Title: "Je suis socialiste et quinziste ": Rugby, Wine and Socialism in the Aude since 1976

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Abstract:

The Languedoc has long been characterised as an historic area where politics run as red as the plentiful wine quaffed by her iconic rugbymen. Yet the intersections between rugby, wine and Socialism give telling insights into the value of regional identity. The historic nationality of the Languedoc, Occitanisme, has motivated nationalist campaigns for increased autonomy and even secession from France. They have done so in reference to the patrimony of Languedocien heritage, making seamless reference to rugby, wine and Socialism as assets of Southern identity.

At the end of the 1970s, the Languedoc's wine industry and her rugby were facing up to the challenges of modernisation. Such pressures energised the Occitaniste movement, which reached its most vocal at this point. Yet, these processes coincided with a Socialist victory in the Presidential election of 1981. The predominance of rugby players and winegrowers in local administrations and at the head of powerful trade unions emphasised the cross-over between board-room and locker-room.

Key Words: Rugby, Wine, Socialism, Languedoc, Occitan, France
"Je suis socialiste et quinziste ": Rugby, Wine and Socialism in the Aude since 1976

Within France, the game of rugby union or quinze (fifteen), as it is commonly known, has long been a cornerstone of Méridional identity alongside the pre-eminence of winegrowing. Both the dominant sport and staple economic function have shaped and characterised local power structures amongst the maisons serrées of the Audois countryside. 1976 represented a tangible moment of change in the region, as the radicalism of the dominant winegrowing industry reached its most outrageous and the rejuvenation of quinze began in Carcassonne. What linked the two processes were the strong social bonds which tied the region’s industry to its favourite past-time. The prominent role of Socialism in the region has drawn prominent actors from the world of wine and rugby into positions of political responsibility, binding these themes of identity into structures of power. 1976 can be looked at as a conceptual tipping point, after which wine, rugby and socialism were all forced to adapt and respond to outside pressures.

Demographic changes throughout the post-war period had seen the wine industry gradually lessening in importance to the regional economy and being forced to modernise from the mid 1980s. As trade unions representing the wine industry struggled to mitigate the pressures of change on their vulnerable members, the influence of regional power networks was crucial to steering development. Audois rugby has, like wine, been challenged by the forces of modernisation and responses to this have been guided by the personal involvement of regional notables. In the same way as some claim that globalisation has stripped wine of its rustic romance, so too do detractors point to changes in the rugby of the Midi. As both modernised rapidly in the 1980s, the central pillars of regional identity were challenged, conjuring up romanticised images of a rustic past. These images provided a platform for the
Occitan movement, representing the region's historical identity, to cast themselves as campaigners for a traditional paysan identity. The intersection of rugby, wine and socialism has characterised both this conceptual paysannerie and the region's administration, juxtaposing competing conceptions of modernity alongside very tangible power structures and potent Occitan regionalism.

**Le chic de Paris contre le choc du Midi**

To fully interrogate the romantic images of the past which came to be associated with Audois rugby, however, it is necessary to briefly outline the means by which it came to be so strongly associated with the region. Despite rugby's association with England, French players and enthusiasts have sought to depict another narrative which accentuates rugby’s roots as an ancient sport of the South-west. Rather than look to 1823 and the Rugby School in Warwickshire, French rugby fans can look to the medieval games of soule and barrette which predate rugby's Anglophone introduction and provide a useful hook upon which to hang the accoutrements of regional identity tradition (Lacouture, 1979, pp.22-23). Jean Lacouture's concession that the oval ball did in fact arrive from England does not diminish his claim that the enthusiastic Frenchmen who picked up this ball were building upon a very regional (Wines, 2010, p.14).

Yet, throughout the late 1800s, rugby would continue to be a game of Parisian elites, reflecting a certain gentlemanly physical vigour and mirroring the experience of English public schools. French society faced a crisis after the defeat of the Franco-Prussian war in 1870, lacking confidence and seeking scapegoats for a shattering of illusions. The stark contrast between a defeated France and the strident posturing of Victorian England is part
illustration of her allure for conservative elites in France searching for a societal tonic. For Agathon, there could be nothing “more helpful for the renewal of the country than a generation that is athletic, realistic, non-ideological, chaste and capable of handling economic challenges” (Terret, 1999, p.66). Rugby was to play a part in encouraging the sociability of élites and fostering a degree of moral and physical athleticism and so it flourished amongst male university students. The ‘Corinthian’ sporting ethos of the tireless promoter of rugby, the famous Baron Pierre de Coubertin (the man who had helped revive the Olympics) dominated the early years of rugby. Such an ethos kept the game exclusive to the “’gentleman-amateur’ issu des couches supérieures de la société parisienne” (Dine, 2007, p.38).

In the 1890s, rugby spread South to Bordeaux, Toulouse and Lyons. Yet, as the game moved South, the character of it drifted away from the individual athleticism of Parisian aristocrats and bourgeois students and towards a greater emphasis on teamwork. In Bordeaux, where Scottish wine merchants had championed the game, enthusiasm sprang from the industry. As Pierre Lacouture observed: "Rugby in the South did not exactly appear from the wine cellars but it had, especially before the First World War, a distinct smell of wine corks" ('Badges of dishonour', 2007). The ‘Corinthian’ values of Parisian masculinity gave way to a somewhat more paysan definition of masculinity as the game travelled south to the winelands of the Midi, as defined by Thierry Terret:

Rugby was a way peasant men could overcome their inferiority complex and take advantage of the morphological and muscular capital they had developed through their work. (Terret, 1999, p.66)

Wine historian Rémy Pech along with Jerome Thomas acknowledge that on implantation in Toulouse, rugby saw changes in the way it was reported, representing the changing values
placed on styles of play. Where sports writers had once praised individual runs and flashes of skill, now they saw a lack of solidarity, instead lauding the collective effort of the scrum or maul (Pech & Thomas, 1986). Such coverage stressed not only competing conceptions of masculinity, between the ‘gentleman-amateur’ and the paysan rugbyman but also necessarily of class. In the Midi, rugby became an expression of municipal pride, drawing together villages in shows of collective solidarity which frequently culminated in celebrations centring around food, drink and music – ‘le troisieme mi-temps’ or third half of the rugby match. This rural adoption of the game moved it away from its origins and inflected it with a Southern character which valued very different attributes to Coubertin’s ‘Corinthians’.

Le paysan et le rugbyman

The legacy of massive wine riots across the Languedoc in 1907 seared a resentment of Parisian authority into the region’s character. Rugby’s expansion provided a means of communicating this traditional resentment as well as competing within the bounds of the region. Indeed, rugby more than any other sport inherently focussed on the notion of defending territory, with the intensity of the idea augmented by the violence of the game. This defensive tone has encouraged recourse to collective identities, stressing the importance of the club or the village – ‘l’esprit de clocher’ or village pride. Amongst the many villages of the rural Languedoc, rugby allowed traditional rivalries to be played out within the context of Southern identity (Darbon, 1999, p.42). The pre-eminence of hunting and bull-fighting in the South were strands which accentuated the ‘blood-sport’ character of rugby (Pociello, 1983, p.66; Baumont, 1987, p.15). Building such an undertone of acceptable violence into a sport which exhibited “a remarkable capacity to activate community and national identities” ensured that the battles which took place on Audois rugby fields would be imbued with
profound significance by supporters (Terret, 1999, p.64). If rugby remained essentially aristocratic and urban in England, then in France it was “républicain et paysan” and centred around the traditional home of these virtues, the Midi (Baumont, 1987).

The story of Quillan is likewise instructive of the development of *quinze* in the Languedoc viticole. A small town in the Aude, Quillan’s union side rose to dominate the region’s rugby scene. The poaching of other players by the club’s wealthy benefactor - hatmaker Jean Bourrel - fostered both great success and bitter rivalries. His ability to pay players indirectly through employment in his commercial business began a trend of sham amateurism which would mar the sport, whilst giving Quillan a competitive edge. A fatality in a game between Quillan and Perpignan in 1927 was indicative of the toxic and violent rivalries which were to emerge, with the Carcassonne-Toulouse match in 1927 and the Lézignan-Béziers in 1929 also displaying shocking and memorable levels of violence. Quillan won the national championship in 1929 (and were beaten finalists in 1928 and 1930) against Lézignan, another Audois team. Violence between the fans confirmed that this was a particularly *méridional* character of rugby, with this violent code seemingly transferred to the national team by the preponderance of Languedocien players selected. The *amicales* (supporters’ associations) were important constituent parts of the development of rugby clubs, often representing a sort of extended family unit in the manner of Languedocien villages (Dine, 2001, pp.68-69). Méridional rugby is famed for its specifically violent nature, a characteristic which has been stressed both as an insult and a boast by supporters and opponents. "La violence est rarement absente de ces rencontres âprement disputées. Le capital morphologique des nouveaux rugbymen méridionaux favorise des affrontements de plus en plus robustes" (Dine, 2007, p.39). (Violence is seldom absent from these hotly contested meetings. The morphological capital of these new Meridional Rugbymen leads to
more and more robust clashes.) This was often referred to as *rugby cassoulet*, a home-spun and fondly remembered village pursuit which enshrined the social event of rugby as central facet of Southern identity. Yet Quillan were not uniquely virtuous.

Jean Galia, lauded as one of France's greatest forwards, was one of the Quillan players in the national XV who was banned from playing Rugby Union for violent play and sham amateurism. He became perhaps the greatest proponent of Rugby League in France, representing his country in the first international matches in 1934. What is interesting about the Aude is that both *quinze* and *treize* have been traditionally strong, although often in mutual competition. Unlike other areas of France, and even the Midi, the Aude has often looked to *treize* as its most prominent sporting endeavour. Shortly after the Vichy regime established itself, Sports minister, Jean Ybarnégaray, announced: "The fate of rugby league is clear. Its life is over and it will be quite simply deleted from French sport" ('Badge of Dishonour', 2007). This came as a result of both an ideological rejection of the semi-professionalism of *treize* players and also the lobbying of committed *quinzistes* close to the government. Interestingly, however, rugby survived the Liberation without attaching itself to Vichy, although there were cases of vandalism of *quinze* clubs after the Liberation by bitter *treizistes* (Garcia, 2007, pp.76-77). Whilst Narbonne remain a good rugby union side, the Aude's greatest sporting heritage has been the prominence of Limoux, Carcassonne and Lézignan amongst the top sides in rugby league. Puig-Aubert, the iconic Carcassonnais Full-back, epitomised the success of rugby league in the South and also the often mystifying concepts of healthy lifestyles in the past (Dine, 2001, p.117). An eccentric and charismatic player, Puig-Aubert was famous amongst other things for taking to the pitch with a lit cigarette in hand in a match against Wigan. Jean Sebedio was a famous *quinze* player who cemented his notoriety with a commanding spell as coach of Lezignan, where he earned the
nickname 'the Sultan' for his bombastic and authoritative character. A hard-drinking and hard-living man, he coached Lezignan to the Championship final in 1929, epitomising "the méridional cult of the strong man." Sébédio's 'strong-man' image relied on his arguing with referees, challenging opponents to drinking matches and, incredibly, presiding over training with a bull whip (Dine, 2001, p.71). Prominent characters like Puig-Aubert and Sébédio embodied the popularity of rugby in both its forms in the Aude, with their outlandish personalities key to their popularity and their success.

The notion that wine drinking was inherently part of a healthy, rugged lifestyle was an affirmation of southern culture and a means of differentiating those of the region from Parisians or étrangers. The ideals of manliness which had been endorsed by the Vichy government were not tainted by association but rather held as constant tokens of Southern identity which had survived the Occupation. The focus on a natural product of the earth was tied to the identity of the paysan and a certain image of Southern masculinity which rejected modernisation as a compromise of its identity. In the picture below (from a viticultural newspaper), the implication that drinking 'Cola' leads to weak and insipid individuals is accentuated by the robust and confident strength of the true Frenchman (complete with beret and striped shirt) happily supping on wine. The Aude's reverence for earthy paysan ideals sat well with the perceived qualities of rugby's charismatic stars. Likewise, in this traditional area of vinous monopoly, the centrality of drinking to the culture of violent rugby was striking.

[insert FIG 1]

Source: La Viticulture Nouvelle (December, 1956) ADH W1522
One telling means of tracing Southern viticultural identity is by looking at instances of self representation. The monthly newspaper *L’Echo des Corbières* was published in the village of Lézignan in the Aude by winemakers of the Comité Régional d’Action Viticole (CRAV).iii The CRAV were the militant wing of the ‘Défense du vin’ movement, defending the ideology of viticultural unity and the inheritance of 1907 often by violent means. This newspaper provided a central voice to the group: printing communiqués from the CRAV alongside emotive editorial and heavy use of Occitan. Littered with cartoons, humorous stories and lascivious images of pneumatic women on the back page, this was a paper of genuine interest to the working men of the region. Its political diatribes and cries of outrage at the impoverishment of vignerons were happily juxtaposed with the triumphant news of recent rugby results.

In subsequent issues the ‘Anti-vin’ campaign was criticised for spreading lies about wine, conflating the national drink with spirits for its links to alcoholism. Whilst proudly displaying baby pictures of 3 sons of Midi vignerons, the journal states “ils n’ont pas été élevés à l’eau minérale” (‘Halte’, 1971). Beneath these childhood portraits are action photos of the rugby stars these men have become in their adult lives, proud members of the southern teams which dominated their northern compatriots. The article speaks of the Midi as the home of Walter Spanghero (in the middle) the Narbonnais who helped lead France to a Grand Slam in 1968 and racked up 50 international appearances at Lock, Flanker and No. 8 (‘French Rugby Federation Player Profile’, 2006). On the left is Hervé Mazard, an iconic player for Béziers rugby league team and on the right another player Guy Madaule.

[insert Fig 2]

Source: 'Halte', 1971
These players represented an image from Languedocien rugby’s ‘golden age’, before the changes wrought by the game’s globalisation came to be truly felt. Icons like Spanghero remained important cultural touchstones until long after, representing the roots of the game in the villages of the South. Their adoption by the wine industry as bastions of Southern masculinity in this instance was indicative of the compact by which many constructed regional identity. Wine and rugby were natural bedfellows, with the involvement of socialism seeming a political prerequisite in the region. That prominent figures from the Parti Socialiste could trace their background in both wine and rugby ensured that these tropes of identification were repeated and reinforced by regional business, sporting and political elites, specifically within the Aude. Yet, this rather cosy compact would be severely challenged by the impact of externally-led modernisation, complicating the relationship between wine, rugby and socialism as elites tried to stamp their authority on development processes.

Between ‘Le Rugby des villages’ and modernisation

The arrival of Jacques Talmier onto the political scene in Carcassonne would reshape the town’s sporting life thereafter. Talmier became President of US Carcassonne in the 1974/1975 season firmly establishing "l'histoire d'amour rugbystique" (‘La finale de l'U.S. Carcassonne’, 2008). The decade of Talmier's chairmanship represented the best in the club's history, raising the profile of quinze in the traditionally treize dominated Carcassonne. Talmier set out to revolutionise quinze by promoting the city of Carcassonne as one “ouvert sur l'international” (‘Rugby à XIII ou à XV?’, 2003). As the head of both the municipal Chamber of Commerce and also the Commercial courts, Talmier had more than sufficient cultural capital to spearhead a change in thinking. The middle child from our previous newspaper clipping, Walter Spanghero, was also involved with Talmier, alongside his brother Laurent. Walter Spanghero was a hero, described as “le John Wayne du rugby français”, and a
powerfully validating force for Talmier’s projects (Soula, 2007, p.211). Although, as Colin Jones pointed out, despite Spanghero's peasant background and *homme de fer* image, he cut a bohemian figure on the pitch with his socks at his ankle. Perhaps, then, more Clint Eastwood than John Wayne. Laurent, on the other hand, was a more established businessman (running a large, profitable Castelnaudry meat firm) but a less distinguished rugby player (although he had represented Narbonne, he never made full international). Laurent was Talmier's Vice-President for 25 years and, in a potentially more illustrious position for Southerners, 'Grand Master of the Castelnaudry Brotherhood of Cassoulet' ('Laurent Spanghero', 2008).

Under their bombastic leadership, Carcassonne's 1975 victory in the Second Division brought about conflict with the city’s *treize* team, necessitating the sharing of the stadium between the two unhappy bedfellows. Slowly, Talmier set about building bonds between the Chamber of Commerce and the *quinze* team, winning round other notables from the city. Antoine Verdale the President of the Chamber of Agriculture and the author of the quote which titles this piece, would play a supportive role in augmenting Talmier’s influence in Carcassonne.

Just as wine was forced to modernise, so too was *quinze*. Talmier's insistence that the Aude was “ouvert sur l'international” had been a statement of intent which aligned him with rugby's modernisers, pushing towards the globalisation and professionalisation of the game (‘Rugby à XIII ou à XV?’, 2003). The background to Talmier’s reforms was the stunning success of Héraultais rugby during the period, drawing envious glances from others in the Languedoc. During the period of 1971-1984, *quinze* was dominated by Béziers, playing a style of rugby which was heavily reliant on the efficient work of the forwards and a steely, if unromantic, grit. Philip Dine remarks that the Biterois domination was somewhat characteristic of France under Giscard, the technocratic France of middle managers as
opposed to the vainglorious peuple Gaullien. Le style biterrois translated to the national team and was embodied by the tight-knit forward pack which represented the Languedoc in the national team and the grinding efficiency represented by players such as the embattled Alain Estèве, the bearded second-row nicknamed variously “the beast” and “the assassin” (Dine, 2001, pp.152-154). Nonetheless, during this period of rugby hewn to its rustic essentials by the blasting wind of the Bitterois Tramontane, the figure of the Languedocien Flanker Jean-Pierre Rives captured the national imagination. His blond hair and swashbuckling style earned him the moniker Casque d’Or and saw literary commentators like Antoine Blondin laud his self-sacrifice and imbue him with antique notions and virtues. Yet Rives also represented the changing dynamic of French rugby union. Courted by the Parisian Racing Club de France in 1981 and given a symbolic post by Pernod-Ricard, Rives became a genuine celebrity, mixing with movie stars and the Parisian social elites whilst he played for the club until 1986. As a sporting icon and member of France’s social elite, Rives’ public profile was only enhanced by television appearances and constant press coverage, symbolic of a development in the French game which would see it commercialised and drawn closer to business (Dine, 2001, pp.162-164).

Many place the creation of the Rugby Union World Cup in 1987 as the moment that Rugby became irreversibly ‘globalised’, embarking on a process of creeping commercialisation which would demand changes amongst national institutions still keen to compete.

[R]ugby union, though officially an amateur game, committed itself to a world where agents and advertisers turn fame into fortunes. Once this occurred, the game, the players, and its administration could never be the same again (Hutchins, 2002, p.40).
This globalisation of the game likewise affected club rugby in France, opening up the traditional *rugby des villages* to the vagaries of global competition. The arrival of southern hemisphere players was one aspect which massively altered the game and took it away from its village roots, pushing the traditionally amateur sport towards the edges of professionalization. Talmier’s role in trying to grasp this developing trend by putting Audois rugby on a more commercial footing was an important step in presaging the changes which would take place in the game. Professionalism was made official in 1995 after the World Cup, although it had been operating to an extent in France long before that. As if to emphasise the familiar faces steering change, Walter Spanghero had been brought on board by the French Rugby Federation as part of the team tasked with making sure France was ready for professionalization.

Arguably, the influence of Quillan’s subtle player enticements in the 1930s had demonstrated that ‘sham amateurism’ was a repeatable model of success. The role of prominent local elites like Talmier, head of the Chamber of Commerce and President of the rugby team, provided a contemporary basis for enticing elite players. Arguably, Carcassonne dealt better with professionalization than the previously ‘invincible’ Béziers, whose amazing record in the 1970s and 1980s was matched only by their precipitous collapse to the minor leagues. That these changes had been anticipated by the pre-eminent Languedociens within the game was characteristic of the close knit nature of rugby and business in the Aude and the Languedoc more generally.

‘*Je suis quinziste et socialiste*’: Changes in viticultural syndicalism

In 1983, Antoine Verdale would be succeeded in the Chamber of Agriculture by André Cases, a winegrower with a radical history. Cases was very much a man of the region,
a rugby-playing smallholder born in 1936 and drawn to viticultural politics after the arduous experience of working his own vines (Revel, 1996). Playing fly-half for a collection of regional rugby teams, he was well versed in leading the back line and coordinating attacks, a skill which he would put to good use in cat and mouse conflicts between winegrowers and the forces of order (Revel, 1996, p.10). Yet, as “leader incontesté du Comité d’Action Viticole de l’Aude”, Cases presided over a tumultuous transition period for winegrowers that witnessed the fatal shooting of a CRS officer and vigneron at a protest which became a gun-fight on 4\textsuperscript{th} March 1976 at Montredon-des-Corbières. Winegrower Emile Pouytès and CRS officer Commander Joel Le Goff were shot and killed, whilst another 17 people were hospitalised with injuries from the disastrous fire-fight. The confluence of blood and wine evinced a significant reaction from the French political mainstream, which vilified the terroristic acts of regional extremists. Exactly who shot first, however, seems to have been lost in the search for culprits afterwards.

This was a turning point for the Languedocien wine industry. The articulate spokesmen who had long championed their central role in the regional economy were increasingly marginalised as tolerance of their protests withered. They had, in part, been forced onto the political margins after electoral failure in 1968, when the winegrowers' leader André Castera stood against the Socialist Francis Vals to little success. Likewise, the market for wine was changing around them, and the \textit{Midi viticole} was forced to address external challenges, increased competition and European integration. Attempts to impose quality as a central tenet of the Midi’s wine production had caused irritation and dissent amongst staunch traditionalists in the \textit{Défense du vin} movement like the CRAV.

The presidential election of 1981, however, offered hope that this process might be arrested, and that the traditional faith of the Midi in the Socialist party would presage a new
era of prosperity and sympathetic government policy. Yet, after the euphoria of victory and as Mitterrand’s état de grace came to an end, the economic picture was poor in both the Languedoc and in France more broadly. This presaged a shift in government’s stated policy intentions and drew a line under the rosy outlook of the Socialist victory. Austerity measures focussed on remedying the deficit in the balance of payments through deflationary policies and continued strides towards economic modernisation. Wage controls and spending cuts were felt across public and private sector as subsidy and intervention were casualties of the government’s bid to get the national economy back into the black (Holmes, 1987, p.47). Against a background of continuing ‘rigeur’ in the public sector, redundancy in the private sector and national insecurity, the demands for price controls and import tariffs emanating from the viticultural South must have appeared naive at best and selfish at worst.

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<tr>
<td><strong>Number of vineyard plots</strong></td>
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<td>83,700</td>
<td>68,800</td>
<td>43,800</td>
<td>35,800</td>
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<td>1,065,300</td>
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<td><strong>Plots under 20HA (%)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Proprietor over 55 years old (%)</strong></td>
<td>52.0</td>
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Key facts about the agricultural sector in the Languedoc-Roussillon (Touzard and Klajman, 2006, p.16)

The table above illustrates to some extent the changes which were the backdrop to this period of reform in the wine world. High levels of ownership amongst the soon-to-be retired ensured that many vineyards were sold on, often to be consolidated within larger plots held by wealthy growers, ensuring that the number of small-holders was shrinking. These small-holding growers connected with the region’s past were the natural constituency of the ‘Défense’ movement. Likewise, a shrinking coverage of vines meant that winegrowing was
no longer as central to the regional economy as it once had been during the early post-war years.

This process created opportunities for new groups to rise to prominence. The national farmers union, the *Fédération National des Syndicats et Exploitant Agricole* (FNSEA), was a modernising, politically conservative organisation which in the largely Socialist Languedoc remained tainted by its association with the agriculture of the North. Yet, from 1983, the FNSEA began to scale up its presence in the Midi and embark upon a ‘charm offensive’. Strongly associated with the political style of Giscard, the FNSEA had resisted the Socialist's attempts to oust it from its central position as the representative of the French countryside. This survival cemented their role and brought their viticultural policy to the fore for Socialists: improving quality and reducing quantity in line with European integration. Two key moments on the European stage affected the Défense movement during this period and solidified their resistance to this brand of modernisation. Firstly, the Dublin Accords of December 1984 singled out the Midi as one of the key targets for change if European agriculture was to avoid constant over-production and continued poor sales. Secondly, the accession of Spain and Portugal into the European Union in 1985 ensured that the provisions of the Dublin Accords would become reality. The Socialist Party's willingness to engage with European expansion on both these occasions signified a step away from its historically close relationship with Languedocien winegrowers and towards the FNSEA. In pursuing further European entanglement, however, the PS was focussed on improving the quality of France's wine production as the only development path worth considering. Although the Languedoc bore this grudgingly, it was a national tonic that it was forced to swallow. In 1985, Minister for Agriculture Henri Nallet summed up the compromise inherent in this new approach to European negotiations in a metaphor which would strike a chord in the Midi:
"Au rugby on ne botte pas en touche lorsqu'on a la possibilité de marquer un essai en coin, sous prétexte qu'après la remise en jeu de la touche, on pourrait le marquer entre les poteaux. J'ai pris mes responsabilités..."

(In rugby, when you've got the option of scoring a try in the corner, you don't kick into touch in the hope that you'll put it between the posts after the restart. I'm aware of my responsibilities.)

In the midst of this turmoil, Antoine Verdale, also the influential President of the Fédération Audoise des Caves Coopératives, spectacularly announced his intention to join the FNSEA, carrying his supporters in the syndical organisations of the Aude with him (McFalls, 1989, pp.266-277). Verdale’s belief in the potential of the region informed his conviction that the Midi viticole must adapt as it fought for recognition. His influence in the legitimate syndical organisations was impressive and his personality was roundly evocative of regional identity. By his own admission his defining characteristics were that “je suis socialiste et quinziste” (Gilbert, 1989, p.238). Verdale’s shift towards endorsing the politics of quality being espoused by the FNSEA was significant in that it represented a move away from the tradition of viticultural unity which had always sought to aggressively defend mass wine production; he had embraced modernisation at the expense of tradition.

When radical winegrowers of the CRAV burnt down a Leclerc supermarket in 1984, it was seen as a cry of desperation, yet widely condemned even amongst traditional supporters. As politicians failed to spring to the defence of the viticultural commandoes and the scale of damages frightened off their traditional supporters, the Leclerc fires seemed destined to mark a turning point for the CRAV and the Languedoc more widely. The reaction from Edouard Leclerc – the proprietor of the supermarket chain – was equally damaging. He pointed out that in all their 450 stores around France, 25% of wine sold came from the Aude, whilst only 0.1%
of wine came from outside France. In destroying the Carcassonnais store, the CRAV had cut off one of the principal distributors of Audois wine, a fact which would only be exacerbated as the chain boycotted Audois wine for a month following the attack. ('Carcassonne: Les ‘casseurs’ de Leclerc arrêtés aujourd'hui?', 1984) The choice of target and the scale of damages impacted on the CRAV's credibility as an acceptable interlocutor. Likewise, it was the Gaullist mayor of Carcassonne Edouard Chésa and Jacques Talmier who led the way in setting up conciliatory meetings with Edouard Leclerc, bringing along with them the head of the FNSEA, François Guillaume. Guillaume, recently buoyed by Verdale's endorsement, declared that he was "certain d'obtenir que M. Leclerc lève interdit." Furthermore, Guillaume declared that if sales recommenced, Leclerc should only allow the wine of "producteurs et coopérateurs qui se réclament de la F.N.S.E.A." to ensure that "Groupuscules de casseurs" were punished for their actions ('François Guillaume: 'Groupuscules de casseurs", 1984). Suddenly, some of the figureheads of the modernisation movement were publicly shown to be cleaning up the mess of the Défense movement's wildest elements, yet these were also men whose bonds had been strengthened on the rugby pitch.

Verdale’s personal traction was accentuated by subsequent Chambre d’Agriculture elections. With the favour of the head of the Chambre de Commerce, the afore-mentioned Jacques Talmier, Verdale could essentially treat these elections as a sort of “plebiscite for the viticultural oligarchy’s rule”. His closeness to the head of Audois rugby was significant as it was Talmier who had presided over the modernisation of Carcassone’s quinzistes. Their social and business bonds based on shared regional identity and close administrative cooperation, helped to steer the Aude towards modernisation on its own terms. This coalition between the business of wine and also rugby was one which was repeated throughout the Languedoc and specifically within the Aude. Rugby clubs remain enduring institutions which
bind the men of the Languedoc and Laurence McFalls points out the proliferation of Socialist leaders who had garnered their reputation in tandem on the pitch and in politics. In describing the subtle shifts towards the politics of quality, it is the crossover between locker-room and syndical board-room which McFalls posits as typical of the informal networks and relationships which directed change (McFalls, 1989, p.315).

**Tangled Elites: Politics and identity**

Indeed, Verdale was not the only elite who drew validation from rugby, wine and socialism. Roland Courteau, another *rugbyman*, was elected Senator of the Aude in 1980, representing the Parti Socialiste (Gilbert, 1989, p.223). Re-elected in 1989, 1998 and 2008, Courteau has been a leading member of the *Groupe d'études de la vigne et du vin* and Co-President of the *Association Nationale des Elus de la Vigne et du Vin* ('Roland Courteau', 2012). With an image which draws in an active sporting past, an interest in the representation of the region's wine and a lifelong attachment to the Socialist Party, Courteau both interacted with and relates to characters such as Verdale and Talmier. Across the Languedocien political sphere, these characteristics were recurring indicators of cultural currency amongst politicians, granting them a validating identity grounded in regional heritage. Régis Barailla, the Conseiller-général of Durban-Corbières in the Aude, is another man whose background is emblematic of the Languedoc viticole. A former rugby player and keen boar hunter, he is also the son of a winegrower and former Conseiller-général. He constructed a close network of power in the Aude by focussing on local interests after his election in 1983. Laurence McFalls specifically recounts Barailla’s intervention in minor legal offences and helping to reassign the sons of constituents to military service within the region. As a Socialist Deputy, Barailla retained office from 1983 to 1993, strengthening his mandate with recourse to the promises of European integration whilst remaining cognisant of its challenges (McFalls,
1989, p.268). He also served as Mayor of Durban from 1971-2008 in the Conseil Général from 1973-2011. In another example of the close-knit power structures of Southern politics, his daughter Fabienne Amigou was also a Socialist counsellor for Durban and sought to become her father's successor on his eventual retirement in 2011. Part of Amigou's platform has been to emphasise the region's heritage as a basis for future progress, incorporating tradition and identity into development. Thus, in her manifesto, she promises:

Associer l'économie viticole aux actions touristiques. Rester à l'écoute des citoyens et des élus. Démocratiser l'accès à la culture. (‘La gauche citoyenne’, 2011)

Amigou's emphasis has been born of a shift in attitudes to regional development which took place during the 1980s. The recognition of the power of regional patrimony by the French state ushered in a new period of regional depiction after the decentralisation of 1981. As such, centrally led campaigns have sought to deploy the Occitan cross as an image of regional distinction. The Occitan cross has been repeatedly pinned to the image of the Cathar knight, horsebound and symbolic of a sanitised regional heritage. Stripped of radical context and widely used as a tool for marketing the Midi to tourists, Cathar heritage replaced the unsuccessful 1963 ‘Mission Racine’ which saw the French government attempt to paint the Midi as a cheap alternative to the beach holiday destinations of Morocco and Tunisia (McCaffrey, 2001, p.128). This campaign infuriated regional groups and its concurrence with the Decazeville strike, viticultural protests and then the occupation of Larzac heightened the sense of a region under attack. This mass-marketing had been a contentious issue, as it was seen as an attempt to erode the functional identity of the region, relegating the cherished rebellious heritage to a historical curio to be found atop biscuit tins. André Cases repeatedly claimed that “le tourisme de masse ne rapport rien, et il est destructeur” (Le Bris, 1976,
The later ‘Pays Cathare’ program, by contrast, has been locally directed and sympathetically incorporated cultural festivals and historical commemorations into a regional celebration of Cathar identity (McCaffrey, 2001, p.130).

The city of Toulouse re-adopted the Croix Occitane as its emblem in 1983 as part of celebrations which commemorated the historical legacy of the medieval Counts of Toulouse. The reclamation of *patrimoine* by regional councils and local authorities after the decentralisation program of 1982 could take place in an atmosphere of sustainable development which actively courted the communication of regional interests. Further to this, institutional usage of the Croix expanded, with the Conseil *régional de Midi-Pyrénées* beginning to use the Croix Occitane as its logo in 1986 (de la Farge, 2006). In its deployment of the Occitan cross alongside the Cathar logo of a rising sun, the Audois ‘Pays cathare’ (adopted in 1989) program was emblematic of a shifting regional dialectic. Suddenly the patrimony which had motivated protest and provided the cultural cache for regional dissidents was reclaimed by the state and reused liberally. Surveys into the possibility of marketing the Aude on its own *patrimoine* were undertaken by the Conseil Général in 1987 and brought private interests closer to the local administration whilst allowing for popular consultation to guide policy (‘Case Study: Pays Cathare’, 2002). These symbols were redeployed in the wake of national political change as a means of developing and refining progressive and positive regional identity rather than communicating grievances against the central state.

Rugby likewise became a way in which to convey a positive regional identity, casting successes as indicative of some sort of regional resurgence. For example, a delegation from the Aude set off for Edinburgh in order to promote Languedocien wine and, incidentally, to play a rugby tour. The delegates, all Midi vigneron, were also rugby players and comprised
players from Durban, Thézan-les-Corbières, Saint-André-de-Roquelongue and l'Entente Bizanet-Nébian. By uniting the twin poles of Audois rugby and wine, together they constituted "l'équipe gagnante du cru corbières". On the morning of 6 March, they attended a wine fair in Edinburgh, representing the wine of the Languedoc to British importers and critics. After a successful morning of business, the afternoon was spent in sport and the Audois select played the Edinburgh Academy 3rd XV in a friendly match which they won 27-22 (with 5 tries scored). On successfully promoting their wine and beating, they noted, the former club of Scottish Rugby captain David Sole, the Dépeche newspaper surmised that "Le rugby et les vins de l'Aude ont donc gagné" ('Un bon ménage', 1992).

Such moments of success allowed regional identity to be stressed as a point of pride. Yet, the modernisation of both wine and rugby was not wholly supported at the time. Both Verdale’s embrace if the FNSEA and Talmier’s decision to court internationalisation challenged the fundamentals of regional identity. Nevertheless, their ability to marshal this change enabled them to stamp their own authority on the region’s modernisation. The bonds between rugby, wine and regional heritage formed a melting pot of identity which helped to instil confidence and supplement an image of robust Southern masculinity during a period of national economic turbulence in the 1980s.

**Rugby beyond (imagined) borders**

The image of a rugby des villages faced with the challenges of modernisation allowed broader comparisons to the Languedoc’s status within France, Europe and the world. Sports journalist Simon Kuper describes the idealised past of le rugby des villages as such:

[S]omewhere in l'Ovalie, the rugby heartland of south-western France, farmers of neighbouring villages beat clods out of each other. At the final
whistle, everyone kisses each other on the cheeks, whereupon both sides, their wives, children and groupies gather around banquet tables to feast on foie gras, duck and local wine. ('French special', 2010)

Kuper's rosy description of the idealised 'pure rugby' of the South is obviously a construction. Yet, at the same time, popular dissatisfaction with the way that the globalised game has changed has fostered a fondness for the romance and rusticity of the *rugby des villages*. One example of such resentment came in a polemical article published in *Le Point* which mourned the passing of the game 'as it should be played':

> Adieu les envolées lyriques, les combats épiques pour la défense du clocher, les batailles monstrueuses quand l'honneur du pays est en jeu. Au revoir les particularismes régionaux; la force des Alpes, le mouvement landais, la mêlée basque, la furia toulonnaise. La globalisation ici, la normalisation là.

> Des armadas de mercenaires venus de tous les pays du monde ovale, des contrats en béton pour des vedettes payées à prix d'or. Tous les sports professionnels effacent les accents régionaux au profit des accents étrangers ('Le rugby des villes', 2011).

(Farewell to the legendary runs, the epic struggle to defend the clocktower, the monstrous battles in which the country's honour is at stake. Goodbye to regional specialities, the strength of the Alps, the movement of the Landes, the Basque scrum, and the fury of the Toulonais. Globalization is here, and standardization with it.)
Armadas of mercenaries from all over the world of rugby, fixed contracts for superstars paid in gold. All professional sports efface regional accents in favour of foreign tongues.)

The notions of regional accents and the *esprit de clocher* are important contributors to the romance of *rugby des villages*. The globalisation of the sport has seen many players from outside France brought in to represent what were once traditional country teams. The sentiment that they each played for *l'esprit de clocher* - village pride - has been replaced with a realisation that money talks and the best players will end up at the richest clubs regardless of their accent, instead focussing on the potential for the region to inspire solidarity in newcomers.

Spoken Occitan became a political issue in the 1960s following strikes and the emergence of a more articulate Occitaniste movement in bodies like Comité Occitan d'Études et d'Action. They rehabilitated a concept which, it was commonly thought, had previously been the reserve of perceived intellectual dandies like the literary movement of the Félibrige. Many regionalist commentators highlight Decazeville as a turning point for the Occitan movement; for Michel Le Bris, “de culturel, le mouvement occitan devient, dès 1962, politique” (Le Bris, 1975, p.31). In particular, the 1962 occupation of the Decazeville pit evoked the vocabulary of Occitanie to highlight longstanding uneven development and the status of labourers as “second-class Frenchmen” (McKay, 1987, p.226). Regional solidarity became the watchword of the period, as strikes broke out all over the Languedoc in support of the Decazeville miners in their “défense du basin et, au-delà, de toute la région.” De Sède, somewhat humorously, points out that concern was such that southerners went as far as to cancel all scheduled rugby matches as a mark of respect (De Sède, 1982, p.267). When one
considers cities like Toulouse, Montpellier and Carcassonne cancelling rugby matches, however, the depth of feeling which accompanied this regional solidarity seems clear.

Such solidarity was a product of a certain Méridional imaginaire which built upon the totems of regional identity – namely the importance of rugby, wine and socialism – as the foundation of an imagined Occitanie. Highlighting traditional characteristics in a modern setting allowed Occitanistes to set themselves in opposition to the modernising state, instead seeking to drive development along specifically Languedocien paths. The former international player, Aménée Domenech, who became a Radical Deputy and served in the cabinet of Edgar Faure, famously stated that "Le rugby, il vote à gauche" (Baumont, 1987, p.15). In this sense, the institutions of Midi rugby reflected those of both regional syndical bodies and the regional political administration's domination by the Socialist party. Such nebulous political attachment fitted well with the Occitan movement's simultaneous reference to leftist politics and nationalist rhetoric, as identified by Julian Wright in his work Regionalism in France. Occitan historian Paul Alliès reconciled Occitanisme with the Languedoc viticole's abiding sympathy for the left by denoting it “nationalisme du gauche”, reliant on pre-Marxist ideas inextricably tied to the Midi – in this case, mutualism, co-operativism and regional syndicalisation (Alliès, 1972, p.15). Languedocien rugby, then, could serve as a beacon for regional struggle "en révolte contre les Jacobins du pouvoir central et contre les technocrates" (Baumont, 1987, p.15). This allowed Occitanistes to tap into not only Southern concepts of masculinity and heritage, but also historical resentment at the unequal development of the region. A whole Occitan vocabulary for the game of rugby has thus been guarded as a symbol of regional identity and an association of the game with politicised Occitanisme. The words in the table below are a selection of those provided by the Department of Haute-Pyrénées when they hosted the European under-18 Championships.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occitan</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anar au patax</td>
<td>Aller au contact</td>
<td>Look for contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los de davant</td>
<td>Les avants</td>
<td>Forwards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assai</td>
<td>Essai</td>
<td>Try</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hòra-jòc</td>
<td>Hors-jeu</td>
<td>Off side</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jogador</td>
<td>Joueur</td>
<td>Player</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples of some Occitan rugby vocabulary ('Lo rugbi en Gascon', 2011)

Linguistic politics have remained an important motivational factor in the Languedoc, often inspiring solidarity with regional movements or helping to generate them in the first place.

In Gaston Bonheur’s novel *La croix de ma mere*, we are presented with a somewhat whimsical depiction of rugby’s importance to regional identity. Set against the background of the OAS campaign to derail Algerian Independence negotiations, Bonheur’s protagonist Alban Hondedeieu attempts to establish a secessionist Southern state by the name of Toulousie, ready to accept the returning pieds-noirs. Far-blown set-pieces such as a siege of Carcassonne and vainglorious storming of Toulouse are interspersed with references to the former rugby prowess of Hondedieu’s co-conspirators. Likewise, his descriptions of Languedocien virtue deploy rugby as a language of success:

Would the autonomy of the South be feasible? From a military point of view, yes. [...] When you are warlike and rugby-playing, victory is in the bag. [...] Algeria was an Occitan colony, not a French one, and, once again, France had made a mess of everything. In any event, it was a good excuse for fighting the old fight once again. We had to take advantage of this national disgrace to impose our old slogan: pretz et
paratge. Always difficult to translate: ‘to be proud and to show it’, ‘to believe in yourself and not give a damn’, ‘pride and chivalry’. Pretz, is when you dive into the scrimmage. Paratge, is when you attack with the ball in hand rather than trying to kick. (Dine, 2001, p.126)

Such descriptions attempted to mobilise the shared background of the Languedoc’s rugbymen as a means for communicating regional attributes relating to a certain paysan masculinity. When these characteristics were mobilised in service of political aims, it was inferred, the Languedoc might be as successful as it was on the rugby pitch.

Indeed, such pride has frequently been taken further. The Supporters club for US Carcassonne happily deploy the symbols of regional identity as a marker of local pride and historical authenticity, calling themselves Les Hérétiques in reference to their Cathar past. Some even more ardent Southerners feel that with Southern France the home of national rugby, Paris receives too much attention. The following statement from the Partit National Occitan, congratulated the national team on their success in the 2010 ‘6 Nations’ tournament, although took issue with the celebration of the victory.

Depuis sa création en 1906, l’équipe dite de France de Rugby est une équipe nationale occitane qui n’ose pas dire son nom. Depuis un siècle, hormis quelques Basques et quelques Catalans, l’immense majorité des internationaux « français » sont occitans d’origine ou d’adoption. La plupart jouent dans les clubs occitans gérés par la Fédération dite Française de Rugby et la Ligue Nationale de Rugby.

Le Tournoi 2010 était le Tournoi du Centenaire de cette compétition sportive. Cette année, la victoire des Rugbymen occitans sur leurs cinq
concurrents prouve que le Rugby occitan est un des meilleurs d’Europe.

(Partit National Occitan Communiqué, 2010)

(Since its inception in 1906, the team called France is an Occitan national Rugby team that dares not speak its name. For a century, the vast majority of "French" internationals were Occitan by birth or adoption, barring some few Basques and Catalans. The majority of them play in Occitan teams managed by the Federation known as the French Rugby Federation and the supposedly National Rugby League.

The 2010 tournament was the competition's centenary. This year, the victory of Occitan rugbymen over their five challengers proved that Occitan Rugby is the best in Europe.)

The Occitan movement mobilised visions of Languedocien proficiency at rugby to paint an image of the Languedoc as it could relate to France and Europe. Its status as a prominent area for rugby, pays homage to regional heritage and values whilst offering the possibility of bettering its station. The traditional paysannerie celebrated by Occitanistes can be mobilised, as in La Croix de ma mère to symbolise a unifying symbol of the past with the potential to direct development in the future. In much the same manner as both Verdale and Talmier harnessed processes of change to accent modernisation, Occitanistes have sought to address their dream of a separate nation by highlighting popular and positive aspects of regional identity.

Conclusion

As spilt blood marred violent wine protests against government-led modernisation programmes, blood continued to be spilt on Audois fields famous for a violent brand of Méridional rugby. Yet, eventually, it was the influence of one of the region’s prominent rugbymen which ensured that the modernisation agenda succeeded. When Antoine Verdale endorsed the national farmers' union over local, traditional representatives he took swathes of
winegrowers with him. His role as an exemplar of regional identity combined rugby, wine and socialism, allowing him to become a motor for change in a region experiencing profound turbulence. Much of Verdale's influence, however, depended on the support of Jaques Talmier, the head of the Carcassonne Chamber of Commerce who championed Audois rugby alongside the iconic Spanghero. The pre-eminence of *rugbymen* amongst regional notables and at the heads of trade unions meant that there was a large degree of cross-over between board-room and locker-room. These men's multiple roles shaped the development of the Aude, yet did so with strong reference to Audois identity.

Nevertheless, the development of the wine industry allowed traditional loyalties to the Socialists to adapt and survive. Likewise, the introduction of foreign professional players into southern rugby changed its character from one of *rugby des villages* to one of a global sport. The clubs, however, retain a support which had adapted to these changes and continues to endorse the institution of the club, even if its players are no longer local. Yet, in the loss of regional voices and local men representing these teams, the Occitan movement has sought to carve out a claim to representing the rustic romance of 'old rugby'. Between wine, rugby and Socialism we can find three of the most telling aspects of Audois identity in the twentieth century, the strong involvement of Occitanisme has made it authentically *Méridional*.
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i The rules of *barrette* bear a striking resemblance to modern ‘Touch Rugby’


iii The Archives Départementales d’Aude hold the full run of this newspaper in series - ADA 573PER1

iv Instituted by the Conseil Général in 1989 and recognised by the European Union in 1992