

## Chapter 2

# “Épuration”: History of a Word

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“Épuration.”<sup>1</sup> The word smacks of heresy. It leaves behind the scent of political justice and popular tribunals; it evokes the grand passions of Saint-Just or the hysterical crowd of Fritz Lang’s *M*. If the word “collaboration” has progressively become known as a synonym for compromise and indeed treason (first during the Occupation, and certainly after the Liberation), the word used to designate only a

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<sup>1</sup> The French word *épuration* is generally translated into English as “purge” and occasionally as “purification.” The translator’s notes are bracketed within the authors’ or marked as “NdT.” Whenever possible, references have been made to English-language editions and the references have been updated and adapted for this publication—NdT.

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banal participation in the *oeuvre commune*. Such is not the case of “épuration.” Even before the Resistance and unoccupied France took possession of the term and made essential demands on the modalities of the war’s settlement, the word resonated with signification and had become fixed in the imaginary. As the word “épuration” came to refer to the legal (and extra-legal) practices that took effect after 1944, which historical memories and political imaginary would the word come to bear?

Words have a memory and this memory has effects that need to be taken into account. As Michael Marrus and Robert Paxton remind us, the Nazis’ military administration gave the order to avoid the word “deportation” in Russia because of the strong connotation of the expulsions to Siberia as practiced by the czars.<sup>2</sup> The study of the variations of a word, of the silence, and of the processes of euphemizing is an integral part of the attempt to reflect on historical lexicology. We hasten to specify that this study will not be systematic. Lacking suitable data-mining capabilities, it was impossible to track the word (or its absence) in the immense body of political literature of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The hypotheses formulated are founded primarily on soundings and on some extant works on the subject. Nonetheless, it was necessary to examine the period of the war more closely. Such an attempt to read History at the level of words has meaning: on the side of Vichy, there is a camouflaged vocabulary, each word to decipher; on the side of the *résistants*, words are the first weapons and each one counts. To say “épuration” is already passing to the act in a small way: it announces the reversal of the situation and of the violence.

When practiced in the administration, the épuration takes on a political, if rarely displayed, character, and it distinguishes itself by disciplinary sanction. It is no longer about mistakes or precise breaches of professional exigencies, but about behavior deemed undesirable, generally in the framework of an upheaval of the political system. To a certain point synonymous with banishment under the *ancien régime* or with proscription, the judicial épuration then diverges via the mark of infamy identified with the notion of indignity. Indignity appeared in 1848 within the context of the grand republican tradition, born of the French Revolution, of a strictly “pure” and virtuous citizenship, like the category of those provisionally excluded from citizenship.<sup>3</sup>

If administrative purging is a reality in contemporary French history, the power of the word is often erased by multiple euphemisms (reform, renewal, and removal from office) used by the nascent Third Republic. Born of the defeat and syncretically combining reaction, tradition, and sometimes modernity, Vichy ambivalently utilized the revolutionary reference and the organicist metaphor of the state. Ideological, and for the first time racist, Vichy’s épuration was intense. It would fall to members of the Resistance to reverse the Vichy lexicon and to fully seize, at least for the communists, the imaginary of Year Two. There, the excommunications of Saint-Just, halos of glory, remained the possible model, a handy reference to justify the punishment of traitors. Between the hype and the mirror effects, the

<sup>2</sup> Marrus and Paxton 1981, p. 351.

<sup>3</sup> See Simonin 2003, pp. 38–60. [Cf. Ibid. 2008.].

use of the word remains semantically delicate and imperfect as it proceeds from appropriateness to the targeted imperfect thing.<sup>4</sup>

## 2.1 The Revolutionary Paradigm and its Legacy

Épuration of mores, taste, language, sentiments: more than the first physical sense (purification of water, humors, and metals), French dictionaries reveal the use of the word “épuration” in the moral language of the *ancien régime* to designate a slow dissolution of harmful parts (purification) or a quick excision tending to chase away foreign evils (purge).<sup>5</sup> The political signification of the word is clearly fixed during the French Revolution and notably during the Jacobin phase.<sup>6</sup> Since then, the term “épuration” has belonged to the revolutionary vocabulary and the politicization of the moral or religious term is characteristic of a political experience that very quickly seeks a veritable conversion.

The word and the reality of the épuration are at the core of the radicalization process of the French Revolution.<sup>7</sup> Occupying “the entire space of the popular will”<sup>8</sup> at the Convention, the Jacobin club’s “purging elections” [*scrutins épuratoires*] were central in figuring this new form of direct democracy and its members were its partisans. They were the exclusive guardians of the excommunication establishing the Terror. The circumstances of 1793 and the rhetoric of the Committee for Public Safety would make the épuration a nodal piece of the revolutionary government. It seemed necessary to purge the sovereign of his hidden enemies in order to re-establish the unity that was menaced both domestically and internationally. In this way, the épuration is inseparable from a new historical category inherited from the French Revolution: the suspects. As well as a new practice: the list. They are intrinsically linked and each calls for a brilliant future. During the French Revolution, infinitely extendable lists appeared. The names of unambiguous opponents, émigrés, and recalcitrant priests soon faded to give way to the supposed detractors of the new regime. The law of 17 September 1793 defining a “suspect” needs to be

<sup>4</sup> In the same vein, see the inspiring analyses of a lexicologist, Alice Krieg 2000. [Cf. Krieg-Planque 2003].

<sup>5</sup> Based on a small investigation of the great dictionaries of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: Pierre Larousse’s *Grand Dictionnaire*, Emile Littré’s *Dictionnaire de la langue française*, B. Dupiney de Vorepierre’s *Dictionnaire française illustré et Encyclopédie universelle* (1876), *Dictionnaire de la Académie française* (1932), and *Trésor de la langue française*, vol. 8. Rousseau provides an example of this moral usage: “I love not at all that with children one affects a too purified language and then one takes long detours to avoid calling things by their true name.”

<sup>6</sup> See Brunot 1937, pp. 818ff.

<sup>7</sup> There is no entry for “Purge” or “Purification” in Furet and Ozouf (eds) 1989, yet there is one in Soboul, Suratteau, Gendron, and Bertaud (eds) 1989. If *épuratif* is rare for F. Brunot, “the noun *épuration* is, on the contrary, everywhere.” (p. 819).

<sup>8</sup> Furet 1989, pp. 704–705.

understood in terms of partial continuity with the *ancien régime*, which had also stigmatized foreigners, as well as unknown and undeclared individuals. The law's passage signified fears ranging from vagabondage to the suspicion of individuals whose ideals deviated from the revolutionary norm. In a certain fashion, everything happens as if the purged had placed himself outside the national pact and the purger only sanctioned this distance. The *épuration* was inscribed in a repressive logic where the continued agitation of *sans culottes*, demanding the arrest of suspects and the *épuration* of the committees, put pressure on the Convention and established the Terror. Robespierre and above all Saint-Just were the theoreticians of a permanently self-purging society. While the members of the National Convention renounced their inviolability, on Marat's proposition, Robespierre proposed a "purifying vote of the members of the Revolutionary Tribunal":

I demand that the members of the Revolutionary Tribunal, who are also members of affiliated societies and who have acquired the right to present themselves here, be purged. Their function as juries requires the confidence of the People. The public vote will be for them, if they leave pure, [they will be awarded] the most ringing certificate of civic responsibility.<sup>9</sup>

In his report on the incarcerated suspects (26 February 1794), Saint-Just vehemently pleaded for the merciless battle against the enemies of liberty—"I dare to say that the Republic would soon flourish if the people and their representatives had the principal influence, and if the sovereignty of the people was purged of aristocrats and *comptables* who seem to usurp it in order to acquire impunity"<sup>10</sup>—but also the revolutionary society's necessary pivot: "Mustn't such a society make the biggest effort to purify itself if it wants to maintain itself?"<sup>11</sup>

If the French Revolution rings of repression, it also extends the promise of regeneration, the two aspects being indissolubly linked. Mona Ozouf has shown how "alongside the word 'regeneration' the word 'reform' soon lost its luster."<sup>12</sup> The momentum and the energy delivered by the French Revolution commands the construction of a new man. Nothing less. The revolutionaries chose the brutal rupture with the *ancien régime* of which it was necessary to eradicate, banish, purge, destroy, erase, neutralize all the remaining "rags," including the ones that remained in oneself. The *épuration* connects to this logic of the tabula rasa and to the organicist vocabulary emanating from Rousseauian thought: the Nation is constructed like a unique and indivisible body of which it is necessary to amputate the gangrenous limb."<sup>13</sup> This metaphor unwound from the political body, and the more

<sup>9</sup> Robespierre 1967.

<sup>10</sup> Saint-Just 1968, p. 202. In his speech of 30 October 1793, Saint-Just extolled the permanent *épuration* of the Administration, too. (*Rapport sur la nécessité de déclarer le gouvernement révolutionnaire jusqu'à la paix*), pp. 168–183.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 191.

<sup>12</sup> Ozouf 1989, p. 782.

<sup>13</sup> Brunot 1937, p. 819: once it has passed by the crucible of the operatory medicine (this rapprochement between the political operations and the practices of the apothecaries is often done in public by derision), "a society was declared regenerated, it is the normal word."

anthropological metaphor of purifying blood, determined the future use of the word *épuration*. Thus, situated between treason and regeneration, the *épuration* belongs to the semantic field of the Terror and Jacobinism.<sup>14</sup> It bears the color and marks of the French Revolution, more 1793 than 1789. It is certainly this halo of significations and the imaginary that also crowns the very selective reemployment of the word in the following century and a half.

Until the Third Republic accomplished the promises of the French Revolution and, by the same token, contributed to the closure of the cycle,<sup>15</sup> the nineteenth century was constructed in a chaotic manner under the double tyranny of the revolutionary memory and revolutionary reference that dictated the possible opinions in the French political repertory. Writing during the Restoration, Chateaubriand showed how 1789 imposed its lexicon on political actors of the bourgeois century without the latter being able to emancipate themselves, consciously or otherwise:

Each also had a poor grasp of the constitutional language; the royalists made gross errors when speaking about the Charter; the imperialists were even less instructed; the members of the Convention ... fell sometimes into the republican dialect that they had almost forgotten, sometimes into the idiom of the absolutism that they had learned completely.<sup>16</sup>

In the clash of the two Frances bequeathed by the French Revolution—a clash that would reinforce a series of regime changes—“épuration” is a troublesome word because of its many connotations. It seemed to disappear from the political vocabulary of the period even though the administrative and judiciary *épuration* became commonplace, marrying the meanderings of post-imperial history. Thus, forgetting the first article of the Charter, the Second Restoration unveiled the purge as a way of regulating state positions and careers. Fouché proposed lists of banned individuals and the ultras of the *chambre introuvable* voted, against the will of Louis XVIII, for exclusionary laws and wanted to resurrect the category of “suspect.”<sup>17</sup> In re-appropriating the language of the Terror—one then spoke of the “White Terror—the word no longer reappeared significantly in the contemporary discourse.<sup>18</sup> A paradoxical coexistence takes effect between a word that one tries to avoid and a reality of purge that harvested its undesirables in 1830, 1848, 1852, and then under the Moral Order and the years 1879–1884 while the Republic, finally in the hands of the republicans, undertook the republicanization of its cadres.

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<sup>14</sup> To avoid weighing down the text, we stick to Robespierre and Saint-Just, but one finds numerous occurrences of the word “épuration” in the period’s discourse, for example, by Billaud-Varenne.

<sup>15</sup> According to the interpretation presented by François Furet in part two (“Ending the Revolution”) of Furet 1992.

<sup>16</sup> Chateaubriand 1973, p. 827.

<sup>17</sup> See Furet 1992, p. 282.

<sup>18</sup> See Simonin 1998, p. 57. Based on surveys of Benjamin Constant’s *Mémoires sur les Cent-Jours* (1829), Guizot’s *Du gouvernement de la France depuis la Restauration et du ministère actuel* (1820), and M. Bérenger’s *De la justice criminelle en France* (1818), Simonin concludes: “‘Épuration’ is a word that is not part of the political vocabulary of the men of the Restoration.”

Still, one must note that the Commune gave place to the Communards' vast reappropriation of the vocabulary of Year II, which they inherited via a slow underground progression within secret societies and republican sensibilities, a veritable repository of the traditions of 1793. It was thus that a new *Père Duchêne* was published, that the terms "Commune," "Public Safety," "revolutionary committees," "Jacobins," and "émigrés" were reused to inject a dose of revolutionary legitimacy into the emerging communal government. It is logical that the term "épuration," which belongs to the same lexical field, reappeared at the same moment.<sup>19</sup>

Despite their desire to anchor the Republic and to assume a large part of the revolutionary legacy, and therefore to reconcile the two Frances, the moderate republicans, in implementing new republican personnel, went surprisingly far in the administrative and judicial épuration and colonization of public services. In 1879, when the senatorial elections provided them a large success, a vast épuration was expected by men who had waited a long time. Between the purged—several pages of whose names were listed in the *Journal officiel*—and those who purged themselves, notably judges refusing to apply the decrees of 29 March 1880,<sup>20</sup> the renewal of the magistracy was nearly complete and belonged to a Jacksonian system of going through documents.<sup>21</sup>

The term "épuration" did not appear in the extreme left's body of electoral proclamations of 1881, 1885, and 1889,<sup>22</sup> where the radicals still considered the accomplished "reforms" legitimate, nor on the right, where they were denounced. Still, the word was utilized by critical brochures from various viewpoints, from Catholic liberalism to legitimism.<sup>23</sup> The "revolution of jobs," as Daniel Halévy would later call it,<sup>24</sup> seemed from then on to become the object of discussions for the stakes that overtook it. Thus, while the Popular Front seemed to ignore the épuration in spite of the intense clash which its arrival to power caused,<sup>25</sup> a debate was organized in 1937 between Daniel Halévy, Robert Dreyfus, Jean Guéhenno,

<sup>19</sup> For the occurrences of the word "épuration," see Dubois 1962, p. 296. Certain people, for example Jules Vallès and the painter Gustave Courbet, did not value—and in fact opposed—this operation of linguistic mimicry.

<sup>20</sup> Issued by Jules Ferry, the decree of 29 March 1880 broke up unauthorized religious congregations in France as part of a larger project of secularizing French society. Later, military personnel and magistrates refusing to sanction the separation of church and state would purge themselves—NdT.

<sup>21</sup> See Association française pour l'histoire de la justice 1995.

<sup>22</sup> See Prost 1974.

<sup>23</sup> See Machelon 1976, p. 289, where both F. d'Aillières' study entitled "Les épurations administratives. Notes statistiques (1877–1880)," which appeared in the liberal Catholic organ *Le Correspondant* (25 February 1881), and P. de Witt's legitimist brochure *L'Épuration sous la Troisième République d'après le Journal officiel et l'Almanach national* (1887) are cited.

<sup>24</sup> See Halévy 1937—NdT.

<sup>25</sup> The illusion of loyalism of the servants of the State was, however, not shared by the most lucid among them (see Zay 1954), but the principles of neutrality of public powers and the equal access to the State's functions were no doubt, nonetheless, more anchored in the politico-administrative mores while the Popular Front's logic of unanimity and reconciliation, quite strong at the beginning, could have played equally.

and Julien Benda in the framework of the Union pour la Vérité and then the Société d'histoire de la Troisième République.<sup>26</sup> Daniel Halévy denounced the extreme character of the 1879 republican épurations, where he saw a clean rupture with the “République des ducs”: it was the end of the reign of the notables in French political history and the new radical strata took the relay without the natural authority of the old elites. Very quickly, the historical discussion moved toward the ideological debate, driven by the category of the épuration. The movement happened as if the épuration of the beginnings of the opportunistic Republic functioned like the touchstone of the acceptance not of the republican regime as such but more fundamentally of the republican model at a moment when the model suffered a crisis of identity and legitimacy.

The Vichy regime officially extolled an “épuration,” that it was loath to call by its name, which spread throughout the sectors dependent on the state and targeting the categories of people judged unsuitable to belong to the national community. The systematic euphemism of the administrative language is not the result of the *résistants*. Nevertheless, and although many of them found themselves in the revolutionary eschatology of the war's end, the term “épuration” flourished longer in Algiers than in the *maquis*.<sup>27</sup> This then signaled, paradoxically, the preeminence of a legal order that intended to assert itself against arbitrariness and excesses, as well as the will to implement justice reducible neither to the revenge of the avengers nor to “the eternal law of suspects.”<sup>28</sup>

## 2.2 From Punishment to Épuration

When Roger Vailland saluted the events of 6 February 1934 of a provocateur named “Monsieur Chiappe, purger of the capital,” the title of an article published in *Paris-Midi*, the meaning of épuration found itself deliberately misappropriated.<sup>29</sup> During the Occupation, the word saw expanded use, designating both a phenomenon and a metaphor, and finally a chronologically determined legislative action.

If the Vichyist discourse avoided the word itself, the organicist metaphor of a “national community” purified and regenerated by unity and a new order, at the

<sup>26</sup> See Laurent 2001, pp. 420–422.

<sup>27</sup> Named after a thick Mediterranean shrub (*maquis* or *macchia*), these anti-Nazi guerilla movements were concentrated in sparsely populated mountainous and forested areas—NdT.

<sup>28</sup> Henri du Moulin de Labarhète, former director of the civil cabinet of Marshal Pétain 1946, p. 275.

<sup>29</sup> Edouard Daladier was elected President of the Council in February, 1934, on the heels of the Stavisky Affair and with the support of the socialists. The latter demanded the replacement of the local prefect of police, Jean Chiappe, whom they accused of having impeded the Stavisky case. Right-wing leagues organized a pro-Chiappe demonstration for 6 February 1934 that quickly degenerated into anti-republican riot and led to the collapse of Daladier's new government. Surrealist-turned-journalist Roger Vailland wrote about the events in the afternoon edition of the local newspaper—NdT.



center of the National Revolution discourse, formed around the idea of a necessary “purification of the country”<sup>30</sup> that must exclude the categories deemed undesirable such as “the foreigners,” “the Jews,” “the communists,” and “the secret societies,” in particular the Freemasons. The “anti-France” acted as a foil to the new regime, withdrawn over “the foundation of our race,”<sup>31</sup> “true” core of the community. An entire legal arsenal of interdictions and repression was forged on this occasion, for example, to “eliminate the Jewish influence on the national economy,”<sup>32</sup> to reject “the unworthy French” who left the territory of Metropolitan France between 10 May and 30 June 1940,” or even to modify the naturalization status of, in particular, “communists, Jews, crooks, political refugees [who] had found asylum among us and, under the pressure of mentally defective politicians they elected, [...] had achieved the disintegration of our country,” as would be presented by a work of propaganda.<sup>33</sup>

The available lexicographic analyses establish that the word “*épuration*” was not part of the prevailing vocabulary in Pétain’s speeches.<sup>34</sup> But it appeared sporadically in the quasi lyrical oratory of Alphonse de Chateaubriant, ardent defender of National Socialism before the war, where it served as a synonym for European, medieval, and Christian renewal. He wrote on 23 June 1941:

The Grand Oeuvre deepens. After having placed the Germanness in the grasp of capitalism and its inhuman exploitations, it completes its designs in turning to the East, against the monstrous Russo-Asiatic organization, triumph of hopeless dehumanization. One would have to be blind not to see here the role entrusted to Germany by Destiny. Deposed and damned will be each nation of Europe that does not rally to the flash of this sword. The march of the human genus has put the human genus in the position of no longer being able to go to live—and to deserve to live—from a total *épuration*.<sup>35</sup>

This blind belief in the *épuration*, celebrated at the moment of the anti-Bolshevik crusade led by the Reich and its henchmen, is the transposition at the European level of the *épuration* process—that does not say its name—realized at the national level.

Use of the word “*épuration*” was effectively restricted to the field of Vichy’s administrative semantics. Its principal foundation was in the Law of 17 July 1940,<sup>36</sup> which eliminated from the service of the state those civil servants born of

<sup>30</sup> *Le Maréchal et sa doctrine*, brochure, 1943. See Peschanski 1987, pp. 145–166.

<sup>31</sup> Message du maréchal Pétain, 11 juillet 1940, in Pétain 1941.

<sup>32</sup> Loi du 22 juillet 1941, “relative aux entreprises, biens et valeurs appartenant aux Juifs,” *Journal officiel* (26 August 1941) in *Les Juifs sous l’occupation* 1982, 62–66.

<sup>33</sup> *Le Maréchal et sa doctrine*, brochure, 1943 [The German army began its western offensive on 10 May 1940 and invaded the French Channel Islands on 30 June 1940, by which time the French government had left Paris, ultimately seating itself in Vichy.]

<sup>34</sup> Miller 1975 and Pétain 1989.

<sup>35</sup> *La Gerbe* (26 June 1941), qtd. in Ory 1977, p. 170.

<sup>36</sup> A second law, from 17 July 1940, also “relative aux magistrats, fonctionnaires et agents civils ou militaires de l’Etat relevés de leurs fonctions,” *Journal officiel* (18 July 1940) left a free path to arbitrariness by authorizing the exclusion of public agents judged undesirable “by decree taken from the sole report of the appropriate minister and without any other formalities.” Baruch 1997, pp. 120–121.



non-French fathers, and it was reinforced by the laws of 22 July and 13 August 1940, which, respectively, asserted the modification of naturalizations and the exclusion from civil service of secret society members. This unfettered “Julyfication” constituted an “épuration” of the public service, in the large sense of the word. It permitted the ostracization of every agent suspected of not adhering fully to the ideals of the National Revolution. The subtleness of these measures allying persuasion and constraint left to the political power the possibility of “distinguishing between the good and the bad civil servants” and “realizing first a épuration, and then in making the civil servant the auxiliary of the central government.”<sup>37</sup> In actuality, the systematic purge put in place by the Vichy government seemed to be much more radical and arbitrary, by legal appearances, than the épuration implemented at the Liberation. A well-crafted quantitative comparison is needed.<sup>38</sup>

A major phenomenon for a minor term, the word “épuration” is rarely employed to designate the thing itself. In a strongly explicit manner, however, the term figured in the program of the ephemeral *Ligue française*. Founded by Pierre Costantini on 15 September 1940 with the accord of the German embassy, it published, starting 6 March 1941, *L'Appel*, a “mediocre weekly without readers.”<sup>39</sup> In September 1941, the movement signed a pact of united action with the Doriot’s PPF and then supported the LVF.<sup>40</sup> Without a single reference to 1789, use of the word here comes close to the metaphor, rather than the historically connoted meaning that connects the word to the regime of the Terror.

Paradoxically, if the filiation with Valmy, 1848, and the Commune is explicitly proclaimed by a large part of the Resistance, the word “épuration” appears only relatively late to designate the big objective that the collection of resistance movements set for itself at the Liberation. Instead, it was much more the promise to “punish the traitors” that surged very early in the clandestine press and remained a leading formula until the moment when the legislature intervened to name the process under the definitive term “épuration,”<sup>41</sup> designating at the same time an action—more precisely, a collection of legal sanctions—and a determined period of time. Once again, the meaning preceded the terminology. The word “épuration” could be understood

<sup>37</sup> Synthèse des rapports, 11 octobre 1940, AN 2AG613, qtd. in *ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 656–657, annexe 8, “Bilan d’application de la loi du 17 juillet 1940 au 29 avril 1941.” See, too, Laguerre 1988, pp. 3–15.

<sup>39</sup> Venner 2000, p. 570. [The organization’s full name was *Ligue française de l’épuration, d’entraide sociale et de collaboration européenne*].

<sup>40</sup> Ory 1976. [Jacques Doriot and fellow nationalistic ex-communists formed the *Parti populaire français* (PPF) in June 1936 in order to oppose the Popular Front. The collaborationist French militia *Légion des Volontaires Français contre le Bolchévisme* (LVF) was founded in July 1941 and in 1944 folded into the *Division Charlemagne*, a *Waffen-SS* unit composed French volunteers who fought the Bolsheviks on the Eastern Front]

<sup>41</sup> From December 1940 to August 1944, a single article in *Libération-Nord* entitled “Épuration” in the 21 December 1943 issue (no. 160) announced the implementation and the principles of the *Commission d’épuration* in Algiers, presided over by Charles Laurent, secretary of the *Fédération des fonctionnaires* (CGT).

as the legislative and then legal translation of the general aspiration consistent with “punish the traitors,” as if the necessity to specify the characteristics and modalities of the action to carry out—limited from the outset—required distancing oneself from an overly readily revolutionary vocabulary.<sup>42</sup> The passage of one term to another marks a mitigation, as underscored by the newspaper *Le Creuset*—“Organ of the engineers and administrative and commercial cadres”—of 15 January 1945, regretting the approximations and slowness of the épuration:

The word épuration has thrown considerable confusion into the *esprits*. Formerly, during the periods of peace separating the invasions of 1870, 1914, and 1939 – when our domestic quarrels were the rule—the word served the parties which reclaimed all of the places for themselves. Purge the Administration! Purge the Army! Purge the press! [...] That’s why today between those who intentionally have been the accomplices of the enemy, it was better to use the word *punishment*. It would not have resulted in any ambiguity. Having committed treason, having sold, despoiled, [or] tortured other Frenchmen merited rapid, summary, and exemplary justice. ALREADY AND EVERYWHERE IT SHOULD BE RENDERED [...] The verb *punish* would make those without a shred of evidence to support their accusation hesitate. Whereas the verb *purge* is both vague and seductive enough that everyone employing the word wants to believe himself sincere even when he cedes to a partisan motive.<sup>43</sup>

For the Resistance, obviously, the intransigent intention and the action preceded the word,<sup>44</sup> which toned down and legalized a process long sought after by actors spanning from the radical left to the extreme right. Beginning in December 1940, *Libération-Nord* opened a column entitled “Our traitors’ heads,” inaugurated by Fernand Brinon, “the socialite traitor.”<sup>45</sup> Drieu la Rochelle incarnated “the traitorous man of letters” who “today believes marking Nazism with the seal of his own thinking,” “The French will brand him before the c... of another seal.”<sup>46</sup> “Abel

<sup>42</sup> *Défense de la France* (no. 31, 20 April 1943) opportunely recalls the text of a decree, not abrogated, taken by the Convention, on 7 January 1793, that stipulates in the first article: “All the French who have accepted or will accept hereafter a civil service position in the parts of the Republic invaded by enemy powers, are declared traitors to the homeland and outlaws.”

<sup>43</sup> Excerpt of an article entitled “De quoi s’agit-il? L’épuration,” *Le Creuset* no. 3 (15 January 1945), unearthed and quoted *in extenso* by Rouquet 1993, p. 277.

<sup>44</sup> The *résistants* did not wait until the Liberation to proceed to the execution of traitors, with or without a trial, in an expedient manner in each case. This was the case of the police prefect of the Rouen region, André Parmentier, condemned to death by “the secret audience” of 2 August 1943. The CFLN took the decision to judge Pétain and his ministers on 3 September 1943 and it arrested Pierre Boisson, P.-E. Flandin, and Marcel Peyrouton on 21 December. Finally, the trial and execution of Pierre Pucheu—called the “French minister of the Führer” by *Franc-Tireur*—announced on 20 March 1944 that the purge had definitely begun. Philippe Henriot, information minister for the Vichy government, was in turn executed on 28 June 1944 after having been sentenced to death by the Conseil national de la Résistance.

<sup>45</sup> *Libération-Nord*, no. 4 (22 December 1940). [The underground newspaper turned resistance movement was largely socialist].

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 5 (29 December 1940).

Bonnard. He is the academic traitor. He does not commit treason systematically, by conviction, or out of cowardice, but simply to see his name in the newspapers or on posters.”<sup>47</sup> Starting in January 1941, a “settling of scores” of the “traitor Déat” and his comrades was promised.<sup>48</sup> “We demand that, at the liberation of the French territory, Pierre Laval and Marcel Déat be brought before the court martial and sentenced, like the traitors they are, to be shot in the back,” specified *Libération-Nord* on 12 January 1941 in an article entitled “High treason.” The other clandestine newspapers expressed an equally intransigent will. “Lead for the assassins” intoned *Franc-Tireur*.<sup>49</sup> From spring 1942 on, the clandestine press published a myriad of “black lists”<sup>50</sup> without forgetting the deviations of the *Bir-Hakeim* newspaper affair,<sup>51</sup> which did not hesitate to attack certain members of the CFLN.<sup>52</sup> The practice of the black lists spread further in 1943–1944. In July 1943, the regional edition of *Combat du Languedoc* dedicated an entire issue to lists of collaborators from the departments of Haute-Garonne, Ariège, and Gers.<sup>53</sup> *Défense de la France* announced the day when “many would pay who had hoped to save their worthless lives.”<sup>54</sup> The communists mobilized references to the French revolutionary tradition: “Vive la Nation! Death to traitors! Such was the cry of the volunteers of Valmy [...] Vive la Nation! Death to the Krauts and the traitors! Such is the patriots’ watchword in 1942. This word must guide all of our acts.”<sup>55</sup> As the Liberation approached, the calls for blood multiplied. *Combat* exhorted its readers to seek revenge: “Against terror, there is no other response than a more powerful and implacable terror. Every assassination of a French patriot which is not immediately followed by the execution of the assassin *or one*

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., no. 9 (26 January 1941).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., no. 6 (5 January 1941).

<sup>49</sup> *Franc-Tireur* (1 March 1944). [A resistance movement, founded in Lyon in November 1940, and underground newspaper that would later merge with *Combat* and *Libération-Sud* to create Jean Moulin’s *Mouvements unis de la résistance* (MUR)].

<sup>50</sup> *Libération-Nord* promised the publication of a “little black Directory of Arts and Letters where would figure the names of all the scholars who committed treason either out of approval, cowardice, or self-interest” (no. 171, 14 March 1944).

<sup>51</sup> Jacquelin 1945.

<sup>52</sup> Resulting from the fusion, in 1943, of Charles De Gaulle’s Comité national français in London and General Henri Giraud’s Commandement civil et militaire in Algiers, the Comité français de la Libération nationale was responsible for both coordinating the French war effort against the Axis Powers and preparing the eventual Liberation—NdT.

<sup>53</sup> Novick 1968, p. 27.

<sup>54</sup> *Défense de la France*, no. 3 (20 November 1941), cited in Novick 1968, p. 25. [Created in July 1941, this underground movement and newspaper operated in the north].

<sup>55</sup> *La Vie ouvrière* (Nord), special issue of September 1942, cited in Novick 1968, p. 25. [A communist-linked underground newspaper created in 1940 by former members of the *Confédération générale du travail unitaire*].

of their own kind is a dishonor to the Resistance.”<sup>56</sup> Although it had hardly tasted this form of action, *Défense de la France* learned the duty of killing:

Kill the German in order to purify our land, kill him because he kills ours, kill him in order to be free. Kill the traitors, kill those who denounce, those who have aided the enemy. [...] Kill the *miliciens*, strike them down like mad dogs...Destroy them as you would vermin.<sup>57</sup>

The word “*épuración*” is well-suited to the long process developed clandestinely.<sup>58</sup> Punishment mingled with the idea of a necessary purification for the future. If the Résistance as a whole precociously demanded that an implacable justice system sanctioned acts of collaboration, assimilated with “intelligence with the enemy,” it required, too, a longer outlook, a new human ideal. More widely, it was not only about punishing the criminals, but also purifying the atmosphere, by attacking profits. “The *résistants* did not simply want revenge, but also to purify the country; not only the traitors, but also everyone who had profited from the defeat politically, economically, or occupationally.”<sup>59</sup> The Resistance’s self-assigned high “Mission” consisted of “purifying Man,”<sup>60</sup> as Henri Michel explained in his postwar book *Les Courants de pensée de la Résistance*. “Separating the wheat from the chaff will begin the grand work of purification,” that will assure “first the taking over of men,” “then the changing of mores,”<sup>61</sup> “political [and] private mores.”<sup>62</sup>

The *épuración* is thus inscribed in the linear thinking of the Résistance, that of the promise of a revolutionary change. The experts of the OCM [Organisation civile et militaire], grouped in study commissions—Charles Bour for the *épuración*—worked on the subject and began publishing their studies in *Cahiers* at the end of 1942.<sup>63</sup> The first political program conceived for the postwar period appeared in January 1943 in *Le Populaire*, the organ of the Comité d’action socialiste (CAS). If the notion “*épuración*” was included among the first required political measures at the Liberation, the word was never used. The matter was one of “indicting all the individuals guilty of treason or intelligence with the enemy,” of “categorical repudiation,”<sup>64</sup> of “merciless punishment of crimes and spoliations,”<sup>65</sup> of making

<sup>56</sup> Circulaire des groupes francs des MUR (s.l.n.d. [1944]), quoted in Michel 1962, p. 338.

<sup>57</sup> *Défense de la France*, no. 44 (15 March 1944), quoted in Novick 1968, p. 31. [Officially created by the Vichy government in 1943 and under the leadership of its secretary-general Joseph Darnand, the fascist paramilitary *Milice* hunted *résistants*, helped to track Jews, and ostensibly maintained order].

<sup>58</sup> Baudot 1971, pp. 23–47.

<sup>59</sup> Michel 1962, p. 338.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 439.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> “Législation sur les responsabilités et les sanctions d’après *Résistance*, no. 6, 25 janvier 1943,” in Michel and Mirkine-Guetzévitch 1954, pp. 251–261.

<sup>64</sup> Andrieu 1984, annex I “Notre programme”; *Le Populaire*, no. 16 (16 January–1 February 1943), pp. 137–140.

<sup>65</sup> Extrait du premier projet commun du CNR, discuté en juillet 1943, in Andrieu 1984, annex II, pp. 141–144.

emerge “a more pure and strong France.”<sup>66</sup> None of the later programs submitted to the Conseil national de la Résistance<sup>67</sup> took up the word, although it was used in the ordinance of 18 August 1943 instituting a purge commission with the Comité français de libération nationale. Even General de Gaulle, whose speech of June 19, 1940 laid “the juridical foundation of the future purge by arguing that Vichy was both illegitimate and illegal,” according to Peter Novick,<sup>68</sup> does not employ the word “purge” [épuration] in 1940, let alone in 1943 in Casablanca.<sup>69</sup> He preferred the verb “to punish” [châtier].

The word has a definite political nature because first it aimed at the managing personnel, Vichy’s government ministers, and then in July 1943 the word applied “to the traitors and war profiteers,” all the while enlarging the sanctions to include capital, at the impetus of the communists, who proposed “the confiscation of traitors’ assets.”<sup>70</sup> The communists of Algiers advocated “a real and rapid épuration,” facilitated by “vigilance committees” that “could arm the citizens to make the identity of the traitors.”<sup>71</sup> As for the country’s communists, they emphasized the “punishment of the cartel men, organizers, and profiteers of the defeat.”<sup>72</sup>

For the socialists, the necessary work of purification appealed to the “old parties disorganized by the defeat, but purified by the Resistance,”<sup>73</sup> starting with the socialist party itself. Until the Liberation, the Resistance generally preferred the expression “punishment of traitors”<sup>74</sup> to the word “épuration.” The latter belonged to the political, legislative, and judicial fields, while the former originated in a

<sup>66</sup> Second projet de charte soumis au CNR, novembre 1943, proposé par le Front national in *ibid.*, annex 3, pp. 145–148.

<sup>67</sup> The word does not even appear in the definitive version of the Resistance’s action program dated 15 March 1944 and approved unanimously.

<sup>68</sup> Novick 1968, p. 21.

<sup>69</sup> In impeccable De Gaullien style, he declared on 8 August 1943 in Casablanca: “It is hardly worth stating, quite to the contrary, that the country must omit from punishing those who betrayed it and delivered to the perpetrators and who, under the irritating pretexts of pardon, invoked either by the guilty, or in the world of the councilors without French responsibility, France can blunt the double-edged sword of her justice. But no! The national union cannot occur and cannot continue if the state distinguishes between the good servants and punish the criminals [...] there is only one word to use: ‘Treason,’ and only one thing to do: ‘Justice!’ Clemenceau said: ‘The country will know who defended her.’ We say: ‘One day, the country should know who avenged her!’” Gaulle 1970, pp. 336–337.

<sup>70</sup> Second projet de charte soumis au CNR, proposé par le Front national, novembre 1943, in Andrieu 1984, annex III, pp. 145–148.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>72</sup> An article by G. Cogniot summarizing the 31 August 1944 meeting of the Communist Party’s central committee, *L’Humanité* (1 September 1944), quoted in Andrieu 1984, p. 106.

<sup>73</sup> “Le mouvement de Résistance et les partis,” *Libération-Nord* no. 125 (20 April 1943) in Michel and Mirkine-Guetzévitch 1954, p. 261.

<sup>74</sup> The death sentence handed down to Pucheu in Algiers and his execution are saluted by articles entitled “Pour les traîtres, la mort!,” *Libération-Nord* no. 171 (14 March 1944) and “Le châ-timent,” *ibid.*, no. 172 (21 March 1944).

more radical model, even if it simultaneously called for a purification of the society overhauled and regenerated by the ordeal of the war.

The word “*épuration*” also corresponds to a particular era and function: emergency justice. The word appeared in Algiers in 1943 in the legislative context of the reconstruction of the state and it remained a word that belonged to the semantics of the year 1944, when it was fixed as designating the emerging willingness of a “purer and stronger France.” No doubt the replacement of the word “punishment,” which retained a clearly individual coloration, with the word “*épuration*,” which possesses a more collective inflection, reflected the necessary adaptation of a vocabulary forged in combat to a more normative vision of a society to rebuild in its entirety. Nonetheless, the malaise subsisted with the use of the word. Numerous *résistants* confusedly felt the disparity between the word and what they wanted to do. If the action of separation with the traitors is evaluated positively, the presupposed hygienists, moralists who judged the separated element “dirty” and “impure,” hindered the employment of a term that one could no longer use with quotation marks.<sup>75</sup> At the end of the war and past the feverish hours of the Liberation, rare were those who would completely accept the word (if not the thing). The *épuration* thus functions like the word of others.

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<sup>75</sup> Krieg 2000, pp. 418–423. Krieg quotes examples of this difficulty in completely accepting the term “*épuration*”: Serge Ravel, propos reported by Rosenzweig, *Le Monde* (13–14 November 1994), p. 17: “It was the purge for us. Moreover, the word purge is hideous. One has the impression of a soap that cleans. It was not that. In fact, we were at war, there were adversaries and at the time we thought that when you find yourself face-to-face with a traitor, a man who doomed Frenchmen to their death, well, one punishes him as such. It is not *épuration*. It is something completely different....” The celebrated word of Camus in *Combat*, (30 August 1945): “The word *épuration* was already painful enough in itself, the thing became odious” in *Esprit* (1 December 1944): “The *épuration*! The term has moralist and totalitarian consonances that sometimes bother us.”

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