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Sometimes the format of H-France Forum is not completely suited to the vigorous give-and-take that a conference panel can provide. This is the case here, where several authors make remarks about *Murder in Aubagne* that could be dealt with easily. For instance, what is wrong with the commonly used phrase “popular justice?” What have I missed in not addressing Robert Allen on criminal tribunals or Jean-Clément Martin’s or Patrice Gueniffey’s theories about revolutionary violence? Why does Paul Hanson think that patron-client relations even existed in Aubagne since the elite was not well off, and therefore had few loaves and fishes to distribute.

All four reviewers present clear summaries and generous evaluations of the book. An oral format could clarify quickly certain misunderstandings, such as Paul Hanson’s that Aubagne was a town of subsistence agriculture (it was not). I agree that ideology was involved in the language of extermination of enemies; certainly, I agree that the Terror wore a different mask in different parts of the country; it is possible the September Massacres in Paris had a role in the local counterparts in the Midi, but I do not think this is a strong relationship. The massacres at Aix-en-Provence, Marseille, and Toulon occurred before those in Aubagne and so were more immediate. The fact that similar killings dating back to 1790 had never been punished may have encouraged the lynchings in Aubagne but there is no evidence for this. Indeed, the inspiration for prison massacres in Paris may have been partly the other way around, in that the Marseillais (including a half-dozen Aubaniens) brought the practices of violent democracy to the capital. They were involved in the massacres in Paris and of the prisoners of Orléans in Versailles in September 1792.[1]

As for Edward Woell’s thorough and fair-minded review, I indeed did not investigate the religious dimension of Aubagne’s history. That avenue just did not appear that promising. The disturbances in the town rarely involved the clergy and never directly. Perhaps I should have gone further since it did matter in Arles both because of its massive ecclesiastical establishment and because it was a refuge for Catholics fleeing the troubles in Nîmes. I wish I could have done more on the impact of dechristianization in the Year II but only a handful of sources turned up.

I agree that the term “violent democracy” has practically no relationship to liberal constitutionalism as we understand it. Yet, the French do things differently. A strand of thought exists that authorizes actions that might be considered seditious in Anglo-American political traditions. Among other things, the French Constitutions of 1791, 1793, and 1848 recognized the right of insurrection. Indeed, since the Declaration of the Rights of Man was specifically subsumed into the Constitutions of the Fourth and Fifth Republics, the “right of resistance to oppression” continues to be a legal right to this day. Moreover, I do not mean to suggest that Aubagne witnessed a “terreur douce” because so many great guilty ones escaped punishment for participating in the Federalist revolt. Both the number of executions
and the number of suspects in Aubagne exceeded the ratios in the Department of the Bouches-du-Rhône as a whole.

While the oral format offers quick clarification, a written format is preferable for bigger questions. Some reviewers wish the book had said more about the protagonists’ ideas. As I will argue farther on, it says more about ideas than they think. Creating, let us say, a section on political culture separate from the narrative might have demonstrated this and allowed a freer linkage with existing literature on radical politics. But it would have produced a lot of repetition too between the political culture and the narrative sections.

Ideas did not drive politics in this region in the sense that protagonists were following the philosophy of a single individual or an agreed upon program. The origins of local political culture and the archival and printed sources where they were expressed are much more diverse and scattered. As Soboul did with his study of the ideas of the sans-culottes, we must take ideological statements as and where we find them. Since contemporaries were talking to each other and not to us, their statements can be allusive or expressed in a kind of shorthand that we have to decipher or clarify. Moreover, Jacobins and anti-Jacobins were men of action so their programmatic statements were usually products of immediate circumstance, designed on the fly to persuade, explain, or warn in a particular situation. In their nature, they are not particularly elaborate. [2]

Nonetheless, ideas that I call “popular justice” or “direct democracy” make sense when we aggregate them. The explanations that contemporaries give for popular behavior are consistent, the men who uttered the remarks were dispersed over a wide area, and they proclaimed them at various points in time. This suggests they were drawing from a common fund of ideas and attitudes. A deeply unpopular fiscal system that was common to the towns of the region created similar grievances for consumers and taxpayers and therefore a common political culture. As the book tries to make clear, public or patriot opinion believed that equitable taxes and more representative municipal structures together would improve the lot of ordinary people. Moreover, a utopianism that appeared very early made these demands much more than a simple demand for institutional and fiscal reform. The instability of institutions and the sense that the opportunity existed to institute a society of true justice, stripped of millennial oppressors, made the emotional stakes very high. On top of this, the extreme left in the country as a whole and local militants shared a common vocabulary and set of concepts.[3]

Moreover, what contemporaries said about popular sovereignty and violence, on the one hand, and the violent acts that people actually carried out, on the other, are two distinct problems. On the whole, my interpretation of popular sovereignty derives from contemporary declarations or explanations, but these usually have nothing to say about the ceremonial of lynching. Jean-Clément Martin interprets this kind of popular violence as an example of extreme brutality.[4] Fair enough, but there is more to say. The crowd also articulated its rage in gestures as well as in words or ideas. These actions too are a form of communication and so need to be interpreted. Mutilating bodies, hiding them or displaying them, disposing of them in defiled territory like garbage pits, tossing them in the Rhone, hanging corpses more than once in different places, cruelty, enforced nudity, sexual molestation, the ceremonial of a lynching with its innovations as well as some elements borrowed from official justice—all these require the assistance of anthropological theory. The protagonists’ spoken or written ideas are only part of the story.

Anthony Crubaugh says that I underestimate the gap between the Jacobin leadership’s disapproval of lynching in principle and their followers’ willingness to indulge in it. I disagree. A careful reading of both the local and national evidence shows how often the revolutionary left felt it had to justify or at least turn a blind eye to popular violence.[5] The future deputies Blanc-Gilli and Barbaroux, for example, excused lynching in Marseille in 1790; the editors of the Club newspaper, the Journal des départements méridionaux, celebrated the vigilante bloodbaths in Toulon in 1792. National leaders even
commended the illegal acts by the Marseillais in the tumultuous spring of 1792. Other leaders excused vigilantism in other towns and regions. The victims deserved their fate (the Barnave excuse), they said; prosecuting murderers from the Jacobin left would empower political enemies (the Vergniaud excuse); regrettable but understandable excesses (the other Vergniaud excuse); and so on. Judgments about the value of formal judicial procedures, therefore, were subordinate to the ideology of popular sovereignty or to political considerations.

The tension between popular justice and due process was always there, of course, as the subtitle of the book suggests. Much depended on circumstance. The crowds in the towns and cities of the Midi attacked to get revenge, when they feared a verdict would not go their way, when they were taunted, when they wanted to penalize infuriating but legal acts (offensive speech would be an example), and so on. Authority never punished acts like these once they had occurred, but they tried to forestall future ones. One example was the Popular Tribunal of Marseille that was supposed to receive denunciations and displace popular anger. Its failure played a major role in generating the Federalist Revolt.

The relation of popular action to the repression of the Terror is complex. The representatives on mission or in the National Convention never established any of the four revolutionary tribunals (or seven if we count the Thermidorian tribunals with identical powers) to satisfy demands from below. Instead, the representatives and the political class generally abandoned the cumbersome procedures of regular courts and embraced a full-bore repression in part because they wanted to punish Federalism and to prevent its recurrence. Without inexorable, rapid, and dramatic justice, authority would never be secure and the political culture of the retrograde masses would never be transformed. These were political aims, even if the form was judicial, and the means violent. Nonetheless, the goals of the representatives and the militants also overlapped. Thus, the clubs wholeheartedly endorsed the work of the terrorist representative on mission, Étienne Maigne, and enthusiastically urged authorities to re-establish the revolutionary tribunals in the summer of 1794. Yet the overlap and the unresolved strain showed up in other places. The assertion of democratic sovereignty over justice and the simultaneous misgivings over direct action were evident in Collot d’Herbois’s and Fouche’s establishment of the dreaded Commission des Sept in Lyon:

Considérant que l’exercice de la justice n’a besoin d’autre forme que de l’expression de volonté du peuple; que cette volonté énergiquement manifestée doit être la conscience des juges;

Considérant que presque tous ceux qui remplissent les prisons de cette commune ont conspiré l’anéantissement de la République, médité le massacre des patriotes, et que, par conséquent, ils sont hors de la loi, que leur arrêt de mort est prononcé . . .

Considérant qu’à l’apparence d’un nouveau complot, qu’à la vue d’une seule goutte de sang d’un patriote, le peuple irrité d’une justice trop tardive, pourrait en diriger lui-même les effets, lancer aveuglément les foudres de sa colère, et laisser, par une méprise funeste, d’éternels regrets aux amis de la liberté . . . .

In other words, the tension was not between Jacobin leaders and militants so much as a tension in the minds of radical Jacobins. One cannot easily assert that popular justice need have no other form than the will of the people, and then assert that a revolutionary tribunal can better avoid precipitous mistakes that legitimate anger and frustration can produce.

I am very pleased, of course, that all four authors accept my arguments about the origins and importance of factionalism. I would like to address two of the reviewers’ remarks on aspects of this
problem, though. Alan Forrest suggests that these factions had been at each other's throats for
generations while Anthony Crubaugh thinks that factionalism alone is sufficient to explain the
bloodshed once external authority had collapsed. The “défaut d'état” occurred for many reasons in 1789
and after, but an excited, higher order factionalism is surely one of those reasons. That is, factionalism
was not always the same. It seems clear that the future factions were already in place in the Old Regime
but the rivalry consisted merely of singing contests that competing penitent societies sponsored. Once
the “défaut d'état” began to occur, however, in the spring of 1789, one group raised the stakes by
challenging the socially, politically, and fiscally privileged position of the other. That is, the future
patriots physically threatened the local elite and refused to recognize as legitimate any but royal
authority. Their leader was Dominique Pichou, a vigneron, who later marched to Paris as part of the
“bataillon du 10 août” to overthrow the monarchy in 1792, a fascinating trajectory for a “primitive rebel”
in 1789. In other words, the future patriots exploited an opportunity in the spring of 1789 and they did
so in remarkably democratic terms, not only in Aubagne but in Marseille too.

As Edward Woell recognizes, these democratic aspirations were expressed in a language that is quite
foreign to modern sensibilities. Anthony Crubaugh believes there is “scant” evidence for the
annihilationist language of extreme Jacobinism. Paul Hanson thinks Jacobins and militants exaggerated,
that they did not really intend to exterminate all their enemies. Perhaps not, since ultimate intentions
are hard to gauge. But on the level of rhetoric, eliminationist bombast was commonplace in areas of
maximalist terror, during repression in the Vendée, in Lyon, and in Bordeaux, as well as in
Provence.[10]

All this talk and action, of course, was the means to an end, the Jacobin utopia, the serene community.
Although one would always like to know more about these goals, from all appearances, the tranquil
community was a simple construct, one where strife had disappeared, where the Jacobins had eliminated
the enemy or the bourgeoisie. It also linked to the annihilationist project. Thus, the Marseille Club
extended the link between annihilation and happiness to the entire world:

Que notre Révolution, sans exemple dans l’histoire, apprenne à tous les peuples que les
Français ne sont devenus libres que par la mort de leur dernier tyran, par le supplice de
tous ses satellites, et par rétablissement d’une République fondée sur l’égalité, les mœurs
et la vertu. Qu’ils sachent, tous les peuples qui couvrent la surface de la terre, qu’ils ne
peuvent être heureux tant qu’il existera des tyrans![11]

Or take this, from the representative Garnier de Saintes, who was active around Le Mans and Bordeaux
(demonstrating that such linkages were not the monopoly of Mediterranean hotheads):

Les grandes mesures que nous prenons ressemblent à des coups de vent qui font tomber
les fruits véreux, et laissent à l’arbre les bons fruits; après cela vous pourrez cueillir ceux
qui resteront; ils seront mûrs et pleins de saveur, ils porteront la vie dans la République.
Que m’importe que les branches soient nombreuses, si elles sont cariées? II vaut mieux
qu’il en reste un plus petit nombre, pourvu qu’elles soient vertes et vigoureuses.[12]

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*Murder in Aubagne* started as a micro-history and while it grew into a regional monograph, the format
has helped think through some issues that are important for the study of the French Revolution. Here is
a partial list:

- Explaining revolutionary extremism through a top-down, Paris-out model of ideological
diffusion does not work for the Midi. Very old aspirations that predated the Revolution by
centuries emerged under local struggles and institutions that incubated a new, democratic
language.

• Taxes and urban fiscality generally, rather than a crise des subsistances, mobilized people in 1789 and kept them mobilized for several years after.

• The White Terror was not simple revenge for the Great Terror, the tensions behind it predated the Terror, killers in the murder gangs had been active in town politics before, and so too had the men who supported them. The future killers even had connections with each other through friendships, god-parenting, and the penitent society that predated the Revolution. The same was true of the Jacobins.

• While the political splits in local society reflected wealth and occupational divisions, albeit imperfectly, residential and associational factors also counted in determining political loyalties.

• The Terror operated through the medium of local politics, preexisting commitments, and factions. Federalism was not a rebellion based on class so much as against Jacobin recklessness. Opposition to the Jacobins was not necessarily counterrevolutionary or royalist.

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There are still bigger issues for the study of the Revolution. While I do not at all claim that my interpretation of the various types of violence is paradigmatic of the country as a whole, I am questioning some received wisdom. As Paul Hanson points out, one of these is the thesis of circumstance exemplified in the rationale for the Terror in Donald Greer's Incidence of the Terror. This is the argument that repression in the Year II was legitimate self defense that any government under attack has a right to implement. Yet the operation of revolutionary courts and the expectations vested in them were much more expansive and complicated than this minimalist formula would suggest. I would hope the book encourages someone to have another look at the revolutionary courts, a subject that, with a few exceptions, has been neglected for over a century. [13]

Finally, the book opens the question of the nature of anti-Jacobin opposition. This was not an opposition that endorsed the counterrevolutionary Declaration of Verona of "Louis XVIII," or that manifested itself as the chouan crouching behind the hedgerow in the cold, rain-soaked bocage of Brittany. Unlike such diehards, future opponents of the Jacobins in Aubagne and elsewhere accepted the Revolution of 1789; later, Federalists claimed the Revolution of 10 August 1792 and the Republic as their own; and each side frequently rewrote the history of revolutionary events to enhance their role and demonize that of their enemies. These things mean the concept of Revolution was clearly fluid, its meaning persistently contested. [14]

Among the many things that define the French Revolution, one of them was a debate over significance and power, a debate that all too often ended in execution and murder.

NOTES


[3] See *Murder in Aubagne*, p. 181 for an example of Parisian Cordelier activity in the region. François Isoard, the Marseille club’s firebrand, also spent the summer of 1793 in Paris in forced exile during the Federalist rebellion where he undoubtedly discussed issues of interest not only with the Cordeliers but with the various provincial delegations in town to celebrate the first anniversary of 10 August. See Jacques Guilhaumou, *Marseille républicaine (1791-1793)* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1992).


[5] Anthony Crubaugh claims Stephen Clay’s portrayal is more nuanced, but is not very precise about where to locate Clay’s evidence. The relevant passage is probably here where Clay speaks of a “condamnation générale de la violence” in “Les réactions du Midi. Conflicts, continuités et violations” *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 345 (2006): p. 22. Or maybe it is here, in Clay’s “Vengeance, justice and the reactions in the Revolutionary Midi,” *French History*, 23(1) (2009): p. 28. Yet this general condemnation never included prosecution for murder. I puzzled for a long time in the papers of the Criminal Tribunal why there were no lynching trials until the Year III. Then the evidence of equivocation began to emerge and with it, the realization that given their sympathy for the idea of popular judicial sovereignty, Jacobins could not imagine such prosecutions.


