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The Cleanliness of the Child between Social Standards and Care Concerns (16th-20th centuries, France)

Séverine Parayre *

Abstract: In this article we looked for transformations in hygiene standards for the children from the 16th century to 20th century in France. We will present the modifications in the practices that had been induced by new conceptions, and show how physical cleanliness became a central element in society. To conduct this research, we analyzed and compared a variety of sources, whether medical (books and medical journals, reports), educational (books, journals, reports, treatises, official documents from the ministry of education, maps, lithographies) and literary classics (dictionaries, books). We will present our result in different sections. The section *Washing: from safeguarding honor to preserving the body* will present the definitions, conceptions and practices of cleanliness from the 16th to the 18th century. The following changes introduced new considerations of the body, based on both protection and new principles of civilization. Sections *Hygiene to aid morality: civilizing the lower classes thanks to body cleanliness* and *Hygiene as the savior of all the people or the era of bacteriology* will focus on the period from the 19th century to the Second World War. We will show how conceptions varied among the educational, medical, social and political players. We will show initiatives of some protagonists, opposite forms of knowledge and practices between various social categories and how a new conception emerged based on well-being during the last decades of the 20th century.

Keywords: cleanliness, children, body, school

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Introduction

For several years, researchers in human and social sciences have contributed to building a history of hygiene practices and of children's bodies within infantile physical cleanliness. Our interest is similar. We looked for transformations in hygiene standards from the 16th century onward.

Conceptions and practices diversified among the various players: parents, doctors, teachers and politicians (Parayre, 2011). We have been inspired by works of historians and sociologists (Elias, 2002; Vigarello, 1987; Csérgo, 1988) who studied changes of behavior and sensibilities about the body and about education. First, we will explain how the clean and dirty pair adjusts (sometimes by merging, other times by opposing). Then, we will present the modifications that took place in the practices and had been induced by new conceptions, and show how physical cleanliness became a central element in society.

Thus, the section *Washing: from safeguarding honor to preserving the body* presents the definitions, conceptions and practices of cleanliness in the French society from the 16th to the 18th century. The following changes introduced new considerations of the body, based on both protection and new principles of civilization.

Sections *Hygiene to aid morality: civilizing the lower classes thanks to body cleanliness* and *Hygiene as the savior of all the people or the era of bacteriology* focus on the period from the 19th century to the Second World War. We will present the transformations of cleanliness standards after hygienism and pasteurism appeared and underwent successive upheavals. Accordingly, we shall show how conceptions varied among the educational, medical, social and political players. We can focus on the initiatives of some protagonists, opposite forms of knowledge and practices between various social categories.

All these resulted in the habits and education of the underprivileged classes being stigmatized. To conduct this research, we analyzed and compared a variety of sources, whether medical (books and medical journals, reports), educational (books, journals, reports, treatises, official documents from the ministry of education, maps, lithographies) and literary classics (dictionaries, books).

Washing: from safeguarding honor to preserving the body (16th-18th centuries)

Body cleanliness and dry toilets

Dictionary entries from the 17th and 18th centuries for the words “dirty”, “clean”, “cleanliness”, and “uncleanliness” enable us to better understand why water was not dominant in physical neatness, why the body was not at the center of the cleaning process and how child cleanliness could be approached. Understanding these older conceptions is essential as they enable us to perceive the civilization principles pertaining to cleanliness of infantile bodies. In so doing, we shall also question the relationships between cleanliness, hygiene, and health.

In the 17th-century edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, the term “clean” has several meanings: it refers to clothes and means “clear, very seemly, well arranged, put well” (article “propre”, 1694, t. 2, p. 335). “Cleanliness” is also “neatness, the quality of what is clean, adjusted and put well” (article “propreté”, 1694, t. 2, p. 335). For example, one could judge a man's cleanliness by his clothing and furniture. The 1694 edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* adds at the end of the “cleanliness” definition: “cleanliness is used for health” (1694, t. 2, p. 335). Indeed, at that time, changing clothes and underwear enabled to absorb bad humors released by the body, thereby regulating them. Some fabrics were even chosen for their favorable effects on perspiration. The internal cleaning of spaces, in particular removing dust and trash, contributed to getting rid of the bad air, thus preserving health. Since Antiquity, air has been denounced as fatal and as a possible agent of disease transmission. Cleaning was done with no water, by changing clothes and underwear, which also contributed to cleaning the body. Yet, no mention of using water to clean the body is made in these dictionaries. Distrust towards water was still strongly present. In the 16th century, successive recommendations were made to protect oneself from epidemic diseases, in particular from the devastating plague (Vigarello, 1987; Porter, 1997; Elias, 2002). Health historians have highlighted the fear of water for the body. Water was thought to dilate pores and let in bad fluids, leading to diseases and the ban on its use prevailed (Vigarello, 1987; Goubert, 1982, 1986).

We looked up “dirty”, “dirtiness”, and “uncleanliness” and paid particular attention to body appearance in the definitions. Again, the word “dirtiness” in the Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* does not refer to

the body. It refers only to “underwear, clothing, the table and the room” (article “saleté”, t. 14, p. 542). Only “uncleanliness” refers to a very visible part of the body: “poorly cleaned hands” (article “mal propre”, *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 1694, t. 2, p. 336). This enables us to understand what uncleanliness of hands could be and why this body part mattered more than others, so much so that it was mentioned in the definitions. Are other physical parts the object of particular cleanliness? Are personal hygiene and health possible explanations?

The cleanliness of the visible body: propriety and honesty

We crossreferenced these first dictionary elements with other sources. We mostly focused on civility and education treatises from the 15th century to the 18th century to better understand how one was meant to behave in society. It is clear that some parts of the body are essential - they are also the most visible ones: hands, fingernails, eyes, mouth, nose, ears and head. In some books, foot cleanliness is alluded to (Locke, 1695). No information exists concerning other body parts. Talking about the body was limited by modesty and the religion. Older ablutions included washing one's hands in the morning and before every meal, i.e., three times a day, washing one's face in the morning, and rinsing one's mouth after eating. Hand cleaning is an old habit. It can be found in various civility treatises: in 15th-century *Les contenance de la table* (Franklin, 1887-1902), in Erasme's 16th-century *Le traité de civilité puérile* (Erasme, 1530), in Fleury's 17th-century *La Civilité honnête pour l'instruction des enfants* (Fleury, 1686), in Antoine de Courtin's *Nouveau traité de civilité* (de Courtin, 1728), or in Jean-Baptiste de La Salle's 18th-century *Règles de bienséance et de civilité chrétienne* (de La Salle, 1716, 1782). Moreover, Norbert Elias made it clear that though the use of a fork for every dinner guest gradually spread in the 17th century, hand washing continued (Elias, 2002, p. 269-274).

To better understand old practices of cleanliness, it is crucial to study which people washed their hands and why they did so. We found that the child who complied with this practice was “the honorable child” (Franklin, 1887-1902, p. 169), “the honest, civil child” (Erasme, 1530, p. 28; de La Salle, 1716 and 1782, p. 63), or “the well-born child” (de La Salle, 1716 and 1782, p. 63). Hygiene, which consists in washing hands to prevent diseases, is not explained by this rule of civility. So far, no relationship has been established with the transmission of impurities by hands, as Norbert Elias demonstrated (Elias, 2002). For example, there is no recommendation

concerning the cleaning of hands after “natural necessities”¹. In Erasme's *Traité de Civilité puérile*, good habits follow a specific order: first the child should release urine and faeces before meals. Washing hands only took place before sitting down at the table. Erasme even specifies: “Do not sit down without washing your hands” (Erasme, 1530, p. 28). Here again, instructions are not given about hygiene specifically. Relieving oneself before eating must help to better receive what is to be eaten and to evacuate bad fluids, as retention is unhealthy (Erasme, 1530). Cleaning of the hands is thus required before eating, rather than after meeting “natural necessities”, because the rule is one of propriety and not of hygiene, unlike in the late 19th century. The morning order is the same: relieve oneself, then wash one's face, hands and mouth with abundant water (Erasme, 1530). De La Salle precisely explains to Christian Schools' pupils why they should wash their hands: “[...] as said our Lord in the Gospel, it is not unclean hands which soil the man. However, honesty commands to never eat without washing them” (de La Salle, 1716 and 1782, p. 63).

Decent people customarily washed their hands to show off their level of propriety. Body secretions were then rid of impurities - from which it was necessary to protect oneself. This was based on a moral principle of society. The soiled body reflected the lack of humanity (Douglas, 2001). On the contrary, cleanliness was associated with all the moral qualities required in *Ancien Regime* society. The diplomat and man of letters Antoine de Courtin made it clear how much it “makes a person's virtue and spirit known” (de Courtin, 1728, p. 124). Cleanliness is addressed to others. It is not about personal well-being, but about showing one's rank in society. Besides, dinner guests washed their hands one after the other according to their rank, starting with the most important dinner guest. In the family, the head of the family washed his hands first, the children washed last. In all the civility treatises previously quoted, the children always washed their hands with water, then dried them with a hand towel. In Christian Schools, there was no towel for each pupil. Therefore, in community living, it was recommended that children be cautious, when drying their hands, to always leave a corner of the towel dry for the following pupils.

¹ In the 18th century, “natural necessities” was used to mean “going to the toilet”.

Body cleanliness to strengthen and protect

Water started to be used to clean the body and was even recommended to prevent discomfort. In the late 17th century, the English philosopher John Locke was the first one to recommend daily foot washing with cold water, to strengthen them and keep them free of corns. Locke said: "It is recommendable for its cleanliness; but that which I aim at in it, is health; and therefore I limit it not precisely to any time of the day". (Locke, 1693, section 7). In the early 18th century, in the renowned Saint-Cyr house for noble, impoverished girls that Madame de Maintenon ran, the water used to wash their hands would always be warmed to "try to prevent chilblains in the girls' (hands)" (d'Aubigné, 1854, p. 293). In 1762, Abbot Jacquin was similarly cautious with foot washing and explained how necessary it was "to have very clean feet, because the slightest grime intercepts perspiration and the making of corns, causing painful inflammation and discomfort" (Jacquin, 1762, p. 289). Jacquin was the first to explain how important it was to wash other parts of the body, especially "those where the sweat by staying produces an unpleasant smell" (Jacquin, 1762, p. 289). For him, delicacy and health could come together.

Yet, distrust towards water and modesty regarding the undressed body remained the same and kept people from using water. Water was still viewed as opening up pores. Baths could be used to cure ailments and in *Ancien Regime* schools, baths were used to treat the sick. For example, only the sick were given a bath at Louis-le-Grand school in Paris in the 18th century. Healthy pupils were not subjected to bathing (Dupont-Ferrier, 1921). Only some Enlightenment thinkers were interested in introducing water to provide daily care to the body. Prominent among them was Genevan philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau: "Wash your children often, their dirty ways show the need of this. If they are only wiped their skin is injured; but as they grow stronger gradually reduce the heat of the water. [...]. This habit of the bath, once established, should never be broken off, it must be kept up all through life" (Rousseau, 1966, pp. 66-67).

It is only in the late 18th century that some doctors started to prescribe water to protect and not only to cure. The French Doctor Tourtelle explicitly announced that regular ablutions were absolutely essential to preserving health (Tourtelle, 1815). He particularly specified that it was also "important to take care of the skin from the earliest childhood if we want to maintain health" (Tourtelle, 1815, p. 429). Thus, it was advisable "to frequently change underwear and bed sheets, to wash oneself every day

with some water, to rub the skin vigorously, and to bathe regularly” (Tourtelle, 1815, p. 429).

Inspired by the medical revolution of the Enlightenment² (Porter, 1997), cleaning of the whole body emerged as a new hygiene practice. It was thought to be beneficial because it protected skin and maintained bone health. During the Enlightenment, though in theory, it seemed possible and accessible, in reality, it was restricted to privileged environments, and to a few wealthy and distinguished school institutions. In all the other environments, whether they were private pensions, colleges, and de La Salle's Christian Schools, body cleanliness (hands, face, and sometimes feet), when it existed, remained yet another rule of good behavior and bathing a cure.

Hygiene to aid morality: civilizing the lower classes thanks to body cleanliness (first half of the 19th century)

With the development of interest in hygiene, triggered in particular by the outbreak of cholera in Europe, precautionary principles for early childhood and concerns over body cleanliness were reactivated in the 1830s. A 1837 document officialized the creation of nursery schools³ or “schools for very young children”⁴. These facilities catered to the educational needs of two-to-six-year-old children from the lower classes (Luc, 1999, p. 33). These nursery schools were not simple nurseries. They were the first instructional facilities, where children were taught reading, writing and arithmetic basics as well as the first notions of religion, morality, cleanliness and order. Nursery schools had the same objective as Christian Schools, i.e., “to prepare for an honest, decent and Christian life” (Luc, 1982, pp. 60-65)⁵. Caring for cleanliness and health was officially going to take on a greater dimension, as the children were younger and were from lower-class families, traditionally considered ignorant of these elements. Nursery school had to set an example of hygiene for all the families. Besides, Minister of Public Instruction de Salvandy believed paying greater attention to nursery school children was beneficial. He explained to the school commissioner that early childhood intellectual

² See Roy Porter for this revolution: “new programmes of medical inquiry, new diseases concepts and research practices were introduced” (Porter, 1997, p. 306).

education could be beneficial to health⁶ and thus become the place where pupils could learn about the body and how to care for it (Luc, 1982).

The April 24th, 1838 ministerial decree brought more detailed, concrete information on young children's cleanliness and health. This official document shows considerable change in how the state viewed childhood. It became more protection-oriented and focused on safeguarding the body. They also show that the state wanted to alter the habits of the lower classes. For the first time, the minister of education could insist on parents' attitudes and great responsibility regarding childcare. The role and the responsibility of parents were highlighted. It is made clear that the responsibility lie with them. They will have to - at least - wash their children's hands and face, comb their hair, and, most of all, not have them wear pierced and torn clothes (Title I, 4 of the admission of the children, the art. 13)⁷ (Luc, 1982, p. 76). Daily nursery school surveillance is said to follow the rules of cleanliness and clothing care from the child's first day (Title II, art. 38)⁸.

Officially, three principles had to be respected, cleanliness, good behavior and politeness. Hygiene and morality perfectly served the same childhood educational values (Frioux & Nourrisson, 2015). As in Christian schools, cleanliness enabled to convey good christian, moral values. Clean skin, absence of stains, and well-kept clothes were signs of a good education. Due to these physical characteristics, children would finally be able to shake off their mediocre everyday life and "bad tendencies"⁹ (Luc, 1982, p. 85). The time had come to inculcate good habits into children. These were also conveyed by physical cleanliness. De Salvandy insisted with the school commissioner that the health and body care of the youngest children were essential in saving the nation and ensuring the homeland's

³ The specific French word is: "salle d'asile".

⁴ They are presented as "charitable establishments, where the children of both sexes can be admitted [...] to receive the care of maternal surveillance and first education which their age demands" (Luc, 1999, p. 33).

⁵ Circular of April 9th, 1836 of Minister of Public Instruction Pelet to the Commissioner of education and to the prefects concerning both creation and organization of nursery schools.

⁶ Circular of de Salvandy of June 22nd, 1837 to the relative to the commissioner of education use of books in primary schools and nurseries schools.

⁷ Order in April 24th, 1838 concerning the manners of the nurseries schools.

⁸ Order in April 24th, 1838 concerning the manners of the nurseries schools.

⁹ Circular of August 2nd, 1845 of de Salvandy to the commissioner of education, concerning the surveillance of nurseries schools by the inspectors of primary school.

future needs. However, cholera broke the trust water had gradually won, while doctors and scientists could not agree on its origin and its mode of transmission.

Nevertheless, the notion of washing the whole body to be better protected, was making its way in people's minds. Concerned as it was to retain social standing, the elite also spread the new conception and the new bathing practices. Be that as it may, the practice of bathing needs to be put into perspective as very few people had the equipment and the space (Pellissier, 2003, p. 484).

Uneven sanitary states in nursery schools

As in other primary establishments, the sanitary conditions were poor - little or no air, light, or heating and significant humidity. Sanitary disparities between nursery schools persisted throughout the 19th century. French educational historian, Jean-Noël Luc, reminds us that ministerial instructions regarding washbasins had not been enforced by the 1880s (Luc, 1999). This deplorable sanitary context was similar in other public institutions and few private individuals could afford the equipment and the water (Goubert, 1986). Numerous sanitary disparities existed among nursery schools. Some had neither covered playground, nor toilets, while others already had bathtubs (as did St Michel nursery school in Angers in 1834). Some had washbasins and cabinets for daily baths (as did the nursery school on rue Vaneau in Paris in 1855) (Luc, 1999, pp. 344-345). Nursery school superintendents also denounced the poor cleanliness habits of some cleaners and primary school teachers, e.g., he once took offence of one single, unrinsed sponge to clean the faces of more than 100 children in Nemours (South of Paris) in 1845 (Luc, 1999, p. 346). He also observed that not all the schools had the same toilet facilities. Many superintendents denounced the absence of toilets, the poor equipment, or the insalubrity and discomfort of such places. Because, they had absolutely nothing in common with official requirements - often, one could see children wading in dirty water and scattered excrements - some superintendents requested seated toilets (Luc, 1999, p. 343). Indeed, when there were seats - a luxury in those days - they were too high and did not fit young children. Inconveniently, excrements could be found next to the seats. Politicians had given great thought to the ratio of toilet seats per pupil, but had absolutely not thought about adopting smaller-scale toilets.

Politicians were ambiguous because, though they officially supported care for young children, they did not provide sufficient means. Municipalities still provided most funding to modernize the schools. Thus, it all depended on the willingness of the people interested in public health, which does explain the disparities between nursery schools to some extent.

Marie Pape-Carpantier: a pioneer of hygiene during early childhood

Marie Pape-Carpantier became the Head of the first French school of primary education in Paris in 1847. This school was a temporary house of studies intended to complete the instruction of the people who wished to head or inspect nursery schools. Marie Pape-Carpantier considered mind, soul and body, and taught instructional basics as well as hygiene. This temporary house of studies first took the name “Normal nursery school” in 1848. It was to become the “Practical Instruction of nursery school” a year later. This time a nursery school was set up next to it, so that future directors and superintendents could train in the new pedagogies without going to other Parisian schools. Marie Pape-Carpantier could not content herself only with preserving sanitary conditions and passing on satisfactory moral, religious and physical education. She also wished to elevate the children of the lower classes to a level above their condition. This was in contradiction with Napoleon III's educational choices and earned her reproaches from Empress Eugénie and from the Establishment (Cosnier, 2003).

The “washing and dining hall” (Figure 1) which she recommended was a twenty-five square-meter room, a luxury for that time. Shelves were put up on the wall to store the children's meal baskets, low benches were proportional to children's size, two small linen hammocks¹⁰ were hung in two corners of the dining hall so that they could rest, and in the middle of the room a round, zinc washbasin was placed so that several children could wash their hands and face simultaneously. Marie Pape-Carpantier had designed it herself. The circular washbasin was 1,75m in diameter and could be used by twelve children at the same time: “the top, in the shape of a cone, was ended with a small brass device from which water gushed in the shape of a globe, then gently cascaded to the pond. There, it passed through a small pipe which led below the ground” (Cosnier, 2003, pp. 223-

¹⁰ It should be noted that these hammocks rolled up with a belt, could be unrolled from a small yet very solid console, cf. *L'ami de l'enfance*, t. III, n° 9, June, 1857, p 233.

224). As the feeder pipe had been placed along the stove, the spouting water was warm.

Marie Pape-Carpantier also found an ingenious solution for latrines: the small board of the used and dirty seat was simply replaced with a clean one: “when the small board on which the child sits down is unclean, we pull it with a small brass buckle, like a drawer, and we replace it with a similar small board hanging from a nail inside every cabinet” (Cosnier, 2003, pp. 223-224).

Figure 1. Washing and dining hall



18. Le réfectoire-lavabo du Cours pratique de Paris (1857).

Source: "Practical Instruction of nursery school" of Paris (1857) (original version: L'ami de l'enfance. Journal des salles d'asile, t. 3, n° 11, août 1857, p. 289).

The covered courtyard served essentially as a breakplace and was used to practice gentle gymnastics in case of bad weather. There was also an open court when the weather was good. The innovation that had been long asked by Minister of Public Instruction de Salvandy had been happened. On the one hand, the children could eat, sleep and wash themselves; on the other hand, they could amuse themselves and do physical exercises. For the first time, the thorough care of the body of young children from the lower classes could develop, which participated in their education.

Hygiene as the savior of all the people or the era of bacteriology (1880-1945)

Scientifically justified cleanliness of the body and the development of baths and public showers to fight against the grime

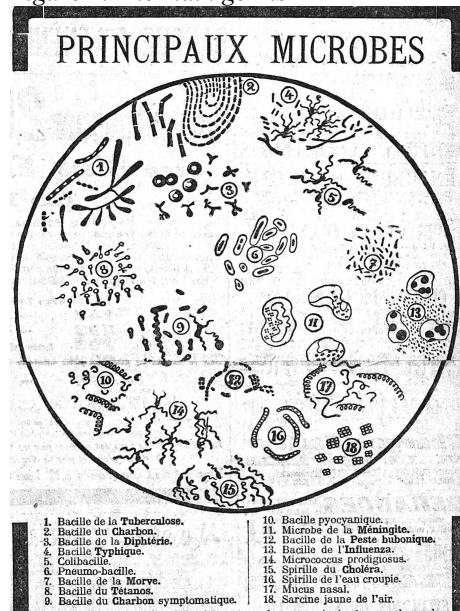
With Pasteur and the era of microbiological breakthroughs, hygiene took on new orientation, organization and acceptance. Focused on limiting germ propagation, hygiene could be improved and prove its utility. The rules that had been sponsored by hygienists since 1830 were thus strengthened as they found their justification in these advances. People were starting to trust medicine (Latour, 2011). Protecting the body appeared as one of the determiners of public and private health. By cleaning themselves, individuals and the whole community were protected. The French historian Georges Vigarello has already explained this major shift: water became perceived as wholesome and could help “to eliminate germs” (Vigarello, 1987, p. 217). For all that, hygiene was still related to the principles of civilities. It was paired with stricter hygiene precautions. Pedagogy was underpinned by microbiology, such as the presentation of germs thanks to new microscope visualization (Figure 2). With Jules Ferry's 1882 laws, hygiene education became a school feature and was included in syllabi, the teachers' review body and changed education with new knowledge and behavior (Frioux and Nourrisson, 2015). Propaganda messages spread within society, not only because of specialized publications, but mostly because of the daily press (Figure 2). All the social classes were impacted. Even the lower classes, which were considered ignorant, dirty germ carriers and transmitters, could thus be more educated and amend themselves (Chevalier, 2007). Dirtiness was shown and denounced as a plague, affecting the lower classes first. In Paris, physical cleanliness was deemed the essential condition of public health for workers (Philippe, 1913).

The first warm swimming pool appeared in the 1880s. Popular baths developed and some even welcomed as many as 120,000 swimmers a year (Du Mesnil, 1893, pp. 9-10). These pools were segregated: men and women, the regiments living in barracks, the fire brigades, the neighboring school boys and schoolgirls, all came at different moments. The Château-Landon Street swimming pool opened on June 29th, 1884 and welcomed

pupils from the 3th, 5th and 19th districts of Paris (Figure 3). There, hot and cold showers could be taken. Numerous reviews and books by doctors and hygienists addressed mostly working-class mothers (Bellaire, 1873; Brochard, 1873 and 1874; Fonssagrives 1868). The same written propaganda was widespread in Europe in the late 19th century. Several newspapers in Belgium addressed mothers: Doctor Balteaux's *Le journal des mères* targeted the bourgeoisie mothers (Marissal, 2014, p. 68) while Marie Parent's *Le journal des mères* targeted working-class mothers (Marissal, 2014, p. 69).

In working-class and farming communities, mothers were assigned many tasks (Mane, 2004, pp. 46-47) and played a major role in hygiene.

Figure 2. The main germs

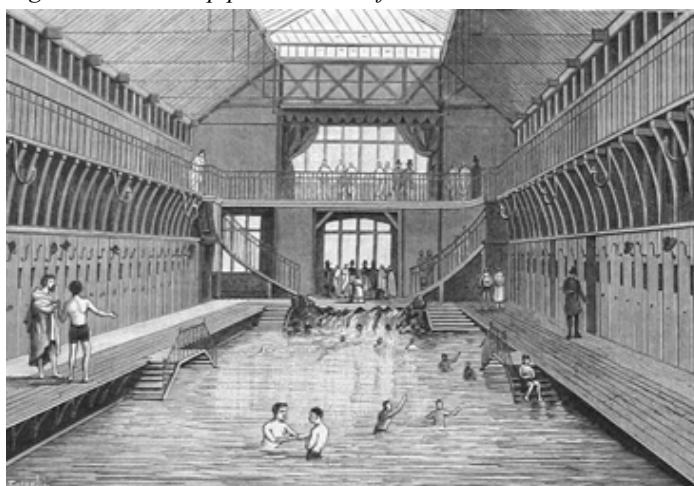


Source: *Journal Le Matin*¹¹, May 12th, 1914.

¹¹ The French daily newspaper created in 1883, and ceased publication in 1944. From 1910 to 1920 It was one of the four big dailies, with a circulation of one million copies on the eve of 1914.

They had to clean and take care of the children's bodies. Consequently, they also had to initiate (and explain) this new knowledge and the new good cleaning habits. Starting in the early 20th century and continuing well after the Second World War, propaganda films supported learning cleanliness. Just after World War I, the Rockefeller committee approved of the “caravans of hygiene”¹², which criss-crossed the countryside to spread cautionary rules about microbial diseases (tuberculosis, syphilis) and campaigned for personal hygiene and against alcohol (Lefebvre, 2002, pp. 76-77; Zarch, 2002, p. 87).

Figure 3. The cheap public baths of the Château-Landon Street in Paris



Source: *La Nature*¹³, n° 579, July 5th, 1884.

Hygiene and cleanliness education: the fight of teachers

Before hygiene became compulsory in teacher education (June 21th, 1865¹⁴), some teachers became aware of its utility and started to complain about its absence in their school and among the population. Some

¹² Truck equipped with an electric generator and a film projector to show movies even in municipalities without electricity.

¹³ Review of scientific popularization that was launched in 1873 by the chemist Gaston Tissandier (1843-1899), absorbed by *La Recherche* in 1972.

¹⁴ *Programmes officiels de l'enseignement secondaire spécial avec les instructions ministérielles et autres documents officiels*, Paris, Ch. Delagrave, 1866.

educators, like Marie Pape-Carpantier, rehabilitated using water in schools (to clean food, places and bodies). Physical cleanliness was then heralded as carrying numerous social, beneficial, and republican values. Rural teachers testified to how dirty country people were. Consequently, they had to serve as parental substitutes to convey the new rules. However, teachers' and parents' conceptions were different. Some primary school teachers testified to changing health and body perceptions from the 1860s (Table 1), i.e, after sanitary premises, cleanliness, gymnastics, and straightening of the body became more common.

Like previous historic research about the 20th century (Ozouf, 1999), we could find examples of teachers advocating hygiene lessons in letters sent to their hierarchy, autobiographies, memoirs about their teaching methods and complaints about their working conditions.

Augustin Sabatier, a primary school teacher in a rural district called Port-de-Bouc (Bouches-du-Rhône, Southeast of France), mentioned the leading role of teachers in the cleanliness learning process: “most of the parents leave in the morning to go to work, either in the fields, or in a factory, come home only in the evening and do not worry about how clean their children are. Thus, it is the responsibility of primary school teachers”¹⁵.

These teachers' sanitary and educational responsibilities extended well beyond their predecessors'. They were not strictly limited by their role, which surpassed a teacher's traditional role. For some of them, it was not only a question of replacing the alleged failing parents, but also of educating them, of making them participate and collaborate in hygiene education. Teaching hygiene at school also meant better educating the child who could educate his parents in turn. These teachers became the main intermediary between official directions (what was necessary to do) and families' knowledge and practices (not yet in line with the major changes). Primary school teachers believed in their capacity to develop the parents' mentalities and to change their conceptions and practices gradually. They also perceived the cultural divide between the conception of doctors and the conception and habits of families, who had neither accepted nor internalized the new knowledge and the new practices (Parayre, 2010, pp. 331-349).

¹⁵ National Archives F¹⁷ 10758, Augustin Sabatier, Bouches-du-Rhône, Southeast of France, January 24th, 1861.

Thus, primary school teachers were the driving force for the integration of new, social, sanitary and educational standards. During the Third Republic (1870-1940), initial training for primary school teachers generalized and contributed to giving vigor and rigor to this profession.

Table 1. Complaints and wishes of rural primary school teachers in 1861 about cleanliness in rural schools

	<i>Complaints</i>	<i>Wishes</i>
<i>Cleanliness</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hands and faces were often unclean - Diseases were common among lower-class children - Cleanliness mostly fell to primary school teachers, because parents disregarded it completely - No fountains so that cleaning was still practiced in the sea or in a river 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cleanliness helps to preserve health - Primary school teachers have to teach good cleaning habits and do so from a very early age - Teachers should check pupils' cleanliness before and after class - Water should be used: to clean food, to clean the premises and to clean oneself. Slightly acid water was recommended as a drink

Source: National Archives F¹⁷ 10758-10798: Competition opens to primary school teachers 1861.

It also strengthened their function and power within the society. They ushered in a new era, that of the “worship of cleanliness” (Frioux et Nourrisson, 2015, p. 131).

L'hygiène par l'exemple:¹⁶ “study and wash yourselves!”¹⁷

In the late 19th century, Pauline Kergomard, a famous French commissioner of education for nursery schools, declared: “our duty is to organize the health in our schools” (Kergomard, 1895, p. 98). She thought that the Republican School had to be a place of sanitary refuge (the principles of hygiene had to combine at school to protect the children), a place of example (primary school teachers adhered, set an example and encouraged new sanitary behavior), and a place of instruction (hygiene basics were taught). *L'hygiène par l'exemple* aimed to be a transmission through teachers' hygiene actions. Thus, they had to look after the pupils constantly and encourage them to do as their teachers did. So, in nursery schools (2-6 year-olds), in the 2nd and 3rd years of primary school (7-9 year-olds), in the 4th and 5th years of primary school (9-11 year-olds), and in the

¹⁶ *L'hygiène par l'exemple* is a specific word that referred to hygiene acquired by practicing and following the examples of teachers and of other people.

¹⁷ De Amicis, 2016, p. 142.

subsequent years of primary school (11-13 year-olds), teachers had to “inspect how clean the children's bodies and clothes were upon arrival, require absolute cleanliness, watch their games, give practical advice on food, body posture and clothes” (Kergomard, 1895, p. 98). Every day, teachers should constantly enforce the principles of hygiene and set a good example to preserve health and propriety.

Teachers could supervise preliminary sanitary education more easily, which also enabled them to continue preserving the rules of civility and keep up classroom order. During the Third Republic (1870-1940), nursery, primary and secondary schools were equipped with material that made it possible to clearly distinguish school practices (Figure 4). Education at school was essential as working-class families had not adopted basic hygiene since they lacked financial means, information and understanding. Education was not easy because teachers were confronted with reluctant families. How could they teach children that daily cleanliness was necessary for health if at home they had no access to proper equipment?

Figure 4. The washbasin at nursery school



Source: *Illustration*¹⁸, 1885.

¹⁸ Origin of the illustration: health and medicine BIU (Interuniversity library), collection, Paris Descartes. *The Illustration* is a weekly magazine published under this name from 1843

During their visits, some education commissioners kept telling teachers that hygiene had to be meticulous and was requested for both clothes and bodies. Such sanitary habits and hygiene propaganda were similar across Europe and across the world (Hirst, 1991; Petrina, 2006; Parayre, 2017). The biography of a primary school teacher in the valley and in the Piemont countryside (after the foundation of the kingdom of Italy), in *Le roman d'un maître d'école*¹⁹ (De Amicis, 2016, pp. 140-142), showed the influence of the commissioner of education who focused on examining the hygiene of the visible body parts (neck, eyes and teeth) and insisted on basic cleanliness and its importance within the school: “a basin of water at the door in every school, two fountains, and some soap are more important than gymnastics” (De Amicis, 2016, p. 141).

Cleanliness to elevate position in society: duties and rights of citizens

Public Instruction became compulsory, free and secular during the Third Republic (1881-1882 Laws by Minister of Public Instruction Jules Ferry). This led to the democratization of medicalization. Families who had no access to education and medicine, or considered they were no priority, could have greater access to them. French health historian Jacques Léonard reminds us: “the more educated the population was, the more readily people accepted the scientific interpretation of the body and its misfortunes. The more sacred individual fulfillment [...], the greater the need for doctors” (Léonard, 1981, p. 274). An educational movement was influencing the political system of the Third Republic, thanks to teachers diligent in the transmission of new educational and sanitary values. Historians have noted that complaints among the labor and rural populations increased after 1870.

The complaints dealt with housing insalubrity, poor healthcare, child labor and access to Public Instruction, thus signaling new claims. Poorer citizens demanded to be educated, cured and cared for, and to be as decently accommodated as the wealthier class (Kalff, 2001, pp. 118-144; Nonnis-Vigilante, 2010, pp. 239-260). Education and health would enable

till 1944, then under the name *France Illustration*, from 1945 till 1955 cf. the archives of the magazine: http://www.lillustration.com/De-L-Illustration-a-France-Illustration_a175.html

¹⁹ The Italian author initially published the novel in 1890 under the title *Romanzo d'un maestro*.

them to climb the social ladder too. Being clean, being educated, being honest and aspiring to a better life, was to meet the days' educational and sanitary standards. Echoing Michel Foucault's bio-power (Foucault, 1994), public health historians have described this process of "bio-responsibility", as the birth of people's awareness of their living conditions. This mostly led them to react by internalizing and conforming to hygiene and health standards (Bourdelaïs, 2001, p. 19).

Primary school-teachers, priests, families, neighbours, etc., acted as intermediary support by spreading the new educational, sanitary principles. By helping the population, they conveyed care and prevention strategies and contributed to gradually spreading the dominant conception of medicine and education.

Thus, they established a sort of "advanced medicalization post" (Léonard, 1978, p. 46) and each one helped to bring "bio-responsibility" to the foreground among these populations. Thus, the massive sanitary acculturation wished for by the successive governments and the elites throughout the 19th century, was made possible thanks to their action. Moralization and medicalization were on the way to also reducing the dangerousness and degeneration of the lower classes. Behavior and sanitary standards were mostly acquired as information directly addressed families with newspapers, books and movies, as presented previously.

Sanitary improvements and cleanliness only started to change status among all the classes during the interwar period. Conversely, dirtiness lost ground as it was increasingly perceived as disrespectful, dangerous and stigmatising. After the Second World War, social hygiene reached its peak and child welfare information spread (Figure 5) (Brodiez-Dolino, 2013).

Books, including children's books, had to show these views. In *L'enfant* by French author and journalist Jules Vallès (1832-1885), the mother takes cleanliness and her responsibility in transmitting it very seriously. The educated poor man may not be able to rise in society, but he may come close by looking decent.

In *Le tour de France par deux enfants*, which was written by a woman²⁰ and was so widely-read that it was republished 411 times from 1877 till 1960, this message is addressed to children of the "good and clean poor":

²⁰ Augustine Fouillée wrote under the nom de plume Bruno, as did many women writers in those days.

“do you want to be thought well of at first glance? Be clean and decent, the poorest can always be” (Bruno, 2004, p. 26).

Figure 5. Sanitary educational postcard: “being clean preserves health”



Source: Ministry of population and public health; interdepartmental demographic and social center for sanitary education²¹

The 1877 school textbook spread patriotic propaganda, in as much as hygiene rules featured prominently.

Conclusion: cleanliness and superimposition of conceptions and standards

The French public health historian Julia Csergo studied the long process of acculturation of cleanliness throughout the 20th century. Cleanliness spread to all the populations and was eventually internalized as the dominant sanitary standard (Csergo, 2002, p. 56). The French researcher in sports and physical education Jacques Gleyse speaks of hygienic constraints getting secularized (Gleyse, 2012). It took several generations for people to include hygiene practices, abandon prejudices, and become

²¹ U.S. National Library of Medicine: <https://collections.nlm.nih.gov/catalog/nlm:nlmuid-101439392-img>

aware that cleanliness increased life expectancy and protected health, and social and civic values. This also resulted from long hygiene propaganda campaigns, greater, continuous fear of epidemics and the understanding of the role dirtiness played in the transmission process. With the spread of proper equipment and technique to private homes after the Second World War, personal hygiene also spread. Today, using water to clean the body has now been accepted.

A new conception emerged during the last decades of the 20th century. Washing became pleasurable and was no longer viewed as an obligation. Water no longer only relieves pain, but provides physical and psychological well-being. As early as 1936, pupils' textbooks mentioned how pleasurable it is to feel clean. In the lesson about morality on February 10th, 1936, one can read: "cleanliness demands that the child be courageous and be given attention. Cleanliness strengthens a person's will. It maintains health, good behavior and enjoyment"²². However, in the last decades of the 20th century, cleanliness became self-centered. Water could therefore be used to enforce the individual's well-being, to relax and take care of oneself. It is no longer only used to preserve health and find relief from pain (Vigarello, 2014). Cleanliness democratized and anchored in the contemporary customs. It is interesting to deal with the variations of "dirty" sensations through centuries, as Norbert Elias was able to do. He has shown how this sensation (or these sensations) is perceived today compared to past centuries and which practices have been transformed or reconfigured (Elias, 2016, p. 57). Let us note that a number of social, esthetic and moral issues still exist today. A citizen's looks and cleanliness are still well-regarded in society. Sanitary challenges have not disappeared and epidemics have reactivated fears about dirtiness and preventive hygiene measures with many propaganda campaigns. The 2009 worldwide H1N1 flu scare provides a striking example. Fear of worldwide contagion reactivated systematic handwashing. Rubbing hand sanitizers became routine. Conceptions and standards sometimes seem to have the upper hand, but there are always some underlying ones and it is interesting for historians, sociologists and anthropologists to study and distinguish them.

Yet, despite being democratized and seeming more accessible and more common today, the practices of physical cleanliness still face persisting prejudices, resistances and difficulties. Again, ambivalences remain

²² Pupils' textbooks from the 1935-1936 school year (private source).

between the clean and dirty pair and variations exist between individual practices. Various body parts are still not taken care of similarly; some, the most visible ones, seem more well-kept than others. Extremes can mix, from modern hygienists who always demand more disinfection, to non-conformists who fail to see the use of daily, diligent cleanliness. After all that happened, cleanliness continues to divide. Today, some schoolteachers overlook cleanliness rules or disease transmission. They either believe uncleanliness is a thing from the past or that it is not their role - nobler subjects have replaced cleanliness education (Leroy, 2016). Children's physical cleanliness still remains closely associated with one's own views of the body and of childhood. Modesty, civilization and citizenship on the one hand, health, cleanliness and prophylaxis on the other hand, should be everyone's concern and remain complex even today.

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