souvent qu'à rendre le pasteur indépendant et plus indocile, et à faire murmurer les paroissiens, quand la nécessité oblige d'agir contre un curé."<sup>77</sup>

One of the six that the Chapter had offered titles to was Joseph Voyer. Thus, Voyer had clear links to the Chapter canons in their struggle against the

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72. "Ordonnance ... qui condamne le Sr Dorvilliers ..." in *Pièces et documents*, pp. 117-120.

73. NAC, MG8 A1, vol. 11, pp. 2 427-2 428, "Lettre de Beauharnois et Hocquart au ministre", 25 octobre 1729.

74. NAC, MG1 série B, vol. 54, folio 423 1/2, "Lettre du ministre à Beauharnois", 4 avril 1730.

75. NAC, MG8 A1, vol. 12, pp. 2 657-2 658, "Lettre de Beauharnois et Hocquart au ministre", 15 octobre 1730.

76. NAC, MG1 série C11A, vol. 107, p. 198, "Lettre de Beauharnois et Hocquart au ministre", 2 octobre 1731.

77. Cited in abbé Auguste Gosselin, *L'Église du Canada depuis M<sup>87</sup> de Laval jusqu'à la Conquête* (Québec : Laflamme & Proulx, 1912), vol. II, p. 189; Honorius Provost, "Le régime des cures au Canada français", *La Société canadienne de l'histoire de l'Église catholique : Rapport* (1954-1955), pp. 85-103.

intendant. After taking possession of his post, the bishop's Coadjutor, Mgr Dosquet, demanded that the priests relinquish their titles. Joseph Voyer refused. He contested the Coadjutor's right to annul the Chapter's decision. In early 1730, Lotbinière, still archdeacon, visited the parish of Sainte-Anne to discuss the matter with him.<sup>78</sup>

He also discussed the matter with the seigneur of Sainte-Anne, who signed the monition against Voyer.<sup>79</sup> Refusing to relinquish his titles, Voyer appealed the Coadjutor's orders to the Superior Council. The Council refused to hear the case. Nonetheless, on 22 March, Voyer relinquished his titles, at the same time protesting against the Coadjutor's decision and promising to continue his search for legal recourse.<sup>80</sup> In the end, Voyer did not pursue any further action, much to the relief of the colonial authorities, who were afraid that in doing so he would once again raise the legitimacy of the Chapter's actions following Saint-Vallier's death. The governor and the intendant later claimed that the Chapter had been preparing to intervene.<sup>81</sup> Is it too much to see the original accusation of the litany, occurring as it did on 23 March 1730, as an attempt to head off this re-opening of the case, another nasty struggle between the clerical and civil authority?

Ultimately, we have little evidence other than unmistakable coincidence that Voyer relinquished his titles and Lefebvre signed a settlement to a long-standing dispute because Verchères was in the process of arranging an accusation which could potentially discredit both of them. Nonetheless, if the connection did exist, then this protracted trial of insults would appear to be a distant echo of the funeral affair. And in addition to the thematic links between the two cases, the debate over legitimate authority, we can discern causal connections as well.

In any case the trials indicate some of the weaknesses of eighteenth-century authority. Given the importance of women in establishing alliances, which were both necessary and contrary to absolutistic power, their vulnerability to gender-specific insults represented a weak chink in the armor of authority. For Verchères, the "whore" epithet reminded her both of her sex and of the tenuous nature of her family's alliances. Assuming that he used the word, Lefebvre may have expressed in this way not only his personal dislike for the seigneuss, but also male problems with a woman who exercised so much power.

Like the funeral affair, these trials scandalized the colony. From the point of view of a woman of power, Mère Duplessis de Sainte-Hélène, they

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78. P.-G. Roy, "Le curieux testament de l'abbé Voyer", *BRH* 50 (1944), pp. 351-352.

79. Gosselin, *L'Église du Canada*, II, p. 76, note.

80. Roy, "Le curieux testament de l'abbé Voyer", pp. 351-352.

81. NAC, MG1 série C11A, vol. 107, p. 138.

illustrated the difficulties of living in the New France: "On n'y parle que de misères, de mauvaise foy, de calomnies, de procès, de divisions, tout le monde se plaint et personne ne remédie à rien, je croy que Dieu châtie cette colonie ..."<sup>82</sup>

Dupuy's actions in the funeral affair also reveal something of the limitations of authority, in this case colonial authority. Given his career path, Dupuy was in effect the most "French" of all the intendants.<sup>83</sup> In the Gallican struggle to establish the primacy of royal authority, the intendant tried to enhance the role of civil justice and administration in everyday life. In eighteenth-century France, this primacy was increasingly well established. Most French clergy shared in some degree the belief that Gallican principles ruled the Church.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, the Chapters were becoming increasingly irrelevant in the French Church, though they defended their rights jealously.<sup>85</sup> Therefore, faced with the Quebec Chapter's obstinacy, and given the colony's absolutistic history, Dupuy may have considered New France exactly the right place to confirm civil authority. Fights over funerals were part of the trend in the mother country to enhance civil authority. Secular officials attempted and largely succeeded in prying administrative control over funerals and burial grounds away from the clergy.<sup>86</sup> Dupuy encouraged the hasty burial of the Bishop so as to protect Saint-Vallier's last wishes and his own position as executor of the will.

Nor was Dupuy alone in trying to acquire some of the legitimacy of Saint-Vallier's position for himself. Forty days after the funeral, Jesuit Father La Chasse presided over the temporary exhumation of the corpse in order to cover the dead Bishop's face and hands. La Chasse kneeled and kissed Saint-Vallier's hand and had the other priests and nuns in attendance do the same. Finally, the Jesuit appropriated the Bishop's benediction for those present by moving the hand in the customary gesture. Thus, even after the original burial, the struggle over the body continued.<sup>87</sup> Both Dupuy and his ally

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82. Lettre du 23 octobre 1730, in Leymarie, ed., "Lettre de Mère Marie-Andrée Duplessis de Sainte-Hélène", p. 54.

83. Unlike all others, Dupuy had the typical French intendant's background as a "maître des requêtes". Jean-Claude Dubé, *Les Intendants de la Nouvelle France* (Montréal: Fidès, 1984), pp. 82-84.

84. François Lebrun, "L'enracinement (1670-1770)" in F. Lebrun, dir., *Histoire des Catholiques en France du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle à nos jours* (Toulouse: Privat, 1980), p. 157.

85. Olwen Hufton, "The French Church" in William Callahan and David Higgs, eds., *Church and Society in Catholic Europe of the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 20.

86. Jacqueline Thibaut-Payen, *Les Morts, l'Église et l'État: Recherches d'histoire administrative sur la sépulture et les cimetières dans le ressort du Parlement de Paris aux XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris: Éditions Fernand Lanore, 1977), p. 9.

87. Anon., *M<sup>gr</sup> de Saint-Vallier et l'Hôpital-Général de Québec* (Québec: C. Darveau, 1882), p. 280.

La Chasse understood the importance of controlling the corpse in order to validate the Bishop's spiritual and temporal inheritances.

Following his downfall, Dupuy came to understand the nature of colonial authority. As he explained to Cardinal de Fleury: "Tel qui se sentira le plus fort, le plus appuyé et le plus accrédité dans le pays s'y rendra toujours le maître à la faveur de la distance des lieux ..." <sup>88</sup> Despite the king's wishes, the person with the strongest clientage cluster could control the colony. But the exercise of power required not only allies but also control of the metaphors of legitimate authority.

The burial of Bishop Saint-Vallier and the rude litany about the family and friends of Madeleine de Verchères both occasioned scandals in the colony. In these conflicts, participants argued over definitions of legitimate and illegitimate authority. They cast aspersions on the economic and sexual alliances of their opponents. They impugned the role of women who exercised power. They exposed their opponents' supporters. Led astray by passion and corruption, the rivals displayed disloyalty and fringed on rebelliousness. Opponents used the symbols of "whore", "cabal" and "rebellion" in their attempts to de-legitimize their opponent's standing.

In these stories that the colonials told about themselves, they revealed some of the problems of authority in New France. Absolutism required unified authority. Yet in light of the distances and especially the length of time it took to appeal to the king, there was no simple recourse to legitimize their power. Except in the necessary and sometimes dangerous sense of acquiring supporters, local authorities could not look towards the habitants for legitimacy. Instead, they had to look upward and across the sea for patronage and protection.

Without this link to "the people", authorities feared popular derision of their actions, and they feared scandals which might create disrespect for their rank. Of course, neither case represented a rebellion in any meaningful sense. Legitimate authority on both the colonial and the local levels emerged largely unscathed — except for the innuendos that have survived to our day. But at the time, the people in power had indeed felt threatened by the scandal, libel and laughter. In this way, by taking both the people's laughter and the fear of the people's laughter seriously, we can get closer to understanding the nature of authority in New France.

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88. "Mémoire de M. Dupuy", p. 95.