

COLONIZATION AS SOLUTION:
LES CANUTS AND FRENCH ALGERIA

by
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In 1845 and 1846, members of Lyon's silk worker class, *canuts*, published fifty-three issues of a newspaper called *L'Écho de l'Industrie*. The papers engaged with the political, philosophical, and social concerns of the 1840s through the lens of the *canuts'* social position as laborers. At this same historical moment, the French colonization of Algeria was in full swing. The publishers of this newspaper followed these events closely, publishing updates about military operations, and providing their own commentary and opinions. The *canuts* were politically and socially progressive for their time. In the 1830s, they staged violent protests to demand just treatment and pay. Later, aligning with the philosophy of Charles Fourier, they peacefully defended their positions as workers within the silk industry, advocating for an economic realignment that would benefit both labor and capital. At the same time, they sympathized with Polish people facing imperial encroachments of Russia. Yet, they fervently supported the colonization of Algeria, which included the violent subjugation of Algerian people. Upon first glance, their position on Algeria seems to challenge their moral character. Using the *canuts'* own words in *L'Écho de l'Industrie*, this thesis explores why the *canuts* were interested in the colonization of Algeria and reconciles their support for it with their larger profile. I demonstrate that their support for the colonization fits relatively simply within the image scholars have of this group of workers, characterized by their forward-thinking, solution-oriented

nature. The *canuts* saw French Algeria, particularly the potential for agricultural colonies, as part of the path towards progress. They applied their own vision for the future of their industry, built around the Fourierist philosophy of economic association, to their vision for the colonization of Algeria. This argument is based on the historical method, primarily relying on analysis of various publications of *L'Écho de l'Industrie*.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	6
Methods	16
Historical Method	16
Note on Bias	18
Translation Methodology	19
Understanding The <i>Canuts: L'Écho de l'Industrie</i> and Its Origins	21
Violence and Peace: How the Canuts Addressed Their Grievances	21
L'Écho de l'Industrie	25
French Algeria in <i>L'Écho de l'Industrie</i>	28
Brief History of Colonization of Algeria	28
Algeria as Discussed in L'Écho de l'Industrie	30
Poland: A Comparative Case Study	37
Brief Historical Context on Poland	37
Poland as Mentioned in l'Écho de l'Industrie	38
Colonization as 'Solution'	46
Solution-Oriented Thinking: The Canuts' Larger Interest in Algeria	46
Broadening the Scope	53
Experience of the 1848 Colonization Scheme	61
Conclusion	70
Bibliography	72

Introduction

In 1857, Norbert Truquin arrived in Lyon, France. He likely would have been twenty-four years old. A man of many places and professions, Truquin was settling into the next stage of life, one of a father, but also one of a silk worker—the life of a *canut*.

* * *

Anyone who has ever visited Lyon, France has more than likely heard the phrase *la colline qui prie et la colline qui travaille*. In English, this translates to “the hill that prays and the hill that works.” The hills in question are *Fourvière*¹ and *La Croix Rousse*², two neighborhoods in Lyon that each, conspicuously, have their own distinguishing characteristics and identities. Fourvière is known for its basilica, which is aptly called *la Basilique de Fourvière*, and is visible from many other parts of the city. *La Croix Rousse*, on the other hand, is marked by its silk-worker legacy. Its buildings are unusually tall to accommodate the towering looms used to weave silk. Today, this silk-worker legacy lives on through this unique architecture, as well as murals and museums. But in the 19th century, the very life and breath of *La Croix Rousse* was sustained by the *canuts*. It was at once their workplace and their home.

While Truquin became a *canut* in the late 1850s, the silk industry in Lyon was already well-established, having been created in the 1500s. Truquin’s era, the 19th century, proved to be an interesting time for the *canuts*. On the heels of the French Revolution, it was a century

¹Fourvière, as a word, has its root in the Latin word *foro vetere*, which means old forum in English (*forum vieux* in French, although now it would be grammatically correct to say *vieux forum*, which over the years, morphed into *fourvière*). It is an old Roman settlement, where one can still find old ruins and a museum. The basilica of *fourvière* was built in the late 19th century to thank the Virgin Mary for saving the people of Lyon from several illnesses and a Prussian invasion.

²*La Croix Rousse*, which means “the red cross” (not to be confused with *la croix rouge*, which refers to the Red Cross organization) is now a neighborhood in Lyon. It is one of two major hills in the city. Locals refer to *La Croix Rousse* as “the hill that works,” due to its legacy as the home of *les canuts*. Even today, *La Croix Rousse* has a distinct cultural identity compared to the rest of the city, perhaps in part due to its geographical position. Residents of the area may consider themselves to be *Croix-Roussien* rather than *Lyonnais*.

marked by political instability and change. The revolution did not resolve all the social ills that had provoked it. Suffering was still widespread, particularly for the working class, of which the *canuts* were part. There would, in effect, be other political and social uprisings to follow. In July of 1830, there was a three-day revolt in Paris known as *Les Trois Glorieuses*, also referred to as the July Revolution in English.³ Similarly, in 1848, the French revolted again, ending the July monarchy and giving way to the second republic.⁴

The *canuts* staged their *own* uprising in 1831, another in 1834, and a third in 1848. The *canut* revolts are a key chapter in Lyonnais history, shaping how historians understand this group of workers. Essentially, the *canuts* were political actors. They were invested in their livelihoods, which, given the challenging economic landscape of 19th-century France, translated into fighting political and ideological battles. But violent uprisings were not their only method—they also took to pen and paper.

In late 1831, following the first of the revolts, some *canuts* published the first issue of *L'Écho de la fabrique*,⁵ the pioneer in a series of worker-oriented newspapers. The paper served as a vehicle for them to express their grievances with society, as well as their aspirations for change. Later, in 1845 and 1846, its successor *L'Écho de l'Industrie*⁶ took the stage. This newspaper, mirroring many of the characteristics of its predecessor, is one of the protagonists in the story that this thesis will tell.

³ The July Revolution marked the shift from a constitutional monarchy to what is known as the July Monarchy. King Charles X was overthrown, with his cousin, Louis-Phillipe, taking power. The famous painting Liberty Guiding the People, which is often thought to depict the French Revolution of 1789, actually depicts *Les Trois Glorieuses*.

⁴ The Revolution of 1848 led to the establishment of the Second Republic. France is now in the Fifth Republic. It also resulted in the overthrowing of Louis-Phillipe.

⁵ Une fabrique is a factory, the word here refers broadly to the making of silk and the silk industry.

⁶ This word is a cognate, meaning industry in French and English.

As one of the most interesting subtopics in *canut* history, the papers have been extensively studied. In his book *Les canuts, ou, la démocratie turbulente*,⁷ scholar Ludovic Frobert explores the relationship between the *canut* revolts and *L'Écho de la fabrique*. He situates the uprisings within the context of the July Revolution in Paris, arguing that it was out of this revolutionary political landscape of the 19th century that the *presse ouvrière*⁸ of Lyon was born.⁹

For Frobert, analyzing these newspapers is the best way to understand the revolts of 1831 and 1834. He traces the political commentary, aspirations, and debates of the *canuts* through all issues of *l'Écho de la fabrique*. He argues that the *canuts* were solution-minded, bringing in multiple voices to discuss what was at stake. He paints this newspaper as a unique, micro-political landscape created by the *canuts* from 1831-1835.¹⁰

Lyon's *presse ouvrière* has more largely interested other scholars. The book *L'Écho de la fabrique: Naissance de la presse ouvrière à Lyon*,¹¹ edited by Frobert, contains essays written by various historians. Among the authors is the University of Oregon's own George Sheridan, professor emeritus of history. Sheridan's essay entitled "Les échos de L'Écho: L'héritage du journal des canuts,"¹² analyzes the trajectory of the silk worker press in Lyon from 1834 to 1870. He demonstrates that the legacy of *L'Écho de la fabrique* is both vast and profound—many of

⁷ Translation of the title: The Canuts, or, a Disruptive Democracy.

⁸ French equivalent of "workers' press." This expression refers to the newspapers that the *canuts* wrote and published in Lyon.

⁹ Ludovic Frobert, *Les canuts, ou, la démocratie turbulente* (Paris: Édition Tallandier, 2009), 20.

¹⁰ Frobert, *Les canuts*, 23.

¹¹ Translation of Title: L'Écho de la Fabrique: Birth of the Worker's Press in Lyon.

¹² Translation of Title: Echoes of L'Écho: the Heritage of the Newspaper of the Canuts.

the newspapers that followed were its “echoes.”¹³ At the same time, however, each newspaper had its own distinct identity.

Sheridan presents useful characteristics of *L'Écho de l'Industrie*, the paper that I have analyzed. First, he argues that it tackled a wider genre of topics than *L'Écho de la fabrique*.¹⁴ Like its predecessor, it was a politically and socially engaged paper. The authors, then, enlarged the scope of their commentary and debates. Second, the paper had a distinct Fourierist identity.¹⁵ Stemming from the philosophy of Charles Fourier, Fourierism “advocated the transformation of society into self-sufficient, independent ‘phalanges’ (phalanxes).”¹⁶ Given that the *canuts* were workers, it is easy to see their interest in Fourierism, a mode of socialist-utopian thought that privileged the working class. Finally, Sheridan points out that unlike *L'Écho de la fabrique*, *L'Écho de l'Industrie* was published in the Croix Rousse, the neighborhood where the majority of the *canuts* both worked and lived.¹⁷

The research of Frobert and Sheridan, as well other scholars, provide the backdrop of my own analysis concerning the *canuts*. It is incontestable that the lasting identity of these workers, at least the one that has entered the historical record through the *presse ouvrière*, is greatly political. However, neither scholar contends with how the *canuts* viewed one of the most significant political developments of the time: the colonization of Algeria.

* * *

¹³ George Sheridan, “Les échos de L'Écho: L'héritage du journal des canuts,” in *L'Écho de la fabrique: Naissance de la presse ouvrière à Lyon*, ed. Ludovic Frobert (Lyon: ENS Éditions, 2010), 214.

¹⁴ Sheridan, “Les échos de l'Écho,” 225.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. “Charles Fourier,” last modified April 3, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Charles-Fourier>.

¹⁷ Sheridan, 226.

When Truquin arrived in Lyon, he had just recently been living somewhere entirely different—the French colony in Algeria.

The existence of this colony was only made possible through violent military conquest. On June 14th, 1830, France invaded Algeria. This event marked the beginning of a bloody colonial war that culminated in the official annexation of Algerian territory into France in 1848. Algeria would not regain its independence for over a century.

As one of the most extensive and contentious topics in modern French history, the colonization of Algeria has garnered significant scholarly attention. For the purposes of my thesis, the scope is largely limited to the phase of colonization between 1830 and 1848.

A handful of scholars have written on the relationship between the early stages of colonization and the domestic front in France. One of the most relevant essays on the subject is Jennifer E. Sessions' "Colonizing Revolutionary Politics: Algeria and the French Revolution of 1848." While other scholars have made compelling arguments that the politics of revolutionary France impacted the colonial front, Sessions sees this relationship as reciprocal. She argues that the revolutionary events that took place in France in 1848 were likewise affected by the colonial warfare simultaneously occurring in Algeria.

Sessions' argument is two-fold. First, she demonstrates that "rhetorical figures of 'barbarism' and 'savagery' rooted in the colonial warfare of the 1830s and 1840s offered both radicals and conservatives a means to contest the legitimacy of domestic political violence."¹⁸ Colonial violence gave both groups a new framework of meaning, through which they could both justify their respective ideological positions and villainize the other. At the same time, French political officials and intellectuals began to identify the potential for the Algerian

¹⁸ Jennifer Sessions, "Colonizing Revolutionary Politics: Algeria and the French Revolution of 1848," *French Politics, Culture & Society* 33, no. 1 (2015): 76.

colonies to provide solutions to domestic concerns, particularly as an “outlet for unemployed French workers.”¹⁹ This would ultimately result in a large-scale, agricultural-colonization project in Algeria, enticing workers like Truquin and his family.

Other scholarship expands on this second point further. David Todd’s essay on the French Imperial Meridian includes Algeria in its broader analysis. Todd identifies the opportunity for the commercial exploitation of Algerian soil as an incentive for colonization.²⁰ He likewise outlines the shift in the sourcing of a potential labor force. Originally, the Indigenous population of Algeria was viewed by French politicians and intellectuals as an ideal, “free” workforce. However, following the second abolition of slavery, this idea changed. Politicians and thinkers turned their attention to domestic workers, encouraging emigration to the colonies “with the twin objectives of reducing metropolitan unemployment and promoting a new kind of colonial development based on white labour.”²¹

Yvette Katan’s essay, “Les colons de 1848 en Algérie: mythes et réalités,”²² attempts to paint a profile of who exactly these colonists were, engaging in a debate on the subject. There is a long-standing idea, albeit a myth, that the French government deported socialists and revolutionary prisoners to Algeria following the repression of the 1848 revolution. Katan debunks this, putting forth a compelling argument that these colonists were largely workers who emigrated to Algeria voluntarily under the premise of open, cultivable land that would provide legitimate opportunities to establish new livelihoods.²³

¹⁹ Sessions, “Colonizing Revolutionary Politics,” 76-77.

²⁰ David Todd, “A French Imperial Meridian,” *Past & Present*, no. 210 (2011): 170.

²¹ Todd, “French Imperial Meridian,” 174.

²² Translation of Title: The colonists of 1848 in Algeria: myths and realities.

²³ Yvette Katan, “Les colons de 1848 en Algérie: mythes et réalités” *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine* 31, no. 2 (1984): 184.

The *canuts* largely fit this profile. They were workers, ones who wanted better working conditions, so much so that they staged three bloody insurrections. They cared deeply about their industry, as it was the backbone of their lives. Further, at least by the mid 1840's many of them were followers of Fourierism. This very philosophy aligned with the utopian visions of agricultural colonies in Algeria.

At least some members of the French public had envisioned a place for silk work in Algeria. A manifesto put forth by *L'Union agricole d'Afrique*, a Lyonnais organization, in 1846 identified silk production to be among the several industries that could thrive in their proposed vision of colonization.²⁴ Some silk workers likely did migrate to Algeria. Among them is Truquin, though he did not become a *canut* until after his return to mainland France. His book *Memoires et aventures d'un prolétaire*,²⁵ illustrates the disillusionment that many colonists experienced once they realized that they had been enticed by a lie.²⁶ Both of these texts speak more largely to the fascinating intersection between the *canuts* and these early stages of colonization.

The invasion of Algeria occurred just before the printing of the first issue of *L'Écho de la fabrique* and the first insurrection of the *canuts*. At the time of *L'Écho de l'Industrie* (1845-1846), the early stages of colonization were well underway. Merely years later in 1848, France annexed Algeria. Thus, the publications of *L'Écho de l'Industrie* were on the doorstep of this momentous year that would forever shape the courses of French and Algerian history, identity,

²⁴ *L'Union agricole d'Afrique: Nouveau système de colonisation de L'Algérie* (Lyon: Imprimerie de Léon Boitel, 1846), 85.

²⁵ Translation of title: Memories and Adventures of a Proletariat.

²⁶ Norbert Truquin, *Mémoires et aventures d'un prolétaire à travers la révolution* (Paris: Librairie François Maspero, 1977), 90-9.

and politics. How the *canuts* viewed and engaged with the colonization of Algeria therefore merits interrogation.

Within the pages of *L'Écho de l'Industrie* are multiple pieces of commentary on the colonization of Algeria. At times, it is as simple as giving the reader a brief update, largely sourced from telegrams or *L'Écho de l'Oran*, a french-colonial newspaper based in Algeria, about the status of military operations. Other times, the authors engage significantly with the colonization of Algeria within the context of larger economic and political discussions, giving their own thoughts on how colonization should proceed. Further, they were familiar with other proposals regarding Algeria, including that of *L'Union agricole d'Afrique*.²⁷ Through all of the examples, the *canut* authors of *L'Écho de l'Industrie* demonstrate their support for the colonization of Algeria.

This thesis aims to answer why the *canuts* were so interested in the colonization of Algeria, and to explain how this interest fits into their legacy that the existing historiography has charted. The *canuts*, as an economically disadvantaged yet intellectual group, were actively searching for solutions that would bring equity to their industry and better their lives. Algeria provided an interesting opportunity to apply the economic strategies for which they advocated within their own industry. Moreover, individuals across France were beginning to frame colonization as a solution to domestic problems, which we will see occur within the pages of *L'Écho de l'Industrie* as well.

However, the *canuts'* defense of other, subjugated peoples further complicates their support of the colonization of Algeria. To the East, Polish people were fighting for sovereignty, their nation having been partitioned. The *canuts* were deeply sympathetic to this cause. To a

²⁷ "Afrique Française," *L'Écho de l'Industrie*, March 14, 1846, 3.

contemporary eye, this appears hypocritical; they supported the Polish in their fight against an oppression like the one the French were forcing onto Algerians. How could they defend Poland's right to nationhood and support the colonization of Algeria at the same time? Many might be compelled to explain this tension by pointing to racism. Surely, given the time period, racist ideology against North Africans played its part. However, it would be a mistake to leave the explanation at that. A closer analysis of the *canuts'* textual support of Poland reveals that they conceptualized these two groups, Poles and Algerians, differently. The authors' support for the Polish insurrection was an extension of their own revolutionary identity, both as French people and as *canuts*. Their interest in the colonization of Algeria was wrapped up in their solution-oriented character, particularly regarding their imagined re-organization of their own industry. Though they projected domestic circumstances onto both peoples, one projection was rooted in the past, the other in the future. When it came down to it, the *canuts* were willing to accept bloody colonial warfare if it would benefit them long-term.

The first section of this thesis traces the origins of *L'Écho de l'Industrie*, examining and explaining its key characteristics. The section also elaborates on the political character of the *canuts* based on the work of other historians, which sets the foundation for the remainder of the thesis. It introduces a keyword, "association," understood by them as the "organization of labor," that shapes the *canuts'* economic philosophy.²⁸ The second section examines the reporting on Algeria in the *Afrique Française* column, demonstrating how although the *canuts* were able to humanize Algerians and did not always agree with tactics of military conquest, they supported the colonization of Algeria. The third section examines their simultaneous defense for the cultural sovereignty of Polish people, interrogating how this position could coexist with their

²⁸ "La Croix Rousse," *L'Écho de l'Industrie*, October 13, 1845, 1.

support for the colonization of Algeria. I will demonstrate that the *canuts*' support for Poland was informed by their own revolutionary past. In the final section, I begin by showing that the *canuts*' interest in the colonization of Algeria was motivated less by ideology, and more by practical economic concerns. This is in line with their worker-identities and their solution-oriented approach to their own industry. The section then explores the idea of colonization itself as a solution, both within *L'Écho de l'Industrie* and in French government and society at large. Using Truquin's memoir, I will illustrate the challenges colonists faced in Algeria, and how the reality differed greatly from the rosy picture the government had painted of colonization. I end the thesis by re-grounding the *canuts*' support in the colonization of Algeria in their otherwise established character, demonstrating that colonization aligned with their tendency to search for solutions, and presented a new theoretical space for them to envision an optimal organization of labor.

Methods

Historical Method

As a history thesis, my research closely follows the historical method. Historical research relies heavily on the analysis of primary sources, calling in secondary sources, or the pre-existing literature on the topic, to situate the argument in a larger conversation. Working with primary sources looks different depending on the material in question, but researchers must always consider the full context of the source, not just its content. At the core, this includes considering the position of the author or creator, its intended purpose, and who it was meant to be read, seen, or used by. In other words, primary sources act as living vessels of their time periods and should not be treated as stand-alone objects.

My research derives from a collection of newspapers published in 1845 and 1846, called *L'Écho de l'Industrie*. Newspapers are not considered to be primary sources by default; whether newspaper-based research classifies as primary source research depends entirely on how the material is approached and analyzed. I use *L'Écho de l'Industrie* to understand the culture of mid 19th century Lyon from the lens of silk-workers. I refer to culture in the sense of the features, beliefs, and behaviors characteristic to a given group of people at a given place and time.²⁹ Specifically, I am interested in the authors' perspective on the colonization of Algeria within the context of this culture and the context of their identities.

In order to form my argument, I closely analyzed several aspects of the newspapers. This included the content itself, and the specific language employed within the articles, but also elements like the visual layout of the pages and the range of topics covered. In analyzing

²⁹ My definition is closest to the following definition of culture from Merriam Webster: "the characteristic features of everyday existence (such as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a place or time."

language, I often relied on close reading, a common literary analysis technique that dissects a text word-by-word to uncover its underlying meaning. I took note of direct quotes that interested me, but also of patterns. I wrote down words or ideas that were repeated to trace thematic threads throughout the many issues of the newspaper.

Historical research must also consider that individual sources or artifacts are not comprehensive representations of the time period on their own. Written texts, such as *L'Écho de l'Industrie*, often have a particular agenda. The authors of *L'Écho de l'Industrie* had a key objective within the text: to make their voices heard, and to spotlight the issues that they cared about deeply. Therefore, I asked myself questions throughout the research process, such as, did the authors seem to prioritize some topics rather than others? What does the visual layout of the page, and the space allotted to each column, reveal about their priorities? Interrogating a text like this harkens back to the principle in historical research of thinking critically about the full context of a source.

As mentioned, the historical method also involves secondary research. In my case, I was primarily interested in the broader literature of Lyon's *presse ouvrière*, as well as the literature on the early stages of the colonization of Algeria. For the latter, I was especially interested in sources that also analyzed reactions to colonization, or the relationship between the colonies and mainland France. My investigation was a consistent back and forth between primary and secondary research. Whenever I found something interesting in a primary source, I would confer with the broader literature to deepen, shape, or redirect my analysis. Similarly, engaging in secondary research sometimes challenged or complicated my perspective of the primary sources, adding a dimension of nuance to my understanding.

Note on Bias

My approach looked much like other humanities research in the sense that I did not know exactly what I was looking for. Rather, I let the material guide me. Even when I came across the first mention of French Algeria, I did not anticipate that it would become the primary focus of this thesis. It was only after digging through several publications that this particular story began to take shape.

My own bias as a researcher also played a notable role in shaping this story. Historians are taught to embrace subjectivity—it's what leads to rich and unique research. Ten different students could have read these same fifty-three newspapers and written ten completely different theses. French Algeria is not the only story to tell, or even necessarily the story the worthiest of telling. However, it is the story that I chose to tell.

As a 21st-century researcher exploring the subject of colonization in a 19th century context, there are more than one hundred and seventy years standing between me and the research material. Extremely significant events in world history have occurred since then, including further examples of colonization—and examples of decolonization—across the globe. Therefore, I bring bias, that being my contemporary understanding of colonization and its long-lasting effects, to this research. That is exactly what can make this story compelling to contemporary audiences, particularly those who are non-historians.

The influence of bias and personal interpretation is even more prominent considering that I conducted all of my primary research in French, my second language. This presents two important considerations. Firstly, I am not a native speaker. Even though I have studied the French language for several years, I will never be able to master all its subtleties. This means that my interpretation of the sources is inherently slightly limited. That is not to say that my second

language competencies do not allow me to successfully conduct research in French, but it should be noted that a native speaker may have caught onto more complicated nuances in the texts.

At the same time, being non-French might give me a certain advantage when it comes to this topic. The colonization of Algeria is a topic charged with shame, as well as other complicated emotions for many French people. These emotions present a different bias. My lens through which I conducted this research was not obstructed by a personal, familial, or even national connection to this colonial legacy.

Secondly, since my thesis is in English, I was naturally required to translate from French each time I refer to the content of the newspapers, whether this be direct quotations or even a paraphrased section. The same can be said for several secondary sources, also written in French. This means that the credibility of my entire argument depends on translation methodology. Thus, I find it important to make those methods clear and explicit.

Translation Methodology

In the practice of translation, there is a wide spectrum of how close translations are to the original text (source text or ST). The translation, which we call the target text (TT), can be as literal as translating word-for-word, which often means abandoning grammatical rules of the language of the new text (target language, or TL). Translations can also be as free as reconstructing the text entirely while keeping the same overall idea. In any case, the style of translation used must be intentional, following a thoughtful consideration of the purpose of the source text, and the effects of its linguistic features.

In the case of this thesis, I have chosen to keep my translations close to the source text, without sacrificing comprehensibility in English. Considering that I quote the sources that formed my argument, often primary sources, I want to reflect their meaning and structures as

much as possible. Staying loyal to the original text limits the possibility that I, as the translator, may accidentally misrepresent the nuances and tone of the text. The more freedom the translator gives themselves, the more likely they are to unintentionally change the meaning. My citations are not the most literal of translations, as I have adapted them to English grammar. However, I kept them as close to the ST as possible.

Understanding The *Canuts*: *L'Écho de l'Industrie* and Its Origins

The commentary of the *canuts* on French Algeria in *L'Écho de l'Industrie*, as well as the paper itself, existed in a larger social and political context. To fully grasp their position on French Algeria, it's important to understand who they were and what they primarily fought for. Reading sections of the newspapers that did not concern Algeria in order to analyze their principal concerns, philosophies, and social arguments, is very useful. Before we can paint this particular picture of their political character, we need to understand the significance of the papers themselves, and the context around them. This section serves to situate *L'Écho de l'Industrie* into a broader narrative. It will include a brief dive into *L'Écho de la fabrique*, the predecessor to *L'Écho de l'Industrie*, and the canut revolts of the mid 19th century, events which give historians key details about who the *canuts* were, and why they wrote. Finally, this section will discuss important characteristics of *L'Écho de l'Industrie*, before transitioning into a brief overview of the content of the newspaper itself.

Violence and Peace: How the Canuts Addressed Their Grievances

The first newspaper of Lyon's *presse ouvrière* was *L'Écho de la fabrique*. Published between 1831 and 1834, it gave the *canuts* a weekly outlet for political expression. It was not only the first worker-based newspaper of the *canuts* in Lyon, but one of the very first in all of France.³⁰ Historian Ludovic Frobert has characterized *L'Écho de la fabrique* as an earnest experiment of democracy within the sphere of the silk industry. A broad range of actors made their own contributions to the pages of *L'Écho de la fabrique*. These included silk workers

³⁰ Frobert, *Les Canuts*, 23. Frobert explains that the first worker newspaper appeared in Paris immediately following *Les Trois Glorieuses*, but *L'Écho de la fabrique* was the first of the kind to be long lasting.

themselves, but also “negociants, *chefs d’ateliers*, politicians, and scholars.”³¹ Thus, the *canuts* did not just amplify their voices and opinions, but also opened space for debates on key issues within the industry. It was an attempt to find a solution, to “adapt the complex regime of the lyonnais silk industry to the ongoing industrial evolution, in order to preserve their autonomy and liberty.”³²

At the same time, the *canuts* would take a very different approach to expressing their grievances and fighting for their rights as workers. In 1831, armed *canuts* descended on the *Croix Rousse* waving a flag inscribed “Vivre en travaillant ou mourir en combattant,” or “Live working or die fighting.” Less than three years later, they engaged in a second, bloodier insurrection. Although the *canuts* did not obtain what they fought for, better prices for their creations, the revolts nevertheless hold significant historical weight. According to Frobert, “the insurrections of Lyon have long been considered as the first violent conflagrations between capital and labor.”³³ Prominent figures such as Marx and Engels regarded the *canuts* as “the first Spartakists³⁴ of the new capitalist era.”³⁵

Thus, when it comes to creating a profile of the *canuts*, these revolts represent their most defining characteristics. Like Marx and Engels, many historians view this group of workers as pioneers of more recent labor rights movements, paving the way for others to follow: “they drew a first diagram, imperfect and imprecise, of a class of workers who would incessantly fight for, by force since it was necessary, their place and their rights.”³⁶ The pages of *L’Écho de la*

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Frobert, 11.

³⁴ The word Spartakist refers to Spartacus, who led a slave uprising against the Roman Empire in 73 BC. In modern times, Spartacus has been mythologized and admired by many, including Marx, and is the namesake of the Spartakist League.

³⁵ Frobert, 12.

³⁶ Ibid.

fabrique affirm this narrative, illustrating the full scope of this combat. Throughout the editions of the newspaper, the *canuts* advocate for a reorganization of the political economy that controls their livelihoods.

However, one question that emerges is how representative is this image of the average *canut*? Is it realistic to imagine that everyone in the Lyonnais working class was politically and intellectually engaged? Historian Fernand Rude has put forth the idea that the *canuts* were an intellectual elite among the working class, distinguished “by their culture, by their vigor, the elevation of their spirit, by their artistic taste, by their high idea of personal dignity, by their sense of just, social demands, by their conception of worker honor.”³⁷ This interpretation is supported by both the *canut* revolts and the *presse ouvrière*. The revolts alone demonstrate a high degree of political engagement and “a real capacity for collective action,” while the newspapers demonstrate their intellectual refinement and curiosity.

Given that silk work itself demanded a certain degree of intelligence, it is logical that the *canuts* considered themselves a working-class elite. It was a complex craft, demanding that the workers follow detailed written instructions to correctly complete the patterns, and therefore, literacy.

Yet, are the *canut* newspapers the best place to collect evidence on the social, political, and intellectual atmosphere of the *canuts* as a collective? Historians have documented that it was largely the *chefs d’atelier*³⁸ who spearheaded and authored *L’Écho de la fabrique*. Compared to the *canuts* whom they employed, *chefs-d’atelier* did have a slightly elevated status. Still, despite owning their workshops and being “employers on a small scale,” they were considered *canuts*

³⁷ Fernand Rude, *L’insurrection lyonnaise de 183: le mouvement ouvrier à Lyon de 1827-1832*, (Paris: Éditions Anthropos, 1969), 733.

³⁸ Atelier means workshop, and chef means leader. The term *chef d’atelier* refers to a workshop manager.

and viewed as laborers.³⁹ Even if those publishing and writing the newspapers were indeed, for the most part, *chefs d'atelier*, their audience was made of other *canuts*. This means that the *canuts* as a group would have been interested in discussions and debates undertaken in *L'Écho de la fabrique* and beyond. Successful newspapers cater to their readership. One could imagine that the authors of the *L'Écho de la fabrique* and *L'Écho de l'Industrie* did the same.

Additionally, scholars who study the *canuts* maintain that their worker newspapers are the best place to understand their social, political, and economic character. According to Frobert, the birth of the worker newspaper gave way to “certainly the newest, most revolutionary means of speaking out.”⁴⁰ Thus, *L'Écho de la fabrique* and its successors contain “the major part of *canut* expression from the period.”⁴¹ Therefore, in the following sections of this thesis when I refer to the *canuts*, their political and social stances, and their support for the colonization of Algeria, I do refer specifically to those who authored *L'Écho de l'Industrie*. However, I also operate under the assumption that the content of the newspapers is an overall, reasonable reflection of the general moral and intellectual atmosphere in the *Croix Rousse* at the time.

For its part, *L'Écho de l'Industrie*, published the following decade, also contributed significantly to this body of *canut* expression. Although it largely followed the blueprint of *L'Écho de la fabrique*, it was also its own distinct paper. The rest of this section will discuss the defining features and content of *L'Écho de l'Industrie* in broad, brief strokes.

³⁹ Jeremy Popkin, “Marius Chastaing et la presse ouvrière à Lyon,” in *L'Écho de la fabrique: Naissance de la presse ouvrière à Lyon*, ed. Ludovic Frobert (Lyon: ENS Éditions, 2010), 29.

⁴⁰ Frobert, *Les Canuts*, 24.

⁴¹ Frobert, 25.

L'Écho de l'Industrie

Directed by *chef d'atelier* Joseph Reynier with editor in chief Eugène Fabvier, *L'Écho de l'Industrie* was steeped in *canut* identity. Sheridan points to the fact that this newspaper was published in the *Croix Rousse*, the neighborhood where the majority of the *canuts* worked and lived.⁴² Its geography is reflective of its mission to “serve the professional interests of its *canut* readership.”⁴³ To do that, it took on a larger scope of discussions and debates than its predecessor, *L'Écho de la fabrique*, though the authors' principle concern remained the silk industry, and the livelihoods of the *canuts*.⁴⁴

L'Écho de l'Industrie also reflected the *canuts*' shift towards a Fourierist identity. Fourierism is a social-reform ideology named for its founder, Charles Fourier. The philosophy advocated for the “reconstruction of society based on communal associations of producers known as phalanges.”⁴⁵ The phalanges were agricultural communities that Fourier imagined “would distribute wealth more equitably than under capitalism and that they could be introduced into any political system, including a monarchy.”⁴⁶

The name Charles Fourier first appeared in *L'Écho de la fabrique* in August, 1832. Originally, the authors of *L'Écho de la fabrique* engaged in the political ideology of Saint-Simon. Like Fourierism, *Saint-Simonien* thought was centered on the reorganization of labor through different associations, an attractive prospect for the *canuts* who sought reform in their industry.⁴⁷ However, this philosophy did not attribute a concrete definition to the association

⁴² Sheridan, “Les échos de *L'Écho*,” 226.

⁴³ Sheridan, 222.

⁴⁴ “La Croix Rousse,” *L'Écho de l'Industrie*, October 13, 1845, 1.

⁴⁵ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. “Charles Fourier,” last modified April 3, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Charles-Fourier>.

⁴⁶ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. “Charles Fourier.”

⁴⁷ Jonathan Beecher, “Le fouriérisme des canuts,” in *L'Écho de la fabrique: Naissance de la presse ouvrière à Lyon*, ed. Ludovic Frobert (Lyon: ENS Éditions, 2010), 121.

model.⁴⁸ The authors began to engage more explicitly with Fourierism, dedicating numerous articles to the subject before *L'Écho de la fabrique* was circulated for the last time in 1834.⁴⁹

Fourierism, particularly its model of association, would come to be one of the driving forces behind the more optimal political economy imagined by the *canuts* through the pages of *L'Écho de l'Industrie*. The authors often referred to association with the phrase “Organisation du Travail” or “Organization of Labor.”⁵⁰ In the first edition of *L'Écho de l'Industrie*, it was this exact theme that was identified as “the great question,” for which they would “fight relentlessly”:

We have said it, and we will repeat it again and again, that the interests of all are intimately linked; to put an end to the causes that have separated them, to unite all these efforts by means of an equitable distribution of profits, to group all the industries around a common focus, to grasp all these scattered elements, and to classify them by giving each their place and their functions, is in a few words, to put an end to the problem; it is, finally, to ORGANIZE LABOR.⁵¹

The *canuts* sought to apply the principle of association, as it was conceived by the school of Fourierism, to their own industry, and beyond. In their vision, this organization would “put an end to the problem,” by liberating the working class, and thus, other classes. When the editor in chief Eugène Fabvier wrote that “the interests of all are intimately linked,” he referred to the fact that when workers suffer, capital also suffers. Accordingly, when conditions are optimal for workers, they are optimal for all.

This is a strong ideological opening to the many issues of *L'Écho de l'Industrie* that follow. Immediately it re-establishes the collaborative, solution-oriented approach that had previously characterized *L'Écho de la fabrique*. In fact, many of the other topics examined in

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Beecher, “fouriérisme des canuts,” 122-127.

⁵⁰ Sheridan, 225.

⁵¹ “La Croix Rousse,” *L'Écho de l'Industrie*, October 13, 1845, 1.

L'Écho de l'Industrie align well with the spirit of mutual interest towards social and economic progress. Whether it be summaries of labor court sessions, discussions about foreign alliance, or the impact of new railways on the silk industry, the content of *L'Écho de l'Industrie* is cohesive, and consistent with the existing historical understanding of the *canuts*.

However, there is one topic that does not seem to fit so neatly into this narrative: the colonization of Algeria.

French Algeria in *L'Écho de l'Industrie*

Approximately 1,800 kilometers away from any military action, the *canuts* dedicated a column to the conquest of Algeria that appeared in many issues of *L'Écho de l'Industrie*. Most commonly, the *Afrique Française* column contained brief summaries of military operations, or other “on the ground” news. These pieces of information were sometimes presented as excerpts from telegrams, or otherwise taken from *L'Écho de L'Oran*, a French-colonial newspaper in Algeria. Sometimes, this reporting would be as simple as saying “there is no important news.”⁵² The consistent presence of this column in *L'Écho de l'Industrie*, even when there were no significant updates to report, demonstrates that the authors were committed to informing their *canut* readership on the colonial war in Algeria.

Brief History of Colonization of Algeria

As we transition into discussing the authors’ commentary on Algeria, it is imperative to first give a brief history of its colonization. France invaded Algeria in June of 1830, a decision entrenched in a tumultuous domestic political scene. On the doorstep of the July Revolution, the Algerian invasion was an attempt to sway public support for Bourbon leadership, Charles X chief among them. The attempt to manipulate public opinion failed, but the invasion was successful. The French would remain in Algeria for over a decade.⁵³

The French army entered a culturally diverse landscape. The large Arab presence that they would encounter in Algeria was a product of the Islamic conquest of North Africa in the later part of the 7th century. Algeria’s Indigenous population was composed of different Berber

⁵² “Afrique Française,” *L'Écho de l'Industrie*, November 15, 1845, 3.

⁵³ Jennifer E Sessions, *By Sword and Plow: France and the Conquest of Algeria* (New York and London: Cornell University Press, 2011), 1.

groups, predominantly the Kaybles.⁵⁴ After the Arab invasion, many converted to Islam, and adopted different aspects of Islamic culture. By the 16th century, Algeria was officially under Ottoman rule, though local leaders retained much independence while recognizing the Ottoman's religious authority. This also brought a different ethnic dimension to Algeria. A group known as the Koulougis, people of mixed Turkish and Algerian ancestry, developed a stronghold in Algerian politics. Their presence was unpopular among many Algerian Arabs and Berbers, creating a division which was paramount to the success of the French invasion.⁵⁵

Beginning with the seizure of Algiers in 1830, France's conquest of the rest of the territory was a brutal war of colonization. Some of their tactics included *razzias*, in which they plundered villages, and *enfumades*, in which they smoked civilians to death in caves.⁵⁶ Such a military conquest did not happen without resistance. The French would largely come to fight against Abd al-Qadir (often spelled Abd-El-Kader in *L'Écho de l'Industrie*), a religious and political leader who organized a modern Algerian state in opposition to the French. He would prove to be an elusive enemy for several years, before eventually surrendering to the French in December 1847.⁵⁷

In 1848, Algeria was annexed, becoming an official part of France, which it would remain until Algerians won independence in 1962. The publications of *L'Écho de l'Industrie* in 1845 and 1846 coincided with the very early stages of colonization, just predating the official

⁵⁴ Sometimes, French colonial sources seemed to rightly distinguish between Arab and Indigenous groups, while other times they seemed to conflate the two.

⁵⁵ Michael Brett et al., "North Africa: From the Arab Conquest to 1830," in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, last updated March 23, 2025, [North Africa - Arab Conquest, Colonization, Decolonization | Britannica](#); Marcel Emerit, "Abdelkader," in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, accessed April 3, 2025, [Abdelkader | Algerian Resistance Leader & Religious Reformer | Britannica](#).

⁵⁶ Sessions, "Colonizing Revolutionary Politics," 77.

⁵⁷ Emerit, "Abdelkader."

annexation. Thus, the publications were on the doorstep of an important historical moment in the trajectory of French Algeria.

Algeria as Discussed in L'Écho de l'Industrie

The *canuts* were far from the only members of the French public who reacted to the colonization of Algeria. Notably, Jennifer E. Sessions explains how the colonial conquest of Algeria gave French citizens on both sides of the 1848 French Revolution a new framework to describe and intellectualize their situation. Many members of the French Army who suppressed the 1848 Revolution had previously fought in Algeria. According to Sessions, in 1848, “the army’s most experienced units were veterans of the Algerian war, and officers who had made (or re-made) their careers in North Africa populated its top echelons.”⁵⁸ Notable among them were Thomas-Robert Bugeaud, the former governor general of Algeria, and General Eugène Cavaignac. The violent suppression of the uprising at the hands of the same men who had fought in Algeria led some revolutionaries and sympathizers to empathize with Indigenous Algerians. They “invoked earlier condemnations of the French army’s conduct in North Africa as ‘barbaric.’”⁵⁹ In their view, members of the French army like Cavaignac were “bringing the uncivilized methods of colonial warfare to the very heart of modern civilization,” likening “Parisian insurgents to indigenous Algerians as victims of that same violence.”⁶⁰ In the context of the suppression of the 1848 Revolution, the insurgents used colonial violence and Algerian victimhood as a frame of reference for their own treatment by the French Army.

For their part, those on the other side of the Revolution used ideas of civilization and barbarism to condemn the Paris insurgents. Such notions had been significantly developed

⁵⁸ Sessions, “Colonizing Revolutionary Politics,” 77.

⁵⁹ Sessions, “Colonizing Revolutionary Politics,” 81.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

through the military conquest of North Africa and colonial warfare in Algeria. For a while, North Africans held an “intermediate status” of being neither civilized or purely savage.⁶¹ But after the invasion of 1830, new ideas about the inhumanity of Algerians came into play, eventually establishing “Algeria’s Muslim Arab population as the ultimate ‘barbarian’ Other to the ‘civilized’ French Self.”⁶² Using labels like “barbaric” and “savage” implicitly connected the insurgents to Algerians, even if explicit comparisons were made less often. According to Sessions, “proponents of order assigned stereotypes of Muslim Algerian “barbarism” to Parisian radicals, whom they deemed in need of the same violent mastery required by the colonial civilizing mission in Algeria.”⁶³ The fact that both sides used the war in Algeria to criticize the actions of the other, or to justify their own, demonstrates the extent to which the colonial war in Algeria became connected to domestic contexts.

Given the presence of Algeria in the Parisian political imagination in the mid-19th century, it is not entirely surprising that the *canuts* in Lyon followed the colonial war there. At the same time, there were many similarities between the *canuts* and the Paris revolutionaries. Considering that the *canuts* themselves staged several violent uprisings, and that they were workers like many of the insurgents to the North, it is interesting to compare their view of Algerians to those of the Parisian revolutionaries. They, in fact, did not *explicitly* express the same empathy as their counterparts in the North. Their view on French Algeria and Algerians specifically is less simple to categorize. On the one hand, they supported the war of colonial conquest that subjugated Algerians to violence, and eventually, political domination. At the same

⁶¹ Sessions, “Colonizing Revolutionary Politics,” 85. Europeans were in awe of ancient civilizations of Asia, while viewing indigenous Americans as utterly “savage.” On the spectrum of the “other,” North Africans were somewhere in between.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Sessions, “Colonizing Revolutionary Politics,” 81.

time, they did not blindly support the French military. They expressed a degree of understanding of the Algerian resistance, and extended some humanity to their military enemies, despite condoning the overall military conquest of their homeland.

There is no evidence suggesting that the *caunts* felt any sense of solidarity with Algerians. When discussing the war of colonization, the authors of *L'Écho de l'Industrie* clearly sided with the French military, conceptualizing their victories as their own, and conversely, their losses as their own. In their third issue of *L'Écho de l'Industrie*, they report “the news from our colonies in Algeria have become more reassuring.”⁶⁴ Referencing this emerging success, the authors speak fondly of the French soldiers: “Our soldiers will take their revenge; they accomplished the most painful part of this perilous alert, and in these fatal circumstances, they showed a courage, a greatness of soul beyond all praise; the campaign will open up more brilliantly for them, and will provide them with the opportunity to reap, as always, an ample harvest of laurels.”⁶⁵ This passage makes the *canuts*’ support for the military conquest of Algeria clear. The language employed is highly respectful and complimentary, particularly the phrase “a greatness of soul beyond all praise.” A sense of pride appears to underlie this quote, cementing the authors’ position in solidarity with the French soldiers on the ground in Algeria. Further, when the authors write “our soldiers will take their revenge,” it is understood that this revenge will be direct military action against Algerians. Thus, unlike the Paris insurgents three years later, the authors’ support clearly lies with members of the French army, to the point of condoning violence against Algerians.

⁶⁴ “Afrique Française,” *L'Écho de l'Industrie*, November 1, 1845, 3. Subsequent paragraphs will give more context for the news that had been distressing before.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Indeed, the circumstances before this uplifting report were much more grim for the French. In their first mention of the military conquest of Algeria, the *canuts* bring “sad news” to their readers from the colonial war front, recounting that four hundred and thirty eight French soldiers out of a column of four hundred and fifty had been killed by the Kabyle “enemy.”⁶⁶ They expand by stating that the news coming out of Algeria in general has been rather “distressing.”⁶⁷ The use of the words sad and distressing seem to mean two different things. First and foremost, with the word ‘sad,’ the *canuts* lament the deaths of French soldiers. At the same time, with ‘distressing,’ they also express that more broadly, things were not going well for the French military. Again, the tone of this passage and the language employed expresses a sense of solidarity with the French army and support for the military conquest of Algeria.

However, this does not mean that they agreed with the strategies and tactics employed by the French military, nor did their overall support for the colonial war keep the *canuts* from humanizing Algerians. Ultimately, the authors are able to rationalize *why* this stage of the war did not fall in France’s favor, leading them to a larger critique of the military. One possible explanation they noted was that it was the month of Ramadan, which they claimed could have given their enemy the advantage “to preach holy war.”⁶⁸ Whether or not this theory had any merit is another question, but it nonetheless shows an attempt to consider the larger cultural circumstances surrounding the war.

More compellingly, they referred to “the memory of the affair of the Grottes⁶⁹ de Dahia.” In this particular incident, “an entire tribe perished a horrible death.”⁷⁰ According to the

⁶⁶ “Afrique Française,” *L’Écho de l’Industrie*, October 13, 1845, 3.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ The word “Grotte” refers to a cave.

⁷⁰ “Afrique Française,” *L’Écho de l’Industrie*, October 13, 1845, 3.

authors, such a dreadful massacre “must have aroused terrible resentments, the disastrous consequences of which [the French] may soon have to deplore.”⁷¹ This massacre was likely the *enfumade* of Dahra, which was executed by the French military in June of 1845, four months before the publishing of *L'Écho de l'Industrie*. As many as 1200 Algerians, many of them women and children, were asphyxiated to death. They had likely been taking refuge in the cave at the onslaught of French military action against them. According to some accounts, Governor General Bugeaud instructed his men to light fires at the entrances to deprive the civilians of all oxygen, inevitably killing them.⁷²

The *canuts* were not alone in their recognition of the brutality of this event. Across Europe, members of the public and press rose up in indignation upon learning of the massacre.⁷³ In this particular mention, the authors do not linger on it, or even outright condemn the French military, although that is the implication. Still, they see it as a key piece of context for Algerian violence against French soldiers. This ultimately demonstrates that the authors are able to see things, at least somewhat, from an Algerian perspective to understand the cause of their actions.

The *canuts* end this section by outright disagreeing with the current military strategy of colonization. They report that the Minister of War had decided to send eight new regiments to Algeria, to “pursue Abd-El-Kader in Morocco, if he finds asylum there.” They ask why the French military continues to chase “our untirable enemy,” particularly in a place where he could find refuge, arguing that the French should have seized their advantage during the Battle of Isly and defeated him then. Finally, they write, “when will we choose to organize our colony by means of a wise administration, instead of furrowing it with ruin, and governing it only by

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Wikipedia s.v., “Enfumades d'Algérie,” last modified March 24, 2025, 14:27, [Enfumades d'Algérie — Wikipédia](#).

⁷³ Ibid.

sword?” Here, the *canuts* express their frustration with the overall approach to colonization undertaken by the French government, and of course, the military. Although they are hoping for a French victory, they are unhappy with how long France has been engaged in a bloody military battle. It is also the first indication that the *canuts* had bigger hopes for Algeria. The idea of organization through a “wise administration” and doing more than “governing it by sword” speaks to a long-term vision of colonization beyond military domination.⁷⁴

While the authors of *L'Écho de l'Industrie* did not outright convey solidarity with Algerians, they also did not express entirely narrow views of Algerians as a barbaric people. When they did use the words ‘uncivilized’ or ‘barbaric,’ it was usually in a matter-of-fact way, sometimes outside of the context of the military conquest of Algeria itself. For example, issue twenty-one opens with a discussion about social progress, and the value of broadening that conversation to a global scale. Having discussed the West, namely France and England, the authors briefly turn their attention to the East. They claim that “Africa itself, and the barbaric countries it contains are not insensitive to the general movement.”⁷⁵ The “general movement” in this sense refers to the trend of social renovation. In particular, the authors name Tunisia and Egypt, citing the examples of the emancipation of enslaved people and the overall “advanced” nature of “ideas” in Egyptian civilization. Even though the authors did not mention Algerians specifically, labelling North African countries as barbaric *and* acknowledging their potential for progress in the same sentence is inconsistent with emerging racialized ideas about Algerians as the ultimate faces of barbarism.

⁷⁴ “Afrique Française,” *L'Écho de l'Industrie*, October 13, 1845, 3.

⁷⁵ “La Croix-Rousse,” *L'Écho de l'Industrie*, March 7, 1846, 1.

In the same paragraph, the authors slander Russia: “Only Russia, preserving in its system of invasion and insolidarity, seems to be regressing towards scenes of barbarism from another age.”⁷⁶ Based on these two passages, the authors of *L'Écho de l'Industrie* place Algerians above Russians on the hierarchy of civilization. This is not due to the very nature of Russian people, but rather attributed to their actions, specifically those of the Russian monarchy and military. Regardless, their condemnation of the Russian government in direct comparison to the identified potential for civilization in North Africa clarifies that the *canuts* did not consider Algerians to be the “ultimate barbaric Other.”

Nonetheless, their overall support for the colonial war in Algeria remained steadfast, even if they wanted to do more than simply “govern [the colony] by sword.” This long-term vision of colonization that has already been referenced is ultimately at the heart of their interest in Algeria.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

Poland: A Comparative Case Study

Before further exploring this idea, it is useful to contend with a possible explanation to this point of tension, presented by their support of the colonization of Algeria, of the *canuts*' moral character. In fact, within early issues of *L'Écho de l'Industrie*, it becomes evident that they did not endorse the practice of colonization universally. Nearby, Polish people were fighting for independence from the neighboring forces of Russia, Prussia, and Austria. The authors of *L'Écho de l'Industrie* stood strongly behind this cause. Given their simultaneous support for the colonization of Algeria, the contemporary reader might see two positions as mutually conflicting. The contemporary impulse, then, might be to attribute the *canuts*' support for the Polish insurrection, and simultaneous lack of support for the Algerian resistance, to race.

This section uses the *canuts*' commentary on Poland in *L'Écho de l'Industrie* as a comparative case study to clarify their support for the colonization of Algeria. Following a quick explanation of events in Poland at the time, I analyze the language employed by the *canuts* to express solidarity with the Polish people. I then contrast this language to an excerpt from the same issue of *L'Écho de l'Industrie* regarding the colonial war in Algeria. Through a further analysis of the *canuts*' writings on Poland, I demonstrate that the French revolutionary heritage ultimately led the *canuts* to identify with the Polish plight. This may have been facilitated by a relative cultural proximity, but was not inherently motivated by race.

Brief Historical Context on Poland

To fully understand the mentions of Poland in various issues of *L'Écho de l'Industrie*, additional historical context is necessary. In the 18th century, Poland dealt with several territorial divisions, generally referred to as the "Partitions of Poland." The reductions were eventually so significant that an official, independent state of Poland did not exist for more than a century. The

first partition occurred in 1772, on the heels of a destructive Polish civil war. A treaty signed by Russia, Austria, and Prussia (modern-day Germany) split about a third of Poland's territory, inhabited by over half of Poland's population, amongst themselves. The second partition forced further succession of Polish territory to Russia in 1792. Polish people revolted in response. However, the uprising ultimately resulted in the third and final partition in 1795, in which the three powers each acquired a portion of Poland's remaining territory.⁷⁷

That would not be the last uprising, though. Polish nationalists led a series of revolts in the 19th century to continue to fight for sovereignty. The one most relevant to *L'Écho de l'Industrie* was the Krakow uprising of 1846, which was preceded by the November uprising of 1830-31, and succeeded by the January uprising of 1863-64. Of the three, the Krakow uprising was by far the most-short lived, but it was far from insignificant.⁷⁸ The fact that the authors of *L'Écho de l'Industrie* reported on the event alone demonstrates that it was watched by international eyes, creating impactful ripples that would help garner support for the Polish cause among certain groups. It was also viewed by notables such as Marx and Lelewel "as the first social revolution on Polish soil," and "an ideological turning point in Polish revolutionary history."⁷⁹ At the very least, it would become a significant talking point for the *canuts* across several issues of *L'Écho de l'Industrie*.

Poland as Mentioned in L'Écho de l'Industrie

The *canuts* followed events in Poland prior to the uprising of 1846. Its first mention in *L'Écho de l'Industrie* appears in the second issue, published on October 25th, 1845. In their

⁷⁷ Piotr S. Wandycz, *The Lands of Partitioned Poland, 1795-1918*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974), 8-11.

⁷⁸ Wandycz, *Lands of Partitioned Poland*, 136.

⁷⁹ Wandycz, 135-136.

section titled “Foreign News,” the authors condemn a plan by the Russian Tsar to send troops into Russian-controlled Polish territory. They call him “cruel” and “barbaric” for “having taken away [Polish people’s] freedom little by little, for having forced them to deny the religion of their ancestors,” and “for having made them suffer horribly to atone for the crime of loving their nation.”⁸⁰ Their tone and diction implies that the authors are appalled by the Tsar’s unrelenting maltreatment of the Polish people, and are vehemently against the ways in which he has threatened Polish cultural autonomy.

Interestingly, this passionate reproach appears right next to the column detailing the latest news about the invasion of Algeria. Though visually close, the two sections are quite dissimilar in content. In this case, the updates about military advancements in Algeria are devoid of any personal commentary on the authors’ behalf. Even in describing a massacre of seven French officials, the tone is matter-a-fact and emotionless: “It is written from Zebdou, that M. Billot, the battalion commander in the 41st of the line and commander of this fort, as well as the lieutenant of Zouaves, Mathieu de Dombales, and 5 hussars who accompanied them, having gone to the Caïd of a neighboring tribe, were victims of their trust, and that all seven were massacred by the Arabs.”⁸¹ The authors do not expand, expressing no grief or outrage at the death of the French soldiers, although we know from their other reporting on the colonial war that they found this type of news “distressing,” and stood in solidarity with French soldiers.⁸²

Further, taking these two sections together, as they visually appear, reveals a potential ideological inconsistency. In the case of Poland and Russia, the authors take a clear, anti-imperial stance. They fully support the patriotism and freedom of Polish people and call the

⁸⁰ “Nouvelles Étrangères,” *L’Écho de l’Industrie*, October 25, 1846, 3.

⁸¹ “Afrique Française,” *L’Écho de l’Industrie*, October 25, 1846, 3.

⁸² Calls back to the first issue of *L’Écho de l’Industrie*, previously discussed in the last section, when the authors discuss “sad news” from Algeria.

Russian tsar barbaric for significantly inhibiting these rights. However, they supported the colonization of Algeria, which was an important component of French imperial expansion. Every piece of reporting in the *Afrique Française* column was a direct result of the 1830 invasion. The *canuts* do not perceive their countrymen as barbaric for having enacted the invasion, despite the fact that they express certain disagreements about military tactics, and are able to humanize Algerians. Their support for Polish people in the face of an oppressive imperial power, and their emphasis on cultural autonomy, reflects a clear moral foundation—one that they do not apply to Algeria.

Analyzing the language employed in the various pieces of commentary surrounding the 1846 Polish insurrection demonstrates that this support was ideological in nature, stemming from shared values and experiences. The first mention of the insurrection came after it had started and ended, in the publication of March 14, 1846. By March 4, Krakow was occupied by both Russian and Austrian troops, yet a revolutionary spirit likely remained among some of the insurgents. It is hard to know exactly how much information the *canuts* had access to, and possible that they did not yet know the revolution had ended while preparing the March 14 publication. In any case, they continued to write about the insurrection for several weeks after its end. The *canuts* speak fondly of this event: “people, *bourgeois*, peasants, nobles, all contribute with unanimous enthusiasm to overthrow the tyranny that has weighed on their heads for so long.”⁸³ Immediately, it is clear that the *canuts* identify the cause of the insurrection: the destruction of tyranny, a cause that they fervently stand behind.

At the same time, it might be helpful to confront a potential contemporary assumption about the *canuts*’ support for Poland. Given that both groups are white, at least by today’s

⁸³ “Affaires de la Pologne,” *L’Écho de l’Industrie*, March 14, 1846, 1.

standards, and share a European heritage, it may seem logical to rationalize their support along these lines, especially because Algerians were regarded as a non-white cultural other. In fact, several moments in *L'Écho de l'Industrie* demonstrate that the *canuts* identified strongly with the Polish people. One stanza of a poem written in solidarity with the Polish does suggest that ethnic similarities *could* have played a role. For example, a poem opening issue twenty-three begins with the following stanza:

Poor and noble Poland, our sister of times gone
by, that we could not forget, here you are waving again
your battered and exhausted breast!⁸⁴

The use of the word “sister” in particular creates a clear connection between the *canuts*, or the French more broadly, and the Poles. Of course, in its literal sense, “sister” refers to a genetic relationship of shared parentage. Here, the word could refer to the fact that both peoples are European, though of different ethnic groups. In any case, it is unlikely that the author of the poem intended to refer to the specific, scientific genetic makeup of the French and the Polish. Rather, the word “sister” seems to have been employed in a more figurative sense, although an allusion to their shared European heritage is not entirely implausible.

However, unpacking the context of another instance in which the authors directly connect the Polish to the French suggests another reason. Following the suit of several other French newspapers, *L'Écho de l'Industrie* set up a *souscription nationale*, essentially a donation campaign, to support Polish people. In their announcement of this effort, they call Polish people the “French of the north”:

⁸⁴ Ibid.

The workers who run *L'Écho de l'Industrie*, applaud with enthusiasm the awakening of Poland. They make it their duty to encourage with all of their power the marks of sympathy given to such a noble cause; to support the universal efforts, they are opening a subscription at the office of the newspaper, rue Duviard, n. 3 in la Croix-Rousse; and at the residence of M. Eug. Fabvier, rue du Commerce, n. 26 à Lyon. Brothers, let this manifestation be unanimous: this work is national; the poor man's mite on such an occasion is the most energetic protest that can wilt tyranny, and the most complete expression of generous sentiments that bind us to the French of the north, fighting for their emancipation, and for that of the people.⁸⁵

The full context of this paragraph gives another clue about the source of the *canuts'* connection to the Polish and their cause. The phrase “French of the north” comes after the statement of “the poor man's mite” being “the most energetic protest that can wilt tyranny.” The full weight of this claim is found in the context of France's recent revolutionary past, and, of course, the *canut* insurrections. Thus, it is highly likely that the connection that the *canuts* felt with the Polish was born out of political solidarity. Even further, the label “French of the north” may reflect that the *canuts* perceived revolutionary behavior as a central component of the French identity. Thus, Polish people earned this title by engaging in a violent insurrection.

There is little, if any, secondary literature that explicitly connects French public opinion on the 19th-century Polish insurrections to France's own revolutionary identity. However, the existing literature does affirm that the *canuts* were not alone in their outward support for Poland. Historian Stanislaw Bóbr-Tylingo outlines quite clearly that French public opinion stood with the Polish people following the 1863 insurrection, citing numerous examples from Parisian, Lyonnais, Bordelais, and Marseillais newspapers.⁸⁶ Their support was strong enough to call for military action on behalf of the French: “the greater part of the press began to proclaim the

⁸⁵ “Insurrection de la Pologne,” *L'Écho de l'Industrie*, March 21, 1846, 1.

⁸⁶ Stanisław Bóbr-Tylingo, “La première intervention diplomatique en 1863,” *Slavic and East-European Studies* 7, no. 1/2 (1962): 23.

necessity of a military campaign.”⁸⁷ Bóbr-Tylingo’s research highlights how the *canuts* were aligned with the vast majority of the press in publicly expressing solidarity with Polish people. Though his analysis does not include the 1846 insurrection, the *canuts* themselves list other newspapers that had created donation campaigns for the Polish cause. The listed papers included *le National*, *la Réforme*, *le Courrier français*, *l’Union*, *la Fraternité*, *le journal des Écoles*, and *la Démocratie pacifique*.⁸⁸ Ultimately, the participation of seven newspapers in the financial support of the Polish insurgents is a strong indicator of public opinion.

Further, there is an interesting, albeit narrow body of work that explores how French revolutionary identity impacted the perceptions of the Russian Revolution. While outside of the particular scope of this section, these analyses provide a framework that is highly transferable to the commentary on Poland in *L’Écho de l’Industrie*. In particular, historian Ionnais Sinanoglou argues that “Frenchmen frequently resorted to their own revolutionary history when confronted with the Russian upheavals of 1917-20.”⁸⁹ Sinanoglou attributes this tendency at least in part to the cultural “belief in the power of historical references to clarify, predict, and even inspire action.”⁹⁰ French culture places a high value on the discipline of history, which influenced the relationship French people had to their own past. According to William Keylor, intellectuals who shaped the French historical professions, such as Ernest Lavisse, believed that France, “by virtue of its revolutionary heritage, occupied a special place in the world that rendered its national concerns universal.”⁹¹ Therefore, French people projected their own revolutionary past onto

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ “Insurrection de la Pologne,” 1.

⁸⁹ Ioannis Sinanoglou, “Frenchmen, Their Revolutionary Heritage, and the Russian Revolution,” *The International History Review* 2, no. 4 (1980): 566.

⁹⁰ Sinanoglou, “Frenchmen, Their Revolutionary Heritage, and the Russian Revolution,” 567.

⁹¹ William Keylor, *Academy and Community: The Foundation of the French Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 94.

different groups, including the Bolsheviks in 1917 and the Polish insurrectionists in 1846. In this light, the *canuts* were right in step with their fellow countrymen.

The historical precedent within the field affirms the textual evidence in *L'Écho de l'Industrie*, clarifying the root of the *canuts*' support for Poland. While a contemporary reader might still feel inclined to draw parallels between the treatment of Polish people by partitioning powers and the colonization of Algeria, the evidence demonstrates that these two events occurred in two separate ideological spheres for the *canuts*. The events in Poland were best understood as an extension of the *canuts*' revolutionary tradition, facilitated by a shared European heritage and degree of cultural understanding. While one could certainly argue that Abd al-Qadir was engaging in patriotic, nationalistic warfare to expel the French from Algerian soil, similar to the Polish against its oppressors, the perceived cultural otherness of Algerians could have prevented the *canuts* from extending their revolutionary sympathies to them.

Nevertheless, it is true that the Paris insurgents in 1848 *did* identify with Indigenous Algerians when met with the violent suppression of the revolution. In this case, the significance of the fact that many of the men who quelled their insurrection in Paris had previously fought on Algerian soil should not be ignored. By likening themselves to Algerians at the hands of the French army, the insurgents “reduced Algerians themselves to rhetorical figures” to represent their own victimization.⁹² In other words, they did not express true solidarity with Algerians, but used their suffering to support their criticism of men like Cavaignac and Bugeaud, and their actions on the Parisian streets.

Additionally, the *canuts* had nothing to gain from Polish domination. It was Russia, Prussia, and Austria who claimed Polish territory—not France. On the other hand, the

⁹² Sessions, “Colonizing Revolutionary Politics,” 81.

colonization of Algeria was swept up in larger social and economic concerns. This larger domestic context is the last piece of the puzzle to understanding the *canuts*’ support for the colonization of Algeria.

Colonization as ‘Solution’

The *canuts* often mentioned the colonization of Algeria within discussions about other social and economic concerns in France, sometimes specific even to the silk industry. Examining the discussions of the colonization of Algeria in *L'Écho de l'Industrie* that were outside the specific context of military conquest demonstrates that they had a long-term, vested interest in the future potential of the Algerian colonies.

This section begins by analyzing certain examples of these larger discussions, painting a clearer picture of the *canuts*' support for the colonization of Algeria. I will then significantly broaden the scope, inviting in other examples, voices, and angles into a development of the idea of colonization acting as a solution to domestic ills. Finally, I will tie it all together with a final analysis, demonstrating where exactly the *canuts* fit into this narrative.

Solution-Oriented Thinking: The Canuts' Larger Interest in Algeria

Regardless of their particular views on Indigenous Algerians and Algerian Arabs, it is clear that the *canuts* supported the French colonization of Algeria, though they were not always aligned with the strategy of the French military. They had aspirations for this territory that went beyond military glory. Throughout the publications of *L'Écho de l'Industrie* are several moments when that interest is expressed. These examples clarify why the *canuts* were so attentive to the colonization of Algeria.

First, it is important to know that in 1845 and 1846, there were ongoing projects of agricultural colonization in Algeria. These attempts were largely unsuccessful, which led the *canuts* and other groups to use the term “problem of colonization.”⁹³ The conception of the

⁹³ “Afrique Française,” *L'Écho de l'Industrie*, March 14, 1846, 3.

current state of colonization as a problem contextualizes the following discussions from *L'Écho de l'Industrie*.

One important development that caught the interest of the *canuts* was the construction of the Sig dam. They introduce this particular piece of news with the following sentence: “We found the following account in *L'Écho de l'Oran* from February 28th that everyone interested in the future of our possessions in Africa will read with pleasure.”⁹⁴ What follows is a long passage from that publication of *L'Écho de l'Oran* on the matter. Because the authors choose to simply insert the passage and not add their own commentary, it is difficult to know their exact thoughts. Nevertheless, it is clear that this was good news to them, based on the optimistic tone of their introduction. In particular, the reference to the “future of our possessions in Africa” speaks to the dedicated, long-term vision of colonization held by the *canuts*.

The excerpt from *L'Écho de l'Oran* explains that the dam had been roughly two years in the making, and why the authors call its completion “a real conquest, a great agricultural achievement accomplished.”⁹⁵ The province of Oran, where the dam was located, is very dry. Successful colonization of the area required adequate water management. Without water, colonial settlements would not be able to self-sustain, as the practice of agriculture would be nearly impossible. Thus, the successful completion of the dam was indeed good news to anyone who had a long-term economic interest in the Algerian colonies, including the *canuts*.

The subject of Algeria sometimes came up in conversations about other social issues. For example, it was presented as a potential solution to the French orphan crisis. The authors quote M. Toussenel, who had suggested sending the orphaned children, once they reached the age of

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ *L'Écho d'Oran*, February 28, 1846, quoted in “Afrique Française,” *L'Écho de l'Industrie*, March 14, 1846, 3.

seven, to farms in Algeria. This way, they would be trained to work within the agricultural industry, becoming capable workers. But that was not all. He proposed that the children also be trained militarily. Simply put, the farms would be “nurseries of pioneer soldiers.” Toussenet wrote, “these children have no home, so I shall make them one in Algeria.”⁹⁶

Toussenet’s proposal frames the colonization of Algeria as a concrete solution to domestic concerns. Before presenting his idea, the *canuts* contextualize the current situation regarding the orphan crisis. They write that “the annual cost of [housing] orphans for France is rising to dozens of millions.” According to the authors, this price becomes the burden of individual cities and departments. They argue that it should be the responsibility of the government, “because the wound of orphanhood is a social wound, and it is up to society to heal it.” They continue to explain that two thirds of these children do not live to see the age of twelve, while many of the remaining third will become criminals, and thus “increase the criminal justice budget.” These last two points are to argue that the dozens of millions of francs spent to care for orphans are essentially “without compensation.” Therefore, they present Toussenet’s proposal as a much more promising investment, and a better use of financial resources.⁹⁷

According to the logic of this plan, sending these children to Algeria would benefit France, particularly in the context of colonial warfare. Raising them there to be workers and soldiers would prepare them for the battles of colonial conquest physically and mentally, by habituating them to the environment and giving them a sense of claim to the land: “This race of colonists, tried by the exercises of fitness and by the habit of working in the sun, would have resisted more easily than our other soldiers the heat of the climate of Algeria, would have

⁹⁶ “Hospices Civils de Lyon—Enfants Trouvés,” *L’Écho de l’Industrie*, November 1, 1845, 2.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

defended with more courage, and cleared with more intelligence the lands that would have been given to them in full ownership.”⁹⁸ Toussenel does not clarify if parcels of land would be literally sold or given to the children once they reach the age of eighteen, although he does suggest paying them a small salary for their labor. Nevertheless, the logic is that having been raised in Algeria and taught to think of the land as their own, they would have more of an intrinsic motivation to fight for the territory than other soldiers. First, the conquest of Algeria would give orphans a place to go, thereby lessening the burden on individual French cities and départements. Additionally, the costs spent to house them in Algeria would be a worthwhile investment, aiding the French in their war of conquest. This example is an important illustration of the *canuts*’ economic motivation for supporting the colonization of Algeria.

Of course, the *canuts*’ support for the colonization of Algeria was not entirely without an ideological dimension. At the time, France and major European powers subscribed to the idea that by colonizing places around the globe, they would civilize less advanced peoples. In France, this idea was known as a *mission civilisatrice*. The rhetoric of civilization as a justification for colonization is often analyzed with the historical context of the French Third Republic and beyond, but it was an influential theory at the advent of the French invasion of Algeria as well. Prominent figures such as writer Victor Hugo and diplomat Edouard Alletz disseminated these ideas in conversation and writing.⁹⁹ Further, Eugène Bodichon, in his work *De l’humanité*, developed a racial hierarchy, denoting degrees of civilization to different groups based on their “physical and moral organization.”¹⁰⁰ As he saw it, the five most civilized nations “were destined

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Margaret A. Majumdar “French Discourses of Empire,” in *Postcoloniality: The French Dimension*, (Berghahn Books, 2007), 23.

¹⁰⁰ Patricia M.E. Lorcin, “Imperialism, Colonial Identity, and Race in Algeria, 1830-1870: The Role of the French Medical Corps,” *Isis* 90, no. 4 (1999): 669.

to guide the different parts of the globe to civilization,” and “France’s role was to lead North Africa.”¹⁰¹

Given both the prominence at the time of the *mission civilisatrice* framework and the *canuts*’ own commitment to engaging in discussions of social progress, it is not surprising that they reflected some of these ideas in their writings. The most notable time this occurred is within a conversation about the threat that foreign competition poses to the silk industry. They argue that straining to keep up with international competition has hurt workers, enforcing low wages that barely secure the basic necessities of survival. In fact, there is a sense of national pride so strong that the workers themselves would give a merchant a discount when told it was to “combat foreign competition.”¹⁰² Having identified this as a problem, the authors then concede to the value of national pride: “certainly, we are the first to say, national honor must be placed high.”¹⁰³ They follow this with a direct reference to the colonization of Algeria:

France has a great mission to accomplish, in bringing the beacon of progressive society to all peoples, she fulfills a divine mandate; she should therefore sow, without fear, numerous colonies on every hospitable shore where our interests might need a representative, by attaching, through good administration, these scattered forces to the mother country, there is no doubt that France will gain immense resources from them, and that soon the barbarian or savage tribes who will approach these distant rays of the central hearth, will come to group around the newcomers and constitute a powerful beam of all ages of society.¹⁰⁴

Clearly, the authors’ thinking here is very much in line with the philosophy of the mission civilisatrice, discussing “bringing the beacon of progressive society to all peoples.” They then classify this act of “civilizing” as a justification to found many colonies all over the world.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² “Concurrence Étrangère,” *L’Écho de l’Industrie*, February 14, 1846, 1.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ “Concurrence Étrangère,” 1-2.

However, there are other parts of this paragraph that should not be ignored. Namely, their discussion about France “gaining immense resources” speaks directly to an economic motivation, even in the midst of a more ideological rationalization of colonization. So, even though there was very reasonably an ideological component to their support for colonization, it went beyond that.

Ultimately, this paragraph does not stand alone, and a further analysis of the context that surrounds it is necessary to understand it properly. The above statement seems to be an appeal amid a larger critique of the government's excessive obsession with national honor, manifesting in part in fighting useless foreign battles. Immediately preceding this paragraph is the one that follows:

Gentlemen, think of your duties! And the fate of our factories and the spectacle of our deserted workshops, of 30,000 workers barely living when work gives and dying of hunger in times of unemployment, should they not preoccupy your vigils and be entitled to your consideration a little more than the insults of a few barbarian tribes, of a few unknown nations, of which a *vaisseau de ligne* will soon be victorious.¹⁰⁵

In this section, it is clear that the *canuts*' principal concern, as usual, is the status of their industry and livelihoods as workers. They explicitly call out the focus of the government on overseas wars as a direct agent of harm, arguing that lawmakers should divert more efforts to remedying domestic poverty. Interestingly, these wars seem to be wars of colonization, indicated by the phrase “the insults of a few barbarian tribes.” This puts the previous, ideologically driven paragraph in a new light. In this paragraph, the *canuts* criticize the government for engaging in too many wars of colonial conquest at the cost of French workers. In the next paragraph, they appeal to the moral value of colonization, which both balances out their argument and adds to

¹⁰⁵ “Concurrence Étrangère,” 1.

their *ethos*. They likely believed in the *mission civilisatrice*. Still, they pushed back against excessive conquest that answered only to national pride, especially when, as they saw it, the government's focus on these wars of conquest contributed to the neglect of French workers.

Additionally, they valued the *mission civilisatrice* only when it was applied through strategic colonial administration. In the original paragraph, they refer to the necessary presence of a "good administration" in order to properly integrate conquered peoples, as well as resources. As we have determined, this is not the only time that the authors of *L'Écho de l'Industrie* emphasize the importance of wise, organized colonization; they had previously criticized the French government for "governing [the colony] only by sword."¹⁰⁶

Ultimately, the commentary analyzed above aligns with the *canuts*' larger vision of the colonization of Algeria. They outline this vision in issue sixteen of *L'Écho de l'Industrie*, in part of a larger conversation once more about foreign competition, international alliances, and the importance of creating an internal alliance between production and consumption. After discussing Europe, they suggest that we "extend our gaze more distantly" to the colony in Algeria:

Are our colonies destined to complete us one day? Sure, Africa is a beautiful conquest; the land there is fertile, the vegetation is magnificent, the climate hospitable in many places; but, to produce, other than conditions of security, we still need an alliance of capital and labor, we need a powerful force of interior organization, capable of creating within, and of opposing an inexhaustible barrier outside. Is all this resolved for our African possessions?¹⁰⁷

Always solution-minded, the *canuts* considered the long-term role of Algeria. The future potential of the colony seems to be centered on its capacity to produce and contribute to France's larger economy. This view on colonization aligns with their larger concerns and priorities,

¹⁰⁶ "Afrique Française," *L'Écho de l'Industrie*, October 13, 1845, 3.

¹⁰⁷ "Politique Générale," *L'Écho de l'Industrie*, January 31, 1846, 1.

wanting Algeria to be a site for strong, organized production, rather than just “a beautiful conquest.” They apply their principle of economic association, calling for “an alliance of capital and labor,” to ensure that this production would be sustainable. Returning to their earlier defense of the Fourierist association model, the authors contended that interests of capital and labor were intrinsically connected. Thus, the *canuts* extended their existing social ideology to envision a more successful future for the Algerian colonies.

Broadening the Scope

The relationship between the *canuts* and the colonization of Algeria is part of a larger narrative. They were not alone in their interest in the colony and its economic potential. As we have already seen with the example of M. Toussenel’s proposal to raise orphans in Algeria, French people sometimes conceptualized the colonization of Algeria as a solution to domestic concerns. This occurred in diverse ways, and at different levels of knowledge and power. This subsection will develop this idea, first by looking at how government officials framed colonization as a solution, and then by looking at the experiences and opinions of workers. I will then engage in a discussion of myths and realities, comparing government propaganda to the experience of colonists, most of whom were working class. Finally, I will tie it back to the *canuts*, clarifying where they fit into this larger story.

As previously discussed, Algeria was declared an official part of French national territory in 1848. This was also the year that the French government launched its large-scale colonization scheme, based on agricultural cultivation of Algerian land. Jennifer E Sessions explains that “historians of colonial Algeria have long recognized 1848 as a critical turning point that consolidated processes of settlement colonization and political assimilation begun by the July

Monarchy.”¹⁰⁸ This “turning point” of 1848 can also be understood as the moment where the domestic and the colonial spheres were no longer two distinct entities, not just in terms of the 1848 annexation and colonization project, but also in the ways in which politicians, intellectuals, and even workers began to conceptualize the two together.

Support in the government for the exploitation of Algerian colonies to address domestic economic concerns transcended party lines. Sessions gives an example of three men from different points on the political spectrum who all believed that colonization provided a good alternative to the National Workshops, by providing “an outlet for unemployed French workers.”¹⁰⁹ The National Workshops had been created in 1848 to mitigate unemployment, largely as a response to the February revolution. Their objective was to provide jobs to unemployed workers through the government, but they saw no long-term success. They were shut down in June, which became the direct catalyst to the June uprising. Even before this dissolution, people had advocated to replace the program. One idea was put forth by Ferdinand Flocon, the Minister of Agriculture and Commerce, who had recommended sending unemployed workers to agricultural colonies in Algeria. Later, more full-fledged plans were proposed by members of the Assembly. Alfred-Eugène Cordier, baron de Montreuil, Jean Brunet, and Marc Caussidière all favored large-scale, agricultural colonization over the National Workshops, despite differences in their backgrounds and politics.¹¹⁰ As they saw it, “colonization would provide not only short-term jobs, but also structural corrections to the economy by rebalancing the labor market, increasing food supplies, and lowering bread prices.”¹¹¹ In theory, a successful

¹⁰⁸ Sessions, “Colonizing Revolutionary Politics,” 76.

¹⁰⁹ Sessions, “Colonizing Revolutionary Politics,” 76-77.

¹¹⁰ Sessions, “Colonizing Revolutionary Politics,” 91.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

agricultural scheme would accomplish all of these things by providing employment opportunities in Algeria, that would directly increase the quantity of resources, particularly wheat, flowing back into metropolitan France.

Politically, support for colonization was often highly strategic, aiming to accomplish multiple things at once. Officials framed “colonial emigration and settlement as a solution to domestic poverty and unrest stemming from overpopulation, urbanization, and industrialization.”¹¹² This operated under the objective of freeing the state from the burden of unemployed French workers, an opportunity which was an unanticipated benefit to the second abolition of slavery.¹¹³ David Todd explains how abolition “compelled French intellectuals and politicians to devise new conceptions of imperial expansion.”¹¹⁴ While the abolition of slavery demanded a new colonial labor force, that same demand could be used to promote “a new kind of colonial development based on white labour.”¹¹⁵ Sending white French workers to Algeria could both transform the racial demographics of the colony *and* reduce unemployment in France. Thus, white, unemployed French workers were the perfect guinea pigs to send across the Mediterranean, with the short-term goal of disposing of them, and the long-term potential of bringing economic prosperity to France.

However, there is also evidence proving that workers *themselves* supported the idea of colonization on similar grounds. In fact, around 20,000 of them presented a petition to the government, calling for the creation of “self-governing associations of two hundred families each.”¹¹⁶ The purpose of these associations would be to live and work on government-provided

¹¹² Sessions, “Colonizing Revolutionary Politics,” 90.

¹¹³ Slavery was abolished in France and the colonies in 1794. However, it was reinstated in 1802 within the context of sugar production.

¹¹⁴ David Todd, “French Imperial Meridian,” 173.

¹¹⁵ Todd, “French Imperial Meridian,” 174.

¹¹⁶ Sessions, “Colonizing Revolutionary Politics,” 92-93.

land. This proposal was far too socialist to be integrated into the official plan of the government, but it demonstrates that the reach of interest in colonization extended beyond governmental spheres and into the working class.

A similar proposal, written by a group in Lyon, caught the attention of the *canuts*. It was published in 1846, ahead of the 1848 frenzy of proposals. The *canuts* were introduced to this plan through *L'Écho d'Oran*, the same publication that discussed the construction of the Sig dam. The *canuts* themselves spoke of the proposal in general terms, promising their readers that they would study this project to better inform their audience of its “probable consequences.”¹¹⁷ However, the discussion does not seem to reappear in later issues. In any case, this proposal was promising to them: they believed it “to be likely to solve the problem of colonization.”¹¹⁸ As we have previously seen, the *canuts* disagreed with the French government’s current approach to colonization, and would have been happy to come across a plan that aligned with their opinions.

The society referenced in *L'Écho d'Oran* and subsequently in *L'Écho de l'Industrie* was known as *L'Union agricole d'Afrique* (Agricultural Union of Africa). In 1846, they published a small book, called *Nouveau système de la colonisation d'Algerie*.¹¹⁹ In it, they outlined their guiding ideological principles for colonization, as well as extensive logistical necessities for the success of their proposition.

The society was composed of members across different professions. Among them were medical doctors, lawyers, negociants, and various military personnel. Very few, if any, were laborers like the *canuts*, therefore their interest in colonization came from a different place. It was also more comprehensive, informed, and focused. Given that their occupations received

¹¹⁷ “Afrique Française,” *L'Écho de l'Industrie*, March 14, 1846, 3.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Translation: New system for the colonization of Algeria.

better pay and more respect, it is imaginable that they were able to dedicate more time and attention to the colonization of Algeria, while it was not the primary interest of the *canuts*. Nonetheless, the *canuts* had an interest in this particular proposal.

The plan put forth by *L'Union agricole d'Afrique* aligned in several regards with the way in which the *canuts* themselves theorized about colonization, explaining why it seemed to them to offer a solution to the “problem” of colonization. Returning to excerpts that have been previously analyzed on their commentary of Algeria, the *canuts* had criticized the government for “governing [Algeria] only by sword,” preferring the organization of the colony “by means of a wise administration.” They had likewise discussed the long-term role of the Algerian colony, calling for the government to make better use of the land, through “an alliance of capital and labor,” comprising a “powerful force of interior organization.”

These same ideas were the driving force behind *L'Union agricole d'Afrique*. In their plan, they begin by stating that “France is starting to focus seriously on Algeria.”¹²⁰ The word “seriously” indicates that France was beginning to see the potential of Algeria beyond military conquest. As they write, France was previously interested only in a “glorious fight for its weapons.”¹²¹ This distinction between conquest and economic asset is in line with the *canuts’* thinking when they discuss the long-term vision of Algeria. The *canuts* and members of *L'Union agricole d'Afrique* were both interested in the greater potential of the Algerian colonies, which may explain why the *canuts* were confident in this plan.

What the members of *L'Union agricole d'Afrique* considered to be the “pivotal work of their time,” was to “colonize the three provinces of Algeria rapidly and on a vast scale.”¹²² Such

¹²⁰ *L'Union agricole d'Afrique: Nouveau système de colonisation de l'Algérie*, (Lyon: Imprimerie de Léon Boitel, 1846), 5.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

an objective required a grounding ideological foundation. This was two-pronged. On the one hand, colonization needed to be “national,” contributing to France’s “glory and strength.”¹²³ On the other hand, it needed to be “social” in order to “bring the light of civilization to a barbaric country.”¹²⁴ Though it was not the principal concern of the *canuts*, their writing demonstrates that they were not opposed to the idea of a *mission civilisatrice*. In particular, their discussion about foreign competition, in which they appealed to the widely supported idea of civilizing North Africans through colonization, reflects the same ideals present in *L’Union agricole d’Afrique*.

The authors of this proposal did express a semblance of concern for Algerians, as did the *canuts*. The authors believed it possible for colonization to accomplish its goals “without exercising unjust oppression against the indigenous people.”¹²⁵ Further, they argued for a certain, albeit limited, respect for the “Arab element.”¹²⁶ To them, it was best not to aim to eradicate Arab cultural influence, but to strive to absorb it into the French culture that colonization would bring.

To a contemporary ear, these might very well sound like empty words. It is important to remember that this proposal does not reflect the harsh realities of colonization, and its effects on Indigenous and Arab Algerians. It may be true that the members of *L’Union agricole d’Afrique* cared, at least a little, about the Algerian people. It ultimately did not usurp the overall value they placed on colonization, a small part of which they believed would also be valuable to Algerians by “civilizing” them, in line with the widespread belief in the *mission civilisatrice*. In any case,

¹²³ *L’Union agricole d’Afrique*, 5-6.

¹²⁴ *L’Union agricole d’Afrique*, 6.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

although they open with an ideological appeal, their vision of colonization was likely guided much more by economic aims, based on the rest of their proposal.

Above all, Algerian soil was to be economically exploited following the principle of association, not too far off from the proposal put forth by the group of workers two years later: those working on the land in Algeria would benefit economically, and that interest would be a priority. The authors clarify that they are neither “greedy speculators nor dreamers of a utopia.”¹²⁷ Rather they believe strongly in the logic and logistics of their proposal, also believing that an association model would be the best way to secure the economic success of the colony, along with the well-being of its inhabitants. They explain that their goal is to “found, in Algeria, on land that will be granted to them by the government, a village, all the inhabitants of which will be associated for their agricultural and industrial interests.”¹²⁸

Though this may seem to echo the basic idea of Fourierism, the authors are quick to clarify that it is not their intention to create a *phalanstère*. They do admit, however, that there are similarities between their vision of associated communes and the communities of Charles Fourier. Interestingly, they also reference the possibility that their intentions may have been misinterpreted: “it is only by an unexplainable confusion that some people could have believed that the plan of *l’Union agricole* was to found a *phalanstère* in Africa.”¹²⁹ For their part, the authors of *L’Écho de l’Oran* do not seem to have been mistaken. As they discuss *l’Union agricole d’Afrique*, the quoted excerpt from *L’Écho de l’Oran* makes no mention of Fourierism, but does speak positively of the association model: “From this unity of action and purpose, and the solidarity of all interests, there must result, after a very short time, a considerable production

¹²⁷ *L’Union agricole d’Afrique*, 7.

¹²⁸ *L’Union agricole d’Afrique*, 46.

¹²⁹ *L’Union agricole d’Afrique*, 49.

which will ensure the existence and well-being of each *associé*.”¹³⁰ Despite the fact that the *canuts* were Fourierists and would have been interested in the establishment of an agricultural phalanx in Algeria, the root of their Fourierism was its application of economic association. Therefore, this plan, guided by that same principle, would have seemed promising to them with or without an explicit Fourierist element.

Finally, what would have undoubtedly interested the *canuts* was the potential for the silk industry in Algerian land. According to the authors from *L'Union agricole d'Afrique*, the colony would need to first complete its agricultural phase, focusing primarily on wheat and grains, before introducing the production of other materials for purchase and for export to France metropole. In the second phase of production, the authors suggest turning to more lucrative products such as tobacco, sugar, tea, cotton, and indigo.¹³¹ Eventually, silk could have a role: “As soon as the colony harvests a certain quantity of mulberry leaves, it will build a silkworm farm and engage in the raising of silkworms.”¹³² However, the authors follow up with a caveat: “We know, it is true, that we have perhaps exaggerated up to now the importance that this industry should have in Algeria; it is not well proven that its results will be, even in the not too distant future, as valuable as they seem to be right now.”¹³³ When they say “this industry,” they seem to be referencing sericulture specifically.¹³⁴ Of course, raising silkworms is the necessary first step in silk production—there could be no silk industry in Algeria without successful sericulture. Even still, the very possibility of the silk industry having a presence in Algeria

¹³⁰ *L'Écho d'Oran*, February 28, 1846, quoted in “Afrique Française,” *L'Écho de l'Industrie*, March 14, 1846, 3.

¹³¹ *L'Union agricole d'Afrique*, 83.

¹³² *L'Union agricole d'Afrique*, 84.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Sericulture is the industry of silk farming (raising silkworms).

concretely links the *canuts* to this proposed approach to colonization, giving them a personal reason to be interested in it.

These different examples highlight the various ways that groups in France across different political and social positions approached the colonization of Algeria. Overall, they show that the economic potential of colonization was widely recognized, as was the opportunity to address domestic concerns through colonial organization. Indeed, the government framed the 1848 colonization scheme as a solution for themselves, by means of mitigating the pressures of unemployment, urbanization, and overpopulation, and for workers, who could find new financial opportunities outside of the oppressive industrial slums.

Experience of the 1848 Colonization Scheme

However, the reality of colonization would turn out to be much different from how groups such as *L'Union agricole d'Afrique* and, certainly, workers, had envisioned it. In almost every regard, the 1848 colonization project was a complete failure. The success of the plan was predicated on entirely false assumptions about the fertility of Algerian land. Having been fed images and narratives of lush landscapes and having little to no farming experience to begin with, the colonists were entirely unprepared for the task at hand. Additionally, the government plan was not nearly as organizationally savvy as other proposals, such as that of *L'Union agricole d'Afrique*. A memoir by Norbert Truquin, who happened to become a *canut* later in his life, details the obstacles faced by the colonists. His experiences shed light on the propaganda campaigns put forth by the French government during this time to encourage emigration to Algeria. Truquin recounts the stark contrast between his imagined life as a colonist and the bleak reality, due to the arid climate and stubborn terrain, but also to the failure of the administration to implement an effective and efficient organization.

Truquin describes the very moment that attracted him to Algeria. At the time, he was a teenager living in Paris. One day, as he walked past the *mairie* of the 8th arrondissement, he heard a man “painting an enchanting picture” of Algeria.¹³⁵ Truquin does not specify if this man was a government official, although the fact that he was positioned in front of the town hall seems to imply that he was. The man described with great praise the “fertility of the land,” adding that there were “coconuts, dates, bananas.”¹³⁶ This image enticed Truquin. He immediately began to figure out how he would be able to go, given that the French government was only sending families to Algeria. He would need to convince his father.

Ultimately, it would not be such a hard sell. His father’s cabaret had been significantly impacted by the political landscape of 1848 France, as his clientele was mostly workers. Once the workers lost their employment opportunities after the closure of the national workshops, he had lost his customers. Truquin successfully convinced his father that there was no future for them in the factories of Paris. In Algeria, at the very least, they would be working their own land, acting as their own bosses.¹³⁷ His stepmother would end up being the only obstacle, as she was vehemently opposed to moving to the colonies. However, Truquin succeeded in overcoming her resistance, and only a month later, they were en route to Algeria.¹³⁸

But the moment the journey ended, and their boat approached land, he realized that what was in front of him did not quite align with his expectations. Upon hearing that they would soon be arriving, Truquin reports “putting himself at the front end to enjoy the view of the land promised.” He describes his excitement in contemplating the “virgin forests filled with

¹³⁵ Norbert Truquin, *Mémoires et aventures d’un prolétaire à travers la révolution: L’Algérie* (Paris: François Maspero, 1977), 85.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Truquin, *Mémoires et aventures d’un prolétaire à travers la révolution*, 86.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

magnificent wood and delicious fruits,” but he saw nothing but rocky, colorless landscapes mostly empty of vegetation. The idyllic description had been a lie.¹³⁹

The very premise that enticed Truquin and his family, and many others, to emigrate to Algeria was simply not true. Sessions explains that theories of colonization in the 1840s were “based on deep-seated, if false, assumptions about the under-population and agricultural neglect of Algeria’s territory.”¹⁴⁰ The idea that there was an abundance of open, unoccupied land was a major component of the incentivization of colonization. Added to that was the false notion of the fertility of the land. Colonists were told that they would be given plots of land to farm. All earlier proposals, such as that of *L’Union agricole d’Afrique*, relied heavily on the success of agricultural production in the territory. As Truquin’s experience illustrates, such a success would be difficult, if not impossible, to come by.

Truquin’s colony in Arzeu,¹⁴¹ in the province of Oran, was composed of 1,200 families.¹⁴² Each family was given a small house with two rooms, and most importantly, three hectares of land to work, but they would have to wait for the houses to be built, and for the plots of land to be designated.¹⁴³ With no houses or land, they camped in tents. Given that there was no other work to be done, Truquin’s father decided to hire him out as a domestic servant for the French officers in Arzeu in exchange for fifteen francs a month. This annoyed Truquin, claiming that his father “never worked, but was busy making other people work.”¹⁴⁴ More importantly,

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Sessions, “Colonizing Revolutionary Politics,” 90.

¹⁴¹ Arzeu small city on the Mediterranean coast of Algeria, just East of Oran, now spelled Arzew.

¹⁴² Truquin, 89.

¹⁴³ Truquin, 90.

¹⁴⁴ Truquin, 89.

Truquin was displeased because this was not why he had come to Algeria. He wanted to work for himself and make his own way.

Things did not improve once the agricultural work began. Truquin describes the stubborn nature of the land they were supposed to farm: “The bushes which covered these areas had large, very large stumps, and the dwarf palm trees were buried thirty to forty centimeters deep; they were very difficult to clear, being enveloped in excessively hard filling; it rains rarely in the province of Oran and the land there is very difficult to work.”¹⁴⁵ Additionally, the colonists had very little agricultural experience. Most of them were from Paris, had gone to school, and then entered the urban workforce. The administration offered them no training, nor did they provide them with adequate tools. Thus, it was quite difficult to attain agricultural, and therefore, economic success in the colonies.¹⁴⁶

Truquin criticizes the organization of the colonies, which he deems inefficient and unjust. Each family was given one ox to help them work the land. Truquin asks, “what could one family do with one ox or even two?”¹⁴⁷ The oxen would tire and could only do so much in a single day. He argues that the families should have formed associations, as the members of *L’Union agricole d’Afrique* had suggested in their proposal. That way, they could have grouped their animals together in common ownership, “so as to have them alternate by half-days.”¹⁴⁸ Under this model, the oxen would have built-in breaks. Although the colonists would not be able to work all their individual parcels of land at once while alternating the animals, the work itself would have been much more productive with well rested oxen.

¹⁴⁵ Truquin, 90.

¹⁴⁶ See Truquin, 90 for all information.

¹⁴⁷ Truquin, 109.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

Another organizational problem was that land was distributed based on status instead of strategy. The wealthier colonists got to choose better plots of land, while most families drew for their lots randomly. Notably, Truquin condemns the land surveyor for granting *himself* the best parcel of land, which is described as having “an abundance of water.”¹⁴⁹ Not only did he find this highly inequitable, Truquin also lamented the wasted potential of these fertile areas, that were closer to water sources and not covered with stubborn vegetation.¹⁵⁰ He argues that instead of reserving fertile areas for only wealthier colonists and administrators, “a less short-sighted administration could have established a village there that would have quickly prospered.”¹⁵¹ By consolidating and sharing resources, whether oxen or fertile plots of land, Truquin argues that the colonists could have reached a degree of success.

These discussions culminate in a larger criticism of the government’s approach to the colonization of Algeria:

All this [inefficiency] did not prevent the government from spending fifty million on these colonies; but the ruling class, only occupied with maintaining its privileges, completely ignores the details of the use of the funds. Besides, in sending these colonists to Algeria, the rulers only thought of getting rid of the most *entreprenant*¹⁵² personalities; *casaniers* are not to be feared, but the interest of France was the last of their worries.¹⁵³

In his view, the colonization scheme was a financial waste, as the fifty million francs spent did not contribute at all to the economic success of the colonies. That sum of money was by no means an investment, since, without a more strategic organizational approach to the agricultural exploitation of the land, there would be virtually no material goods returning to the metropole.

¹⁴⁹ Truquin, 108.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² In French, the word “entreprenant” or “enterprising” has a negative connotation.

¹⁵³ Truquin, 109.

However, Truquin suggests that the French government did not really care. Rather, his experience led him to believe that France was more concerned with getting rid of certain types of people through colonial emigration. His word choice is particularly interesting here. The word *casanier* literally translates to “homebody.” Within the context of his larger claim, it takes a figurative sense, meaning comfortable or docile. On the other hand, “enterprising” people were more likely to cause a stir, and threaten the status quo in France, just as the Paris insurgents recently had.

Indeed, some interpretations of the 1848 colonization scheme have suggested that the French government intentionally sent the Parisian insurgents to Algeria. Historian Yvette Katan thoroughly debunks this myth, by painting a profile of the 1848 colonists using evidence from the National Archives. First, she points out that, contrary to the pervasive idea of the colonists being “deportees,” they went to Algeria voluntarily.¹⁵⁴ Truquin’s own account of his eagerness to move to the colonies supports this. Katan cites a report *la Commission des colonies agricoles*, stating that over 80,000 candidates had signed up to emigrate to the colonies, of which the government could only send a fraction.¹⁵⁵ This evidence presented contradicts the idea that the colonists were forcefully transported to the colonies, even though the government may have encouraged emigration.

Katan’s analysis indicates another interesting characteristic of the colonists, which helps us better understand Truquin’s perspective on the government’s intentions. She writes, “the 1848 colonist, a volunteer for Algeria, appears to be a ‘reliable man,’ not very motivated by revolutionary or socialist ideas.”¹⁵⁶ Truquin, well on his way to developing a socialist identity,

¹⁵⁴ Katan, “Les colons de 1848 en Algérie,” 180.

¹⁵⁵ Katan, 183.

¹⁵⁶ Katan, 187.

was an exception. Thus, though we cannot say for sure, he may have been more critical of the organization of colonization than the other colonists. His idea that the government had intentionally approved the emigration of only “the most enterprising personalities” to Algeria seems to be a projection of his own situation and not backed in historical evidence.

Nevertheless, Truquin’s experience raises important points and questions. Namely, what *should* we make of the government’s intentions behind the 1848 colonization scheme, particularly considering the difficulties encountered by Truquin, and his larger criticisms? This is a big question, and one that is certainly outside of the scope of this paper. Yet, it is clear that the workers who immigrated to Algeria as colonists were heavily misled by government messaging. Additionally, as other scholars have documented, we know that government officials were interested in using the colonization of Algeria as a way to relieve the pressure of unemployment in France. A much narrower question, one that we *can* answer, also arises: where does all of this leave the *canuts* who wrote *L’Écho de l’Industrie*? If we call into question the government’s intentions behind their colonization plan of 1848, should we question the integrity of the *canuts*’ interest in colonization? Put simply, that answer is no. Examining the origin of the myth of the fertility of Algerian land, as well as how that myth was spread, helps demonstrate why.

After reading Truquin’s descriptions of barren landscapes with sporadic lush patches, one may wonder where the picture of a fertile Algerian land came from. As Sessions describes, “advocates of settlement argued from an almost blind faith in Algeria’s fabulous fecundity, while opponents denounced the soil as barren.”¹⁵⁷ She attributes the fertility myth to classical text and travel diaries from the early modern period. The myth pervaded long into the 19th century, even after early attempts at French agricultural settlement in the region had failed. In the 1830s,

¹⁵⁷ Sessions, *By Sword and Plow*, 208.

debates about the alleged fertility of Algeria increased as deputies fought over the colonization budget. Even though the narrative of fertility remained dominant, the debates do demonstrate that, at least to a degree, certain government officials were aware that the natural landscape rendered agriculture difficult.

Members of working-class communities like the *canuts* had limited access to information about the true nature of Algerian soil. The information they received overwhelmingly reflected the fertility myth. Instrumental in disseminating this fantasy were guidebooks produced by the Ministry of War, travel journals, and illustrative magazines, each depicting visualizations of lush landscapes: “together, these texts and images helped bring the Algerian fertility myth to prospective emigrants from the lower ranks of French society.”¹⁵⁸ Indeed, the *canuts* themselves sang the praises of the fertility of Algerian land, referring as well to the “magnificent vegetation.”¹⁵⁹ Given the information at hand, the *canuts* almost certainly believed earnestly in the agricultural potential of the Algerian colonies—so long as they were organized well.

Further, the *canuts*’ support for the colonization of Algeria is more or less consistent with their other, stronger convictions. Colonization gave them a new framework to apply their vision of the reorganization of labor through association. They called for “an alliance of capital and labor” to solve “the problem” of colonization in Algeria. This proposed alliance is at the very heart of their Fourierist philosophy, which operates on the assumption that the interests of capital and labor are intertwined. In this sense, their support for colonization was not a diversion from their existing political character, but an extension of it.

¹⁵⁸ Sessions, *By Sword and Plow*, 223.

¹⁵⁹ “Politique Générale,” *L’Écho de l’Industrie*, January 31, 1846, 1.

At times, the *canuts* also conceptualized the colonization of Algeria as a concrete solution to domestic problems. Namely, their discussion of the training-farms for orphans in Algeria proposed by M. Toussanel illustrates that they were interested in the potential economic benefits of colonization. If implemented, they thought that this approach would lessen the burdensome costs on cities seeking to shelter children. As a forward-thinking group of workers hoping for improved economic conditions for all, they welcomed colonization as a part of this solution.

Of course, the *canuts* were principally concerned with the vitality of their industry, and their ability to thrive within it. If the colonization of Algeria would have been a piece of that puzzle, giving the *canuts* direct opportunities to both expand and optimally re-organize the industry, then they would have been further incentivized to support it. Members of *L'Union agricole d'Afrique* had carved out a place, albeit a small one, for silk work in the larger scope of vision of colonization for which they advocated in their published proposal. Some *canuts* read this plan, which aligned with their economic philosophy of association, and directly connected colonization to the potential future of their industry.

At the very least, these examples help to illustrate that the *canuts'* interest in the colonization of Algeria is best understood in conjunction with their more prominent political and economic values. They were *canuts* before all else, workers who cared deeply for their craft and fought for justice in their industry in pioneering ways. Their approach to colonization is one chapter in this larger, overarching narrative.

Conclusion

As dynamic characters of Lyon's past, the *canuts* have captured the interest of many historians over the years. They have been rightly classified as a working-class intellectual elite, passionate about their craft, and determined to improve the organization of their industry. However, an important piece of the puzzle has been missing. The colonization of Algeria was a major historical process that occurred well within the era of the *canut*. Their attentive interest in it has not been thoroughly studied by other scholars. This thesis sought to bridge that gap, exploring the root of the *canuts*' support of the colonization of Algeria through an analysis of their commentary on it in *L'Écho de l'Industrie*. In the end, their position on Algeria was in line with the key characteristics of their collective identity. The *canuts* were solution oriented. They envisioned a better future for their industry, guided by the principle of economic association. Accordingly, they advocated for the implementation of the association model in Algeria, through an "alliance of capital and labor." Even their simultaneous support for the Polish insurrection clarifies, rather than challenges, how we should understand their interest in the colonization of Algeria. They stood in solidarity with Polish people who fought against tyranny because they saw themselves in this fight. It was reminiscent of recent French revolutionary struggles, not to mention the *canut* revolts of the previous decade. This ideological framework, rooted in their own identity, did not apply to Algeria. Similarly, the practical opportunities offered by the colonization of Algeria to apply the economic system of association, or otherwise respond to pressing domestic concerns, did not apply to Poland.

Secondarily, this thesis fights against the tempting contemporary impulse to simplify the narrative of the *canuts*' support for the colonization of Algeria. Knowing what we now know about the brutality of the colonization of Algeria, as well as the emergence of the field of

postcolonialism, it might seem easy to attribute the *canuts*' support for colonization to racism and bigotry. However, this explanation does not listen to the evidence itself. When they spoke about Algerians, the *canuts* did not use explicitly racist language by 19th century standards. Though they gave credence to the *mission civilisatrice*, it was not the primary source of their interest in colonization, nor was it considered to be racist then in Western society as it is today. That being said, the intention of this thesis is not to defend the morality of the *canuts*. As many 19th century Europeans, they were complicated, problematic characters, and were surly racist by today's standards. Oversimplifying the narrative, however, obscures the real reasons why they supported the colonization of Algeria.

A group of workers in 19th century Lyon might seem insignificant, their interest in colonization inconsequential. Still, there are lessons we can glean. Most historians study the past to better understand the present. Today, we do not truly live in a postcolonial era. Not only are groups around the globe, such as Algerians, still dealing with the ramifications of decades of political subjugation, groups like Palestinians in the West Bank are forced to watch their land be stolen from them, often in violent ways. Unless we take a moment to sit with hard truths, and interrogate why ordinary people could tolerate, or even cheer on colonial violence, there is no interrupting this cycle. In our current national and global climates now more than ever, we need to have hard conversations. We need to confront the fact that some people condone horrible things, and are willing to stand by while their country wages war, just because they *might* have something to gain from it in the end.

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