

# Social Change through a Southwest French Wine Cooperative

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Ulin, Robert C. 1986: Social Change through a Southwest French Wine Cooperative – *Ethnologia Europaea* XVI: 25–38.

The French government since the early twentieth century has provided assistance to small independent proprietors of wine to form cooperatives. By focusing on the Sigoulès cooperative, located in the southwest of France, this essay shows how wine cooperatives of the Aquitaine institutionalized the capitalist division of labor and its mode of social control. Not only is the significance of capitalist markets and social divisions between wine growers highlighted, but new scientific technologies of wine production are related to social control through the medium of culture. It is concluded that the Sigoulès cooperative, as well as others, serves primarily pragmatic rather than political ends, while enabling small proprietors of wine to compete on a national and international scale.

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Wine cooperatives in the southwest of France serve as both an agency and a conduit for social transformation among small proprietors of wine. Arising in the early part of the twentieth century, wine cooperatives provided a means through which small independent producers of wine in the southwest could accommodate to competitive markets and the assertion of the capitalist mode of production as dominant in the French countryside. In seeking to accommodate to the capitalist mode of production, wine cooperatives absorbed its division of labor and rationalization of the production process. In addition, wine cooperatives provided the institutional means through which the French state could monitor the production of small proprietors. Hence, while wine cooperatives can be understood as serving the pragmatic interests of small proprietors in providing collective resources and access to markets, their historical connection to the capitalist mode of production and its mode of rationalization and social control must not be overlooked.

The research that supports my argument in this essay was conducted in the southwest of France during 1983–84 at the Sigoulès cooperative, Cave Cooperative de Sigoulès.<sup>1</sup> The Si-

goulès cooperative is located twelve kilometers from Bergerac in the Department of the Dordogne. Its current 355 members earn their livelihood through a combination of wine growing and other agricultural pursuits such as cereals and livestock raising. Sigoulès is an important cooperative as it is the largest of nine in the Dordogne and the second largest in the Aquitaine region of the southwest of France – an area that includes the celebrated vineyards of Bordeaux.

In order to understand the contemporary articulation of wine cooperatives, it is important to understand something of their historical background. Many cooperatives in the southwest of France were founded during the first third of the twentieth century following the social consequences of the infamous phyloxera blight. The phyloxera, a parasite which attacks the roots of plants, did not cause, in the positivistic sense<sup>2</sup>, wine cooperatives to be founded as it impacted on capitalist social relations that were already in place during the last third of the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> While it is important to take note of the seriousness of the phyloxera, its significance for the wine growers of the Sigoulès cooperative must be seen with respect

to profound historical and economic consequences rather than simply in terms of a natural event.

Capitalist markets in wine existed in the southwest of France as early as the ninth century. However, it was during the English occupation of the twelfth to fifteenth centuries and the Religious Wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that commercial ties established with the north of Europe led to a rapid increase in exports, monocropping in some areas, the beginning of specialized labor and the ascendancy of bourgeois merchants at Bergerac.<sup>4</sup> Although expanded commercial ties resulted in more articulate capitalist markets, the capitalist mode of production, in terms of a creation of a market in labor<sup>5</sup>, did not assert its determinancy until well into the nineteenth century. Theda Skocpol (1979) and others<sup>6</sup> have argued that this was the case because competing interests of the upper classes and monarchy, as well as local restrictions on trade, were an obstacle to capitalist development. Although the French Revolution served to consolidate bourgeois property by challenging communal holdings and control over production, the encumbrances of complex proprietary rights and the predominance of the small dispersed family holding prevented a rapid transition to capitalism.

Despite these obstacles to capitalist development, the Republican reforms of the eighteenth century opened up new economic and social potentials. For example, Charles Tilly (1975, 200) maintains that Republican reforms supported capital accumulation in three ways: one, by consolidating bourgeois property through reducing use rights and revenues that affected any individual property; two, by establishing a uniform system of taxation; and three, by reducing traditional controls and fiscal hindrances on trade and industry. The reduction of use rights in land severely affected peasants with little or no land forcing them in many cases to sell their labor power to the large estates, thus advancing the creation of a rural proletariat. In short, the commercial potentials generated from the Republican reforms not only stimulated wine commerce and the surface area devoted to vineyards and

monocropping but also redefined property rights and hence the social relations on which they were based. In addition, the stage was set for the state to play a more direct role in the economy, a factor that would become particularly important in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The eighteenth century brought important changes to the southwest of France as severe competition with Spain and Portugal (Enjalbert, 1953), as well as lucrative trade with northern Europe, led wine growers with large estates to increase production of quality wines or grand crus, thus leaving a larger share in the market for table wines or vin ordinaire to the auspices of the small peasant proprietors.<sup>7</sup> The introduction of the grand crus led to an intensification of the division of labor on the large estates which, in turn, undermined traditional forms of the organization of production. This is not to say that the impact was immediate; specialized labor, like the capitalist mode of production itself, was slow to mature. In the Bergerac region, specialization did not make much of an impact until late in the nineteenth century due to the predominance of vin ordinaire. However, the consequences of specialization for Bordeaux producers were experienced considerably in advance of Bergerac due to the higher percentage of grand cru stocks.

In order to appreciate the transition in the organization of wine production that followed from the introduction of grand crus, I will briefly characterize the different systems of labor that typified production in the Aquitaine at the moment of their introduction in the eighteenth century. By far the most common organization of production in the Aquitaine, especially in the vicinity of Bergerac, was sharecropping. The owners of large estates leased portions of their vineyards to peasants for which they would receive at least fifty percent of the yield in return. A portion of the yield was retained by the sharecropper for personal consumption and for sale at the market. Sharecroppers maintained a relation with proprietors that was more than fiduciary as they would look to the proprietor for advice, medical assistance and other social needs that deepened their interdependence.

In addition to sharecropping, a combination of a yearly pension and piece work typified labor on the large estates. Proprietors would pay their wine growers an annual pension that was calculated over a range of activities that included planting of vine stocks and pruning. Pensions were not always sufficient to guarantee the reproduction of the wine grower's household so that supplemental income acquired through piece work was necessary. Other activities which the wine growers performed for the proprietors included tending sheep and raising pigs. In the latter case, the wine grower would split the profit with the proprietor at the time of slaughter.

Many proprietors provided housing for their wine growers in the vicinity of the estate vineyards. The house was equipped with a pig sty, stable, furnace and a wine press. The fundamental part of the wine grower's diet was composed of cereals such as wheat and rye. Payments made to the wine growers tended to be in one or both of these staples. Because they were paid in a staple, fluctuations in the price of grain influenced the quality of life for the wine growers. According to Beauroy (1976), the wine growers employed by the large estates had a social standing above the floating population but beneath that of sharecroppers.

Peasants who acquired some land were able to obtain a partial subsistence by both working household vineyards and selling their labor power to nearby estates for monetary wages. It was this group that was often sympathetic to the vine workers of the large estates and who supported them in their periodic revolts for higher wages. Revolts among the wine workers and growers were sporadic and for the most part were tied to local issues. Periodic gluts on the market resulted in a drop in wine prices, a situation that was most directly felt by small proprietors and wage laborers.

The introduction of the grand crus in the eighteenth century initiated an assault on the personal ties between wine growers and the large proprietors. In their place, the market commenced to mediate social relations on the large estates. The ascendancy of the market as the mediator of social relations was manifest in an ever intensifying specialization of labor and

the replacement of sharecroppers and those housed on the estates by wage labor.<sup>8</sup> The areas that were most resistant to the mediation of social relations by the market were those regions, such as Bergerac, where the production of vin ordinaire was dominant.

A salient example of the development of specialized labor in the later eighteenth century was the vine trimmer. Vine trimming is a skilled activity whereby select vines are pruned seasonally. The more skillful the vine trimmer in the execution of judgement, the better will be the final growth of grapes.<sup>9</sup> As indicated above, prior to the appearance of specialized vine trimmers, this activity, along with others, was done by workers who were paid an annual pension and whose abode was often on the estate of their employment. With the advent of the vine trimmer, this important skill was abdicated to a single category of worker. In addition, it was often the vine trimmers who were assigned supervisory responsibilities over other wine workers in the case of an absentee landlord.

Vine trimmers, however, are just one case of the more general specialization that followed from the introduction of grand crus. To the social consequences of the grand crus, we owe the chasm between the formerly unified processes of viticulture and viniculture – a distinction, as we shall see shortly, that was crucial to the question of social control in contemporary wine cooperatives. Viticulture refers to planting, cultivating, and harvesting vineyards while viniculture refers to processing grapes into wine. In the eighteenth century and throughout much of the nineteenth, the division between viticulture and viniculture did not yet have much of an impact on small independent growers who avoided working as wage laborers on the large estates.

The process of specialization that was set in motion by the introduction of grand crus undermined the production of wine as a unified process and the stratified labor on which it was based, thus furthering the proletarianization of wine workers throughout the nineteenth century. This was of course fortified by Republican guarantees in private property, enclosures of commons, and the liberalization of re-

strictions on local trade supported by a more direct role played by the state in the economy. By the time that the phyloxera blight struck the Dordogne in the 1870's, a frail accommodation had been achieved between the large growers and those with small holdings. Many of the large growers produced quality wines while the small growers produced table wines for the urban working class and rural peasants and proletariats.<sup>10</sup> This is not to say that the relation between small and large growers was harmonious. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, periodic crises ensued from overproduction and intensified class antagonisms affecting most severely the small proprietors and wage laborers.<sup>11</sup>

The phyloxera ravaged the Dordogne, destroying nearly seventy-five percent of the vineyards. While the vineyards around Bergerac were restored, those between Bergerac and the departmental capital to the north, Périgueux, were lost forever. Many of the small wine growers left the Dordogne for cities in the north while others left France for such far away places as South America.<sup>12</sup> Alternative occupations were sought by some wine growers in tobacco cultivation or the search for valuable truffles. In the Canton of Sigoulès alone, nearly twenty-five percent of the population departed in search of a livelihood elsewhere.

After the phyloxera, many large growers replanted rapidly with high yielding, lower quality vine stocks. Some large growers also turned to the production of fraudulent wines which, in response to an outcry from predominantly small proprietors, led the government to pass the Loi Griffe in 1889. The Loi Griffe, for the first time, gave a legal definition to wine as a beverage.<sup>13</sup> The phyloxera also stimulated investment into research on the process of viticulture in order to improve techniques to protect the vineyards from infestations. The merchant class among all the large growers had sufficient capital to invest in new methods of viticulture. But even more than large growers with insufficient capital, it was those with small holdings who were most seriously disadvantaged. Small growers did not have the resources to compete with large growers who were now producing high yielding lower qual-

ity wines. Many of the small growers turned to mutual aid societies and syndicates for assistance in obtaining agricultural materials such as fertilizer at lower cost and for the purpose of representing their needs as a unified group.

The syndicates, however, served essentially conservative interests and therefore reinforced the traditional hierarchy of the countryside. Ever since their appearance in the early nineteenth century, their leadership was drawn not from the small growers but from among the larger proprietors. These large proprietors were well aware of the fate suffered by the small proprietors and wine workers during periods of economic crisis. Heavy taxation and declining wages, including increases in the cost of staples, had long driven the small proprietors and wine workers to demonstrate their discontent against local oppressors in such rebellions as «la revolte frumentaire» at Bergerac in 1773.<sup>14</sup> The formation of syndicates in the early nineteenth century was an effort on the part of large proprietors to quell local discontent that ensued from economic crisis. Although syndicates were initially outlawed by the state, their innocuous political motives were soon recognized by the national government as is evident from their legalization by the middle of the nineteenth century.

The historical narrative that accounts for the creation of wine cooperatives in the southwest of France, of which Sigoulès is a good example, bears a close resemblance to that of the syndicates in that both assisted small proprietors through periods of crisis. Even more than the syndicates, the creation of wine cooperatives found direct support from the French legislature and the state bank, Credit Agricole. From the perspective of the legislators, the creation of cooperatives would provide an opportunity to challenge the perceived radical individualism<sup>15</sup> of small proprietors and to bring wine production as a whole under stronger state control. As mentioned previously, overproduction had generated serious crises throughout the history of capitalist viticulture. Peasants, with their small dispersed plots, paid little attention to laws regulating plantations and yields.<sup>16</sup> Leo Loubere claims (1978) that even politicians in the legislature who were





Farm owned by a member of the Sigoulès cooperative. Wine production alone is not sufficient to guarantee the reproduction of a wine grower's household.

hostile to collective ownership voted in favor of loans and direct subsidies to assist in the creation of cooperatives. However, the Credit Agricole was under specific instructions from the government not to assist all small proprietors of wine but only those who showed the most promise to modernize. This was true whether or not the small proprietor aspired to join a cooperative. State assistance through the Credit Agricole reinforced therefore the stratification of peasant proprietors and turned the tide against those who were most tied to traditional means of production.

The Sigoulès cooperative was founded in 1939 during the end of a period which witnessed a growth in the number of cooperatives in the southwest from 92 to 834 (Duby, 1976). The Sigoulès cooperative, like many others, was financed by a direct grant from the minister of agriculture for the Dordogne, loans from the Credit Agricole, and individual contributions made by the original 125 members. While

always marked by stratification, the Sigoulès membership as a whole can be classified as small proprietors. For example, sixty-percent of the current membership exploits less than two hectares which is hardly sufficient to obtain one's subsistence. Consequently, income from wine growing is subsidized through wage labor or other agricultural pursuits such as livestock and cereals. In being a cooperative whose ownership and collective activity is limited to vinification and marketing, Sigoulès does not challenge private ownership of vineyards. My informants of various political perspectives related that they would have never joined the cooperative if it had been necessary to abdicate ownership rights in vineyards.

Because the cooperative does not challenge property rights, and therefore property relations<sup>17</sup>, its role as a collectivity is effectively limited to pragmatic objectives in providing small proprietors with the institutional means to accommodate to recent technical and social

developments in capitalist viticulture. Before the 1930's, it had been possible for small proprietors to produce their own wine and market it through middle men at Bergerac. Now, recognizing the competition from large growers with vast resources, as well as competition from Italy and Spain, the members of the Sigoulès cooperative admit that they lack the resources as individuals to invest in advanced technology, advertising, and the pursuit of new markets. In its collectivization of viniculture and promotion and marketing, the cooperative allows the stratified but small proprietor of the Sigoulès cooperative to compete in national and international markets.

Although the cooperative discloses its institutional conservatism in the support of private property, this does not negate the possibility that some of its early membership was motivated on a personal level by political as well as pragmatic motives. For example, the Sigoulès cooperative was founded during the end of the Popular Front, France's first socialist government. Among other things, the socialist government of Leon Blum is noted for its contribution to improved labor laws. While the Popular Front is acknowledged to have improved working conditions in factories, it is generally thought to have had little impact in the countryside. However, one must recall that many peasants left the Dordogne after the phylloxera to seek employment in urban areas. It is certainly this group and their offspring that would have experienced the impact of the labor reforms initiated by the Blum government. Many urban factory workers maintained strong ties with their former villages and would return during festival periods. It is possible therefore, but difficult to substantiate<sup>18</sup>, that through these ties something of the ideology of the Popular Front touched the lives of villagers.<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, the southwest of France has always been known as a center for radical political activity. This can be confirmed in articles that appeared throughout the 1930's and 1940's in the agricultural journal, *L'Agriculteur*, serving the Perigord, Limousin and Quercy. For example, a 1941 article called upon the peasantry to participate in syndicates

and to collectivize their labor in the Union Regionale Corporative. Some contributors to the journal correctly identified the woes of the small proprietor as attributable to markets that were closed to their produce and to prices that were fixed by powerful wine negociants at established commercial centers such as Bordeaux.

Le vin est le veritable element ferme du marché. Le courant d'affaires étant assez large les prix sont fermes surtout sur les hauts degrés qui continuent à être recherchés par la clientele. (*L'Agriculteur*, December 15, 1938, no. 415)<sup>20</sup>

The political acumen and opinions reflected in this regional agricultural journal supports the likelihood that some members of the Sigoulès cooperative at its founding perceived themselves as united against the ruthless practices of large proprietors and the long time hegemony of the Bordeaux merchants. In addition, while it was not the intent of the founding charter of Sigoulès to collectivize vineyards, its leadership in the early stages, unlike the syndicates, came from among the radical socialists.

What is clear today is that whatever political motives were involved in the founding of the cooperative have been transformed into ones which are economic – or as my informants expressed it, «aujourd'hui, c'est la rentabilité qui est important».<sup>21</sup> This transformation of the early political objectives into ones which reflect an economic rationality or pragmatics shows the degree to which the cooperative, in declining to challenge property relations, has absorbed the very logic and structure of power of capitalist viticulture – thus neutralizing the collective voice of its membership. This is reflected in the role that the cooperative has assumed as mediator between the state's desire to gain control over small independent producers of wine and the wine growers' efforts to survive by keeping pace with the scientization of capitalist viticulture.<sup>22</sup> It is a sense of mediation that is embodied in and saturated by the division between viticulture and viniculture institutionalized in the cooperative but which owes its origins to developments in the eight-

eenth century and the appearance of grand crus.

The salient characteristics of the wine cooperative's organization and system of functioning elucidates the commensurability between the Sigoulès wine cooperative and the capitalist division of labor and social control. As a vinification cooperative, Sigoulès's corporate activities are limited to the processing of grapes, bottling of wine, marketing and advertising. The cooperative activities are executed by a staff that consists of a director, several oenologists, two accountants, two secretaries, four wine cellar workers, four bottlers and two drivers. The relationship between the cooperative workers is hierarchical with the director at the top and the non-specialized employers such as drivers and secretaries at the bottom. The director, oenologists and accountants are all university trained. Only the director has regular contact with the membership. Information and new technologies are disseminated by the director through a monthly newsletter and meetings which are called as needed.

The secretaries and three bottlers are women. Women occupy a subordinate position at the cooperative and in the vineyards although some of the vineyards are owned by women.<sup>23</sup> In this respect, the organization of the cooperative has not altered the division of labor along gender lines as women continue to perform the major part of domestic labor. Although not specifically a reflection of the cooperative, the division between domestic and non-domestic labor has become more rigidly defined with women clearly having less of a presence in the vineyards than previously. For example, in the early part of the twentieth century, many women would follow their husbands through the vineyards while they pruned the grape vines. The discarded vines were collected in bundles by the women and then sold to the village baker who would use them to fire the ovens. Since ovens are no longer fired with dried grape vines, women are far less visible in the vineyards. Today, some cooperative members hire women during February and March to prune the grape vines, although still considerably outnumbered by men. It is not that technology in itself has changed the role of women

in viticulture but rather that the cooperative has done nothing to challenge or even question the traditional division of labor by gender. Hence, the sexual division of labor at the cooperative is coincident with that in other sectors of agriculture throughout rural France.

The membership of the cooperative is not homogeneous in that holdings in vineyards range from less than a half hectare to five hectares. Although the difference in the size of vineyards owned is a basis for stratification or wealth differentiation, it would be hard to support an argument for social class distinctions among the cooperative members.<sup>24</sup> Even though some members work for others as wage laborers, the cooperative membership as a whole bears an essentially equivalent relationship to large independent producers and merchants who set the ground rules for production and marketing in the southwest of France. Apart from social distinctions based on differential ownership of vineyards, cooperative members are also distinguished by educational and political differences. Younger members have largely learned their trade through the regional agricultural schools and apprenticeship while the older members were taught by parents, siblings, or, in some cases, a father-in-law. Hence, younger members tend to be more open to new technology while many older members favor the traditional methods.

Age however is not a basis for political divisions and, much to my surprise, neither was social stratification. Political perspectives ranged from the far right to communists, with the largest representation being radical socialist. From what I could ascertain from interviews with informants, political perspective seemed most tied to family tradition. For example, one informant related how his father had been the first communist mayor of the village of Cuneges and that although he had let the political ambitions of the family lapse, he closely identified with his father's political affiliation and notion of a just society.

Members of the cooperative work their own vineyards. Fertilizer and insecticides can be obtained cheaply from the cooperative while equipment can be borrowed. Seasonal workers are hired at the time of the harvest as wage la-



Winter pruning of grape vines by a hired wage laborer.

borers. In the past, these workers were primarily foreign<sup>25</sup>, but more recently college students provide the majority of labor. During the harvest, some members make use of cooperative harvesters while others still pick manually. The harvest itself is transported to the cooperative in collectively owned wagons where it is then weighed to determine each member's contribution. Members are paid the equivalent of one hectolitre for each 150 kilograms of the harvest. 125 kilograms is necessary to make a hectolitre of wine and therefore 25 kilograms remains with the cooperative to cover general expenses. The payments are made to the members five times per year with the first in December. The cash payments are determined by both the hectolitre contribution and the specific type of wine figured at ten degrees alcohol. For example, a member who contributes a hectolitre of ordinary red wine to be sold in cask is paid 100 francs but 167 francs if the hectolitre happens to be classified, or appellation contrôlée, wine. Most of the members that I inter-

viewed were highly satisfied with the system and felt that the cooperative functioned to their benefit.

The cooperative not only attempts to promote and market its own wine but is connected to other cooperatives through numerous marketing organizations. For example, with two other nearby cooperatives, Sigoulès created Les Vieilles Caves de Sigoulès which promotes the wines of all three cooperatives. This organization also markets the red wines of Medoc and St. Emillion, as well as Cognac and Armagnac. These quality wines and brandies are marketed with the wines of the cooperatives because they serve as a lure to encourage merchants to try the cooperative wines. In addition to Les Vieilles Caves de Sigoulès, Sigoulès is a member of the Union des Cooperatives de la Dordogne, which markets wines in bottles, and L'Union Centrale des Cooperatives Vinicoles, which handles the marketing of wine in casks, or »en vrac«. However, these two marketing organizations, because of their close ties to



merchants at Bordeaux and their indifference to many concerns of the cooperative membership, have strained relations with the cooperative leadership. Neither of these major marketing organizations has been involved in recent efforts on the part of the directors of the Sigoulès and Monbazillac cooperatives to organize independent producers towards the end of promoting Bergerac wines throughout France.

Although the organization and purpose of the cooperative does not challenge the capitalist mode of production, it can be reasonably concluded that from a pragmatic basis it serves well the interests of the Sigoulès membership. However, the cooperative's institutionalization of the historically developed division between viniculture and viticulture places the membership in a subordinate position both internally to the cooperative directorship and externally to the Bordeaux markets<sup>26</sup> and the state's regulation of the wine economy. This position of subordination manifests itself not only socially but culturally.

Today, the processing of wine, as well as all experimentation with new blends, is conducted at the cooperative by university-trained oenologists. These technician-scientists are distinguished from those who produced wine in the past not only by education but by different culturally mediated values. In the context of the laboratory, wine is stripped of its social value as it is objectified into active agents and chemical components which are then recombined in a calculated manner to produce a beverage whose taste is standardized from year to year. The idea behind standardization is to create a product on which clients can count by overcoming the vicissitudes of nature and subjective contributions that make one wine grower's product different from another.<sup>27</sup> While wine growers of the past conducted their craft with technical knowledge acquired practically, it was a sense of technical integrated with natural and social rhythms along a continuum of labor experienced as a unified process. In the past, the small wine growers marked the cycle of viticulture and viniculture not merely by technical requirements but by collective meals taken in the vineyards, harvest festivities, and

offerings given to patron saints such as St. Vincent.

My interviews with members of the Sigoulès cooperative revealed that they knew little of what the oenologists did at the cooperative, although they respected the oenologists' scientific skills. This was further confirmed by a random encounter at the Sigoulès cooperative with one of the wine cellar caretakers or »cave-vistes«, Philippe. Philippe related that his parents had been wine growers or »vignerons« and that since the time he was a small boy he had had the opportunity to work in the vineyards. Much of the work that today is described as arduous, such as picking grapes at harvest time, was recounted by Philippe as enjoyable and fulfilling as it gave the worker the opportunity to exhibit his or her skill. Philippe does not like the modern day harvesting machines which he claims gathers grapes and branches alike making for a far less clean product. The harvesting machine cannot distinguish between mature quality grapes and those which should be discarded. Philippe directed his most severe criticism to the contemporary vigneron who, in his opinion, did not understand the fine points of the total process and therefore only cared about the monetary return from his contribution to the cooperative. Even if Philippe's recounting of the better days of the past was romanticized, forty-six years of a division between viticulture and viniculture has left few who know or remember much about how grapes are transformed into a quality wine.

The issue of the division between viniculture and viticulture is not simply one of a rupture between science and tradition, but is directly connected to power in the sense of social control. This is the case, not so much because oenologists make policy decisions, but rather because the locus of power is at the cooperative and not in the vineyards. Administratively, the cooperative has a director and a small support staff. While the director maintains close contact with the cooperative members and is generally accessible, he alone oversees the total process of production and marketing at the cooperative. His power derives therefore not so much from his personality as from his priv-



ileged position within the structure of the cooperative. Although decisions are made collectively between the director and a rotating group of cooperative members, the tremendous gap that exists between work in the vineyards and the processing of wine at the cooperative, as well as complicated marketing arrangements, favors the autonomy of the director in shaping policy. In addition, even though the advisory council consisting of cooperative members is supposed to rotate, the same members tend to serve from year to year. This is the case because a large percentage of the members are not interested in the operation of the cooperative beyond receiving a fair return on their contribution at harvest time. The schism between viniculture and viticulture, which historically reproduces the social division of labor in the capitalist system<sup>28</sup>, therefore removes the collective membership from acting as an agency in governing its own corporate body. Furthermore, their loss of knowledge of wine producing as a whole has simplified their labor and made them less able to judge the social significance of new technologies promoted by the state or disseminated by the director.

This is not to say that the members of the cooperative are oblivious to the social consequences of the introduction of technological innovations. In an interview with one of my informants of the political left, who was also the only informant that worked with his wife in the vineyards, I was told in a somewhat sarcastic tone that wine growers were sensitive to the relation between viticultural technology and domestic labor. In other words, new technologies were for the most part celebrated by the cooperative members because they were time saving and made labor in general less arduous. However, given that most of the members of the cooperative are men, they seem to be well aware that time saving technology could result in additional demands from their wives with respect to domestic responsibilities. My informant, who showed his discomfort through nervous laughter, claimed that members of the cooperative, himself included, would surely be opposed to time saving technology when their wives pleaded for their labor time.

The cooperative also serves as a point of le-

verage from which the state can establish control over production. Ever since the phyloxera epidemic, laws have been enacted regionally and nationally to control production. During the period that I conducted research at Sigoulès, a neighboring cooperative, Cave Coopérative de Monbazillac, was under a regionally generated mandate to control its production of white wine made from the semillion stock.<sup>29</sup> The cooperative lends itself well to control over production because as a collectivity it centralizes authority and accessibility to individual small proprietors. In this way, the state and departmental governments can ensure that individual members meet the mandates of the law with both respect to quantity of production and quality, such as in the *appellation contrôlée* legislation.

From a superficial perspective, it would appear that the *appellation contrôlée* legislation, as well as other legislation, was designed to protect consumers, as well as producers of wine, by guaranteeing that the wine in the bottle meets the regional classification as marked on the label. *Appellation contrôlée* legislation regulates the classification of wine on a regional basis by specifying, for example, how much sugar can be added during fermentation, the degree of alcohol that is permissible, as well as what grapes from various vine stocks can be blended. About fifty-eight percent of the Sigoulès wine now is marketed under the "*appellation contrôlée de Bergerac*" demarcation. Since a better price can be obtained at market for *appellation contrôlée* wine, the director of the cooperative has encouraged the members to increase their production in this direction. It must be recalled that members are also paid a larger return per hectolitre contribution for *appellation contrôlée* wine. However, the quality control of wine production through *appellation contrôlée* seriously affected the small independent producer when it was introduced in the 1920's. This was the case because the small independent producer did not have the resources, in terms of vinification technology and storage facilities, to meet its designation requirements. This, to some extent, is even true of the cooperatives today in that their technology and production techniques are only ade-



Burning of freshly cut grape vines. In the past they were used to fire the ovens of the local baker.

quate to meet the minimum requirements of appellation contrôlée legislation. Except for few exceptions in the Bordeaux region, the upper levels of the appellation contrôlée classification, such as, for example, “premier grand cru classé”, are reserved for wines produced by the famous chateaux. In turn, certain sectors of the market are denied to all who are unable to meet the regionally controlled specifications for the production of these quality wines. The appellation contrôlée legislation therefore favored the large producers and merchants who could easily meet its specifications. The legislation also assisted the large producers in that it gave the appearance to consumers that classified wines were of a consistent quality.<sup>30</sup>

The cooperative in its promoting of technology and its division between viniculture and viticulture has contributed to the effacement of ceremonies related to wine. While an annual wine festival is held in the village of Sigoulès, it is predominantly a spectacle for tourists and a means to promote the wines of independent

growers. The wine festival was not initiated by the wine cooperative but rather by petty bourgeois merchants of the village of Sigoulès and Bergerac. Although the cooperative maintains a booth at the festival where wines can be tasted, the director and his staff were conspicuously absent from two meetings that I attended at which the festival for 1984 was planned.

The virtual absence of ceremonies other than the wine festival from the Sigoulès and Bergerac region shows how thoroughly secularized this once ritualized process of wine cultivation and production has become. My informants related that if I wanted to witness wine festivities I would have to visit the Loire Valley which, they added, is much more traditional and politically conservative than the Dordogne. While it is doubtful that the presence or absence of ritual is a reflection of political perspective, my informants may be correct in identifying traditional culture as the central factor in the persistence of wine festivities. I

deemphasize political perspective with respect to wine rituals because the Sigoulès membership at its founding, unlike the Loire Valley today, was predominantly radical socialist. The harvest, during the early period of the cooperative, was saturated with ceremony as meals were taken collectively in the vineyards and the rhythm of labor was joined by that of song. It appears therefore that wine festivities can be present under either the predominance of conservative or radical political affiliations.

With respect to the Sigoulès cooperative, it has been increased mechanization in the context of capitalist social relations and the capitalist division of labor that has eroded traditional culture and the wine ceremonies which it supports. Today, it is the automatic harvester that orchestrates a large part of the harvest work. Presently, only about forty-percent of the cooperative members use the harvester but plans exist to expand their use in the near future. Even the planting of vine stocks has been accommodated to the harvester as the rows of vines are now planted further apart so that the tractor and the harvester can pass easily. The harvester has eliminated the need for large numbers of workers thereby making the harvest increasingly capital intensive rather than labor intensive. This in turn has reduced the skill of those who work in the vineyards during the harvest and hence has also cheapened their labor power.<sup>31</sup> The mechanical harvester is so noisy that it precludes the exchange of song and conversation in the vineyards. In addition, meals are no longer taken collectively.

The cooperative's contribution to the gradual eclipsing of ceremony or ritual is a consequence of a progressively rationalized production process. The rationalization of production is not simply built upon the the abstract application of technical knowledge as implied in theories of modernization<sup>32</sup>, but, rather, shows its continuity with the historical division between viticulture and viniculture that was born in the context of the grand crus and capitalist social relations. This form of rationalized production, while perhaps indeed accounting for a standardized product, has undermined the symbolization of wine production as a uni-

fied process and, in turn, countered possible efforts of cooperative members early on to advance a collective voice in opposition to the hegemony of Bordeaux markets and state officials who supported the large estate vineyards. The cooperative, in short, has aided the displacement of ceremony or ritual from the sphere of work to that of personal life where it continues to occupy an important place in interpersonal relations.

## Conclusion

The Sigoulès cooperative, in conclusion, like so many others, has served as both a conduit and agent of social change. There is no doubt that the cooperative has institutionalized state objectives in gaining control over the production of small independent producers. In times of crisis, usually arising from overproduction, the departmental ministries of agriculture can make direct appeals or mandates to the cooperative leadership with respect to instituting restrictions. It is also possible to ensure that laws are obeyed and that new technologies can be disseminated through the centralization which the cooperative provides. The cooperative itself is also an agent of social change in that it has institutionalized the logic of capitalist wine production and its social division of labor in viticulture and viniculture. The scientization of the production process has furthermore introduced new cultural values in the objective of a standardized product and has contributed to the disappearance of ceremony and the play - in Huizinga's (1955) sense - of wine production. The localization of strategy generation, as well as the autonomy to put them into practice, leaves the directorship in a privileged position while undermining the authority of the collective voice of the membership. Power in the sense of social control is therefore axial in all aspects of the wine cooperative. However, in spite of these limitations, the cooperative has provided a viable means through which small producers can accommodate to, but not seriously challenge, capitalist viticulture. This is the case because the voice of resistance is still tied closely to the discourse and social praxis of the capitalist mode of production.

## Notes

1. The research on which this essay is based was made possible by a Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research post doctoral grant. I would like to thank the foundation for their generous support.
2. By positivistic, I mean in the sense of isolating a single entity in a linear time sequence that is identified as bringing about a consequent or consequents. Such a theory of history attempts to establish regular or law-like relations between so called independent facts thereby ignoring how those facts are constituted socially. I propose that the relation between cause and effect should be recast as the meaning of relations between historical events.
3. Although capitalist markets have a long history in the southwest of France, I maintain throughout this essay that capitalist social relations and the capitalist mode of production were not dominant in the French countryside until the last third of the nineteenth century. The consequences of the phylloxera must be understood as arising from and impacting on capitalist social relations.
4. Both the English occupation and the Religious wars contributed especially to the ascendancy of Protestant merchants. The French hugenots in their flight to Holland during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries fortified commercial ties with protestant merchant families that remained in Bergerac. To this day, the largest land owners in the Bergerac region, including at the Monbazillac cooperative, are Protestant.
5. I follow Eric Wolf's (1984) interpretation of Marx in arguing that it is not simply circulation of commodities but the creation of a market in labor which is specific to the capitalist mode of production.
6. Consider, for example, the following from Albert Soboul: Even though feudalism was abolished once and for all by the decrees of the convention of 17 July 1793, certain aspects of feudalism persisted throughout the first half of the nineteenth century and sometimes until the very dawn of the twentieth. Essentially, these aspects affected the regions where small scale farming and share cropping were prevalent, that is, western and southwestern France, where the "agricultural revolution" had scarcely penetrated. (1977: 50)
7. Peasants did not consume wine on a regular basis until the nineteenth century. Cider was a far more common beverage among the French peasantry and in the Sigoulès region was a viable cottage industry. For comments on the peasantry's wine consumption, see Eugen Weber's (1976) *Peasants into Frenchmen*.
8. This is not to say that wage labor was not employed on the estates prior to the introduction of the grand crus. Specialization, however, was a principal factor in shifting the emphasis with wage labor assuming a much greater prevalence.
9. This can be confirmed by me personally. The one activity that I was not permitted to perform in the vineyards was the pruning of vines.
10. Not all the large growers produced quality wines, but the percentage of those who did was sufficient to allow small proprietors with adequate vineyards to get by with vin ordinaire.
11. Large proprietors with adequate storage facilities could hold on to wine until prices became more favorable. This was of course beyond the means of small proprietors.
12. Peru was one of the first places to which the wines of the Sigoulès cooperative were exported. It appears that growers and merchants in the southwest of France have always known how to take advantage of personal ties in furthering commercial interests.
13. The introduction of this legislation is testimony to the extent to which fraudulent wines were a problem. This is not to be confused with the production of piquette on the part of the peasantry. Piquette was produced by adding sugar water to already pressed grapes.
14. La Revolté Frumentaire resulted from the high price of grain which was a staple in the peasant wine grower's diet. The revolt was particularly interesting in that although women did not participate often in wine production, they played a leading role in the revolt.
15. The notion of radical individualism should not be confused with the current psychological sense that emphasizes individual self-sufficiency. That the peasants were protective of their households and individual plots is a long way from the sense that the concept of individual has in our society.
16. Peasants, rather than strictly following state regulations, planted according to the limits of their resources and what they considered to be marketable.
17. Here, I am maintaining that accessibility to and ownership of property is itself determined by social class relations. In order not to reify property, it is important to grasp the social relations on which it is based.
18. None of the original members of the cooperative were alive during the period in which I conducted fieldwork, 1983-84. I was therefore dependent on secondary accounts already thoroughly imbued with the pragmatic aspects of the cooperative rather than its possible one time political objectives.
19. I am grateful to Yves Lebreton of the University of Bordeaux for the suggestion that the Popular Front may have influenced the early period of the cooperative.
20. Wine is the veritable stable element on the market. The flow of business being wide spread, prices are fixed on the high degrees that continue to be sought by their clientele. (my trans-

- lation) The reference to high degrees in this quote is to the high alcoholic content of table wines. It was these wines whose price was fixed on the market.
21. Today, it is profitability that is important. (my translation)
  22. By scientization, I have in mind the progressive infusion of high technology into wine production whereby the objectives of the process seem to be set by science itself.
  23. Now and then, it was women who inherited vineyards. These vineyards were in all cases worked by their husbands. It also appeared that decisions affecting the status of the vineyards were made by men.
  24. I refrain from using social class as a basis to differentiate members of the cooperative because there is not a wide difference in the size of their vineyards. Social class, however, is an important analytic category for understanding the history of wine production in the southwest and important differences between categories of small growers.
  25. From the early period of the cooperative until the 1960's, many of the workers hired during the harvest were Algerian.
  26. Since the early history of capitalist markets in the southwest, Bordeaux has played the central role in controlling the circulation of wine in the Aquitaine. Even today, wine prices for the southwest of France are frequently set at Bordeaux.
  27. The cooperative director admitted that very good wine was made by the traditional methods. However, for marketing purposes, he thought it important to give the clients a taste that they could count on.
  28. For an excellent account of the history of the capitalist division of labor, including the rationalization of specialization, see Harry Braverman's (1974) *Labor and Monopoly Capital*.
  29. Currently, it is red wine that is fashionable in France. Much of the plantation at Monbazillac is in white wines, especially those which are sweet. To avoid the consequences of overproduction, a cut back in white wine production has been mandated.
  30. Since appellation contrôlée wines were preferred by consumers, the accessibility to extensive markets was enhanced by producing quality wines.
  31. With the harvester, judgement as to which grapes to pick is no longer relevant. Harvest workers are therefore no longer skilled and so command a lower wage.
  32. Some theories of modernization, such as that of Max Weber, see certain characteristics of rationality as endemic to all current complex societies in terms of a historically developed process. However, the history of wine production in the southwest of France is tied immediately to capitalist social relations and so the rationality that permeates technical innovations in the production process must be understood concretely in the context of the capitalist mode of production.

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