

THE ROOTS OF IDENTITY

Algerian Viticulture and Its Relationship
with France, From *Phylloxera* to the
Regulations of 1930s

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“Wine is felt by the French nation to be a possession which is its very own,” declared Roland Barthes in *Mythologies*, a collection of essays first published in 1957 in the midst of the traumatic eight-year Algerian War.¹ Wine and viticulture have made distinctive contributions to French identity and its many myths. In Algeria, wine provoked many contentious and revealing debates about what it meant to be French. The debates about “What is French?” lay at the heart of the dynamic relationship between metropolitan France and Algeria during 132 years of French rule.²

The *phylloxera* epidemic ignited the explosive growth of Algeria’s wine industry, transforming Algeria’s nearly non-existent viticulture into the world’s largest exporter of wine.³ This rapid change resulted in significant economic, social, and legislative consequences which impacted Algeria at the height of settler colonialism and metropolitan France during the Third Republic, as well as the frequently contradictory relationship between the two. The Third Republic was simultaneously an imperial nation-state and a peasants’ republic, with powerful interest groups pushing for legislation in response to social and economic pressures.⁴ As France and Algeria transformed around the turn of the twentieth century, divergent interests tugged at the colonial link of “Algeria is France.” The evolution of the wine industry aligned with an increasing insistence on terroir and regional identities.⁵ Economic pressures from the wine market grew, with competition between industrial wine and luxury wine, and between industrial wines of different regions. Both accentuated the latent tensions underpinning constructions of French identity.

This paper traces the roots of identity formation by responding to the following questions. How and why did the metropolitan perception of Algerian viticulture shift dramatically from a panacea to a problem? How did social and political actors interact to respond

1 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York, NY: Noonday Press, 1972), 58. Because of the viticulture’s vital role in the Algerian colonial economy, supporting the colons’ wealth and political dominance, it was attacked by the Algerian independence movement as a symbol of imperial oppression. Joseph Bohling, *The Sober Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 2. For an interrogation of how wine figures in private memory, national memory, and cultural memory, refer to Georges Durand, “La vigne et le vin” [The vine and the wine,] in *Les Lieux de mémoire* [The Sites of Memory,] P. Nora (ed.), III. Les France, 2. Traditions (Paris: Gallimard, 1992).

2 This essay focuses less on the related question of “Who is French?”, which is an extremely compelling but contentious topic, especially vis-à-vis Algeria. For a broad bibliography about scholarship on French and Algerian identity, refer to Jonathan K. Gosnell, *The Politics of Frenchness in Colonial Algeria, 1930-1954* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2002).

3 Giulia Meloni and Johan Swinnen, “The Rise and Fall of the World’s Largest Wine Exporter—And Its Institutional Legacy,” *Journal of Wine Economics* 9, no. 1 (May 2014): 3-4.

4 Bohling, *The Sober Revolution*, 18.

5 *Terroir* is a uniquely French concept that I contend to be an aspect of wine identity, and by extension, of vigneron identity. Some scholars have defined terroir to be a description of “the holistic combination in a vineyard environment of soil, climate, topography, and ‘the soul’ of the wine producer.”

Kolleen M. Guy, *When Champagne Became French: Wine and the Making of a National Identity*, The Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science 121 (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003): 2, 41-43. This book also includes an insightful bibliographical essay summarizing the extensive scholarship on the history of wine and viticulture.

to the economic pressures of the French wine market? In what ways did Algerian viticulture reinforce and challenge the prevalent colonial notion that "Algeria is France"? How did identity play a role in the debates about viticulture, terroir, and regulations? Inversely, how did those debates influence and reflect evolution of identity?

This paper first analyzes why Algerian viticulture was perceived as a panacea to the challenges facing the French metropole, particularly for the *phylloxera* epidemic and the colonial endeavor to replicate the French rural republic in Algeria. It then examines how market demand and economic policies catalyzed the rapid development of Algerian viticulture, which in turn shaped the society and politics of colonial Algeria. Next, this paper explores how and why Algerian viticulture was increasingly portrayed as a competitor to metropolitan viticulture. It investigates how the economic pressures from the wine market and Algerian viticulture prompted a discourse that increasingly focused on identity and terroir and consider how this discourse figured in the regulations adopted in the beginning of the twentieth century. Ultimately, this paper seeks to understand how French identity, as both an imperial and agricultural nation, evolved in relation to Algerian viticulture.

PART I - Algerian Viticulture as a Panacea: Remedy for *Phylloxera* Ravaged France and Potential for European Colonization of Rural Algeria

1 - *The Phylloxera Epidemic: Market Incentive for Developing Algerian Viticulture*

Viticulture in metropolitan France was beset by the *phylloxera* infection, which started in 1863 and devastated French vineyards during the subsequent decades. These tiny insects that feed on the leaves and the roots of grapevines posed a difficult pest problem throughout France.⁶ One-third of the French vine area was destroyed between 1875 and 1889; the surviving vineyards produced little wine. As a result of this epidemic, French wine production declined by 70 percent.⁷

Demand far outstripped supply in the French wine market. By 1890, the average annual production had fallen to 30,000,000 hectoliters while consumption remained at 45,000,000 hectoliters.⁸ France turned to imports to compensate for their lagging national production. In only one decade, French wine imports increased tenfold from 1,200,000 hectoliters in 1865-1869 to 10,600,000 hectoliters in 1875-1879.⁹ In 1880, French government openly called for Algeria to "...bring relief to this viticultural [sic], agricultural, and commercial disaster. It has been decided to plant vines everywhere the soil seems suitable."¹⁰

6 Banghua Cai, *Insect Taxonomy*, eds. Xiaoming Cai and Fusheng Huang (Beijing: Chemical Industry Press, 2017), 198. Rod Phillips, *French Wine: A History* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016), 155.

7 Meloni and Swinnen, "The Rise and Fall," 7-8.

8 Meloni and Swinnen, "The Rise and Fall," 8.

9 Meloni and Swinnen, "The Rise and Fall," 9.

10 Quoted in Phillips, *French Wine*, 169.

The *phylloxera* epidemic destroyed the livelihood of many vigneronns and provoked a prolonged shortage of wine that catalyzed the explosive growth of Algerian viticulture. This natural disaster pushed many affected French vigneronns to move to Algeria, bringing with them their winemaking expertise. For many of the vigneronns ruined by *phylloxera*, Algeria appeared to promise livelihood. For instance, the Hérault department facilitated the arrangement of some vigneronns who were "reduced to misery, and who were basing all of their hopes for making a living on being able to use their skills in our African colony."¹¹ The government provided loans for these migrants and the Governor-General of Algeria provided 30 hectares of quality land for each of the families.¹² Similar offers were made to vigneronns throughout France; approximately ten thousand accepted, mostly from Languedoc-Roussillon, Provence, and the Rhône valley.¹³ The new arrivals stimulated the development of Algerian viticulture, increasing the acreage of vineyards from 17,000 hectares to more than 60,000 hectares between 1878 and 1885.¹⁴ These hectares would soon generate millions of liters of wine destined for metropolitan France.

2 - *The Promise of Viticulture: Republican Colonization of Rural Algeria and Ambitions for Assimilation*

The movement of French winegrowers ruined by *phylloxera* across the Mediterranean was aligned with the official colonization program conceived by the Third Republic. Rural settlement of Europeans was at the heart of the Third Republic's ambitious vision of replicating rural French democracy in Algeria.¹⁵ An enormous amount of Algerian land was expropriated by the colons under the Third Republic, which was especially friendly to the colons compared to the previous military government under the Second Empire. Notably, the law of 26 July 1873 (also known as the Warnier Law) provided the colons with the legal instruments to acquire 1,750,000 hectares of native land (in addition to previous acquisitions).¹⁶ In the period between 1871 and 1900, 50,000 families were installed on nearly 700,000 hectares of land by the colonial administration.¹⁷ This figure does not even include those who arrived and acquired land by themselves, outside of the official colonization program. By the 1880s, the availability of land, technological innovation, and low wheat prices set the stage for the dramatic growth of viticulture to contribute to the colo-

11 Quoted in Phillips, *French Wine*, 169.

12 Phillips, *French Wine*, 169.

13 Phillips, *French Wine*, 170.

14 Phillips, *French Wine*, 170.

15 John Ruedy, *Modern Algeria: The Origins and Development of a Nation*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2005), 83.

16 Ruedy, *Modern Algeria*, 81. As many historians have noted, the colons' territorial acquisitions contributed to the destruction of the native economy and the impoverishment of natives. Refer to Tony Smith, "Muslim Impoverishment in Colonial Algeria," *Revue de l'Occident musulman et de la Méditerranée*, no. 17 (1974). Smith, "Muslim Impoverishment," 152.

17 Hidebert Isnard, "Vigne et Structures en Algérie" [Vineyards and Social Structure in Algeria], *Diogenes* 0, no. 27 (July 1, 1959): 81.

nization program.¹⁸

Viticulture's initial expansion contributed to the growth and consolidation of the European community in Algeria. Officials expected that opportunities in Algerian viticulture would encourage the substantial resettlement of small peasantry who traditionally participated in viticulture in France.¹⁹ Moreover, the immigration of European workers was encouraged, as the administration sought to recruit a permanent European agricultural workforce for the labor-intensive and specialized industry.²⁰ Geographer Hidebert Isnard argues that the French development of Algerian viticulture was the "most efficient instrument of the colonization of Algeria."²¹

The vast program of settler-colonialism in Algeria resonated with enthusiasm for the French assimilation of Algeria and for the implementation of the idea that "Algeria is France." The integration of Algeria did not immediately materialize following the 1848 incorporation of Algeria as three departments of France. Rather, the status of Algeria remained constantly in flux, and its relationship with France was defined by colonial hierarchy. For instance, after 1848, tariffs were still levied on Algerian products, which were considered "foreign" imports by France.²² While duties were levied on Algerian wine importation, the Algerian market was reserved for French wine.²³ The emergence of assimilation discourse significantly shifted the relationship between France and its colonies.²⁴ Legislation between 1870 and the early 1880s facilitated the political inclusion of the French colons in France under the auspices of assimilation.²⁵

The economic incorporation of Algeria to France was marked by the formation of a customs union between France and Algeria in 1867. This union was essential for the development of Algerian viticulture, as tariffs on Algerian wine were finally lifted by

18 Until Louis Pasteur's discoveries in the mid-nineteenth century and the consequent innovations, European settlers were unable to ferment drinkable wines in Algeria's hot climate. The "cold fermentation" methods such as advance refrigeration systems made better wine production possible in Algeria's hot weather. Meloni and Swinnen, "The Rise and Fall," 7.

Until 1880, wheat was the main crop planted by settlers, and historian Charles-Robert Ageron even described wheat to be "the true plant of colonization." However, the sizable new overseas supply of wheat caused a twenty-year slump in world wheat prices. The prolonged low prices of wheat, which was previously the main crop, made it even less economically attractive for rural settlers who already have access to vast amount of land.

Charles-Robert Ageron, *Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine*, 11th ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999), 53. Ruedy, *Modern Algeria*, 84-85.

19 Smith, "Muslim Impoverishment," 152.

20 Smith, "Muslim Impoverishment," 152.

21 Hidebert Isnard, "Vigne et colonisation en Algérie" [Wine and Colonization in Algeria,] *Annales de Géographie* 58, no. 311 (1949): 216.

22 Meloni and Swinnen, "The Rise and Fall," 15.

23 Isnard, "Vigne et colonisation," 214.

24 Refer to Martin Deming Lewis, "One Hundred Million Frenchmen: The 'Assimilation' Theory in French Colonial Policy," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 4, no. 2 (January 1962).

25 The Governor-General's powers were reduced, government functions were attached or rattaché to mainland ministries, and the colons had three seats in the Senate and ("a grossly disproportionate") six seats in the Chamber of Deputies by 1881. Ruedy, *Modern Algeria*, 80, 86.

France.²⁶ The vast wine market of the French mainland was thus opened to Algerian supply, which provided for the unmet demand caused by the *phylloxera* epidemic. The first barrels of Algerian wine, no longer considered “foreign” or blocked by tariffs, arrived in Marseille in 1867.²⁷

3 - Economic Policy Facilitating Algerian Viticulture's Debt Intensive Growth

The desire to develop Algerian viticulture, considered beneficial for French wine consumers and wine growers devastated by *phylloxera* and the Republican program to colonize rural Algeria, was reflected in measures adopted to facilitate its growth. The creation of vineyards, which necessitated building the cave and buying specialized equipment, required significant amounts of upfront investment. This initial investment was usually beyond the modest means of concessionnaires who partook in the official colonization program.²⁸ The availability of cheap and accessible credit was thus essential for the extensive establishment of vineyards in Algeria.

Until 1880, only the Banque de l'Algérie had a strong presence in Algeria. It had previously refused to provide credit for agriculture because it was an issuance bank that had to ensure the liquidity of its assets in order to guarantee the convertibility of its issued bills, and agriculture often implicated long-term illiquid assets.²⁹ However, when it sought to renew its mandate, the government mandated its support and provision of credit for agriculture.³⁰ This government backing of settlers' agricultural endeavors illustrates the multifaceted effort to encourage rural settlement in Algeria. Other financial institutions and individuals later followed suit, engaging in massive amounts of lending and financing the explosive expansion of vineyards in Algeria. The re-extended loans in viticulture ballooned from 265 million francs in 1878-1879 to 515 million francs three years later, showing the increasingly unsustainable vigneron debt financing Algerian viticulture.³¹

While credit was essential to the initial establishment of Algerian viticulture, the dependence on borrowing magnified vignerons' vulnerability to the fluctuations of wine prices. Paradoxically, this measure — intended to promote the colonization of the Algerian countryside by French peasants — ultimately pushed many French settlers into Algerian cities or back to France. The vignerons unable to service their debt when wine prices fell lost their vineyards and other assets.³²

The borrowing that fueled the explosive growth of Algerian viticulture also destabi-

26 Bohling, *The Sober Revolution*, 25.

27 Footnote from Meloni and Swinnen, “*The Rise and Fall*,” 12.

28 Isnard, “Vigne et colonisation,” 215.

29 Isnard, “Vigne et colonisation,” 215.

30 Isnard, “Vigne et colonisation,” 215.

31 Charles-Robert Ageron, *De l'insurrection de 1871 à la guerre de libération de 1954* [From the Insurrection of 1871 to the War of Liberation of 1954]. Vol. 2 of *Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine* [History of Modern Algeria]. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1979), 108-110.

32 Isnard, “Vigne et Structures,” 82.

lized the industry and contributed to the negative impression of Algerian viticulture as industrial and capitalist. Instead of artisanal winegrowers who extended the French tradition of winemaking to Algeria, these vigneron were likened to “an American businessman with the mentality of a gambler, as he gambles with easily granted credit...”³³ The borrowers who attempted to use leverage in their vincicultural endeavors were rejected as greedy and American, instead of French. The original Republican vision of the Algerian countryside cultivated by small French winegrowers did not materialize despite widely-available credit funding the dramatic development of Algerian viticulture.

4 - The Social and Political Impact of The Evolution of Algerian Viticulture

Catalyzed by the *phylloxera* epidemic, encouraged by the Republican vision for rural colonization, and fueled by the availability of cheap credit, viticulture in Algeria quickly took hold. The vine area in Algeria expanded from 20,000 hectares in 1880 to 150,000 hectares in 1900.³⁴ Wine production grew from 400,000 hectoliters in 1880 to 5,000,000 hectoliters in 1900.³⁵ At the turn of the century, viticulture's economic weight in Algeria became indisputable: wine constituted half of Algerian exports and a third of Algerian gross domestic product.³⁶

The rise of this highly profitable industry contributed to segregation within Algerian society: settlers planting different crops faced economic stratification. One hectare of grapevines was estimated to generate at least 160,000 francs of income per year compared to the maximum of 30,000 francs generated by wheat.³⁷ Wine making also magnified economic and cultural divisions between settlers and natives. The few native Algerians hired during this period of economic expansion worked in marginal positions and remained segregated from Europeans.³⁸ During later periods of economic contraction and crises, in which wine prices and salaries plummeted, European workers were substituted with natives.³⁹ Native labor eventually became indispensable for the 93% of Algerian vineyards owned by French colons.⁴⁰

Aside from perpetuating this native-settler dichotomy, wine separated Christians and Jews from Muslims. Not only was wine often considered to be an expensive and foreign

33 Isnard, “Vigne et colonisation,” 216.

34 Meloni and Swinnen, “The Rise and Fall,” 11. Figure 4 contains more extensive data.

35 Meloni and Swinnen, “The Rise and Fall,” 11. Figure 1 contains more extensive data.

36 Meloni and Swinnen, “The Rise and Fall,” 12.

37 Isnard, “Vigne et Structures,” 86.

38 Smith, “Muslim Impoverishment,” 152.

39 Isnard, “Vigne et colonisation,” 218.

40 Isnard, “Vigne et colonisation,” 219. Smith, “Muslim Impoverishment,” 153. Bohling, *The Sober Revolution*, 22. Some observers have pointed out that wages for natives were higher in viticulture than other sectors, in order to counter the argument that Algerian viticulture was exploiting natives (which Barthes lamented in the end of his essay: Barthes, *Mythologies*, 61.)

product, its consumption was also forbidden by the Quran.⁴¹ Through their food choices, native Muslims were thus defending their identity and challenging French claims of cultural superiority. This case was merely one of many instances of entrenched religious and cultural differences segregating different groups within Algerian society, which had important implications related to identity, heritage, and citizenship.⁴²

The rapidly expanding winegrowing industry influenced Algerian politics as Algeria's relationship with France transformed. Under the mounting interference and criticism in the last decade of the 19th century, settlers increasingly favored association with more autonomy instead of assimilation.⁴³ *Délégations financières*, created by decrees of 1898 and 1900, provided budgetary autonomy and remained the most important representative body in Algeria for the next half century.⁴⁴ Successful winegrowers, with increasingly concentrated power and wealth, won elections on all levels of Algerian politics; they became mayors, *conseillers généraux*, representatives in the *délégations financières*, and senators.⁴⁵ These decision-makers, representing winemaking and colon interests, not only dominated the political scene in Algeria but also participated in the strengthening of the vocal Algerian constituency in the metropole.

5 - *Paradigm Shift: Production Surplus and Consolidation in Algerian Viticulture*

The supply and demand dynamics of the French market, which ignited the initial development of Algerian viticulture, also proved to be the source of challenges which shaped its evolution. Algerian viticulture faced its first surplus crisis in 1893, which was the first manifestation of Algerian viticulture's complete dependency on the mainland market demand and regulations. The mainland market was Algerian wine's only significant outlet, where it sold 98% of its harvests.⁴⁶ As a result, Algerian viticulture was especially sensitive to the recovery of mainland supply and good harvests flooding the mar-

41 Willy Jansen, "French Bread and Algerian Wine: Conflicting Identities in French Algeria," in *Food, Drink and Identity: Cooking, Eating and Drinking in Europe since the Middle Ages*, ed. Peter Scholliers (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 207.

42 Since the *sénatus-consulte* of 1865, Algerians were declared to be French, but not citizens of France unless they renounced their Muslim civil status and agree to live under French law. This renunciation, however, was equivalent to apostasy for Muslims whose religion was central to their identity and society. In the following eighty years, only two thousand Muslims ever requested naturalization; the vast majority were relegated to civil and political subordination. Ruedy, *Modern Algeria*, 75-76.

43 Ruedy, *Modern Algeria*, 86. Ageron, *Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine*, 49. Some mainland observers, such as Jules Ferry, became increasingly skeptical about the progress of mission *civilisatrice* in Algeria and concerned about the impoverishment of natives under colon domination. Charles-Robert Ageron, "Jules Ferry et la question algérienne en 1892" [Jules Ferry and The Algerian Question in 1892], *Revue d'Histoire Moderne & Contemporaine* 10, no. 2 (1963): 143.

44 Ruedy, *Modern Algeria*, 86-87.

45 Isnard, "Vigne et colonisation," 218.

46 Bohling, *The Sober Revolution*, 22.

ket.⁴⁷ With new grafting and hybrid grape techniques, viticulture in mainland France began to recover in the last decade of the 19th century.⁴⁸ By 1900, mainland wine production recovered to the level of pre-crisis years, reaching 65,000,000 hectoliters.⁴⁹ As a result, French wine prices peaked in 1880 and dramatically declined in the 1890s, eventually falling more than 60% in the next quarter of the decade.⁵⁰

These low wine prices unleashed a cycle of foreclosures and consolidation that would be repeated with subsequent surplus crises in the twentieth century. Banks seized the land of those who were unable to survive surplus crises and pay back their debt, selling the land cheaply to a small group of large winemakers. These bankruptcies and the resulting land concentration thus obliterated the republican vision of Algerian viticulture cultivating communities with small French peasantry.⁵¹ Instead, this highly unequal distribution of property and production increasingly defined the realities of Algerian viticulture. The average size of an Algerian vineyard was about 20 hectares, whereas the average size of vineyards in French metropole was less than 1 hectare and remained highly fragmented.⁵² In 1887, 32% of vineyards in Algeria were larger than 50 hectares, and twenty years later, that figure rose to 53%.⁵³ By 1938, 55% of the land and 56% of total wine production were owned by only 6% of the vigneronns.⁵⁴

The predominance of large properties enabled Algerian viticulture to adopt mass production and mechanized industrialization with lower production costs.⁵⁵ Negative portrayals of Algerian vigneronns, in the same vein as criticisms about excessive borrowing and speculation in Algerian viticulture, multiplied as wine supply increased and the

47 Böhling, *The Sober Revolution*, 25. In response to increasing supply, the government first instituted a series of tariffs between 1880s and 1892 to protect the Franco-Algerian wine industry. These tariffs dramatically decreased the French importation of Spain and Italian wines, and facilitated the substitution of foreign wines for Algerian wine, which had been allowed to enter the mainland tariff-free since 1867. Meloni and Swinnen, "The Rise and Fall," 14-15.

48 Böhling, *The Sober Revolution*, 21. The different measures adopted by mainland France's different regions to combat the *phylloxera* infection also contributed to different relationships to Algerian viticulture. Wealthier winegrowers in famous regions such as Burgundy resorted to the more expensive solution of grafting of French vines onto *phylloxera*-resistant American rootstock. Other winegrowers in less famous regions such as Languedoc planted pest-resistant hybrids which were less costly, required less care, produced higher yield, but lower alcohol contents, which necessitated Algerian wine for blending. A parliamentary report recognized that "The Algerian wine ... appeared as a complement to bad French wine." Conseil économique, *Étude de la proposition de loi n.6929 présentée par M. Gourdon et plusieurs de ses collègues tendant à organiser le marché des vins de consommation courante par l'institution d'un centre régulateur*, Journal officiel de la République française: Avis et rapports du Conseil économique (Paris: Imprimerie des journaux officiels, 1958), 285.

49 Meloni and Swinnen, "The Rise and Fall," 13.

50 Meloni and Swinnen, "The Rise and Fall," 13.

51 Smith, "Muslim Impoverishment," 151-152.

52 Böhling, *The Sober Revolution*, 21.

53 Ageron, *De l'insurrection*, 115-116.

54 Isnard, "Vigne et colonisation," 217.

55 Isnard, "Vigne et colonisation," 217. Böhling, *The Sober Revolution*, 21.

prices decreased. Algerian vigneronns were increasingly portrayed as competitors with an unfair advantage by metropolitan vigneronns, who denounced Algerian winegrowers as the “moguls” or “nabobs” of the wine trade.⁵⁶

The economic pressures resulting from the French market’s limited demand and increasing supply spurred the change of Algerian viticulture’s status in French minds. After the recovery of the French metropolitan vigneronns from the devastations of phylloxera, as well as the failure to replicate the metropolitan model of viticulture cultivated by small peasantry, the allure of Algerian viticulture faded. It was no longer seen as the panacea for wine shortages and the recreation of the French rural republic in Algeria; instead, Algerian viticulture represented a threatening and unscrupulous competitor to the metropolitan vigneronns.

PART II: Algerian Viticulture as an Industrial Competitor to “Authentic” Vigneronns in France

Debates about subsidizing and protecting wines were in fact the subject of the largest proportion of parliamentary debates on agriculture during the Third Republic.⁵⁷ During this period, the populous countryside obliged many parliamentary candidates to cater to rural voters in order to win elections.⁵⁸ However, as historian Kolleen Guy observed, “Rarely do historians look at how debates over the protection of commodities, such as wine, shaped and were shaped by notions of identity, linking the fate of a material good to that of the nation.”⁵⁹ Because protectionist legislation such as appellation d’origine draws significantly upon the concept of terroir, as well as the interlinked ideals of authenticity and heritage, debates about these policies were key in elucidating the meaning of French identity.

Under the economic pressure of mounting supply from the mainland and Algeria, French winemakers increasingly pushed for governmental interventions in the wine market. As a parliamentary report summarized, before the introduction of regulations, wine prices were entirely subject to the equilibrium of supply and demand.⁶⁰ As the supply of wine was highly variable while demand was comparatively more inelastic, the prices of wine were potentially highly volatile and subject to sharp decreases in the event of a dreaded crisis wrought by a surplus, or “mévente.” The French market was saturated with wine surpluses between 1900 and 1907, and 1928 and 1936, which aggravated the plight of winemakers.⁶¹

56 Quoted in Bohling, *The Sober Revolution*, 21.

57 Bohling, *The Sober Revolution*, 17.

58 Bohling, *The Sober Revolution*, 18.

59 Kolleen M. Guy, “Wine, Champagne and the Making of French Identity in the Belle Epoque,” in *Food, Drink and Identity: Cooking, Eating and Drinking in Europe since the Middle Ages*, ed. Peter Scholliers (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 164-165.

60 Conseil économique, *Étude de la proposition*, 287.

61 Bohling, *The Sober Revolution*, 28. Other factors, in addition to Algerian viticulture, contributed to the surplus: the planting of higher-yield grape varieties; the emergence of new kinds of alcohol and wine industries in America that threatened French exports; new taxes from countries retaliating against the Third Republic’s tariff policies; and the growth of temperance movements that decreased the demand for French exports.

Winegrowers of different regions unified behind regional interests and established powerful lobbies under the largely rural Third Republic. As the tariffs against foreign wines failed to stop wine prices from falling, Algerian viticulture then became the target of protectionist pressures and measures meant to bolster viticulture in metropolitan France. By examining the role of rural metropolitan and colon constituencies as well as the resulting laws regulating the quality and quantity of wine, this paper analyzes how the paradoxes of identity shaped the relationship between metropolitan France and Algeria.

1 - *The Leakey Affair: Defense of Terroir and Authenticity*

In July 1905, the Governor-General of Algeria, Charles Jonnart, awarded a contract to James Leakey, a London-based liquor merchant, to advertise Algerian wine on the British market.⁶² The ensuing controversy about the marketing of Algerian wine illustrates contemporary debates about how terroir constituted an essential element of the cultural identity of different wine regions within France. The endeavor to protect the reputation of luxury wines from specific regions (in this case, Bordeaux) with government intervention to delineate and reinforce distinctions between wines from different regions would be reiterated later in the promulgation of laws establishing the system of appellation d'origine. The Leakey Affair demonstrates the extent to which the implementation of later wine regulations emphasizing terroir and authenticity were in response to the challenges and competition of Algerian viticulture.

For the Bordeaux winemakers, the very reputation of Bordeaux wine appeared to have been jeopardized by the association with Algerian wine. The secretary-general of a Gironde syndicate denounced Leakey's advertisement that "Algerian wines" were "currently predominantly consumed by the Bordeaux market" as an "utterly false assertion capable of causing us [Bordeaux winemakers] enormous damage."⁶³ The syndicate vowed to fight the harmful association with Algerian wine by pressuring the government to "take measures to prevent similar situations from appearing in the future" by working closely with its deputies in the Parliament.⁶⁴ The discourse from Bordeaux focused on defending the reputation of their wines from any association with Algerian wines. The superior quality of Bordeaux wines, according to them, was the product of their superior terroir. As terroir and quality were inseparable, and terroir was essential to both the characteristics of their wine and their identity, a threat to their wine (in this case, from association with Algerian wine) also threatened their identity. The fierce Bordeaux objection to the promotion of Algerian viticulture in Leakey's advertisements centered on their fear that their reputation might be tarnished and their identities undermined by affiliation with Algeria, thereby challenging the place of Algeria in France.

In Algeria, on the other hand, there was an outpouring of support for Jonnart and his

62 John Strachan, "The Colonial Identity of Wine: The Leakey Affair and the Franco-Algerian Order of Things," *The Social History of Alcohol and Drugs* 21, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 119.

63 *La Gironde vinicole* (Bordeaux), December 15, 1905, 183.

64 *La Gironde vinicole*, December 15, 1905, 183.

promotion of Algerian exports outside of France. Like many other colons, the mayor of Oran wrote on behalf of the Municipal Council of Oran, to “compliment highly the effort made to create outlets for Algerian wine outside of the metropolitan market to alleviate the ruinous effects of the low wine prices on Algeria.”⁶⁵ In addition to enthusiastic praise, many Municipal Councils even planned to offer financial contributions for the Governor-General’s endeavors.⁶⁶ The Algerian press, often published by regionally organized colon syndicates, also mobilized for the defense of the Governor-General from the criticisms launched from Bordeaux. *Le Journal Général de l’Algérie et de la Tunisie* (which was the “Official voice of the Algerian Business Syndicate”) for instance, dismissed the outrage from Bordeaux as “a lot of noise for nothing” and expressed surprise at the magnitude of the controversy.⁶⁷ They justified the Governor-General’s actions as necessary response to the “harm of forced competition between the colony and the products of the metropole.”⁶⁸ The Algerian discourse emphasized the need to find solutions to the economic hardship and structural problems in viticulture, rather than engaging with the idea of terroir. Ironically, they sought to develop commercial relationships outside of France by leveraging their connection to France. The interest of Algerian viticulture was increased economic independence from France. Dependence on French markets subjected Algerian viticulture to intense competition and increasingly frequent surplus crises, which were only worsened by the unfavorable regulations sought by metropolitan producers. This fraught relationship with France would ultimately prove to be both the making and undoing of Algerian viticulture.

In Parliament, the deputies from Gironde advocated fiercely for the Bordeaux viticulture interests and denounced both the Leakey advertisements and the dealings between the Algerian Governor-General and Leakey. They addressed interpellations to the Minister of Commerce which sparked heated debates with extensive ramifications. One such debate in the Chamber of Deputies, in November 1905, began when André Ballande of Gironde denounced Leakey’s advertisements as false claims which damaged reputable metropolitan winemakers. He lambasted the dealings between the Governor-General of Algeria and Leakey as a source of “unfair competition with tendencies of fraud” which advantaged Algerian winemakers with governmental support.⁶⁹ Algeria’s unique and complex relationship with metropolitan France, as both a colony and three departments of France, resulted in it having a colonial Governor-General along with political representation in the parliament. Metropolitan winegrowers and their representatives protested this structure as unfair to them, as they did not have governmental subsidies for the promotion of their products in foreign markets.

To demonstrate the wide-ranging threat affecting all French winemakers — and especially those with well-established reputations — Ballande then cited another adver-

65 *Journal général de l’Algérie et de la Tunisie* (Alger), November 23, 1905.

66 *Journal général de l’Algérie et de la Tunisie* (Alger), December 10, 1905.

67 *Journal général de l’Algérie et de la Tunisie* (Alger), November 19, 1905.

68 *Journal général de l’Algérie et de la Tunisie* (Alger), November 19, 1905.

69 *Compte rendu in-extenso*, Journal officiel de la République française: Débats parlementaires Chambre des députés (Paris: Imprimerie des journaux officiels, 1905), 3296-3297.

tisement made by Leakey. This advertisement declared Algerian wine to resemble the renowned wines from Médoc, Saint-Émilion, and Bourgogne.⁷⁰ His arguments elicited enthusiastic responses, not only from the deputies of Bourgogne, who immediately sided with those of Bordeaux, but also from many legislators who were concerned with the larger issue of wines falsely advertised as originating from reputable winemaking regions.⁷¹ Guillaume Chastenet, another deputy of Gironde, deplored Russian and American wines with “very beautiful labels[,] carrying all of our brands from Bordeaux, Bourgogne, Champagne, and Cognac.”⁷² This concern about inauthentic regional identifications of wine precipitated discussions about the need for “a system that satisfies all French producers” by certifying authenticity, leading up to the appellation d’origine system. This debate about the advertisement of Algerian viticulture thus precipitated a much broader discussion about wine fraud in the Parliament.

The deputies from the Bourgogne and the neighboring Franche-Comté regions echoed the concerns of the deputies from Bordeaux. The deputy from Côte-d’Or in Bourgogne, Jean-Baptiste Bouhey-Allex, pressed for the implementation of the 1 August 1905 law against frauds in the wine business, especially in Algeria.⁷³ However, this law, which required clear indication of the origins of commercial wine, was perceived by some as an insufficient response.⁷⁴ Charles Dumont, a deputy from Juras in Franche-Comté, argued that “one must persevere and push the government itself to help us accompany our products with certificates of origin.”⁷⁵ He also urged government subsidization and assistance in “the sale of products officially authenticated to be French products.”⁷⁶ For the numerous legislators representing metropolitan vigneron competing with Algerian vigneron in the same market, the Leakey Affair was indicative of a pressing need for the institutional delineation and protection of regional boundaries, terroir, and identity.

Between 1908 and 1912, the regions of Bordeaux, Cognac, Armagnac, and Champagne wines were enshrined as appellations.⁷⁷ This authenticity-granting label legally validated the concept of terroir and its implicit links with the quality of the wine, protecting the winemakers in regions with established reputations. Laws in 1919 and 1927 further tightened the restrictions on appellation wine, with a law in 1935 finally creating the Appellations d’Origine Contrôlées.⁷⁸ In the face of challenges from regions such as Algeria, as shown in the Leakey Affair, Bordeaux, Bourgogne, and Champagne successfully secured systematic legal protection for their terroir and the identity of their wine.

70 *Compte rendu*, 3297.

71 *Compte rendu*, 3298.

72 *Compte rendu*, 3298.

73 *Compte rendu*, 3298.

74 Meloni and Swinnen, “The Rise and Fall,” 18.

75 *Compte rendu*, 3301.

76 *Compte rendu*, 3301.

77 Meloni and Swinnen, “The Rise and Fall,” 18.

78 Meloni and Swinnen, “The Rise and Fall,” 18.

2 - Appellations d'origine: The Implicit Metropolitan Rejection of "Algeria is France"

The president of the parliamentary "Investigation on the Viticulture Situation of France and Algeria" conducted in 1933 declared:

The Chamber [of Deputies] has underscored a clear will to rest upon this principle: the defense of the agricultural artisans. One does not want to leave the small winegrower — who, with his family, freely cultivates his soil — to die; one does not want this small winegrower to be expropriated by the big landowners like there are in Midi and in Algeria who, by themselves, farm land as big as a district of Côte d'Or."⁷⁹

The economic hardship of the metropolitan winegrowers, presumed to be caused by competition from industrial Algerian viticulture, elicited widespread sympathy and attracted significant support from French legislators. The discourse romanticizing and favoring artisanal viticulture in metropolitan France, explicitly in opposition to the capital-intensive industrial viticulture dominant in Algeria, thrived especially in the interwar period.

The law of appellations d'origine contrôlées adopted in 1935 legally reified the republican ideal of artisanal farming. This law designated the newly-created Comité national des appellations d'origine (CNAO), along with local syndicates and collectives of owners, as the regulator of appellations.⁸⁰ The appellations d'origine system solidified the segmentation of the wine market, formally differentiating luxury wines from ordinary wines, vins de consommation courante, produced mostly in Algeria and Languedoc.⁸¹ The metropolitan vigneron succeeded in establishing the appellations d'origine system by evoking the contemporary discourse of "authenticity." Amidst increasing anxiety about rootlessness and Americanization, many French leaders advocated for the preservation and revival of France's "authentic" regional cultures.⁸² "Authenticity" in this context was nearly always exclusive to metropolitan France and excluded Algeria.⁸³

Economic pressures in the wine markets generated social tension and motivated powerful lobbying forces which successfully established the appellations system, which shielded metropolitan winegrowers with the idealized discourse of terroir and the bucolic image of artisanal agriculture. Industrial Algerian viticulture, which contributed to that economic pressure, did not have a place in this system that facilitated the attachment of quality to terroir and never received AOC status.⁸⁴ Because the appellation d'origine system facilitated the recognition of regional wines as essential to national legacy, or "the

79 Édouard Barthe quoted in Olivier Jacquet and Gilles Laferté, "Le contrôle républicain du marché: Vignerons et négociants sous la Troisième République" [The Republican Control of the Market: Vigneron and Merchants under the Third Republic], *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 61, no. 5 (2006): 1161.

80 Jacquet and Laferté, "Le contrôle," 1162. CNAO was later renamed as *Institut national de l'origine et de la qualité* (INAO).

81 Bohling, *The Sober Revolution*, 30.

82 Bohling, *The Sober Revolution*, 34-35.

83 Bohling, *The Sober Revolution*, 35.

84 Bohling, *The Sober Revolution*, 7-8.

national fortune” according to Raymond Poincaré, the absence of Algerian wines from AOC reflects the implicit exclusion of industrial Algerian viticulture from the French patrimony.⁸⁵ This rejection comes in spite of the grand visions of cultivating and settling small vigneron in the Algerian countryside. The prevalent idea that “Algeria is France,” which was fundamental to the initial development of Algerian viticulture as a panacea for the *phylloxera*-devastated metropolitan France, was thus rejected by the metropolitan wine industry.

3 - Statut viticole: Affirmation of “Algeria is France” In Principle

Challenges to Algeria’s place in France were sometimes more explicit, especially from the metropolitan vigneron in Midi who competed more directly with Algerian vigneron because both produced wine unprotected by the appellation d’origine. The Confédération générale des vigneron du Midi (CGVM) was established in 1907, after a surplus crisis pushed hundreds of thousands of people onto the streets to protest their economic hardship in one of the largest uprisings since the French Revolution.⁸⁶ The CGVM openly questioned the link between Algeria and France, insisting that Algerian wine was foreign and fraudulent.⁸⁷ A leader of this syndicate echoed a common sentiment in Languedoc by declaring in the widely-disseminated *Revue des deux mondes* that “to consider Algeria as a strict extension of France would be a mistake; it’s too different from the mother country because of its race, religion, and morals.”⁸⁸ Another observer argued that “a hectoliter of Algerian wine is...less French than a hectoliter of metropolitan wine” because indigenous workers undertook 70% of the labor in Algerian viticulture whereas metropolitan French workers undertook 1,000 hours of work out of the 1,200 hours needed to cultivate a hectare of grapevines.⁸⁹

Nevertheless, this discourse based on the explicit rejection of Algeria as a part of France remained marginal in the 1930s. The powerful French-Algerian lobby successfully defended Algerian viticulture from direct challenges to Algeria’s relationship with France. For instance, Midi vigneron sought to impose tariffs or quotas on Algerian wine in 1929 when the Great Depression hit the wine markets, but the proposed law to limit imports

85 Quoted in Guy, “Wine, Champagne,” 165. Bohling, *The Sober Revolution*, 6-8, 42. Algerian wines of 11 districts were eventually categorized as *Vin D’limité de Qualité Supérieure* (VDQS), which was created in 1944 as an intermediate level between AOC and industrial wine. Historian Joseph Bohling argued that the AOC system would have important implications in the process of decolonization: “...the INAO uncoupled Algeria from the metropole and created a framework for imagining a post-Algerian France; once France had retreated from empire, it could help efface the intimate relationship that had bound Algeria to France for over a century.” Bohling, *The Sober Revolution*, 8.

86 Bohling, *The Sober Revolution*, 1. Refer to Jean Sagnes, “Le mouvement de 1907 en Languedoc-Roussillon: de la révolte viticole à la révolte régionale” [The 1907 Movement in Languedoc-Roussillon: From Viticulture Revolt to Regional Revolt], *Le Mouvement social*, no. 104 (1978).

87 Bohling, *The Sober Revolution*, 35.

88 Quoted in Bohling, *The Sober Revolution*, 35.

89 Quoted in Bohling, *The Sober Revolution*, 35.

of Algerian wine to 8 million hectoliters was promptly rejected.⁹⁰ Algerian representatives in Parliament equated discrimination against Algerian wine to fratricide.⁹¹ An influential lobbyist for Algerian wine emphasized France's imperial identity with the notion of "Greater France."⁹² Although competition between Algerian and metropolitan wine industries produced significant economic and social pressures, the tenet that "Algeria is France" reigned supreme.

In contrast to the failed proposal to block Algerian wine importation, measures that did not explicitly discriminate between the French citizens in France and those in Algeria were successfully adopted. The *statut viticole*, a series of laws passed between 1931 and 1935, sought to control the wine supply on the market by banning the expansion of vineyards larger than 10 hectares and vigneronns who produced more than 500 hectoliters of wine.⁹³ Although these regulations were applicable to both Algerian and metropolitan producers, they disproportionately impacted colon vigneronns. These vigneronns in Algeria owned larger properties averaging around 22 hectares and produced higher yields per hectare; in contrast, the average French vineyard was only around 1 hectare in the period between 1930 and 1935.⁹⁴ The *statut viticole* immediately halted the expansion of Algerian vineyards; because Algeria exported nearly all of its wine to metropolitan France, this measure was effectively equivalent to import constraints.⁹⁵ In fact, the *statut viticole* sealed the fate of Algerian viticulture's development: total vineyard area never grew beyond the 400,000 hectares reached in the mid-1930s.⁹⁶ Ultimately, measures to limit supply by targeting the biggest producers of industrial wine, rather than explicitly challenging Algeria's status as a part of France, triumphed under the Third Republic.

Conclusion

The beginning and end of Algerian viticulture's explosive growth were inseparable from France. The *phylloxera* epidemic in metropolitan France generated the surge of demand that drove the remarkable development of Algerian viticulture. The growth of Algerian viticulture was ultimately halted by regulations adopted by French legislators in the 1930s, who faced pressure from rural metropolitan constituencies clamoring

90 Meloni and Swinnen, "The Rise and Fall," 21.

91 "La loi viticole," *La Voix des colons*, July 20, 1931, quoted in Bohling, *The Sober Revolution*, 33.

92 Édouard Kruger, quoted in Bohling, *The Sober Revolution*, 36.

93 Meloni and Swinnen, "The Rise and Fall," 21. Bohling, *The Sober Revolution*, 30. Other measures included "blocage," or the mandatory storage of excess production, obligatory distillation of surpluses, taxing high yields, and subsidizing the uprooting of high-yield vines.

94 Meloni and Swinnen, "The Rise and Fall," 21.

95 Meloni and Swinnen, "The Rise and Fall," 21-22.

96 Meloni and Swinnen, "The Rise and Fall," 22-27. *Statut viticole* and its incentive to uproot "overproductive vines" dramatically reduced vineyard and production, until the paralysis caused by WWII, when *Statut viticole* was repealed. Following the post-war recovery, *Statut viticole* was reintroduced under the name *Code du vin* in 1953. Algerian viticulture ultimately collapsed with independence, when it lost its free access to French markets and suffered from export constraints and the industry's poorly-managed nationalization.

for “authenticity” and cherishing terroir. Conversely, the development of Algerian viticulture played a distinctive role in the economic, social, and institutional transformations of France around the turn of the twentieth century. Its evolution both reinforced and challenged the notion that “Algeria is France,” thereby exacerbating tensions between the contradictory imperatives of France the imperial power, and France the rural republic. Consequently, Algerian viticulture provoked and partook in important debates about the boundaries of regional and national identities, as institutionalized by the appellation d’origine system. Although Algerian viticulture has all but disappeared today, the history of its remarkable rise illustrates the evolution of boundaries and links between Algeria and France.

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