

**“From the soil we have come, to the soil we shall go and from the soil we want to live”: Language, politics and identity in the Grande Révolte of 1907.**

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**Abstract**

During the summer of 1907, France experienced one of its largest social disturbances since the Revolution, as the winegrowers of the Languedoc-Roussillon led a mass protest movement that paralysed the region and challenged the state. Although the Grande Révolte evoked references to the Albigensian Crusade, and juxtaposed North and South, it never fully represented a moment of Occitan regionalist rising. The failure of the cultural organisation the Félibrige to fully engage with protesters led to a fissure between political and cultural expressions of Occitan identity that marked the movement thereafter. By combining linguistic anthropology and historical analysis, we are able to foreground a key aspect of national identity formation as it occurred in 1907. Considering the impact of the Grande Révolte on the identity and language of the Midi offers us an insight into the development of regionalism both within and beyond the borders of the French nation.

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The winegrowers' Grande Révolte comprised a series of large-scale protests in response to a pronounced and enduring economic downturn in the Languedoc-Roussillon. As wine prices remained depressed, protesters filled the streets of the region's cities, culminating in the gathering of an estimated 600,000 people in Montpellier on 9<sup>th</sup> June, 1907. Occitan-speaking protesters were rallied with rousing reference to regional heritage, and there were repeated allusions to the Albigensian crusade.<sup>1</sup> Here too there were martyrs, with the spilt blood of

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<sup>1</sup> The terms 'Occitan' and 'Occitanism' have been chosen here to refer respectively to the autochthonous Romance linguistic varieties spoken in the southern third of France, and any political

protesters seeming to highlight the gravity of this conflict. Tax strikes, violent protests and the defection of an army regiment all served to create an atmosphere of crisis, drawing intervention from the central state. This swirling mix of economic grievances and regionalist symbolism seemed to suggest the blending of these conflictual desires. For many, this seemed to mark a regional rising, and fears abounded in the National Assembly that this Southern rising constituted an attack on the French Republic. Indeed, it was perceived at the time and subsequently<sup>2</sup> that the revolt represented a movement towards separatism or revolution voiced in regional linguistic varieties such as Occitan. The leaders of the demonstrations, seeking to build a movement that mobilised the entire region, courted the involvement of the *Félibrige*, the intellectual elites who had championed Occitan culture and language. Yet here, momentum faltered. The perception that this revolt could buttress existing divides between mass politics, language and identity proved illusory as the movement ended in compromise, disappointment, and what seemed to be a victory for the central state.

During the first decades of the twentieth century, different regionalist movements were gaining ground throughout Western Europe, as "local and regional systems of power and legitimacy [...] were threatened by the expanding state" (Keating 2009, 36-37). The timely nature of this revolt makes it a particularly interesting landmark in the evolution of regional identity. The importance of the centralist French nation-building project at the state's periphery has been actively studied, following the landmark work of Weber (1979). More recently, Weber's work has been critiqued as lending too little agency to the 'peasants' he described, and scholars like Lehning (1995) have challenged the utility of unitary labels like 'peasant' in the first instance. This study considers a revolt that drew extensively on its local context, blending social categories in a language different to that of the state. This chimes with Ford's narrative of Breton development, which focuses on the negotiated adoption and translation of centralising forces, so that ethno-regionalist movements approached modernisation with the

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and/or regionalist sentiment attached to the Midi. The glossonyms 'Occitan' and 'Occitan (linguistic/language) varieties' were chosen since other current terms were either too regionally specific (Provençal, Lengadocien, Auvergnat) or too broad (Patois). This follows the general practice of linguistics scholars who refer to the totality of typologically similar varieties as 'Occitan' and who reserve terms like 'Provençal' for more diatopically restricted varieties. Mistral's own term of *lenga d'òc* was avoided, as this may again lead to an association with a narrower region than that of the whole Midi, i.e. Languedoc. 'Occitanism' was consequently preferred in order to reinforce the links between the linguistic and political-ideological regionalist arguments.

<sup>2</sup> This opinion would be repeated in the later winegrowers' movement and Occitanist newspapers like *Echo des Corbières* and *Lutte Occitane*, published during a resurgence of regional political assertion and activism amongst winegrowers in the 1960s.

twang of the patois (Ford 1993, 4-9). In order to chart the evolution of identity within the periphery, it is necessary to consolidate the understanding of impositions from the central state with an appreciation of socio-cultural and political changes at the regional level. Negotiation has increasingly supplanted top-down notions of diffusion and reaction in the historiography. There is then the possibility to paint a more nuanced picture which allows for useful metrics, such as language usage, to better explain transformation at the fringes of the centralising state. The importance of language in this central nation-building process has been stressed by Harp (1998), who emphasised how French and German language education tussled with local *patois* in the Alsatian borderlands. Likewise Reed-Danahay (1996) focuses on the importance of 'resistance' to central language policy in helping to frame regional identities. These studies would seem to place some significance on the popular use of spoken Occitan during our period of study. These focused studies of social structures are relevant to this analysis of the Grande Révolte, as they emphasise that the construction of identity is often dependent on negotiations between prominent local elites, the reconfiguration of economic relationships and also on the reaction of the state. Analysing the interaction of cultural elites (in this case, the Félibrige) and representatives of the dominant economic sector (the protesting winegrowers) allows us to tease out some of these tangled negotiations as they take place in 1907. As suggested by Laven and Baycroft (2008, 255), this study contrasts the interactions of the "local, regional and national" in exploring how the Grande Révolte influenced the nation building process, either as a revolt against the central French project or as the faltering steps in a parallel Occitan attempt.

This is especially true given the way the Revolt was utilised later in the twentieth century. The upsurge in political violence from militant winegrowers in the 1970s was founded in the belief that theirs was a struggle that had emerged directly from 1907. Relating 1907 to the struggles of the 1960s and 1970s saw the contemporary Occitanist revival contextualised alongside a long history of protests in the wine industry. When a statue to Marcelin Albert, the leader of the Revolt, was erected in his village of Argeliers in 1964, the head of the committee that commissioned the statue called Albert: "[L]e chef de ces gueux, nos pères, nos grands-pères, qui écrivirent une si magnifique page de gloire et d'énergie dans le pays occitan de la vigne" (Marcelin Albert, l'apôtre de la viticulture, va revivre à jamais dans le bronze, 1964). The statue was made by a sculptor chosen because she had donated a bronze sculpture of renowned Occitanist cultural figure Prosper Estieu to a school in Narbonne, and the poet Ernest Vieu read the dedication address in Occitan. This marked the start of a period in which many of the most active spokesmen across the region sought to construct narratives of continuity between this period of articulacy in Occitan and winegrowing movements and its earlier expression in 1907. In his characterisation of the Midi *vignerons* in 1976, regionalist

writer de Sède describes them as “victimes d’une crise endémique dont les causes n’ont guère changé depuis 1907” (de Sède 1976, 273). Indeed, in 1980, the Occitan activist Malvès delved into his history books to reclaim the memory of 1907 for Occitanists as well as winegrowers, posing the question:

fut-elle un simple soulèvement paysan parmi tant d’autres, ou une véritable «révolution» occitane, un moment de colère et d’exaspération dans l’histoire «protestaire» de notre peuple d’Oc? (Malvès 1980)

This formed part of a conscious effort to write the mythology of the winegrowers’ movement, connecting it to a broader regional struggle rooted in ethnolinguistic identity. This was the work of radicals, looking for intersections that could strengthen their appeal and to contextualise their struggle with that of other minority nationalist groups (Smith 2014, 183-7). Yet it was interesting to view the volume of attempts to conflate Occitan cultural and linguistic identity with the winegrowers’ revolt of 1907. This article will unpick the ways in which these claims were constructed, using a collaborative and inter-disciplinary approach to disentangle the interaction of politics, language and identity in the Grande Révolte of 1907. Contemporary actors believed they could construct a common front between Oc and Vine, whilst later activists seemed to believe they should have. This article will investigate the appearance and reality of Occitan linguistic and political significance to the epochal Revolt of 1907, to illustrate the fissures between occupational protest and language maintenance efforts that precluded cooperation and hampered the development of an ethnolinguistic identity comparable to its neighbours.

### **The Revolt of 1907**

The Revolt of 1907 came out of a prolonged period of depression in the areas of southern France dominated by winegrowing.<sup>3</sup> The intensification of the wine slump in 1905 and 1906 had seen joblessness and wage-cuts rise right across the South, as vineyards became less financially viable (Lem 1999, 56). Between January and July 1905, a movement led by Antonin Palazy had tried to concentrate and amplify recent labour strikes. He wanted to appeal across classes and focus on fraud as the principal enemy of southern winegrowers. Yet, despite gathering decent support in Béziers, arguments broke out over demands that proprietors should contribute to a strike fund. Workers’ organisations walked out, led by the Socialist

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<sup>3</sup> This narrative of 1907 is drawn from a collection of archival and newspaper sources where stated, and also more generally using Bechtel (1976), Fontvieille (1977), Napo (1971) and Sagnès, Pech and Pech (1997).

mayor of Narbonne, Ernest Ferroul, and the movement fell to factionalism (Cazals and Fabre 1990, 162).

As the region had fallen further into decline and proprietors began to face the same hardship as labourers, the gaps between the classes dissolved and the Midi as a whole entered into a period of open revolt. The Midi's urban centres bore witness to the crisis years of 1904-1907 as unemployment rocketed to 50% in Béziers and Montpellier, with all commercial trade in Montpellier declining a corresponding 50% (Warner 1975, 21-22). Fostering *inter-classisme* was perhaps the greatest achievement of Marcelin Albert, the café-owner and small-holding winegrower who was to emerge as the leader of the 1907 events. Commonly nicknamed “the messiah” or “the redeemer” (Warner 1975, 23), he gathered vast crowds of anxious winegrowers who were drawn to his rhetoric: he took the tension and grievances from the labour strikes of the early 1900s and translated them into a broader, unifying social movement, overcoming the difficulties which demolished Palazy's united front. The demands for a right to employment in the vineyards became a more general, and much more relatable, demand to live from the vine.

In its first issue, *Le Tocsin*, the central newspaper of the 1907 protests, outlined the identity of the Comité d'Argeliers, the group who would set the tone for the entire revolt. At the head of the Comité was Marcelin Albert, and the group were keen to validate their claims to represent the winegrowers as a cross-class, apolitical movement reacting to grave economic pressure:

Nous sommes ceux qui aiment la République, ceux qui détestent et ceux qui s'en foutent; nous sommes ses ardents défenseurs, ou ses adversaires déclarés; radicaux ou conservateurs, modérés ou syndicalistes, socialistes ou réactionnaires, nous sommes ceux qui ont leur jugeote et aussi leurs opinions. Mais nous avons un ventre et nous sommes ceux qui crèvent de faim (Qui nous sommes 1907).

In this articulation of the group's beliefs, Albert's Comité stressed their independence from the dominant political parties of the day and their detachment from specific political demands. Yet, in reality, Albert's Comité comprised a rural bourgeoisie which was unrepresentative of agricultural labourers. Amongst their number, they counted Radicals, conservatives and some few who might be considered Socialists. In the words of Sagnès: “Bref, le Comité d'Argeliers n'a rien de révolutionnaire. Il ne peut même pas être classé à gauche” (Sagnès and Séguéla 2007, 155). Unlike Ferroul's class politics, Albert's message relied simply on an appeal to defend the region, crack down on fraud and provide bread to the impoverished. The Comité's

ability to simplify this message into an apolitical and personal plea ensured that they avoided the divisive class entreaties of previous years.

Following the emergence of *Le Tocsin*, attendance at protest meetings rose exponentially. One in Capestang on 21<sup>st</sup> April attracted an estimated 12,000 winegrowers. In the next week demonstrations in Lézignan attracted between 18-25,000 protestors doubling in the following week in Narbonne, whose mayor Ferroul appeared alongside Albert for the first time. They were unlikely allies, and the extreme-leftist Ferroul's distaste for Albert and his bourgeois Comité ensured that their rivalry would not be easily resolved. Regular Sunday protests became a fixture offering winegrowers an escape from the drudgery of vineyard labour (or, indeed, unemployment). The week of 12<sup>th</sup> May, 150,000 met in Béziers, followed by 185,000 in Perpignan on 19<sup>th</sup> May, 200,000 in Carcassonne on 24<sup>th</sup> May and 150,000 in Nîmes on 2<sup>nd</sup> June. The movement took on the appearance of a genuine uprising. The climax came at a colossal meeting in Montpellier of an estimated 600,000 people on 9<sup>th</sup> June. During this time, Ferroul's importance rose dramatically; with the protest movement becoming a regular occurrence in the cities, he rallied the establishment in the Midi's towns to support the cause and brought an end to the sequence of peaceful protests which had so far characterised the movement. Ferroul began to assume the leadership of events, capitalising on Albert's success in creating a simple, mobilising message and constructing a unified inter-classiste platform.

On 10<sup>th</sup> June, he addressed around 20,000 protesters in front of Narbonne City Hall in a fiery meeting which issued an ultimatum for the government to eliminate fraud or face a tax strike. This time the crowd did not disperse, however, and Narbonne's theatre was set ablaze by rioters caught up in the spirit of the Grande Révolte (Fontvieille 1977, 87-102). After 10<sup>th</sup> June, the sheer scale of the meetings which had swept across the Midi and the sudden ferocious turn of the movement prompted Radical, Socialist and Monarchist Deputies to appeal across the benches for a solution to the crisis (Sagnès 2006, 157). As Mayors and local councils resigned, the South lost many of its direct links to Paris and the tax strike which began on 13<sup>th</sup> June seemed to verge on secession (Lem 1999, 56). On 18<sup>th</sup> June, Clemenceau ordered the arrest of Ferroul, the man apparently responsible for the intensification of the Grande Révolte. The response was an immediate escalation of violence, with crowds setting wildfires and demanding the Mayor's release. The military occupation on 19<sup>th</sup> June which followed the torching of Narbonne's theatre merely fed the tension in the troubled centres of the Midi's *colère*.

The day of the military's arrival, rioters erected barricades. Skirmishes during the night left many injured and the first of six protestors dead. As news of this filtered through the town,

there were angry confrontations with troops. One besieged unit panicked, firing indiscriminately into the crowd and killing four more protesters. Fires burned the next night, as funeral pyres were erected on the streets of Narbonne and violence spread to Montpellier where rioters lamented the killing of innocents and the imprisonment of Ferroul. Shoot-outs in the streets of Montpellier over the following nights further increased the sense of violent confrontation. This proved too much for the soldiers of the 17<sup>th</sup> Regiment, drawn from young men of the region on military service. On 21<sup>st</sup> June, 500 men mutinied, seizing weapons and joining the ranks of protestors to blockade Béziers. Protesters were buoyed by the gesture, which, in turn, further convinced the government that this regional rising was serious.

The vote which endorsed the government's ability to deal with the Revolt was passed with a large number of dissenters (327 to 223 against). The minority of 223 brought together a curious alliance of left and right. On the left, the 65 SFIO members of parliament (including Jaurès, Aldy and Guesde) combined with the dissenting Midi radicals aligned against Clemenceau (Lafferre, Pujade, Sarraut) in opposition. On the right, there were: monarchists like the Marquis of Rosanbo, the Barons of Reille and Fernand de Ramel; conservative republicans like Emmanuel Brousse and Pierre Leroy Beaulieu; and the anti-Dreyfusard right like Lasies (Sagnès 2006, 165). The presence of the right in the protests and the strange alliance of left and right in the Assembly was enough to convince the Radicals that this was a potent threat to the Republic as they rallied to support an end to the Revolt. These moments of violence, destruction and protest framed a crisis that invited fears of revolution. In a febrile political atmosphere, the whiff of anti-Republicanism conjured up feverishly perceived threats to the authority of the central state. This was clearly more than "un simple soulèvement paysan" (Malvès 1980), but, for concerned figures in the Assembly, its precise implications could not yet be read.

### **Regionalist Politics and 1907**

For winegrowers, the region they were fighting for was based around the winegrowing départements of Aude, Hérault, Gard and Pyrénées-Orientales. This was not delimited by the use of Occitan nor some historical vision of an ancient land, but rather by the solidarity of professional practice. Defining regional interests was therefore an interesting prospect; both Albert and Ferroul promoted the needs of a specific winegrowing constituency in the language of historical conflicts. The deployment of imagery which signified an Occitan ideology was, in reality, a means of connecting present struggles to a narrative of protest. How that was viewed outside of the centres of the Revolt was another thing entirely.

Whilst federalism or secession could be inferred from the rhetoric of the revolt's leaders, the Comité d'Argeliers itself had consistently championed "ni réaction, ni révolution" (Vive les gueux 1907). Indeed, with the labour strikes of the 1900s firmly in mind, the Socialist Mayor of Toulouse, Albert Bedouce, tried to calm fears in the Assembly: "La vérité est que la mouvement n'est ni séparatiste, ni politique, mais que c'est un mouvement économique" (Assemblée Nationale 1907a). This summation of the riots is supportive yet also denies the revolt's ideological significance. Such fears persisted, however, despite the assurances of Deputies. Ernest Ferroul, for one, presented a fearsome prospect, with a tribune's fervour and deep-rooted attachment to the Midi. Ferroul is purported, whilst still a University student, to have travelled to the tomb of the original hammer of the Cathars, Simon de Montfort, just to spit on his grave (Zaretsky 2004, 89). Such antics were reflected in the references Ferroul made to the Albigensian campaign and to the Cathars as a means of mobilising support. He used the imagery as a means of pitching the region against the north:

Un souvenir me hante, souvenir de misère pareille à la vôtre! Lorsque les barons féodaux envahissaient le Midi et le saccageaient, un troubadour pleurait ainsi: Ah! Toulouse et Provence, et la terre d'Argence, Béziers et Carcassonne, qui vous a vu et qui vous voit! Depuis, les barons de l'industrie du Nord nous ont envahis et ruinés. Nous ne voulons pas les supporter davantage. En avant! Debout pour les repousser, eux et leurs complices. Parlez plus fort, unissez vos voix, votre prière prendra le ton d'un commandement (Ferré 2007, 44).

Likewise, the more moderate Marcelin Albert nonetheless made direct reference to the crusades during one rally outside the resonant Cité médiévale in Carcassonne:

Les albigeois étaient autrefois réunis sous ces murs, ils y tombèrent pour la défense de leur liberté. Nous ferons comme eux! En avant pour la défense de nos droits! Le Midi le veut, le Midi l'aura! (Ferré 2007, 44).

These references to the regional past were intended to mobilise resentment of the North and solidarity in the communal poverty of the region. By invoking such historical references, they drew themselves closer to articulating a common regional identity, yet they also terrified those seeking to vilify revolters as separatists or worse.

Indeed, the head of the Fédération Régionaliste Française (FRF), Jean Charles-Brun, reflected on the events of 1907 as "un grand mouvement régionaliste, les viticulteurs se sont tournés vers l'Etat" (Discours de Jean Charles-Brun 1915). Organisations declared solidarity in Paris, Brittany and elsewhere, such as Charles-Brun's Comité Parisien de Défense de la viticulture française that distributed the posters of the Comité d'Argeliers around Paris (Le comité parisien de défense de la viticulture française 1907). Indeed, *Action Régionaliste*, the



newspaper of the FRF, declared that “la crise viticole a des causes nombreuses et complexes, mais là, comme ailleurs, c’est le régime centralisateur qui est le grand coupable” (La Fédération Régionaliste Française et la crise du Midi 1907). In Brittany, *Le Réveil Breton* mused “Cette méthode vient de réussir dans le Midi, pourquoi ne réussirait-elle pas en Bretagne, si on en faisait un essai sérieux?” (Pensées d'un Breton 1907). Echoing the rhetoric of Ferroul and Albert, Breton commentators described Clemenceau as a “nouveau Simon de Montfort, à la tête des Nordistes contre les modernes Albigeois!” (Carnet d'un Breton 1907). This historical allusion showed precisely how the events of the South could be used by regionalist spokesmen in other areas. The Breton commentator Leon Le Berri described the revolt as representative of a “dégoût général pour la politique”, aligning the disgruntlement of the Midi vignerons with a wider dissatisfaction with centralised politics across the regions of France (Carnet d'un Breton 1907). Such sentiment was anathema to Republican centralists in the Assembly, and can indeed help to explain the severity with which Clemenceau’s government met the demonstrators.

The interests of the region may have been articulated in the language of ideologised regional difference, though ultimately without the revolutionary import that some feared or hoped. Defining the *Midi viticole* as the heart of the revolt coalesced with visions of Occitania for some, though ultimately represented a more limited constituency with more prosaic political demands<sup>4</sup> Demands made of the government did not include political autonomy nor recognition of a sub-national or linguistic identity. Instead, they were shaped by Albert’s rhetoric. He spoke of the *Midi viticole* as a patient in need of saving by Parisian doctors. The Socialist Deputy Justin Augé echoed this in the Assembly, quoting Albert in declaring “Vous êtes le médecin qui devez guérir le malade.” The derisive laughter and cries of “Buvez du vin!” which met his statement were, in turn, illustrative of the contempt many in the chamber felt for this negation of responsibility (Assemblée Nationale 1907b). Albert, as leader, took no responsibility for finding this cure, stating only the end result winegrowers wanted (wine sold above production cost and stricter regulations to eliminate fraud) and that the government should endeavour to make it a reality. Essentially Albert articulated a culture of dependency which would be inherited by later winegrowers’ movements.

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<sup>4</sup> For more on French regionalism during the Third Republic, see (amongst others): Thiesse (1990), Peer (1998), Lebovics (1992), and Storm (2010) for an insight into the cultural and intellectual construction of regional and minority identities in relation to the state; Wright (2003), and Zaretsky (2004), for examples of particular regionalist actors in the Third Republic and the means by which they constructed their appeal; Judge (2000), for a focus on the impact of state linguistic policy; and Berger (1972), for a strong case study of the Breton movement outlining these key themes.

Simplifying the causes of the crippling *crise de mévente* was an important step which would allow the Défense movement to articulate its cause more successfully. Of the many possible causes, (such as the over-planting of vines at the turn of the century, increasing yields or Algerian imports) the theme of fraud quickly became the dominant issue of the Comité d'Argeliers and the entire 1907 movement. Despite having constantly supported the suppression of viticultural fraud<sup>5</sup> and the control of distillation (to ensure that unsalable wines could still be profitably disposed of), the great figurehead of the Socialists Jean Jaurès criticised the winegrowers' lack of coherent demands and constant recourse to the government for solutions. Although he was supportive of the movement, he refused to compromise the ideals of the SFIO in favour of the Midi. France, he reminded the protesters, "n'est pas toute dans les départements de l'Aude, de l'Hérault et des Pyrénées-Orientales" (Sagnès 2009, 156-157). Instead, Jaurès proposed the nationalisation of the wine industry as a solution to the crisis. This proposal failed to be taken seriously and debate reached an impasse, with Southern Socialists out of step with the SFIO.<sup>6</sup>

The failure of the Assembly to arrive at a response did not obstruct the emergence of an increasingly punitive approach to events in the Midi. As Mayors and local councils resigned, the South lost many of its direct links to the capital and the tax strike which began on 13 June seemed to connote a strike against the state. Yet, the demands made of government were not driven by regionalist ideology (seeking greater autonomy or language equality), but rather sought interventionist regulation of the prevailing industry. They were addressed openly and plaintively, drawing on an established vocabulary and methodology of protest that reinforced rather than denigrated the Republican system. Although the winegrowers would garner some unlikely supporters, their grievances were straightforward and their demands made in an accepted political tradition.

## **Language and 1907**

...for peasants and workers, the mother tongue is patois, the foreign speech is French. (van Geppen 1911, cited in Weber 1977, 73).

During the Grande Révolte of 1907, Occitan language varieties were the primary means of communication in southern France; it has been estimated that in the late nineteenth century, between 70% and 90% of the population of southern France were monolingual or primary

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<sup>5</sup> Such as the addition of sugar to unfermented grape must to increase the alcohol content, known as chaptalisation.

<sup>6</sup> Rémy Pech posits that Jaurès was never serious about this proposal, but rather sought to promote the collectivist standpoint whilst standing back from the debate (Pech 2011).

Occitan language users (Armengaud and Lafont 1979, 778).<sup>7</sup> There was a key Occitan language element to the 1907 protests: Ferroul would have addressed the assembled masses in Occitan, given its prevalence in the community (Lafont 1980, 341; Fabrié 1985, 191)<sup>8</sup>, and many banners written in Occitan dating from the revolt have been preserved. In contrast, the protests were orchestrated by the weekly publication *Le Tocsin*, exclusively through the medium of French. However, we must remember that French was the key language of literacy in France (there were no popular education movements using Occitan varieties as media of instruction), despite the purported level of monolingual Occitan language use in the community. Moreover, the French language has always been linked to Republican values, dating back to the 1794 *Comité de Salut Publique* report which counselled the destruction of regional languages in a republic which must be 'une et indivisible' (cf. Hawkey and Kasstan 2015). In addition to being the primary written language of the whole of France (including the Midi), it has been argued that the use of French is simply the most reasonable and effective way of communicating the aims of the protest externally to the government and indeed the French people more widely (Pech 1990, 224). The emphasis on the use of French can also be witnessed when examining the banners and placards preserved from the protests. Pech (1990) has conducted an extensive analysis on a wide range of the demonstration materials, and revealed that a mere 17% are written in a language other than French, that is to say the regional languages of Occitan and Catalan.<sup>9</sup> Once again, this may seem unexpected in light of the primary languages of the protesters, but Pech also points out that the protesters constituted the first generation of French citizens to have undergone compulsory French-language education, as a result of the Lois Jules Ferry of the 1880s. As such, the choice of French is justifiable, not only as a means of communicating with a wider audience, but also given the fact that this was the main language of literacy in France (Pech 1990, 225-6).<sup>10</sup> Moreover, only one of the recovered placards written in Occitan or Catalan even hints at a

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<sup>7</sup> Even the official statistics from the Ministère de l'Instruction Publique of 1863 (which would have had cause to exaggerate the vitality of French) reveal the départements of the Midi Viticole to be areas where "all or nearly all communes [were] non-French speaking" (Weber 1977, 68).

<sup>8</sup> These post-hoc accounts from academics constitute some of the very scant references available concerning oral communication in regional varieties in public speeches. The language varieties used in the Grande Révolte are arguably of greater importance than other public speeches made in the region during this period not only given the incendiary political nature of the content, but also due to the unprecedented size of the crowds assembled.

<sup>9</sup> The analysis took into account the 339 banners and placards recovered that contained more than merely the name of the commune in question. 17% thus translates to 57 of these 339 banners.

<sup>10</sup> Although again, Weber (1977, 77) points out that even the implementation of the Lois Jules Ferry did not entail a high level of French language competence in pupils schooled in French.

wider Occitanism, with the slogan '*Lou Miejour triounfarà. Voulèm lou vi franc e naturel*' (The South will triumph. We want honest, natural wine) (Pech 1990, 240). This one sole evocation of *lou Miejour* (le Midi) is the closest the Occitan language banners come to calling on a wider notion of pan-Occitania regionalism.

In the mid-nineteenth century, as other national and regional identities were becoming more clearly articulated elsewhere in Europe, an Occitanist cultural and linguistic identity was also forming. In 1854, Frédéric Mistral led a group of writers and intellectuals (the *primadiers*) in creating the Félibrige, an Occitan cultural society that still exists today and has been responsible for the promotion of Occitan language varieties in various domains, such as education and the church, as well as spearheading attempts at unifying and standardising Occitan orthography and grammar (Calavel and Javel 2002, 136-40). Given their status as intellectuals, the *Félibres* also possessed a full and fluent competence in the socially prestigious French language; for example, founding member Théodore Aubanel came from a background where Occitan was not the primary language of communication, one can find work published in the French original by original Félibre Jean Brunet (for example, the *Étude de mœurs provençales par les proverbes et les dictons*), and of course, French was the language of communication between Félibres and other, non-Occitan speaking French intellectuals (as evidenced by letters from Mallarmé to Mistral and Aubanel). For members of the Félibrige, Occitan was to be revived and mobilised as a vehicle of cultural and literary expression. The restoration of an Occitan literary tradition (potentially to rival the corresponding French one) was arguably a step towards according dignity and prestige to the Occitan language. This ideology is linked to, but fundamentally different from, the way Occitan varieties were used by the general population, many of whom were monolingual Occitan speakers. Bernard Revel, a journalist writing on the resurgence of winegrower activism in the 1960s and 1970s marked the different uses of Occitan during the 1907 revolt:

Le point de ralliement dans cette marée humaine, c'est la langue occitane. Plus exactement le patois. Les vigneronns ne savent pas que ce patois qui change de forme d'un département à l'autre, parfois même d'un village à l'autre, est le vestige d'une civilisation qui, aux XI<sup>e</sup> et XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles, eut une grande influence sur l'Europe. Peu leur importe d'ailleurs. La langue des troubadours n'est plus qu'une façon de parler de la pluie et du beau temps, des choses de la vie, d'exprimer sa joie ou de crier sa colère. Une façon de se sentir entre gens du même pays. Allons donc, ce patois là ne saurait être l'élégant 'provençal' du Félibrige porté à son apogée par Frédéric Mistral. (Revel 1996, 19-20).

It must be stressed that the Félibrige, while invoking rural imagery and drawing on the notion of Occitan as the language of the people of the Midi, remained an elite cultural and literary

institution. There was, therefore, a sharp rift between high-end literary Félibrige Occitanism on the one hand, and Occitan as a vehicle of communication in the Midi on the other.

Yet, given this language situation – i.e. the high level of monolingualism in Occitan varieties and the concomitant limited level of competence in French on the part of the general populace – it would be misleading to attribute any verbal use of Occitan in the protests (by Ferroul for example) to a political Midi ideology: Occitan was simply the most practical means of communication in this instance. However, the predominance of French in the placards arguably betrays the hegemonic ideology of French as the leading literary and prestige variety. The hegemony of French is further underlined since it was chosen as the chief language of written communication (via the placards) between a largely monolingual Occitan speech community and a largely monolingual French speech community. The hegemony of French and its position as the prestige variety feeds into a broader language ideology concerning Occitan language use among the general populace, wherein lack of French competence is a sign of low social prestige. However, this language ideological detail does not confer any specific mobilising force on the use of Occitan. There is no evidence to suggest that the use of Occitan was chosen as a tool to galvanise the population into action and to evoke a form of Midi sentiment; it was simply the most effective means of communication. This is of marked contrast with the Occitan language ideology we shall see embodied by the Félibrige.

Despite its role as the leading vehicle for contemporary cultural and linguistic Occitanism, the Félibrige distanced itself from the events of 1907, refusing to lend its full support to the Grande Révolte. Albert and Ferroul both sent telegrams (in Occitan, of course) to leading Félibres requesting their presence at the revolts, such as the following sent from Albert to Mistral on 5<sup>th</sup> June, 1907:

Terro venèn e terro anan e de terro voulèn vièvre. Es pèr aco que vous qu'avès cantat, amb uno tant grando voues, la terro Maire del Miejour, farés plasé à tout noste pople se venès, al coustat de tóuti lous d'Argeliés, a Mount-Pelié lou 9 de jun (Fabrié 1985, 193).

(It is from the soil we have come, to the soil we shall go and from the soil that we want to live. It is of this that you have sung with such a great voice, this motherland of the Midi, and you would bring great joy to the people if you would stand alongside those of Argeliers in Montpellier on 9 June.)

It should be maintained that the Félibrige did not appear to condemn the actions of the revolt altogether (Abrate 2001, 101), and there is indeed evidence to suggest that key Félibres were initially in favour of the cause (Fabrié 1985, 194). Nevertheless, instead of appearing at the head of the revolt, Mistral and Pierre Dévoluy (the then-leader of the Félibrige) went no further

than sending telegrams of solidarity to the protesters assembled in Montpellier, such as the following message sent from Dévoluy, sent at the time from a cultural event in Avignon:

Li patrioto de Prouvènço, acampa vuei en Avignoun, mando a si coumpatrioto li vigneiroun dóu Lengadò, lou counfort calourènt de sa fraternita e de sa pleno coumounioun dins si demando mai que justo (Fabrié 1985, 194).

(The patriots of Provence, assembled today in Avignon, send to their compatriots, the winegrowers of Languedoc, the warm reassurance of brotherhood, and total support of this more than just cause.)

Many reasons have been proposed for this policy of non-engagement on the part of leading Félibres, ranging from Mistral's prior commitment at the above-mentioned festivities in Avignon (the official pretext offered at the time) to his advancing age (Fabrié 1985, 196). The non-participation on the part of the leading Occitan language association is most likely, however, to have been politically motivated. The Félibrige had long maintained a position of political neutrality, never propounding an Occitanist discourse which exploited the economic problems of southern France (Abrate 2001, 101); and in a letter to poet Albert Arnavielle, Mistral states his belief that the Félibrige would be seen as political agitators if they were to become directly involved in the revolt, which may have proved detrimental to their own cause (Fabrié 1985, 195). Contrary to the aims of the revolt, the Félibrige sought to defend the Occitan language “dans le cadre de la République et par-delà les clivages politiques” (Calavel and Javel 2002, 159). Even Mistral's decision to attend a cultural gathering in Avignon, as opposed to the demonstrations themselves, is arguably rooted in the official stance of the Félibrige vis-à-vis political engagement: in choosing a fête over a protest, Mistral was choosing linguistic politics over the real cultural identity of the *Midi rouge*, and was perpetuating the Félibrige emphasis on Occitan as a poetic and aesthetic means of identity construction, rather than as a political tool. Indeed, the Félibrige were arguably aiming to redefine Occitan varieties as languages of artistic expression, not of political protest. Moreover, we have already alluded to the fact that the language ideology of the Félibrige regarding Occitan greatly differed from that of the protesters (and by extension, the general population). For the Félibrige, language was a mobilising force in the creation of an Occitan prestige variety, while for the general population (represented in our case by the diverse mass of protesters), Occitan was ideologically a marker of low social prestige with little mobilising potential. This ideological schism between cultural institutions on one hand and the language users on the other may well have contributed to the lack of co-operation between the protesters and the Félibrige.

These ideological differences between the Félibrige and the protesters can be brought into yet sharper focus. In the previous examination of the regionalist political import of the

Grande Révolte, we explored the ways in which its leaders defined regional interests, the target groups for mobilisation, and the demands made of the central authorities in France. By applying these same questions to the Félibrige linguistic and cultural movement, the ideological similarities and differences between the two groups become even clearer. The early Félibrige had always articulated its idea of Midi regional interests and identity in cultural-linguistic terms: importance was given to the history of the region (again invoking imagery of the Cathars and the Albigensian Crusade, cf. Martel 2008b), the need to restore Occitan language varieties to a position of relative prestige was underlined, and Occitan language poetry was accorded a place of particular importance. However, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Dévoluy added a dimension of social action and activism to the Félibrige, which moved the organisation slightly away from its apolitical roots and more towards a form of cultural-linguistic regionalism (this 'new Félibrige' was often referred to as *dévoluyisme*) (Calavel and Javel 2002, 155). Since the Félibrige was (and is) an elite cultural institution, the sectors of the population targeted for political mobilisation were either small (focusing on literary and cultural figures) or non-existent (bearing in mind the apolitical nature of pre-Dévoluy Félibres). The demands made by Félibres on leading French political and cultural decision-makers were always more modest than of many regional and minority movements, with even the more politically active (*dévoluyiste*) members pursuing at most decentralising policies, as opposed to secessionist or even independentist ones (Martel 2008, 145).

This fundamental mismatch in how the Félibrige and the protesters ideologised Occitan language varieties begs the question of whether these groups could ever have set aside their differences and come together to push towards their respective related goals. It is important to remember that there was a significant amount of common ground between the two groups. It is true that a great many Félibrige activities were culturally and ideologically focused specifically on Provence (particularly in the early days of movement), as demonstrated in the above quote which neatly contrasts “li patrioto de Prouvènçò” and “li vigneiroun dóu Lengadò”. However, the Félibrige did not exclude the rest of the Midi, including the Midi Viticole. The above-mentioned invocation of the Cathars and the Albigensian Crusade (primarily focused on Languedoc, not Provence) is an example of how the Félibrige appealed to symbols that connoted a larger Midi. Although the seven original *primadiers* all hailed from Provence, the ethos of the movement quickly grew to encompass the complete range of Occitan-speaking areas. This can be seen in the choice of venue for the yearly Félibrige congress, the *Santo Estello*: of the 33 congresses that had taken place by 1907, 11 had been held outside of Provence, with 6 of these between 1897 and 1907. Moreover, the Félibrige increasingly acknowledged (and accorded prizes to) authors from across the Midi, including the Gascon writer Philadelphe de Gerde (crowned laureate of the *Jòcs Floraus* in 1899) and

the Languedocian writers Albert Arnavielle and Justin Bessou. The ethos of the Félibrige clearly looked beyond Provence to incorporate other Occitan-speaking areas, and the leaders of the *Grande Révolte* were reaching out to the Félibrige in a similar pan-Occitan vein. Therefore, these were two groups whose aspirations and ideologies were not mutually exclusive. Points of consensus offered ample basis for the pooling of efforts in this moment of crisis; indeed, the fact that Albert so pushed for Félibrige support demonstrates that he considered this at least a possibility. The failure to reconcile these interests, and the ideological mismatches illustrated, seemed to chafe against existing attitudes towards inter-classisme and the role of a Midi-wide movement from both parties. These existing differences contributed to the fact that the Grande Révolte failed to index any wider sense of wider pan-Occitan, Midi regionalism.

The Grande Révolte thus received limited support from the leading Occitan language association, despite the common aims of both protesters and Félibres, i.e. greater representation and autonomy for the largely Occitan-speaking inhabitants of southern France. This cautious distance maintained by the Félibrige arguably impacted on the development of Occitan language as an identity creation tool. Recent linguistic anthropological frameworks can provide a formalised analysis of this situation. Bucholtz and Hall (2004) develop a framework which explains how language can be used to perform identity work. Language is shown to function as an identity construction tool if the four *semiotic processes of identification* of *praxis* (repeated language use), *indexicality* (the frequently discussed property of language to index other social factors or phenomena), *ideology* and *performance* (conscious display of language use for effect) successfully interact. The four semiotic processes of identification failed to fully interact and it is thus not possible for the Occitan language to be a successful tool in group identity creation, based on both evidence from the banners and placards, and the policy of non-engagement pursued by the Félibrige. As regards the banners and placards, we see that Occitan, although the most widely used oral language, was not the language of the protests (despite any addresses made by Ferroul or other leaders) insofar as it was not widely used. Nor was it used to organise the events, this being achieved through the medium of French in *Le Tocsin*. Moreover, when the Occitan (or Catalan in the Pyrénées-Orientales) language was employed, it was not used to express any notions of a wider political Occitanism, as shown by the content of the recovered placards. The *praxis* of the repeated, generalised use of Occitan by the population at large, therefore, did not successfully become attached to an Occitanist political *ideology*. *Performance* cannot foreground an ideology that does not sufficiently exist, and as such, Occitan group identity could not be established, based on the placards and banners. Turning to the attitude of the Félibrige, it can be argued that due to the lack of support from this cultural and linguistic institution, there was a failure to establish any



form of *indexicality* between the contemporary developments in Occitan culture, literature and language use (as supported by the Félibrige) on the one hand, and the political Occitanist nature of the 1907 demonstrations on the other. Once again, the *praxis* of repeated Occitan language use was not connected to any *ideology*, and *performance* was thus unable to foreground anything. Therefore, using this conceptual framework, we can understand the means by which Occitan political and cultural group identity was not bolstered by linguistic factors during the 1907 protests. This linguistic data illustrates how Occitan identity did not substantially develop as a result of the Grande Révolte. Likewise, despite the apparent symbols of revolution and the widespread use of Occitan, the lack of collaboration and ideological common ground between the Félibrige and the protesters ensured that this was not the regionalist rising that some hoped to depict both at the time and thereafter.

## Conclusion

When Marcelin Albert finally met Clemenceau at the end of June, their interview was stormy, with each accusing the other of fuelling the discord in the Midi. Clemenceau accused Albert of having contributed to “making the duke of Orléans’ bed”<sup>11</sup> in weakening the Republic, whilst Albert protested that his Republican credentials were not in question. Eventually, they agreed that they would both do their part to quieten protests if fraud was more rigorously prosecuted, parting on a note of mutual sympathy. Accounts of the interview further related that Clemenceau had given Albert a 100Fr note. The money was a subsidy to allow the penniless Albert the means with which to travel home yet, to the protestors of the Midi, this pocket money loomed like 30 pieces of silver after Albert’s furtive capitulation in Paris. Clemenceau had impeached the unassailable morality of the ‘great Redeemer’ whilst securing the quiescence of the movement. With Albert central to 1907’s effectiveness, his discrediting was a fatal blow to the movement’s cohesion.

Ultimately, the dispersal of the protests hinged on the persistence of sectional interests and the loss of faith in the fêted leader. This, it seems, spoke volumes for the missed opportunities of 1907. Nelli, in his seminal *Histoire du Languedoc* explained the non-involvement of the Félibrige in terms that echoed the differing visions so far outlined. He claimed it was as much “par la crainte d’engager le Félibrige dans des voies trop réactionnaires que par celle d’engager une tentative ‘séparatiste’ qui n’était souhaitée par personne” (Nelli 1974, 289). For Nelli, writing in the 1970s, confluence seemed predestined to

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<sup>11</sup> The Duke of Orléans was then the self-styled Philippe VIII, and supported by those monarchists who wished to oversee a return to a French monarchy and the dissolution of the Republic.

fail. Yet for others, like the ideologically motivated Malvès, writing after the prominent winegrowers' campaigns of the 1970s, stronger links could be sought, as at first glance the Revolt of 1907 had been voiced in Occitan and was replete with symbols of political revolt. Ultimately, this analysis shows that 1907 was not a "simple soulèvement paysan", as Malvès attests. Yet neither was it the "véritable 'révolution' occitane" that he hoped to claim in support of his cause. (Malvès 1980)

In many respects, the Grande Révolte of 1907 represented a missed opportunity in the evolution of political and linguistic Occitanism, due to the lack of cooperation between the Félibrige and the protesters. The ideological differences between these two contributory forces to the (arguably stalled) development of a Midi identity rest on three points: how the leaders of each movement defined regional interests; their target audience for mobilisation; and their demands of French decision-makers. Both movements invoked the rich history of the region (making reference to the Albigensian Crusade, for example) to create a Midi identity. Both shared an ambition of unity across Occitan-speaking areas. The protesters sought to mobilise the entire region in rising, yet the conservatism of the Félibrige's purely cultural approach precluded them from endorsing the Grande Révolte. A larger difference between the two groups lay in their target audience: the protesters sought to mobilise as large a section of the population as possible (through a combination of Albert's rural masses and Ferroul's urban supporters), while the Félibrige focused on a very limited sector of elite, intellectual society. A further ideological divergence between the two camps becomes apparent upon discovering what demands they made of central French forces: the protesters sought an activist, interventionist response, while the only requests from the Félibrige came from a minority of members, and skirted any large-scale change in the governmental system. It is clear, therefore, that the Félibrige and the protesters approached issues of Midi identity from two very different standpoints, and this kind of internal ideological conflict was to have profound consequences on subsequent developments in Occitanism.

The potential impact of collaboration between the Félibrige and the protesters in 1907 can be extrapolated from analogous contemporary cases. Other, arguably more successful, regionalist and nationalist movements of the period owed a great deal to the fact that they more effectively embraced inter-classiste principles, uniting popular political protest with elite, intellectual interests. Indeed, a clear comparison can be drawn with the progress of Catalan nationalism in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Catalonia's early industrialisation led to a growth in working-class politics which reached an unprecedented level in the five days of violence and destruction in 1909 known as the *Setmana Tràgica* (Conversi 1997: 29). Alongside such working-class politicised action, the well-developed bourgeoisie encouraged the growth of 'higher' literary and linguistic forms of Catalan (Conversi 1997: 31), including the

establishment of the *Institut d'Estudis Catalans* in 1907, and the Catalan language standardisation efforts of Pompeu Fabra, whose 'Orthographic Norms' appeared in 1913. These developments were accompanied by the first Catalanist political manifesto, *La nacionalitat catalana* by Enric Prat de la Riba in 1906, and the setting up of the first Catalan political institution, the *Mancomunitat Catalana* in 1914. Although the various social strata led different types of Catalanist or protest movements (*Setmana Tràgica* by the working classes and Catalan language standardisation by the intellectual elites), these all came together to form part of an overarching successful burgeoning Catalanism. While there were obviously many factors at play that differentiate the Catalan case from the struggle of their Occitan counterparts at the very same time on the other side of the Pyrenees, the cross-class nature of the support for Catalanism, and the diverse forms this took, cannot be underestimated.

This is not intended to assume the inevitable logic of a coherent regionalist movement, nor any normative expectation that concerns should be framed in regionalist terms. Instead this analysis takes place in the context of later Occitan speaking political movements seeking to explore the potential links between language and politics in the revolt of 1907. When Malvès asked, in 1980, whether 1907 was "Occitane", he was posing a very similar question to this article, albeit seeking to confirm his own beliefs. This study has sought to foreground the troubled post-war history of Occitan nationalism, enriching the work of Keating (1986), whose study of the failure of political Occitanism outlined how it had not managed to "integrate cultural and economic demands into a coherent political project with popular appeal and a clear strategy for advance" (Keating 1986, 31). It seemed that, for those who would try to make use of it, that 1907 had all of the form but none of the function of an Occitan revolution. In reality, this analysis of 1907 anticipates the slide back into the "nostalgic veneration for the past" (Keating 1986, 31) that Keating associates with the Félibrige and their continued hold over the Occitan movement. By failing to establish a workable index between political activity and linguistic activity, leading figureheads missed the opportunity to develop Occitanism as a vibrant force.

That Occitan linguistic varieties never came to fully index a sense of politicised identity at this crucial juncture has interesting consequences for how we conceptualise the relationship between minoritised languages and centralist ideologies. In nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe, regional and/or minority languages were often closely associated with regionalist political movements of the areas where they were autochthonous varieties (Catalonia, the Basque Country and Brittany constituting three such examples). In light of these factors, one would have expected Occitan to have been adopted as an ideal tool in the creation of a Midi regional identity. That this was not the case underlines the need to separate theoretical notions of identity construction from what is frequently empirically attested. While regional languages

are often employed as nation building tools, secessionist ideologies need not always be present: indeed, this is revealed by the willingness of many of the actors in 1907 to work within a Republican framework. The Revolt of 1907 spawned a mythology that outgrew and outlived its original significance. Later activists sought in the Revolt exactly what contemporary actors had sought to create of it: a movement that could herald the imagining of Occitan nationhood. The seductive simplicity of 'le pays occitan de la vigne' belied the reality that neither occupation and identity, nor politics and language, nor even Albert and Mistral could reconcile the competing strands of regional mobilisation. Neither a simple rising, nor a regionalist revolution, these findings lend extra nuance to Warner when he describes the 1907 revolt as a "picturesque and pathetic episode in French history" (Warner 1975, 23).

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