



From the Cape of Good Hope to the Pointe de Grave : a study of natural wine and its political challenges. Environmental movements and the transformation of wine production

Clémentine Chazal

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**Sciences Po
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POUR L'OBTENTION DU GRADE DE

DOCTEUR EN SCIENCE POLITIQUE

DE SCIENCES PO BORDEAUX

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**FROM THE CAPE OF GOOD HOPE TO THE POINTE DE
GRAVES: A STUDY OF NATURAL WINE AND ITS
POLITICAL CHALLENGES**

**Environmental movements and the transformation of wine
production**

Par Clémentine CHAZAL

Sous la direction de Dominique DARBON et Andy SMITH
Réalisée à LAM (Les Afriques dans le Monde) – UMR 5115

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Abstract in English

From the Cape of Good Hope to the Pointe de Grave: a study of natural wine and its political challenges - Environmental movements and the transformation of the wine production

Within the current wine industry, a paradigm shift is underway as winemakers increasingly question conventional Fordist practices and intensive viticulture techniques. Yet, this departure from the industrial model remains confined to a select cohort of trailblazing winemakers who are reshaping wine production by championing environmental stewardship, ecological care, small-scale viticulture, and renewed craftsmanship. These alternative practices manifest through the emergence of the natural wine movement, a niche segment of the wine market that has attracted tremendous attention from wine professionals, specialised media and critics internationally, provoking some acute reactions from all ends of the wine spectrum.

This research departs from the absence of a technical definition for natural wine, examining it not as a product, nor a commodity, but as a social movement. The doctoral study is grounded in three key hypotheses. First, I assert that the natural wine movement acts as a platform for resistance and radical innovations, particularly for small independent winemakers, setting a precedent within an industry that is highly normed, regulated, and symbolically charged. Second, I argue that the Natural Wine Movement has surfaced in all wine regions, both from the so-called Old and New World. Consequently, the natural wine movement can be considered a transnational network with a diversity of local anchors yet supporting an international identity that cuts across wine regions. Third, I contend that the natural wine network allows for a political project of knowledge production throughout the wine sector at large, offering alternative ways of producing and showcasing innovations. In this perspective, the natural wine network becomes an agent for incremental yet structural change within the wine industry

Adopting an approach at the crossroads between political sociology and political economy, and employing qualitative methods, including interviews and observations, and social network analysis, this study delves into the emergence of the natural wine movement in two distinguished wine regions: the Western Cape Province in South Africa and the Bordeaux region in France.

Keywords: Natural wine movement; Wine Industry; Bordeaux (France); Western Cape Province (South Africa); Environmental mobilisations; Cognitive framework; Knowledge and power agencies; Alternative Agro-Food Movement; Social Network Analysis;

Abstract in French

Du Cap de Bonne Espérance à la Pointe de Grave : une étude du mouvement des vins nature et de ses enjeux politiques – Mobilisations environnementales et transformation de la production vitivinicole

Au sein de l'industrie vinicole actuelle, un changement de paradigme est en cours alors que de plus en plus de vignerons remettent en question les pratiques conventionnelles fordistes et les techniques viticoles intensives. Pourtant, cette rupture avec le modèle industriel reste confinée à une cohorte restreinte de producteurs, de vignerons pionniers qui transforment la production de vin en défendant la protection de l'environnement, le soin écologique, la viticulture à petite échelle et le renouveau de l'artisanat. Ces pratiques alternatives se manifestent par l'émergence du mouvement des vins nature, un segment de niche du marché du vin qui a attiré l'attention des professionnels du vin, des médias spécialisés et des critiques internationaux, suscitant des réactions vives de toutes parts.

Cette recherche part de l'absence de définition technique du vin nature, l'examinant non pas comme un produit ni une marchandise, mais comme un mouvement social de résistance et une évolution du marché. Cette recherche doctorale repose sur trois hypothèses clés. Premièrement, j'affirme que le mouvement des vins nature agit comme une plateforme de résistance et d'innovations radicales, notamment pour les petits vignerons indépendants qui en faisant émerger un nouveau cadre cognitif créent un précédent au sein d'une industrie hautement normée, réglementée et symboliquement chargée. Deuxièmement, je soutiens que le mouvement des vins nature est apparu dans toutes les régions viticoles, tant dans ce qu'on appelle la « Vieille Europe » que le « Nouveau Monde ». Par conséquent, le mouvement des vins nature peut être considéré comme un réseau transnational avec une identité internationale qui traverse les régions viticoles et une diversité d'ancrages locaux. Troisièmement, je soutiens que le réseau des vins nature permet un projet politique de diffusion de nouveaux savoirs et savoir-faire dans le secteur vinicole, en proposant des voies alternatives de productions et en présentant des techniques innovantes tout le long de la chaîne de valeur du vin. Dans cette perspective, le réseau des vins nature se pose en agent de changement progressif mais structurel au sein de l'industrie vinicole.

Adoptant une perspective à la croisée entre la sociologie politique et l'économie politique, et utilisant des méthodes qualitatives, y compris des entretiens et des observations, ainsi que l'analyse des réseaux sociaux, cette étude explore l'émergence du mouvement des vins nature dans deux régions viticoles distinguées : la province du Cap-Occidental en Afrique du Sud et la région de Bordeaux en France.

Mots-Clés: Mouvement des Vin Nature; Industrie vitivinicole, Bordeaux (France); Cap-Occidental (Afrique du Sud); Mobilisation environnementales; Cadres cognitifs; Circulation des savoirs; Alternative Agro-Food Movement; Social Network analysis

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List of abbreviations

	English	French
AAFM	Alternative Agro-Food Movement	Mouvement Alternatifs Agro-alimentaire
AB		Agriculture Biologique
ANC	African National Congress	
AVN		Association des Vins Natures
AOC		Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée
BEE	Black Economic Empowerment	
BWI	Biodiversity Wine Initiative	
CIVB	Interprofessional Committee of Bordeaux Wines	Comité Interprofessionnel des Vins de Bordeaux
CNAOC		Comité national des Appellations d'origine contrôlée
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility	Responsabilité Sociale en Entreprise
DAFF	SA Department of Agriculture, Fish and Forestry	
DRAFF		Direction régionale de l'Alimentation, de l'Agriculture et de la Forêt
HSM	Hyper- and Super- Markets	
HVE		Haute Valeur Environnementale
IFOAM	International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements	
IGP		Indication Géographique Protégée
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change	
IPW	Integrated Production of Wine	
IR	Institutionalised Relationship	
KWV	Koöperatieve Wijnbouwers Vereniging	
LRAD	Land Redistribution and Agriculture Development	
NOP	USA National Organic Program	
ODG		Organisme de Défense et de Gestion
OIV		Organisation Internationale du Vin
ONIVINS	National Office of Wines	
PE	Political Ecologies	
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment	
RSA		Revenu de Solidarité Active
SAINS		Association des vins Sans Intrants Ni Sulfites Ajoutés
SAOSO	South African Organic Sector Organisation	
SAWIS	South African Wine Industry Information and Statistics	
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence	Violences Sexistes and Sexuelles
SIP	Swartland Independent Producers	
SME	Environmental Management System	Système de Management Environnemental
SNA	Social Network Analysis	
WIETA	Wine and Agricultural Ethical Trade Association	
WO	Wine of Origin	
WOSA	Wine Of South Africa	
WTO	World Trade Organisation	
WSB	Wine and Spirit Board	



Figure 1. The natural winemakers' revolution. Source: Lloyd Martin, 2024

INTRODUCTION

“Live in each season as it passes;
breathe the air, drink the drink, taste the fruit,
and resign yourself to the influence of the earth.”
(Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*)

1. The natural wine movement and how to define it: an analogy to Thoreau’s premonitory dream of political ecologies.

Henry David Thoreau, who is regarded as one of the earliest champions of ecological thinking, laid the groundwork for a philosophy that was deeply rooted in reconnecting with nature long before a formal definition of ecology emerged. In *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (1854), Thoreau described how he had embarked on a journey to live alone in the wilderness near Walden Pond (Massachusetts, USA), constructing his own cabin and striving for self-sufficiency. Contrary to popular belief, Thoreau’s endeavour was not inspired by a desire for isolation or reclusiveness; rather, it emphasised a return to the wild, a rekindling of the relationship between self and the natural world. Three ideas that were central to Thoreau’s philosophy emerged from this book: embracing nature, transcendentalism and civil disobedience.

The first central element of Thoreau’s ethos was the embracing of nature. Through his experiment of living self-reliantly in a cabin in the woods, Thoreau became a pioneering figure in “nature writing,” situating nature at the core of his writings and preoccupations. His advocacy for a return to the wilderness is often applied in modern political ecology thinking. His philosophy underscores the interconnectedness and dependency between humanity and the natural world, and reasserts that humans were intrinsic parts of nature long before they became enmeshed in the realm of society’s laws (D. Latour, 2010). Thoreau’s ethos is also often associated with transcendentalism, aligning with a quest for emancipation and non-conformity. He advocated an economy of simplicity embodied in the notion of doing better with less. In his overtly anti-capitalist stance, Thoreau also advocates the pursuit of liberation from societal expectations, prompting a deeper reflection on human life and work transformations. His philosophy rebels against societal norms and economic constraints and supports simplicity – if not frugality – and sustainability and individual freedom. Finally, he was also a precursor of the modern concept of civil disobedience, emphasising the individual responsibility of each person to defend the

societal project they deemed just. And while he may not have explicitly articulated a collective project in *Walden*,¹ his advocacy of civil disobedience underscored the importance of individual agency in effecting change.

In 2010, David Latour analysed Thoreau's philosophy, interpreting Thoreau's "premonitory dream" as "the beginnings of ecology." Drawing on Latour's analysis, I propose to begin this thesis by outlining an analogy between Thoreau's philosophy and the natural wine movement, which will be the central focus of this work. This analogy is particularly useful for its power to evoke a specific way of thinking. Thoreau's visionary perspective on nature resonates deeply with the ethos of the natural wine movement, which emphasises a profound connection with nature and a commitment to authenticity and sustainability. I have used this analogy to explore how Thoreau and proponents of the natural wine movement both advocate for a harmonious relationship between humanity and the natural world, paving the way for a more profound understanding of ecological consciousness and ethical production practices. As this thesis unfolds, we will see how Thoreau's legacy inspires ways of living that are holistic and sustainable, and also fuelled – perhaps even unconsciously – the fundamental principles of the natural wine movement. The natural wine movement is a somewhat new subject that has hitherto received little attention from academics, especially from the social sciences and humanities. Indeed, as yet there is no widely accepted definition of the movement from the authors that have examined it, thereby adding to the complexity of understanding this emerging trend. The chapters that follow will delve more deeply into the intricacies of its definition and its borders, and so instead of offering a final definition at this stage, I will set out here to introduce the natural wine movement to the reader by relating it to the central paradigms of Thoreau's philosophy.

First, Thoreau's deep connection with nature, as exemplified by his retreat to *Walden*, mirrors natural winemakers' immersion in their vineyards. Thoreau's "rewilding" vision resonates deeply with the ethos of the natural wine movement, which celebrates the symbiotic relationship between humans, vines and the land. Furthermore, both endeavours

¹ However, the absence, or at least the lack, of a formulation of a collective project in *Walden* raises questions about Thoreau's perspective on collective action. As Thoreau himself remarked, "We find but little virtue in the action of masses," which indicates a feeling of skepticism towards collective endeavours. The absence of a collective vision is a criticism that has often been levelled against Thoreau, notably by Hannah Arendt.

seek intellectual emancipation and a return to authenticity, attaching importance to manual labour and working with the earth (the soil and the vines). The “errant walker,” as Thoreau describes himself, mirrors the natural winemaker who wanders among his vines. Just as Thoreau sought to break free from the dominant economic mould and build an environment conducive to self-cultivation far from the distractions of industrialisation and material possessions, so natural wine producers seek to create wines that break away from conventional production and are untainted by technological interventions or mass production. Both advocate simplicity and sustainability, challenging conventional practices. Thoreau’s marginality also finds resonance in the principles of the natural wine movement: by embracing a simpler, more sustainable approach to winemaking, natural wine producers challenge the hegemony of mainstream capitalism. As such, both Thoreau and natural winemakers defy societal norms and embrace alternative paths, striving for greater autonomy and authenticity in their endeavours. Finally, Thoreau’s emphasis on individual responsibility when defending one’s principles emphasises the importance of personal conscience over blind adherence to societal norms or laws. This dissenting emancipatory dimension echoes the principles of the natural wine movement, which encourages producers to challenge conventional winemaking practices and embrace alternative approaches that break with the status quo. In this sense, both Thoreau and practitioners in the natural wine movement advocate a form of resistance that prioritises personal conviction and ethical responsibility, ultimately aiming to contribute to broader transformations towards a future they deem more just and sustainable.

Latour concluded his analysis of Thoreau by affirming his desire to “live by example,” to undertake an experimental life project in order to launch “a provocation by example, a cry of alarm to awaken human potentials” (D. Latour, 2010, p. 10). This aspiration to break away from conventional paths and construct alternative futures through one’s own unique experiments lies at the heart of the natural wine movement and will serve as the main thread of this thesis. However, while there are numerous parallels between Thoreau and the natural wine movement, it would be simplistic to assert that their aspirations are identical, or even that the analogy is being explicitly used by actors in the natural wine movement today. By analysing the natural wine movement and its actors’ cognitive dimension, this thesis aims to both analyse the dynamics of contestation and resistance to which it gives

rise and uncover the romanticism, if not utopian, dimension of these transcendentalist projects².

2. A social movement or a shift in the market? From an enigma to a theoretical framework

2.1. The enigma of natural wine

In this introduction, my analogy between Thoreau's premonitory dream of ecology and the ethos of the natural wine movement is really a detour, more precisely a tactic to establish an initial characterisation of the natural wine movement without imposing a stable definition. Just as the definition of ecology in Thoreau's work is multifaceted, the natural wine movement defies reduction to a single definition; it is protean, and has yet to be agreed on. Simply put, natural wine is not just a method of production; it encompasses a spectrum of practices rather than a single model that simply aims to break free from the conventional model of wine production.

This same analogy lays the groundwork for this thesis, which investigates the trajectories of actors in the natural wine movement amidst dynamics of emancipation, contestation, ecological activism and more. Despite the limited academic exploration it has enjoyed, the natural wine movement has become a tangible reality in the wine industry over the past decade. It encompasses new production methods in vineyards and cellars alike, as well as distinctive communication and marketing strategies. It has become a niche market segment with its own distribution channels and consumer base, and most importantly it has created its own cognitive framework, which includes a set of values and claims and a shared identity. What is more, despite being a niche phenomenon, it has received enormous attention from the specialised media and critics internationally, and there can be no doubt that the movement has provoked sharp reactions from all parts of the wine spectrum. Natural wine is not an epiphenomenon, therefore, and it deserves to be better understood by wine industry professionals and by academics working in and outside the wine world.

² Henry David Thoreau, as with other figures of the transcendentalist movement, is often classified as a romantic writer, and is sometimes criticised for his philosophical romanticism and his obsession with finding solutions in holism and interdependence (Robbins, 2012)

In a press article, the South African wine economist Petri de Beer declared: “Natural wine is but the latest iteration of a social movement rather than a wine style or farming style.”³ This quote encapsulates the paradox of trying to define natural wine and plants the seed of an idea I will return to throughout this thesis: natural wine as a social movement. In the absence of a technical and officially recognised definition, I explore it as both a social movement and a shift within the market.

My thesis uses two overarching theoretical frameworks as the basis for gaining an understanding of the movement. Firstly, it is understood as a contestatory movement, and is examined at the intersection of three bodies of literature: the sociology of social movements, political ecologies and political economy. Second, I argue that because the natural wine movement has both generated and been engendered by a transnational movement, it requires a multiscalar analysis to examine the agency of the actors who intervene at different scales and across various territories. The construction of this theoretical framework guided the development of this thesis, and situates my research within the existing literature. The theoretical landmarks listed above also highlight the fact that while the primary focus of this thesis is natural wine, its academic scope can be extended well beyond the literature of the wine industry and integrated into the broader debates outlined below.

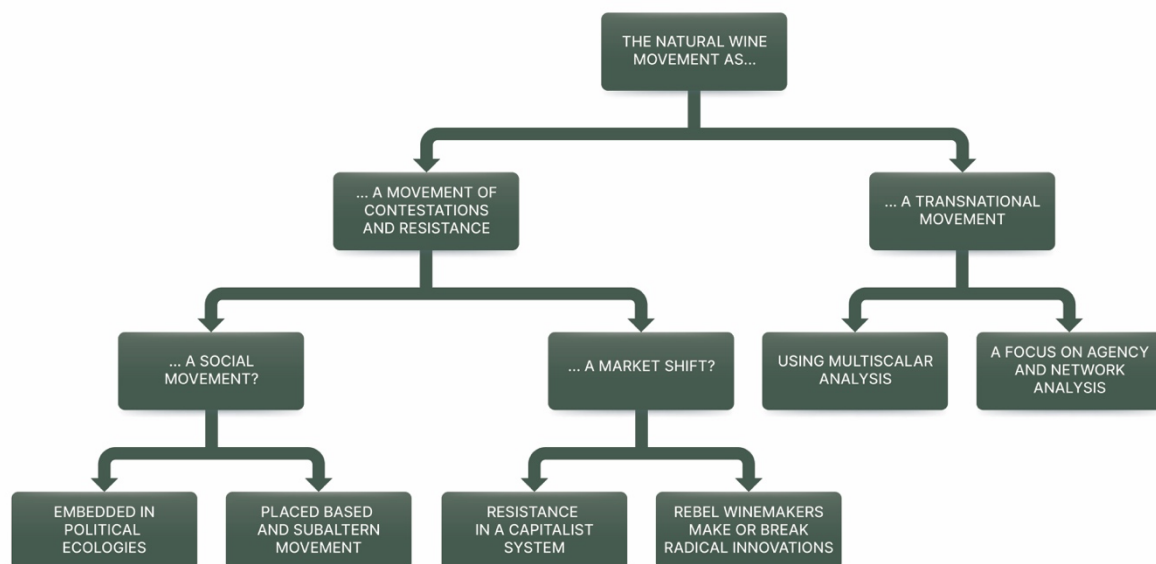


Figure 2. How to think about the natural wine movement. A draft theoretical framework

³ Beer, Petri De. 2023. “Do You Know What Is in Your Glass? The Enigma of Natural Wine.” Wine.co.za.

2.2. Why the natural wine movement triggers resistance in the wine industry

First, we see a surge of resistance movements that are attempting to deal with issues around the governance and management of natural resources, better known in academic spheres as political ecologies. These issues can be viewed through two lenses: the literature on social movements and political economy. The next section examines the natural wine movement from both these perspectives – as a social movement of resistance and as a market shift. However, before delving into these discussions, it is essential to clarify the concept of “industry” on which this research is grounded.

2.1.1. *Understanding the wine industry and its institutional order*

I use the concept of industry in this work to define the professional sector within which I develop my analysis. By referring to the wine *industry* rather than field or sector, it becomes possible to understand both the economic and political dynamics at play within it. My understanding of the term “industry” is informed by the definition provided by Bernard Jullien and Andy Smith (Jullien & Smith, 2008), who conceptualise “industries” as frameworks comprising (relatively stable) rules, norms and conventions that influence how actors are perceived, perceive themselves and interact with one another. Their analysis of industries is built around the notion of “institutional orders,” and there are four main institutionalised relationships that constitute these orders (employment, finance, sourcing and commercialisation). The stabilisation of these relationships engenders corresponding institutionalised arrangements. By grounding this study in the wine industry, I aim to illustrate how institutional orders can undergo transformation, face challenges and be disrupted. To borrow from Mary Douglas’s investigations, this research explores the following questions: “How does a social group generate its own worldview and define its thought style? Who governs the interaction patterns?” (Douglas, Balandier, & Abeillé, 1989). Focusing on the small group of actors who make up the natural wine movement and its cognitive dimension, I first examine how they fit into this institutional order and the position they occupy within it, and how they interpret market relationships through the cognitive and symbolic frameworks they have built. I then shed light on the political strategies these interpretations have spawned and the oppositions and ad hoc alliances they have given rise to. By using this approach, I seek to highlight how the wine industry and its institutionalised relationships have been disrupted over the past two decades by a new

group of influential actors, and the negotiations, conflicts and agenda-setting issues that have ensued.

2.1.2. At the crossroads between political ecologies, the sociology of social movements, and political economy

As I mentioned above, this study positions itself at the crossroads between three different strands of literature: the sociology of social movement, political ecologies, and political economy. First, I examine the literature on social movements, especially the branch that deals with conflicts and challenges around the management of environmental resources. I then turn to the political economy literature. Indeed, while dynamics of contestation often fall within the sociology of social movements, there are reasons to believe that this approach alone is somehow limiting, and does not allow us to grasp the full picture of the political and economic challenges at stake here.

2.1.2.1. A social movement of resistance?

➤ A movement embedded in political ecologies.

The sociology of social movement has given rise to a dense, ever-evolving stream of literature (Neveu, 2011; Tilly, 1984). So as to avoid getting lost in its abundance of publications, this study focuses on ecological theories of political resistance. The management of vineyards and grape production, as well as the challenges around distribution, commercialisation and consumption, explicitly link the natural wine movement to the literature on political ecologies because it involves dynamics of contestation around access to and the management of natural resources. Agricultural challenges are at the core of political ecology debates, as exemplified by the literature on peasant struggles (Desmarais, 2010; Thivet, 2017; Wiebe, 2023), environmental justice (Martinez-Alier, Temper, Del Bene, & Scheidel, 2016), climate activism (Fairhead, Leach, & Scoones, 2012), and because, as we have been accurately reminded by Pierre Blanc, “arable land has been a breeding ground for politics for centuries” (Blanc, 2020). The point of departure that interests us here is the rivalries relating to modes of production or access to and management of resources that enable wine production, such as land and vineyards, and also biotopes, water, grapes, yeasts, etc. The challenges that arise from the governance and management of those resources and the conflicting visions that ensue are at the core of

this analysis, and thus require consultation of the literature at the crossroads between political ecologies and social movement.

As Joan Martinez-Alier has noted, “Changing the metabolism of industrial economies gives rise to an increasing number of ecological distribution conflicts” (Martinez-Alier et al., 2016). This study falls within the scope of this observation, as actors from the natural wine movement create resistance and disrupt the institutional order imposed by agro-industrial actors in the wine industry. Their political agenda includes redefining the meanings of vineyard management, wine production and commercialisation and the power relationships that govern them. The literature on political ecologies has recently overlapped with the literature on social movements, leading to an increasing engagement with activism and situated knowledge (D. E. Rocheleau, 2008). In ecological theory, political resistance is often centred around the concepts of moral economy and everyday resistance (Robbins, 2012, p. 61). I draw directly from the sociology of social movements to investigate how a small group can effect change in a profit-oriented and highly-regulated sector, and I offer insights into the tools and repertoires of action available to them for this purpose. The literature on social movements and political ecologies has generated a set of concepts for studying these movements of resistance to the hegemonic discourse that range from environmental justice to subaltern and place-based movements. For this reason, it is necessary to take some time at this point to situate the natural wine movement within and with regard to these existing concepts.

➤ **A placed-based subaltern movement?**

The term subaltern can be used to describe groups that are socially and politically marginalised within capitalist societies, such as subaltern strategies of resistance by peasants and farmers to globalisation. However, a reliance on the concept of subaltern alone would not be entirely satisfactory for the purposes of this analysis. Indeed, although this research reveals that many actors in the natural wine movement consider themselves to be marginalised because of their subordinate position in the wine industry, I must state again that here we are a long way from the notion of subaltern that emerged from postcolonial studies – notably Indian decolonial studies – to describe groups that have been subordinated and colonised by an oppressive regime. Other authors have come up with concepts that come closer to this study, including subaltern ecologies and subaltern environmentalism (Egan 2002). Therefore, instead of referring directly to a subaltern

movement, I draw on the body of literature that explores the adoption of grassroots environmental activism by marginalised groups. Nevertheless, the concept of subaltern proves useful for several reasons: first, subaltern movements emerge from small groups in civil society who successfully create a space for political mobilisation and active resistance; second those grassroots mobilisations are likely to emerge at the margins, or “in the spaces that are unnoticed or seen as insignificant by powerful state or corporate actors” (Wekerle, 2004, p. 380); and third, analyses of subaltern mobilisations often reveal resistance through “everyday acts of resistance” (Scott, 1989) or “soft opposition” (Cheru, 1997).

A second potential way of categorising this contestatory movement is to turn to the concept of place-based movement: that is, one that explores its relationship with the space it inhabits. This concept was developed by two critical development scholars, Arturo Escobar (2001) and Arjun Appadurai (2000). They theorise movements rooted in localities that draw upon individuals’ agency to mobilise their local everyday practices and vernacular knowledge. The purpose of these movements is to create contestatory networks that challenge dominant power structures and counter narratives of capital and modernity. They often emerge in response to socio-environmental injustices, and are driven by a desire to reclaim control over local resources and decision-making processes.

What is particularly interesting about the frameworks proposed by Appadurai and Escobar for the study of social movements is that they recognise the significance of place in shaping collective action while also acknowledging the potential for engagement with translocal networks. Escobar, for example, observes that social movements often employ both place-based strategies rooted in attachment to territory and culture and global strategies facilitated by what he terms “meshworks” (which should be understood as translocal networks). Similarly, in Appadurai’s framework, place-based movements are influenced by global networks and discourses but remain grounded in specific cultural, social and political contexts, enacting a “politics of scale from below”. The literature on local networks and resistance movements is extensive, particularly in the realm of political ecologies, and it might be argued that food-based movements have made a major contribution to this trend. As this thesis will reveal, alternative agro-food movements provide a foundation for the development of theoretical frameworks such as these in the literature on political ecologies and social movements, which seeks to understand resistance to globalisation, alternative

practices and experiments, re-embeddedness strategies and how local knowledge and transnational coalitions intertwine (Wekerle, 2004).

➤ **A new social movement built on paradigms of identity and opposition.**

One lingering question remains: is the natural wine phenomenon truly a movement in the conventional sense understood in the social sciences, or is it more closely aligned with the concept of a network, a coalition or even simply a group of actors? In his analysis of local food movements, Amory Starr notes: “Determining whether a phenomenon indeed qualifies as a social movement remains one of the most vexing questions in the field of social movements” (Starr, 2010, p. 481). The literature on new social movements offers valuable insights into this issue. Here I draw from authors such as Sylvie Ollitrault, Alberto Melucci and Alain Touraine, who have contributed to the theorisation of new social movements and adapted the analytical framework for understanding these new forms of collective actions (Melucci, 1983; Ollitrault, 1996; Touraine, 1980). Without going into too much detail here, they define New Social Movements by identifying new claims and repertoires of actions that break away from traditional working-class protests. The challenge in these new struggles lies in uncovering the symptoms of a new “post-industrial” society (thus adapting the Marxist grid), along with the emergence of new actors who advocate for alternative societal models. They highlight two central paradigms that are crucial for identifying these new social movements: the identity paradigm – in which a shared identity is built during a conflict – and the opposition paradigm – which highlights the new form of opposition that purposely emerge from them. As Touraine points out, these new social movements are those “most directly carrying a counter-model of society.” (Touraine, 1980). I should note here that new social movements, especially those that emerge out of place-based or subaltern groups, may create a societal shift and give rise to policy change, not necessarily through organised collective actions and direct confrontations, but rather through everyday resistance or slow, long-term shifts in beliefs and values. This thesis will demonstrate how framing new social movements through the identity paradigm and the opposition paradigm, fits so well with understanding the natural wine movement.

Having made the point that the literature on social movements helps articulate the dynamics of contestation and resistance and the subversive character of the natural wine movement,

I will now discuss political economy literature as a means of understanding the dynamics of institutionalisation and adaptation to mainstream markets.

2.1.2.2. A market shift?

The intersection between the sociology of social movements and political economy shines an original light on the issues at hand; they are not isolated from each other, and the points where they converge offer a unique perspective on the topics before us.

➤ **Studying resistance within a capitalist system**

There is a significant body of literature on resistance movements in the capitalist world that is particularly interested in logics of accumulation that diverge from a form of “expanded reproduction of capital” (Roger, 2020). In line with authors from the Marxist tradition, this thesis investigates alternative forms of production that challenge the exploitation of nature by the dominant capital, which has also been conceptualised as the “metabolic rift” (Foster, 1999). According to this approach, industries are deeply intertwined with capitalist society, making the political economy approach almost indispensable for addressing ecological challenges. That said, it is essential to distinguish between the different meanings of “industry.” On the one hand, I refer to the wine industry to describe the sector I study here and to decipher the dynamics surrounding its institutional order. On the other, I refer to the industrial production of wines that is characterised by conventional, standardised, profit-driven, mass-produced approaches and is a direct result of capitalism. In other words, it is possible to find a wide spectrum of production methods in the wine industry, from “natural” production, which rejects the use of synthetic ingredients, to intensive and industrial production, which embraces them wholeheartedly.

This research adopts a heterodox posture inherited from political economy theorists such as Ellen Meiksins Wood and Karl Polanyi, and analyses both economic forces and political struggles. It assumes that economic relations are not solely the product of an autonomous logic, and considers economy and politics to be intrinsically linked. In line with this heterodox approach, I believe that capitalism can never be solely understood by economic forces, and that political dynamics come into play and participate in shaping (creating or constraining) the market. Studying social movements of resistance within this approach is particularly interesting because they contribute to re-politicising capitalism (Wood, 1999), establishing forms of moral economy (Scott, 1998) and resisting the elimination of non-

capitalist organisational forms by re-embedding collective norms (Polanyi, 1944). Central to this research is the exploration of the agency of individuals and groups in mobilising and organising in order to challenge established norms, thereby bringing about changes in both markets and public policies. My objective here is to identify how their actions shape the trajectory of innovation and drive a paradigm shift in production (and to a lesser extent consumption) dynamics in the wine industry.

➤ **Rebel winemakers make or break radical innovations**

Rebel winemakers is a direct reference to “Market Rebels: How Activists Make or Break Radical Innovations” by Hayagreeva Rao (Rao, 2008), whose concepts and theories have nurtured the conceptual framework of this research in profound ways. In the introduction to his book, Rao highlights an oversight in academia regarding the role of social movements in shaping radical market innovations. He goes on to advocate the adoption of a position that links the sociology of social movements and political economy. Economists have tended to disregard the collaborative efforts of activists and their allies to drive the creation and disruption of radical innovations (Rao refers to the “joint hand” in contrast to Adam Smith’s concept of the “invisible hand” to conceptualise the agency of activists and movements of resistance). Meanwhile, sociologists studying social movements have primarily examined their interactions with the state, thus neglecting their influence on market dynamics. As a result, radical innovations are often viewed as market shocks rather than outcomes of collective actions.

In Market Rebels, Rao seeks to bridge this gap by examining how social movements and activist groups shape radical innovation in markets. He introduces two key concepts: market rebels and radical innovation. As Rao defines them, market rebels are “activists challenging the status quo, organising collective efforts to preserve identity” (Rao 2008, 5). Radical innovation, on the other hand, involves actions that challenge “existing interests, norms, and values because they disrupt an existing technological trajectory and introduce a brand-new set of performance features to consumers. [...] Most importantly, radical innovations transform social practices and social relationships, and hence challenge existing norms and presuppositions” (Rao, 2008, p. 4). My research draws from this framework to analyse the agency of rebel winemakers who either facilitate the adoption of innovations or disrupt existing market structures.

To sum up, this research positions itself within the expansive realm of political ecologies, investigating ecological resistance movements and drawing insights from the sociology of social movements and political economy to construct its theoretical framework. Specifically, my analysis focuses on how actors in the natural wine movement confront the prevailing status quo and oppose the dominant conventional market. It raises the question of whether this phenomenon manifests itself as a social movement of resistance or as a transformative shift within the market. By navigating these diverse streams of literature, I have developed my own analytical framework to examine the agency of “rebel winemakers” in challenging the existing institutional order. The issues of demarcation and the strategies of marginality of natural winemakers are structural elements of the natural wine movement. In this research, the controversies and conflicts between players in the movement and the wine industry are analysed in different territories and at various levels.

2.3. A transnational movement and a multiscalar analysis

The second part of this theoretical framework sets out the notion of scale and describes the decision to investigate the natural wine movement using a dual lens approach: the natural wine movement is first conceptualised as a transnational movement and then analysed using a multi-scalar analysis. The transnational approach makes it possible to look at the movement in the making, as not only an evolving network of actors who are bound together by shared values and common narratives, but also a diversity of actors among whom coalitions have formed, creating interlocking networks that link actors from the natural wine movement across the globe. This transnational phenomenon requires an analysis of scale and scalability dynamics to observe the agency and network dynamics at play from the local to the global level. This dual-dimension analytical lens offers a particularly useful way of understanding the ambivalent character of the natural wine movement as a phenomenon that exists internationally but is also embedded locally, highlighting the importance of situated knowledge and local practices and specificities.

2.3.1. A transnational movement

The international nature of the natural wine movement becomes evident when one looks at both the congruence of demands among the participants in various wine-producing regions and the interaction of scales involved between the wine-producing territories, spanning from the vineyards to the global market. In order to gain an understanding of these diverse

dimensions, I turn to the concept of transnational movement to analyse a phenomenon that circulates through multiple arenas in various ways.

Transnational phenomena are not new, but they have gained increased visibility in the social sciences with globalisation dynamics. The concept of transnationalism has enabled globalised phenomena to be studied by moving away from the dominant states or national frameworks that have thus far been the preferred focus of interest. An analysis of transnational phenomena highlights locally connected dynamics that affect different spaces and territories without necessarily playing a specific role at a national level. When applied as an analytical concept, transnationalism offers multiple ways of analysing the interconnection between actors and spaces in motion. What is particularly interesting about this particular study is the revitalised perspective it brings to the sociology of social movements through the emergence of the “transnational turn,” or more specifically the idea of a “transnationalisation of collective action” (Hrabanski, 2011; Siméant, 2010). In line with Joanna Siméant and Marie Hrabanski’s arguments, I explore the transnationality of the natural wine movement as a prime example of a form of activism that operates simultaneously in various spaces.

Both Siméant and Hrabanski refer to Keohane and Nye’s (1972) definition of transnationalism as “contacts, coalitions, and interactions that cross state borders and are not controlled by the central foreign policy body of governments,” thereby limiting the analysis of transnationalism to international activities of non-governmental actors. This aligns with the literature on alter- and anti-globalisation movements, as well as subaltern and place-based movements, which manifest themselves through the self-organisation of groups in civil society and include the formation of both global alliances and international campaigns (Starr, 2010; Wekerle, 2004).

Hrabanski’s study of the transnationalisation of food sovereignty in West Africa underscores the value of analysing transnational mobilisations, and offers stimulating insights into how the transnationalisation process contributes to the emergence of new issues championed by activist groups. It also explores how these issues are adopted by various actors, who form ad hoc coalitions and interlocking networks during transnational mobilisations to serve local interests. The concept of transnational mobilisations enables us to consider the natural wine movement in both its global setting and its localised

existence. In this thesis, I focus my analysis on two local antennae of the natural wine movement, and draw a comparison between them.

Finally, while the transnational framework prompts us to consider the territorial articulation of multi-situated phenomena, I also argue that there is a need to understand the scalar dimensions of the movement. This is why I use a two-dimensional analytical lens, the multiscalar concept is unpacked more deeply below.

2.3.2. *A multiscalar approach*

Here, I propose to integrate another analytical framework for the study of transnational phenomena by introducing the multiscalar approach of my research to examine the agency of actors in the natural wine movement from the local to the global level. As Colin McFarlane has highlighted, the issue of scale has become almost intrinsic to the narrative of actors involved in transnational phenomena, and yet it is often treated indirectly (McFarlane, 2009). By refocusing the scalar dimension at the heart of the analysis, it is possible to see how the scalar question of a phenomenon has become almost inevitable given the pervasive influence of globalisation across the political, economic and social realms. I draw from authors such as Swyngedouw, McFarlane and Wekerle in order to be able to understand how a multiscalar analysis directs us to bridge the gap between the local and the global by documenting local resistance projects while simultaneously observing the construction of the networks, alliances and strategies that materialise across scales and territories.

In pursuit of bridging the gap between the local and the global, Eric Swyngedouw introduced the concept of the “glocal,” positing that scale is not fixed and rigid but rather socially constructed. He contends that new social movements often operate on a “glocal” scale, blending global and local dimensions (Swyngedouw, 1997). This is a compelling perspective, as it underscores the deep interconnection and mutual shaping of local and global dynamics and all the scales in between. Gerda Wekerle explores this notion further in her examination of transnational food movements, and emphasises how “place-based subaltern struggles” connect through global networks and illustrate the phenomenon of “glocality” through the emergence of movements that jump between scales (Wekerle, 2004, p. 383). A consideration of the question of scale also provides an opportunity to

reflect on the geographical scope of militant action. In essence, it involves analysing the territorial and social spaces of influence of activist groups. As Abby Peterson suggests, these spaces are cognitively constructed to acquire meaning: “The “place” of militant social action is embedded in multiple layers of meanings; subsequently, the territorial action space of a militant group/action network is embedded in different scales that mutually influence each other” and underly their transformative power (Peterson, 2018, p. 6).

Multiscalar analysis can also be found in the political ecologies literature, notably because it makes it possible to investigate nature-culture relationships at multiple levels (Barrett, 2013; Cox, 1998). In conjunction with the multiscalar notion, Gabrielle Hetch suggests that the Anthropocene should be analysed as an “interscalar vehicle.” Hetch’s proposal sheds light on the capacity of multiscalar analysis to create iterative movements among actors situated on different scales to understand their interrelations and interdependencies (Hecht, 2018).

I borrow from these approaches and use multiscalar analysis to create a puzzle of intertwining scales. In order to understand the transnational scope of the natural wine movement for the purposes of my research, it is necessary to examine the multiplicity of scales on which actors in the movement interact. It is also interesting to look at the scales used for the analytical framework of the research: which are relevant to the structure of the wine industry, and which are at play in the construction of the natural wine movement? First, studies on the wine industry offer an opportunity to move away from the national framework because wine production is primarily referenced in terms of regions rather than countries. Second, the culture of wine and grape production is rooted in a scalar paradox: on the one hand, it is intrinsically linked to the (micro-)local environment (terroir, ecosystems and climates), while on the other, it is one of the most widely traded products globally, and its economic market relies on strategies of global trade and international reputation (Chauvin, 2010). Finally, the wine industry is governed at multiple levels, and its international political scenario offers semantic opportunities that contribute to a greater complexification of scalar dynamics.

In Swyngedouw’s conception of scalar analysis, the emphasis is placed on the process rather than the form. Scales are not fixed; but instead, are emergent, relational and performative. In Swyngedouw’s view, analysis is never confined to a single geographical

scale, but rather extends to the process by which scales perform and reconstitute themselves; geographical scales are not perceived as delimited zones but as a continuum. The processes and interdependencies between different scales are particularly visible in the natural wine movement as it operates from the local to the global level. My analysis entails an accumulation of scales, starting from micro-local dynamics at the level of a wine domain or even a vineyard, after which – by means of a funnel effect – broader scales come into play. These include those delimited by Appellations d’Origine Contrôlée (AOC), which regulate production at the local level, and the norms, rules and standards established by a region, which in turn are joined by national (in some cases European) and international legislation. Studying the mediation processes among these different scales is particularly enlightening for the purposes of understanding the emergence and spread of the natural wine movement because it allows us to examine the effects of movement contagion. What are the primary sites and actors from which to analyse the flows of information circulating within the natural wine movement globally? What are the hotspots of the natural wine movement, and how are they evolving? Are we observing a fluid, continuous spread of the movement or just isolated pockets that emerge with no pre-existing links? This analytical framework interprets the natural wine movement as an accumulative multiscale process and prompts us to consider a number of issues. First, there are the interdependencies of different scales within the natural wine movement, from the very local to the very global. A multiscale analysis acknowledges the reciprocal influence of local and global forces within the natural wine world, where the movement’s actors are both locally rooted through their wine production and embedded in broader networks of people, places and cosmologies. Second, this approach also grasps the interrelations of actors within the natural wine movement separate from the rest of the wine industry. Although we are studying a niche movement, there is a proliferation of actors who are working on an international scale. These actors represent both a new market segment and the emergence of new discourses and practices that advocate for re-embeddedness in local ecologies (Murdoch, 2000).

2.3.3. A focus on agency and network

Finally, I use agency as an ideal analytical framework for approaching transnationalism and multiscale phenomena. It enables an analysis of complex assemblages, the phenomena in circulation and multi-situated events. The agency approach also makes it possible to

focus on the relational dynamics that make up a phenomenon, and even to think about the phenomenon in terms of networks. Looking at networks is a particularly useful way of investigating changing social-ecological formations that incorporate the everyday resistance, oppositional practices and individual agencies that shape policy processes and affect changes in the global – in this case in the wine industry. As Valeria Siniscalchi and Carole Counihan have emphasised, “Activists construct relationships, forms of opposition, or negotiations with and through these power structures and power holders by employing diverse strategies. Some actors are legitimate players, and others move on the margins of classic political arenas or in entirely new spaces they carve out” (Siniscalchi & Counihan, 2017). By studying the different forms of agency, therefore, one can observe the varying degrees of power of individuals and their capacity to transmit knowledge and affect outcomes.

3. The ambitions and structure of the thesis

This research fits into wider discussions, as it reveals how the natural wine movement can be studied at the crossroads between social movements and market shifts. It provides insights into several critical debates, including subaltern environmental strategies of resistance to globalisation and mainstream markets, the transnational turn of social movements, the social construction of scale and the glocal movements that bridge the gulf between the local and the global. It also focuses on the environmental movements that are accompanying the rise of natural wines, thereby contributing to broader debates on movements towards ecological transition within production systems and socio-ecological shifts.

In order to support the local anchoring of environmental mobilisations in the wine industry, I vary the scale of my analysis by examining the phenomenon in two wine-producing regions: Bordeaux in France and Western Cape Province in South Africa. By comparing two globally renowned wine regions, I analyse the construction of the natural wine movement as a transnational network with a shared identity and common values but marked by the specificities of the local context and situated knowledge. I pursue three parallel objectives through this comparative design.

First, I argue that the natural wine movement is a niche segment of the market and a quantitatively small movement that is attempting to outdate the traditional functioning of the wine sector by revealing its pitfalls and failings. The movement's actors are constantly developing and negotiating new ways of making and selling wine outside traditional channels in order to assert their differences from the rest of the industry and to escape from the conventional industry's Fordist aspects. I investigate how they build a resistance to mainstream and conventional wines, and how they have successfully created a precedent and shown alternative paths of production.

Second, I analyse the natural wine movement as a transnational network that comprises both a diversity of local anchors and an international identity that cuts across wine regions. I argue that not only has the natural wine movement emerged in all wine regions worldwide, from both the so-called Old World and New World, but that its very existence serves as a valuable analytical tool for exposing the prevailing flaws in conventional categorisations in the wine industry. The movement's transnational nature reveals the shared challenges encountered by wine regions globally, including heightened global economic pressures and the looming threat of climate change.

Finally, I posit that the natural wine network facilitates a political endeavour of knowledge generation and international dissemination, thereby enabling alternative pathways throughout the entire wine production chain. By analysing the natural wine movement through the lens of agency as an anchored and multi-situated network, I have been able to observe the controversies and conflicts between actors from the natural wine movement and the global wine industry. This analysis also sheds light on the dynamics of circulating new knowledge and know-how within the movement, as well as the construction of a shared and evolving cognitive framework.

This thesis is explicitly informed by constructivist and relational epistemologies. As will be explained in full in chapter 3, it is based on qualitative methods, including eighteen months of immersion in the field (Bordeaux and Western Cape), semi-directive interviews, participant observations and the construction of a social network analysis. Each chapter develops its own theoretical framework and adopts a distinct empirical and methodological approach. This allows a dynamic evolution in the writing style and tone that is adapted to the specific issues being investigated. Some chapters fully embrace a comparative design,

engaging in an iterative process and a back-and-forth between Bordeaux and Western Cape (Chapters 2, 5, 6 and 8), while others provide in-depth analyses that focus more deeply on one of the case studies (Chapter 7 on Bordeaux and Chapter 8 and 9 on the Western Cape). Finally, two chapters use the lens of the transnational movement to investigate the global presence of the natural wine movement (Chapters 1 and 4). The thesis is divided into three parts and nine chapters, and develops as follows.

➤ **The organisation of the thesis**

The first part set the stage for understanding the natural wine movement by exploring its contested definition, emergence and characteristics, and the comparative design and methodological framework used in the research. Chapter 1 examines the contemporary nature of the movement and its undefined boundaries. Chapter 2 compares Bordeaux and Western Cape as case studies to provide insight into regional differences. Chapter 3 outlines the methodological approach, including qualitative fieldwork and reflexivity, in order to lay the groundwork for understanding the emergence and spread of the movement.

Parts 2 and 3 draw on Hayagreeva Rao's framework to investigate how natural winemakers challenge the wine establishment. This approach, which lies at the crossroads between the sociology of social movements and political economy, proves particularly useful for analysing how a small group of actors creates grassroots resistance and shapes the market by proposing alternative production paths. Playing on the original title from Rao's work, these two parts examine how rebel winemakers make and break radical innovations in the wine industry.

The second part focuses on the resistance dynamics of the natural wine movement within the wine industry. The formation of a collective identity among "rebel winemakers" unfolds in two distinct phases: initially, there is a "hot cause" that triggers shared emotions and fosters community cohesion, while later, "cool mobilisations" solidify their shared cognitive framework and sustain their commitment. I use this framework to explore the emergence of the natural wine movement from its foundational ethos to its practical manifestations. Chapter 4 delves into the movement's ethos, exploring what the common representations and foundational beliefs are that connect natural winemakers, and also how a crisis in the wine sector has united them against conventional production methods. Chapter 5 analyses the practices of the movement, examining the alternative practices and

resistance it embodies locally both in Bordeaux and the Western Cape. Chapter 6 investigates how the movement forms new identities and differentiates itself from other market players, while also examining its commitment to tackling deeper hierarchies in the wine sector.

The third and final part investigates how rebel winemakers shape radical innovations in the wine market, positing that markets are shaped and constrained by grassroots resistance. I argue that the natural wine movement can be seen as a political project that triggers incremental, yet structural, changes in the wine industry. Part 3 examines the challenges posed by the arrival of these new winemakers in the wine industry. Chapter 7 explores the dynamics of political and administrative recognition of the movement and its relationship with public authorities. Chapter 8 discusses the integration of natural wines into market dynamics and studies innovations in the global wine market. Finally, Chapter 9 investigates the spread of the natural wine movement as a network, exploring knowledge production and diffusion through networks.

Overall, the thesis presents the natural wine movement as a political project driving incremental yet structural change in the wine industry. Through an approach at the crossroad between sociology of social movement and political economy, I investigate how a small group of actors within an industry can coalesce to create new cognitive framework and disrupt the institutional order of an industry.

PART 1: SETTING THE SCENE

This first part aims to present the diffusion of the natural wine movement as a grassroots movement rather than an epiphenomenon. Whereas it is often viewed simply as a production method that includes changes both in the vineyard and in the cellar, I argue that it also reflects and exemplifies an underlying trend which induces deeper changes at the intersection of plural political sociology issues, encompassing environmental, economic and social aspects. This part is dedicated to setting the scene for this thesis through an exploration of its research object, context, the stance of the researcher who developed it and her tools. First, it investigates the natural wine movement as a moving and contemporary phenomenon whose characteristics and borders are yet to be defined (chapter 1). Then it delves into the regions of Bordeaux and Western Cape as an unexpected pair of case studies that deserve a bold comparison design (chapter 2). Last, it dissects the methodological apparatus of this research involving qualitative fieldwork, epistemological reflections and the researcher's positionality and necessary reflexivity (chapter 3). Ultimately, these first three chapters lay the foundational basis for understanding the emergence and diffusion of the natural wine movement.

1. CHAPTER 1: The challenges involved in defining natural wine and the natural wine movement.

Introduction

The focus of this first chapter is on gaining an understanding of the subject being studied here – the natural wine movement – and to appreciate the complexity involved in arriving at a definition. To understand the more demanding challenges of defining what natural wine is, I start out by exploring the spectrum of definitions offered by informants in the field and the confusion they raise or perpetuate. I then turn to the academic work and literature that is peculiar to this industry to situate my work within the existing literature on natural wine. I go on to problematise the distance between natural wine as a product and the natural wine movement, making it clear that the focus of this thesis will be on the latter. I briefly retrace the origins of the natural wine movement, its founders and its current presence. In short, this review of the state of the art on my research object will help us understand why natural wine is a relatively new subject area whose boundaries and definitions are still a subject of debate.

1.1. Contested definitions from informants in the field

During the interview process, my informants, who included winemakers, distributors and representatives of institutions, were systematically asked to provide their definitions of natural wine. This first attempt at defining the subject generated extraordinarily divergent, and sometimes even contradictory, answers. The selection below illustrates the wide range of responses.

“No, there isn't a standard definition. There isn't a sort of “if you want to make natural wine that's it.” Some guys say if I don't use sulphites, it's a natural wine and others will say “If I'm getting my grapes from an organic vineyard and I'm only using old wood and not adding sulphites it's natural,” or “if there's sediment in it, it's natural,” or “if it's cloudy, it's a natural wine.” It's like ... you can use all these criteria or just one of them.” (Interview Sean, caviste in Cape Town, 18 December 2021)

“It's a very contentious topic. I mean, you know, generally what people think when you are talking about natural wine is that it would be unfiltered, unfined, it's going to be fizzy, it has skin contact etc., all of that! But it doesn't always have to be that, I think a lot of people do make wine naturally, and it's clean. You just use gravity to sort of let the sediments set.” (Interview Gina, wine bar manager in Cape Town, 20 December 2021)

“I’ll be interested to know what your definition is at the moment because I think the definition is evolving: in six months’ time it might be different, not drastically different, but in terms of sulphurs and things like that, maybe even filtration...” (Interview Lennie, distributor in Cape Town, 12 January 2022)

In a blog article, the owner of a wine shop, who was also interviewed for the thesis, commented:

“We South Africans still don’t really know what natural wine is, mainly because no official criteria has been established for the term. The guiding motto of natural wines is “nothing added, nothing taken away,” but the term is used as a misnomer as often as not and carries about as many interpretations as there are people using it.” (Freemantle, M. (2020). *Unclear: Natural Wine on a Knife Edge. Extracts*).

The confusion is clearly evident from this handful of citations. The interviewees – who are all wine professionals – find themselves in trouble when they are asked to define what is and what is not natural wine. Some are aware that there is no standardised definition and are therefore not totally at ease, and/or offer quite reflective answers, while others suggest a definition they have developed on their own, as this wine distributor commented (after making a lengthy attempt to define natural wine): “But remember that for natural wine there’s no label, it’s more of a philosophical approach.”⁴ Despite the continuing confusion, the informants below attempt a definition that includes a few technical farming criteria:

“A natural wine is a wine without additives that comes from an organic vineyard. For me, it should be self-evident, but I know it’s not always the case.” (Interview Amandine, winemaker in Bordeaux, 14 January 2021⁵)

“It’s not clear at all, and it’s true that I’m often asked about it. So I usually start by explaining a few principles – to put it very simply, at least so people can understand immediately – I would say: “no use of chemicals, no pesticides, no GMOs and no synthetic products” because even with organic agriculture, you can have inputs that are certified as organic but are actually derived from GMOs. So ideally, a natural winemaker is not supposed to use these types of product. I would also say that natural viticulture is based a bit more on the principles and precepts of biodynamic farming.” (Interview Sarah, caviste in Bordeaux, 17 April 2021⁶)

“Firstly, natural wine... well, you could still be a natural winemaker and still use commercial grapes but on the winemaking side, obviously, receiving the grapes and not adding anything to the wine,

⁴ Interview Damiano, wine bar owner in Cape Town, 8 December 2021

⁵ *My translation of:* “Un vin nature c’est un vin sans intrants et issu de vignoble en bio. Pour moi ça devrait couler de source mais je sais que ça ne l’est pas forcément.”

⁶ *My translation of:* “Ce n’est pas claire du tout, c’est vrai qu’on me pose souvent la question. Moi je pars du principe - pour l’expliquer de façon très simple, en tout cas pour que les gens comprennent tout de suite - je dis: “pas d’utilisation de produits chimiques, pas de pesticides, pas d’OGMs et pas de produits de synthèse” parce que même en agriculture biologique on peut avoir des intrants qui sont homologués bio mais issus d’OGM. Donc normalement le vigneron nature n’est pas censé utiliser ce type de produits. Et je dis aussi que l’agriculture naturelle va se baser un peu plus sur les principes et les préceptes de la biodynamie.”

except maybe the only thing I would do is that I would help the wine with a little bit of sulphites.” (Interview Dan, winemaker in Western Cape, 22 April 2022)

Some departures can already be seen from this limited selection of definitions: in the first instance, an organic vineyard is a primary condition for the production of natural wine. The second definition is even tighter: the grapes must be “more than organic⁷” or follow the precepts of biodynamic farming. The third is more lenient, and the winemaker concedes that commercial grapes can be used. The primary area of debate appears to be related to the vinification process, however; here again, what is allowed in the natural wine-making process and what is not is far from clear and varies widely from one informant to the other:

“Because I focus on natural winemaking and having the purest expression in the glass. It is very much a hands-off approach. If you have a healthy vineyard, then you have healthy grapes and you can let things ferment naturally and you don't have to add anything, ... but you can add a little bit of sulphites. Sulphites are your friend.” (Interview Kevin, distributor in Cape Town, 11 March 2022)

“Natural means no sulphites during vinification, no yeasts, nothing! And then an ageing period. But personally, I do a filtration process before bottling.” (Interview Remy, winemaker in Bordeaux, 19 April 2021⁸)

“It's very broad, even among winemakers. You have people who call themselves ‘natural minus a quarter’ who will add sulphites before bottling because they are worried, and those who won't add anything at all, and the wines will be undrinkable for six months. Like everything else, there are loads of contradictions.” (Interview Léon, wine bar owner in Bordeaux, 27 April 2021⁹)

The main bone of contention lies around the addition of SO₂ (also called sulphites) to stabilise the wine, and the quantity used. Other vinification techniques such as wine filtration, temperature manipulation and the addition of commercial yeasts are also a subject of controversy. However, the differences are not focused on technical criteria alone, but also on the meaning of the concept itself and the semantics of the use of this idea of “naturalness.” Here are a few reflections on the concept of natural wine from an epistemological perspective:

⁷ “More than organic” is actually the definition proposed by Pierre Jancou, a pioneer of the natural wine movement in Paris and the owner of the restaurants and bars *La Cremerie*, *Racines* and *Vivant*.

⁸ *My translation of*: “Nature c'est sans soufre en vinif, sans levure en vinif, sans rien! Et après un élevage plus ou moins long. Et par contre avant mise en bouteille, moi, je filtre.”

⁹ *My translation of*: “C'est très vaste, même au niveau des vignerons, tu as ceux qui se font appeler les “natures moins le quart” qui vont sulfiter avant la mise [en bouteille] parce qu'ils ont peur et ceux qui ne vont rien mettre du tout et où les vins vont être intorchables pendant six mois. C'est comme tout, il y a pleins de contradictions.”

“Me, I’ve always explained things that way: a natural yoghurt is a plain yogurt and if it is not natural then it’s a flavoured yoghurt, like with bananas or something else. So as far as I know, wine is not a flavoured product. That’s it.” (Interview Gabriel, INAO representative, 25 August 2021¹⁰)

“It’s like calling wines ‘non-natural’... You’ll have to explain to me what natural wines are in the first place, as if the others aren’t!” (Interview Jean-Marc, winemaker in Bordeaux, 2 April 2021¹¹)

“I mean, planting a vineyard is not a natural thing. You’re planting rootstocks from America, and varieties from France, and you’re planting them in a row in South Africa... Is that natural?” (Interview Dave, winemaker in Western Cape, 5 April 2022)

In these extracts, the informants reflect on what the term “natural” encompasses. Some are of the view that all wines are natural in essence, since they are the product of a natural resource (the grape)¹², while for others, the notion of “natural wine” is misleading “because as soon as you start cultivating vineyards and pruning vineyards in a certain way you are intervening^{13,14}. One aspect that is unanimously acknowledged by wine professionals is the heightened level of risk associated with producing natural wine.

“Natural wine is still a gift from heaven because many conditions need to come together to be able to make it.” (Interview Jacques, Syndicat de Défense des Vins Méthode Nature, 15 July 2021¹⁵)

“I do so much more work in the cellar and in the vineyard to be able to bottle a wine like that! A wine without sulphites. If I’m just going to add sulphites and filter it all then I don’t have to be that clean and careful and precise. But doing it like this [naturally], you’re taking a very big risk.” (Interview Justin, winemaker in Western Cape, 6 April 2022)

There are numerous excerpts from the definitions that could be used to illustrate the persisting confusion around the definition of natural wine. From the organoleptic perceptions of these wines to the primary conditions for producing them or the criteria needed to classify them as “natural wines,” nothing seems to be universally accepted or commonly agreed on. Another thing that was particularly interesting during the interview

¹⁰ *My translation of:* “Moi j’ai toujours expliqué: un yaourt nature pour vous c’est un yaourt et un yaourt aromatisé c’est un yaourt à la banane ou autre. Donc, à ce que je sache, à part le rosé pamplemousse, le vin est un produit qui n’est pas aromatisé... bon voilà.”

¹¹ *My translation of:* “C’est comme dans les vins dits ”non-naturels”... Faudra m’expliquer ce que sont les vins naturels d’ailleurs, comme si les autres ne l’étaient pas totalement.”

¹² “We believe that wine is special, and one of the things that make it special is that it is, in essence, a natural product. We argue that this naturalness is important for wine, and any attempt to make wine less natural by allowing winemakers greater freedom to make more additions could severely damage the image of wine and its continued specialness.”.

¹³ Interview Edwin, caviste in Cape Town, 29 December 2021

¹⁴ This debate has been fuelled by references to the *Loi Griffe* (1889), which defines wines as a natural drink made exclusively by fermenting fresh grapes, and excludes any addition of water, sugar or other additives.

¹⁵ *My translation of:* “Le vin nature c’est quand même un don du ciel, parce qu’il faut qu’il y ai beaucoup de conditions réunies pour pouvoir arriver à le faire.”

process was the use of different terminologies to talk about the same object: “natural,” “naked,” “raw,” “minimal intervention,” “natty,” “fermented grape juice” in English, or “vin vivant” or “sauvage” in French¹⁶. Many informants refused to use the generic term “natural wine” because it embraces too many meanings.

“I used to use that word quite a bit. Now I would call it experimental wine. You know, it doesn't have to wear one hat.” (Interview Gina, wine bar manager in Cape Town, 20 December 2021)

“Natural wine became quite a blanket term, in the same way that craft beer did. [...] So I'd say there are two things that stop me from saying natural wine. First, it alienates non-natural farms that are very much on that path; and second, it doesn't give you any specific information.” (Interview Ian, caviste in Cape Town, 21 December 2021)

“Also, there is a sort of trend, almost snobbery. And I find it restricting, and I definitely don't want that. It's as if we're entering some sort of caste: the natural wine caste. That's really not my thing at all.” (Interview Damien, winemaker in Bordeaux, 12 May 2021¹⁷)

“It's a buzzword; well, I guess everything is a buzzword in the beginning. [...] You see, it's such a strong marketing word at the moment that everyone's using it, but nobody really knows what it actually is.” (Interview Dave, winemaker in Western Cape, 5 April 2022)

“But also the concept of natural wine is not necessarily good for exports. Personally, I prefer to say that my wine's clean and not inoculated and that the terroir is respected.” (Interview Jeanette, winemaker in Western Cape, 12 May 2022¹⁸)

This long and winding epistemological reflection on a definition of the topic is a necessary step towards understanding the greater challenges at stake when one tries to define what natural wine is and what it encompasses. What meanings and perceptions does it embrace? How have these associated depictions evolved across time and space, particularly across the two case studies? And what serves as cohesive elements to unify these diverse practices under the collective banner of “natural wine”?

1.2. Natural wine as a product

1.2.1. *A relatively new object in the social sciences*

¹⁶ “And, yes, perhaps a less contentious term, such as “live,” “pure,” “raw,” “real,” “true,” “low-intervention,” “authentic,” “farmhouse,” or some such expression would be less provocative. [...] For whatever reason, people all over the world have chosen to use the term “natural” in the face of all the alternatives to describe healthily grown, nature-friendly, low-intervention wines that truly express their place of origin.” Legeron, 2014, p. 44.

¹⁷ *My translation of:* “Puis y'a une espèce de tendance, presque de snobisme. Et je trouve que c'est enfermante et je ne veux surtout pas ça. Enfin c'est comme si on rentrait dans une espèce de caste: les vins nature. Moi ce n'est pas du tout mon truc.”

¹⁸ *My translation of:* “Après le vin nature, ce n'est pas forcément bien pour les exportations. Moi je préfère dire que mon vin est clean, non inoculé, et que le terroir est respecté.”

In addition to the absence of a clear, institutionalised definition, natural wine also suffers from a scarcity of academic research. It is a relatively new subject in the social sciences, and little attention has been paid to it by academia. Legeron attributes the lack of publications to the fact that the conventional wine world and its associated lobbies discount natural wine, believing it to be of lower quality and not commercially viable (Legeron, 2014, p. 11).

➤ **A handful of academic publications have formed a strong basis for this work**

Despite this, my thesis has benefited from the foundational work of several scholars who have worked on natural wine from a social science perspective, or in and around the topic. It draws from five previous doctoral theses on similar subjects. In 2012, the geographer Anna Krzywoszynska published her thesis entitled “*“We produce under this sky”: making organic wine in a material world*” (Krzywoszynska, 2012). Although it did not discuss “natural wine” as such, her approach and her findings about small organic winemakers in Northern Italy resonate with the natural wine movement. In 2017, the anthropologist Christelle Pineau was to my knowledge the first scholar to make “natural wine” the subject of a doctoral work. (Pineau 2017). Her book *La corne de vache et le microscope* (C. Pineau, 2019) received extensive coverage and enabled natural wine to be discovered by a wider audience. In it, Pineau uses an ethnography of the French natural wine movement to describe the emergence of the natural wine movement as an experience of “rehabilitation du sensible”: that is, one that is accompanied by a rehabilitation of the senses. She argues that natural wine producers rely on a common rhetoric based on the myth of “a return to nature.” More recently (2021), Clelia Viecegli defended a thesis in philosophy entitled “*Crafting Alternatives through Wine: An Ethnography of Female Natural Winegrowers in Italy*” (Viecegli, 2021). She adds an interesting gender dimension to the topic, basing her thesis on an analysis of the sensorial aesthetics of natural wines and arguing that this new aesthetic sheds a fresh light on the material ecologies of production and consumption that challenges the existing regulatory regimes. Finally, two other theses proved to be especially enlightening even though natural wine was not at the core of their research, offering insights into the two wine regions investigated in this project: the thesis of Frédérique Célérier, who investigated organic winemakers and their relationship to territorial actors in Bordeaux (Célérier, 2017), and the thesis of Jonathan Steyn, who questioned the concept of “authenticity” in wine in the case of independent winemakers in Swartland, South Africa

(Steyn 2021). I had the privilege of meeting and talking with both of them, and this work has benefited from these great exchanges. These five pieces of research have formed the foundations and inspirational basis on which I have been able to build my own thoughts. That said, natural wine is still a new topic, especially in the social sciences, and academic publications on the subject are somewhat scarce, but although the subject is relatively new, it is worth highlighting the number of publications in the past few years. Between the time this project began in 2020 and the publication of my thesis in 2024, there has been a good deal of literature, which signals both the proliferation of the movement and the timeliness of my own research.

➤ Digging into the abundant indigenous literature from the world of wine

In the face of this lack of scholarly contributions on the subject, one can of course also turn to the abundant literature produced by wine professionals, be they wine journalists or critics, wine experts, sommeliers or even wine producers. The world of natural wine includes personalities who act as important informants and landmarks of the field at an international level. To name just a few, they include media experts like Antonin Iommiamunategui¹⁹, Ophélie Neiman²⁰, Aaron Ayscough²¹, Jamie Goode, Tim Atkins²² and Alice Feiring²³, not to mention the renowned natural winemakers' lawyer Eric Morain²⁴ and the RAW wine fairs organiser Isabelle Legeron²⁵. The list might also include wine producers who have published on the subject, such as Jean-Pierre Amoreau²⁶ of Château Le Puy in Bordeaux or Nicolas Joly²⁷ in the Loire Valley. All these commentators (and many more besides) have written extensively on natural wine in various media (wine

¹⁹ A French journalist, he is the organiser of various wine-related events such as *Sous les pavés, la vigne, mi-livre, mi-raisin*. He is the editor of *NouriTurfu* and the author of the *Glouglou Guide* and the *No wine is innocent* blog.

²⁰ A French journalist at Le Monde and the author of the blog *MissGlouglou*, she has published extensively on natural wine in France

²¹ Aaron Ayscough is a sommelier and writer, and the author of "Not Drinking Poison," a newsletter about natural wine culture published since 2010.

²² A British journalist and Master of Wine, Tim Atkins has written extensively on natural wine and has been a promotor of "New World" natural wines.

²³ An American author and journalist (notably for the New York Times), she has defended natural wine in several books: Feiring, A. (2016). *For the love of wine. My odyssey through the world's most ancient wine culture*. Potomac Books, University of Nebraska Press; Feiring, A. (2011). *Naked Wine: Letting Grapes Do What Comes Naturally*. Cambridge: Da Capo Press.

²⁴ Morain, E. (2019). *Plaidoyer pour le vin naturel*. Paris: Nouriturfu.

²⁵ Legeron, I. (2018). *Natural Wine: an introduction to organic and biodynamic wines made naturally*. London & New York: Ryland Peters & Small.

²⁶ Amoreau, J.-P. (2019). *Plus pur que de l'eau*. Paris: Fayard.

²⁷ Joly, N. (2019). *Le vin du ciel à la terre: la viticulture en biodynamie*. Paris: Editions Libre & Solidaire.

guides, manifestos, essays etc.) and have developed an online presence through blogs and social media. Their publications praise natural wine and position them as clear advocates of the movement. Although they are rich in information, they are of course socially situated, and so must be approached with a critical eye. For instance, there is an obvious bias in the preface to Legeron's famous book, which could almost be read as an ode to natural wine:

“It [this book] is a tribute to those wines that are not only farmed well, but also fly in the face of modern winemaking practices, remaining natural against all the odds. It is also a celebration of the remarkable people who create them. Like sailors going to sea, playing the winds and riding the waves, these winemakers understand that nature is much greater than themselves. They acknowledge that not only is it futile, but actually counterproductive, to try to control or tame her, as her magic lies in her power.” (Legeron, 2014, p. 13)

Most of these publications take a dogmatic or ideology-driven approach, which is why they have been used as secondary data here in an attempt to make up for the scarcity of academic publications. In the next section, I resituate the existing literature on natural wine with the aim of zooming out and taking a critical step away from the fieldwork data. It seems important to begin by making a distinction between “natural wine” and “the natural wine movement.” On the one hand, natural wine is the material object, the contents of a bottle, the final crafted product circulating across the global value chain of wine professionals, while on the other, the natural wine movement represents the intangible sphere that surrounds the product, the network of people and objects gravitating around natural wine. The natural wine movement participates in the production of knowledge and the making of new values and perceptions in this specific segment of the wine sector. It is the natural wine movement that is the central focus of this study. Specifically, natural wine will be unpacked to reveal its various facets, and then the natural wine movement will be examined to discover its identity, the challenges around its recognition and its spread as a global movement.

1.2.2. A diversity of technical definitions available

“The most unfortunate thing about the natural wine movement is the name, because it suggests that any other wine must be unnatural.” (Jancis Robinson, My resolutions for 2020, *Financial Times*, 3 January 2020)

Most of the published literature on natural wine is committed to defining it in technical terms, which is a helpful approach to describing the product. Despite the controversies cited

in the previous section, all authors agree on some basic points. First, natural wine is made from organically (or biodynamically) grown grapes, entailing the rejection of synthetic chemical pesticides, fungicides, herbicides and chemical fertilisers in the vineyards. Second, the grapes must be harvested by hand. Last but not least, it must be produced with a minimum amount of intervention in the cellar, meaning no (or very few) external inputs. Two kinds of input have been identified by Goode and Harrop: chemical interventions (additives such as sulphur dioxide – also called SO² or sulphites – commercial yeasts, acidifiers, fining agents or oenological products such as artificial aromas) and physical manipulation (filtration, extraction, etc.) (Goode & Harrop, 2013, p. 111). This means that the fermentation process occurs spontaneously without the use of any invasive mechanical process. Looking at it from a different perspective, one might say that natural wine is mostly about what does not happen rather than what does, in the sense that it outlaws the use of artificial chemicals in the vineyards and the cellar and forbids a whole range of practices inherited from industrialisation.

Having said this, some authors have engaged in ontological debates on what natural wine encompasses. Isabelle Legeron, the organiser of the pioneering natural wine fair RAW, has proposed her own definition: natural wine is “Wine from vineyards that are farmed organically, at the very least, and which is produced without adding or removing anything during vinification, apart from a dash of sulphites at most at bottling.” (Legeron, 2014, p. 45). This strict definition has been nuanced by Goode and Harrop, who prefer the term “authentic wine.” They bemoan the narrow understanding of natural wine and comment in the preface to their book: “Naturalness has its place, but it should be part of a wider body of considerations. As a result, we came up with the term “authentic wine” to describe a wine made in consideration of not just naturalness, but also a broader range of important factors, including environmental impact, marketing, and sustainable viticulture. [...] The “naturalness” of a wine is most usefully measured on a continuum from least to most natural and takes in many aspects of the cultivation, harvesting, and processing of the raw ingredient: the grape.” (Goode & Harrop, 2013, p. 2). Another interesting viewpoint is provided by Morel, for whom the natural approach differs from agrobiology and biodynamic farming above all in that “it extends its ambition to the entire production process from planting and tilling the soil to the care of the vines, the harvest, the vinification and maturation, right through to bottling,” and therefore “showcases the purest expression of the terroir” (Morel, 2013, p. 13). Morel’s definition highlights the holistic dimension of

the process. Another definition looks at wine production across a timeframe and considers wine to be natural if it was produced before the Industrial Revolution, as was the case with all wine produced before the 1960s. If we apply this temporal dimension, all wineries that have not undergone industrial modernisation fall into the natural wine category: they are wineries that by choice or by default have not introduced industrial techniques into their production, and do not make use of machinery or chemical synthetics in their vineyards or artificial aromas in their cellars. Wineries such as these are likely to be found in remote Italian or low-key French wine regions. Feiring even goes so far as to date the birth of natural wine to the first wine we know of, which was produced in Georgia (Feiring, 2016, p. 14).

From all these definitions, partly because the technicalities of natural wine production are not so much the focus of this work, I have chosen to adopt the approach proposed by Pineau: natural wine is a concept developed in opposition to so-called “conventional” wines (Pineau 2017): that is to say the large-scale manufactured wines that are most frequently produced by agro-industrial actors, ostensibly to respond to a ‘demand’ for branded, homogenous wine. Indeed, according to Pineau “This adjective [*natural*] attached to the wine has concomitantly given rise to the idea that by contrast, other wines are not” (Pineau 2016, 63). By adopting this definition of natural wine for my thesis, I have purposely opted for a comprehensive approach that enables my analysis to encompass a wide range of profiles and a variety of viticultural and vinification practices that all share one thing: their departure from conventional, industrial and mainstream production methods. If one considers wine production as a spectrum, natural wine is therefore at the opposite end from conventional wine and can be included in the broader family of organic wines. The figure below, which is proposed by the *Association des Vins SAINS*²⁸ (Figure 3) offers a helpful way of understanding common categorisations across the wine spectrum.

²⁸ Association des vins SAINS (Sans Aucun Intrant Ni Sulfite Ajouté)



As we see in the figure, the amount of sulphites allowed varies greatly depending on the category: while the AVN (*Association des Vins Naturels*) only allows between 30 and 40 mg of added sulphites per litre, organic wines can contain up to 150 mg, five times the initial amount. The amount of permitted sulphites skyrockets to 200 mg per bottle for conventional wines. The figure provides a good order of scale to help situate the ongoing debates.

The debate about sulphur dioxide (SO²) at the heart of the natural wine movement

Sulphur dioxide is used in wine for its preservative and stabilising properties: it protects it from oxidation and blocks the development of micro-organisms. Its use is widely criticised within the natural wine movement as a chemical product that is potentially harmful to human health. Although the actual harmfulness of the product is still under debate, a number of articles have demonstrated adverse reactions in drinkers who suffer from sulphite sensitivity (Costanigro, Appleby & Menke, 2014; D'Amico, Di Vita & Monaco, 2016; Lester, 1995; Vally & Thompson, 2001). On the other side, conventional winemakers and oenologists prescribe the use of sulphites to preserve wine, notably for ageing purposes, or else the product can often turn into vinegar. Outside the debate on sulphites,

it is worth mentioning that the European Union authorises the addition of some fifty additives, even in the production of organic wine (Figure 4).

Textbox 1. The debate on sulphur dioxide (SO₂) at the heart of the natural wine movement.

Intrants autorisés dans le vin

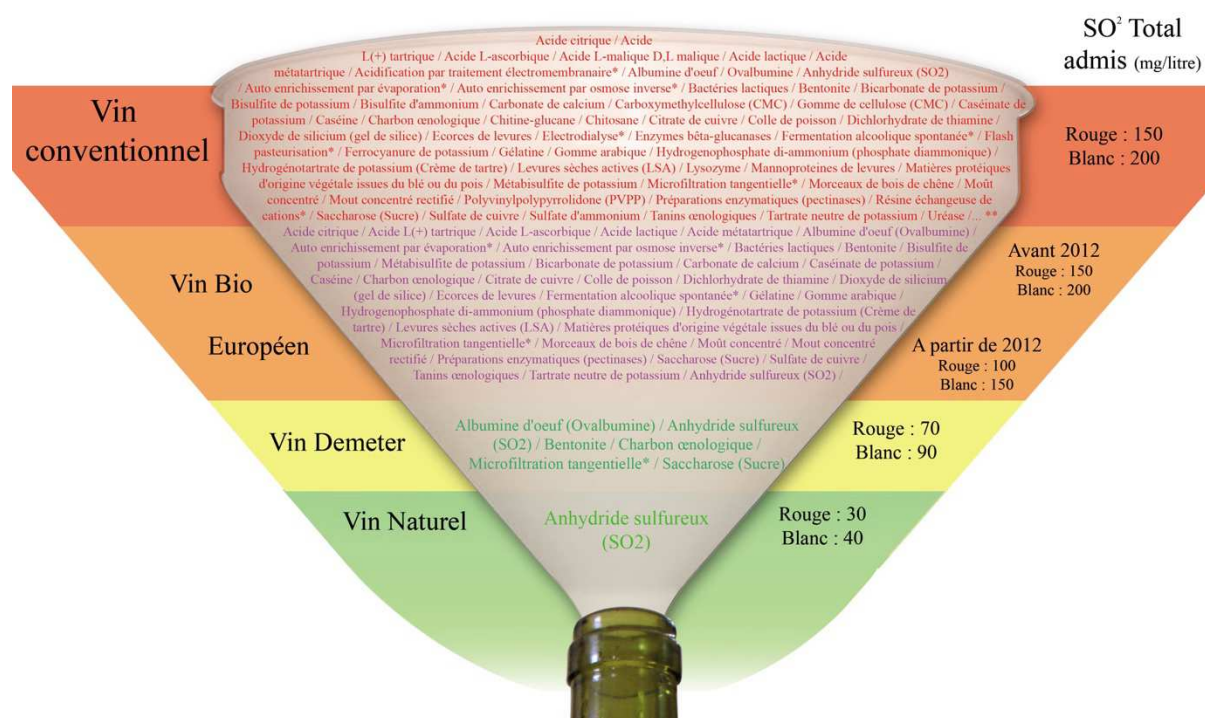


Figure 4. List of authorised inputs in wine.²⁹

1.2.3. A new market segment and consumer perspectives

Some recent publications have focused on natural wine from a consumer perspective. This literature has its origins in economic and marketing studies. Natural wine is identified as an emerging, rapidly growing trend that is occupying an expanding niche market (D'Amico, Di Vita & Monaco 2016; Galati et al. 2019; Parga-Dans & Alonso González 2020). This literature represents an initial attempt to understand this new market segment, and the authors involved have all made similar observations: first, they note the socio-demographic consumption characteristics of natural wine and agree that well-educated young urban consumers are the main target for natural wine; second, they have studied the willingness to pay (WTP) for this newly-available product and highlight the increasing demand for environmentally conscious production and healthy wines (including wines that are free from harmful chemicals or limit the use of sulphites); and last, they all conclude

²⁹ Source: www.alarencontredesvinsnaturels.fr.

that there is a lack of knowledge among consumers of the meaning of natural wine: although they seem to understand its proximity to organic wine, most report confusion and misleading information, notably due to issues with labelling. In the face of pervasive vagueness, Parga-Dans and González call for “a deeper theoretical engagement with the notion of natural wine, which positions it among other sustainable and ecological certifications, including organic, biodynamic or sulphite-free.” (Parga-Dans and Alonso González 2020, 1). Although this literature is informative as an aid to situating the natural wine market segment, it is geared towards consumer behaviour and preferences, and is therefore quite a long way from my own research focus.

1.2.4. *The debates on its recognition and legitimization*

One thorny question that comes up with regard to natural wine is whether or not the concept should be given a legally recognised framework. There is currently no official international definition, and there are therefore no rules to define what can or cannot be called natural (as we shall see in chapter 7, a label called *Méthode Nature* was created in France in 2021, representing the first official recognition of natural wine in France). As the quotes at the beginning of the chapter demonstrate, despite the fact that the category is an undoubted presence in the market and notwithstanding the huge following it enjoys, it is extremely difficult to pin down the exact meaning of the notion. The absence of a legal framework has several implications. The products are not subject to any labelling requirements, and the way labels are used is not regulated, which leaves the notion open to abuse. Indeed, in the absence of a legal framework, grey areas exist that are easily exploitable. Matthew Freemantle has commented in a blog post that this is particularly true in new frontiers like South Africa: “It’s hard enough going by what is generally agreed on to form a decent picture about who is making natural wines in South Africa without the tendency of some producers to bend the rules to suit their sales pitch,” he says, adding that “without any rules to go by, people tend to make up their own. For some consumers, natural wine is anything that comes in a clear bottle with a shallow-dip wax top and preferably a label drawn in crayon by a child.”³⁰ At the end of the day, the natural designation seems to be simply a matter of the winemaker’s personal approach. At first glance, given the confusion, an official definition would appear to be both necessary and inevitable, but there seem to be

³⁰ Freemantle, M. (2020). Unclear : Natural wine on a knife edge. *Extracts*, pp. 1–7.

as many arguments for a legal recognition of natural wine as there are against it, as the journalist Ophélie Neiman brilliantly summed up in this “*Face à Face*” article in *Le Monde* (See below Figure 5).





DAVID ADRIEN

Un label qui rassure Vignerons en liberté

Sur le site explicatif du label « Vin méthode nature », une photo est d'une extrême mignonnerie: un nid douillet dans lequel se serrent une demi-douzaine d'oisillons duveteux. Une manière de dire que ce label est un nouveau-né mais qu'il grandira vite. Reconnu par les instances officielles, il déploie ses petites ailes. Au 1^{er} septembre, il comptait 292 adhérents et, début novembre, son président, Jacques Carroget, vigneron au domaine de La Paonnerie dans la Loire, confiait que la barre des 500 adhérents était dépassée. Parmi eux, des producteurs de vin, mais aussi des cavistes ou de simples sympathisants.

Il faut dire que la demande était forte de pouvoir fixer une définition, assortie d'un cahier des charges précis, du vin nature. Désormais, celui-ci doit être certifié bio, issu de vendanges manuelles, sans ajouts ni modification œnologique lors de la vinification (pas de filtration, de flash pasteurisation, de thermovinification ni de procédés qui se terminent en « ion » et que le grand public se garde bien d'approfondir). Et bien sûr, sans soufre ajouté, ou alors moins de 30 mg/l (tandis qu'un blanc sec conventionnel peut en contenir jusqu'à 210 mg/l). De quoi mettre fin au flou artistique qui entoure cette catégorie en plein essor. L'appel à la nature est un puissant levier marketing dans l'agroalimentaire. Or, sans définition administrative, n'importe qui pouvait affirmer produire du vin naturel. On a ainsi vu fleurir le mot « nature » et ses dérivés sur les rayons de la grande distribution, pour des vins triturés à l'extrême, enrichis par exemple en vitamine C pour remplacer le soufre. Il était grand temps de poser un cadre.

Le logo « Vin méthode nature » devrait donc estampiller quelques centaines de cuvées d'ici à début 2021, quand le millésime 2020 sortira à la vente. Le cahier des charges étant strict, le label devrait rester confidentiel, avec un circuit de vente restreint aux cavistes spécialisés. Sans pour autant garantir que le vin est bon, il certifie une production peu interventionniste et rassure le consommateur à la recherche d'un vin artisanal qui respecte les engagements de l'agriculture biologique. De la transparence, de la fiabilité, voilà qui nous manquait. On ne va pas boudier les bonnes nouvelles.

La nature doit-elle être encadrée? Pour plusieurs raisons (bonnes et mauvaises), la création du label « Vin méthode nature » suscite, depuis dix ans, de vives altercations. Le nom d'abord. Faut-il dire « vin nature » ou « vin naturel »? Le débat n'est toujours pas tranché. D'où le nom baroque du nouveau syndicat qui l'encadre: le Syndicat de défense des vins nature¹. Ou comment ne pas choisir. De toute façon, la réglementation européenne ne reconnaît pas le terme « vin naturel »: comment départager ce qui est naturel de ce qui ne l'est pas?

Aux yeux des consommateurs, ce qui est naturel est meilleur. Sauf quand il s'agit d'inondations, de sécheresses ou de virus mortels. Bref, cantonnons-nous à l'image d'une fleur dans un champ...

La charte à respecter a également posé question: fallait-il interdire la filtration, procédé qui a tendance à lisser les arômes mais qui permet d'éliminer toute bactérie? Fallait-il interdire tout ajout de soufre ou en autoriser une portion congrue pour faciliter la stabilité et la conservation du vin?

Il y aura deux autocollants différents à poser sur les bouteilles, selon la décision du producteur.

Mais les tenants de ce type de vin ont appris à se méfier des étiquettes. Régulièrement retoqués des appellations d'origine contrôlée lors des dégustations, car le goût ne collait pas avec l'image parfois stéréotypée qu'on en attendait, frustrés de se voir interdire l'utilisation de cépages qui ne figuraient pas dans le cahier des charges des AOC, lassés de se voir imposer des traitements ou pratiques pour bénéficier de l'agrément bio ou biodynamique, certains vignerons préfèrent se tenir à distance de toute certification. Ils s'épanouissent dans la catégorie peu contraignante du « Vin de France ». Libre à eux de varier les pratiques culturelles d'une année à l'autre pour s'adapter au profil du millésime, mais aussi de créer des cuvées éphémères, expérimenter, en somme de se sentir libres. Comment s'assurer, dès lors, que leurs pratiques sont conformes à leur discours? Complicier, à moins de pouvoir se fier au caviste qui sera allé vérifier sur place. Et de pouvoir mettre de côté l'adage de l'écrivain britannique Jonathan Swift: « *Comme la croûte des pâtés, les promesses sont faites pour être rompues.* »



Figure 5. Neiman, O., 23 November 2020. *Quel vin nature ? Face à Face*. *Le Monde*, p. 6.

A large percentage of natural winegrowers are in favour of a form of legal recognition that would entail the creation of a label to regulate the production and marketing of natural

wine, and they present numerous arguments in favour of it. First of all, legal recognition would allow statistics on natural wines to be generated. Second, it would provide producers with clear guidelines and consumers with a grid to enable them to identify the product more efficiently, thereby ensuring a certain level of ethics of production. Finally, it would meet a need for transparency and clarification of the product and the practices surrounding it and would prevent abusive uses of the term. Some winegrowers and other actors in the movement, on the other hand, see the demand for legal recognition as a way of forcing compliance with the norms and constraints of the dominant system they want to fight against. They also fear that the specifications would be too strict and would leave no room for creativity and experimentation from one vintage to the next or from one region to another, characteristics they claim are key to the production of natural wine. They see regulation as a way of constraining and crystallising farming practices over time, as opposed to the freer way of making wine they value. Paradoxically, on both sides of the controversy – the pro- and anti-label factions – there is a fear that the conventional segment of the wine industry will take over the codes of natural wine for their own marketing purposes. For those who defend the implementation of an official definition, labels would be a way of controlling every product, thus avoiding the usurpation of the natural identity thanks to stricter regulations. In the other camp, there is a distrust of labels and a fear that labels would be taken over by large-scale industrial enterprises that would use the “natural” label as a marketing and selling tool.

The EU Regulation on the production of organic wine and the 2012 reform.

The regulations governing organic production in the European Union, which are contained in Regulation 203/2012, serve as the primary legal framework for organic wines. Organic viticulture is regulated at the European Union level and is represented by the label *Agriculture Biologique* (AB). Organic farming, which is also known as agrobiology, is characterised by an approach to viticulture that respects vines, soils and ecosystems. To meet the Union’s certification standards, producers must adhere to precise specifications, refraining from the use of synthetic or chemical treatment products such as fungicides, herbicides and pesticides. According to the Bio Agency, organic viticulture accounted for 14% of French vineyard land in 2019.

When the European Union initially established standards for organic food in 1991, organic wine was restricted to being labelled as “wine made from organic grapes.” In August 2012, a new amendment permitted the use of a new mention: “organic wine.” This amendment

attracted significant criticism from winemakers who were apprehensive about the leniency of the regulations regarding the vinification process and its potential repercussions.

The natural wine movement criticised the 2012 amendment for focusing solely on work in the vineyards. Indeed, despite European regulations since 1 August 2012 that seek to oversee the entire production process from grape to bottle, there is limited control over the vinification process. In other words, the specifications bind grape growers more than they do winemakers. In an open letter to the European Commission, a group of natural winemakers denounced the regulation as a “short-term strategy intended to accelerate the industrialisation of organic wine and capture new market shares.” They lamented the fact that “the European regulations for organic wine, applicable since August 2012, authorise a variety of inputs: preservatives, yeasts, fermentation activators, lactic bacteria, acidifiers and de-acidifiers, stabilising and clarifying agents, etc.” (Morel, 2013, p. 168). Despite the criticisms, the reform had a dual objective: it facilitated the recognition of organic wine at a European level with standardised rules for all Member States, and it enabled the transition from the “wine from organic grapes” label to the more comprehensive “organic wine.”

Textbox 2. The EU Regulation on the production of organic wine and the 2012 reform.

1.3. Resituating the emergence of the natural wine movement

I now move away from natural wine as a product to the natural wine movement and focus on situating this loose coalition of winemakers who have grouped, or been grouped, together under the natural wine banner. My objective is to make sense of this group of actors, what binds them together and the collective identity they forge. But beforehand, one must understand the context in which the natural wine movement was born.

1.3.1. *The cradle of the movement and its spread*³¹

The birth of the natural wine movement is now well documented (Feiring, 2011; Legeron, 2014; Morel, 2013; C. Pineau, 2017, 2019; Viecelli, 2021). The emergence of the movement as we know it today can be traced back to France. My intention here is not to contradict Alice Feiring, who dates the first natural wine production to 6000 BC in Georgia, but again, the focus here is less on the product and rather on the movement and the actors

³¹ This section is based on a chapter published in a collective book. For more information, see: Chazal Clémentine, “Qui sont ces “hurluberlus” du vin? Comprendre l’émergence du mouvement des vins nature en France,” in the collective work *Vignes et vigneronns. Évolutions des métiers, des pratiques et des territoires*, Sitnikoff Françoise, Chazal Hélène and Christèle Assegond (eds.), Presses Universitaires François-Rabelais, p. 209-226

that initiated it, which is why I situate the cradle of the movement in Beaujolais, France in the early 1980s.

The first appearance of the term “natural wine” during the Midi Rouge revolts.

One has to go back to 1907 to find the first written traces of the notion of natural wine. Indeed, the term “natural wine” appeared for the first time on this date on the occasion of the revolt of the winegrowers of Languedoc-Roussillon against the economic crisis they were facing, a political outcry that is better known as the “Midi Rouge” revolt. According to Mann, the structural crisis of overproduction might very well have been the main factor behind the economic crisis and surpluses, to the despair of many producers. However, the opacity of the structural economic arguments was never fully understood by the growers, who blamed them for fraudulent production. The winemakers’ claims included better regulation of wine production, including a ban on chaptalisation (the addition of sugar to wine) and stricter control of fraud, which especially targeted wines from Northern Africa. “When they were asked “Why is there too much wine on the market?,” the winegrowers had no trouble answering: there was too much wine because some winegrowers had no hesitation in cheating by adding sugar to their wines, soaking their wines or using chaptalisation on a massive scale.” (Mann, 1998, p. 51), Mann explained when asked about the impact of the revolts. Among the slogans used in the protests led by the socialist and communist winegrowers of the Languedoc was: “Long live natural wine! Down with the poisoners!”³² Some time later, an initial regulation to control wine production was passed. At that time, the term “natural wine” did not refer to a wine with no added sulphites, but to a product made solely from the fermentation of fresh grapes, as opposed to artificial wines (fraudulent wines made with sugar beet, for example, or wines mixed with water to increase production, a process that is also known as *mouillage*). Therefore, one has to wait until the 1980s in France for the concept of natural wine to emerge as we understand it today.

The Midi Rouge episode also marked the gradual institutionalisation of the notion of quality in wine, an idea that would remain a central element throughout the modernisation process of the French wine industry. According to Genieys, this transformation of the Midi Rouge was symptomatic of more structural changes. It gave space to a revived industry in which the iconic figure of the grower as a simple producer of grapes gradually gave way to that of the *vigneron* as the person who produces the wine, who manages the entire production from the vine to bottling. The transfer of new technical knowledge played a full part in defining the contours of the winegrowing profession and the legitimisation of a new social status within it. The work to legitimise the *vigneron* profession bears witness to this. Genieys comments thus on structural transformation: “The traditional trilogy of “the vine, the winegrower, the Midi” has been replaced by “wines, winemakers and terroirs”” (Genieys, 1998, p. 21). Finally, the creation of the *Appellations d'Origine Contrôlées* (AOCs) in 1935 was an extension of the first series of laws passed in 1907 with the aim of

³² My translation of: “Vive le vin naturel! À bas les empoisonneurs!”

guaranteeing not only the intrinsic qualities of a wine but also its geographical origin (there is more on the AOC scheme in Chapter 7).

Textbox 3. The first appearance of the term “natural wine” during the Midi Rouge revolts.

Various authors who have written about natural wine agree on attributing the birth of the movement to the work of Jules Chauvet (Célérier, 2017; C. Pineau, 2017; Vieceili, 2021). Chauvet was a biochemist who dedicated his entire life’s work to the study of bacteria and yeast cycles in order to gain a profound understanding of the fermentation process and eventually to be able to avoid using chemistry in the production of wine. More precisely, the founding event can be dated to a meeting between Jules Chauvet, the wine merchant and researcher in biochemistry, and Marcel Lapierre, an iconic winemaker from the Beaujolais region. They are considered the founding fathers of the movement: Jules Chauvet for bringing his expertise in chemistry and highlighting the importance of endogenous yeasts in the winemaking process, and Marcel Lapierre for putting these principles into practice and converting his entire production to the natural approach. The meeting between the two men in 1981 marked the starting point for the movement. Another important figure in this process is Jacques Néauport, who was Jules Chauvet’s disciple and a natural wine consultant. According to Legeron, who nicknamed him “the druid of Burgundy,” he did a great job of spreading Jules Chauvet’s work posthumously and “put his teachings into practice in such a way that entire regions blossomed as natural wine hubs” (Legeron 2014, p. 248). This new way of making wine was quickly taken up by a few other Beaujolais winemakers who were close to Marcel Lapierre, including Max Breton, Jean Foillard and Jean Thévenet. One might say that at the time, natural wine was embodied by a small group of friends, who were also called the “Gang of Four.” Some of the other winemakers who can be included as pioneering figures in the movement are Pierre Overnoy in the Jura, who was also a loyal student of Chauvet’s techniques, François Ribo in Crozes-Hermitage, Hervé Souhaut in Saint-Joseph, Jean-Pierre Frick and Patrick Meyer in Alsace and Jean-Pierre Amoreau (Château Le Puy) in Bordeaux.

Steiner and the biodynamic agricultural method

Another significant figure to these two icons can be added: Rudolf Steiner, the founder of the biodynamic agricultural method, whose founding principles are fundamental to a better understanding of the philosophy behind the natural wine movement. In her exploration of the natural wine movement philosophy, Pineau comments: “When the super-sensitive man

(Steiner) meets the great Cartesian (Chauvet), the path can lead to a third way.¹” (Pineau, 2017, p. 69).

Steiner (1861-1925) represents the cornerstone of biodynamic principles. In 1913, he created the anthroposophy, a spiritual philosophy that explores the interconnectedness between the spiritual and material realms. At the core of his philosophy lies the fundamental premise that the earth is an interconnected living entity, and that agriculture operates as a catalyst for the dynamic forces that shape nature. It is from this central idea that he developed the principles of biodynamic agricultural methods. In 1924, he gave a series of lectures entitled *The Agriculture Courses*, which paved the way for the founding principles of biodynamic methods. In essence, the concept of biodynamic agriculture embraces the notion that farming is an act of stimulating and harmonising natural processes. Two core concepts encapsulate Steiner’s central thinking. First, he places great emphasis on the influence of cosmic rhythms, specifically highlighting the pivotal role played by astral bodies such as stars and the moon in the growth and development of plants. Second, there is the principle of the agricultural organism as an autonomous entity, which asserts that farmers should strive for complete autonomy in their fields. This entails the pursuit of a self-contained individuality in which the farm becomes a holistic entity in and of itself. Consequently, the ideal state for a farm is one that lacks any external inputs or outputs and operates with a natural balance that sustains the well-being of the entire ecosystem. The Agriculture Course (1924) also included practical and technical advice on how it should be applied, including the use of horn manure, preparations for sowing composts, decoctions and herbal teas. All of them are made to stimulate the life of plants and soils and enhance their natural equilibrium and capacity for self-defence. Remarkably, Steiner was advocating for the abolition of synthetic chemicals as early as 1920, at a time when their use was in its infancy (Morel, 2013, p. 70).

Steiner’s biodynamic methods had a real impact in German-speaking countries (Germany, Austria, Switzerland) before they spread to Europe and then to the rest of the world. The methods were then expanded by other authors who were close to Steiner, among whom were Ehrenfried Pfeiffer, who in 1937 published *The Earth’s Face*, an investigation of the effects of industrialisation and mechanisation on the environment of soil fertility, and Maria Thun, whose book *The Biodynamic Calendar* (1960) established precise agricultural cycles based around the planets and the seasons. It is interesting to note, however, that vines and viticulture were not a central concern for Steiner, who mentioned them only briefly in one of his Agriculture Course lectures. The spread of biodynamic agriculture has been monitored since the creation of the Demeter system in 1932, which gives the methods international recognition (France has had a domestic branch of Demeter since 1979, and in South Africa, Demeter is applied through the Biodynamic Agricultural Association of Southern Africa). As well as Demeter, a syndicate of winemakers created a label specifically for biodynamic viticulture in 1996 called Biodivin. Today, it is estimated that biodynamic methods are practiced by over 7000 farmers across 60 countries (Guigui, 2020).

What are the common grounds and differences between biodynamic methods and the natural wine movement? Although Steiner's position is quite controversial, Pineau believes that Steiner is still one of the founding pillars of the natural wine movement, adding that even though Steiner and Chauvet are seemingly at odds with each other, they in fact interact and create meaning for winegrowers thanks to the actors in the natural wine movement, and provide them with a useful toolbox for helping them think about the implementation of their growing options (Pineau 2017, 43)

Finally, it is interesting to note that despite this esoteric and mysterious theoretical background, biodynamic principles are now officially recognised in EU regulations by Demeter certification; in fact, it might even be claimed that they are better regulated than the principles of natural wine production, which still suffer from a lack of a legislative framework (more can be found on the esoteric dimension of biodynamic knowledge in Chapter 9).

Textbox 4. Steiner and the biodynamic agricultural method.

As Legeron has claimed, “There is no single individual to whom the movement can be attributed, as examples exist all over the world of people who resisted modernising trends” (Legeron, 2014, p. 184). Instead, there are stories of natural wine clusters emerging in different areas, and of winemakers whose practices and visions inspired others, causing a ripple effect of interest. It is clear that the movement began with Chauvet and his disciples, but its later emergence was more spread out as it expanded throughout wine-producing territories. Since the 2000s, the number of winegrowers claiming to be part of this movement has increased dramatically: the movement has spread far beyond the group of friends from Beaujolais to become an international phenomenon with multiple local and situated anchors.

1.3.2. Complexities of scope

Natural wine has become an increasingly important part of the wine industry, as well as a new market segment. However, in the absence of official figures, it is difficult to quantify its production. In the case of France, for example, in 2020 the main associations representing the movement – AVN (*Association des Vins Naturels*) and SAINS (*Association pour des Vins Sans Intrants Ni Sulfites Ajoutés*) – only had a few dozen members. In 2022, however, the new *Syndicat Méthode Nature* had 261 members. Another indicator is provided by the online application *Raisin*, which has been mapping the world of natural wine since 2016, and by 2022 had identified over 5500 places to drink or buy

natural wine worldwide (bars, wine shops, restaurants, etc.³³). This figure must be applied cautiously, as only places that have been recommended are considered, and there is also a clear geographical bias because it only takes into account certain large cities (mainly cultural capitals), leaving out entire wine regions (South Africa is not included at all, for instance). The figures published in the 2022 *Raisin* report are interesting, however, because they show a fast-growing market: fewer than 1000 such places were identified in 2016, and over 5500 in 2022³⁴. More generally, judging by the number of “natural” bottles available in wine shops or the multiplication of trade events specialising in the sale of natural wine, it is fair to assume that there are several hundred producers in France who claim to be part of the natural movement³⁵. Another figure that is often repeated in presentations and media articles – although it is not possible to trace its source – is that natural wine producers represent 1% to 2% of wine production worldwide, leaving natural wine in the category of a niche market, a marginal product at the far extreme of the wine production spectrum³⁶. Once again, without objective criteria to define what is and what is not natural wine worldwide, these numbers are at best useful for the purposes of establishing an order of magnitude for the movement and observing its international expansion. They are not reliable, however, and one must be cautious when trying to quantify natural wine producers. To my knowledge, no institutional or scientific initiatives have yet attempted to quantify this market segment, leaving a clear knowledge gap and a need for further research in this direction. Nevertheless, the fact that natural wine has penetrated all wine regions is worth noting, no matter how small and porous the movement may be locally: today, all major wine-producing regions worldwide have a local branch of the natural wine movement (Feiring, 2011; Legeron, 2014).

Conclusion

This introductory chapter has presented the object of this study. There is no officially recognised definition of natural wine and it is therefore a controversial notion whose meaning and perceptions are still widely debated and contested by actors in the field and

³³ *Raisin* only recommends establishments whose offerings include at least 30% of natural wine. According to them, “This is the minimum requirement for inclusion on *Raisin*, as it signifies a genuine commitment by the establishment to guide its clientele in the exploration of natural wine.”

³⁴ <https://jeunesnaturelles.raisin.digital/5000-bars-restaurants-caves-ou-boire-du-vin-naturel.html>

³⁵ In its latest report (2023), *Raisin* listed 1,357 natural winemakers in France. Source : Le vin nature est-il devenu trop mainstream? *Podcast, Radio Vino*, May 2023.

³⁶ According to the specialist magazine *Meininger's Wine Business International* (Lohfert, 2019), the total production of natural wines may account for only about 2% of global sales (Viecelli p. 69).

academics alike. The technical aspects I have raised above provide insights into the complexities of the debate around natural winemaking. For readers who are unfamiliar with wine production methods, it is important to note two key points. Firstly, when wine production is viewed on a spectrum, natural wine is at the opposite end from conventional wines. Secondly, natural wine production advocates for a holistic and minimally interventionist approach from vineyard to bottling and rejects the use of synthetic chemical products: in fact, the term natural wine is often simplified to wine with no added sulphites.

To delve deeper, the second part of this chapter has made an important distinction between natural wine as a product and natural wine as a movement and recalls that it is the latter that is the focus of this research. The section is devoted to detailing the emergence of the natural wine movement and tracing its multiple origins from the first ever wines in Georgia in 6000 BC to the cradle of the natural wine movement as we know it today in Beaujolais in the 1980s, with the work of founding fathers such as Jules Chauvet and Marcel Lapierre. The natural wine movement has spread globally from its origins in Beaujolais, and I argue that it is now present in most, if not all, wine-producing regions. However, because of the lack of a clear definition, there is no reliable data, and so quantifying the movement is a difficult task.

Following this brief picture of natural wine and the natural wine movement, the next chapter introduces the two case studies of this research: the Bordeaux region and Western Cape Province, two local antennas of this transnational phenomenon.

2. CHAPTER 2: Embarking on a comparative analysis of the natural wine movement through the Bordeaux region and Western Cape Province.

Introduction

In this chapter, I present my two case studies and introduce the reasons behind my use of a comparative analysis design. With such different cases in mind, one might have expected the comparison to be based on a “most different systems” design (Przeworski, 1970) or on the “dramatic contrast” method (Gazibo, 2002). Indeed, at first glance, the differences between the two wine regions are numerous and permeate almost every dimension. On the one hand, Bordeaux in France has some of the oldest vineyards in existence, and its international reputation needs no explanation. It has a global influence, notably for paving the way in terms of appellations systems, developing the notion of *terroir*, and producing wines for high-end market. On the other hand, the Western Cape Province in South Africa is part of the so-called New World wine region, the state plays almost no role in wine-related businesses and the wine market is not very highly regulated. Despite the apparent conflict between these two cases, I depart from a standard, and perhaps expected, comparison using the “most different systems” approach in this research. Instead, I apply a term-by-term comparison between the two regions, my main goal being to underline the fact that comparison does not require resemblance and similarity, or contrast and conflict; rather, it simply means identifying points of contact between the cases studied. In this instance, a comparative analysis has been used to examine the natural wine movement via both its global identity and its local specificities.

The chapter is divided into two sections. First, I introduce the two case studies: the Bordeaux region (France) and the Province of the Western Cape (South Africa). This section provides reasons for the selection of these two regions and define the specific contexts within which the thesis as a whole unfolds. In the second section, I explain the comparative design of the research and its benefits and limitations, and the peculiarities of working with an African and a European case study. I then draw upon the North-South theory to propose a new analytical grid of the world’s wine regions, moving away from the Old World-New World antagonism, which I do not believe is the appropriate lens for this research. Instead, I adopt an analytical framework in terms of “multiple” worlds of wine.

2.1. Setting the cases for the comparison: introducing the socio-historical background of the two regions

This section paints a global picture of the two regions. First, it introduces some fundamental context background and sociohistorical perspective, then briefly describes the institutional order of the wine industry locally and unveils their regional integration in the global wine market and subsequent economic difficulties, and finally focuses on the challenges associated with the rampant environmental and climate change pressures that have impacted the two regions. These elements are critical for an understanding of the analysis of the natural wine movement that unfolds in the following chapters. The section does not attempt to provide a comprehensive landscape of the local wine industry; rather it pinpoints the historical local characteristics and contemporary challenges that have provided fertile ground for the natural wine movement in each wine region. My objective here is to use the abundant literature on the two wine regions as a gateway to understanding the context in which the natural wine movement emerged in each of the localities.

2.1.1. *A socio-historical background to the two regions*

Retracing the socio-historical background of the two regions is necessary to understand the contemporary structure of the wine industry and its challenges. Both have been the subject of an abundance of literature because of their dense yet singular histories, the legacies of which actively shape the industry today.

2.1.1.1. Bordeaux, the cradle of the terroir concept and a market of excellence

The Bordeaux region is one of the most studied wine regions in the social sciences. In fact, it would not be too bold to suggest that it is the area that has been studied most extensively. The numerous academic works dedicated to it trace, *inter alia*, the historical construction of the vineyard (Hinnewinkel and Lavaud 2019; Schirmer 2020), the emergence of the Appellation and Grand Cru systems (Chauvin, 2010; Garcia-Parpet, 2009; Roudié, 2000b) and the structuring of the wine chain and the global influence of the Bordeaux model (Itçaina, Roger, and Smith 2016; Roudié 1997; Smith, Maillard and Costa 2007). More recently, research has focused on the significant changes the region has undergone since the end of the twentieth century and the multifaceted crisis that has gripped the sector

(Célérier, 2015; Darcy, 2023; Feredj, 2007; Réjalot, 2021), which, as this thesis will demonstrate, has been a pivotal element of the emergence of the natural wine movement.

Bordeaux is located in the southwest of France. It has a maritime climate because of its proximity to the Atlantic coast. Its vineyards stretch across both banks of the Garonne River in the Gironde, which are often referred to as the Left Bank and the Right Bank. With over 5550 wine producers and approximately 110800 hectares of vineyards, Bordeaux ranks as the largest French AOC wine-growing area and the third-largest wine-producing region in France³⁷. Renowned primarily for its red blends, which account for over 85% of its production, Bordeaux wines are typically crafted from a blend of Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc. Bordeaux also produces white wines (mainly from Sauvignon Blanc and Sémillon), claret, rosé and crémant. Additionally, the Bordeaux wine scene is characterised by its complexity and deep historical roots, with relationships among its actors that have been cultivated over centuries and are steeped in tradition.

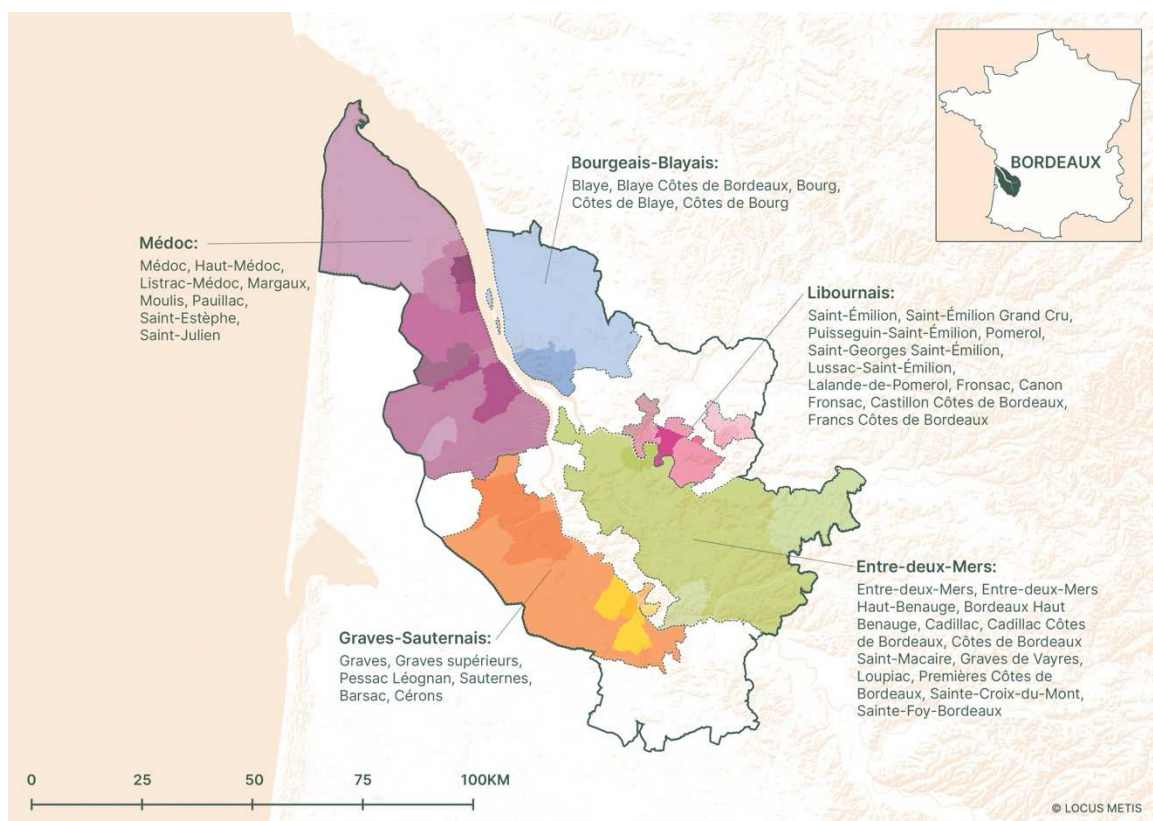


Figure 6. Map of Bordeaux's vineyards and Appellations. Source : CIVB. Design: Chazal 2024³⁸

³⁷ Data sourced from the CIVB. 2020. *Dossier de Presse Bilan 2019 et Stratégie 2020*.

³⁸ Most maps and figures in this thesis were designed with the assistance of Lloyd Martin, also known as Locus Metis. I am grateful for his support in creating the visual renders.



Figure 7. Bordeaux's wine sector in a few key numbers. Source: CIVB 2022³⁹

Bordeaux's vineyards were historically based on small, family-owned estates and peasant farming operations. On the production side, therefore, the estates tend to be relatively small. Although the average estate covers 19.6 hectares today, the proportion of smaller estates (less than 2 hectares) has significantly decreased in favour of larger domains (20 hectares or more), a trend that has been observed by Bouzdine-Macheeva and Ninomiya (2011, 73). Despite the increase in the number of larger domains, the figure of the *vigneron*, whose role encompasses both viticultural production and winemaking, still dominates in Bordeaux. In order to fully grasp the singularities of the Bordeaux wine industry, one needs to look at its historical actors and institutions: from being the first "all-AOC" region to its structure around the influence of *Châteaux* and *Grands Crus Classés* and the *En Primeur* system, Bordeaux wines have a range of characteristics that are unique to its local industry.

○ The historical "all AOC" strategy of Bordeaux

Bordeaux has built its reputation of excellence around the notion of terroir (see more in Textbox 19) and implemented a terroir-driven strategy as a prime marketing argument,

³⁹ CIVB. 2022. La RSE. Dossier de Presse 2021-2022., p. 35

building narrative around quality wine and high-end markets. The notion of terroir has been very well encapsulated in the construction of the Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée (AOC) scheme, which was implemented in France in 1935⁴⁰. Bordeaux epitomises the success of this scheme, and today it is the largest French AOC wine-growing area and a leading AOC nationally. According to the 2020 CIVB sales report, “In a global context disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic, Bordeaux wines remain the leading French AOC, both in export markets and domestically.” Bordeaux has built its strength on the AOC system, notably by investing in a 100% AOC strategy since the 1970s (Itçaina, Roger and Smith 2016, 112). This system forms the backbone of Bordeaux vineyards, although as this thesis will show later (More in Chapter 7), the “all AOC” strategy is currently facing challenges from all sides.

○ *Châteaux, Grands Crus and other classified growths*

Another distinctive feature of Bordeaux vineyards is that their identity is built around the concept of *Châteaux*⁴¹ and *Grands Crus Classés*. The region has a sophisticated classification system aimed at categorising its wines based on quality and prestige (Chauvin, 2010). It includes classifications such as *Premier Cru Classé*, *Deuxième Cru Classé* and so on. Two main classifications are especially well renowned and make a significant contribution to the prestige and reputation of Bordeaux internationally: the Médoc classified growths of the official 1855 Grands Crus classification⁴² which lists over sixty Grands Crus, and the more recent Saint-Émilion classification⁴³. The persistence of these classified growths in the vineyards of Bordeaux and the esteem in which they are held are evocative of the structure of the sector.

⁴⁰ Details of the AOC scheme will be given in Chapter 7, but in brief, it is a system of regulations aimed at guaranteeing the quality of wine through its origins and terroir. It specifies and delimits the geographical area from which a particular wine originates as well as the technical methods by which it is made. These regulations are administered nationally by the *Institut National des Appellations d'Origine* (INAO).

⁴¹ The essential role of Châteaux in Bordeaux's identity is described in detail in Chapter 5.

⁴² According to Hay (2010), the Médoc Grand Crus classification “was produced at the instigation of the Bordeaux Chamber of Commerce to help in the process of selecting and displaying wines from the region for the Emperor's Universal Exposition to be held in Paris later that same year. The task was subcontracted to a group of brokers who, despite their best efforts (in the short time available) to taste samples and visit chateaux, were forced in the end to classify properties in terms of their relative market position (their average price over preceding vintages) at the time. Fifty-seven chateaux were classified in five bands, descending from the 4 first growths to the 16 fifth growths.” (Hay, 2010)

⁴³ According to Hay (2010), “The first classification of the wines of Saint-Émilion did not occur until 1955, and was modelled very closely on that a century earlier for the wines of the Médoc. It, too, was based largely on average price attained. Yet, unlike the 1855 classification, it is updated every 10 years.” (Hay, 2010)

○ Courtiers *and* maisons de négoce*s in Bordeaux*

Things become more complicated when we look at the marketing and distribution aspect of the Bordeaux wine scene. Woven over centuries of historical tradition, the intricate network of actors involved in the wine sector is unique to the Bordeaux region, and suggests a deeper exploration of wine chain integration. Two particular actors have crucial roles in facilitating transactions here: wine brokers (*courtiers*) and wine merchants (*négoce*s). Wine brokers act as intermediaries to facilitate transactions between wine producers and merchants. Brokers are experts who assess the quality and characteristics of wine from every vintage and negotiate prices between buyers and sellers. Merchants, on the other hand, purchase wine from domains and distribute it to wholesalers, retailers and consumers. They acquire the wine in bottles or in bulk, store it at their facilities and oversee marketing and distribution operations through various channels, in particular for export. Merchant traditions have left a significant mark on urban planning in Bordeaux, especially in districts like Chartrons, which was designed around wine merchants' storage houses. Traditionally, these merchants wielded considerable economic influence in the Bordeaux wine sector, and their role is still pivotal today, with over 300 wine merchant houses in operation. Wines bottled and traded by merchants are referred to as “branded” as opposed to Château wines.



Figure 8. Principle structure of the Bordeaux wine chain. Source: Chazal 2024

The En Primeur system

Another particular feature of Bordeaux's wine market is its En Primeur system, also known as wine futures. Every year, typically in mid-spring, wines are sold while still in the barrel, a year or eighteen months before a vintage is officially released. This practice gives wine enthusiasts the opportunity to invest in wines from a promising vintage before they are available for general sale, often at a special price. As noted by Hay, the En Primeur system is among “the most traditional, status-oriented, and densely institutionalised of all markets.” (Hay, 2010, p. 686). Because the wines are being sold before they are bottled, and sometimes even before they have finished ageing, the En Primeur market is particularly sensitive to various quality indicators and expert opinions, thereby reinforcing the role of

brokers and merchants, who traditionally act as intermediaries and understand how to navigate this complex market.

Textbox 5. The En Primeur system.

○ *Bordeaux, an export-based model that has been copied internationally*

Bordeaux is one of the largest wine-producing regions in the world and has established itself as a model for global viticulture. From the second half of the nineteenth century, Bordeaux wines have been exported not only to England – historically their prime export destination – but also to the entire world. In fact, Roudié has noted that “it is in all the vineyards of the world that one finds Bordeaux influence.” (Roudié, 1997, 405). Not only are Bordeaux wines appreciated worldwide, but the Bordeaux vineyard model itself has been exported and copied, if not actually plagiarised, and its technical and financial success has aroused envy and given rise to fraudulent imitations (Salomon, 2005). The influence of Bordeaux can also be seen more directly in Bordeaux vineyard owners’ investments in vineyards and land outside the Gironde, as illustrated by several examples of South African estates owned by major Bordeaux families. Bordeaux ended up by resting on its laurels and is now paying the price for its international success, as this chapter will reveal.

2.1.1.2. South African vineyards, historically isolated and marked by profound racial inequalities⁴⁴

I now move South to present the second case study: the Province of the Western Cape in South Africa. Although South Africa is often categorised as a New World wine region, grape farming and winemaking have roots there dating back to the 1650s, coinciding with the arrival of the first colonisers in the Western Cape (See textbox 6). The wine industry is mostly concentrated in Western Cape Province, with some limited production in other regions such as the Northern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. Because the Western Cape accounts for over 95% of South Africa’s wine production, it was natural that I should focus on this region, and at times I may use the term “South African wines” to refer to the situation in the Western Cape.

⁴⁴ This section is based on a published article: Clémentine Chazal, “L’émergence du mouvement des vins nature dans une région du “Nouveau Monde.” Le cas du vignoble sud-africain.” Christelle Pineau; Bernard Cherubini. *La sublimation patrimoniale du vin et des régions viticoles*, Éditions Universitaires de Dijon, pp. 61–76, 2023.

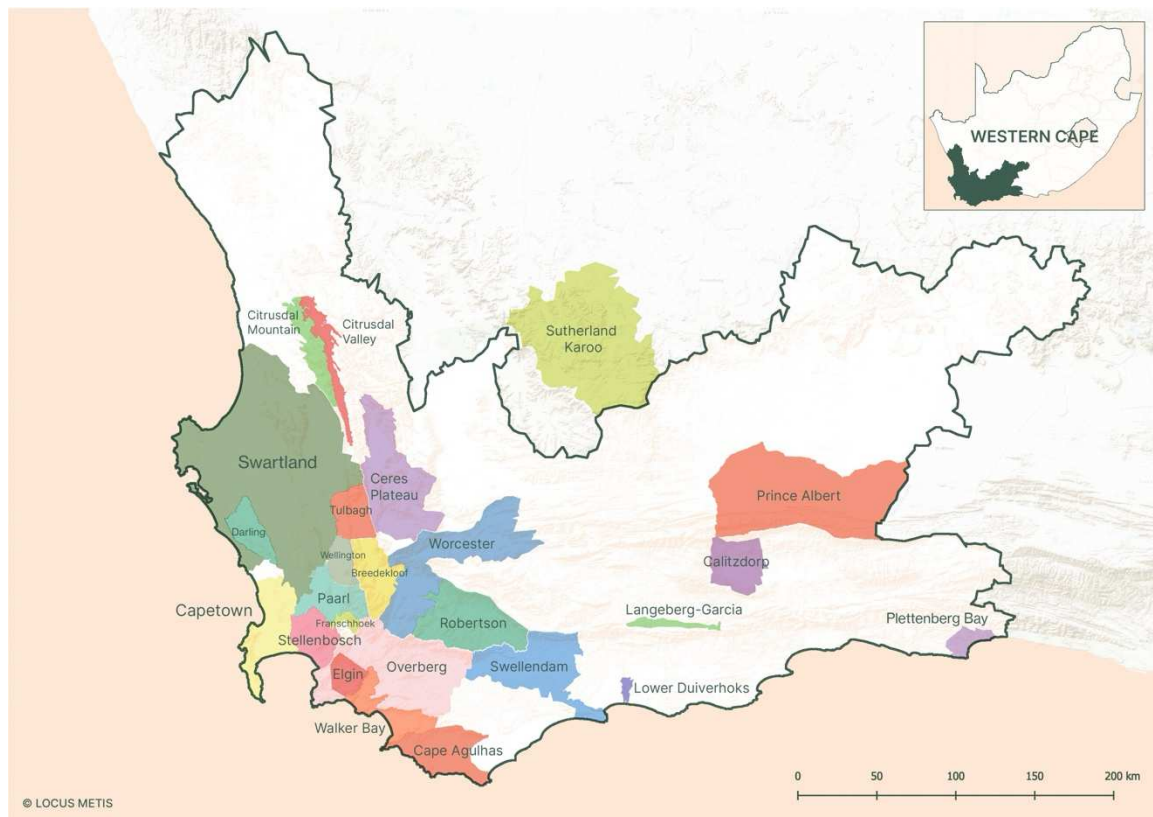


Figure 9. Maps of winegrowing areas of the Western Cape, South Africa. Source: WOSA. Design: Chazal 2024

1655, the first *vitis vinifera* in South Africa

It is interesting to note that despite their relatively ancient history, South African wines are classified as New World. In fact, cultivation of the first vineyards in the Western Cape can be traced back to 1655 with the arrival of the Dutch East India Company (Estreicher, 2014). It was the Dutch who planted the first vineyards in the Cape region, under Governor Jan Van Riebeeck, using grape varieties brought in from the Rhone Valley and Spain. Governor Van Riebeeck wrote this historically famous quote in his diary: “Today, praise be to God, wine was made for the first time from Cape grapes.” At the time, wine was considered “indispensable for the health of the shipping crews” (Huetz De Lemps 2001). The spread of viticulture practices came at the end of the seventeenth century with the arrival of French Huguenots, who settled in sub-regions such as Franschhoek (French Corner). Large estates were established during this period, such as Groot Constantia in 1679. Thanks to Constantia, South African wines were very popular in Europe at the time and were reportedly even a favourite of Napoleon. Despite the fact that most of its production was bulk wines of low quality, South Africa was considered by some to be the only non-European wine-growing area capable of producing quality wines (Schirmer, 2012b). The longevity of local viticulture and wine production locally is quite counter-intuitive with the classification of South Africa as a New World wine region.

Textbox 6. 1655, the first *vitis vinifera* in South Africa

South African history is profoundly marked by enslavement, colonisation and apartheid, and because the wine industry is a leading economic sector it has often been an emblem of these historical regimes. It is therefore unsurprising that most of the literature on the South African wine sector has been framed within this historical context. The majority of academic publications, particularly in the social sciences, have focused on how the restructuring of the wine industry has perpetuated the legacy of apartheid and its influence on the structure of the industry and its labour practices (Dellier, Rouvellac and Guyot 2013; Ewert and Hamman 1999; Ewert and Du Toit 2005), and on examining various initiatives, notably related to Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) (Du Toit, Kruger and Ponte 2007; Williams 2005). A third branch of this literature has explored ethical trade initiatives that affect labour conditions on wine farms and questioned the space for manoeuvre for more policy options to de-racialise the industry (Bek, McEwan and Bek 2007; McEwan and Bek 2006, 2009; Moseley 2008). The next section gives a brief historical background of the South African wine industry, with a particular focus on its post-apartheid restructuring and contemporary challenges.

➤ **An industry shaped by colonialism and exploitation**

Numerous historical publications on the South African wine sector have portrayed an industry entrenched in a logic of racial domination that began during the slave society of the colonial era and continued through the apartheid regime (Du Toit, 1993; Estreicher, 2014; Viall, James, & Gerwel, 2011). Domains were owned by white settlers (Afrikaners, descendants of Huguenots or British settlers) while wine production was entirely dependent on black and coloured⁴⁵ labour. The relationships between vineyard workers and their employers reflected the logic of the racial hierarchies in place and functioned in a paternalistic and authoritarian manner that had been directly inherited from the colonial era

⁴⁵ The term is taken from one of the four racial classifications used during apartheid (Blacks, Whites, Indians, and Coloureds), and has been translated into French as “*métisse*” by some authors. The use of the term “black” or “coloured” here is thus not scientifically sound, but is used as reference to a social construct. I also use the term “non-white South Africans” interchangeably in this thesis.

For more information on this terminology see Viall, Jeanne, Wilmot James, and Jakes Gerwel, 2011. *Grape: From Slavery to BEE*. Tafelberg. Other authors such as Ponte have preferred to use the term “historically disadvantaged person” (HDP), which refers to any person who is disadvantaged by unfair discrimination before the 1993 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act no. 200 of 1993) came into force. South African texts specifically refer to the empowerment of ‘black people’, defined as ‘a generic term that encompasses Africans, Coloureds and Indians’ (Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act. Act no. 53 of 2003, p. 2).

(Du Toit, 1993). The system of dependency and paternalism between vineyard workers and white landowners was reinforced by land dispossession and the proletarianisation of agricultural labour (Moseley, 2008). The Cape Peninsula is often used as the geo-symbol of South Africa's colonisation by Europeans, and the wine sector became the symbol of the exploitation of local populations.

Bulk wine produced by large cooperatives

Throughout the twentieth century, the wine industry was dominated by powerful cooperatives that produced wine in bulk, often of poor quality. Despite the natural qualities of the terroir and a local cool Mediterranean climate suitable for viticulture, the wines produced were initially truly mediocre, using grape varieties that were ill-adapted to their new environment, and the wine that was produced was of low quality for centuries. Giant cooperatives also played a pivotal role in the historical structuration of the industry. In the first place, they established a rationalised division of production between grape growers and winemakers that differed from the role of the *vigneron* that was of such importance in Bordeaux. Second, they were instrumental in structuring the economy of the industry and its regulations. One cooperative, the Koöperatieve Wijnbouwers Vereniging van Zuid-Afrika, better known as the KWV, which was granted statutory powers to regulate the industry, stands out. It was initially established in the early twentieth century to improve cooperation among wine farms and to control production to avoid surpluses. Its objectives expanded rapidly, however, and it operated as a monopoly, setting prices and implementing policies (determining the permitted cultivars, regulating production methods, imposing quotas, etc.) for the entire South African wine industry (Estreicher, 2014).

Textbox 7. Bulk wine produced by large cooperatives

➤ Deregulation and restructuring: the “Renaissance” of the South African wine industry

The South African wine sector has undergone a profound restructuring since the 1990s that has been characterised by the twin processes of deregulation of wine production and the re-regulation of labour and inter-racial relations. Some authors have described this moment as an intense process of “deregulation and restructuring” of the local industry (Ewert & Du Toit, 2005), while others have even conceptualised it as the “Renaissance” of the South African wine industry (Rouvellac, Dellier, & Guyot, 2011; Velasco-Graciet, 2010). This “Renaissance” has followed two distinct trajectories: on the one hand, it has been led by the national democratic transition and its impact on the sector, and on the other, the change

has been boosted by the integration of the South African industry into the global market (T. M. Shaw, 2001).

- *The first democratic elections and a need for land redistribution*

From the late 1970s, numerous indicators, including social unrest and political and economic pressures, signalled the inevitable collapse of the apartheid government. The first truly democratic elections in South Africa took place in 1994 with Nelson Mandela as the candidate of the African National Congress (ANC). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, under the chairmanship of Desmond Tutu, served to kickstart a mechanism for addressing the profound wounds inflicted by decades of racial segregation. The new democratic government led by the ANC was tasked to address the issue of land redistribution with social justice as its goal, and in the case of the wine industry specifically it sought to overturn the internal power relations between landowners and farm workers. This restructuring of the wine industry was intended to establish dignified, regulated working conditions, and above all a degree of independence for vineyard workers from landowners. This effort was initiated through two sets of policies in the ANC programme: the first on land redistribution and the second on Black Economic Empowerment (BEE). The land tenure reform materialised into initiatives such as the Land Redistribution and Agriculture Development (LRAD) programme, which was designed to enable vineyard workers to acquire vineyards (or at least shares in them). However, the results of the programme were modest, to say the least, and there was a wide gap between the stated ambition of social justice and the actual implementation of the land tenure programmes (Dellier & Guyot, 2015; Vircoulon, 2003). The transformation of the industry was also driven by BEE policies that manifested themselves in the form of affirmative action aimed at changing the division of labour, ensuring better wages and working conditions for black workers and especially providing non-white populations access to more qualified positions (Du Toit et al., 2007; Moseley & McCusker, 2008; Williams, 2005). All these public policies – whether they targeted vineyard workers' conditions, land tenure and property rights or a redistribution of positions within the wine sector – were developed with the goal of social justice and the de-racialisation of the wine industry, but they failed to achieve the hoped-for radical structural changes (Bek et al., 2007; McEwan & Bek, 2006).

- *The integration of the South African wine sector into the global market*

The second trajectory was driven by the increasing globalisation of the wine industry. It must be recalled here that throughout the second half of the twentieth century, production was almost entirely marketed locally because South Africa was subjected to embargoes – the imposition of international trade sanctions against the apartheid regime – and thus operated outside the dynamics of the global market. Post-apartheid, the economic operation of the industry was completely redesigned according to the principles of market (neo)liberalisation and advocated for free competition. Once the embargo had been lifted, the local industry was integrated into international markets and witnessed a remarkable surge in exports and a fourfold increase in wine produced for export in a decade, increasing 71 million liters in 1995 to 279 million liters in 2005⁴⁶. This growth was also evidenced by the rise in the number of wine farms, as illustrated in Figure 10 by Estreicher, manifesting the end of KVV monopoly on production. The integration of the sector into the global market and the boom in exports led to a marked qualitative shift in wine production. From the late 1990s, South African vineyards became a real competitor for other wine-producing regions and the country now ranks as the eighth largest wine producer in the world⁴⁷.

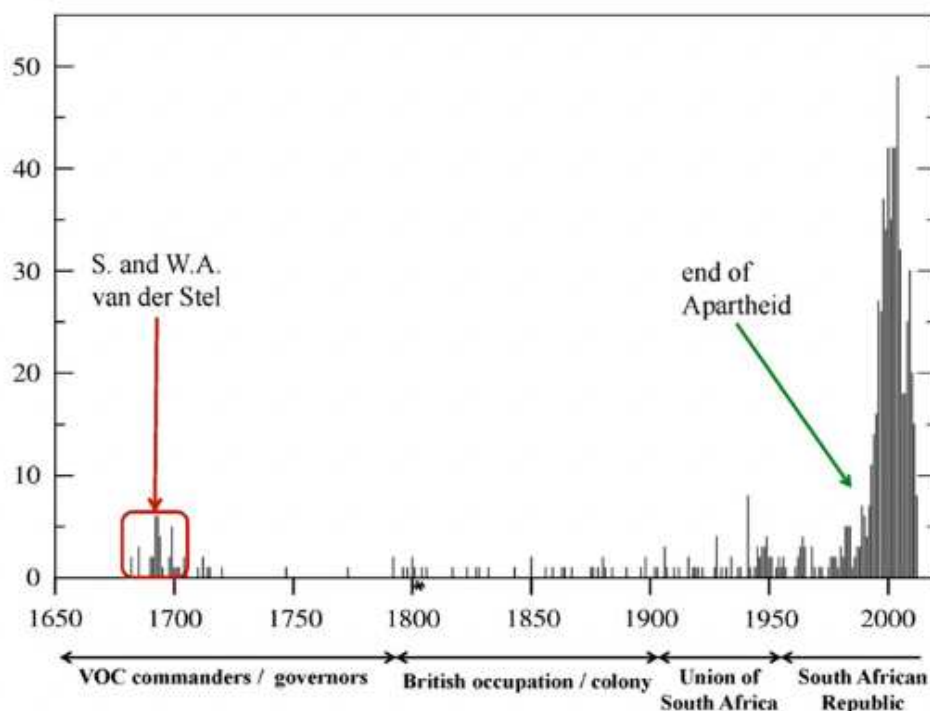


Figure 10. Number of new wine farms and wineries or wine labels established per year.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ South African Wine Industry Information and Systems (SAWIS) (2006) Statistics, <http://www.sawis.co.za/>

⁴⁷ Source: OIV data, 2022.

⁴⁸ Estreicher, Stefan K. 2014. "A Brief History of Wine in South Africa." *European Review* 22(3), p. 531.

➤ **A quality turn, but an absence of structural transformations**

○ *The absence of structural transformations in the wine sector*

This “Renaissance” phase needs to be put into perspective, however: the two trajectories (national restructuring and international integration) have yielded somewhat contradictory results, most of them disappointing. In fact, the neo-liberalisation of the industry has taken place at the expense of structural transformations in the wine sector. Political transformations and economic liberalisation in the industry ultimately acted as competing agendas (T. M. Shaw, 2001). Embedded in extensive capitalist dynamics, South African public policies moved towards neoliberal agricultural policies that prioritised land-based income over agrarian justice objectives (Moseley, 2007). Integration into global markets has not benefited everyone: there has been no profound restructuring of the wine industry, and it remains one of the most unequal sectors in the country today. To put it very bluntly, the wine sector still operates according to relatively unchanged racial hierarchies. Moreover, the paternalism that has always been ingrained in labour relationships has not disappeared; rather, it has mutated through capitalist transformations in the industry, and is now referred to as neo-paternalism (Ponte & Ewert, 2007).

○ *The qualitative shift and the current positioning of the industry*

While the structural shift did not succeed in bridging racial and economic inequalities, it has brought about a fundamental qualitative change in wine production, notably thanks to the exposure of South African wines to the global market (Ponte & Ewert, 2007). The previously dominant quantitative strategy gradually evolved into a more qualitative one, and as a result, the number of cooperatives specialising in the production of bulk and low-cost wines decreased and the number of small wineries and private wine cellars rose. According to statistics provided by SAWIS in April 2023, South Africa has 524 wineries, including 43 cooperatives and 458 private cellars. The figure below summarises the structure of the industry and its main actors (Figure 11).



Figure 11. Principal structure of the South African wine chain. Source: Chazal 2024

This shift also led to wine being newly identified as a high-quality, even high-end product, and contributed to a redefinition of the local wine culture, making wine a cultural product, notably by promoting wine tourism and creating wine routes such as the Stellenbosch Wine Routes.

This thesis aims to analyse the emergence of the natural wine movement in South Africa within this singular historical context, in which the wine industry has experienced a decisive quality turn in wine production, but is still very much defined by the pervasiveness of structural inequalities (more details in Chapter 6).

2.1.2. Different governance structures and institutional order in the two regions

Bordeaux and the Western Cape have very different socio-historical backgrounds, which translate into the way the industry and its governance are structured. The next section briefly presents the main institutional order governing the wine industry in each region. The differences in the levels of state involvement in the two regions and the subsequent presence (or absence) of public policies expressly designed for the wine sector reveal very different modes of governance.

2.1.2.1. Bordeaux: a governing system embedded in a multi-level institutional order anchored in tradition

In Bordeaux, the wine industry is governed by a multi-level institutional order, with a multiplicity of actors at different levels asserting, and sometimes competing over, the power of governance. The main institution representing both winemakers and wine merchants is the *Comité Interprofessionnel des Vins de Bordeaux* (CIVB), which is the central arena of Bordeaux's institutional order and is responsible for branding all Bordeaux wines. However, as Smith and Costa have noted, “While the Bordeaux institutional order strongly conditions how the interests of this wine region are represented, it can only be fully understood by grasping its degree of embedding in the French and European wine institutional orders” (Costa & Smith, 2006, p. 3). Without delving too deeply into the details, governance structures and the establishment of norms in the wine sector occur within a complex meshing of different levels: departmental (Gironde), regional (Nouvelle Aquitaine), national (the Ministry of Agriculture, the National Institute for Origin and Quality (INAO) and the *Comité National des Appellations d'Origine Contrôlée* (CNAOC)), European (notably the regulations issued by the European Commission), and

finally global (the International Organisation of Vine and Wine (OIV) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO)), as illustrated in the figure below (Figure 12).

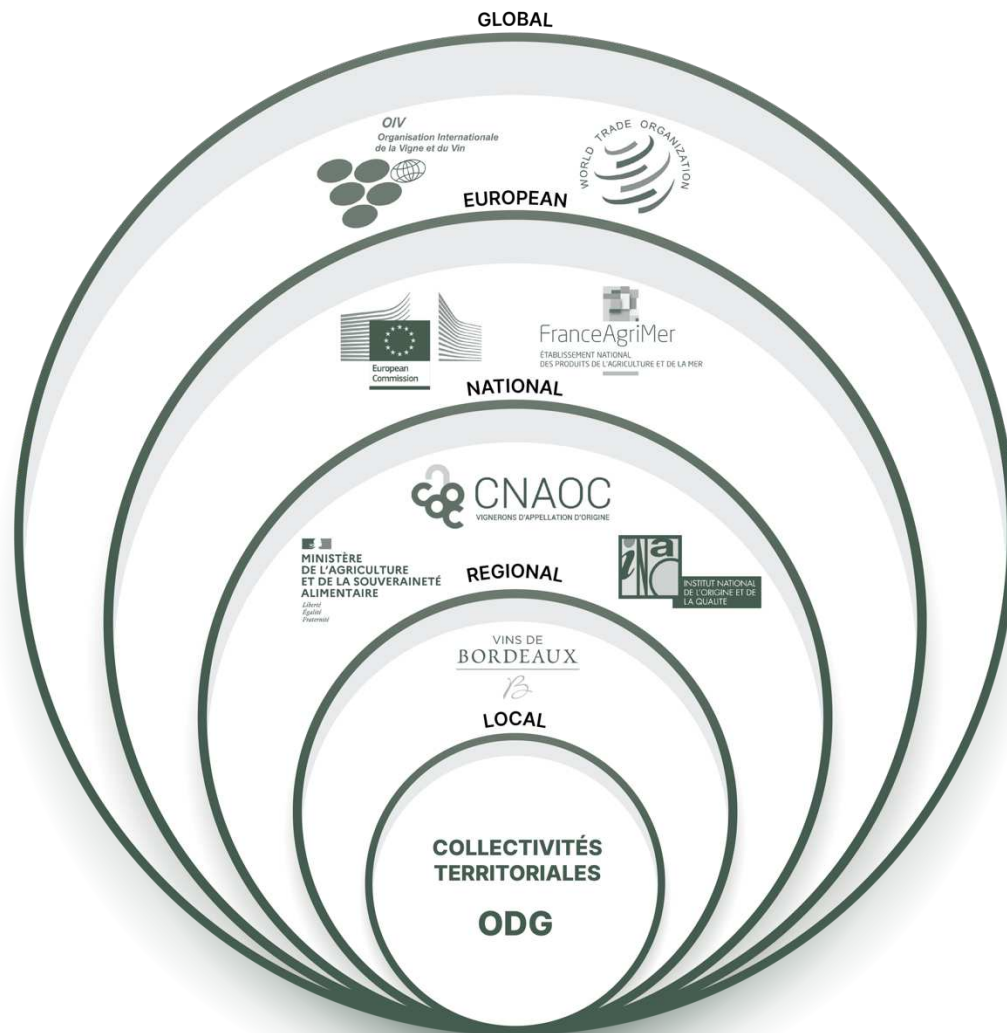


Figure 12. The Bordeaux wine sector's governance structure: a multi-level institutional order. Source: Chazal 2024.

Two key observations emerge from this very brief overview of the Bordeaux wine-growing region. Firstly, it has been built up over centuries, fostering its prestige and reputation through highly standardised patterns that are deeply rooted in tradition. Secondly, it is readily apparent that the region's wine industry encompasses a diversity of situations, and therefore diverging interests. This means that the interests of the various professions within the industry (wine producers, merchants and brokers), of the different types of winemakers (from small peasant operations to large chateaux) and of the various appellations in

Bordeaux (from the most modest to the most prestigious) dictate highly contrasting strategies (Costa & Smith, 2006). This diversity is a double-edged sword that has also fed the multifaceted crisis from which the Bordeaux wine sector is currently suffering.

2.1.2.2. A neoliberal governing approach in the Cape wine industry

In terms of governance structure – and this will be one of the main threads of this thesis – South Africa is shaped by the imprint of neoliberal capitalism. The neoliberal capitalist system of production has contributed towards shaping the country's economy, and has influenced its methods of governance and the construction of the South African state (Darbon, 2010). This trait is particularly evident in the wine industry, where the State has very limited involvement in wine businesses. The wine industry is mostly regulated by the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) and the Wine and Spirit Board (WSB), which was created in 1973 alongside the implementation of the Wine of Origin scheme.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ The Wine of Origin (WO) scheme is a set of regulations that guarantees the origin, cultivar and vintage of wines. It was directly inspired by the French AOC scheme (more details on the AOC scheme in Chapter 7)

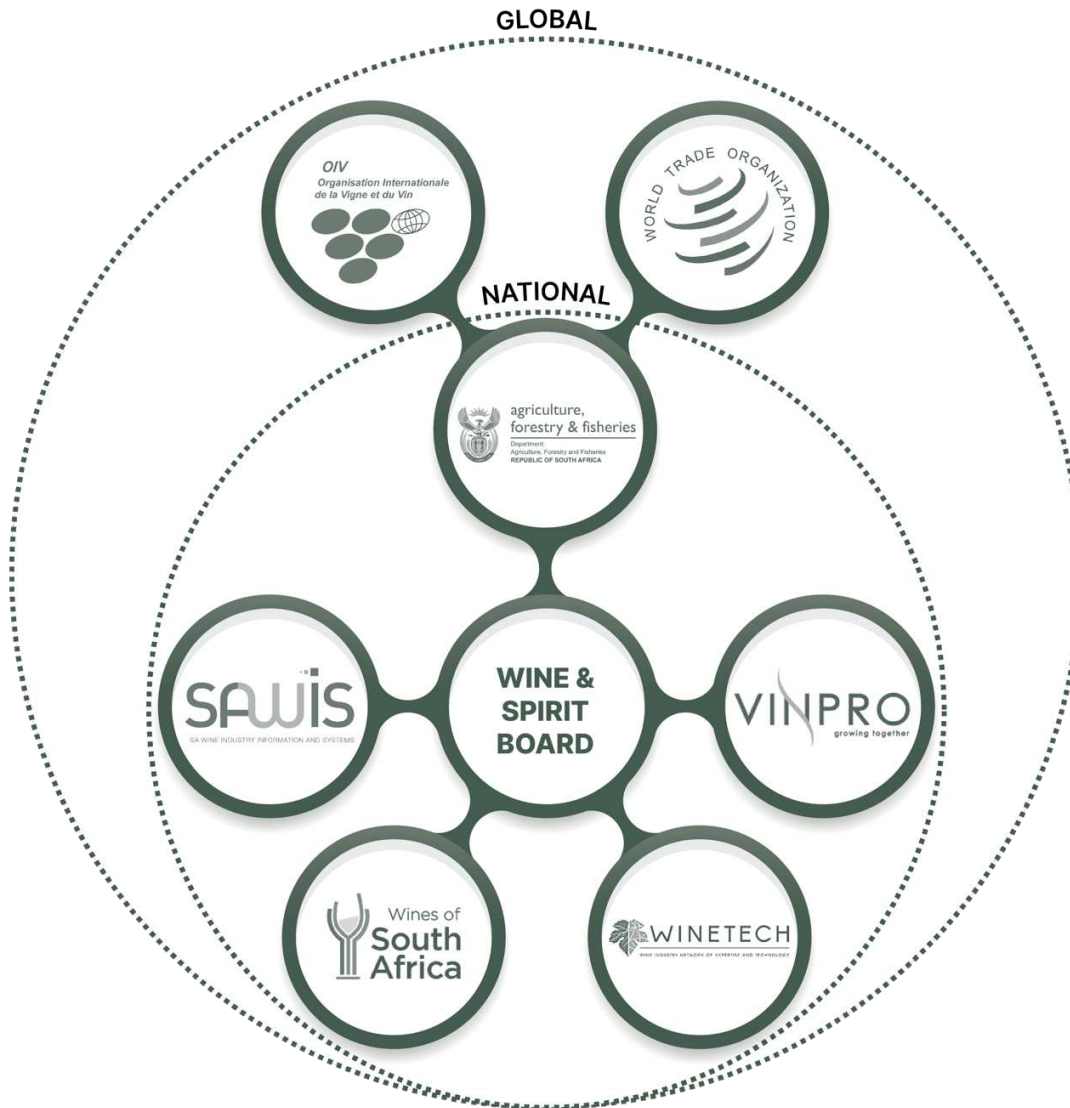


Figure 13. The governance structure of the South African wine sector: a sectorial approach. Source: Chazal 2024

There are also other structures that organise and regulate the South African wine industry, including SAWIS, VinPro, WOSA and WineTech (see Figure 13). SAWIS (South African Wine Industry Information and Systems) is known as the bookkeeper of the industry and is in charge of monitoring production and providing yearly statistics. VinPro represents over 2600 South African wine grape producers, cellars and wine-related businesses and is responsible for providing strategic direction and specialised services and for prioritising people development. WOSA (Wines of South Africa) promotes the communication and general marketing of South African wines abroad. WineTech is a research and development platform geared towards innovation in the sector. The institutional structure in South Africa

is therefore divided by roles, and the institutional framework of the South African wine industry is more horizontal and less complex than it is in France.

2.1.3. Economic difficulties: regional integration in the global wine market

Despite their contrasting socio-historical backgrounds and the structural differences in their governance systems, both regions have common economic dynamics. The globalisation of the wine industry has reshaped commercial strategies and intensified competition from all sides. Wine regions must now adapt to international demands and ever-evolving consumption patterns. Integration into the global wine market is one of several factors that are contributing to economic crises in the wine industry, something that is vividly reflected in the case studies in this thesis. At the time of my research, the wine sector was also profoundly affected by conjunctural crises, notably the recent COVID-19 pandemic, which brought the industry to a standstill for almost eighteen months, and other geopolitical events that impacted international trade such as the Trump's 2020 tax reforms and the consequences of Brexit for export taxes and regulations.

2.1.3.1. A multifaced crisis affecting Bordeaux's vineyards

➤ The structural dimension of the crisis: the collapse of a model?

Various stakeholders in Bordeaux have been warning for the past twenty years that the wine industry is mired in a “state of crisis,” a sentiment that has been echoed in numerous academic publications (Célérrier, 2017; Costa & Smith, 2006; Feredj, 2007; Réjalot, 2021). There is a shared feeling among professionals in the industry that Bordeaux is “backed against the wall, facing a colossal storm.”⁵⁰ The causes and symptoms of this crisis that have been identified by stakeholders vary, and despite the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic was raging at the time of my fieldwork, many professional actors attribute the current challenges facing the Bordeaux market to deeper systemic issues: “Bordeaux is in a terrible slump. Leaders tend to blame this on COVID-19, but it started long before.”⁵¹ In his article entitled *The Bordeaux vineyard: A vineyard in deep crisis*, Réjalot observes, “At this stage, we can sense how these expressions using the word “crisis” refer to things that clearly belong to various domains, leaving a sense of vagueness and offering little aid in

⁵⁰ Interview Remy, winemaker in Bordeaux, April 2021

⁵¹ Interview Gilles, winemaker in Bordeaux, 27 April 2021.

understanding the issues” (Réjalot, 2021, p. 92). To shed light on these uncertainties, I now attempt to characterise the various dimensions encompassing the wine crisis in Bordeaux.

- *A much disparaged two-tier system*

Firstly, the structural characteristics of the Bordeaux wine sector that were once instrumental in building a prestigious and internationally renowned wine region are now showing their weaknesses. The Bordeaux region operates according to a deeply ingrained two-tier system, with the *Grands Crus*, which represent approximately 3% of total production, on the one hand, and the remainder of the sector, which is largely dependent on market fluctuations, producing mass-market wines on the other. With regard to this expanding gap between the tiers, Réjalot comments, “The situation of the *Grands Crus* remains good, even excellent. Although they represent only 3% to 5% of the volumes, they account for 20% of the market value of Bordeaux wines and always find buyers worldwide. [...] But on the scale of the vineyard, the good health of the *Grands Crus*, besides appearing insolent to those who suffer from oversupply, does not compensate for the difficulties of other segments.” (Réjalot, 2021, p. 94). It appears that Bordeaux wines are torn between two extremes: on one side, there are the prestigious *Grands Crus*, which are sometimes even viewed as investment vehicles (Sanning, Shaffer, & Sharratt, 2008), and on the other there are the mass-produced wines, some of which are sold in bulk or through large distribution retailers or cooperatives. The excessively high price of land in prestigious AOCs such as Pomerol or Saint-Émilion and the rampant poverty in the more neglected appellations, notably in Entre-Deux-Mers, also contribute to this widening gap. The increasing dichotomy between “the top 3% and the rest that barely survives” is a compelling framework for analysing all the crises faced by the industry locally, and will be a constant theme throughout this thesis.

- *Concentration and abandonment as the main causes of the decrease in the number of wine domains*

The crisis is also reflected by the decreasing number of domains, especially small ones. Since the 1990s, the number of producers has declined by over 50%, “from slightly more than 20,000 in 1987 to almost 9,100 in 2008” (Bouzdine-Chameeva & Ninomiya, 2011, p. 72). This trend can be attributed to concentration (mergers and acquisitions) and abandonment. Réjalot also highlights the growing number of large farms of over 100 hectares: “In 1995, only 15 operations surpassed this threshold. By 2014, there were over

40. [...] This process of land consolidation is even more noteworthy when considering that in 2014, around a hundred viticulturists alone cultivated over 20,000 hectares of vineyards, accounting for 18% of the total vineyard area” (Réjalot, 2021, p. 98). These same constraints are driving the consolidation of cooperative sites. However, these concentration mechanisms and cooperative models have caused significant damage to the economic situation of Bordeaux wines because producers no longer have control over their selling prices. The consolidation of estates into larger farms or cooperatives is also being accompanied by another phenomenon: abandonment. There is a reinforcing loop at work here: because of a distinct lack of attractiveness in the industry, the new generations of winemakers are not continuing the family farm legacy. This farming crisis has been extensively documented (Ansaloni & Smith, 2021; Champagne, 2002; Mendras, 1984; Purseigle & Hervieu, 2022), and the suicide rate among farmers serves as a stark indicator of the problem. The wine sector is no exception to this trend.

➤ **At the heart of the crisis: commercial and economic challenges**

- *Overproduction: producers are asking for 30,000 hectares of vines to be grubbed up*

Meanwhile, Bordeaux is facing an issue of overproduction, to the extent that discussions are under way to implement subsidies for grubbing up vines. This problem stems directly from the increasingly large stocks being held by wine merchants, which has led to a fall in prices and made production unprofitable. Producers and professional unions such as *Viti33* and the *Confédération Paysanne* agree that approximately 30000 hectares of vineyards in Bordeaux need to be removed in order to restore balance to the industry.

- *Less consumption locally and more competition internationally*

This overproduction crisis is fuelled by two phenomena: a decline in local consumption and an increase in international competition. In France, average per capita wine consumption has been falling steadily since the 1960s. Although Bordeaux wines still lead in the domestic market, since the 1990s they have seen their market share diminish. Faced with this decline in French consumption, many actors invested hope in increasing international demand to compensate for the shortfall (new markets such as China now play an essential role in exports), but the emergence of these new importers has not offset the

regular decline in purchases, notably because Bordeaux's wines have faced increasingly fierce competition from new wine regions.

○ *A commercial crisis reflected in low prices.*

Several factors can be used to illustrate the economic crisis affecting the Bordeaux wine market. Firstly, the price of barrels has been steadily declining for several years. Secondly, the average price of a bottle of Bordeaux red wine in large retail chains is below five euros, a remarkably low figure. Réjalot has commented on this trend: “44% of Bordeaux sales in hypermarkets and supermarkets were made at less than 4 euros per bottle. Considering the number of intermediaries in this channel (broker, trader, logistics provider, transporter, purchasing centre...), this indicates the extreme weakness or even non-existence of margins and profitability, regardless of the participant involved.” (Réjalot 2021, p. 95). The latest report from the CIVB provides some key figures on the sale prices of Bordeaux wine in large retail chains and helps us understand the extent of the problem (Figure 14). The issue of sale prices in large retail chains was later highlighted by the scandal of a particular wine that was sold by the Lidl supermarket chain for 1.69 euros in 2021⁵².



Figure 14. Average price of a bottle of red wine sold in hypermarkets and supermarkets⁵³.

In his 2021 article, Réjalot summed up the ongoing crisis in Bordeaux by categorising it as a commercial crisis, a social viticultural crisis and an identity crisis. I would also suggest that the environmental crisis is another component of this multifaceted situation.

⁵² Abellan, Alexandre. 2021. “Lidl Casse les Prix des Vins de Bordeaux à 1,69 € la Bouteille.” Vitisphere.

⁵³ Source : Vins de Bordeaux, Bilan de Consommation, 2020 CIVB.

2.1.3.2. In the Western Cape, a difficult balance between a quality turn and profitability

Since its post-apartheid “renaissance,” the South African wine industry has continued its intense struggle to consolidate, and its durability is based on a tenuous equilibrium: economic and racial labour inequalities are still relevant issues today, and the pressures from global competition are ever-increasing. The South African economy in general is very fragile, and it is failing in many areas. The momentum created in the wine sector in the 1990s began to falter, and as of 2006 the industry started to show signs of a fall in profitability and competitiveness, as witnessed by a decreasing growth in exports and a number of bankruptcies (Ponte & Ewert, 2009). The drop in profitability has also been fed by the lack of an indigenous wine culture and low domestic consumption.

➤ **The relative absence of a wine culture in South Africa**

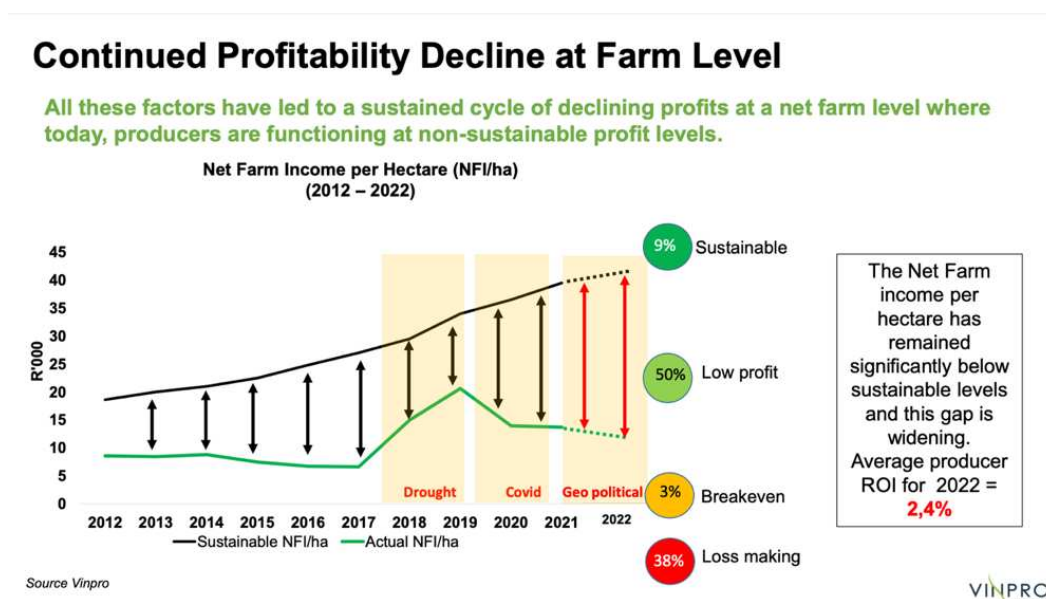
The Western Cape can be considered to be the primary wine-producing region in South Africa, and even on the African continent. However, there is no mainstream wine culture in South Africa; it is reserved for a socio-cultural elite. It is also worth noting that the wine culture has long been confined to the white populations, and this is still broadly reflected in domestic consumption. Paradoxically, this is one of the consequences of the *Dop* system, which involved paying vineyard workers with alcohol. Although the practice has been illegal since 1965 (Nugent, 2012), it has left behind a heavy legacy of alcoholism, and has deepened the gap between two wine cultures: on one hand, the consumption of low-quality bulk wines by farm workers, and on the other, a culture of consuming a luxury product reserved for a predominantly white elite. Thus, South Africans – and especially non-white South Africans – are not major consumers of wine, preferring other alcoholic beverages such as beer or brandy. Today, wine accounts for only 14% of the total legal alcohol consumed in South Africa, compared to 56% for beer and 20% for spirits⁵⁴. According to Salomon, however, per capita consumption in the Western Cape Province has increased significantly: “2 litres per capita in 1930; 17 in 1955 and 26 in 1972, although today it has stabilised at around 30 litres per capita and is no longer increasing” (Salomon, 2005). As a result, the growth in wine production in the country is mainly due to its openness to the international market rather than domestic consumption. On the subject of the relative

⁵⁴ Basson, Rico. 2023. *Winning in Wine. Yes We Can, but How?* VinPro Information Day

absence of a local market for wine in South Africa, Rouvellac and Dellier commented “Export or disappear, this could be the motto of the South African wine industry” (Rouvellac & Dellier, 2019, p. 100). It is therefore easy to understand that there is very little knowledge about natural wine locally; it remains a “niche within a niche,” and with South Africans spending on average less than ZAR 100 a bottle, it is not surprising that the natural wine movement is struggling to gain traction locally.

➤ The wine sector: A large pool of jobs but profitability challenges

Today, the wine industry supports over 166,000 direct jobs in the Western Cape (excluding tourism).⁵⁵ In 2021, it contributed 1.1% of South Africa’s GDP (a total of ZAR 54.96 billion), which makes it a significant contributor to the economy of the Western Cape. Perhaps even more important than the direct economic impact of employment is its capacity to create an economic activity based on wine tourism, as well as to generate an attractive image of South Africa abroad. Despite this, with the growing international competition and the structural economic crisis in South Africa at large, it is becoming harder every day for producers to ensure the profitability of their businesses. On top of these factors, conjunctural crises such as consecutive years of drought and the COVID-19 pandemic⁵⁶ have accelerated the continuing decline in profitability, as illustrated in the graph below (Figure 15).



⁵⁵ Source: SAWIS 2021

⁵⁶ South Africa implemented a ban on alcohol during the COVID-19 pandemic that prevented sales for eighteen months and had a severe negative economic impact on the wine sector.

Figure 15. A continuing decline in profitability at a farm level⁵⁷.

This lack of profitability echoes the current economic crisis in Bordeaux's vineyards, where similar trends of decline in the number of producers can be seen. As in Bordeaux, one of the consequences of the decrease in profitability is a steady reduction in the number of farms (suggesting mechanisms of concentration and abandonment), and thus a steady diminution in the area dedicated to viticulture since 2012, as illustrated in the SAWIS graph below (Figure 16).

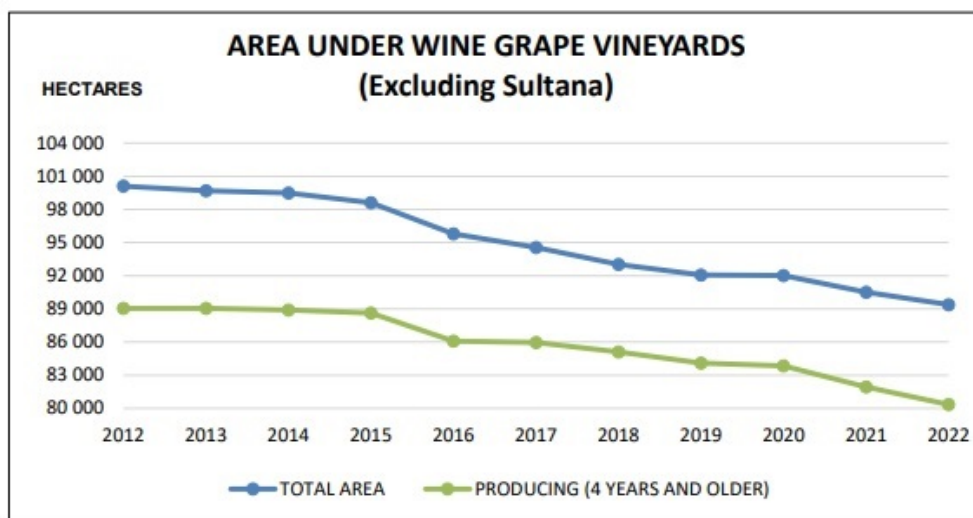


Figure 16. A steady decrease in vineyards area in South Africa since 2012⁵⁸

2.1.4. New parameters: Climate change and environmental challenges

In addition to the economic and structural challenges facing the wine industry, the two regions are now being confronted with the threats posed by global climate change, as well as other environmental vulnerabilities specific to their local contexts. There is, of course, global pressure in response to the ecological emergency and the impact of climate change on viticulture (Cukierman, Quenol, & Bouffard, 2021; Ollat & Touzard, 2020). Naturally, one might also look at the problem through the opposite lens and question the impact of intensive viticulture on the environment and the ecosystems surrounding vines. Indeed, in their search for solutions to climate adaptation and mitigation, these same studies have pointed out the damage caused to the environment by conventional viticulture's reliance

⁵⁷ Source: Basson, Rico. 2023. *Winning in Wine? Yes We Can, but How?* VinPro information Day.

⁵⁸ SAWIS statistics: <https://www.wosa.co.za/The-Industry/Statistics/SA-Wine-Industry-Statistics/>

on synthetic chemical products. In practical terms, environmental and climate-related challenges manifest themselves in issues regarding preserving soils, ecosystems and biodiversity surrounding vineyards. Climate change also results in a shift in seasonal cycles (earlier bud break, recurring late spring frosts, earlier harvest dates, etc.) and a drop in rainfall and hotter temperatures, which both significantly impact vineyards. As demonstrated by the new media outlet *VinoFutur*⁵⁹, it should be expected that vintages affected by climate-related incidents will now become the rule rather than the exception. There has already been a heightened frequency of climate-related incidents in Bordeaux (increased episodes of frost, hail and heatwaves) and in the Western Cape (drought and heatwaves) over the past decade. These climate incidents have both short-term consequences, including an impact on yields, and medium- to long-term effects such as the transformation (or even disappearance) of certain terroirs. Today, summers in Bordeaux and the Western Cape are hotter and drier, resulting in their wines often being higher in alcohol. It must also be recalled that conventional viticulture has a dual impact: it affects both the environment and the health of producers. Numerous studies have illustrated the connections between intensive viticulture, chemical treatments and the occurrence of cancer among farmers (J. N. Jouzel & Prete, 2024). The following section provides a brief outline of the main environmental issues and the local responses to them.

2.1.4.1. Bordeaux criticised for jumping on the bandwagon late in terms of environmental measures

As mentioned above, Bordeaux – a terroir that has historically been praised for its natural (climatic and ampelographic) qualities – has not been exempt from the impact of climate change on viticulture and other environmental challenges.

○ *Bordeaux in the spotlight for its extensive use of pesticides*

Although it is a global leader in the wine industry, Bordeaux has long been regarded as a novice in terms of environmental practices, and has been under the spotlight for its use of pesticides⁶⁰, which is hardly surprising if one considers that Bordeaux boasts the largest vineyard area in France and viticulture ranks among the most pesticide-intensive crops

⁵⁹ Source: *VinoFutur*: <https://www.vinofutur.fr/>

⁶⁰ Bordeaux also has a heightened dependency on chemical treatment due to its exposure to the Atlantic and therefore to a climate that is particularly conducive to vine diseases and subject to strong mildew pressures. Some winemakers argue that in these conditions it is harder to pursue a conversation about moving to agroecological farming.

(Alonso Ugaglia, 2011). What is more disconcerting is the code of silence surrounding the issue of pesticides and the fact that Bordeaux has long been hesitant to implement environmental measures. This is precisely what Célérier illustrates in her article “La viticulture bio dans le vignoble bordelais, les liaisons dangereuses” (Célérier, 2015).

○ *The inertia of the CIVB in the face of these controversies?*

The CIVB took its time to react to the criticisms regarding Bordeaux’s intensive and conventional viticulture practices. In his book on the Bordeaux wine sector, the journalist Sebastien Darcy writes of a “missed ecological shift,” and reminds us that the CIVB has long preferred the status quo over promoting discourse on an ecological transition. He recalls that in a 2019 speech, Allan Sichel, the then-president of the CIVB, declared, “Everyone is free, but organic is not the path we advocate for all.” Similarly, in 2023, the current president of the CIVB, Bernard Farges, defended himself by stating that he had to represent the entire industry and not just its organic faction: “Among the CIVB members, there are many shared and transversal aspects. We cannot agree on things over which we are opposed” (Darcy, 2023, p. 74). The constant quest for ‘a consensus’ therefore favours maintaining the status quo.

Despite the prevailing inertia, however, some efforts have been made to set the much-needed ecological shift in motion. The CIVB has gradually implemented tools for the industry to commit to more sustainable development practices. Firstly, in 2010, the CIVB implemented the Bordeaux wine “Environmental Management System” plan (SME), a process that allows vineyards and wine merchants who wish to do so to pursue environmental certifications such as HVE and ISO 14001. In 2020, the CIVB also adopted a collective approach to individually supporting companies in their move towards CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) called *Bordeaux Cultivons Demain*⁶¹. It is worth noting, however, that the improvement of the image of organic viticulture in Bordeaux first became visible thanks to the commitment of some *Grands Crus* and other prestigious estates to organic – and even biodynamic – practices.

⁶¹ CIVB. 2022. La RSE. Dossier de Presse 2021-2022.

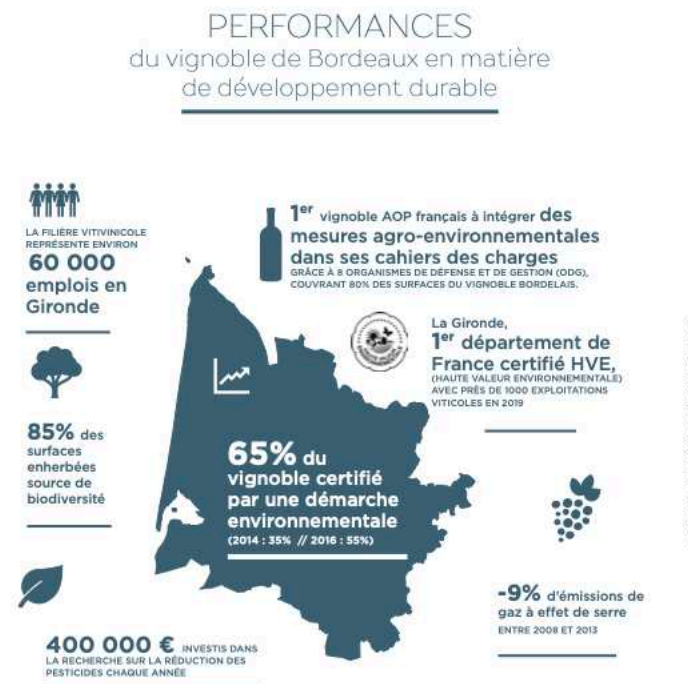


Figure 17. Key figures of Bordeaux performance in terms of sustainability⁶².

2.1.4.2. The Western Cape in the face of consecutive years of intense droughts

The Western Cape province is also threatened by the impact of climate change on grape production and numerous ecological challenges⁶³. The primary issue associated with the climate is water resources, because the region has experienced consecutive years of widespread droughts that have impacted all sectors (2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020). The drought crisis peaked in 2018, prompting warnings to the residents of Cape Town of the potential for a “day zero” when taps would run dry. The Winelands have not been spared from the severe consequences of the droughts, which has raised awareness of the fact that water is now a scarce resource. The Western Cape is experiencing drier summers, with diminishing rainfall and higher temperatures throughout the year. These climate patterns are impacting production, and yields have fallen considerably. The wine industry has been particularly affected by drought, and has experienced a fall in its harvests: 18% lower in 2018, 14% lower in 2019 and 11% lower in 2020. These events have forced wine farmers to become far more environmentally conscious, as it is a necessity to bear up toward climate change if they want to remain sustainable and profitable over the long term.

⁶² Source: CIVB. 2020. Dossier de Presse Bilan 2019 et Stratégie 2020.

⁶³ Source: Food for Mzansi, 2023, *No Room to Hide: Climate Change in the Cape Winelands*, documentary by Food for Mzansi.

2.1.5. Conclusions: Similarities and differences between the two regions

➤ What can be learned from the two regions?

Bordeaux is grappling with a crisis of overproduction while at the same time navigating a market characterised by a failing two-tier system. Apart from its economic challenges, the region is now confronting global ecological pressures and environmental vulnerabilities unique to its terrain. Indeed, alongside the common climatic and ecological issues faced by all wine-producing regions there is a noticeable increase in the frequency of climate-related incidents in Bordeaux. Lastly, with the spotlight on the environmental and health impacts of industrial viticulture, Bordeaux finds itself under particular scrutiny for its use of synthetic chemical products in its vineyards. In the face of this multifaceted crisis, however, the industry has long kept blinkers on, and has continued to promote a discourse focused on the prestige and excellence of Bordeaux winesproduction.

The wine sector in the Western Cape exhibits very different sociohistorical characteristics. The Cape Winelands are profoundly influenced by a long history of racial segregation and the legacy of apartheid. Despite the reforms that were initiated after the first democratic election in the 1990s, the industry remains highly unequal and predominantly white-owned. Its integration into international markets has sparked a local “renaissance” characterised by a tangible qualitative improvement in wine production. This has translated into a shift from bulk-wine production to a more quality-driven industry that exports much of its wine and attracts international tourism to the Cape Winelands. However, the South African wine industry is precariously balanced on a delicate equilibrium: structural economic crises are compounded by other conjunctural challenges, making it increasingly difficult to make a profit in the wine sector. Amidst these challenges, the consecutive years of drought that have affected the Western Cape in recent times have forced the wine industry to adapt to the impact of climate change on viticulture.

➤ Similarities and differences between the two regions

To my knowledge, Bordeaux and the Western Cape have never been the subject of a detailed joint study, and so a comparison between these two wine-producing regions may be unexpected. The previous section illustrates how Bordeaux and the Western Cape have

evolved along distinct socio-historical trajectories. At first glance, the wine sectors in the two regions seem markedly different, as summarised in the table below.

	Bordeaux	Western Cape Province
Surface area (in hectares)	110,800	89,300
Number of producers	5,660 (2021)	2,781 (2019)
Production (in hectolitres)	45.6 million	10.2 million
Exports	44% of production	50.7% of production
World ranking	2 nd	8 th

Table 1. Key figures and main differences between the wine sectors in Bordeaux and the Western Cape

Upon closer examination, however, we also see numerous crossovers, juxtapositions and similarities between them. First, it is important to highlight the connections between the two regions, including cross-border financial investments, shared training programmes, common research and development initiatives and more. It is also worth noting that the Bordeaux model has been widely exported, and South Africa is one of the regions that have drawn significant inspiration from Bordeaux's grandeur and prestige to develop their own models. This is evident in the establishment of the WO appellation system, which mirrors the French AOC system, as well as in the construction of wine estates that have been directly inspired by Bordeaux-style chateaux. Second, both regions face common challenges, such as the significant influence of global market pressures stemming from the globalisation of wine markets. Both regions also have a history of exporting to the UK, and have been influenced by the taste preferences championed by international critics like Robert Parker (more in Chapter 5). They are also both in the grip of climate change, and although the severe impact of consecutive years of drought affected South Africa earlier, Bordeaux is also now facing more frequent climate-related incidents. Finally – and this is the main subject of interest of this thesis – the two regions are similar in terms of the timing of the emergence of their natural wine movements. This similar chronology in an existing wine sector offers the opportunity to build a sociological comparison. I describe the

benefits of this comparison and my decision to move beyond the confines of a North/South or Old World/New World comparison in detail in the second section.

2.2. The benefits of a comparative analysis

The benefits of the comparison I have chosen to make are manifold, and of course, comparative analysis is a highly respected method in the social sciences. Its founding members used comparison in their work⁶⁴. Comparative analysis is a rigorous, demanding practice that presupposes a refined understanding of different contexts, fieldwork and subjects of study. My comparison is based on a qualitative analysis, and uses a back-and-forth movement between the two cases “to identify regularities, while bringing out the singularity of the cases studied” (De Verdalle, Vigour and Le Bianic 2012). In her book on comparative analysis, Vigour describes the comparison based on African case studies as “promising yet underutilised” (Vigour, 2005, p. 158). The section below shows how African cases – which are only rarely compared to non-African cases – shed light on trends, regularities and discrepancies from a transnational perspective. In line with Vigour’s argument, the African-European comparison used in this work has proved to be a stimulating analytical resource throughout the preparation of this thesis.

In this section, I engage in a reflexive, epistemological debate, and ask what a comparison between a European and African case actually means. I delve into the recent literature on decolonisation of knowledge to identify the challenges and opportunities of applying such a daring comparison. I question the relevance of African exceptionalism, and once I have debunked this myth, I challenge the supposed incommensurability of African cases, and lay out the necessary precautionary steps to be taken when dealing with such an asymmetrical design. I then posit that my thesis needs to move beyond the traditional North-South comparative approach, which in the case of the wine industry often translates into a comparison between Old World and New World wine regions. It is my belief that

⁶⁴ In his introduction to *Suicide*, for example, Durkheim wrote “one can only explain by comparing.” He defended comparative analysis as a necessary way of expressing proof and a primary condition of a sociological approach. Max Weber also placed historical comparative sociology at the core of his work to observe ruptures and continuities between different social classes. In “The Craft of Sociology, Epistemological Preliminaries,” which he wrote with Jean-Claude Passeron and Jean-Claude Chamboredon, Pierre Bourdieu stated that sociology has “the specificity of only being able to constitute its object through the comparative approach” (Bourdieu, Chamboredon and Passeron 1968, 74).

these categories are flawed and do not provide a satisfactory analytical framework for this research.

2.2.1. Preliminary reflections on the challenges involved in using such a comparison

I first return to some of the challenges and obstacles I faced during my research, with its ambition to compare an African case study with a non-African one. My arguments are based on the ongoing discussions and burgeoning literature on the decolonisation of knowledge (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012; Wai, 2015; Young, 2014). In the section below, I set out to debunk some of the pervasive myths that are (still too often) associated with conducting research into any African case.

2.2.1.1. Moving away from African exceptionalism

Some recently-published articles have showcased a common intention to move away from African exceptionalism, thus allowing space for comparisons between African and non-African cases (Allal, Boutaleb and Tannous 2022; Pons-Vignon and Tinel 2022; Stuppia and Ridley 2021). In line with this recent literature, it seems important here to review some of the pervasive myths that surround African studies in general and prevent comparisons between African and non-African case studies. My ambition here is twofold: first, to outline the pitfalls and precautionary steps required to avoid them that I have identified as being crucial for my own comparison; and second, this section provides an opportunity to delve more deeply into the political implications intrinsic in African studies and consider strategies for addressing them.

The first step in this process is to reflect on the analytical categories used to frame this research in order to bring another perspective to studies of African cases. To achieve this, it is necessary to de-tropicalise, if not to *des-exoticise*, the analytical gaze (Allal, Boutaleb and Tannous 2022; Bensa 2006; Coulon 1997) as a means of adopting a new lens to frame the analytical comparison. Several hazards or biases have been identified in the social sciences literature. First, there is a tendency to homogenise, and thus essentialise, the multiplicity of realities of the African continent. Despite numerous attempts to showcase the incredible diversity of African situations, the clichés about there being *one* Africa are still all too common (Pons-Vignon & Tinel, 2022, p. 13). The profound heterogeneity and intrinsic diversity of the continent is counteracted by the use of the plural *Africas*, which

makes it possible to place emphasis on “the *métissages*, but also the historical, social, cultural, religious, political and economic conflicts within societies whose homogeneity should not be overestimated” (Allal, Boutaleb and Tannous 2022, 7). The concept of social and political trajectories – as opposed to fixed situations – developed by Bayart serves to underscore these differences and heterogeneities, and makes it possible to draw a comparison with Western societies subject to their own distinct trajectories (Bayart, 1999). Another myth, which is highly correlated with this fiction of uniformisation, is the tendency to shed an all-pessimistic or conversely an all-optimistic light on African situations. The Afro-pessimist posture is virtually an intrinsic element of the vast literature on development (Kaplan, 1994; Rostow, 1990). Afro-pessimism is often stained with pity and made up of over-simplifications, and linked to neo-colonial or paternalistic attitudes. Conversely, it is also possible to find a proliferation of ultra-optimistic discourses that report an awakening or revival of the African continent (Sarr, 2016). Both these biases (Afro-pessimism and Afro-utopia) contribute to feeding tropes about the continent and present obstacles to a nuanced understanding of lived realities. This first cautionary step helps us remain alert to these pitfalls and find a moral equilibrium between the two positions.

Another aspect I questioned during my comparative research process is the relevance of conducting area studies. Although many researchers readily admit to the plurality of African situations, most ultimately stick to intra-African comparisons. I believe these politics of places inhibit the potential for wider comparison. Area studies have been widely criticised, especially in the United States, because they create a hierarchisation of academic production in which African literature is specialised while Western literature has a more general scope and can more easily feed theoretical ambitions. They therefore limit the opportunities for more contrasted comparative analyses (Allal et al., 2022; Chabal, 2005). Accordingly, even though my research is sponsored by a French Africanist research institution, namely *Les Afriques dans le Monde*, I have not limited it to a study of an African case: thanks to its comparative structure between an African and a European case study, the research intends to feed into more general discussions.

Unwinding this thread constitutes the third precautionary step which involves debunking the myth of African exceptionalism, as such approaches can easily fall prey to essentialism. In this study, I reflect on the (possibly even more pernicious) myth of the exceptionalism of South Africa in particular. It is worth noting here that there is a form of exception for

South Africa within its own region, and arguably on the African continent as a whole, which results in the country's being treated separately as an alien case that does not match other African situations. South Africa is known for its particular historicity and the singular nature of its institutions. This impacts numerous sectors such as the land tenure system, production and the division of labour. While acknowledging the particularities of each of the two cases I have studied, I make a conscious effort to look at both through the same lens so as not to take the exceptionality of the South African case for granted, but rather to constantly question it. Indeed, one of the dangers of ethnocentrism when making comparisons is the application of the logics observed in the proximate field to the distant field. If we break away from ethnocentrism, we might hope to achieve an "epistemological break with familiar realities" and allow for "sociological astonishment" (De Verdalle et al., 2012, p. 10).

These cautionary steps are all closely related, and offer a new analytical grid with which to study African cases, in line with the current literature on the decolonisation of knowledge. This reminder of the many ways in which the African continent is divided up, perceived and written about by scholars has been a prerequisite for examining the question of the specificities of African cases and the implications this may have in the context of a comparative approach.

2.2.1.2. Challenging the incommensurability of African cases

Following the discussion above, and bearing in mind the numerous possible biases when studying an African case, this research raised another challenge: the pervasive myth that African cases are incommensurable with non-African case studies. In fact, as I was designing this research, I faced a certain amount of scepticism with regard to the relevance of making a comparison such as this, and I felt the need to strengthen the justification of the comparative design⁶⁵.

Several authors (Allal et al., 2022; Myers, 2014; Pons-Vignon & Tinel, 2022) have shown a willingness to overcome the alleged incommensurability of African cases. While arguing

⁶⁵ These same challenges have also been faced by some of my peers, and so the arguments I wish to put forward in this section stem from a collective reflection. Within this collective working group, we seek to break away from the need for hyper-justifying comparisons between Africa and non-African by proposing rich and original comparisons that take African cases out of their exceptionalism. I am confident that the design of my research fits this ambition.

in favour of unexpected urban comparisons, Myers makes the point that “it is vital to turn our critical comparative ambitions toward overcoming the pitfalls of potential parochialism and to using broad regionalist comparativism to speak back to the still dominant Western-oriented universalisms on global urbanism” (Myers, 2014, p. 105). In line with this observation, I argue that social science needs a methodological and epistemological renewal of comparative analysis.

Having said that, a comparison of African and non-African cases requires a very rigorous definition of comparative concepts and a meticulous description of the analytical processes used to categorise each case from this perspective. Justifying the use of a comparative analysis was an exercise in which I was engaged not only during the research design and the realisation of the fieldwork but also during the restitution phase: the result is the fruit of a supple methodological process. As Giraud recalls, the experience of comparison is formalised after the empirical study has been carried out, and therefore the writing process is a key moment: “The choices of plan, presentation and formatting of the analyses produced largely define the contours and scope of the comparisons made. Consequently, it is very often in these writing procedures that the heuristic gains of the comparison in the social sciences are constructed and played out.” (Giraud, 2012, p. 111). The analytical framework that is an inevitable part of the writing process creates a tension between the need to expose the relevant context of each case, the results of the analysis, the methodological paths, *inter alia*. In a similar vein, the challenge of moving beyond the incommensurability of the African case was a subject of reflection at different stages of the research process.

2.2.1.3. Dealing with asymmetrical cases

I will now continue this discussion of the comparability between the two cases by reflecting on the asymmetrical dimension of the research design. To do so, I draw on an article by Delage in which she argues that an asymmetrical comparison can be transformed from a methodological obstacle into an analytical lever (Delage, 2017). I believe that despite the obvious differences between the two cases, the relevance of the comparison and its apparent asymmetry is less an impediment and more a research opportunity. First, it provides space for reflexivity, as there is a dual asymmetry to take into consideration. The asymmetrical dimension is magnified by the asymmetry of the relationship of the researcher *vis à vis* her fields: the proximate field/distant field dialectic enables the

emergence of new questioning to emerge (Sa Vilas Boas, 2012). Second, the varied nature of the available sources and data becomes a tool for research enquiry (Delage, 2017; Giraud, 2012), and while this might be true of most comparisons, the issue becomes more pronounced when the gap in accessibility between two cases is reinforced by the researcher's positionality. The writing phase of this work allowed for reflexivity on the different asymmetrical aspects of the comparative analysis: from the asymmetry of the cases themselves to that of the methodological process and the asymmetrical relationship between the researcher and the locations of her fieldwork.

2.2.2. Moving beyond a North-South or Old World-New World approach

One might expect that the comparison framework for this thesis would be between North and South or its equivalent for a study of the wine industry, between an Old World region (Bordeaux) and a New World region (Western Cape). This is not a satisfactory analytical framework for a number of reasons, however. As I noted above, the Western Cape's wine industry is in fact long-established, and in many respects, it does not fit a New World categorisation. In the next section, I intend to move away from the contrast between the Old World and the New World by drawing upon critical North-South theory to propose a new analytical grid of the world's wine regions in terms of multiple worlds of wine.

2.2.2.1. Taking a position with regard to North-South critical theory

While acknowledging that the natural wine movement emerged in European vineyards (mainly in France and Italy), it is now a truly transnational movement. I argue that it is present in each and every wine region on the planet, with winemakers sometimes sharing more with other natural winemakers across the globe than with their next-door conventional neighbours. I contend that the movement's transnational nature offers an opportunity to move beyond the North-South divide, and I draw from critical urban literature (McFarlane, 2010; O'Brien, Eriksen, Sygna, & Naess, 2006; Parnell & Robinson, 2012; Robinson, 2011) to reflect on the use of this dichotomy in contemporary comparative studies. Since the early 2000s, a considerable body of critiques in urban geography have pointed out the legacy of development studies in dividing the world into categories such as developed/developing world, first/third world and global North/global South. This Western-oriented vision has been challenged by Robinson, who argues that in an era of globalisation, the cities of the global North and South "move toward" each other

(Robinson, 2011, 2013). This critical (and postcolonial) turn in urban geography promotes comparison as a method but also as a mode of thought in which knowledge and theories are placed into a more horizontal comparative field (McFarlane, 2010). In other words, once comparative analysis has been freed from a single ideological perception of a North-South dichotomy, it plays a crucial role in the generation of knowledge and theory.

The comparative design of this research was also inspired by Myers (2014), who defends “unexpected comparisons.” He believes in a new generation of research for which the possibilities of comparativism are amplified, one that would move beyond the global North-South dichotomy by following pragmatic steps toward de-colonising research practice. In Myers’ own words, this new form of comparative design is about developing a “growing arena of research exploring common ground and reciprocal or even reverse idea flows between global North and global South urban contexts and further to South-South comparativism and growing “global South knowledge networks”” (Myers, 2014, p. 105). His forward-thinking approach closely mirrors the reflexive steps I adopted in the previous section, in which I endeavoured to work out the empirical shape of the new forms of comparative work from a practical standpoint. I therefore intend to bypass the expected North-South comparisons by experimenting with the flow of ideas differently and by decentring the analytical gaze from a more “orthodox” or expected comparative framework. Of course, my work is very different from the approaches taken by Myers and urban geographers in general because it does not focus on cities or urban contexts but on a transnational movement that has a rural anchor. As such, this research makes the case that by moving beyond a Eurocentric approach and the North-South dichotomy, one can look at both wine regions as potential providers of insights, and in so doing address a more general question: What lessons can be learned from the South African vineyards that can inform the situation in Bordeaux, and vice-versa?

2.2.2.2. Questioning the relevance of the New World/Old World divide

Questioning the North-South paradigm and the related literature on critical North-South theory is particularly insightful for this research because a similar dichotomy is commonly used in wine jargon: the divide between “Old World” wine-producing regions and the so-called “New World” ones. In the next section, I analyse the historical constructs of this divide and question its relevance and applicability to today’s global challenges. In other

words, in the same way as Robinson has questioned the North-South critical divide in urban theory, I argue that the categories are similarly flawed in the wine world, and that producing wine regions are also “moving toward each other.” This is not a ground-breaking argument, of course, and several scholars have already pointed out the blurred nature of the categorisation between Old World and New World (Banks & Overton, 2010; J.-C. Hinnewinkel & Velasco-Graciet, 2005; Schirmer, 2007, 2012b). In this section, I analyse why the traditional North-South division is flawed and propose paths towards alternative analytical frameworks. In other words, I aim to demonstrate how the analysis can reveal another reality by deconstructing this entrenched view of the North-South divide.

➤ **The historical foundations of the Old World-New World dichotomy**

For years, the world’s wine industry has been seen in terms of a simple dichotomy between the Old World and the New World, but in many ways this distinction can be seen as over-simplified and the categories it supposes outdated. First, however, I will return to the historical foundations of this dichotomy in order to shed light on the evolutions in the market and industry.

The dichotomy between Old World and New World wines has been explored and discussed in the vast majority of scholarly publications on the wine sector (Cusmano, Morrison and Rabellotti 2010; Deroudille 2003; J.-C. Hinnewinkel and Velasco-Graciet 2005; Remaud and Couderc 2006; Schirmer 2007; Schirmer and Velasco-Graciet 2010; Velasco-Graciet 2010). A thorough examination of the literature appears to reveal that the contrast is profoundly socially and historically constructed (Itçaina et al., 2016). It is based on a number of presumed differences, which might be approximately listed as follows:

	Old World	New World
Wine regions	- European vineyards: mainly France, Italy and Spain	- Southern hemisphere vineyards: South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, - North America (USA and Canada) and Latin America (Chile, Argentina, etc.)
Nature and modes of production	- Indigenous varieties - Multi-century traditions: long-established and unchanged methods	- Little to no endemic grape varieties, thus import of European varieties.

	- Guardians of intergenerational legacies of know-how and techniques - Sense of place: an (almost mystical) attachment between the land and its people (terroir)	- Watchwords: experimentation and innovation - Use of high-end techniques and artificial chemicals - Large-scale, industrialised, mass-produced wine
Structure of production	- Family-owned businesses	- Companies or industries - Financial investors
Identity and symbolic function of wine	- Strong cultural and identity marker traditions - Craft products, limited production, emphasis on the figure of the <i>vigneron</i>	- Homogenised, standardised wines produced to satisfy international demand. - Industrially made
Organoleptic characteristics	- Fine wine - Quality - Terroir expression	- Fruity - Easy drinking - Standardised, obvious flavours
Labelling and marketing strategies	- Appellations: strong regulatory frameworks emphasising the place of origin, such as the AOC system in France - Place-based, promotion of terroir	- Estate brands - Labelling by grape varieties

Table 2. Presumed differences between the Old World and New World regions. Chazal 2024

Table 2 condenses the findings in the literature and is an attempt to identify the main arguments used for these categorisations. It serves as a good basis for understanding the reading grid of most scholars who have relied on the Old World-New World terminology. However, it is unsatisfactory, for reasons I will explain below. What does this North-South analytical framework imply? How does it reflect a Eurocentric vision in which experience, knowledge production and theory travel from North to South, a process that cannot be satisfactory for a post-colonial researcher?

By subscribing to this dichotomy between production in the North and the South, one creates a perceived superiority of European wine regions over their counterparts that is justified by the longer history of wine production and culture in Europe and suggests a natural ascendancy of Europe over the New World. As this thesis will investigate further, cultural norms and tastes related to wine and winemaking techniques have historically been predominantly shaped by the Old World. However, there has been a longstanding struggle for control over this normative production. The *savoir-faire* and tangible and intangible

heritage surrounding wine in France generates a sort of sacred, almost mythical dimension of wine in French culture. This argument has been made by Boris Pétric, who writes that Old World actors benefit from “a form of almost natural opposition between *our* Europe and the New World” (Pétric 2008, 22). In his view, several narratives have contributed to feeding this argument by describing “a kind of know-how, but also notoriety, in other words, intangible knowledge, a legacy, that causes some wines to have a certain aura that others do not” (Pétric 2008, 24). This supposed superiority is reinforced by the fact that wine is used as a national identity symbol in France and a marker of European culture at large. I believe that the historical dimension of the superiority of European vineyards over the New World is based on shaky foundations. Besides, the idea of *naturalness* has actually been widely discussed in the broader literature on terroir (Demossier, 2011; Fourcade, 2012) (See textbox 19). This ascendancy also presupposes two factors that are problematic for this kind of comparative analysis: first, that the transfer of skills and knowledge only travels one way, from North to South, and second that the French model is the one every region should seek to replicate. Wine production has always been about transferring skills and adapting them to new terroirs, but to believe that all wine-producing techniques are “made in France” and then imported would be simplistic. In the same vein, French vineyards, and Bordeaux in particular, have been elevated to become a universal template to be replicated in both terms of wine production and wine culture. This vision has been adopted so extensively that many New World domains mimic the French experience in some way. “Everything must recall the rustic aspect of France in the imagination of international visitors, with tasting rooms that resemble cellars, paintings representing French wine landscapes, or bottles (often empty) from great Bordeaux châteaux,” Huygue comments about South African vineyards (Huygue, 2005, p. 1). This idea of a constructed idyll inspired by French vineyards that is deployed everywhere is also discussed by Howland, who questions the paradox of an increasingly globalised wine universe and a desire to “drew heavily on the bucolic, pastoral imagery of their world-renowned vineyards and historic rural villages, symbolically linking them to enduring histories of hospitality, charity and climate” (Howland, 2022, p. 259). The French model has influenced not only the way wine estates have been set up but also the product itself, as underlined by Salomon, who investigated the attempts to imitate what he calls “tipo Bordeaux” or “tipo Bourgogne” (Salomon, 2005). This dichotomy between the two worlds and the superiority of European vineyards over the rest of the world it creates, is pernicious and deeply ingrained in the

wine sector, as well as being supported by some scholars⁶⁶. Consequently, in the face of this supposed superiority, it is not surprising to observe that a more negative, or at least paler, portrait is drawn for the other wine regions. According to Schirmer, New World wines are automatically depicted as “standardised, industrialised and modernized” and as being consumed “far from any code and any representation, without any reference to a gastronomy or a landscape” (Schirmer, 2007, p. 8). I argue that not only are the visions and preconceived ideas implied by the dichotomy problematic, but also that there are a number of reasons to believe that the categorisation itself is biased.

➤ **Why is the Old World-New World dichotomy flawed?**

Consistent with Banks and Overton’s article, I argue that it is critical to re-examine the Old World-New World distinction that has structured most of the thinking about the wine industry until now (Banks & Overton, 2010). Globalisation has altered the landscape, and the disparities between the Northern and Southern wine regions, which might have been meaningful in the past, have little analytical value today. As a result, it is necessary to explore the effects of globalisation and other changes in the wine industry in order to understand both why the categorisation is outdated and why it continues to suit the policy and marketing strategies of wine actors on different sides of the globe. To this end, Banks and Overton’s new analysis of the wine sector provides a fresh perspective on the matter: in their words, contemporary research should consider “an approach which foregrounds the multiple ‘worlds of wine’ as cross-cutting, contingent and contextual” (Banks & Overton, 2010, p. 58).

Since the early 1980s, globalisation has been a very significant challenge for the wine industry. The global economy is increasingly interconnected, with flows of people, capital, commodities, investment and technologies having multiple effects on emerging wine regions that are experiencing a boom (Schirmer, 2012b). Globalisation has led to a search for low-cost sources of production, resulting in global brands becoming increasingly homogenised. The sector is closely integrated with upstream and downstream industries, as well as with mass distribution. This has also led to an explosion of wine exchanges and exports that has been facilitated by the dismantling of customs barriers under the influence

⁶⁶ In his 2008 article, Pétric even goes so far as to talk about a “clash of civilisations”, using Samuel Huntington’s concept to illustrate the divide between Northern and Southern hemisphere wine-producing regions (Pétric 2008, 21).

of neoliberalism and the easing of transport logistics. New World vineyard decision-makers have chosen to adapt to their perceptions of global demand by using a variety of marketing strategies to meet the challenges of the global market, and the geography of both the producing and consuming countries has been transformed by these changes as a consequence (Banks & Overton, 2010; Schirmer, 2012a; Velasco-Graciet, 2010).

Globalisation is an undeniable reality in the wine market, and it requires no further demonstration. As early as 2005, Hinnewinkel and Velasco were underlining “the extent to which these so-called “New World” wines are dangerous competitors, even for prestigious vineyards such as Bordeaux [...]. But above all, these same wines call into question many certainties in these same prestigious and heritage vineyards” (J.-C. Hinnewinkel & Velasco-Graciet, 2005, p. 2). In his evaluation of the market, Schirmer also noted that New World wines were being sold in UK supermarkets at the same price as European wines even though the transport costs were considerably higher (Schirmer, 2012b). Another aspect that was a significant challenge to the way the industry transformed is the gradual financialisation of the wine sector, with large wine companies starting to be listed on stock exchanges. This has contributed to the development of a viti-business model that is applied worldwide (Schirmer, 2007). Despite this, there has been little recognition of this economic reality from a whole segment of wine professionals, especially those from traditional wine regions that have preferred to believe their comparative advantage would last forever.

The tough competition brought by New World countries over the last few decades has jeopardised the traditional stereotyped dichotomy between European and New World wines, as exemplified by a decrease in domestic consumption of wine in Europe, as European winegrowers have been unable to protect their appellations from competition. This has been especially felt in France, where producers have attempted to deal with the collapse of their wine sector with an “all AOC” policy that has often proved not to be economically viable (Hinnewinkel and Velasco-Graciet 2005, 3). Global competition was especially experienced in the Bordeaux region, where wine professionals denied that there was competition at first, but their blinkered approach was not enough to resist the economic crisis that struck the region. Associations were made between the global wine crisis (and the economic destabilisation it entails) and the arrival of the New World regions on the international market. According to Hinnewinkel and Velasco: “The arrival and even greater

success of New World wines on the world market is the result of a sort of “boomerang effect”: the commercial success of New World wines reveals the handicaps of Bordeaux wines.” (Hinnewinkel and Velasco-Graciet 2005, 9). This contributed to the idea of economic warfare between the regions and called into question the notoriety and the comfortable situations, that enabled Bordeaux vineyards to prosper. Boris Pétric also identified this narrative of competition from New World regions being seen as a threat to the Old World when he commented: “We [*France*] are still the world’s leading wine producer but with the anxiety of a possible end to this power and the emergence of unfair competition from New World wine.” (Pétric 2008, 23). The heated debates around the perception of new producing regions as a threat are largely fuelled by the general ignorance of French producers about these regions. However, the traditional producers’ discourse also explains why the dichotomy persists and how it feeds certain anti-globalisation, protectionist, and even conservative, discourses in traditional European wine regions. The fierce competition has also unfolded concurrently with a steep decline in domestic wine consumption in France over the past two decades.⁶⁷

➤ **Moving beyond a binary approach**

The globalisation of the wine sector in recent decades has had a significant effect on the terminology used to describe the diversity of wine regions. The emerging trends of homogenisation and diversification of wine production and the increasing circulation of products have blurred the distinctions between Old and New World categories, which has required the development of new terminology to accurately reflect the current state of the wine industry. One example of this is the term “New Producing Countries” proposed by Hinnewinkel and Velasco-Garciet (Hinnewinkel and Velasco-Graciet 2005). However, this term fails to consider the diversity of emerging wine regions and continues to enforce a binary analysis. We therefore need to consider other terminology to capture the nuances of this globalised industry. In their article, Banks and Overton acknowledge the complexity of today’s wine geography, which extends from traditional vineyards (in France, Italy and Spain) to now well-established wine-growing areas in the USA, South Africa, New Zealand, Australia and Latin America and to game-changing newcomers like China and

⁶⁷ According to a report by FranceAgriMer, it is estimated that between 1960 and 2022, the average individual consumption of wine in France fell by 60%. Source: France AgriMer, CNIV, *Enquête Sur La Consommation de Vin en France en 2022*. 2023.

India (which are emerging as rivals), as well as smaller regions like those in Northern Africa (Algeria and Morocco) or the Middle East (Turkey and Lebanon). The authors reflect on the relevance of introducing a new category of Third World vineyards but conclude that it would not be right: “Thus, we should not only dispense with our old simplistic notions of a dual-structured world of wine, but we should additionally reject the obvious solution posed by the most recent producers of adding a ‘Third World’ to our categorisation” (Banks & Overton, 2010, p. 72). Instead, they argue for “multiple” worlds of wine in which new ‘worlds of wine’ are marked by diverse sets of “often contradictory impulses, connections, transgressions and integrations that are not easily contained within local, national or categorical (Old World/New World/Third World) boundaries” (Banks & Overton, 2010, p. 70). I share this vision, as I believe that this terminology allows for widespread and unexpected comparisons.

➤ **The implications of moving away from this dichotomy: towards multiple worlds of wine**

A move away from the binary scheme offers an opportunity for a new analytical framework for the wine world. First, even though the principal narrative focuses on the trend towards homogenisation, there is a parallel – and possibly counter-intuitive – trend towards a diversification of production. Indeed, another branch of the literature makes the point that globalisation has led to a more complex and diversified production that ranges from mass-market, large-scale industrial products to craft, terroir-based fine wines (Banks & Overton, 2010; Salomon, 2005). As Hinnewinkel and Velasco have pointed out, Southern Hemisphere countries are not simply confined to basic or mid-range products: “They too can claim the production of premium and terroir wines.” (Hinnewinkel and Velasco-Graciet 2005, 3). This segment is fed by place-based artisanal production, quality assurance through a product’s provenance, and the quality of the inputs and clean production methods, as well as a search for differentiation based on the vernacular skills of the winemakers and a localised reappropriation of the notion of terroir (Remaud & Couderc, 2006, p. 407). Not surprisingly, another aspect that coincides with this trend towards product differentiation is the phenomenon of resistance to globalisation, which I analyse in depth in Chapter 4. The traditional European wine regions have also not escaped the viti-business model. Schirmer uses the term “anti-terroir” (Schirmer, 2007) to describe the trend towards homogenisation and industrialisation in Europe: a whole range of techniques are being employed in European vineyards and cellars, such as the aromatisation of wines with

wood chips, and so these techniques are not confined to New World regions. In this same article, he comments that there is “a deep penetration – if not even a sort of consanguinity – between vineyards on the different continents.” (Schirmer, 2007, p. 11). Last but not least, the circulation of knowledge, the transfer of skills and the interpenetration of know-how that characterises the global wine world invalidate the alleged one-way transfer from North to South and give us a more nuanced understanding of the situation.

What conclusions can be drawn from this reflection on the analytical framework adopted here and from moving away from and beyond the traditional North-South or Old World-New World dichotomy? First, while I agree with some recent literature that this binary framework is flawed, it is still important to understand how and why it was constructed socially and historically and what narratives it fits. Second, globalisation and the consequent global economy have imposed changing geographies of wine production and consumption that cannot be ignored. Third, while I adopt a “multiple worlds of wine” reading, which I believe is fertile ground for making our comparison, there are also other types of distinction in use, such as “artisanal/industrial,” “cool climate/warm climate,” “conservatism/experimentation,” “place designation/varietal specification” and “regulated/unregulated.” Finally, on a global front and under environmental and ecological pressure, new forms of quality indicators have emerged that make no distinction between Old World and New World wine regions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has delved into the intricacies and challenges of comparing Bordeaux and the Western Cape Province. The first section retraced the socio-history of the two regions, bringing forth key contextual elements that will aid in understanding the emergence of the natural wine movement locally. The contextual analysis of both regions paid attention to the historical background of the wine industry, its contemporary institutional order, and modes of governance, and provided insights into the economic and environmental challenges currently faced by the wine industry. This comparison of the two regional contexts aims to lay the groundwork for addressing the emergence of the natural wine movement in relation to its context. Despite significant differences in the wine industry between the two regions, I argue in this thesis that in both contexts, the various

components of the crises have provided fertile ground for alternatives such as the natural wine movement to emerge.

Building on the contextual analysis of both regions, which highlighted both their differences and similarities, I engaged in a term-by-term comparison rather than a comparison by contrast or “most different case” as might have been expected. The second part of this chapter delves into the challenges of dealing with such asymmetrical cases and constructing a comparative design involving an African case and a European case. Drawing from the literature on the decolonisation of knowledge and critical urban geography, I argue that this unexpected comparison makes sense as wine-producing regions globally move toward each other and face similar economic or environmental challenges. Finally, through the comparative design, I assert that this research moves beyond traditional North-South comparisons. And more specifically, within wine literature, this research intends to move beyond the Old World versus New World dichotomy, which appears flawed and instead adopts an analytical framework in terms of multiple worlds of wine.

What does this mean for our analysis of the natural wine movement? Firstly, although the movement initially emerged in France, for this analysis, I consider the regional emergence of the movement, which appears to have occurred around the same time, the 2010s, in Bordeaux and in the Western Cape. Secondly, I do not assume that the natural wine movement in the Western Cape was influenced by the movement in Bordeaux. Instead, I adopt a multi-scalar dimension in this research to observe the circulation of the movement from its micro-level antennae to its transnational dimension. Thus, a two-dimensional approach is adopted in this research: first, a term-by-term comparison between two local antennae of the movement, namely Bordeaux and the Western Cape; and second, a multi-scalar analysis spanning from the scale of the domain (micro) to that of the global market (macro). This two-sided perspective helps elucidate the emergence of the movement and its dynamics of knowledge circulation.

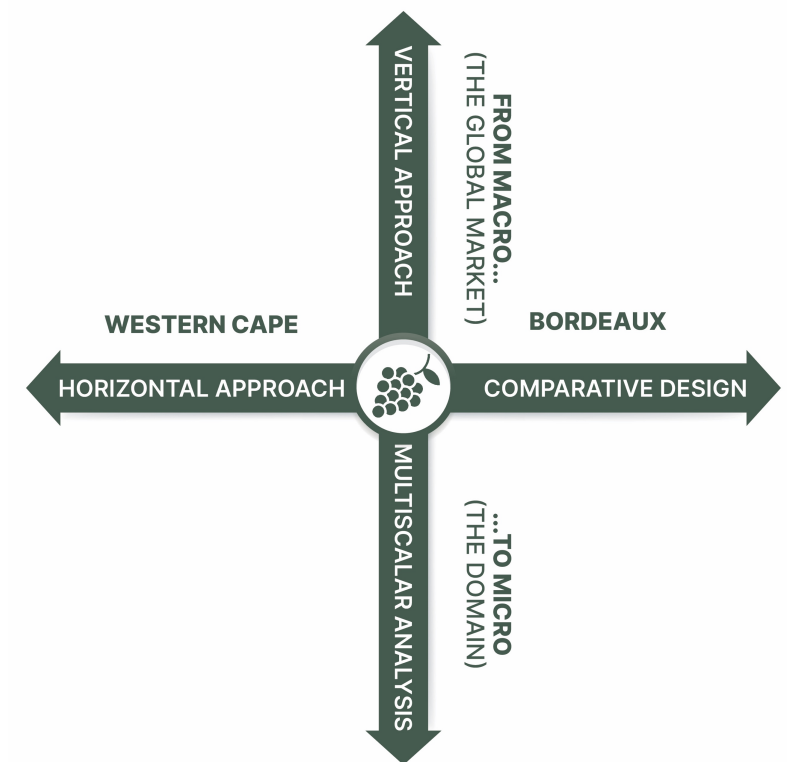


Figure 18. A double lens perspective: the comparative design and the multiscalar analysis

3. CHAPTER 3: Methodology: Fieldwork immersed in the vineyards of Bordeaux and the Western Cape Province

Introduction

In this chapter, I set out my research methodology and highlight the challenges I faced in the field. First, I describe the different methods I employed, which include fieldwork, interviews and participatory observations and network analysis, and demonstrate the relevance of these methods to my research ambitions. I then adopt a reflexive approach to discuss the research ethic and positionality *vis-à-vis* both my research topic and my fieldwork experience. This chapter also aims to set the tone for my later development of the subject by justifying the personal tone I have used and in so doing explaining the central place of the researcher in this study in particular.

I conducted relatively long periods of fieldwork in each of the wine regions I studied. My data was collected through fieldwork based upon immersion in the Bordeaux region from April to October 2021 (eight months) and in the Western Cape Province from November 2021 to July 2022 (nine months). The empirical material was created primarily from semi-structured interviews and participant observation. The data collection protocol for these two methods is explained in detail later in this section, whilst the sections that follow deal with other sets of methods I employed: working with social network analysis and backing it up with secondary data. The last section describes the fieldwork experience (its challenges and opportunities) and explains the position I adopted in the field.

3.1. Conducting field research in and around the vineyards

It is worth noting that because this thesis was undertaken during the COVID-19 ‘era’, the fieldwork logistics were constantly being adjusted. In fact, my field trip to South Africa came close to being abandoned due to the numerous postponements caused by the healthcare crisis, the closure of borders during the pandemic and the administrative restrictions imposed on my university and the South African Embassy. On the other hand, the focus on the Bordeaux region, which was initially intended to be a secondary field to be used as a point of reference for my comparison, was modified to become a full case

study, thereby transforming the thesis project into one based upon genuine comparative analysis.

In the field, I adopted a qualitative, exploratory and inductive approach, and I will now attempt to reflect on the methodological implications of my choices. I decided not to use the term “ethnography” because I believe it has been overused in the social sciences as an umbrella term and has lost its focus at the expense of the anthropology profession (Ingold, 2014). I preferred to frame my work around my eighteen-month “immersion” in fieldwork. The main objective of this fieldwork was to track the natural wine movement by analysing its network characteristics; the roles, representations and interactions among different individuals (wine professionals), organisations and institutions (public and private); natural resources (soil, vines, grapes, etc.); objects (bottle, barrels, chemicals, sulphites, etc.); and intangible artefacts (ecolabels, certifications, wine routes, wine fairs, etc.). Working with both humans and non-humans as “actants,” I applied the principles of the actor-network theory (ANT) developed by Callon and Latour (Callon, 2006), which conceives the world as a heterogenous network in which context is to be understood as something in motion, as a collection of interactions between actants, creating a locally available actor-network as they happen (B. Latour, 1996). By using the ANT approach as a fieldwork method, I focused my analysis on tracing the connections among people and things, and on the movements, flows and changes within the network (Routledge, 2008). The network is not used as a structural reality here, but rather as a conceptual and analytical tool that enables the researcher to make sense of a complex reality (Marshall & Staeheli, 2015).

From this perspective, I followed the lived experience of the field informants and assembled the different materials they provided to grasp the meaning of, and the relationships within, the natural wine movement phenomenon in particular contexts. In line with Bertaux’s ethics for the collection of life stories, my intention was to adopt a comprehensive approach to the lived experience, using the informant’s individual experience as a source of phenomenological knowledge (Bertaux, 2016; Burrick, 2010). This inductive approach allowed me to follow my informants’ narratives as they unfolded during my fieldwork and interviews, and through their knowledge, experience and engagement I let them guide my understanding of the natural wine movement. This cognitive reasoning also offered an opportunity to navigate between controversies as they emerged through the diversity of individual strategies and experiences.

Finally, as part of the inductive, exploratory aspect of my fieldwork, I must also highlight here the role of serendipity during my fieldwork. I became used to making constant methodological adjustments. My data collection process was non-linear and kept as flexible as possible, primarily to navigate within logistical constraints (including the global pandemic rules), but also to allow for unexpected findings and to redirect my gaze as empirical discoveries unfolded. To achieve this, I developed fieldwork tactics to seize opportunities as they emerged and as new topics and controversies presented themselves on the ground, allowing my informants, their movement and the direction to which they pointed me, to guide my steps. This meant that the boundaries and scope of my study were constantly being reevaluated, and I was able to tailor and adjust my theoretical framework in parallel with the data collection process.

3.1.1. Interviews with a diversity of actors in the wine sector

The primary material used for this research is semi-structured interviews. The following section provides a brief portrait of the diversity of the actors I interviewed and describes the challenges I encountered when dealing with such a niche, yet diverse, pool.

3.1.1.1. The interview protocol and pool of interviewees

The primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews. A total of 83 interviews were conducted. Each interview typically lasted between 45 and 180 minutes (a total of 95 hours of audio data were collected). After a first phase of pre-identification of the main actors in the natural wine movement, I mostly used snowball techniques to sample my interviewees. The way my social connections expanded so quickly over a relatively short span of time already says something about the level of interconnectedness and the network dimension of the natural wine movement. Throughout the field, new actors (be they individuals, market actors or institutional bodies) were discovered and progressively included in the study. The table below (Table 3) is a summary of the interviews I conducted and how they were categorised by types of actors.

Interviews		
Bordeaux (April-October 2021)	Wine production professionals	18
	Vignerons working in the natural wine movement	16
	Conventional vignerons	2
	Other professionals in the wine field (wine shops, bars, distributors etc.)	3
	Public Institutions	7
	INAO (<i>Institut National de l'Origine et de la Qualité</i>)	2
	AgroBio Gironde	1
	BNA (<i>Bio Nouvelle Aquitaine</i>)	1
	CIVB (<i>Comité Interprofessionnel des Vins de Bordeaux</i>)	1
	ODG (<i>Organisme de Défense et de Gestion</i>)	2
	Trade Unions / NGOs	4
	Syndicat de défense des Vins Naturels	2
	Confédération paysanne	1
	Génération futures	1
	TOTAL Bordeaux	32
Western Cape (November 2021-June 2022)	Wine production professionals	28
	Winemakers and Winegrowers	19
	Winemakers only	8
	Winegrowers only	1
	Other professional of the wine field (wine shops, bars, distributors etc.)	9
	Private viticulture consultants	2
	Government recognised Institutions	6
	Wine Tech	1

	IPW (Integrated Production of Wine)	1
	WOSA (Wines of South Africa)	1
	Vin Pro	1
	SAWIS (South Africa Wine Industry Information and Systems)	1
	Swartland Wine and Olive Route	1
	Private Initiatives	4
	SAOSO (South African Organic Sector Organisation)	1
	Private eco-labels (ECOCERT, CERES)	2
	OVP (Old Vine Project)	1
	Chenin Blanc Association	1
	UCT (University of Cape Town) research group	1
	TOTAL Western Cape	51
TOTAL interviews		83

Table 3. List of interviewees categorised by type of actors.

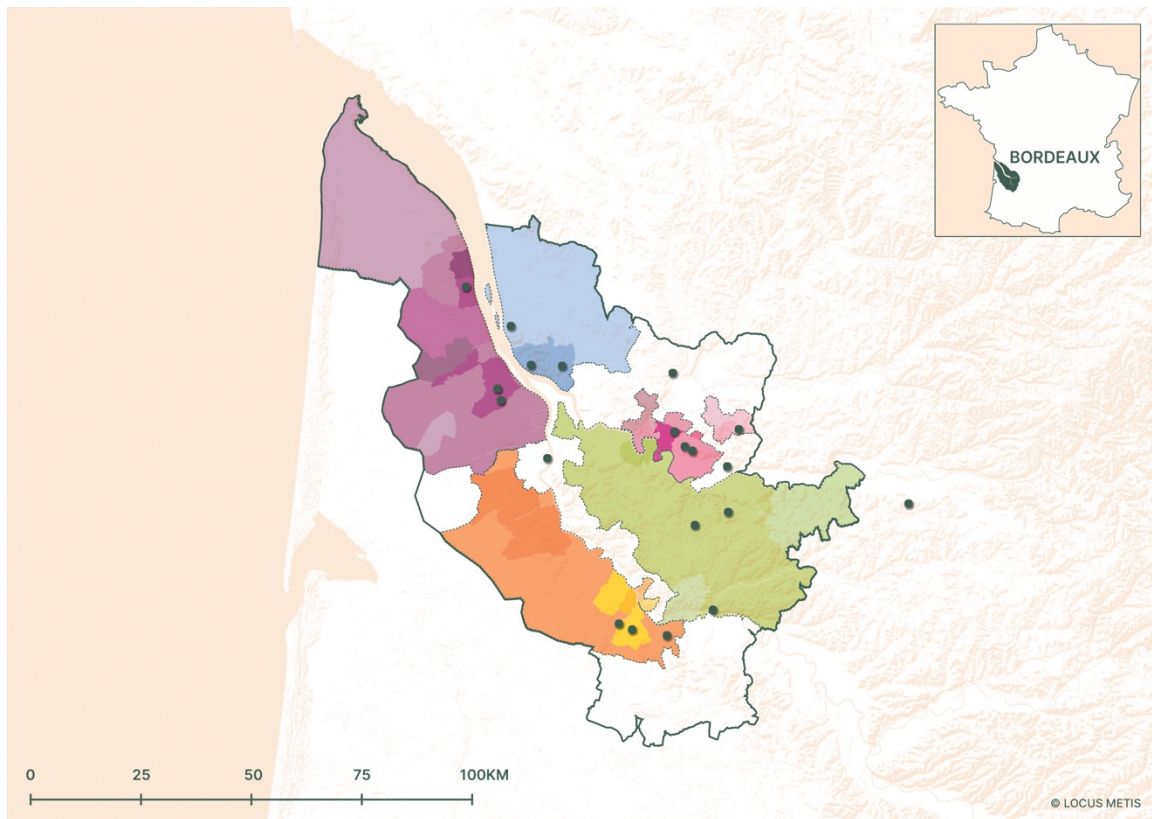


Figure 19. Maps of winemakers interviewed in Bordeaux. Source: Chazal 2024

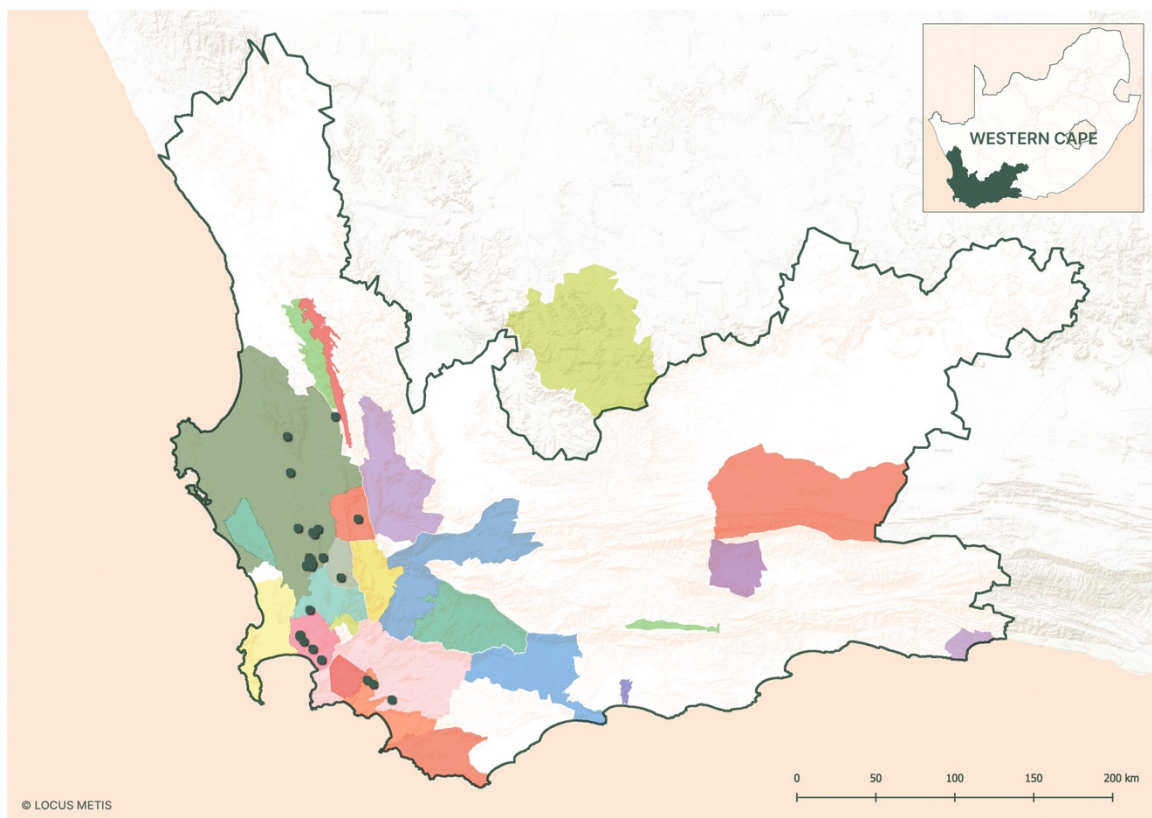


Figure 20. Maps of winemakers interviewed in the Western Cape. Source: Chazal 2024

3.1.1.2. Dealing with a plurality of actors

Before delving into the intricacies of the interview process, I should explain how I have attempted to categorise the diverse array of actors associated with the natural wine movement. The table above table assumes a categorisation by types of actor, including a wide variety of individuals and bodies that can be roughly divided into four sections: first, actors responsible for wine production (grape growers and winemakers); second, other professionals in the wine sector (upstream of production, mainly viticulturists and consultants, and downstream, in the form of wine suppliers, distributors and merchants); third, the bodies responsible for the governance of the wine sector (public – or at least government-recognised – institutions that act as policymakers or statutory agencies); and fourth, the other institutions, public or private, that gravitate around wine production with a defined agenda such as labellers, syndicates, trade associations, field-specific organisations and winemakers' collectives.

These classifications are in some ways artificial: although this first attempt at categorisation is useful for understanding and situating the landscape of the wine sector for each of the cases studied, it lacks certain information that will be crucial for my analysis. Two other categorisation entries might also be proposed: the first in terms of the scale of actions dividing the bodies, from local to international, and the second in terms of their closeness to or distance from the natural wine movement. I will explore them below, together with further details.

Not only was the categorisation of actors interviewed a daunting task, but things became even more complex when I realised that the categories are not mutually exclusive, and that many of the respondents straddled categories. For instance, the individuals I interviewed as representatives of a collective or a trade association are also likely to be winemakers themselves, which means that it is not possible for the discourse and narrative during the interview to distinguish between the two statuses.

“It also appears that the categories of actors I had predefined are sometimes porous. Indeed, many institutional actors are also winemakers. While this was not problematic during the identification phase, I will need to take it into consideration during my analysis. For example, when the chairperson of a syndicate who has also been a winemaker for the last 40 years shares his opinion on the evolution of the industry, is he speaking as the chairperson or as the winemaker? How should these “two-hat” situations be managed? (Notes from fieldwork notebooks, 20 September 2021)

Acknowledging the fact that some of the interviewees were wearing two hats also helps us understand that the data collected during the interview recorded individual experiences and personal reflections rather than the official voice of the institution they are meant to represent.

3.1.1.3. The institutional landscape in South Africa versus the one in France, and methodological adaptations

As the reader will undoubtedly have noticed in the table, the categories of actors in the two case studies (Bordeaux and Western Cape) do not match. In fact, there is almost no group of actors that overlaps the two cases. The asymmetrical character of the two fieldwork periods reveals significant differences in the data collected, but it is of particular interest to differentiate between two contrasting institutional landscapes (De Verdalle et al., 2012, p. 16). These differences can be easily explained if we return to the socio-history of the wine industry in both countries. First, in South Africa, wine production is virtually systematically divided between *winegrowers* (vine professionals whose main role is to cultivate and sell grapes) on the one hand, and *winemakers* (cellar professionals whose mission is to transform grapes into wine) on the other. This compartmentalisation is a legacy of the cooperative system used under apartheid, where the vast majority of grapes grown were sold directly to large cooperatives. Consequently – and unlike the case with French vineyards – the figure of the *vigneron* (where the activities from vineyard cultivation to winemaking are the responsibility of a single individual) is almost absent from the South African landscape⁶⁸.

Like the mismatches within other categories already mentioned, the difference in the presence of the State between the two cases has clearly shaped the organisation of the sector. In Bordeaux, most of the actors are public state institutions in charge of regulating the sector at different levels (national for the INAO, regional for the CIVB, and local for the OGD in charge of their AOC). In South Africa, the relative absence of the State from all wine-related affairs has created a space for private structures to emerge to take charge of governance of the sector. They are recognised by the State and run independently, and are funded by the industry itself (VinPro, WOSA, SAWIS etc.) (See the organigramme in

⁶⁸ In Chapter 4, I argue that the figure of the *vigneron-paysan* is being reclaimed by leaders of the natural wine movement as a sign of quality and a position adopted as regards alternative ways of making wine

Figure 13). The mismatch of categories does not present an obstacle to a comparative analysis, as both cases – even though the two regions are structured by very different institutional landscapes – have similar challenges in the wine sector and have a relatively similar temporality as regards the emergence of the natural wine movement.

3.1.1.4. Conducting interviews

The interviews were semi-structured, and the interview guidelines varied according to the type of actor being interviewed. Winemakers (and more generally wine production professionals) are at the heart of this study and account for the largest group of interviewees. In the next section, I develop the interview policy (*La politique de l'entretien*, Olivier de Sardan, 1995) I used with the winemakers: it is a *bricolage* of a collection of life stories – used in order to understand the informants' trajectories and their proximity to the natural wine movement –, semi-structured interviews to cover other surrounding themes that might inform new dynamics and transformations within the sector, and a collection of primary relational data to build a network analysis. I will then turn to the interviews I conducted with other actors in the sector.

➤ Interviews with wine production professionals

The wine production professionals were first asked to present and track their personal and professional trajectories, and to explain the decisions and opportunities that led them to work in this sector. They were asked to detail the reasons and incentives that led them to produce natural wine, including (where relevant) their motives for pursuing a conversion to organic or biodynamic agriculture, the adoption of (or lack of) environmental certifications, and their proximity to or involvement in the natural wine movement and its related values and actions. This first segment of the interview was conducted in accordance with the life stories approach (Bertaux, 2016; G. Pineau & Le Grand, 2019) to examine the social and professional trajectories of the informants, and how they built a sense of identity. The biographical approach of life stories in the broader field of life histories is a research tool to make sense of social phenomena and investigate the living experience of individuals, their representation of a phenomenon and their affects and thoughts (Burrick, 2010; G. Pineau & Le Grand, 2019). Contrary to Bourdieu's idea of "biographical illusion" as an obstacle to life stories, Bertaux argues that with the critical understanding of the researcher, life stories collected through interviews can be used as stepping stones to the

construction of sociological descriptions and interpretations because they make the social relationships and structural forces behind a social phenomenon visible (Bertaux, 2016). My design for these life stories was taken from Bertaux's approach and was also inspired by a project developed by Chaxel et al. (Chaxel, Fiorelli, & Moity-Maïzi, 2014) that presents a life-story-based method complemented by cognitive mapping to analyse new farmers and their set-up strategies. In line with Chaxel, I believe that life stories allow for the identification of the social network of the ego and its significative alters (Bidart, 2008), as the researcher can prompt the interviewee to detail their connections with the individuals mentioned. Unlike Chaxel and al., however, I did not complete my collection of life stories using cognitive mapping, but with Social Network Analysis (SNA) methods in order to question the key actors in the ego's network that might have influenced its involvement in the natural wine movement. In the end, my methodological *bricolage* combines life stories, studies of trajectories and social network analysis, and aligns with the constructivist sociology of Callon (Bénathouïl, 1999), my hope being to convey and analyse the actors' capacity to build their environment depending on their actions.

The second part of the interviews was designed around a series of topics, with the addition of further details according to the informant's particular interests. The interview contained themes such as the singularities and challenges faced by the wine region (Bordeaux or the Western Cape) and the awareness and sensitisation of the informant and their peers with regard to climate change and other environmental issues (notably soil and biodiversity protection). The respondents were prompted to talk about their knowledge of the ongoing initiatives (collective or individual, public or private) that are transforming the wine production and provision system. Finally, questions were asked about the channels for the diffusion and circulation of knowledge in the sector.

To the extent possible, the meetings with winemakers were held at their domains, and comprised a recorded interview and a visit to the vineyard and/or cellar. Conducting interviews at the respondent's workplace offered multiple opportunities. First, the informants were generally more comfortable and played the interview game more easily. It closed the gap between our profiles – me as a researcher and them as professional winemakers – and allowed individuals who were not used to this kind of interaction to open up and relax in the interview process. It was a double-edged sword, however, as some winemakers were used to being in the spotlight and to receiving considerable attention from

the international media. In these instances, I had to adapt my stance to reassert my role as a researcher and not as a journalist or wine critic. Second, being *in situ* provided a greater opportunity for contextualised responses and observation of behaviour. I noted substantial differences between the interviewees, including in terms of the economic capital they displayed, the size of their domains, their cellar equipment, the attention paid to the ecosystems (flora and fauna) on the farm and the presence of workers and their working conditions. I was therefore almost always able to test whether there were any gaps between the narratives offered during the interview and my direct observations.

➤ Interviews with other actors in the wine field

Interviews were also conducted with other actors in the wine field: representatives from public institutions in charge of governance of the sector, trade unions and syndicates, meta-organisations with a specific agenda and private actors such as eco-labels, consultants etc. The conduct of these semi-structured interviews was more classic. The interviews were shorter but sometimes more incisive, as the respondents were representatives of institutions and therefore more likely to have pre-prepared discourses. They also tended to have a greater awareness of the ongoing challenges and the regulations, legal frameworks and public policies that affect the wine industry. They might not have been close to the natural wine movement in any way, but they were crucial for understanding the dynamics at play in the sector and the wide variety of opinions from both a market (economic) and regulatory (political) perspective.

3.1.1.5. When to stop collecting data?

As explained in Chapter 1, the production of natural wine accounts for less than 1% of the total wine produced worldwide. Thus, the natural wine movement is a fairly niche phenomenon, with just a handful of actors involved. One of the benefits of studying a relatively small object is that the researcher can hope to identify and meet with all its key actors. When I started this project, therefore, my intention was to interview all the winemakers producing natural wine in the two project regions. This was a way of overcoming the dilemma of achieving a generalisable analysis, which can be an issue when one is only working with a sample. My plan was revised, however, partly due to logistical constraints, but mainly because the data collected during the interview process were reaching saturation (Olivier de Sardan, 1995). I then faced the practical challenge of

defining when and where to stop. There is no universal yardstick for deciding the moment when a researcher should stop collecting data, but I noticed a certain redundancy during my final interviews: the actors mentioned for my relational analysis kept coming up again, the controversies had been covered with a sufficient diversity of points of view, and the number of new discoveries or findings had diminished. I decided that the sample I had interviewed contained a satisfactory degree of heterogeneity and provided a fine mesh of the data collection area. Finally, despite qualifying as a niche phenomenon, the natural wine movement saw tremendous growth and a major increase in attractiveness over the course of my research (between 2020 and 2024), the proliferation of the phenomena was easily by looking at the multiplicity of new winemakers claiming to produce natural wine. This might have hindered my original ambition to interview every actor, but it is also a clear sign of the booming attraction of the natural wine phenomenon.

3.1.1.6. Interviews and data analysis

A period of data analysis was conducted during and after the fieldwork. It included the interviews' verbatim transcripts and some entries in my field notebook that contained a brief description of the meeting (place, time, description of the domain etc.), my first impressions of the interviewee (and reflexive thoughts about those feelings) and everything that happened before and after the official interview with the audio recorder turned on, which was sometimes the most interesting part. I have also used extracts from these notes as material for this thesis. I refer to them as "fieldwork notes."

A second period of data analysis involved transcribing and coding the interview material. The coding was carried out with an inductive coding system using the MAXQDA software programme (the interviews were coded into different themes and sub-themes, and all the names of the individuals or institutions mentioned were also coded to facilitate the next phase of social network analysis. In total, over 7,000 codes were used). The coding through MAXQDA helped to bring to light some recurring themes mentioned by the interviewees, they revealed concerns on some specific issues regarding ongoing challenges of the wine industry, as well as highlighted shared beliefs and representations. Finally, the coding also helped creating the database for the social network analysis developed below as every individual or organisation mentioned during an interview was coded in the software.

3.1.2. *Participatory observation: from working in the vineyards to participating in wine fairs*

During the course of this immersion in the two regions, I also engaged in participant observation. I monitored each region's agenda for wine-related events and attended a wide variety of wine fairs, tastings and other trade events. I immersed myself in the network of the natural wine movement to "become further entwined in the entangled relations, interactions, relays, intimacies, arguments, and jealousies that made up the web of contacts that enabled these people to strategise and the network to act." (Routledge, 2008, p. 207), in other words, to obtain a detailed understanding of the existing controversies. This participant observation took multiple forms: I attended industry workshops, conferences, roundtables, fairs, tastings, informal meals, and social drinking events, to the point where the observation became ubiquitous. Similarly to what Olivier De Sardan calls the "impregnation phase" (Olivier de Sardan, 1995), I immersed myself in the wine universe, more precisely the natural wine world, navigating between different roles: I sometimes attended as a wine enthusiast, a simple consumer or a tourist. In these moments of "impregnation," my aim was less to take notes and jot down my observations in my notebook, and more to familiarise myself with the local wine culture and gain a better understanding of the broader scheme of wine-related matters. My participant observation also provided some novel insights that could not have been explored otherwise.

Apart from these impregnation moments, I attended various events where my role as a researcher was more clearly stated and my observations more active. In these instances, my observations needed to be transformed into a corpus and the data were collected in my field notebook. These events can be divided into five categories:

- (1) **Activist campaigns.** These campaigns mainly took place in the Bordeaux region, and were organised by a grouping of different actors, including syndicates, trade unions and NGOs. They often took the shape of protests, marches and public space events to protest against the political directions adopted by public institutions. For instance, between December 2020 and October 2021, I followed several events relating to the lawsuit brought by the CIVB (*Comité Interprofessionnel des Vins de Bordeaux*) against the whistleblower Valérie Murat. Murat had denounced the presence of prohibited chemicals and excessive traces of pesticides in Bordeaux

wines, and the CIVB accused her of defaming Bordeaux's wine sector and contributing to the ongoing phenomenon of "Bordeaux-bashing."

- (2) **Trade events.** This category embraced a wide variety of events organised by industry members (winemakers, wine merchants etc.) to promote natural wine. I attended tastings in clubs and at wine fairs with various focuses: natural, organic, biodynamic or regional wine. I was also involved in the organisation of a natural wine fair in Bordeaux called *La Gouleyance*, which was meant to be held in March 2021 but was eventually postponed because of a pandemic lockdown. I attended several meetings with the fair organisers and participated in the selection of Bordeaux winemakers who would be exhibitors. These events focused on marketing and sales, but they offered me great insights into market dynamics.
- (3) **Events for industry professionals.** A number of information and innovation events were organised for winegrowers and/or winemakers by private or public bodies from the sector. These events, which included roundtables, conferences and workshops, often mixed academic and private sector interventions to provide wine professionals with innovative techniques or new insights into sector strategy.
- (4) **Informal winemaker gatherings.** The "impregnation" phase and my attempted immersion into the natural wine movement proved successful when I was invited to or had the good luck to be at informal social gatherings with winemakers or wine merchants. I attended a couple of informal dinners with winemakers, including the infamous *Pizza Nights* organised at the farm of a winemaker, and some of the Sunday monthly *Wine and Jam Sessions* at a wine bar in Cape Town city centre.
- (5) **Wine production activities.** Last but not least, I also asked winemakers to allow me to take part in various phases of winemaking activities, including harvests and bottling. The harvest experience lasted three weeks between September and October 2021 in two domains in Graves and the Médoc. As for the bottling experience, I shadowed and assisted a wine merchant in Cape Town who had begun to buy a few barrels from different wine farms to market wine under his own label. These embodied practices were influenced by the yearly calendar of viticulture work. My experiences offered me an opportunity for an in-depth engagement with the rich discursive and material practices natural winemakers work with.

The subsequent development of my thesis gave me the opportunity to return to each of these experiences in detail. When I conducted the participant observation, I was interested

not only in facts and observations but also in the agency: that is to say the network effect around the making and provision of natural wine. Finally, something I had not anticipated but which became evident as my fieldwork unfolded was the sensorial aspect of my participant observation. In her thesis on organic wine production in Italy, Clelia Viecegli introduces the idea of conducting sensorial ethnography. She suggests that this approach seeks to focus “on our body as the locus of multi-sensorial experience where memory, imagination, and sensations are all interwoven so as to produce signification.” (Viecegli, 2021, p. 39). Following Viecegli’s sensitivity, I too felt a high level of sensorial engagement during the fieldwork, from drinking wine to working in vineyards or wandering around cellar spaces. Having an awareness of the sensitive, sensorial, and even sensuous effects of embodied observations enriches the material collected in the field. The sensorial aesthetics and lived experience of the researcher in the field is rendered and situated in fieldnotes, to the extent possible (Brisson, 2016).

3.1.3. The specialist wine press and online publications: Exploiting secondary data

In addition to my interviews and participant observations, I collected secondary data for the study. The sources of this secondary data were diverse and consisted mainly of literature indigenous to the sector: media articles, social media monitoring and official statements from trade organisations or public institutions. I used indigenous literature to compensate for the lack of academic literature from the social sciences on the natural wine movement. Because of the relatively new and unexplored dimension of the research subject, I had to rely on books, manifests, blogs and documentaries on natural wine by wine critics, sommeliers and sometimes winemakers themselves. This study benefited from the rich variety of materials available on the wine sector, which gather a great diversity of opinions, debates and sometimes conflicting values. Monitoring press releases and social media was a fruitful way of following hot news items and controversies in the wine sector, as well as keeping me updated on upcoming events. My desktop research was useful both for the “impregnation phase” of my fieldwork and for keeping an eye on one Bordeaux when I was working in South Africa, and vice versa. Finally, secondary data was used to back up emerging findings from the field. Ironically, I became aware of the emerging gaps – and therefore the controversies – between the discourses of my informants in the field and the discourse of journalists in the mainstream media, which also fed into my analysis.

3.2. Working with Social Network Analysis (SNA)

The third method used in this research was network analysis. It is developed in the concluding chapter of this thesis (See Chapter 0), and the theoretical and methodological framework with which this network analysis aligns is presented in detail in Chapter 9. The next section briefly elucidates my objectives in employing this approach, delineate my position within the field of network sociology and outline the materials used for this analysis.

3.2.1. *Using SNA as an analytical tool and an exploratory method*

Network sociology has experienced a surge in popularity in the social sciences, and has given rise to various branches of network analysis. Despite the multitude of approaches to studying SNA, they all share a common focus: the examination of relationships among actors, which are commonly called “ties.” This work aligns with the post-structural constructivist approach to social networks, and considers networks as artefacts of the research project itself. It delves into SNA using a qualitative approach as it is especially concerned with the meaning of ties and the study of the social and cultural phenomena that arise from observable interactions. In line with Fuhse and Mützel, I believe that “While networks are often seen as analytical constructs of quantitative algorithmic outputs, the qualitative nature of most interactions makes SNA essentially a hybrid method” (J. Fuhse & Mützel, 2011). As such, SNA is used as a grounded iterative tool in conjunction with other qualitative methods (mainly participant observation and interviews). There is a feedback loop here in which SNA informs the approach to fieldwork by helping visualise networks and discern patterns, which subsequently enriches SNA by clarifying how connections are negotiated and how information and resources are utilised.

3.2.2. *Building a material/data set for SNA.*

By using a qualitative approach to network analysis, I was able to delve into the intricate web of relationships and the diverse nature of connections that shape the network. Through the interview process, I gathered extensive data on relational ties, which were then organised into two distinct datasets. The first focuses on the relational ties among actors in the natural wine movement, encompassing professional connections (such as employment history, training affiliations, grape sourcing and collaborative winemaking ventures), kinship bonds (including marriage, cohabitation and parent-child relationships) and collective affiliations (like membership of meta-organisations, eco-labels or tasting clubs).

The second dataset consists of directed ties, which reflect reputations or influences within the movement. At the end of each interview, I asked a series of targeted questions: “Who, in your opinion, are the catalysts for change in the local wine industry?”; “Whom do you admire for their innovative environmental practices?”; “Who are the trailblazers of the natural wine movement?”; and “Do you have any recommendations for additional individuals I should speak with?” These responses informed the construction of this second dataset. The two datasets were used to run social network analysis using the GEPHI software programme. I was able to produce diagrams in the form of graph concepts with nodes and edges that serve as a visualisation tool.

However, it is important to acknowledge a number of limitations I encountered during the data collection process, including issues related to data accessibility, a reliance on self-reported information and the challenge of delineating the boundaries of a fluid and porous network. Consequently, the network identified in this project is viewed more as a dynamic process than a fixed and defined structure. In other words, the network analysis serves as an exploratory research method, generating potential avenues for further research rather than adhering strictly to a quantitative approach typical of traditional SNA. The obstacles encountered during the social network analysis underscore what Marshall and Staeheli aptly noted: “the extent to which networks are artefacts constructed through the research itself...more than they are representations of actually existing structures.” (Marshall & Staeheli, 2015).

3.2.3. The ambitions for the use of network analysis in this research

Incorporating SNA techniques into my research yielded several methodological benefits. It served as a valuable tool for complementing the qualitative approach of this study, either by confirming or challenging the findings derived from my fieldwork. It also revealed certain dimensions I could not have identified or anticipated simply from an analysis of the interviews and observations. Furthermore, the use of SNA is geared towards achieving three primary sets of reflections, all of which are included throughout this thesis. First, it helps deepen the comparative analysis: I wanted to use network visualisation to scrutinise the differences in network structure between the Western Cape and Bordeaux natural wine networks. I suggest that these differences may arise from variations in governing structures and levels of state involvement in the two regions. Second, by bridging the gap between

the micro and the macro, SNA helped me explore the multi-scalar dimension of the network, which in turn helps me defend my theory that the natural wine movement is characterised by its dual foundation on hyper-local and international networks. Ultimately, I used SNA to explore the role of natural wine movement networks as a platform for learning and the exchange of knowledge. It allows me to demonstrate the power of the natural wine network in relation to learning and knowledge-sharing.

3.3. Where do I stand? A few words on positionality and reflexivity

In this last section, I make an effort to decentre my own analytical gaze. This means negotiating my positionality *vis-à-vis* my research object, as well as constantly adjusting and reflecting on my legitimacy in the field. In the work of researchers engaged in feminist theories (Baksh & Harcourt, 2015), political ecologies (Rocheleau, 2008) and post-colonial studies (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012; De Sousa Santos, 2018; Wai, 2015), an emphasis is placed on situated knowledge, as well as the positionality of the researcher.⁶⁹ In line with this post-structuralist and subaltern intellectual literature, I adopt a critical stance and present a reflexive analysis of my positionality with regard to both my research topic and my two periods of fieldwork.

3.3.1. Challenges of the researcher's positionality

3.3.1.1. Positionality toward my subject

➤ Embarking on an apprenticeship

I would like to begin by emphasising the apprenticeship I embarked on during my fieldwork, not just as a researcher but also as an individual working with vineyards, vines and eventually wine. This apprenticeship encompassed the whole range of agencies with natural resources (vines, grapes) and technical objects (from grape shears to barrels and bottles) that needed to be discovered and apprehended. By shadowing and observing winemakers as they went about their daily activities, by convening sensorial stimuli and through a range of sometimes unspoken and intangible practices, I learned about wine production and the wine world more generally.⁷⁰ In line with Olivier De Sardan's

⁷⁰ See Inglis and Amila (2020) p. 19 for a definition of/distinction between the terms wine world, wine culture, wine production and wine field.

description of the “impregnation phase” of the researcher in the field, my apprenticeship in the wine worlds was ubiquitous and a constant process, as well as being a necessary stage towards accessing this research. In the notes below, I recall why the harvesting period was a lynchpin moment in the research process.

“When I started this thesis, going to participate in grape harvesting seemed like a logical choice. However, upon further reflection, I struggled to justify this step. Why would I involve myself in a harvest? What type of data would I collect there? In reality, I was asking the wrong questions. It is not just a time for data collection but rather a space for me to get closer to the topic and the field. Throughout my research, I had developed a deep curiosity about winemaking that my reading and interviews alone could not satisfy. I needed to get my hands dirty, literally get my hands in the vineyard. How could I claim to understand and describe the experience and feelings of these winemakers without first grasping the essence of their profession, the core of their activity? This was also a very simple technical matter: I had to see it with my own eyes and take part in the winemaking process to truly comprehend it. Otherwise, I would have remained in a sort of epistemological void in which I would have known all the steps and technical terms in the vineyard and cellar but would have been incapable of creating a good mind map of how was wine made, therefore understanding the process in its entirety.” (Notes from fieldwork notebook, 30 October 2021)

Similarly, the *in situ* dimension of visits and interviews with winemakers offered clear insights into this apprenticeship and a broader understanding of my research object. Indeed, over the course of these encounters and from an accumulation of my experiences, I learned how to differentiate soil in a vineyard that has been chemically treated from soil that has been farmed organically, or even biodynamically; I can appreciate hygiene in a cellar and distinguish between large-scale industrial and craft practices at a glance. All of this was part of a virtuous circle supporting my understanding of the research object, which in turn favoured my access to the field and its informants.

➤ **Knowing my object: a certain acquaintance with natural wines**

My apprenticeship phase made me reflect on my proximity to my research object and the related access to my fieldwork. Thanks to the acquaintance I acquired with the natural wine movement, I became able to decipher local dynamics. But because I was a young female researcher working in wine – a male-dominated industry – my knowledge, and therefore my legitimacy, was often tested by my informants. It is no surprise that in *La Distinction*,⁷¹ in which the “*champs*” (field) theory was first elaborated, Bourdieu uses the example of the wine sector to illustrate the notion of symbolic capital. He shows how symbolic values are formed in differentiated social fields, and how specific forms of capital can be valued

⁷¹ Bourdieu Pierre (1979) *La distinction : Critique social du jugement*, Collection Le Sens commun.

as a tool for social recognition and are valuable for asserting a dominant position. In line with Bourdieu, Garcia-Parpet concludes that the social value intrinsic in the wine field comes from a combination of multiple elements, including a necessary apprenticeship on its specific knowledge, distinctive time values, strategies of self-presentation and a marker of the *bourgeoisie* (Garcia-Parpet, 2009, p. 53). I was confronted with all these elements in my fieldwork, and had to learn about the many faces of the wine world in order to build some symbolic capital for myself so that I would achieve some recognition and gain access to fieldwork. I remember writing about this feeling of being an “outsider” in the wine world and the need I felt to bridge this gap.

“[...] I needed to establish a certain legitimacy in this field. I no longer wanted to be an outsider; I wanted to embrace the codes, values, language and references that surround the natural wine movement. Participating in the grape harvest, this pivotal moment in the year when winemakers are about to exchange their viticulturist's hat for that of a cellar master, the instant when the grapes are ready to be transformed into wine, was a step that brought me closer to this insider status.” (Notes from fieldwork notebook, 30 October 2021)

More generally, a major asset for understanding the field was previously acquired knowledge of it, and so, prior to my doctoral journey, between 2016 and 2018, I worked in several establishments specialising in natural wine in London (including two renown restaurants named Brawn and Bright). The hospitality industry offered informal weekly training for sommeliers, and the overall experience undeniably opened doors to a world that cultivates *entre-soi* and that I had been ignorant of until then. Thanks to these cumulative experiences and my curiosity, I acquired some of the codes, references and specific cultural markers of the natural wine movement. On several occasions, I was able to note the importance of specific knowledge and of appropriating common references in order to be “validated” and “integrated” into it. Not only did my acquired knowledge of and proximity to natural wine give me access to some of my informants, but they also allowed me to be a part of some fierce debates and technical discussions about the wine field, sparking new discourses within which meaningful interpretations could take place.

➤ The dangers of developing empathy and affect

As I learned about the natural wine world, I developed not only technical knowledge but also emotional awareness. My acquaintance with the natural wine world slowly transformed into affect: over the course of my research, I developed organoleptic preferences for natural wines over conventional ones, but most importantly I noticed an

empathy and benevolence towards the cause of the natural wine movement and a certain homophily with the winemakers I interviewed. This was a point of strength for my interviews with winemakers, as they clearly felt a sense of friendliness and responsive listening from my side, which helped me penetrate the natural wine world and more sensitive issues. However, I am also aware of the dangers of bias that proximity between a researcher and a research object can present.

To overcome this danger and remain aware of any possible bias, I turned to the activist research literature. Activist research emerged in the second half of the twentieth century with (mostly American) feminist scholars (Baksh & Harcourt, 2015) giving a voice to subaltern groups, revealing structural inequalities and forging solidarities between scholars and women's rights groups. Although they are not necessarily new, those methods are not always well understood, notably because the co-production of knowledge is involved, and the researcher's position is not always well-defined. Nonetheless, the activist research approach spread to other academic fields such as research into indigenous groups and decolonising methodologies, and even democratised to the study of social movements, which often involves acute tensions between the researcher's ideological beliefs and the axiological neutrality imposed by scientific observation. Here, I adopt the methodological posture suggested by Siniscalchi and Counihan in their ethnography of food activism, in which the researcher positions themselves "at different vantage points, some at the heart of a movement and others on the periphery." (Siniscalchi & Counihan, 2017, p. 5). If this proximity is properly recognised and analysed, it can become an asset for the purposes of accessing the field rather than an obstacle to the required academic neutrality. This approach allows researchers to "navigate a fine line between being participants and observers, between being involved insiders and detached outsiders, a tension that is perhaps particularly acute in the study of activism." (Siniscalchi & Counihan, 2017, p. 5).

➤ **The myth of impartiality (axiological neutrality)**

As I discuss the position of the researcher towards their research object, I also revisit a pervasive and misleading commonplace regarding "axiological neutrality," the neutrality of an interviewer during an interaction, which is frequently seen as a necessary condition for academic analysis. There is now a vast body of literature debunking the myth of impartiality (Buire, 2012; Jenkins, 1994; Legavre, 1996). While Jenkins and Legrave

highlighted the impossibility of being an “objective observer,” Buire went even further, acknowledging the role of the researcher as “an acting member of the micro-local geopolitics he or she is investigating,” and calling for “a full recognition of the intimate relationships in the field as part of the scientific project itself.” (Buire, 2012, p. 600). Today, the active social role of the researcher is asserted, and therefore the use of the personal “I” instead of the traditional “we” is justified. The stylistic option of this personal tone is thus both a methodological and epistemological affirmation of who is observing, who is talking, and where they come from (Brisson, 2016, p. 13). Following Olivier de Sardan’s recommendations, I engaged in this methodological self-reflexivity, while also constantly seeking to avoid the pitfalls of dramatisation, heroisation or exoticism (Olivier de Sardan, 2006, p. 420).

3.3.1.2. Positioning in the field

The section above focused on my positioning towards my research object (the natural wine movement). I will now address the question of the politics and ethics of conducting two separate fieldwork sessions: one near home (the Bordeaux region is in my own country) and one further away (the Western Cape in South Africa).

➤ **The challenges when working with different sites.**

The comparative dimension of my research calls for some reflexive thoughts on the ambivalence of working on close versus distant fieldwork. Although I actively tried to move away from the “domestic” versus “exotic” distinctions and engage with the literature on the decolonisation of knowledge (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012; De Sousa Santos, 2018; Naylor, Daigle, Zaragocin, Ramírez, & Gilmartin, 2018), I must acknowledge my situatedness: I am a white, female, European, middle-class person with the privilege of academic mobility, *inter alia*. On top of this – and I believe it is worth mentioning in the light of the importance of symbolic capital in the wine world – I have a French wine cultural background, which granted me easier access to the field both in France and in South Africa (even though in other situations I stood out as an educated individual from urban areas with little to no experience of the daily life of wineries).

Having chosen The Western Cape Province as a case study, I also needed to reflect on the challenges posed by working in an ostensibly post-colonial context and therefore how to conduct my research (Butz & Besio, 2004, p. 350). I am aware of the situated multiple and partial knowledge that comes with transcultural fieldwork (Brisson, 2016; Routledge, 2008), but I hope that I have succeeded in this research in remaining alert to the pervasive “effects of colonial discourses and structure of domination on contemporary cultures and societies” in order to “contribute to processes that dismantle those effects.” (Butz and Besio, 2004, p. 350). To avoid the common pitfalls, I paid attention to the different sensibilities at work while in the field and their epistemological implications, and I questioned and reflected on my access to sites and institutional actors, as well as the lingering differences between conducting research at home compared with South Africa. Nevertheless, the Western Cape province was not a foreign field waiting to be discovered, as I had already spent over a year living in Cape Town and had had numerous opportunities to explore the Western Cape for professional and personal reasons. While I am neither a native nor a local, I had had some time and cumulative experiences to familiarise myself with the ever-more complex socio-history and landscapes of South Africa. Finally, being a white researcher in a predominantly white industry with massive and structural issues of racial inequality also allowed me to navigate the field more easily.

➤ **Reflections on research ethics and moral behaviour**

○ *Alcohol in the field, what behaviour to adopt?*

Out of concern for this research – wine being at the heart of this study – I paid attention to the processes and practicalities that underpin wine consumption by the researcher. The literature on alcohol consumption and the associated risks is abundant; however, almost nothing has been said about the various positionalities and ethical behaviours at play for researchers who are embedded in drinking spaces during their fieldwork. Only a few scholars have attempted to reflect on the ethical concerns associated with the presence of alcohol in the field (Gillen, 2016; Palmer & Thompson, 2010; Sin & Yang, 2020). Sin and Yan recalled that “it is not so much that researchers are not involved in such spaces of alcohol consumption, but rather that it is conveniently bypassed, thereby rendering drinking invisible in academic work.” (Sin & Yang, 2020, p. 1031).

In the wine world I immersed myself in, the drinking culture is far from the guilty pleasure, risky and often excessive drinking culture Palmer and Thompson wrote of their study of the Australian Rules football drinking culture (Palmer & Thompson, 2010). On the contrary, especially in the natural wine movement, wine is considered to be a refined product, and wine drinking serves many functions that a researcher who is immersed in the field cannot escape from. Drinking is used to build social relationships and to test the cultural capital of guests and lastly, because wine is the winemaker's final product, drinking wine is expected as a way of appreciating the "craft," especially when visiting domains. Unlike other studies where alcohol consumption is simply part of the research environment, in this study, wine is the research object itself.

Although drinking wine was clearly part of the immersion process, I wanted to avoid the effects associated with alcohol consumption (schmoozing, lack of control, etc.) at all costs while I was conducting my field research, and so I developed tactics to counter these effects as my fieldwork progressed.

"Throughout my fieldwork, I remained vigilant about clearly separating my thesis work from what might resemble a socialisation experience. I used techniques to avoid situations that might fall into the latter category. For instance, during visits to domains and interviews with winemakers, I was expected to engage in wine tasting. As I was arriving alone in my car, I often played the driving card as an excuse not to drink. However, I must admit that despite my attempts to keep the professional and private aspects separate, the generous, convivial and sometimes festive nature that is so characteristic of this environment sometimes got the better of me and I often found myself being invited to lunch or dinner after interviews." (Notes from fieldwork notebook, April 2022).

At first, I tried to systematically compartmentalise my fieldwork practice from social moments. I used a wide variety of excuses to skip the tasting parts, but then I realised that these off-the-record, more informal settings also prompted crucial revelations.

○ *Racism and awkward silences*

In the course of this research, especially while talking to wine farmers in the Western Cape (but in Bordeaux, too!), I experienced racist discourses that were formulated in a more or less explicit manner, but always left me speechless. I did not know how to react when I faced these interventions: should I push the conversation and drive it into a corner in the hope that the informant would elaborate on their thoughts and maybe concede the awkwardness of the argument? Or should I let the remarks flow and assimilate the banalisation of the argument? Playing naive was often the posture I adopted, and so as the

conversation progressed, I was able to decipher whether the racist comment was an unconscious one banalised in the informant's discourse or a breach voluntarily opened up by the interviewee. In most cases, it was the former. Martina Avanza's article in which she reflects on her own behaviour as an ethnographer working on an Italian xenophobic movement (Avanza, 2008) provided great insights into what academic posture to adopt, although in my case the issue was not as systematic, as it was less the relationship to my object that was problematic than it was my relationships with certain (rare) informants.

"During the dinner, I asked Amanda about relationships with international importers, and we got talking about the growing Asian wine market. In the space of a minute, Amanda managed to let out some of the most racist clichés about Asians: they were dirty, invasive, everything "made in China," wine included, was bad quality, their "namaste" spirit was "pissing everybody off," etc. This conversation was followed by an awkward silence from my side. I was rendered speechless. Not noticing the lingering discomfort, Amanda offered to open another bottle of her sparkling wine." (Notes from fieldwork notebook, April 2022).

Part of the researcher's task is to deconstruct discourses and people's narratives, but in some instances, as in the one I related above, the proximity I pretended to share was difficult to maintain. Although such examples were quite rare in my field experience, ordinary racism and colour blindness were much more common. Below are some interview extracts of these instances:

"[*Talking about farm workers*] It is very difficult to work with them, you cannot give them more than one instruction at once. You can't ask them to do two or three things because they are not skilled. They just can't." (Interview winemaker in Western Cape, May 2022)

"*No support from the government either?*

- No, I am all solo. I don't even know if there is government support. Actually, in this country, they won't support someone like me.

- *Because your production is too small?*

- Because of my skin colour." (Interview winemaker in Western Cape, April 2022)

"I see my clients asking me about it, especially the Americans: "Do you have wines made by blacks?" My answer is always "wine is white or red, good or bad" not "black and white" (Interview caviste in Cape Town, December 2021)

In off-the-record moments, conversations often led to winemakers expressing feelings of insecurity about living in South Africa: some felt they needed to buy weapons, others to build larger fences around their farm to protect themselves. Many talked about the rampant poverty in the country, and the ravages of the youth in rural coloured communities caused by drug use. At some moments, I was also able to observe the paternalistic tone of white farmers when talking about their black and coloured employees. One recounted alcoholism issues and all the times his workers called him in the middle of the night to "top up their

electricity” or to “take his wife to the hospital because he had beaten her too hard.” It is hard to analyse these events without falling into an oversimplification that would lead to narratives of “bad white farmers against poor black and coloured workers.” The complexity of the South African social reality must caution the researcher against the risks of reaching hasty conclusions, but we need to stay aware and acknowledge the omnipresence of ordinary racism in the wine field.

In a similar vein, Blondet learned how to navigate her gender (Blondet, 2008) and Gillen his whiteness (Gillen, 2016) through their fields, and I learned to deal with my gender and skin colour when necessary. As the vast majority of informants in this research were white, it may require studying “whiteness” as a social positionality (M. Steyn, 2005) and the evolution of white identity in South Africa, and more generally an investigation of the growing trend of “white studies” to analyse their strategies for maintaining domination (López, 2005). Finally, even though they may be occasional, these incidents and racist or sexist narratives were part of a general disenchantment felt by some figures in the natural wine movement, reminding the researcher of the right distance that needs to be kept from the research object.

3.3.1.3. A necessary note on terminologies and translation

Because of the comparative analysis and the transcultural settings of the fieldwork, the data that inform this thesis were collected in two languages: French and English. The language duality raised a terminological challenge that has been highlighted by De Verdalle et al., who argue that “to compare is inevitably to translate – at the risk of betraying” (De Verdalle, Vigour and Le Bianic 2012, 16). Indeed, as I explained in Chapter 1, the definition and acceptance of the term “natural wine” is still highly contested. The conceptions of the term vary according to its local usage as well. This is true of multiple terminologies. One of my main challenges was to understand the winemakers’ farming practices and the definition they would apply to the chosen terminology. For instance, while the French *vignerons* would almost all adopt the EU definition of *agriculture biologique* (organic farming), I was surprised to realise that for South African winegrowers, organic farming was not the correct translation of *agriculture biologique*, but had a different meaning. This meant that it was quite a challenge to understand the practices and meanings of different terms such as bio, organic, agroecology and regenerative agriculture.

Here, attention is paid to the way terminologies are used in discourses and travelling narratives more than to the technical reality they encompass. Additionally, as a social scientist researching complex social realities, notions and their usage are also part of my situated knowledge they have ontologically multiple meanings, and my analysis focuses on how these meanings travel and hang together. To make this thesis more readable, terms have only been left in their original language where their meaning varies significantly, for instance the difference between a *vigneron* and a winemaker.

3.3.2. *Research ethics and compliance with RGPD norms*

This thesis has been prepared in compliance with the rules of the General Data Protection Regulation, which has recently been imposed by the European Union in academic spheres. The research outline and the data collection guidelines were approved by the CNRS (the National Centre for Scientific Research) at the outset of this research (registration number 2-21756). Throughout my fieldwork, special care was taken to ensure that the privacy and confidentiality of my informants were protected. Before each interview, informants were asked for their free and informed consent, a summary of the research objectives was provided and a consent form was signed. These same objectives were made available on an online page through the LAM website.⁷²

However, for the sake of transparency, the challenges faced with the GDPR norms when trying to anonymize informants must be mentioned. I encountered a number of obstacles during the anonymisation process that might reveal the pitfalls of the GDPR when it comes to accommodating the social sciences, especially ethnographic and field research. First, I was left wondering in numerous instances how to differentiate between what falls within the public domain and what needs to remain anonymous. Winemakers, especially in such a niche segment, cannot remain anonymous. In fact, some take pride in being global public figures: their marketing is based on their personal stories, and dozens of press articles have been written about them in the specialist press. On other occasions, however, this was not the case. As such, telling their stories while trying to preserve their anonymity would be a foolish enterprise, and any reader who is fairly familiar with the leaders of the natural wine movement would easily be able to identify them. In order to avoid such a situation, it was

⁷² More information is available about the protection of the respondents' personal data in the context of this thesis (in French and English) at: <https://www.lam.sciencespobordeaux.fr/rgpd-clementine-chazal/>

decided that a wine domain and the story of its winemaker were public and did not require anonymity. However, the quotes from interviews were all anonymised and pseudonyms were used in order to preserve the interviewees and encourage them to speak freely.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter outlines the methodological design employed in this study. I utilised a combination of traditional sociological and political science methods, including field immersion consisting of semi-structured interviews and participant observations with various stakeholders in the wine industry: wine professionals (producers, merchants, retailers) and representatives from public and private institutions, NGOs, winemakers' collectives, syndicates, etc. This field immersion was supplemented by two additional sets of methods: first, a desktop analysis to gather secondary data such as press cuttings, social media and blog posts, and official industry reports; and second, a social network analysis. I took the initiative to construct the database necessary for social network analysis, employing this relatively innovative method to complement the qualitative analysis with an exploratory and iterative approach, which proved challenging but yielded great results. This methodological bricolage found satisfactory results, especially when dealing with such a niche object, after eighteen months of fieldwork and data collection I could attest that I had reached saturation.

The last part of this chapter provided an opportunity to reflect on my positionality regarding both the research object (the natural wine movement) and the fieldwork itself. In this part, I reveal the genesis of this project, and my previous acquaintance with natural wines prior to embarking on this doctoral journey. I emphasise the significance of intangible experience that greatly influenced the outcomes of this thesis: from hands-on experience in wine production and tasting, to the profound impact of sensory aesthetics and epistemic reflexivity. Additionally, I utilised this chapter as a platform to contemplate the challenges of operating within a field that is largely dominated by white males, and strongly marked by symbolic capital and traditions. I scrutinised how I navigated around these dimensions and, thereby, negotiated my access to my fieldwork.

PART 2 – THE NATURAL WINE MOVEMENT’S DYNAMICS OF RESISTANCE AND CONFLICT IN THE WINE SECTOR : FROM ETHOS TO PRAXIS

The second part of this thesis delves into the conflict dynamics and resistance of the natural wine movement vis-à-vis the wine industry, employing dual perspectives of a social movement of resistance and a transformative market shift. Drawing from Hayagreeva Rao’s analytical framework, I investigate how natural winemakers initiated a precedent and have engaged in resistance against the wine establishment. The movement stemmed from the observation of a multifaceted crisis in the wine industry, leaving some winemakers feeling excluded from conventional channels of redress, or simply feeling completely out of phase with current market norms and expectations. According to Rao, “In such cases, identity movements, informed by a “we feeling” arise to challenge dominant organisations or categories and seek to realise new collective identities by building new organisations that emphasise democracy, participation and empowerment.” (Rao, 2008, p. 45).

Utilising Rao’s conceptual framework, the formation of a collective identity among *rebel winemakers* has unfolded during two distinct phases. Initially, a “hot cause” triggered shared emotions and fosters community cohesion, while later, “cool mobilisations” solidified their shared cognitive framework and sustained their commitment. This thesis employs this framework to explore the emergence of the natural wine movement, from its foundational ethos to its practical manifestations. Firstly, it examines how the multifaceted crisis in the wine sector has galvanised shared emotions among natural winemakers, uniting them against a common adversary: conventional agro-industrial production. This “hot cause” forms the core of the movement’s ethos, sparking insurgent identities in opposition to prevailing norms (chapter 4). Then, it analyses how “cool mobilisations” have facilitated the formation of new identities and engaged winemakers in alternative paths. An examination of the factors underpinning these cool mobilisations helps elucidate the praxis of the natural wine movement (chapter 5). Finally, this part investigates how actors within the natural wine movement have formed new identities and differentiated themselves from other market players through alternative behaviours and experiences, while also questioning the validity of their own claims and their role in unveiling pre-existing hierarchies within the wine industry (chapter 6).

4. CHAPTER 4: The Ethos of the movement: A strong position against 'industrial' methods

Introduction

This chapter analyses the fundamental principles of the natural wine movement, and what unites its actors, the “hot causes” as conceptualised by Rao. It uses a cognitive approach to investigate the values, claims and visions expressed by the movement’s actors and carries out a comprehensive examination of its philosophy – what I call the ethos of the natural wine movement. In order to do so, I review the existing literature on subaltern transnational mobilisations. The positioning of the natural wine movement within the broader scholarly discourse is accomplished through the application of a ‘funnel’ approach (Figure 21).

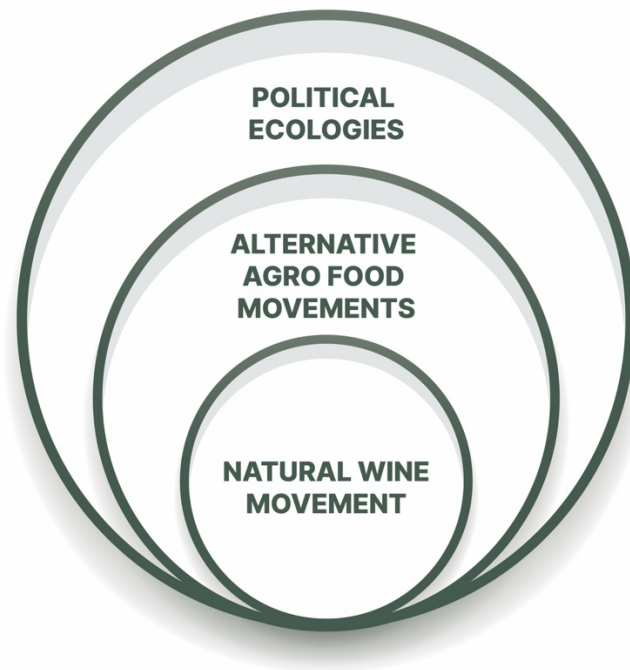


Figure 21. A funnel approach to understanding literatures feeding the natural wine movement. Chazal 2024

Specifically, the first section examines the literature of political ecologies in order to comprehend the intricate issues surrounding the management of natural resources, power dynamics and hierarchies and the resulting disparities. It goes on to explore various strands from the literature on collective mobilisation, including alternative agro-food systems, food activism and anti-corporate movements. I argue that there are proximities between this stream of literature and the ethos of the natural wine movement: in other words, the founding vision and philosophy underpinning these movements and their transnational

emergence and novel forms of collective action are vecteurs for gaining insights into the natural wine movement. Two case studies serve as instructive analogies: *Via Campesina* for its transnational dimension and the Slow Food movement because it shares a similar ethos. The overview of this body of literature helps me to understand and frame the praxis and ethos of the natural wine movement.

To go further, there are two ways to portray the natural wine movement, which I explore in the second part of this chapter: what it stands for and what it stands against. I first investigate its founding vision and philosophy by looking at the way it asks novel questions about the relationship between producers and their environment and, at a deeper level, revisits the nature-culture dichotomy. More concretely, I argue that the natural wine movement can be encapsulated by two core principles: a hands-on approach in the vineyards and a hands-off approach in the cellar. While the hands-on approach in the vineyard is nothing new and has affinities with other agro-ecological practices such as organic or biodynamic principles, it is the distinctive approach ‘to the cellar’ that sets actors in the natural wine movement apart and provides them with a more comprehensive and holistic framework. I argue that natural winemakers position themselves as stewards of their land and natural resources and as ecological carers. Conversely, what closely unites participants in the natural wine movement is a collective opposition to certain phenomena that goes beyond their shared values. The different branches of the movement are bound together by their resolute opposition to a variety of entities that are often identified as the Fordist agricultural system, capitalist market forces or the standardisation of production. This anti-corporate, anti-conventional and anti-industrial stance serves as a common rallying point against a shared adversary, and encompasses diverse realities within the natural wine movement.

This chapter helps to position the natural wine movement’s ethos and standing values. It seeks to make a contribution to the literature on collective mobilisations, and on transnational alternative agro-food movements more specifically, by connecting it to a political ecology approach.

4.1. Roots and related literature feeding the movement.

4.1.1. *Political ecologies*

The political ecology literature is used as a means of understanding the dynamics of power relationships over natural resources and their management, but in this study the focus is on the management of vineyards and grapes. From this perspective, the natural wine movement is a subaltern group in the wine industry that creates resistance against and alternatives to the order imposed by mainstream agro-industrial actors. Its political agenda includes redefining the meanings of power relationships and their influence on the management of natural resources. This study can, I maintain, be included within the broader community of the practice of political ecologies.

Political ecologies are used as a way of explaining complex socio-environmental dynamics, with the aim of understanding the interactions between nature and society and the processes by which humans alter, manage, and govern natural elements, including land and resources. Rocheleau's definition of political ecologies also incorporates elements of Marxist theory when she describes them as "the study of uneven distribution and control over 'natural resources' in structural hierarchies of political and economic power." (Rocheleau, 2015, p. 70). Some of the key themes of political ecologies are access to, and control and governance of, natural resources, resistance against dominant forces and upheavals in the way of life of a local population linked to environmental change. Over the past few decades, this emerging field has embraced a growing number of scholars who initially came from geography, but now also encompass disciplines such as anthropology, development studies, environmental sociology and political science. They share a common interest "in the condition of the environment and the people who live and work within it." (Robbins, 2012, p. 13).

Political ecologies are an explicit alternative to "apolitical" ecologies, the perspective that previously prevailed in ecological discourses. Indeed, certain issues such as ecological crises or environmental changes were traditionally solely addressed by using arguments that emphasised the limitations of nature, thus disregarding any form of analysis of the political implications surrounding the distribution, control and power dynamics associated with natural resources. In contrast, political ecologies assert that the political dimension is an inherent aspect of ecological crises. A good example of this, and one that is particularly

relevant to this research, is the prevailing argument that ‘modern’ techniques of production, exploitation and conservation are the only viable path forward. This vision is generally grounded in a commitment to ‘economic efficiency’ (Robbins, 2012, p. 18), but it tends to ignore the significant influence of political economic forces and governance decisions. This holds particularly true in the context of wine production, where apolitical (or non-political) ecology uses agriculture and oenology techniques as an uncontested synonym for progress, and therefore addresses recommendations that fit with a higher yield (and thus higher income) strategy. Conversely, political ecology scholars tend to take greater account of other political and economic factors that might impact environmental change and “accept the idea that costs and benefits associated with environmental change are for the most part distributed among actors unequally ... reinforc[ing] or reduc[ing] existing social and economic inequalities ... [and holding] political implications in terms of the altered power of actors in relation to other actors” (Bryant & Bailey, 1997, p. 28). In other words, political ecologies assert that no analysis of ecological transformation is complete without serious attention being paid to who profits and who loses from these changes, and “without exploring who takes what from whom” (Robbins, 2012, p. 59). Consequently, almost all the research in the political ecology literature engages theoretically with broader discussions on political economy (Blaikie & Brookfield., 1987, p. 17).

The main differences between French “*écologie politique*” and Anglo-Saxon “political ecologies”

Caution must be used when translating the concept from English to French because of its distinct meaning in French. Specifically, French *écologie politique* can be understood as an examination of the progressive incorporation of environmental concerns into the political arena, or more tangibly the rise of ecological values and activism in political parties and campaigns. Gautier and Hautdidier describe *écologie politique* as “an intellectual script for France’s green movement” (Gautier & Hautdidier, 2015, p. 57), thereby emphasising the potential pitfalls of translating it. It is therefore understandable that most of the literature used in this study on political ecologies is drawn from Anglophone sources.

Where does the subject of political ecologies come from? The literature dates back to the 1970s and circulated widely throughout the 1990s. Blaikie’s ground-breaking political economy analysis of soil erosion in Kenya remains a foundational text (Blaikie, 1985) and led to a proliferation of similar research. Various sub-currents of political ecology literature emerged following Blaikie’s work: neo-Marxist (Hardt & Negri, 2001; Harvey, 2001), post-structuralist (Escobar, 1995) and indigenous and decolonial subfields (Adams, 2003;

Middleton, 2015; Mignolo & Escobar, 2013), as well as feminist political ecologies (Rocheleau & Nirmal, 2015). The field has also been shaped by research activism, especially by its Latin American branch. Political ecology practitioners often engage in experimental participatory forms of research that are closely linked to social movements and grassroots groups.

Textbox 8. The main differences between French “écologie politique” and Anglo-Saxon “political ecologies”.

The ever-changing metabolism of industrial economies has given rise to an increasing number of ecological distribution conflicts, and consequently to a vast number of mobilisations for environmental justice (Martinez-Alier et al., 2016). The agro-food industry is no exception to this: in fact, arable lands are a fertile breeding ground for politics and numerous studies on political ecologies have highlighted agricultural rivalries around modes of production, access to land and the management of natural resources, among other topics. In this study, I argue that the natural wine movement and the resistance that emanates from it and against it in the wine sector fit into the wider field of environmental conflicts. Indeed, it matches most of the criteria defined by Martinez Alier et al. (Martinez-Alier et al., 2016): the tensions begin during the extraction phase (grape production in this case), occur in rural areas (like 65% of other environmental justice conflicts) and involve a complex network of actors. Last but not least, it uses certain collective actions and forms of mobilisation in terms of a strategic, tactical and discursive repertoire that can be traced to the social movement theory (Neveu, 2011; Tilly, 1984).

4.1.2. The study of alternative agri-food movements and food activism

Following the funnel research strategy, I now turn to alternative agro-food movements and food activism, two strands that are inherently linked, and also helpful for the purposes of understanding the emergence of the natural wine movement. In this section, I set out the proximities between the natural wine movement and other alternative agro-food movements, both being subaltern and placed-based mobilisations that share a common ground in rising up against mainstream agro-industrial actors.

4.1.2.1. Alternative agro-food movements

The literature on alternative agro-food movements (AAFM) originated as a response to the economic crises of the 1980s, particularly in expanding urban spaces. It has stimulated a significant body of research that encompasses studies on food security (Maye, 2013),

consumer mobilisations (Dubuisson-Quellier, Lamine, & Le Velly, 2011), local food circuits (Starr, 2010; Winter, 2003), the food justice movement (Wekerle, 2004) and more recently food sovereignty (Hrabanski, 2011; Thivet, 2017; Wiebe, 2023). The transition from “food security” to “food sovereignty” entailed a clear change of paradigm: while food security was concerned with ensuring access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food for all, food sovereignty emphasises local control and decision-making power over the food system, empowering communities to shape their own agricultural and food policies. This more recent paradigm also critiques the global food system and challenges the dominant industrialised agriculture model (Wiebe, 2023), calling for a re-embedding of production in local ecologies. My study falls squarely within the latter paradigm. The various focuses of AAFM studies can include the struggles of peasant farmers (Desmarais, 2010), fair trade production (Dubuisson-Quellier & Lamine, 2008), organic or biodynamic methods of agriculture (Francis et al., 2008; Kondoh, 2015), urban farming (Bricas, Lamine & Casabianca, 2013), community food-sharing programs (Loh & Agyeman, 2019) and social movements against GMO (Hayes, 2007) or multinational food companies and agribusinesses. These instances of AAFM studies and many others make the compelling case that “the crises facing the hegemonic global food system are inseparable from the systemic and perpetual crises of capitalism” (Smith Maguire, Watson, & Lang, 2017, p. 500).

One might wonder why the natural wine movement should be associated with this literature. Understandably, doubts may arise for the simple reason that wine is not food. Indeed, wine has no (or very little) nutritional value and does not fall within the subsistence economy, and so does not involve challenges to food security. It also obeys completely different rules of production and marketing. The paradigm shift from food security to food sovereignty in AAFM studies partly answers this question, but for the most part the natural wine movement seems to mirror – or at least draw influences from – AAFMs, from the way they organise and their political claims to their subaltern and subversive characteristics. This is what I intend to demonstrate below.

Studies of alternative agro-food movements identify the different ways of mobilising all the actors along the agro-food global value chain in the negotiation of a food system: from growers and producers to intermediaries such as distributors and sellers, and finally to consumers. This work, however, focuses less on the consumer side and more on the perspective of producers (and to a lesser extent distributors). Nonetheless, the link to

consumers is still present in different forms: whether acknowledging that education is a keystone in the construction of an identity for the movement or that citizens' engagement in alternative forms of trade to the conventional market is contingent on educating consumers to make them active players and appeal to their individual consciousness. In AAFMs as in the natural wine movement, one of the objectives is to enhance the connection between producers and consumers, recreating links and transparency all along the value chain "from the farm to the table," or in this case "from the grape to the glass".

The literature on AAFMs originates from the broader literature on collective action and social mobilisations. The term "alternative agro-food movements" describes movements that operate on the margins of mainstream industrial food circuits, and is used to describe anti-corporate movements that have agriculture or food matters at the heart of their struggle. According to Wekerle, AAFMs generate "alternative models that relocalize food systems and de-link them from the corporate global food system" (Wekerle, 2004, p. 378). This notion of de-linking strategies is used by Wekerle to describe movements that challenge the prevailing globalised corporate food system by engaging in different production strategies. By creating precedents, AAFMs show that alternative ways of producing are possible. In AAFMs, the adage "get big or get out" is counteracted by alternative producers who are staying small and becoming much more profitable by using product differentiation strategies (Starr, 2010, p. 480). Following Starr's reasoning, Goodman argues that AAFMs create new economic spaces that are more capable of "withstanding the countervailing, disembedding forces of globalization, unfettered markets and increasingly complex division of labour and corporate power." (Goodman, 2003, p. 2). As part of a new social movement theory, AAFMs are an increasingly prominent feature of rural politics (Woods, 2008). The diversity of contemporary rural social movements is reflected in their "size and scale, character, organization, tactics, campaign focus, and ideological inclination" (Woods, 2008, p. 131). The new rural mobilisations reveal a new wave of militant farmers' groups such as natural winemakers who are actively engaged in the processes of remaking rural society.

AAFMs are also closely tied to the concept of food activism, which is particularly useful for understanding the form of militancy at play in the natural wine movement. Food activism can be defined as "efforts by people to change the food system across the globe by modifying the way they produce, distribute, and/or consume food." (Siniscalchi &

Counihan, 2017, p. 3). Like AAFMs, it targets the capitalist system of production, distribution, consumption and commercialisation. However, its focus is on the diverse forms of dissent and resistance initiated by actors within the food system, and its objective is to analyse “activists’ discourses, values, practices, forms of resistance, political and economic dynamics, challenges, and successes.” (Siniscalchi & Counihan, 2017, p. 4). Food activism can range from acts of resistance that go from non-participation in the hegemonic systems and democratic acts of a more equitable distribution of resources to more radical social action taken to seek a positive structural transformation (Shreck, 2005). These forms of militancy can be spontaneous or organised. Many of the initiatives that originated from the natural wine movement fall within these continuums of specific food activism.

Studies of AAFMs and food activism in general are conducive to ethnographic fieldwork and favour empirically grounded approaches. They require investigations of place-based, socially embedded alternative food practices, and are therefore often conducted by anthropologists or social scientists. Like the scholars who study food militancy initiatives, I pay great attention to the natural wine movement’s processual dimensions and its transformations, proliferation and internal tensions, from the dynamics at play in Bordeaux and in the Western Cape.

4.1.2.2. Two case studies as instructive analogies to the natural wine movement

Two case studies can serve as instructive analogies in order to obtain a better grasp of the dynamics of the natural wine movement in terms of both structure, as a transnational proliferating phenomenon, and a basis of values and general philosophy stemming from its actors.

➤ *Via Campesina*, the transnationalisation of AAFMs

One of the most studied initiatives in the AAFM literature is the global *Via Campesina* campaign, which has received the attention of numerous scholarly publications (Borras, 2008; Desmarais, 2010; Hrabanski, 2011; Siniscalchi & Counihan, 2017; Thivet, 2017) because it is a prime example of a transnationalisation of collective action and has reshaped global debates on food sovereignty to a considerable degree. It started out in 1993 as an international farmers’ movement against neoliberal globalisation. In search of legitimacy

and recognition, some of the representative branches of *Via Campesina* took advantage of a window of opportunity provided by the 1996 World Food Summit at the headquarters of the FAO in Roma, to bring the notion of food sovereignty to the forefront of international debates. *Via Campesina* brings together over 140 organisations in more than 50 countries, and has created an extensive network of anti-GMO activist groups, environmentalists and indigenous NGOs, as well as farmers' coalitions in developed and developing countries alike. It has established itself as a voice for anti-globalisation while working on the promotion of policy concepts around food sovereignty. While *Via Campesina*'s main focus is on sovereignty, it has also embraced diverse struggles, including land rights, indigenous and agroecological practices and domestic market protection. Some of its branches also emphasise gender, race or class equality, while others focus on citizens' participation and democracy-based markets.

The *Via Campesina* movement was a catalyst for mobilisations of small farmers across borders and "allowed them to become a voice of resistance increasingly heard in international and domestic policies" (Thivet, 2017, p. 9). In line with Siméant's argument on the transnationalisation of collective actions (Siméant, 2010), the *Via Campesina* global initiative demonstrates that alternative agro-food movements are experiencing an internationalisation of their scope. Food justice movements are becoming more and more active in building transnational networks to challenge the global food system based on visions of a more just society. While their activities are developed around locally grounded alternatives, they also act at various levels. *Via Campesina* showcases a specific type of agro-food activism organised across borders. It is at the forefront of international campaigns against neoliberal globalization, and coordinates the actions and interests of multiple peasants' and farmers' initiatives (Desmarais, 2010). It serves as a prime example of the internationalisation of food activism struggles, in line with Siniscalchi and Counihan's affirmation that "the actions and ideologies of food activism are connected through transnational flows, like those linking peasants in India and Brazil through *Via Campesina*'s struggles for food sovereignty" (Siniscalchi & Counihan, 2017, p. 3). Although *Via Campesina* has succeeded in building coalitions with international institutions, NGOs and local groups (such as the *Confédération Paysanne* in France) in order to convey an alternative means of agro-production and a reassertion of peasant identity internationally, it should be noted that its global project has also been marked by

internal tensions among some of its members, with diverging visions and inequalities in terms of available resources among its various branches (Desmarais, 2010).

➤ **The Slow Food movement, an embedded agri-food counterculture**

Another initiative that has been featured in various academic analyses of food activism is the Slow Food movement (Hendrikx & Lagendijk, 2022; Lagendijk, 2004; Laudan, 2004; Simonetti, 2012; Siniscalchi, 2013; Siniscalchi & Counihan, 2017). It was born in North-West Italy in the mid-eighties out of demonstrations and protests against the arrival in Italy of new fast food chains like McDonald's. Shortly thereafter, the leader of the embryonic movement, Folco Portinari, an Italian writer and activist, published the first Slow Food Manifesto. The Manifesto was in the form of a political statement against fast food and argued for a return to a production and consumption approach that respected nature and the rights of small producers. The movement spread rapidly on an international scale and is currently present in over 150 countries, with over 1,500 local chapters (Hendrikx & Lagendijk, 2022). It is more than an international coalition of small farmers' initiatives: it also includes not-for-profit entities such as the Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity, as well as its University of Gastronomic Studies and Wine Bank and the Terra Madre Foundation. In this sense, Slow Food is at once a social-political movement, an association and a company.

The Slow Food movement stands in clear opposition to the industrial fast agro-food system. The term “slow” needs to be understood as a call to “take time”, to enjoy conviviality around the table and culinary crafts. Praising slowness as a pillar of the movement, Siniscalchi comments: “Speed is that of industrial agriculture, which is opposed by slow production that respects the seasons and the land, which small-scale producers and food artisans are supposed to practice, and which would preserve the diversity of species and products. Fast refers to globalization, which standardizes, while slow emphasizes attention to the specific production characteristics of different environments, and to their climatic and environmental characteristics, considered to be the basis of product quality” (Siniscalchi, 2013, p. 137). Along the same lines, Slow Food's Italian website states: “Slow Food works to safeguard local cuisine, traditional products and plant and animal species at risk of extinction; it supports a new model of agriculture that is less intensive and cleaner.”

Although the movement encompasses a variety of ideas and practices across the world, spanning from epicurean and conviviality matters to campaigns against food inequalities, food deserts and anti-GMO agriculture, the movement's national chapters differ in their commitment and strategies depending on their local priorities. As such, Slow Food is multifaceted. What is particularly interesting beyond its transnational dimension, however, is its positioning as a subaltern movement, with a heritage that has clearly been inspired by the counter-culture and anti-consumerism of the 1960s and 1970s (Simonetti, 2012). Slow Food's rebellious producer/consumer narrative has created unexpected coalitions of actors across the globe.

➤ **The natural wine movement within the broader constellation of AAFM initiatives**

The idea of a social movement as a collective consisting of 'many faces in one' is not a new one (Hendriks & Lagendijk, 2022), and the examples of *Via Campesina* and the Slow Food movement are further illustrations of this phenomenon of the interlinking of multiple grassroots practices. I argue that the natural wine movement also falls into this format. As the two examples above highlight, these transnational phenomena are rarely homogenised; rather, they are multifaceted and embodied in many different places. In his analysis of emerging rural social movements, Woods suggests "a shift in the tenor and architecture of rural politics: from rigid, hierarchical organizations to fluid and polycentric groupings; from electoral and policy interventions to direct action and mediations; from sectoral representation to integrative campaigning and coalition building; from economic bargaining to post-materialist and identity politics." (Woods, 2008, p. 129). These dimensions apply to new forms of alternative agro-food movements such as the ones I have cited above.

Apart from the similar structures and shared international proliferation of these movements, there is a comparable ideology that drives them all: their objective is to fight the large agri-food corporations that control mainstream markets and send small peasant farmers spiralling into poverty. Slow Food and *Via Campesina* are twin philosophies on which the natural wine movement can feed. They are embedded into some sort of counterculture and build their narratives and main struggles around opposition to the Fordist agriculture system. They all involve a moral and political dimension of individual choices: in the case of the natural wine movement, the moral choices are geared towards how to grow grapes

and how to make wine, but the general philosophy remains the same. Finally, they all exist at multiple levels, in settings that vary from local to global. Other movements, such as the permaculture movement (Centemeri, 2019a, 2019b), can be added to these constellations of rural alternative agro-food movements, food activism initiatives and place-based resistance. The philosophy of the permaculture movement, which promotes “earth care, people care and fair share”, is described by Laura Centemeri as sitting somewhere “between the miracle cure for the ecological crisis and the silent revolution” (Centemeri, 2019a, p. 9). Like the natural wine movement, it is closely linked to issues of agroecology and allows for deeper reflections on the state of the planet and the ecologisation of every sector. However, some differences between the natural wine movement and Slow Food or *Via Campesina* should be mentioned. First, the natural wine movement seems to be less formally organised: it has no official representative or even official leadership voice, and is rather disorganised. Second, unlike Slow Food, the main activity of the natural wine movement is focused on production more than consumption. Third, as this thesis will explain in greater detail below (See Chapter 6.2), the question of the socioeconomic belonging of natural winemakers must be tackled in order to fully understand how and to what extent they position themselves as subaltern and marginal in the global wine industry.

In conclusion, it is clear that the natural wine movement is not an isolated phenomenon. Instead, it has emerged as part of the broader constellation of phenomena to which the literature on political ecology, alternative agro-food systems and food activism has been dedicating attention in recent times. However, while initiatives such as *Via Campesina* or the Slow Food movement have been the subject of several academic publications, little has been written to date about the natural wine movement from a scholarly perspective. Moreover, of the few attempts that have been made to describe the natural wine movement, none have explicitly used the perspectives of political ecology or food activism to analyse the phenomenon. I argue that these two analytical frameworks (PE and AAFM) are a good match for understanding the founding principles and core values held dear by actors in the natural wine movement. In the second section of this chapter, I consider the range of political values held by natural winemakers in different places and at different times. It retraces my dialogue with various field informants and seeks to give a broad, yet nuanced, picture of the motivations and beliefs that drive natural winemakers.

4.2. What does the natural wine movement stand for?

Because the natural wine movement is still a process in the making, a movement that lacks clear borders and official voices, the range of claims, beliefs and values can vary greatly from one region to the other, and even from one winemaker to the next. However, the common denominator, and the foundation of this new philosophy of making and thinking about wine, seems to be a renewed relational approach to nature. By focusing on the producers' narratives, I now examine the ambiguities, tensions and novelties of natural winemaking.

4.2.1. *Building on a new philosophy and relationship to the environment*

The ethos of the natural wine movement intervenes at every step along the commodity chain of wine production and involves a transformation of the production system. The political fascination of wine must be recalled here: it is a product that stimulates imaginaries, with a high economic and symbolic value. With the growing awareness of environmental issues among producers, such as the impact of viticulture on ecosystems and climate change, not only is the production process challenged, but the cultural aspects and imaginaries surrounding wine are also questioned and need renewed representations. This increasing awareness has opened a window of opportunity for the wine sector to reflect on its production processes and the meanings associated with them. Thus, actors in the natural wine movement (re)invent practices that seek to respect the terroir, the vines, the grapes and the wine by promoting the intrinsic naturalness of their product. This section draws from fieldwork observations and the narratives of winemakers engaged in the natural wine movement to continue the work begun by previous authors (Krzywoszynska, 2012; Pineau, 2017; Viecelli, 2021) on defining the core values and philosophy of actors in the natural wine movement. The ethos of the natural wine movement is encapsulated by two principles: a hands-on approach in the vineyard and a hands-off approach in the cellar.

4.2.1.1. A hands-on approach in the vineyard

“You can make bad wine with good grapes, but you can’t make good wine with bad grapes. And even the most skilled winemaker cannot make a great wine without a great vineyard to work from.” (Goode & Harrop, 2013, p. 111)

The backbone of non-conventional winemaking, be it organic, biodynamic or natural, is this idea of paying attention to the quality of the raw material and the grape that is being

grown. This translates directly into dedicating time, care and attention to the viticulture stage.

Organic and biodynamic agricultural methods offer an alternative to the development of synthetic chemical treatments (such as chemical fungicides, pesticides, herbicides, insecticides and fertilisers). Even today, vines are among the largest consumers of phytosanitary products, which have a profound effect on the soil and eventually lead to biological degradation and soil erosion. The damage caused by chemical treatments impacts not only vineyards and their ecosystems but also the quality of the wine. As early as 1989, viticultural experts Claude and Lydia Bourguignon alerted us to these dangers: “It has to be recognised that the violent techniques developed by agronomists after the 1960s, the excessive use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides, and above all total weed control and the cessation of tillage have led to a decline in wine quality.” (Bourguignon & Bourguignon, 2015). Many natural winemakers draw parallels between conventionally farmed parcels and a “moon-like soil”, a dead soil:

“We started [*the conversion toward organic*] pretty much immediately, which was stupid because we were sending our grapes to the coop. But when we came the soils were – you see the white here on the wall? – that was the colour of our soils in the vineyards! It was the result of 1963 to 1997 – so 45 years essentially – of chemical fertilisers and Roundup! And not a single growing thing in the vineyard! Not a blade of grass, nothing!” (Interview Robert, winemaker in Western Cape, 21 January 2022)

This concern about causing soil degradation and subsequently endangering ecosystems is expressed by many, including Cyan, an organic certification consultant:

“In South Africa, farms are used to full surface pesticide spraying...

- *No moderation?*
- No! Nothing! They call it “neat farming.” If there’s a little bit of weeds, then you’re a sloppy farmer. It’s a cycle that we need to break. But we’re seeing it already: the younger guys are coming and asking the right questions: “What would happen if I don’t use this?” looking for better quality products, better soil.” (Interview Cyan, ECOCERT representative, 21 February 2022)

The picture is not much different in Bordeaux, as noted by those winemakers:

“It’s different today. We can no longer ignore the damage of industrial viticulture, and we must question our practices. But back in the day, there was no alternative path.” (Interview Gilles, winemaker in Bordeaux, 27 April 2021⁷³)

⁷³ *My translation of:* “Aujourd’hui c’est différent on ne peut plus ignorer les dégâts de la viticulture industrielle, on se doit de questionner nos pratiques. Mais à l’époque il n’y avait pas de voie alternative.”

“Monoculture, regardless of its nature, is dangerous and sad. Therefore, there are many things to be done so as not to depend on a single crop.” (Interview Damien, winemaker in Bordeaux, 12 May 2021⁷⁴)

Change is on the way in the Western Cape and Bordeaux, and it is arriving from different sources, including sustainable, regenerative agriculture and organic, agro-ecology and biodynamic techniques. The number of grape growers who have begun to question conventional farming methods is growing constantly, and whatever branch of viticulture method is adopted by natural winemakers, they all agree to establish the frontier at what is called in French *agriculture raisonnée* [sustainable agriculture in English]. In their view, *agriculture raisonnée* is in fact “unreasonable”, as it allows (even moderate) use of chemical products (Morel, 2013, p. 61). They therefore reject *agriculture raisonnée* and engage in more radical practices that deviate from conventional modern techniques. But how does one qualify what falls within conventional or modern viticulture techniques? Is everything that is modern rejected by natural winemakers? Many natural wine producers highlight the fact that industrial agro-production and chemical treatments are in fact relatively recent and are therefore not to be taken for granted.

“I’ll give you a quick lesson: before 1870-1880 – that is, before the introduction of American vines, of phylloxera, and all that mess – well, the vine, pfff... The Romans didn’t treat either. In fact, treatments are very recent. So, when we say “traditional methods,” no, it’s been traditional since 1890, since we grafted vines! Before that, there were no issues with copper and treatments.” (Interview Serge, Confédération Paysanne representative, 19 June 2021⁷⁵)

“It’s essential to remember that chemistry has only existed for a hundred years, since the end of the First World War. Before that, everyone was into organic, but it wasn’t called organic. For me, organic should be considered to be the conventional method.” (Interview Antoine, winemaker in Bordeaux, 10 May 2021⁷⁶)

Many winemakers defend viticultural techniques from “the old days” (*pratiques d’antan*), including the reintroduction of animal traction and practices that encourage manual work in the vineyards, and because manual labour cannot be upscale, natural winemaking is invariably associated with small-scale, artisanal production. But although they reject products and techniques inherited from the industrial revolution, most argue that making

⁷⁴ My translation of: “La monoculture quelle qu’elle soit est dangereuse et triste. Et donc il y a plein de choses à faire pour ne pas dépendre d’une seule culture.”

⁷⁵ My translation of: “Je vous fais un petit cours : avant 1870-1880, c’est-à-dire avant l’introduction des vignes américaines, du phylloxera et tout le bordel, en fait la vigne pfff... Et les romains ne traitaient pas. En fait c’est très récent les traitements. Donc quand on dit “façons traditionnelles”, non, c’est traditionnel depuis 1890, depuis que l’on a des pieds greffés ! Avant il n’y avait pas de problème de cuivre et de traitements.”

⁷⁶ My translation of: “Mais il faut se rappeler que la chimie n’existe que depuis cent ans, depuis la fin de la première guerre mondiale. Avant tout monde était en bio, mais ça ne s’appelait pas bio. Pour moi, le conventionnel devrait être le bio.”

natural wine is not the equivalent of making wine as it was made at the beginning of the 20th century: “We don’t make wine just to make wine. We envision wines of the 21st century. If you want to make a living from your wine, it has to be contemporary. If you make wines today the same as yesterday, you won't survive; you have to adapt”⁷⁷ commented a winemaker from Bordeaux. The shift away from conventional farming is more (and most often) embodied in a generational shift in which natural winemakers have broken away from their families’ agricultural habitus and business models, as Anne explains:

“It's a challenging generational leap. Let's say that they [my parents] practised a kind of agriculture that didn't suit me. They were part of the big movement of the 1960s-1970s that originated from the post-war era and all the intensification. So they had a very intensive way of producing, thanks to which they paid for my education, so that's cool, I'm not complaining. I was able to study engineering. I didn't want to follow in their footsteps, however, and they wouldn't have accepted a change as drastic as I would have proposed... So to maintain good family relations... and also, they didn't believe in it; they couldn't see me doing this type of thing.” (Interview Anne, winemaker in Bordeaux, 26 May 2021⁷⁸)

Another particularly significant dimension of their viticultural approach is the particular emphasis placed on the time spent in the vineyard. This time and care dimension is very present in my interview notes:

“I think farming and winemaking are about exploring the soil and time and exploring the limits. It wouldn’t be at all attractive to do conventional farming. It wouldn't make any sense. It’s up to us to understand how plants behave, and luckily now we’re finding out so much more about the nature of plants and how they talk to each other.” (Interview Nile, winemaker in Western Cape, 20 May 2022)

“You need to know each vineyard on the farm because they’ve all got a different way of growing. Some of the vineyards can handle the competition better, so you know you don't have to start with them. You mustn’t focus on a neat-looking vineyard. You need to be very functional about it, maybe do some cutting as close as you can. We use sheep here, for instance, so that helps a bit.” (Interview Marsh, winemaker in Western Cape, 19 January 2022)

“That’s crucial. And it probably sounds like a cliché, but wine is 90% made in the vineyard. It’s so important to get out there and break your ankles on the rocks and just be there to have an idea of what you’re dealing with.” (Interview Justin, winemaker in Western Cape, 6 April 2022)

⁷⁷ *My translation of:* “Nous ne faisons pas du vin juste pour faire du vin, mais imaginons des vins du 21ème siècle, si tu veux vivre de ton vin il faut qu'il soit contemporain. Si tu fais les vins d'aujourd'hui pareil qu'hier tu n'en vivras pas, il faut s'adapter.”

⁷⁸ *My translation of:* “C'est un saut de génération qui est difficile, disons qu'ils [*mes parents*] avaient un genre d'agriculture qui ne me convenait pas. Ils avaient fait partie du grand mouvement des années 60-70, issue de l'après-guerre et tout d'intensification. Et donc ils avaient une manière de produire très intensive, grâce à ça ils m'ont payé mes études donc c'est cool, je ne m'en plains pas j'ai pu faire des études d'ingénieur, par contre je n'avais pas envie de continuer dans leur sillage. Et eux n'auraient pas accepté un revirement aussi brutal que ce que j'aurais pu proposer. Donc pour garder des bonnes relations de famille... Et puis ils n'y croyaient pas, ils ne me voyaient pas dans ce truc-là.”

Natural winemakers compare this attention and time spent in the vineyard to conventional farming, where the farm runs according to an economic vision (in terms of costs and benefits).

“In my opinion, natural and biodynamic winemakers, and a good number of organic winemakers, are aware of this reality, whereas if you take someone who is conventional, they often calculate a balance based on expenses and profits. They have an employee who prunes and another who does the treatments and that's it; they won't check on their vines throughout the year.” (Interview Gabriel, INAO representative, 25 August 2021⁷⁹)

This different temporal dimension is often linked in winemakers' narratives to an emotional, sometimes even spiritual, discourse. Amanda, a winemaker in the Western Cape explains: “The trick at certain times of the year is to understand the rhythm of nature in your vineyard. You don't even need to write it down; you would just feel it.⁸⁰” They also emphasise that with time spent in the vineyard comes new knowledge of the vines' cycle and a better understanding of vineyard ecosystems: “I work on observation, you know. What you see is what you get,⁸¹” Ryan confirms. It is a learning-by-doing process that also allows winemakers to avoid being dogmatic about certain modes of culture such as agroecology or biodynamics, but rather to adapt the general guidelines to the needs of their own farms. This philosophy might be summed up by a Chinese proverb I overheard during my days working in the vineyard: “The footstep of the farmer is the best soil fertiliser.”

Johan Reyneke, a pioneer of biodynamic farming, claims to be: “organic by design, not by neglect”

In this sense, Johan Reyneke's vision is quite revealing when it comes to understanding the need for natural winemakers to invest extra time and effort in their vineyards and to debunk the idea of “lazy farmers” that can sometimes be heard in conventional discourses. Reyneke is probably one of the most acclaimed grape growers of the Western Cape, and is the only winemaker in the region with Demeter biodynamic certification. Many producers admit to being greatly inspired by Reyneke's approach to farming. As one producer put it: “In terms of farming, Johan Reyneke is a legend. He is for us the Mecca of farming in this part of the world. And he manages to spread a kind of wisdom around him as there are a lot of farms around him that are now starting to take some of his philosophy – not all his philosophies or all his practices, but bits of them.”⁸²

⁷⁹ *My translation of:* “Donc à mon avis le vigneron nature et biodynamie et une bonne partie des vignerons bios sont conscients de cette réalité. Alors que si vous prenez quelqu'un qui est en conventionnel et bien souvent il calcule un bilan avec des charges et des gains, il a un salarié qui va tailler et un autre qui va faire les traitements et point barre, il ne va pas voir ses vignes de l'année.”

⁸⁰ Interview Amanda, winemaker in Western Cape, 21 April 2022

⁸¹ Interview Ryan, winemaker in Western Cape, 22 April 2022

⁸² Interview Thomas, winemaker in Western Cape, 11 May 2022

When Reyneke first started farming organically in 1992 (and later biodynamically), however, his peers laughed at him: the yields from his first harvests were terrible, and the vineyards suffered from serious mildew and other pests. He recalls the embarrassing moment when he had to take his grapes to the local cooperative and the driver refused to drive the tractor because “the grapes were so bad!” After consulting university experts and reading intensively about agroecology, he realised that he was “organic by neglect and had to become organic by design⁸³”. From that day forth, he invested enormous effort to understand the life of his vineyard’s vines, soil and surrounding ecosystems. He now uses the adage “organic by design” to explain the time and effort he spent in the vineyard when he turned to non-conventional farming practices. Over the years, Johan has proved to his peers that organic and biodynamic viticultural methods are possible in the Stellenbosch area, and he is now nationally recognised as a pioneer of alternative viticulture.

Portraits and field notes 1. Johan Reyneke, a pioneer of biodynamic farming, claims to be “organic by design, not by neglect.”

To sum up, the vision and practices of natural winemakers in the vineyards are not new. In fact, they are the legacy of accumulated agricultural practices such as organic, biodynamic regenerative agriculture and even agro-forestry. The major difference between natural winemakers and the other trends reported above is their distinctive approach in the cellar. Indeed, the specifications for organic winemaking do not include much in terms of vinification recommendations, and according to Morel “the vast majority of organic winegrowers accept inputs in the grape must and wine” (Morel, 2013, p. 67). According to the natural wine philosophy, on the other hand, the process is holistic and continues from vineyard to bottling, a process that is classified as minimal intervention. Let us now turn to the second phase of the production process: what happens after the harvest, the vinification process in the cellar.

4.2.1.2. A hands-off approach in the cellar

“On the bottle, I wrote, “Making wine only with grapes—what a strange idea!” I wanted to add “in Bordeaux,” but I didn’t dare.” (Interview Remy, winemaker in Bordeaux, 19 April 2021⁸⁴)

Natural winemaking can be distinguished from other practices because of its minimal intervention in the vinification process. Producers involved in the natural wine movement denounce the addition of synthetic chemicals to wine, which they consider to be going

⁸³ Interview Justin, winemaker in Western Cape, 26 January 2022

⁸⁴ *My translation of*: “Sur la bouteille j'avais marqué “faire du vin qu'avec des raisins quelle drôle d'idée !” Je voulais rajouter à Bordeaux mais je n'ai pas osé.”

unchecked, and strongly oppose modern oenological techniques. Anne, a winemaker in the Médoc, regrets the immoderate use of oenological interventions that characterised Bordeaux wines, particularly in the 1980s:

“I often found that Bordeaux wines from the 1980s... And I'll be brutally honest, I think that in the 1980s and 1990s we really spoiled some wines in Bordeaux. We wasted vintages with things that age poorly: beautiful terroirs and beautiful bottles, but oenological practices that were a bit too harsh and stifled some wines. And when we drank them in the 2010s, nothing came out well. It was a disaster.” (Interview Anne, winemaker in Bordeaux, 26 May 2021⁸⁵)

For natural winemakers, oenology is a non-sense: it is a way of disguising failings in wine by adding synthetic chemicals when the failings are themselves caused by excessive interventions in the vineyard and are the consequences of industrial damage such as impoverishment of the soil through the use of chemical pesticides. In other words, they see the success of oenology as a direct result of the desertification of soils and a certain decline in the quality of the wines. They condemn the universally positive value associated with progress, of which oenology is the perfect embodiment. For Christophe, a winemaker who has recently established his business in Bordeaux, the natural wine movement has allowed him to show an alternative way, one that stands apart from “fault-free” but standardised wines:

“In the natural wine movement, [...] there is the freedom taken by winemakers who have chosen an extraordinary path. They have reinvented wine and a certain relationship to wine that in the 1970s and 1980s was altered by oenology. Oenology created a new wine, a generally perfect wine, meaning that on the shelves of a supermarket, there were no longer faulty wines, whereas there was some plonk in the 1970s. It was undrinkable, but consumers were much more tolerant. Oenology brought that about, and natural wine brought another perspective by showing that one could also produce great wines, even much more interesting wines, with very simple oenology. So my philosophy aligns with natural wine.” (Interview, Christophe, winemaker in Bordeaux, 17 April 2021⁸⁶)

While oenology can be associated with the pursuit of flawless wines, natural wines follow Jules Chauvet's approach, one in which their living character is guaranteed by minimal intervention on the part of the producer. Below are a few extracts from a virulent pamphlet

⁸⁵ *My translation of:* “Souvent, je trouvais que les Bordeaux des années 80 ... Je vais être assez dure... Mais je pense que dans les années 80-90 on a vraiment gâché des vins à Bordeaux, on a gâché des millésimes avec des choses qui vieillissent très mal quoi, de beaux terroirs, de belles bouteilles, mais des pratiques œnologiques un peu trop dures, on a éteint des vins. Et quand on les buvait dans les années 2010, rien ne ressortait bien, c'était une catastrophe.”

⁸⁶ *My translation of:* “Dans le mouvement nature [...] il y a à la fois la liberté qu'ont pris les vignerons qui ont pris une voix extraordinaire. Ils ont réinventé le vin et le rapport au vin qui dans les années 70 et 80 a été modifié par l'œnologie. L'œnologie avait inventé un nouveau vin, un vin globalement parfait, c'est-à-dire que sur un linéaire de grande surface il n'y plus de vins à défauts, alors qu'il y avait des sacrées piquettes dans les années 70, c'était imbuvable, mais le consommateur était beaucoup plus laxiste. L'œnologie a apporté ça et le vin nature a apporté une autre voix en montrant qu'avec une œnologie très simple on pouvait aussi faire des grands vins, voir des vins beaucoup plus intéressants. Donc ma philosophie est sur le vin nature.”

written by a winemaker in Pomerol who is now the head of the *Confédération Paysanne*. The blog post was published after a technical meeting organised by the prestigious Pomerol appellation on 8 September 2009, just before the harvest (see figure below).

Hallucinations à Pomerol

“[...] L'intervenant suivant, un œnologue, entame alors un exposé sur la vinification. Et là, ça devient tout à fait surréaliste, sauf sans doute pour les esprits que l'œnologie moderne a déjà totalement remodelés.

L'exposé débute par la nécessité impérieuse de levurer. On entend alors une mise en garde lourde : "Ne prenez surtout pas le risque d'une fermentation sauvage !". "Sauvage" se trouve là par référence à levures "indigènes", non civilisées, non maîtrisées, non reformatées par la modernité et donc source d'une peur sourde et irrationnelle. "Sauvage" nous renvoie à l'indigène en pagne avec l'os dans le nez et la lance à la main. Brrrrr !!!

Après nous avoir fait frémir de crainte, l'œnologue nous invite à pénétrer dans le monde merveilleux de l'œnologie conquérante, où la maîtrise sur la nature est totale et où l'incertitude est traquée jusque dans les moindres recoins. Il nous conseille de sulfiter de plus en plus au fur et à mesure du remplissage de nouvelles cuves, car, voyez-vous, le chai est de plus en plus "contaminé" par les premières fermentations. Une telle peur des processus naturels évoquerait facilement une déviation névrotique si on ne percevait quelques préoccupations mercantiles. Après une telle mise en garde, on a du mal à croire que des hommes aient pu faire du vin pendant quelques dizaines de siècles sans tout cet arsenal. [...]

Aurais-je déjà usé et abusé du Pomerol ? Mais non, ce spectacle désolant se déroule bien réellement au sein d'une appellation prestigieuse, mais dont on se demande si elle pourra le rester bien longtemps avec une vision aussi agro-alimentaire du vin. [...]

Se rendent-ils compte que chaque intrusion dans ce fabuleux processus viticole au nom de la Sainte Œnologie les rapproche du néant, les aspire un peu plus vers le vide ? Non contents de détenir savoir (ultra-technique et pourtant si ridicule et dangereux lorsqu'il n'est pas employé avec le recul et le renoncement du sage) et pouvoir (la persuasion des prêtres colonisateurs assénant la même vérité au bout d'un crucifix comme à celui d'un fouet selon le degré de soumission de ces fameux "sauvages"), ils pratiquent l'hypnose à grands coups d'analyse de labos complaisants.”

Dominique Techer, *Hallucinations à Pomerol*, éditorial de la revue technique "Vivre la vigne en bio", N°81-82 Juillet-août

Figure 22. "Hallucinations à Pomerol" by Dominique Techer

The raw and sarcastic tone of this post is an illustration of the fierce opinion of certain actors in the natural wine movement with regard to unwarranted interventionist practices during the vinification process and the broader influence of oenology in winemaking. Conversely, natural winemakers continue to advocate for minimum intervention, which translates into giving up synthetical chemicals, using only indigenous yeasts, rejecting (or considerably diminishing) the use of sulphites and no (or very little) technological manipulation in the cellar. This rejection of technological interventions is epitomised by the name of a South African domain included in this study: *Luddite*. It is no coincidence that Niels and Penny chose to call their domain Luddite in 1995, as the word is used to describe someone who is opposed to technology or technological change. According to the Luddist ideology, technology must serve human life rather than the other way around. The top banner of Niels and Penny's website reads "Technology and mechanisation will never be a substitute for passion". When I ask Niels about his philosophy, he happily comments "I think the big thing is that we farm as green as possible, and you can drink a bucket of our wines, and you will feel fantastic the next day. There is no bullshit in there"⁸⁷. In the course of my research, many producers expressed a similar philosophy, in which wine is above all a story of craftsmanship and a low-tech approach. Another South African winemaker I interviewed has named his brand "Blacksmith", and this emphasis on craft is at the heart of his discourse: "Take our brand the Blacksmith, for instance: there are blacksmithing things on my side of the family. Blacksmithing is an art. You have to use your hands and trust your instinct; it's a craft. It's the same for natural wine, and that's where I draw a link: you have to trust your instinct, work with materials to turn them into an end product."⁸⁸ According to Jacques, a French winemaker who is also President of the *Syndicat de Défense des Vins Méthode Nature*, the artisan approach is not only a production philosophy but also reverberates in the organoleptic qualities of wine.

"Especially since there is a part of the taste of wine that comes from technical elements. Wine is extremely industrialised in terms of vinification. You can go into cellars, and it's clear that it's not craftsmanship! And that changes the nature of the wine. I have the misfortune of having lived much longer than you and tasted wines that were made in barrels; tanks no longer exist. Then sulphites came into play, and the taste of wine evolved." (Interview Jacques, Syndicat de Défense des Vins Méthode Nature, 15 July 2021⁸⁹)

⁸⁷ Interview Niels, Luddite, 4 April 2022

⁸⁸ Interview Tremayne, Blacksmith, 23 May 2022

⁸⁹ *My translation of*: "Surtout qu'il y a quand même une partie du goût du vin qui vient des éléments techniques. Le vin est extrêmement industrialisé en termes de vinification, on peut rentrer dans des chais, on voit bien que ce n'est pas de l'artisanat ! Et ça, ça change la nature du vin. J'ai la malchance d'avoir vécu beaucoup plus longtemps que vous et d'avoir goûté des vins qui étaient fait dans des barriques, les cuves n'existaient plus, puis il y a eu le soufre etc. Et le goût du vin a évolué."

Sarah, the manager of a wine shop in Bordeaux, unreservedly expresses the same opinion. In her view, the main reason why natural winemakers do not intervene in the vinification process is to enhance the quality of their wine and its organoleptic characteristics:

“And so you really see the difference between a conventional wine and a natural wine without added sulphites. Tastewise, there's no comparison. When I worked in conventional winemaking, we used a lot of sulphites at every stage of vinification, even during ageing. So I think we were dealing with litres and litres of SO₂. [...] You open the bottle and you can smell it. It's sulphurous. Then in the mouth... The worst is with the whites.” (Interview Sarah, caviste in Bordeaux, 17 April 2021⁹⁰)

In fact, natural winemakers assume, and even sometimes boast of, the organoleptic differences in their wines. The emphasis is on natural factors and the climatic variations of the vintage, and these elements must be reflected in the wine's taste and characteristics:

“I didn't understand why we were growing such beautiful grapes and trying to change everything in the winery. I want to see those fine details shining through. Even though there are some quirks in the vineyards, I still want that to shine through.” (Interview Rob, winemaker in Western Cape, 4 May 2022)

In conventional production, the wine is expected to meet certain standards and fit general consumer demand. The vinification stage therefore offers the opportunity to adjust the product so that it will meet these criteria. Natural winemakers condemn this trend towards standardisation of the product and instead claim to “make wine from a blank canvas” and “let the grapes express themselves.” It therefore comes as no surprise that natural wines evolve from one vintage to the next – some would even say “from one bottle to the other.” Johan, a pioneer of natural wines in South Africa, explains that this idea of the winemaking process from the vineyards to bottling is bigger than him, something that he does not have full control over:

“I liked the name *Force Majeure* because it's a legal term meaning "act of god". So for instance when something happens but it's neither party's fault, it is called an act of god. And that's what wine's about, I think, especially when you're making natural wines. We are so reliant on whatever we believe in, but there's a higher force out there that controls the weather, the climate, whatever's happening in the vineyards, and you [*as a producer*] are so small. So it's really an act of god when you drink a bottle of Force Majeure. Hence the name.” (Interview Johan, producer in Western cape, April 2022)

However, all producers insist that natural winemaking is not to be confused with carelessness or laziness. On the contrary, winemaking without the use of additives requires

⁹⁰*My translation of:* “Après tu vois vraiment la différence entre un vin conventionnel et un vin nature sans souffre ajouté, il n'y a pas photo gustativement, rien à voir. Moi quand j'ai bossé en conventionnel, du souffre on en utilisait énormément, à toutes les étapes de la vinification, voire de l'élevage, donc je pense que l'on était sur des litres et des litres de SO₂. [...] tu débouches ta bouteille tu le sens, t'as la soufrière, puis après en bouche... Le pire c'est sur les blancs.”

great rigour and precision. Because they cannot resort to the techniques and products of modern oenology to correct faults, natural winemakers run greater risks: their hygiene standards in the cellar must be excellent, and the time and attention they dedicate during the fermentation process is doubled.

As mentioned previously, in the absence of a legal framework, what falls or does not fall into the natural wine category is still somewhat blurry, and therefore there is a whole continuum of cellar practices that are more or less accepted. Maxime in Sauternes is something of a purist, and in his view a natural wine means no interventions, and nothing added. During our interview, he asserts that “no added sulphites” does not equal natural wine because “there are a whole bunch of other intrants that can be added to the juice.”⁹¹ In South Africa, however, I soon noticed that there is an ongoing confusion between natural wine (the holistic approach described here) and natural fermentation, which could be described as a vinification technique in which intrants are limited and commercial yeasts are banned. Cyan, the organic certification consultant, seems to have fallen into this trap: “It’s a difficult thing to define natural wine here. I think there are so many different ideas of what it is. For me, I think it’s natural fermentation first of all, to let the grapes express themselves as much as possible.”⁹² Some winemakers are buying non-organic grapes, using natural fermentation and marketing their product as natural, thereby creating even greater confusion in the sector. However, for pioneer natural winemakers like Justin, the difference is subtle but real, and he warned me about it:

“And when I say natural wine, I’m talking full on, you know: no sulphites, no filtration, organic farming, etc. The whole process classifies me as a producer as [*making*] natural wine because a lot of people want to claim that they’re making natural wine but the only thing they’re doing naturally is the fermentation. But the rest is still commercial and filtration and sulphites, etc. I mean there’s nothing wrong with it, but I think there should be a separation in what we do because I do so much more work in the cellar and in the vineyard to be able to bottle a wine like that! Without sulphites.” (Interview Justin, winemaker in Western Cape, 6 April 2022)

Over and above the internal differences and subtleties in terms of the different vinification approaches within the movement, there is this shared philosophy of minimal intervention and a rejection of modern oenology techniques. Beyond the very concrete and technical applications of the natural winemaking process – both in the vineyard and in the cellar –

⁹¹ Interview Maxime, winemaker in Bordeaux, 20 April 2021

⁹² Interview Cyan, ECOCERT representative, 16 February 2022

the movement encompasses a broader philosophy that includes life ethics, a relationship with nature and other elements I analyse in the next section.

4.2.2. Natural winemakers, stewards of their land and natural resources

From the adage “hands-on in the vineyards, hands-off in the cellar”, broader reflections emerge on farming styles and life ethics. Following a similar ethos to those of the Slow Food or Permaculture movements, the natural wine movement encompasses a broader call to rethink the ways in which wine is produced and consumed and to reconnect with nature. It falls within a broader framework that includes a growing ecological awareness, a logic of care, and a questioning of the complex relationship between humankind and nature.

I argue that this broader philosophy applied by natural winemakers can find a match in the idea of environmental stewardship, a concept that helps us to understand the moral responsibility demonstrated in the way grape farmers and wine producers manage their land and natural resources. The natural wine movement has a clear moral underpinning that at a very practical level includes the producers’ responsibility for the way they treat the land and the natural resources they work with, and in a wider sense, humans’ responsibility to the natural world at large. By promoting environmental stewardship, natural winemakers challenge other forms of management and exploitation of resources, particularly the modes of production associated with capitalism, and more specifically profit-oriented and industrialised wine production.

In 1998, at a time when the notion was being used loosely, Brown and Mitchell proposed a definition of environmental stewardship as “efforts to create, nurture, and enable responsibility in landowners and resource users to manage and protect land and natural resources” (Brown & Mitchell, 1998). In their view, as a response to environmental degradation and inadequate public action, the stewardship approach advocates for both individual and collective accountability when it comes to ensuring the responsible management of natural resources. Worrell and Appleby completed this definition by specifying that the scope of responsibility must involve all users of land and natural resources. As they see it, stewardship is “the responsible use (including conservation) of natural resources in a way that takes full and balanced account of the interests of society, future generations, and other species, as well as of private needs, and accepts significant answerability to society” (Worrell & Appleby, 2000). The concept of environmental or

land stewardship has been increasingly used in recent years, notably in the land use and conservation literature and more broadly by political ecology scholars (Bennett et al., 2018; Middleton, 2015). The notion can have both a secular and a religious interpretation, in the sense of being a steward for something bigger, a higher authority, or as Worrell and Appleby put it “for God, a god, nature, society, or future generations” (Worrell & Appleby, 2000, p. 266).

Winemakers are taking up a position as environmental stewards and trying to minimise the impact of their products over the long term. This feeling of being responsible is very present in the discourse of winemakers I interviewed. For Ian, a bar owner in Cape Town, this idea of “giving back to the soil” should be the backbone of the ethics of natural wine production:

“There is a group of people who go to natural wine bars because it’s a cool spot to hang out. But ultimately, we don’t want people buying natural wine because it’s left to do its own thing in the cellar, we want people to buy natural wine because it’s part of an important farming movement which gives back to the soil. That is really why we should be behind it, otherwise, it’s a passing phase, and it doesn’t really help anyone.” (Interview Ian, caviste in Cape Town, 21 December 2021)

Milo, a producer from the Swartland, has put this concern at the heart of his production.

“And that’s where I think regenerative and organic and biodynamic agriculture – or whatever the name of those non-conventional methods engaged in – but it’s about the realisation that OK, we’re here, we’re taking something from the earth, so there’s a responsibility to return that.

- *I guess at one point it’s just a bargain with your natural resources.*

- Yes, and usually at that point, that’s the shift and that’ll become the focal point. For some it lasts a generation, for others it’s multi-generational, and it all comes down to the culture in the domain with the next generation: how do you work with it?” (Interview Milo, winemaker in Western cape, 7 June 2022)

Other winemakers attest unreservedly to this feeling of having a long-standing responsibility:

“We can’t carry on... please, unless this the end of the earth anyway, but we want future generations to also enjoy this beautiful place.” (Interview Paul, winemaker in Western Cape, 20 January 2022)

“I think people are waking up and thinking: Why are you farming? You’re farming for the next generation; we’re not really farming for ourselves: I’m farming for this little daughter of mine running around.” (Interview Justin, winemaker in Western cape, 6 April 2022)

Many producers stress the fact that the return on investment is not immediate; rather, they are investing for their children’s generation. This slow return results in an obligation to see things differently, to a shift in mentality where the final objective is long-term (economic) equilibrium rather than short-term profit. Apart from the responsibility of winemakers expressed in the quotations above, the concept of stewardship allows us to capture the growing interest in ethical aspects of the relationships between people and nature. I believe

that in the natural wine movement, this environmental stewardship is incarnated in three specific reflections that invite us to rethink this relationality between humans and non-humans: first, rethinking the nature-culture duality, second, the notion of care, and third, the re-empowerment of the figure of the *peasant* farmer. What they all have in common is that they restore humans to being part of the environment; it is a vision in which the producer works with nature instead of against it.

4.2.2.1. Questioning the “nature versus culture” dogma

This nature-culture divide has been theoretically challenged by many authors, including Serge Moscovici, Nadia Breda, Bruno Latour, Philippe Descola, Eduardo Khon, Michel Serres, etc. Pineau (Pineau, 2019) and Viecegli (Viecegli, 2021) have already analysed in depth the appropriation of this debate by actors of the natural wine movement. They conclude that, through the wine production process and the meaning attached to it, natural wine creates an opportunity to raise challenging questions about the way we approach and conceptualise the relationship between nature and culture. In order to be able to observe this in my fieldwork, I have drawn from the Latourian concept of agency to reflect on and rethink the relationality between humans and non-humans (B. Latour, 1996). Using agency as an analytical lens to understand the web of human and non-human relationships, I observe the emergence of new discourses and practices that advocate forging new links with the environment (the vineyard as an ecosystem) and with non-humans more generally (in vineyards without phytosanitary products and in cellars without chemical inputs). This renewed approach of winemakers toward non-humans is often defined as a personification of nature. For instance, in her book on natural wine, Legeron recalls an interview with a winemaker from Sancerre: “He considers each vine individually. He says, “They’re like people: each plant needs different things at different times.”” (Legeron, 2014, p. 18). A few pages later, while explaining the consequences of interventionist technologies in the testimony of an Oregon producer, we read: “But the wines came out soul-less. Tasty, but lacking the magic.” (Legeron, 2014, p. 30). This mystical connexion is also emphasised by Etienne Davodeau in his illustrated book (See Figure 23).



Figure 23. Extract from Davodeau, Étienne. 2011. *Les Ignorants : Récit d'une Initiation Croisée*. Futuropolis. p 28

In the extracts above, the vine is personified, almost humanised. Similarly, one interviewee reported a patient-doctor relationship in which the winemaker is the doctor, administering soft medicine and care to their vines.

“Today, good natural winemakers, like true biodynamic winemakers, work on their vineyards like a garden. They are like a doctor infusing consciousness into their actions. They observe, reflect and above all feel the vine when it's not doing well, etc.” (Interview Gabriel, INAO representative, 25 August 2021⁹³)

As well as doctors, winemakers also compare themselves to artists – as Damien does: “I am a vigneron, a winemaker, a craftsman, some would even say that making wine is an art⁹⁴” – or even magicians accompanying vines to grow grapes and juice to be fermented into wine: “I called one of my labels last year “Abracadabra” because my stage name is Remy the Magician.”⁹⁵ This renewed relationship between winemakers and their vines reconnects producers to their emotions and feelings, and calls out to the sensitive world. In this sense, it is a direct legacy of Steiner’s biodynamic approach.

The 2021 harvest at Les Closieries des Moussis: a sensitive approach

During the twenty days I spend working on the harvest at Les Closieries des Moussis, the approach is imbued with sensitivity. It leaves room for emotions, and I cannot help but think of the writings of Christelle Pineau in “La Corne de Vache et le Microscope.” Indeed, as Pineau describes in her book, I am witnessing a certain tenderness between the

⁹³ My translation of: “Aujourd'hui un bon vigneron nature, comme un vrai vigneron en biody', travaille son vignoble comme un jardin, il est médecin, il met de la conscience dans son acte, il voit, il réfléchit et surtout il ressent la vigne quand elle va mal etc.”

⁹⁴ My translation of: “je suis vigneron, vinificateur, artisan, certains disent même que c'est de l'art de faire du vin.” (Interview Damien, winemaker in Bordeaux, 12 May 2021)

⁹⁵ My translation of: “Une de mes étiquettes l'an dernier j'avais intitulé “abracadabra” parce que mon nom de scène c'est Remy le magicien.” (Interview Remy, winemaker in Bordeaux, 19 April 2021)

winemakers and their vines. In the evenings, Laurence, one of the two winemakers, typically takes a stroll through the vineyards to closely observe the development of the grapes (will they be ready to harvest tomorrow or the day after? How is the mildew evolving?). In the meanwhile, Pascale, the second winemaker, is in the cellar, affectionately conversing with the fermenting grape juices. In an almost maternal tone, she whispers sweet words to them, the words of a mother to her child: “So, how are you today, my little ones?” These verbal expressions are gentle, a unique form of communication that underscores the deep connection these winemakers feel with their creations.

I also learnt that Pascale is trained in *Reiki*⁹⁶ and uses the concepts of energy circulation to help with the fermentation process. I am not sure if it is a coincidence, but *Reiki* and beliefs around energy circulation in general are widely shared by the entire team of harvesters, some of whom work with alternative medicines, and all of whom have a vested interest in the natural wine movement, or at the very least in a less conventional approach to the vineyard.

In reality, this gentle and caring approach in the vineyard and cellar is more akin to a wider life ethic, one that finds its place in all aspects of daily life. And so throughout the time I spend at the domain, we avoid mechanisation as much as possible and instead, we favour using the two horses for traction; we harvest by hand; we only treat the vines with natural preparations (herbal infusions from handmade biodynamic practices); we prioritize the self-balance of biodiversity over treatments; and we allow the indigenous yeasts from the grapes to initiate fermentation. Alongside all of this we eat organic, local and non-industrial food, use dry toilets, optimise our means of transport, minimise the use of smartphones, wear second-hand clothes and coexist with the animals that live by our side.

Notes from fieldwork notebook, October 2021

Portraits and field notes 2. The 2021 Harvest at Les Closieries des Moussis: a sensitive approach.

4.2.2.2. Building on the notion of “care”

Closely linked to reflections that examine the relationship with nature is the notion of socio-environmental care (also sometimes called ecological care). The notion of care has its origins in eco-feminist and indigenous traditions (Whyte & Cuomo, 2016). Although it was first used in the social, health and clinical sectors, environmental or ecological care implies extending it to non-humans. According to Whyte and Cuomo, the notion of care ethics “refers to approaches to moral life and community that are grounded in virtues, practices, and knowledges associated with appropriate caring and caretaking of self and others.” (Whyte & Cuomo, 2016, p. 235). The notion of care has been especially

⁹⁶ Reiki is a non-conventional Japanese energy healing technique. It uses gentle hand movements to guide the flow of healthy energy to promote healing, relaxation and reduced stress and anxiety.

prominently featured in environmental discourses to frame our understanding of the relationality between humans and non-humans. Centemeri, for instance, placed the notion of ecological care at the heart of her analysis of the permaculture movement (Centemeri, 2019b). In her view, practices of care are “fundamental to the emergence of micro-worlds in which human needs can be met while guaranteeing the conditions in which other species (animal, vegetable) can also thrive” (Centemeri, 2019b, p. 10). In this section, I argue that winemakers consider themselves to be not only stewards of the land, but also carers. In this sense, their responsibility is expanded to taking care of, protecting and preserving the non-human elements they work with and that surround them. Ecological care involves a moral commitment that guides environmental decision-making, taking into account the complex network of interdependencies between humans and non-humans and acknowledging the significance of caring for all kinds of others and a reliance on nature (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). This feeling of care was expressed by several of the winemakers I interviewed. When asked about her production ethics, a Bordeaux winemaker said: “It’s common-sense farming: we take care of our environment, which feeds and sustains us⁹⁷.” Another winemaker – a pioneer of the biodynamic approach in Bordeaux – also noted that “biodynamics is about caring for the land and respecting living things; these values are important to me.”⁹⁸

Another dimension of care that is particularly interesting is the expression of environmental reflexivity by farmers themselves, as emphasised by Centemeri, who affirms “What seems original to me in this approach to environmentalism is the importance attributed to the development of a reflexivity on what one considers valuable in the relation to the environment: the way in which people define and attribute value to beings, things, places, and activities in their everyday practices becomes a key dimension in the process of repairing and regenerating. More specifically, practices of care require that people reconnect with context-sensitive value logics not primarily related to instrumental utility.” (Centemeri, 2019b, p. 5). This reflexivity is conveyed by some of the winemakers, like Antoine:

“Making natural wine is going to take ten times as much work as making chemical wines because you have to be constantly on top of things. You have to listen to yourself, and a lot of winemakers have lost that, and that's a shame. Many trust external opinions, which is a bit unfortunate. First, you

⁹⁷ *My translation of:* “C'est le bon sens paysan, on prend soin de notre habitat qui nous nourrit et qui nous fait vivre.”

⁹⁸ *My translation of:* “La biodynamie est le soin de la terre, le respect du vivant, des valeurs qui me portent.”

have to trust this [*points to his heart*], what you feel. That's the basis. You have to know how to listen to your heart." (Interview Antoine, winemaker in Bordeaux, 10 May 2021⁹⁹)

There is also an explicit sensitivity and emotional caring in the winemakers' discourses. For instance, producers express an emotional intensity in the running of small-scale artisanal farms. Many appeal to the register of emotions when they talk about their vineyards or production:

"In any case, what's certain is that to have a product that brings happiness, it cannot be a deviant product, because deviance doesn't create happiness. That's why I say there are two categories: winemakers on one side, and politicians on the other. And that's where we must make a slight distinction. [...] We're going to have a completely different wine that will evoke different emotions." (Interview Jean-Yves, winemaker in Bordeaux, 7 April 2021¹⁰⁰)

The care aspect goes beyond the dimension of production techniques and encompasses a wider social approach, including caring for the other humans involved, as the testimony by this producer from the Médoc reminds us:

"- *So the human dimension is important to you?*

- Yes, yes. And especially with our group of harvesters. It's fantastic, you know, we enjoy it. [...] We have a great team. And I believe that if we give them a little and treat them well, we get a fantastic response. First of all, we enjoy being with them. And when they feel valued to some extent, they give us beautiful things. [...] Even though technically, with a machine, you wouldn't distinguish it, it's still an extension of our choices and it's a beautiful moment of sharing... It takes a lot, but we take so many positive things from it that we carry on." (Interview Gilles, winemaker in Bordeaux, 27 April 2021¹⁰¹)

The natural wine movement has created a code of ethics for caring for actors' environments and their production. Non-intervention in the vineyard and the cellar is used as a powerful symbol of caring and as an expression of resistance to environmental exploitation. The caring dimension expressed by the winemakers seems to influence a broader environmental engagement in practice and impact emancipatory practices.

⁹⁹ *My translation of*: "Faire du vin nature ça va demander dix fois plus de boulot que faire des vins chimiques parce qu'il faut être constamment derrière, il faut s'écouter et beaucoup de vignerons ont perdu ça et c'est dommage, beaucoup font confiance à des gens de l'extérieur bon c'est un peu dommage. Il faut d'abord se fier à ça [*pointe vers son cœur*], à ce que l'on ressent. C'est la base. Il faut savoir écouter son cœur."

¹⁰⁰ *My translation of*: "En tout cas ce qui est sûr, c'est que pour avoir un produit qui envoie du bonheur ça ne peut pas être un produit déviant, parce que le produit déviant ne crée pas de bonheur, et c'est en ça que je dis qu'il y a deux catégories : les vignerons d'un côté, les politiciens de l'autre. Et c'est en ça qu'il y a une petite nuance que l'on doit faire. [...] On va avoir un vin qui est complètement différent et qui va apporter des émotions différentes."

¹⁰¹ *My translation of*: "Donc le côté humain est important ? - Oui, oui. Et notamment notre groupe de vendangeurs c'est super quoi, on se régale. [...] On a une super équipe. Et je crois que si on leur donne un peu et qu'on les considère, on a un super retour ; d'abord on y prend du plaisir d'être avec eux. Et eux quand ils sont un minimum valorisés ils nous donnent des belles choses. [...] Même si techniquement avec la machine on ne distinguerait pas, c'est le prolongement quand même de nos choix et c'est un très beau moment de partage... Qui demande beaucoup, mais on prend tellement de choses positives que l'on continue."

Bernhard, winemaking as a way to connect back to his family legacy and the story of the land.

I met Bernhard at his farm a few kilometres out of Stellenbosch on the road toward False Bay. Bernhard offers to take us on a trip by car to explore Sinai Hill, his old family domain – or what is left of it – and the new parcels he leases. Bernhard begins to narrate his story as a winemaker. He grew up in a family surrounded by wine and is the seventh generation of wine farmers. Pointing at a steep hill with rows of vines, he explains: “That’s where I grew up and where my passion lies, on that specific hill.” However, the Bredell family farm has been sold to foreign investors. I am not too sure why; Bernhard is rather discreet about the reasons that led to the farm's economic collapse when his father was managing it. Although his family expressed concerns about the farm's future, he asserts that becoming a winemaker was an obvious choice: “I needed to follow that childhood dream to become a winemaker, not an engineer. Do what feels right, even though it might be brave or bold.” It was this irrepressible need to go back to his roots that led him to lease some of his ancestors’ vineyards. He now works with some of the vines planted by his late grandfathers, which are classified as Old Vines. He tells us that his passion lies here in Sinai Hill, the terroir where he grew up making wine from these vineyards, hence the name Scions of Sinai, which reflects his commitment to both his family and to the land: “scion” has the dual meaning of a young vine shoot and a generational descendant.

Bernhard stops suddenly on the side of the road and points at a row of vines in the distance. There is a springbok in the vineyard. It takes me a few minutes to see the animal. He starts the car again, and we drive past the 300 hectares that made up the old family farm.

When the farm was sold, the new owners ripped out most of the vines and only replanted Sauvignon Blanc and Merlot. Historically the vineyard had been 100% bush vines and dry farmland. “We didn’t have a single tap for irrigation” explains Bernhard. I can see the tense expression on his face when he observes the “neat”, desert-like, irrigated young vines that have replaced the old ones.

“I used to drive past our old vineyards every day, and every year I could see they had ripped out the vineyard more and more. It was agonising. Eventually, on weekends, I would spend my whole time just planning and thinking about how to plan my winery. And driving here every day was a clear “why?” It was so sad to see it being uprooted. So why did I want to do it? Because I had this love for this vineyard and this site and I wanted to have a chance to express this terroir in a more complete, pure natural way. It is probably the last time you can see that if they decide to do some development here. And having such a long heritage here, I wanted to blend it in with our heritage and maybe it was the chance not to lose our heritage completely.”

Bernhard parks the car, and we walk through the six-hectares parcel he has leased since 2016. “Maybe it’s better if we go and sit and talk there,” he suggests, pointing at two large granite rocks. The view is stunning – we can see as far as Durbanville. There is a warm

wind on this end-of-summer afternoon. I can easily guess the emotional baggage that Bernhard associates with his production. He expresses it through a form of caring and a willingness to protect, to preserve the land, the terroir, the vines and his family heritage all at once, with no distinction or hierarchy. When I ask him about his influences and inspirations to farm organically and commit to natural production, he explains:

“This is another source of inspiration. When I was 21 years old, I was going to the Stellenbosch library and while I was doing my research, I stumbled upon a very old wine magazine called the *Wine Farmer*, and on the front cover there was a picture of my grandfather, who passed away that year as well. I never knew about this article, which talked about his farming decisions here in the Overberg. It inspired me a lot to think about the soil and how he took care of the soil. The way he spoke about it was in fact almost the same way the Japanese have that philosophy that "you never own land; you rent it for your children." You want to take care of your soil so that the next generation has something to work with. So having a vineyard for us is that.”

Portraits and field notes 3. Bernhard, winemaking as a way to connect back to his family legacy and the story of the land.

4.2.2.3. Re-empowering the figure of the *peasant winemaker*

“The industry has become so mechanized and detached from its roots that not only has "most wine today never even seen a human hand," but also "the growers don't call themselves 'farmers'." They don't see viticulture or grape-growing as an agricultural pursuit.” (Legeron, 2014, p. 18).

Last but not least is the idea of re-empowering the figure of winemakers as *peasant* farmers. At the heart of this is the notion that with the industrial revolution and the increase in the size of vineyards (and thus the growth in structure and the number of employees), winemakers slowly moved away from working on farms and in vineyards and became increasingly confined to desk jobs and management tasks. Serge, a retired winemaker who is now involved in a regional farmers' trade union, bemoans this professional shift:

“The image of the peasant? That's over. The guys are in suits and ties... seriously! [*Laughter*]. It can be much simpler. They have lost peasant simplicity, really, pfff... And now there are only hipsters with their perfect three-day beards in the industry... they don't even spend time in the vineyards.” (Interview Serge, Confédération Paysanne representative, 6 June 2021¹⁰²)

The evolution of the farming profession has been well documented by Mendras in *La fin des paysans* (Mendras, 1984). Although it is acknowledged that viticulture has evolved somewhat differently from general agriculture due to its unique economic model, natural

¹⁰² My translation of: “La figure du paysan ? C'est terminé ça. Les mecs sont en costard-cravate... faut arrêter quoi ! [*Rire*]. Ça peut être beaucoup plus simple. Il y a une simplicité paysanne qui s'est perdu quoi, vraiment pfff. Et là maintenant il n'y a que des bobos avec leur barbe de trois jours réglementaires dans le milieu... Ils ne vont pas dans les vignes.”

winemakers still identify with this abandoned figure of the peasant in an attempt to re-empower it. Mendras shows how political mutations have led to a profound transformation of the farmer's activity, work and living conditions. More recently, his prophetic argument about the end of peasants was confirmed by Ansaloni and Smith, who describe the relentless expansion and intensification of farms (Ansaloni & Smith, 2021). Through a political economy study of the agricultural sector in France, they investigate the social and political mechanisms that organise the concentration of the means of production (land, labour, livestock, etc.) into ever larger production units. They demonstrate the gradual disappearance of the family farming model, which is increasingly in competition with the rise of corporate farming. Purseigle and Hervieu made similar observations: the idea of the immutable uniqueness of the peasant is in the process of disappearing. According to them, "This process opens the door to a form of agriculture with far fewer working farmers, or even "agriculture without farmers." (Purseigle & Hervieu, 2022). This shared observation sheds light on the willingness of natural wine producers to go back to peasant agriculture as a way of counteracting or escaping from the process of corporatisation of farms. Fanny, a representative of an organic farming association, suggests:

"This generation of winemakers who are reembodying this profession can only be small winemakers, family-owned, individual structures that are involved in both the vineyards, the cellars, and the business. It's a completely different structuring of the industry. It's not the same job." (Interview Fanny, AgroBio Gironde representative, 16 July 2021¹⁰³)

In the natural wine movement, producers want to reassert their attachment to and involvement in farming activities. This goes hand in hand with the idea of spending more time in the vineyards. In the natural wine movement, the re-empowerment of the figure of the winemaker is intensified. Pineau asserts that "a sort of homology is established between the winemaker and his bottle, which embodies him"; the identification between the winemaker and his wine is strengthened, and "the wine tells the story of the winemaker's daily life, the difficulties, the risks, the doubts and sometimes the mistakes" (Pineau, 2016, p. 69). Consequently, a sales pitch for natural wines is more likely to showcase the story and narrative of the winemakers rather than the brand name and domain, or even the region or appellation they are part of. A wine merchant in the Western Cape explains to me how he pitches his natural wines to international buyers:

¹⁰³ *My translation of:* "Cette génération de vignerons qui se réapproprie une certaine idée de ce métier là ça ne peut être que des petits vignerons, des structures familiales, individuelles qui sont à la fois dans les vignes, dans les chais, au commerce. C'est une autre structuration de la filière. Ce n'est pas le même métier."

“Especially when I said things like “This is Nadia, a badass lady winemaker”. As a sommelier it’s all about the narratives! I always see myself as an ambassador for South African wines. So, I would say things like “You’re gonna have to taste that crazy motherfucker, his name is Adi Badenhorst, making some beautiful wine from a beautiful vineyard”. You want to show a sense of place as well.” (Interview Kevin, distributor in Cape Town, 11 March 2022)

This highlight of the winemaker’s personal story is facilitated both by the limited production, because most of the time a domain is only run by one person (and the brand name is embodied by the winemakers themselves), and by the limited number of intermediaries between the winemaker and the wine merchant, which makes it easier to tell a personal story. This intense showcasing of the figure of the winemaker is not to everybody’s taste, however, and several interviewees lament the too often recurring “ego trips of natural winemakers,” including Amandine, a technical director at a Bordeaux biodynamic domain:

“The man (or the woman) is much more in the forefront, his/her personality as well, whereas in the system of Grand Crus and the 1855 classification, the terroir and the brand predominated over the winemaker. Normally, it’s a combination of know-how around the winemaker, whereas here there’s really the winemaker’s face behind the product.” (Interview Amandine, winemaker in Bordeaux, 14 January 2021¹⁰⁴)

Any efforts to build a general picture of what binds actors from the natural wine movement together have been quite tenuous, and as will be seen throughout this thesis, divergences among different factions within the movement still dominate. Accordingly, in this continuing attempt to define the natural wine movement and its ethos, it seems easier to characterise what the movement is against and how it builds its strength by rallying against a common adversary.

4.3. What does the natural wine movement stand against?

4.3.1. *Rallying against a common enemy and feeding into subversive and subaltern mobilisations...*

What emerges implicitly, and what can also be found in the literature on AAFMs, is resistance against a common enemy that is given different names depending on the interlocutors, including capitalism, the agro-industrial system and conventional wine

¹⁰⁴ *My translation of*: “L’homme (ou la femme) est beaucoup plus mis en avant sur sa personnalité, alors que dans le système des grand crus et le classement de 1855, le terroir et la marque prennent le devant sur le vigneron. Généralement c’est une multitude de savoir-faire autour du vigneron, alors que là il y a vraiment une gueule derrière le produit généralement.”

production. Here again, by moving away from a technical definition of natural wine production, one can fully grasp the concept of a shared ethos that is embodied by a shared opposition to the dominant production system. This is also what Teil and colleagues argue when they writes about organic winemakers: “A portion of these winemakers base their practices on a dual rejection: that of agricultural techniques, particularly synthetic products, and that of a harmful economic system because it encourages and maintains the use of these destructive agricultural techniques, the dangers of which are now clearly perceived.” (Genevieve Teil, Barrey, Floux, & Hennion, 2011, p. 94). I contend that shared values, representations and a common language are partly generated with reference to this “common enemy” and the resulting ethical obligations of the movement itself, which have been fuelled by this alterity. Indeed, the natural wine movement stresses the dual nature of the wine world and feeds into the common representation of a “bipartition of the agricultural world,” one that is divided between large-scale agro-industrial companies on the one hand and “alternative” local value chain human-sized domains on the other (Maurines, 2021).¹⁰⁵ When it comes to these dual representations of the wine industry, natural winemakers clearly identify with the latter, and in fact they build their own identities around resistance against the former. In other words, it is this idea of resistance to the dominant production system that serves as a catalyst for bringing natural winemakers together and sustaining their common actions.

Natural winemakers build a resistance to the dominant logic of the wine industry and envision themselves as creators of a counterculture. This is where the literature on alternative agro-food movements, and especially a comparison with *Via Campesina*, is heuristic. AAFMs are inherently based around the emergence of a counterculture that is subaltern to the hegemonic discourse and emerges to combat an increasingly productivist and industrial agricultural system. *Via Campesina*, for instance, initiated an overarching discourse to highlight the contradictions surrounding the “destruction of local agricultural production through corporate monopolisation of agriculture and the increasing concentration in the food chain” (Hrabanski, 2011, p. 154). Led by small farmers worldwide, it sought to break away from market liberalisation and ensure fair prices for farmers. I argue that in a similar spirit of counterculture, the natural wine movement resists

¹⁰⁵ According to Maurine, narratives are based on perceptions and interpretations related to one of these realities of the agricultural worlds or the other, but we must remain critical of and cautious towards the pitfalls of falling into a binary representation of agriculture systems.

the dominant segment of the wine industry and positions itself as a subversive and subaltern movement against the hegemonic discourse. This sentiment is aptly captured in this reflection by Goode and Harrop: “The interest in “natural” or “real” wines is growing, and this movement has a strong element of counterculture to it. In some ways, natural wine producers define themselves as much by what they are opposed to as by what they stand for. It’s interesting that the rise in natural wines has paralleled the growth of what could (somewhat unfairly) be called industrial branded wines and their increasing dominance of the marketplace. Could it be that the rise in natural wine is in part a production-led reaction against “industrial” wine?” (Goode & Harrop, 2013, p. 94)

In contrast to what is seen within the movement as an over-regulated and over-protected wine industry mainly ruled by conservatism, actors from the natural wine movement present themselves as bearers of renewal and change, as shown by the testimonies of these interviewees:

“The natural wine movement challenges the established order; it’s not just a minor issue on the side. It’s difficult for some to accept because it’s constructed in opposition to a dominant viticultural vision. So inherently it can only happen with struggle; it’s inevitably a battle.” (Interview Anne, winemaker in Bordeaux, 25 May 2021¹⁰⁶)

“The natural wave was born as a reaction of all the protocols to make wines.” (Interview Damiano wine bar owner in Cape Town, 8 December 2021).

From an analytical standpoint, by positioning the natural wine movement as a subversive and subaltern group, this study is better positioned to explore the ties between the situation of the actors of the natural wine movement – which lie at the periphery of wine production – and their ability to break out of the dominant system. The next section attempts to identify the “political work” engaged in by actors in the natural wine movement that challenges institutionalised relationships within the wine industry, and in so doing it introduces an analytical framework that will be used again during the subsequent analysis.

4.3.2. ...To challenge institutionalised relationships: an anti-conventional and anti-industrial stance

Here, I borrow from the analytical approach of *The Politics of Industry* developed by Jullien and Smith (2008) to analyse the resistance and subversive approach of the natural

¹⁰⁶ My translation of: “Le mouvement des vins naturels remet en question l'ordre établi, ce n'est pas juste un petit quelque chose à côté, c'est que quelque part c'est difficile pour eux de l'accepter dans le sens où ça se construit en opposition avec quand même une vision viticole dominante donc en soi ça ne peut se passer que dans la douleur, c'est une bataille forcément.”

wine movement within the global wine industry. They propose the concept of industry as an institutional order within which economic activities are organised around four main institutionalised relationships (IRs): production, employment, finance and sales (Jullien & Smith, 2008). If one uses this concept of “industry” rather than the traditional “sectorial” approach, it becomes possible to examine the institutionalised relationships that both structure economic activity and mediate professional identities. This works as a relevant framework for an in-depth political economic study of an industry, and encourages a detailed investigation into the normative, cognitive and symbolic structure underlying IRs within any industrial sector.

The purpose of this analytical work is to analyse the challenges at stake in an institutional order by looking at the political work carried out by actors in the industry, in particular by revealing the controversies and conflictual relations that can exist in institutionalised relationships. I use this approach here to categorise the ways actors from the natural wine movement challenge the institutional order of the global wine industry. In particular, I use the analytical framework developed by Andy Smith in his analysis of the European wine industry (Smith, 2008), as detailed in the figure below (Figure 24). IRs in the wine industry are politically saturated because wine as a product is highly regulated and symbolically charged, and the actors who govern the industry are numerous and their relationships are complex. A closer look at the analytical framework proposed by Smith serves as an insightful basis from which to understand political work in the wine industry.¹⁰⁷ I provide some indications of how a small group of actors – the natural wine movement – are able to destabilise an institutional order by challenging its core IRs. The disruption of the four IR components by the natural wine movement is presented briefly in the section below and analysed in greater depth in the chapters that follow.

¹⁰⁷ Although Smith’s analysis is focused on the European and not the global wine industry, the framework remains basically the same. In fact, this same analytical framework has been used to observe different areas such as the automobile industry, the pharmaceutical industry and the French foie gras industry (Jullien and Smith 2008).

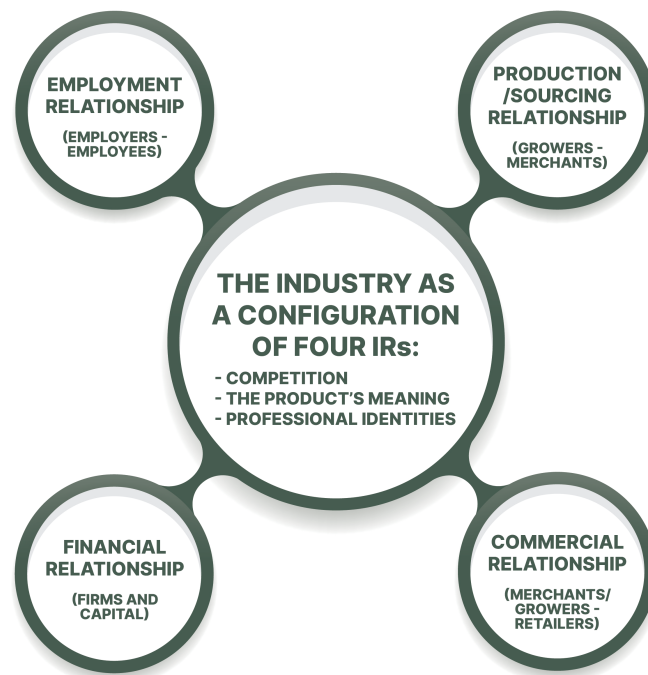


Figure 24. The wine industry as an institutional order of four Institutionalised Relationships.¹⁰⁸

➤ **Production: a warning against engaging in conventional viticulture and interventionist oenology.**

The production IR includes the sourcing or purchasing relationships between grape growers and winemakers and between winemakers and wine merchants. The production IR is very noteworthy for being ruled by conventional actors who have dominated the space both historically and quantitatively. The challenges of production IRs are probably the most obvious, and are at the heart of the natural wine movement. Natural winemakers have joined together to develop representations of mainstream and conventional wine production that highlight their limitations. Firstly, natural winemakers exhibit a desire to break away from conventional viticulture that is evident in every step of the production process, but they primarily target the harmful effects of the synthetic phytosanitary products used in wine production. In the vineyards, actors from the natural wine movement denounce the damage caused by conventional viticulture since the industrial revolution in winemaking in the 1960s. They reject the legacy of the post-war economic boom, and criticise its ambitions for a mode of wine production that is solely formulated in terms of yield and profit. In addition to their general critique of productivity-driven viticulture, they also oppose the excessive use of technology and denounce the destruction of the natural

¹⁰⁸ Source: Smith, Andy. 2008. "Globalization within the European Wine Industry: Commercial Challenges but Producer Domination." In *Industries and Globalization: The Political Causality of Difference*, London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, p. 67.

environment that followed the intensification of industrial viticulture. Proponents of the natural wine movement have no hesitation in pointing the finger at those they believe to be responsible: agronomists in the 1960s who developed techniques for weed control that they consider to be harmful and responsible for the decline in soil and wine quality; engineers who in the pursuit of increased production facilitated the mass mechanisation of viticulture; and even policy-makers who favoured monoculture, thereby contributing to a loss of diversity in grape varieties and soil depletion. Beyond the viticultural aspect, vinification techniques have also been fundamentally questioned and natural winemakers openly position themselves as non-interventionists who stand against the immoderate use of oenological interventions.

These criticisms then developed into the adoption by natural winemakers of the “hands-on” approach in their vineyards and the “hands-off” approach in their cellars. They also resonate with broader concerns about production standardisation, which is seen as being in line with both viticultural standardisation – that is, the idea that viticulture has been concerned with developing duplicable approaches that can be applied uniformly anywhere and indefinitely – and product standardisation, where wine is produced in massive quantities with the ultimate objective of uniformity so as to fit certain expectations and be ready for sale in large retail stores and supermarkets. Finally, the discourse of natural wine movement actors also includes both a denunciation of the monopoly of economic proficiency and a defence of a type of agriculture that adapts to ecosystems, as opposed to agro-industries, which seek to adapt them. By positioning themselves against conventional viticulture production, the techniques of interventionist oenology and the dominant production system more broadly, the criticisms raised by actors in the natural wine movement are no longer merely technical in nature: they are at the heart of a genuine ideological battle.

The three other IRs (employment, finance and commercial) are introduced here briefly, but they will be tackled in more detail later in this thesis. However, this brief picture will help us understand how the natural wine movement is challenging IRs within the wine industry from all sides, all part of an attempt to “free themselves” from the dominant model.

➤ **Employment: reinventing relationships around work and workers**

Employment IRs configure rules and expectations regarding employer-employee relations and how labour is conceived, managed and mediated. These issues are linked to deeper reflections on the labour-capital nexus – the relationships between landowners and workforces – and will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6, but what should be initially noted here is a renewed relationship with work that especially seeks to reconcile intellectual and manual labour. As described by Pruvost in her analysis of ecological alternatives to traditional work relationships, “manual labour is not experienced as an impossibility to access intellectual knowledge, but rather, on the contrary, as knowledge in its own right and sometimes even as a condition of reflection.” This also draws from Thoreau’s philosophy, which holds that the “act of literally putting one’s hands in the earth is presented as a “rich” experience in every way” (Pruvost, 2013). In this way, the work relationship also participates in the restoration of an eminently artisanal dimension to agricultural work without omitting its repetitive and wearing aspect, but by emphasising the fact that producing wine gives a noble dimension back to work. As I argue later in the thesis (See chapter 9.2.2.), the professional arena is also the primary vector of militancy for winemakers in the natural wine movement, whose ethos permeates both their personal and professional spheres.

➤ **Financial: promoting “peri-capitalist” forms of wine production**

Financial IRs encompass how actors in an industry manage their capital investments and how each industry tends to develop its own set of standardised practices, regulations and patterns of power that enable its durability. Throughout this thesis, I demonstrate the ambiguous relationship natural winemakers have with the dominant economic model, which manifests itself through differentiated relationships with capitalism that sometimes emphasise “peri-capitalist” production models and sometimes ride the neoliberal wave. In their discourses and narratives, however, actors from the natural wine movement are mostly opposed to the capitalist, productivity-driven model. This translates into critiques of the currently dominant modes of capital accumulation and financial flows of the wine sector. First, as we have seen above, natural winemakers position themselves as stewards of the land and therefore question human domination over nature, which inherently conflicts with a capitalist economy. Second, they argue against the effects of ultraliberal and “scalable” capitalism and instead advocate for human-scale enterprises, following the popular adage

in AAFMs that “small is beautiful.” Third, they condemn the escalation of prices in wine transactions and lament the fact that some wines have become vehicles for financial investment. Last but not least, the natural wine movement challenges the capitalistic appropriation of vineyards as “an ecologically strategic territory.” Here, I borrow from Pineau, who asserts that “vineyards are ecologically and economically strategic territories, which have already undergone a process of predation-substitution with the standardization of crops, grape varieties, the goal of yields per hectare correlated with the use of pesticides.” and that “natural winemakers are committed to defending their vineyards against these acts of predation, or at least to restoring the environment unbalanced by this substitution.” (C. Pineau, 2019, p. 154). In opposition to this form of domination of land and natural resources, natural winemakers engage in peri-capitalist forms of production. Chapter 8 offers an opportunity to go into the renewed relationships with land tenure and property the movement promotes in greater detail, as well a renewed approach to business operations that is more akin to that of profit sufficers than to profit maximisers.

➤ **Commercial: using the imperfections of traditional commercial IRs to their advantage**

In the wine industry, this final IR is concerned with the relationship between producers and retailers and between retailers and wholesalers. The rules and regulations that govern commercial IRs in the wine business are complex and numerous. Among them, the third-party certification system has imposed itself as the model to be followed globally, through quality signs (which determine the right for a wine to bear a geographical designation) or environmental signs. These certifications are part of a law on labelling that dictates what can be displayed on a bottle. In addition to this, other commercial and marketing strategies, such as brands, grape varieties, vintages and storytelling, come into play. A reputed “growing global competition” combined with rapidly changing consumption patterns has placed enormous strain on commercial IRs. It is a challenge that some actors in the natural wine movement have turned to their advantage by imposing their own commercial and marketing strategies and their own channels of distribution and marketing. Indeed, as detailed in chapter 8, I go as far as to argue that the natural wine movement has coalesced around the shortcomings of traditional commercial institutions. This dynamic manifests itself in different ways in the two regions, however. For example, in Bordeaux, the CIVB – the main organisation responsible for representing wine professionals – is often depicted as having failed in many respects to protect Bordeaux’s winemakers from the current crisis.

In numerous interviews, natural winemakers have stated that they do not feel that they are represented by this body and have criticised its governance choices, and some have even “declared outright war” on the organisation. In contrast, in the Western Cape, natural winemakers have come together and formed professional solidarity groups based on a shared assessment that there is a complete absence of state involvement in the wine industry. While some find this satisfactory, others say that they suffer from a lack of assistance and public subsidies that would encourage the development of a better commercial IR and thus improve profitability in the industry. Ultimately, in both France and South Africa, a common adversary has been identified that has created very limited space for discussion with the natural wine movement: the CIVB is on the front line in Bordeaux, whereas in South Africa the corresponding figure is mainly the state.

Conclusion

In many aspects, all the IRs unpacked above are interwoven in a complex meshing and can only be distinguished in the cases studied in this thesis with considerable difficulty. Nonetheless, the approach as a whole remains an interesting framework within which to conceptualise the complex layers of rules, regulations and structures that govern the wine industry globally in the two contexts studied, and how actors in the natural wine movement have built a common identity and ethos in opposition to some of these traditional IRs by revealing their failings and/or proposing alternative pathways. The main point to be taken away from this section is that by adopting a position against conventional viticulture practices and the dominant production system more broadly, the natural wine movement has voiced criticisms that are no longer merely technical, but are at the heart of a real ideological battle. This in turn increases the need to examine the political work carried out by the various actors involved in the industry. This being the case, an analysis of the natural wine movement clearly falls within the broader literature of political ecologies, which is concerned with power over and management of natural resources.

In order to offer a brief summary of the shared approach that binds actors from the natural wine movement together, I have proposed the following approach. First, one needs to look at what the natural wine movement stands for and what unites the winemakers who identify with it. This can be summed up as a “hands-on approach” in the vineyard and a “hands-off approach” in the cellar. Other characteristics that define natural winemakers include a

renewed relationship with nature based on a notion of “ecological care,” in which they see themselves as having a role of “stewardship of the land.” Second, one needs to discover what actors in the natural wine movement stand against. Here, the opposition to a common enemy – be it the dominant production system, the capitalist market, the agro-industry or standardised production – is very acute and highly visible. Actors from the natural wine movement have gathered together in opposition to the actors who dominate the wine industry’s hegemonic discourse and by so doing envision themselves as a sort of counterculture or subaltern group (and thus they can be considered within the broader literature on AAFMs).

However, we must remain aware of the lack of homogeneity, and even a lack of leadership, within the movement, which has no clear rules or defined borders. The diversity of the values and approaches the movement encompasses is offset by a shared opposition to the common enemy – industrial production. In the coming chapters, I will analyse the history of the emergence of the natural wine movement, the building of a shared identity and the symbols of aggregation to and exclusion from it in greater detail.

5. CHAPTER 5: Praxis of the Natural Wine Movement.

Recounting the local emergences of the movement and its rhizomatic diffusion internationally

Introduction

“Every revolution needs a spark, a catalyst that changes things forever. It might not compare with the storming of the Bastille or the fall of the Berlin Wall, but the Sauvignon Blanc that Charles Back of Fairview tasted at a co-operative in 1995 has had a dramatic impact on the Cape Wine industry. That glass of wine was a moment of sublime serendipity. Without it, the Swartland would still be regarded as a rural backwater, better known for wheat fields than vineyards. Instead, it is one of the most dynamic regions in the southern hemisphere.” (Tim Atkin, *The Swartland Revolution*, TimAtkins.com, 8 August 2013)

“There is a wine revolution quietly going on in South Africa. Or more correctly, a second revolution. The first one was when apartheid ended and the KVV iron grip on the wine sector also came to an end. That led to the birth of the modern wine industry in South Africa, where today you can find many very exciting wineries producing outstanding wines.

The “revolution” that is happening now, since a few years back, is perhaps less overwhelming and on a smaller scale, but it is also very interesting. There is a new breed of winemakers experimenting with new styles, new grape varieties (or actually old!), and working with techniques that can sometimes be on a knife’s edge. [...] They prefer to work with old vines and always with very few additives. Some would call their wines natural wines.” (Britt Karlson, *Five “natural” wines from South Africa that are really good!* Britt on Forbes, BKWineMagazine, 7 June 2017)

“Isabelle Saporta – A Bordeaux, en dix ans, 30 % des vigneronns ont disparu. Leurs domaines ont été vendus, soit pour faire du bas de gamme, soit à des groupes qui sont les seuls capables d’acheter à prix d’or des domaines prestigieux. Bientôt, sur le plateau de Pomerol, il n’y aura plus un seul propriétaire paysan.

Jonathan Nossiter – Bordeaux n’est plus un paysage mais un centre commercial pour riches.

Isabelle Saporta – Les bouteilles à trois chiffres, ce sont des prix purement spéculatifs. Un cheval-blanc, c’est certes un grand vin très bien fait, mais ça ne vaut pas 500 euros, faut pas déconner, il n’y a pas d’or au fond des bouteilles! [...]

Jonathan Nossiter – Face à ça, une révolution a commencé il y a une dizaine d’années et ça me réjouit le cœur. C’est une révolution pacifique, éthique, sans violence, sans idéologie dogmatique qui exclut la diversité des gens, à l’inverse des révolutions du XXe siècle. Ces révolutionnaires sont des paysans éclairés, des agriculteurs vrais et engagés, chacun avec sa conception, qui se sont unis pour construire une société parallèle démocratique. [...]

Dans ce paysage dévasté, une chose extraordinaire se passe: des agriculteurs, des vigneronns font des recherches historiques, comme de bons cinéastes ou de bons journalistes le feraient. Ils étudient l’histoire de leur lieu, font le tour de leur terroir pour discuter avec les vieux – pas pour les imiter, mais pour mieux se projeter vers l’avenir. Ensuite, ils interprètent ce travail de fond en fabriquant des produits. Dans leurs cas, ces produits ne sont pas des films ou des journaux mais du vin, du blé, des fruits et légumes, qui incarnent un lieu et sa mémoire historique de manière active. Puis ils partagent. La mémoire du lieu et la bonne santé de la terre ne leur suffisent pas, ils appliquent la même éthique à la distribution. Ils ont conscience du tissu social, donc des prix: ils ne cherchent pas à s’enrichir avec leur travail mais à en vivre dignement.” (Extracts from media article of Serge Kaganski, “Les raisins de la colère: Faut pas déconner, il n’y a pas d’or au fond des bouteilles !”, *Les Inrocks*, 20 September 2015).

As these extracts show, the narrative on the emergence of the natural wine movement is often accompanied by lexical field of the “revolution.” This chapter asks whether the much-trumpeted revolution announced by actors in the natural wine movement is actually taking place. It seems that “revolution” is used spontaneously by actors in the field and in the narrative of the natural wine movement at large to describe the changes that are taking place and the pathways created by the movement within the industry. “The natural revolution is under way” commented the Spanish daily newspaper *El País* in an article entitled *The Wine Fever* in January 2021¹⁰⁹. This idea of a revolution was already developed in Pineau’s work, when she described natural winegrowers as “a troop of foot soldiers engaged in the battle of denial and/or feigned ignorance.” (Pineau, 2019, p. 161). The notion of a revolution here needs to be understood in terms of a narrative used by the actors in the movement rather than my own choice as a scholar. In this chapter, I question the prominent use of this narrative, and quickly come to the realisation that the term “revolution” serves marketing and visibility purposes much more than it describes an actual revolution in the wine sector. I would argue instead that the stories of the emergence of the natural wine movement in the two regions reveal certain claims and resistance strategies, as well as challenges to and mobilisations against the conventional wine system. Still, the narrative of the “revolution” has proved to be a useful lens through which to reveal the story of the natural wine movement and display events as they unfolded, creating precedents and showing a clear intention to mount an in-depth challenge to the current system in the wine industry.

The natural wine movement crystallises in struggle between small militant groups and the dominant conventional system. It deliberately takes new and original forms and goes beyond the strict framework of professional practices. In this chapter, I investigate the ways the natural wine movement manifests itself in the regions I have studied. How has it set itself apart from the rest of the industry? What strategies have been used by actors in the natural wine movement to resist and create differentiation? Are they submitted to or seized on, circumscribed or iterative, conscious or unaware, individual or collective?

¹⁰⁹Almudena Àvalos, La fiebre de los vinos naturales, *El País*, 8 January 2021.

To achieve this aim, I develop and apply three hypotheses throughout the chapter. First, I establish a parallel between the proliferation of the movement and the figure of the rhizome. I use the figure of the rhizom to describe the morphology of the movement in its transnational polycentric settings as well as its non-centric and non-hierarchical dimensions. The rhizome offers an especially interesting way to reflect on both the emergence of the movement and its shape and proliferation and to forge links with the values and ethos of the natural wine movement I described in the previous chapter. Second, I hypothesise that the natural wine movement is more likely to emerge in regions with a history of neglect, in the sense that they did not invest in the wine industry. Here I introduce what I call the “theory of empty space” and describe the environments I believe are conducive to innovation and counterculture movements. Last, I draw on the sociology of social movements to identify two stages of mobilisation: cognitive and through collective actions. These three hypotheses are examined by means of a detailed review of the emergence of the natural wine movement in the two regions of the project. Because of the lack of official recognition of the movement and the absence of an official representative body, the narrative is somewhat diffuse, and so for this reason, it has mostly been reconstituted analytically by drawing from the testimonies of field informants backed up by secondary data, mainly in the form of media articles.

5.1. How has the natural wine movement manifested itself? An analytical framework in three parts

The first part of this chapter presents the analytical framework I developed to conceptualise the emergence of the natural wine movement in the two regions. I first look at Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome concept, and then posit that “empty spaces” are fertile ground for countercultures and radical innovations. Finally, I review the literature on social mobilisations in order to make a distinction between cognitive mobilisations and mobilisation through action.

5.1.1. *The rhizome as the embodiment of the natural wine movement*

How can we encapsulate and represent the emergence of the natural wine movement analytically? How has it proliferated across scales and regions and different wine territories? I now turn to this idea of a rhizome, a concept developed by Deleuze and Guattari in 1976, to understand the processual dynamics at play.

➤ **The rhizome from the origins of the concept to its reformulation for this study**

The notion of a rhizome, which comes from the field of political philosophy, presents as a representation of an a-centric, non-hierarchical and multiple-entry network shape. This metaphor for social representation is directly inspired by vegetable metabolisms. In fact, the rhizome is above all a vegetable system that proliferates horizontally, often underground, and has no central point, or in another sense, it has many of them. A rhizome can be contrasted with a tree, in that a tree is a centralised, hierarchical structure, whereas a rhizome rebels against centrality and is a-centric. For Deleuze and Guattari, the rhizome is more than just a simple comparison with vegetable systems: they embody ways of thinking and governing, and influence political organisations (Krtolica, 2021). The tree (or arborescent) system is the dominant figure in Western thinking, while the rhizome offers alternative ways of organising. In their essay *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari describe the new paradigms that emerge with the rhizome theory: first, it is a system that tends to reject the effects of centralisation through the way it is rooted in the branching of multiplicity, and rhizomes or organisations are “labyrinths, multi-cursal pathways that are dissolving hierarchies, ignoring anachronistic power structures, soil for germinating collective, distributed agency.” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980). Finally, perhaps one of the most important characteristics that offer an understanding of the rhizome is that it always has multiple entryways, in the sense that whether one begins at a particular point or with the network as a whole, it is possible to view this network from any given node. This figure is mainly used in analyses of social movements, especially transnational ones (Rocheleau and Roth 2007, 435).

Why a rhizome rather than a polycentric network?

Why use the figure of the rhizome and not simply explain the movement as a polycentric network? The differences between a polycentric network and rhizome are subtle yet real and merit a little further investigation. First, let us return to the definition of a polycentric network. The polycentric network was the principal subject of interest of Ostrom (Ostrom, Tiebout, & Warren, 1961). In her view, it refers to a system with many different centres of decision-making authority and collective action. In polycentric networks, the multiple decision-making centres are formally independent of each other and can intervene at different levels. Both polycentric networks (Ostrom) and rhizomes (Deleuze and Guattari)

propose alternative ways of organising and governing, but they have different conceptual foundations and implications. First, they differ in their scope of application. A polycentric network is primarily applied to the governance and management of common-pool resources and is used to address collective action problems affecting multiple decision-making units. Rhizomes on the other hand, find their application in a broader range of contexts, including knowledge production and social movements. They challenge traditional hierarchical and centralised organisation modes, and encourage horizontal, non-linear methods of connectivity and knowledge dissemination. They also differ in the fact that polycentric systems do not necessarily undermine hierarchical structures, but seek to distribute decision-making power across multiple levels and scales, whereas rhizomatic systems reject the notion of fixed hierarchies and linear structures. Rhizomes embrace a decentralised, non-linear mode of organisation. They are characterised by interconnected nodes that can emerge and connect in various ways without any predetermined or central point of control. This structure allows for multiplicity, flexibility and adaptability.

Textbox 9. Why a rhizome rather than a polycentric network?

➤ **The natural wine movement embraces the morphology of the rhizome**

In my analysis of the natural wine movement, it seems appropriate to use the figure of the rhizome rather than the polycentric network. The rhizome proves to be very useful for multiple reasons. First, it makes it possible to understand the structure of the movement as an a-centric, non-hierarchical system. The rhizome architecture implies several patterns that match the structure of the natural wine movement. There is no one centre: rather, there is a multiplicity of anchors in every wine-producing region. In addition, the natural wine movement proliferates without a central authority or main regulating body, but through multiple horizontal alliances among winemakers, as well as between different actors in the wine value chain. This theoretical framework offers an opportunity to focus on the connectivity and relationships among the various actors that are part of the movement. This idea of a proliferating, a-centric network was already germinating in Pineau's reflections: when she seeks to define the natural wine movement, she contends that "'network' is undoubtedly the most appropriate term, since it includes the winegrowers, with their various components, as well as intermediaries (sommeliers, wine merchants, hospitality staff, etc.) and consumers." (Pineau 2019, 145). She sees an extraordinary network of mutual support in the movement that exists "in a quasi-parallel world, activists, farmers, winegrowers and citizens weave webs of links, still fragile, which they imagine as so many parachutes, useful to the greatest number of earthlings." (Pineau, 2019, 150). I also believe that inter-relationships and interdependencies among actors in the network are key to analysing the dynamics of its proliferation and the spread of its ethos and praxis. Whether

or not they define themselves as militants, the actors in this network find themselves in a position of militancy and opposition to the norm, and contribute through agencies to the transfer of new claims and the transmission of similar modes of actions across localities and scales.

➤ **The natural wine movement embracing the rhizome philosophy**

Apart from offering an understanding of the organisational structure of the natural wine movement, the political philosophy behind the idea of the rhizome also includes a certain vision of and relationship to nature that provides particular insights for this study. In fact, the concept is frequently used in the political ecology literature, and relates in many ways to the discourse of natural winemakers.

After dedicating a substantial period of time to studying the works of Deleuze and Guattari, Krtolica proposed this hypothesis: in the rhizome theory, there is a link between the way you treat nature and the way you treat others; in other words, there is a correspondence between “the way in which plants are cultivated and domestic animals reared, on the one hand, and inter-human political and social relations, on the other” (Krtolica, 2021, p. 43). This resonates with certain elements of the ethos in the natural wine movement, especially the reflections around the dogma of the opposition between nature and culture. In the rhizome theory, Deleuze and Guattari compare “direct positive action” with “indirect negative action” as an ecological philosophy. Direct positive action comes from Western thinking, and translates into the direct collective management of others. The herd is a perfect illustration of this: it depends on a shepherd for protection, and it needs him to find its route, to be fed, etc. The herd and its shepherd are a very good example of direct positive action. On the other hand, indirect negative action involves finding the best conditions for an animal to thrive or for a plant to flourish in and designing its environment to allow it to develop its full potential. In this sense, it is about accommodating a living being in its optimal ecosystem and letting it do its own thing rather than providing any direct intervention. Archetypes of this way of thinking can be found in yam cultivation in West Africa and rice plantations in Asia; in fact, much of it is present in Chinese philosophy.

A similar distinction is voiced by natural winemakers: on the one hand, chemical treatments and technical interventions have been established by the wine industry as the main direction for progress. A very good example of direct positive action in this case might be oenology,

and the never-ending race to adapt, tailor and modify wine to fit certain standards and expectations. Conventional winemakers use oenology techniques to seek to produce – or reproduce – a certain taste and expected organoleptic characteristics. Natural winemakers have a different vision of producing wine, one that better suits the “indirect negative action” narrative. I present three arguments here to illustrate this point. First, on the viticulture side, natural winemakers have turned to agroecological, sometimes even biodynamic, practices that aim to preserve and maintain their vineyards’ ecosystems. There are numerous connections between “indirect negative action” and biodynamic guidelines. They both involve taking in the effect rather than seeking it out: for instance, Steiner’s biodynamic recommendations include the idea of an autonomous, holistic farming system in which the farmer’s intervention is focused on maintaining the balance and wellbeing of the ecosystem with little to no external input. Second, in Legeron’s definition of natural wine as “nothing added, nothing taken away”, a phrase that has virtually become the adage of the natural wine movement, there is a clear intention to highlight the absence of manipulation or intervention in the vinification process. Some winemakers call this natural vinification, meaning that they allow the fermentation process to happen on its own with minimal external intervention. Haudricourt, the anthropologist who largely inspired Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome theory, also advised letting a non-interventionist attitude prevail, adopting an attitude that allows things to happen. There is indirect negative action when wines are the result of an accumulation of factors (including terroir, soil, grape variety and climate), a vision in which the winemaker ultimately intervenes and adapts to nature, and not the other way around. Finally, as we saw in the previous chapter with the notions of stewardship and ecological care, natural winemakers extend this philosophy beyond wine production, and it becomes an ethos for life: as Krtolica puts it, “these patterns of action are valid for all fields of practice, both in the treatment of nature and in the treatment of others” (Krtolica, 2021, p. 44). In this thesis, I ask how far this argument works: do the actors in the natural wine movement extend their way of being one with nature and making wine to the rest of their agencies and interactions? Lastly, there are clear anarchical roots and discourses in Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy, which in many ways embraces the ecosophical (Shaw, 2015) or ecological ethos of the natural wine movement.

To sum up, the rhizomatic aspect of the natural wine movement helps gain an understanding of the natural wine movement in its global setting as a transnational phenomenon with a multiplicity of antennae (local shoots). As a polycentric, a-centric, non-

hierarchical figure, the rhizome is an interesting concept to be borne in mind throughout the development of this thesis as multiscalar dynamics and ties between the local and the global are revealed.

5.1.2. *“Empty spaces” as a conducive breeding ground for innovation and countercultures*

As the story of the rise of the natural wine movement as an international network unfolds, it becomes clear that it first emerged in wine regions that had not historically benefited from a particularly good reputation. I suggest here that alternative practices and alternative ways of thinking emerge in the margins. Indeed, in line with the arguments developed by Florida in his study of creative classes in urban spaces, I believe that innovation and creativity are fostered on the fringes (Florida, 2003). Following a similar argument, bell hooks suggested that margins engender a space of radical openness. Commenting on her previous book *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, she wrote:

“I was working in these statements to identify marginality as much more than a site of deprivation. In fact I was saying just the opposite: that it is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance. It was this marginality that I was naming as a central location for the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives. As such I was not speaking of a marginality one wishes to lose – to give up or surrender as part of moving into the center – but rather as a site one stays in, clings to even because it nourishes one capacity to resist. It offers to one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new words.” (hooks, 1989, p. 20)

Drawing from Florida and hooks, I have built what I call the theory of “empty spaces” in which the latter – that is, regions that have historically been neglected in terms of wine investments – are conducive to the emergence of counter-reactions to the dominant forces, in this case the mainstream markets. As the following section reveals, the story of the natural wine movement first emerged in regions that have never benefited from a long-term reputation for quality wine production. Historically, they were not seen as prime regions for investing in the wine sector, and were therefore left to large cooperatives and the production of bulk wines. This is the case with Beaujolais or Languedoc Roussillon in France, and the Swartland, and even more recently regions like Bot River and Hermanus in South Africa. The story of the emergence of the natural wine movement in the two regions of the project are two contrasting cases that confirm this hypothesis.

5.1.3. *Cognitive mobilisation and mobilisation through actions by the movement*

My analysis of the movement's identity-building process borrows from two approaches. First, I use the sociology of the professions, in particular the concept of professional identity as defined by Dubar, meaning both a process of belonging – “identity for oneself” – and one of attribution – “identification by others” (Dubar, 1998). Second, it is based on the sociology of social movements and activism, in which identity-building is analysed in its collective dimension and as a continuous, dynamic and interactive process and plays a part in the differentiation and legitimisation of a social group (Michael Voegtli, 2020; Neveu, 2011). By examining the narrative natural wine activists from the two regions have developed about themselves, I aim to explore how the identity of the natural wine movement has been created and transformed. I do this by looking at both the processes of identification and belonging that allow the construction of collective identity and the dynamics of marginality, demarcation and resistance that winemakers have built on this idea of a “revolution.” I investigate the cognitive dimension that stimulates activism practices and the special efforts required of those involved to break from the dominant model by moving away from established paths.

In 1998, Patrice Mann analysed the mobilisation process that led the winemakers of the South of France into the *Midi Rouge* at the beginning of the twentieth century (See textbox 2). He used two notions to explain the different stages: cognitive mobilisation and mobilisation through actions. He explained: “Mobilisation processes are complex. To act collectively, individuals must be able to give meaning to a situation that has become “problematic.” To do this, they need to make a diagnosis, identify the causes of the problem, and envisage solutions capable of remedying it. Once the nature of the problem has been identified and its solutions found, they will have to define and collectively implement effective means of action to rectify the situation. The first dimension of this process is called cognitive mobilisation, the second, mobilisation for action.” (Mann, 1998, p. 48). I borrow from Mann's analytical framework to observe the emergence of the natural wine movement in Bordeaux and in the Western Cape.

Although there may be a temptation to profile the producers who are committed to the movement and establish some standard profiles, I see a diversity of situations that would be difficult to put into boxes. In her study of natural wine in France, Pineau distinguished two categories of winemakers (C. Pineau, 2019, p. 48): the “crop (r) evolutionary” and the “neo-winemaker”. The crop (r)evolutionary depicts a shift from the family legacy in which

part of a family's knowledge and history is transmitted but the winemaker ends up questioning the good intentions of these practices. The life stories of these winegrowers often tell of pivotal moments and realisations that enabled them to embark on a cultural and cultivation revolution and move away from the legacy of their ancestors. The second category describes neo-winemakers: as part of the wider segment of neo-ruralists, their winemaking technique is often the fruit of a professional conversion, and sometimes even a complete personal regeneration. This new activity embodies the realisation of a dream made up of appeals to nature and clear rejections of urban lifestyles. While these two archetypes are certainly useful for understanding different life trajectories, and while there is no reason to dismiss such ideal-type categories, I have chosen not to use them in this context, as my fieldwork did not reveal such distinct categories. In fact, it encountered a wide diversity of profiles that did not fit into either of them. In the following sections, therefore, rather than categorising the winemakers involved in the movement, I draw portraits of some of its iconic figures (iconic should not be understood here as leadership, but rather as the way their portraits illustrate a branch of the movement). Indeed, like a rhizome, the natural wine movement is characterised by its lack of leaders and official representative bodies. Similarly, the demands its actors make are multiple, diffuse and evolving. The proliferation of the discourses and demands of the movement's actors are depicted as the story of the emergence of the natural wine movement unfolds. Unlike in the rest of this thesis, the Western Cape and Bordeaux are treated separately in this section in order to better understand the chronological events and local dynamics at play, starting with the story of the natural winemakers in the Western Cape Province, South Africa.

5.2. The emergence of the natural wine movement in the two regions: a singular history, building the narrative around the “revolution”

The story of the birth of the natural wine movement in the two regions has yet to be explored, and the conditions behind its worldwide emergence need to be defined more systematically. It should be noted that both the Western Cape Province and Bordeaux are latecomers to the movement, and so its emergence might concurrently obey different sets of circumstances and rely on the existing dynamics in other regions. Because these two regions are not at the forefront of the natural wine movement, this is, to my knowledge, a story that has never been written before. The following sections are therefore almost

entirely based on my own field experience. I have attempted to remain true to the words of my various informants.

5.2.1. *In the Western Cape Province: from the Swartland Revolution to the pioneers of the natural wine movement*

In order to fully comprehend the origins of the natural wine movement in the Western Cape Province, it is necessary to delve into the story of the Swartland Revolution. The Swartland is a sub-region of the Cape Peninsula that has experienced a remarkable renaissance in wine production and reputation thanks to a small group of winemakers dedicated to producing differently and distinguishing themselves from the rest of the South African wine industry. I have adopted an approach that focuses on an analysis of the actors' narratives in the subsequent section to recount the events that led to the Swartland Revolution and its influence on the burgeoning natural wine movement.

5.2.1.1. The Swartland Revolutions and their legacy

➤ **From grains to grapes: the singular history of the Swartland region**

The Swartland is a sub-wine region of the Western Cape Province, a district defined by the SAWIS division of appellations. The name Swartland is thought to have originated with Jan van Riebeeck, who, during the Boer colonisation of Khoisan lands, named the area “Het Zwarte Land” (meaning the black country) after the *renosterbos* (rhinoceros bush), a dark indigenous plant that covers the Swartland's landscape (Malan, 2014). It lies to the north-west of Cape Town, between the Atlantic Ocean and the Cederberg mountains (See Figure 9). It is the fifth most productive wine-growing region in South Africa, with over 12,000 hectares of planted vines.¹¹⁰ Historically, the Swartland was cereal-producing area, with wheat fields extending over hundreds of hectares, and it was long considered to be the bread basket of South Africa. The first wine grapes did not appear until 1795, almost 150 years after the first vines had been planted in other parts of the country. Grape growing was a secondary activity for Swartland farmers at the time, and most of the grapes that were produced were sold in bulk. Winegrowing in the Swartland is therefore a relatively young activity.

¹¹⁰ SAWIS Statistical Districts Report, 2022.

As the country underwent its democratic transition in the early 1990s, the wine sector experienced a number of transformations: international demand for New World wines in general, and South African wines in particular, continued to grow, and so growing vines was becoming an attractive economic opportunity for South African farmers (Ponte & Ewert, 2009). At the same time, the Swartland underwent significant changes in terms of land use. With the arrival of these new economic opportunities, many cereal farms turned to the production of grapes for the wine industry (Halpern and Meadows, 2013). This transformation “from grains to grapes” was reflected in an evident increase in the area planted with vines, which increased from less than 1% in the 1960s to almost 9% in 2010. However, the entry of the South African wine sector into the neoliberal global economy also meant price competitiveness, which, coupled with the legacy of the cooperative system that had operated under apartheid, was largely felt by producers, and only a third of South African winegrowers could claim to run a financially viable operation (Hauptfleisch, 2016). As a result, and with the help of techniques imported from the agrochemical industry, wine production in the Swartland moved towards mass production. Winegrowers constantly tried to increase their per hectare yields to compensate for the ever-decreasing prices per tonne of grapes imposed by the cooperatives. The Swartland has therefore long been a region known for its production of bulk wine of grapes used for brandy.

➤ **Black country, blank canvas: Investing in the Swartland**

In addition, because the Swartland is a relatively young wine region, it has been unable to build a national reputation – let alone an international one – unlike other regions like Constantia or Franschhoek, for instance, which became world-famous for their wine production before international sanctions were imposed during apartheid. South Africa’s main wine-producing regions such as Stellenbosch, Franschhoek, Paarl and Constantia developed around the concept of *estates*¹¹¹ and the appropriation of models imported from Europe, more specifically drawing inspiration from the Bordeaux aesthetic. In the post-apartheid era, these same regions created Wine Routes, which gave a major boost to both the tourism sector and the wine industry, particularly in the case of the Stellenbosch and Franschhoek regions (Bruwer, 2003). The Swartland, on the other hand, less by choice than

¹¹¹ According to Dellier et al., “The Estates correspond to bottling entities, akin to the châteaux in the Bordeaux region”. In Julien Dellier, Éric Rouvellac and Sylvain Guyot, “Le vignoble sud-africain dans l’ère post-apartheid, entre transformation et continuité”, *EchoGéo*, 2013, vol. 23, p. 5.

by default (having previously focused on cereal production), was not able to benefit from these tourism initiatives and found itself labelled as a “bulk wine-producing region” whose wines were stocked on the back shelves of grocery shops.

The Swartland could have remained a historically cereal-growing region, producing poor-quality wine from high-yield vineyards, as well as a place with little tourist attractiveness. At first glance, it does not offer any major attractions for the natural wine movement. On closer inspection, however, it is precisely because the Swartland is a historically neglected wine-growing region that it has become a land of opportunity for new independent winemakers. In fact, growing vines in the Swartland provides a number of advantages. First, because of the region’s lack of a reputation, there is little pressure on land tenure, and so access to land for viticulture is relatively easy. Second, the Swartland can produce grapes at a fraction of the cost of other regions: in 2015, VinPro identified the Swartland as the region with the lowest production costs (Hauptfleisch, 2016, p. 59). During our interviews, a number of wine growers made similar observations:

“Because the coops just left people in a lurch and the farmers were not paid for almost two years after their harvest... They were still waiting for their money! So, farms were for sale as well. You could buy farms for nothing. [...] Everything: the price of land was cheap; the grapes were cheap. It was... It wasn’t a fashionable area. And if you go to Malmesbury you will see, I mean it’s a pretty shitty town.” (Interview Grayson, caviste in Swartland, 22 May 2022)

“That was 2007. We were already making some wines from the Swartland, so we were buying grapes from the area for our previous winery. So, we knew already where all the interesting vineyards were, where the good terroirs were. And at that time, it was a very unknown wine region. For us, it was an obvious place to start the winery. We knew there was very good fruit available, and we knew where to find it. And it was affordable.” (Interview Matthew, winemaker in Swartland, 25 April 2022)

The winemaker interviewed here, like many of his peers, saw these low costs as an opportunity to set up an economically viable wine production. As this other recently settled winemaker explained:

“As a winemaker in South Africa, you can start with one barrel of wine, you can buy grapes somewhere, etc. And a lot of the Swartland wine or natural winemakers that is how they started. It’s a lot of young winemakers that started with no money. And the freedom, the openness of the [South African] legislation allows you to do that.” (Interview Marsh, winemaker in Western cape, 19 January 2022)

Furthermore, because of the Swartland’s poor reputation, there were few (if any) expectations in terms of the style of wines to be produced. It did not yet have a name for producing high-quality wines, and little had been done to build a regional brand image. A

wine producer who arrived in the 1990s recounts the early days of winegrowing in the region:

“It [*The Swartland*] was never sexy! The Swartland has always been a wheat and sheep growing area, and a bit of cattle. Although, I believe that in the Swartland basically it was chenin and cinsault that were planted back in the day... for brandy!” (Interview William winemaker in Western Cape, 21 April 2022)

Many new winemakers took advantage of the lack of reputation, and thus the lower production costs (including lower tenure prices), to set up production in the region. This is confirmed if one looks at the number of private wineries that have been established in the region: in fact, the Swartland is one of the only wine-producing regions in the country where the number of private wineries has increased since 2004 (compared to the cooperative model), with the majority of the Swartland’s winegrowers being “small” producers¹¹². With its history of cooperative wineries and its reputation for producing “table wines,” the region’s transformation into a wine-producing region can be compared to that of Languedoc in France (Petric, 2008). As in Languedoc in the 1970s, with the arrival of a new fringe of producers in the region, the Swartland has witnessed a genuine shift in quality: winegrowers abandoned the cooperatives and focused increasingly on small-scale production geared towards fine, top-of-the-range wines. At the same time, the Swartland’s new producers saw the absence of a regional brand image as an opportunity to work together to promote the region’s unique character. It was against this backdrop that the idea of the Swartland Revolution was born.

➤ The story of the Swartland Revolution

In the early 2000s, therefore, the Swartland was a fertile ground for the emergence of a new movement: the Swartland Revolution. Initiated by four wineries, the Revolution was in fact a series of events that took place between 2010 and 2015, organised in the Swartland, more precisely in the city of Riebeek Kasteel, bringing together independent winemakers with the aim of raising the profile of the region. I use the tale of the Swartland Revolutions to try to answer a few questions: who came up with the idea for these events; what is the ambition behind them; what is the message to be put across; and what was the scale of this (unexpected) success?

¹¹² According to the SAWIS categorisation, small producers produce between 1 and 500 tons of grapes per year.

○ *The four founding domains*

Eben Sadie stands out among the new independent producers in the Swartland. After several years working for Spice Route (which, along with Lammershoek was one of the first wineries to break away from the system by refusing to sell their grapes to cooperatives), he set up his own estate, Sadie Family Wines, in 2001. He saw the Swartland as an opportunity to produce fine wines and to highlight the notion of terroir. A close network of winemakers with similar ambitions and winemaking practices grew up around him. Chris and Andrea Mullineux first worked for Reyneke and then for Sadie before setting up their own estate, Mullineux & Leeu Family Wines, in 2007. At the same time, Adi Badenhorst moved next door to the Sadie estate and set up AA Badenhorst (2007). Finally, Callie Louw started as cellar master for Adi Badenhorst before becoming manager of Porseleinberg (2009), an estate in the neighbouring valley owned by Mark Kent. These four estates (Sadie Family, Mullineux, AA Badenhorst and Porseleinberg) were the driving force behind the Swartland Revolution (Figure 25). With the exception of Eben Sadie, none are originally from Swartland, and thus they are a good example of how new winemakers invested and settled in a “new” wine region, or at least one that did not benefit from a prestigious winemaking reputation.

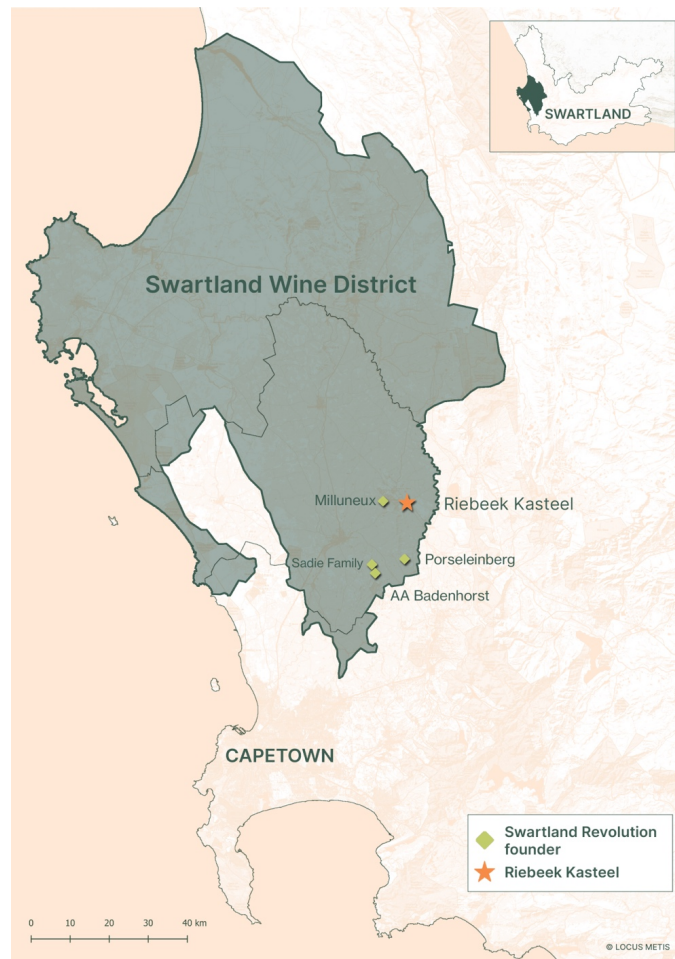


*Figure 25. Map of the Swartland and the domains of the four founders of the Swartland Revolution.
Source: Chazal 2024.*

The four estates shared a common vision of viticulture and cellar work that contrasted with conventional production in the rest of the country. They envisioned a form of regenerative agricultural production that respects the precepts of organic farming and regenerative agriculture together with a moderate use of irrigation, chemical fertilisers and phytosanitary products. Ultimately, they have aimed to produce quality wines (in both oenological and environmental terms) rather than high yields. Their vision involves research into grape varieties, notably ones adapted to the region’s semi-arid climate, and cultivation using special techniques such as bush vines and the preservation of old vines. The quality of the grapes that are harvested has also led those winemakers to reflect on their practices in the winery. For example, a low-input vinification process is favoured. Above all, the four estates share a common interest in promoting the Swartland region and building an image associated with fine wines. It was in response to this need to build the region’s reputation and at the same time assert their alternative vision of wine production that the Swartland Revolution was born. The founders, who are also known as “the Revolutionaries,”

organised and financed Swartland Revolution events, and by so doing laid the first stones of a shift in wine production in the region.



Figure 26. The Swartland and a portrait of Eben Sadie.

○ Revolution events

The annual Swartland Revolution event took place over a weekend in November and was dedicated to the Swartland's independent producers. It not only included the four founding domains but also benefited the thirty or so producers based in the region who operate independently of the cooperative system. They are mainly micro-enterprises, and very often the producers have little financial capital and therefore no (or little) access to land tenure. They rent plots of land or buy grapes from grape growers. They are mainly in charge of vinification (sometimes in shared and/or rented cellar spaces).

The events included tastings, speeches by international speakers and attendance by prominent figures from the wine press. Foreign winemakers such as Tom Lubbe¹¹³ (Domain Matassa), Stephane Ogier (Côte Roti) and Pax Mahle (California New Movement) who share similar values in terms of wine production and winemaking style were invited to present their wines. The participants came together over a weekend to taste wines in a festive spirit around a *braai*¹¹⁴ and to the rhythm of traditional Afrikaner songs. The small town of Riebeeck Kasteel is the epicentre of the movement, thanks especially to its headquarters, the *Wine Kollektive* wineshop, a pioneer in the sale of wines produced outside the cooperative system. Launched in 2010, the annual Swartland Revolution event fast became a landmark for alternative wine enthusiasts in South Africa.

○ *Ambitions and spirit of the Revolutions*

It was emphasised many times in interviews that the main objective of these events was “to put the Swartland on the map” in order to identify the region as a quality wine district nationally, but more importantly internationally. To achieve this, communications focused on promoting the diversity of the terroirs, the quality of the wines produced by independent producers who had broken free from the cooperative system and the talent of its young, newly-established winemakers. In an interview, one of the founders of the Revolution explained:

“We were all good friends, and we knew the potential of this place. And tasting our wines and each other’s wines we just saw how special the wines were. But it was difficult because the region was really unknown. So, when I would go to Johannesburg or London or New York, people didn’t really know about the Swartland, and they weren’t keen to spend a lot of money on the wines here because they thought it was just a cheap wine region. So our idea, together, we were like “how do we lift the reputation of this place?” and we thought it’s difficult to go to London or New York and tell people how amazing the Swartland is, so people have to come here and see the place for themselves.” (Interview Chris, Mullineux, April 2022)

The Swartland Revolutions created a new market consciousness by heightening awareness of the wines produced in the region. The core concept of the Revolutions emphasised the idea of authenticity, as argued by Steyn (Steyn, 2021), who describes the collective strategies put in place by Swartland producers to highlight the authenticity of their practices, both in the vineyard and in the cellar. The authenticity of Swartland wines was

¹¹³ Originally from South Africa, Tom Lubbes now has a well-known wine domain in Languedoc (France) and is sometimes perceived as the godfather of natural wine in South Africa

¹¹⁴ A South African term for “barbecue,” local customs.

presented by those involved in the Revolutions, and the perceptions associated with the idea of authenticity were reinvented and reappropriated by its participants. The Swartland Revolutions could be distinguished from previous wine fairs by the codes, values and discourses they used to convey their message. The events were much more than a simple gathering of winemakers: they were a performance orchestrated by the producers, who developed strategies to differentiate themselves from the rest of the industry. These strategies involved a range of visuals (such as posters and bottle labels) and discourses that sought to break with the traditional codes of the wine sector. For example, for each edition, the Swartland Revolution poster featured a new photo edit of its founders:

“In 2010 their images were superimposed on Delacroix’s iconic French Revolution depiction of Liberty Leading the People. In 2011 they were presented as naked Burgundian peasants stomping grapes in a traditional vat, while in 2012 they were presented as characters from the classic Western film, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, and in 2013 as Jedi knights and other characters from the *Star Wars* film franchise.” (Steyn, 2021, p. 109)



Figure 27. Promotional posters for the six editions of the Swartland Revolution staging the founder's domains¹¹⁵.

¹¹⁵ Source: Posters from www.theswartlandrevolution.com

Steyn identifies two strategies used by Swartland winemakers to promote and differentiate their wines: “mobilising the fringe” and “contesting countervailing frames.” The idea of a counterculture and efforts to position themselves on the fringes of the industry was also present in interviews with informants I met during my fieldwork:

“We were very sort of avant-garde. We did everything slightly to piss people off or draw attention. [...] You have no idea! Plus, everything now was slightly revolutionary, avant-garde, it was perceived to be “against the system.” It was almost like the wine establishment was on, and Stellenbosch couldn’t understand how we, people with no budget and nothing else, could do that.” (Interview Grayson, caviste in Swartland 22 May 2022)

Cowboy costumes, a festival atmosphere and festive banquets: the staging devised by the founders of the Swartland Revolutions quickly permeated, and was taken up, adopted and even amplified by other independent producers in the region, who also benefited from the positive spin-offs from the event and adopted these visual symbols as their own.

○ *From local gatherings to international success*

Two hundred people attended the first edition of the Revolution, but for the last one in 2015, all five hundred tickets were sold online in less than two minutes, a clear sign of success. The event was also noteworthy for a strong media presence. International journalists and wine critics flocked to the Swartland every year. Taking inspiration from the setting and atmosphere to write their articles, they contributed to the international reputation of the Revolutions. Anton, the owner of the *Wine Kollektive*, was quite astonished by this sudden global success, he recalled:

“And of course, there was this whole thing about the writers that came here and wanted to write about the Swartland. And I remember one American guy that came back and said: “Out of nowhere, you are probably one of the most wine-happening regions in the world.” And now I’m thinking “how the fuck? Everything that people are crazy about is all in here, in this shop. Is this the totality of the most exciting wines in the world?” (Interview Anton, Wine Collective, May 2022)

This feeling was later confirmed by renowned wine critic Tim Atkins, who published on his blog in August 2015:

“Can you think of a region anywhere in the Southern Hemisphere that has generated as much publicity or column inches in such a short space of time as the Swartland? Several of the key figures in the revolution had previous form with other wineries, but they are nearly all recent arrivals.” (Tim Atkins, The Stellenbosch Renaissance, *TimAtkins.com*, August 2015)

Other wine critics shared similar impressions:

“There’s a ‘surfers-and-cowboys’ vibe there that’s exhilarating to be around.” (Victoria Moore, Pioneering Winemakers of South Africa, *The Telegraph*, December 2011)

“There are signs of ‘dynamic life’ in South Africa’s backwoods Swartland region source of an increasing number of truly distinctive wines.” (Jancis Robinson, Swartland Revolts, *JancisRobinson.com*, July 2010)

The independent producers of the Swartland were aware that they were in the spotlight of the international wine media. They opened this window of opportunity with the annual Swartland events to showcase another way of making wine in terms of both producing techniques and organoleptic styles. The Revolution events definitively shaped the image associated with the region, and even the reputation of South African wines more widely: the Swartland had high-quality wines produced by iconic winemakers with a rebellious spirit, and the founders were celebrated by the international press. In a fanzine published by the Wine Kollektive, the founders were given nicknames: Eben Sadie – the winner of several awards, notably “Best Winemaker in the Southern Hemisphere”– became *Baby Jesus*, Adi Badenhorst was *Elvis*, the Mullineux were called *the Potters*, etc. One independent producer recalls the energy emanating from the Revolutions and compares the emblematic winegrowers to a “rock band that would have this huge following.”¹¹⁶ Steyn goes as far as talking about an emotional contagion: “Ultimately, in addition to the emotional contagion that occurred through evangelism, valorising also occurred through the alignment of beliefs between a new wave of younger generation fringe wine producers” (Steyn, 2021, p. 150).

After six editions (from 2010 to 2015), the Revolution’s momentum was running down, and the founders decided not to repeat the event. The Revolutions had helped bring the region to the attention of the South African public, not least because of the eccentric personalities of the winemakers and their alternative winemaking styles. They also had a lasting impact on the ecosystem of the South African wine industry. I argue that the changes initiated by the Swartland Revolutions have fostered the emergence of the natural wine movement.

The Swartland Independent Producers (SIP) as a way to perpetuate the efforts of the Revolutions.

At the same time, the winemakers associated with the Revolutions came together under the name Swartland Independent Producers (SIP), primarily as a means of institutionalising the efforts and changes initiated by the Revolutions. After the Revolutions, there was a

¹¹⁶ Interview Stephen, winemaker in Western cape, 23 March 2022.

need to involve more like-minded producers. SIP is therefore both a marketing and sales organisation for wines of Swartland origin. It also sets out guidelines and a vision for production. To enhance the value of their practices in the vineyard and cellar, the founders of the Revolutions set themselves the goal of building a quality image for the Swartland. Drawing from the appellation system in France, they built a set of production guidelines known as the SIP chart.

The manifesto published by the SIP entitles its members (if they comply with the rules of the chart) to use the words “Swartland Independent Producers” on the back of their bottles. The SIP illustrates the efforts made by producers to unite to get their message across to the public and perpetuate the Swartland’s reputation beyond the Revolutions nationally, and above all internationally. This strategy of collective action on the marketing front is bearing fruit: some of those interviewed said, for example, that some invitations to tender in Scandinavian countries explicitly state that their selection criteria favour wines bearing the “SIP” label.

Textbox 10. The Swartland Independent Producers (SIP) as a way to perpetuate the efforts of the Revolution.



Figure 28. Logo and map of the Swartland Independent Producers. Source: SIP website¹¹⁷

5.2.1.2. From the Swartland Revolutions to the rise of a local natural wine movement

When I asked Gina, a wine bar manager in Cape Town, where I could find the main figures of the natural wine movement in the region she answered: “They are mostly in the Swartland if I’m quite honest. It’s where the whole Revolution kind of started. There, they started to make different types of wine.”¹¹⁸ And indeed, the emergence of the natural wine movement in South Africa can be linked to the tight network of the Swartland Revolutions, but their legacy is not the only pillar of the natural wine movement: international dynamics and overseas influences also played an important role.

The pioneers of the natural movement in South Africa include three key domains: Craig and Carla Hawkins, who created Testalonga; Johan Meyer who manages three brands, JH Meyer, Mother Rock and Force Majeure; and Jurgen Gouws, who set up Intellego. The “Big Three” as they are sometimes called, act as markers of the natural wine movement and have enabled the movement in South Africa to be identified on the international market. It is interesting to note that these pioneers are all based in the Swartland. What is more, they all worked as trainees or cellar-masters for one of the founders of the Revolutions before setting up their own brands. One of the pioneers of the natural wine movement described how this tight-knit network of new winemakers concentrated in the Swartland enabled the birth of the movement in South Africa.

“So that kind of happened and we were on the sweet spot, so we were jumping on the wagon and said “fuck, here we are, we’ve got wine from the Swartland”, it was 2012, here is my wine. And back then, there was no one: there was only Eben and Adi, and the Mullineux and Callie, and maybe a couple of young guys, Donovan Rall, David Sadie. But we were like a handful of young guys.” (Interview Johan, JH Meyer, April 2022)

¹¹⁷Source: <https://swartlandindependent.co.za/>

¹¹⁸ Interview Gina, Cape Town, 20 December 2021.

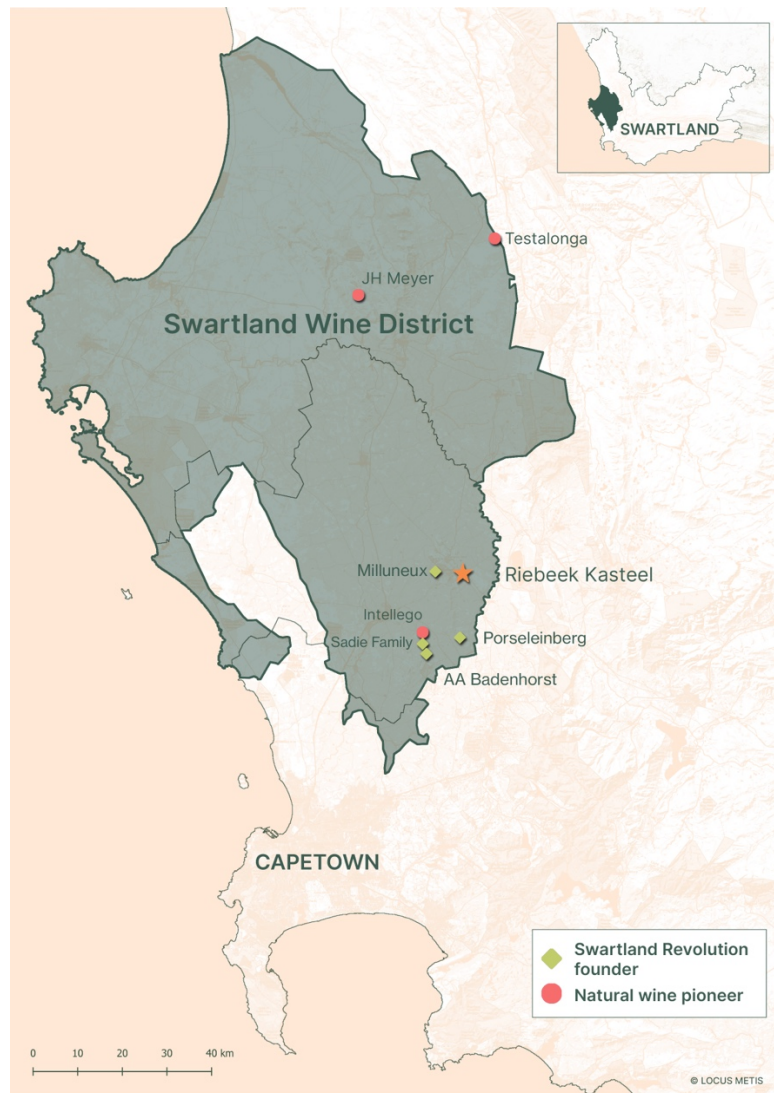


Figure 29. Pioneer winemakers of the natural wine movement in South Africa and their link to the Swartland Revolution. Source: Chazal, 2024

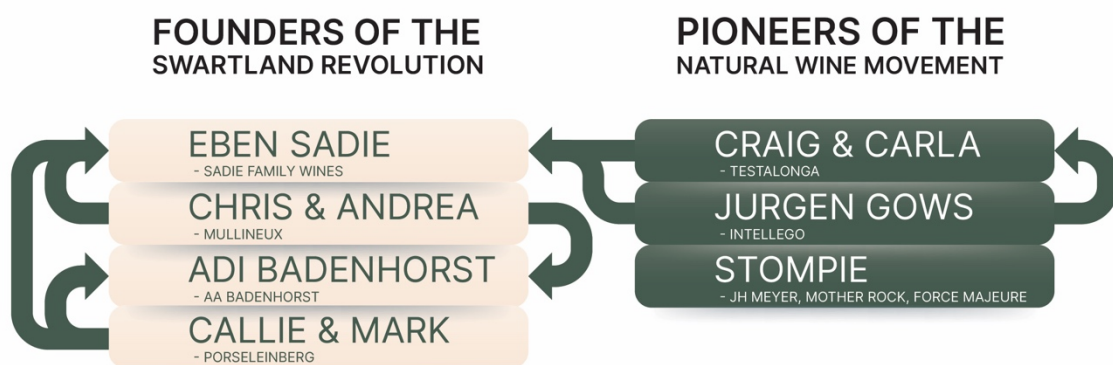


Figure 30. Professional ties between the founders of the Swartland Revolutions and the natural wine movement. The arrows indicate who worked for who. Source: Chazal 2024

It should be noted that even though the Swartland Revolutions might have laid a strong foundation in terms of wine production, identity and philosophy, it differed in several respects from the philosophy of the natural wine movement. The philosophy of the Swartland Revolutions is more akin to that described by Goode & Harrop in their book *“Authentic Wines”*, where human intervention in the cellar is limited and efforts are concentrated in the vineyard (Goode and Harrop, 2013, p. 259). For its part, as we saw in Chapter 1, the philosophy of the natural wine movement is closer to the definition proposed by Legeron, which advocates “little or no intervention in the cellar” (Legeron, 2014). One of the founders of the Revolutions explained in an interview:

“I kind of understood that in parallel with – or a bit after– the Swartland Revolutions, there was also the natural wine movement. Was there ever a point where those two initiatives kind of merged? - Well, I think, I’ll be honest with you, I think the reason why Johan, Craig and Jurgen came here was when we set up the Swartland Independent Producers guidelines. When you read that, it reads almost like a natural wine manifesto. That wasn’t necessarily the intention. We didn’t set it up because we wanted Swartland to be a natural wine region. We created the guidelines to be guidelines on making wines that had a sense of place, wines that spoke about the Swartland. But if you look at it, and you read it, you can very easily interpret it as a natural wine manifesto. And I think that was one of the things that excited those guys: we were making our wines with minimum sulphites and no yeasts and no enzymes and very little new oak. So, all those things followed along with the natural wine-making philosophy.” (Interview Chris, Mullineux, April 2022)

This extract is a good illustration of the fact that the natural wine movement was inspired by the values and foundations established by the Revolutions, which have been adopted and perpetuated in the region. But another major factor at play was the influence of the movement’s international dimension. First, certain producers started to notice the growing international demand for natural wines and picked up on it. Because Cape Town is an internationally renowned tourist destination, more and more people travelling to the Cape began to enquire about natural wine. This growing trend was identified quite early on by Damiano a wineshop owner in Cape Town city centre:

“While I was a little bit learning and accepting natural wine, at the same time, I noticed that there was around me a demand – first of all from Europe, let’s say young British clients with a little bit of knowledge of wine, and they were asking for it. And then we started having people coming into the shop and asking: “Do you have natural wine?” or “Do you have organic wine?”” (Interview, Damiano, wine bar owner in Cape Town, 8 December 2021)

However, the shift in mindset and the desire to change production techniques and renew approaches to winemaking came from the producers themselves. One thing that explains this shift is probably that for the first time, South Africa had a new generation of young winemakers who had not experienced apartheid – or at least had not worked under the apartheid regime – and so there was a new generation of winemakers who were not

constrained by international restrictions and were able to travel overseas, gaining knowledge and experiences from other wine-producing regions outside South Africa.

“Now, all of a sudden, the younger crowd [*the natural wine producers*] that came and followed the also-young crowd [*the Swartlanders*] had different ideas. Because remember, now everybody has travelled, whereas before 1994, we couldn't go to other countries: for South Africans to have a visa was impossible. So it was the first time people had international experience, and people came back with different things and being like “Fuck this, we're the New World: if we want to mix some Shiraz and some Cabernet we can do it, if we want to change our label to something absolutely crazy we can do it”. We can even make natural wine!” (Interview Grayson, cavist in Western cape, 22 May 2022)

5.2.1.3. The flowering of like-minded initiatives: the *cool kids* of the South African wine industry

Today, the “Big Three” are recognised as the pillars of the movement in South Africa and enjoy an international reputation. The natural wine movement is not limited to them, however: on the contrary, it has given rise to a new generation of winemakers with similar practices and winemaking philosophies. If we take the definition of the natural wine movement in its broadest sense, there are now over forty wineries in the Western Cape that claim to be part of it or are directly inspired by it. In other words, the Swartland Revolutionaries and the “Big Three” laid out a new path for many more winemakers to follow. This new production path is not only at odds with the conventional cooperative system and the large-scale agro-industrial production structures, but it is also distancing itself from the brand image other regions like Stellenbosch have developed. Concepts such as “*château*” and “*estate*” are internationally reproducible symbolic signifiers of nobility, or at least of a certain prestige linked to wine production (Howland, 2022; Inglis and Ho, 2021). The Swartland Revolutions and the natural wine movement have undermined these international markers. In opposition to a wine culture they consider too elitist, this new wave of producers have come to perform and re-explore, or even appropriate, the concepts of authenticity and terroir that are so prevalent in the world of wine, using new codes and a new approach (Inglis, 2015).

In other wine-producing districts of South Africa, and following the model of the Swartland Revolutions, new producers are forming horizontal networks, which Hauptfleisch describes as “coopetition” networks: that is, networks that are halfway between competition and cooperation, in which producers help each other during the wine-making process and then compete indirectly on the market (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Hauptfleisch, 2016). These new dynamics are illustrated by nascent meta-organisations in wine-growing

regions that have hitherto received little attention, such as Bot River and the Hemel-en-Aarde valley, two regions to the West of the Cape. In Bot River, for example, a dozen new winemakers have come together and since 2018 have been organising an annual gathering entitled Barrels & Beards. This is an account of the birth of the event from the Bot River winemakers' website:

“First, some history. The tale of how infuriating stubble became a yearly tradition all started one night (after a few bottles of quality Bot River wine...) when our wonderfully eclectic, handsome bunch of very talented Bot River Winemakers challenged each other to grow the most luxuriant beard during harvest.

This became known as The Great Bot River Beard-off. The challenge stuck. It begins with an event called the "Shave Off" on the 1st of February which marks the start of harvest as well as the start of a new beard. You see, when harvest starts, it waits for no one, and when the fruit is ripe, and the cellars are hopping there is little time for sleep and even less for time-intensive activities like shaving...” (Barrels & Beards event presentation)

Cowboy spirit, masculinity, self-deprecation... In addition to “coopetition,” all the aesthetics and staging characteristics developed during the Swartland Revolutions are present in these new meta-organisations. The organisational system of the Swartland Revolutions combined with the ethos of the natural wine movement has been replicated multiple times and has given rise to small collectives of winemakers like Barrels & Beards and the Zoo Biscuits. The particular aspect of Zoo Biscuits is that it has taken the initiative outside regional dynamics and gathered like-minded winemakers from different South African regions. It was founded in 2015, and brings together a dozen young winemakers who share a similar situation: they are first-generation winemakers with little or no economic or land capital, they were all born in the (late) 1980s and they are all fighting the legacy of the cooperative wine structure. They also share a vision of wine production centred on grape quality, natural winemaking and natural vinification. This article from a blog post perfectly sums up the organisational transmission from the Swartland Revolution to the Zoo Biscuits collective:

“In many ways, they’ve picked up the baton from the recently-disbanded Swartland Revolution, a crusade led by luminaries like Adi Badenhorst and Eben Sadie, to shatter preconceptions – and raise quality – in that region’s wines. Yet unlike the Swartland bunch, the Zoo Biscuits don’t represent one region, scattered across the Western Cape as they are. Rather, it’s their philosophy (plus a passion for surfing) that binds them: a focus on natural winemaking, native yeasts, old vines, and a hands-off approach in the cellar with minimal use of new oak.” (K. Bieler, *Energy: South Africa’s Zoo Biscuits, A New Breed of Winemakers*, *Grape Collective*, 3 November 2016)

I draw two conclusions from this proliferation of natural winemaker collectives. First, South African natural winemakers have moved on to the second stage of mobilisation: mobilisation through collective actions. They engage in collective manifestations and use

narratives and stagings around the idea of “revolution” and their “rebellious spirit” to gain visibility as a collective movement and promote their shared identity, and as a way to market their products to wider markets. The second conclusion has more to do with the structure of the industry. As I described in Chapter 2, the wine industry in South Africa is almost entirely run by the private sector, and the state has very little involvement in wine-related businesses. It might be suggested, therefore, that collectives of winemakers and other wine meta-organisations have arisen as a way to compensate for the lack of state involvement in the industry. Moreover, unlike in France, there is no history of previous environmental movements in South Africa: under apartheid, the wine industry was almost entirely run by the KWV, and after it the movements largely focused on Black Economic Empowerment strategies, (understandably) leaving no space for grassroots organisations with an environmental agenda to develop. In the absence of state-sponsored or grassroots organisations, therefore, new meta-organisations are an easy opportunity for producers to gather under the same banner and to mutualise their resources, whether for knowledge exchange or marketing purposes.

5.2.1.4. The natural wine movement exacerbates the polarisation between South African wine regions

If we pursue my theory of “empty space” as a space for fostering creativity and innovation, it is easy to understand why winemakers have invested in regions like the Swartland as their base for the rise of the natural wine movement, regions that had hitherto been largely run by large cooperatives and (desperately) needed a boost to their reputations, in opposition to more established and prestigious wine districts. As such, it created a phenomenon of polarisation between the regions that is embodied in the three following examples. First, this winemaker explains:

“I guess the identity created around the Swartland is so different from the traditional one in Stellenbosch.

- Yes. It’s difficult to explain but I think nobody is competing with anybody here [Swartland], People are just trying to build a bigger ...

- Make a place for themselves?

- Yes! And maybe give the other places a wake-up call so they have an opportunity to go back to their drawing board and just maybe think a bit more outside the box rather than being stuck in the past.” (Interview Liton, winemaker in Western cape, 23 May 2022)

This extract from Tim Atkins’ blog perfectly illustrates the duality between the internationally renowned regions such as Stellenbosch and the edgy new ones like the Swartland:

“The Swartland is sometimes marketed as a radical, edgy alternative to Stellenbosch, the traditional heart of the South African wine industry. The latter is perceived as conservative, moneyed and unadventurous, a Cape version of Bordeaux or the Napa Valley, if you like. To some people, Stellenbosch represents the old South Africa, with all the baggage it chose, or was forced, to shoulder, while the Swartland is the post-1994, Mandela-sanctioned rainbow nation.” (Atkins, Tim. 2015. “The Stellenbosch Renaissance.” *Tim Atkins Blog*.)

The climax of this polarisation was best exemplified when the *Wine Kollektive* released a leaflet including a map of South African wine regions represented as different body parts of a pig (See Figure 31 below). The creator of the leaflet commented:

“We did everything slightly to piss people off or drag attention. And that was before the Swartland Independent Producers. I suppose we were trying to take the piss out of Franshoek being the pig's tail.” (Interview Anton, Wine Kollektive, May 2022)

Understandably, the cartoon rubbed some people the wrong way, because the prestigious region of Franschhoek was represented as the tail of the pig, while the Swartland was a tender and typically preferred cut of ham.

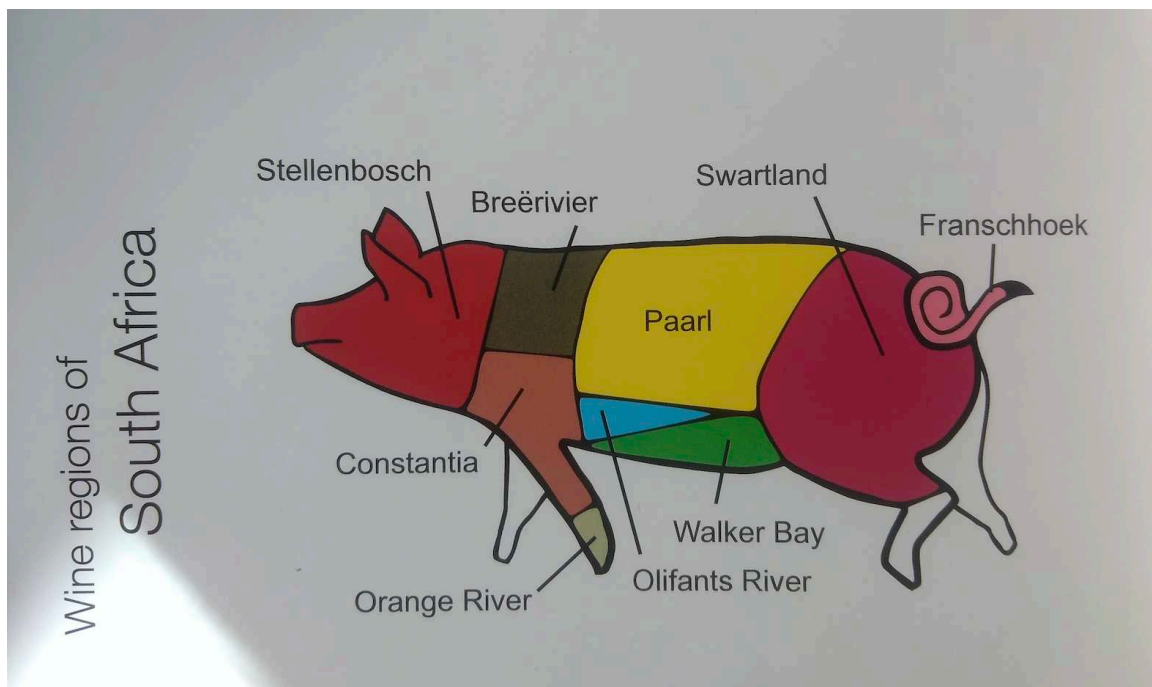


Figure 31. Cartoon: “Wine regions of South Africa” Source: *Wine Kollektive leaflet*

What is more, it is fair to assume that the natural wine movement is still at an embryonic stage in South Africa, because it seems that it has not yet penetrated high-reputation sub-regions such as Stellenbosch or Constantia, and only a handful of alternative domains have set up in Stellenbosch, whereas in France, the movement has infiltrated even the most conservative and prestigious wine-growing areas, like Bordeaux.

5.2.1.5. Conclusions: a local manifestation of the natural wine movement

To summarise the rise of the natural wine movement in the Western Cape Province of South Africa, one must return to the events of the Swartland Revolutions that took place between 2010 and 2015. The Revolutions were clearly influential in setting up a new way of approaching wine production. The Swartland quickly became the epicentre of the alternative approach for South African wines and was recognised internationally as such, although it is worth mentioning that the international echo that benefited the Swartland was not fully acknowledged by certain other national players in the wine industry, especially those who already benefited from a strong historical reputation and might have overlooked the ongoing dynamics in the Swartland.

The founders of the Swartland Revolution, together with other independent producers who joined the initiative, created the SIP chart, which set guidelines in terms of production. Although it was not intentional, the SIP guidelines might be interpreted as a first attempt at a local natural wine manifesto. The Revolutions paved the way for the natural wine movement, but the movement took things a step further by embracing an even more radical approach to winemaking, notably in terms of vinification techniques. The natural wine movement was also influenced by international exposure and the global reputation of the new winemakers. The “Big Three” have been identified as the pioneers of the natural wine movement locally, but the movement proliferated and there is now a new wave of alternative producers who fit into the natural wine movement (in its broader definition). These young winemakers have been able to build their approach to winemaking by using both their international experience and local influences (notably by drawing inspiration from the founders of the Revolutions, but also from certain other influential figures such as Reyneke, who have been pioneering agroecological and biodynamic viticulture since the nineties). Like the Big Three, who were trained by the founders of the Swartland Revolutions, many of the new natural winemakers benefited from the training and advice they received directly from the natural wine pioneers. For instance, Andrew Wightman (Wightman and Sons) was trained by Craig Hawkins (Testalonga) and MC Stander (Lequinox) is under the direct supervision of Jurgen Gouws (Intellego). And so, this pattern of transmission and knowledge sharing is carried from one producer to the next, allowing the rhizome to spread new shoots. Other natural winemakers gradually appeared outside

the cradle region of the Swartland, such as the Maanschin in Hermanus and even the Cravens in Stellenbosch. Finally, a few natural winemakers in South Africa like Magna Carta and Elemental Bob have emerged by drawing inspiration almost entirely from international influences, as they have little or no connection with other winemakers locally.

The path that has opened the way to alternative ways of making wine has been carried on through multiple initiatives. First, one can observe a proliferation of meta-organisations or collectives of winemakers, like-minded producers who have freed themselves from the cooperative systems, operate independently and lay claim to being small-scale producers. Then winemakers' collectives such as Beards and Barrels and Zoo Biscuits emerged, shedding light on these alternative practices and creating a sense of community. In this sense, the natural wine movement clearly opened the way for new thinking and experimentation. For instance, there are numerous collaborations between producers or between producers and merchants to make special *cuvées*, very small batches of experimental wine. This trend had already been identified in 2013 by Dellier, Rouvellac and Guyot when they analysed the qualitative turn in South African production: "At the extreme end of this qualitative spectrum are a number of "garagists,"¹¹⁹ as these mini structures are called, producing infinitesimal quantities of wine for an essentially local clientele." (Dellier et al., 2013, p. 23). According to several informants, garage wines are also a way of producing wines off the radar: that is to say with vines or grapes that are not registered with SAWIS, as well as production that does not fit into any of the categories prescribed by SAWIS but is of growing interest to international natural wine consumers, such as "*piquette*" (Textbox 21).

Apart from the producers' side, the natural wine movement in the Western Cape has clearly infiltrated the hospitality and food industry, where the regional dynamics obey the same rule as the natural wine movement internationally. Bars and wine shops such as Publik, Leo and Open Wine have opened in Cape Town with a clear orientation towards natural wines. They target young urban consumers and are very much geared towards an international clientele. The natural wine movement has also taken root through the emergence of specialised distribution networks such as Ex Animo, the first dedicated

¹¹⁹ The term "garagist" emerged in Saint-Émilion vineyards in the 1990s as a counter-reaction to the dominant identity of the *Grands Crus* and the Châteaux. However, while the Saint-Émilion garagist movement aimed to integrate the elite of Bordeaux wines, its South African version is more to be understood literally as "wine made in garages or small cellar spaces."

distribution channel for South African natural wines, and Wine Rebels, which handles exports of natural wine between South African and Scandinavian countries. The movement now also has its own festivals, such as the Noble Vice Festival since 2021 or the even more recent Good Juice Wine Fair, which promotes local wineries that use natural production methods.

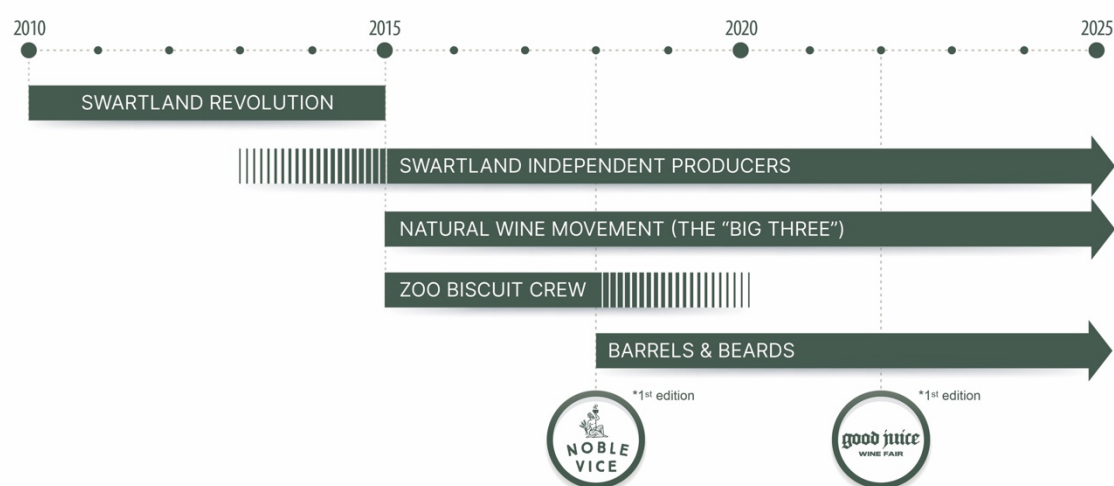


Figure 32. Chronological table of events in and around the natural wine movement in the Western Cape, South Africa.
Source: Chazal 2024

What stage is the movement at now, and what does the future hold for the natural wine scene in the Western Cape? Opinions on this differ. Some claim that South Africa “is already at a post-natural wine stage,”¹²⁰ while for others “the best is yet to come.”¹²¹ Many believe that the natural wine scene is going through an experimental stage and will eventually learn to “perfect natural wine production”:

“I think there is a great future for natural wine from this country. We have everything in our hands to be able to make amazing natural wines – we just need the motivation from more producers, and people don't drink enough and don't travel enough to understand it. I have done a lot of that stuff. I go to the festivals and fairs, but people don't do that enough here: they only go to Burgundy and Bordeaux and the main touristy spots, and miss the real stuff. So, if you don't drink it, why would you understand it?” (Interview Justin, winemaker in Western cape, 6 April 2022)

“It looks easy from the outside because there are so many people that are trying at this stage. There is a lot of trial and error and people trying to get on their feet. Maybe because it looks like it is cost-effective to start independent winemaking. But I have been in it for six years already and I can tell you the reality really hits you.” (Interview Rob, winemaker in Western cape, 4 May 2022)

¹²⁰ Interview Lenny, wine distributor in Cape Town, January 2022

¹²¹ Interview Rob, winemaker in the western cape May 2022

Finally, the South African natural wine movement in general is timid, and in a country where wine consumption is still associated with a cultural elite, it remains a “niche within a niche.” In the eyes of its counterparts in other wine regions worldwide, however, the Western Cape Province can boast a dynamic natural wine movement which in many respects is at the forefront of international debate from a product experimentation perspective (producers are experimenting with skin contact, *méthode ancestrale* or even *piquette*) to new containers (like wines in cans or kegs) and to more technical discussions in terms of viticulture techniques and varieties adapted to climate change, among other things. Natural wine producers in the Western Cape have managed to build themselves a strongly demarcated identity using the heritage of the Swartland Revolutions, the codes of the international natural wine movement and the freedom of New World countries’ marketing in terms of branding image.

5.2.2. *In Bordeaux: Building the pirates to counter the bashing*

I now move on from South Africa and shift my focus to the emergence of the natural wine movement in Bordeaux, which reveals an entirely different narrative. The origins of the story in Bordeaux lie less with community and solidarity bonds and more with winemakers seeking an alternative because of shared frustrations. It involves charting a new course in order to diverge from the established industry norms.

The initial signs of natural winemaking in Bordeaux did not emerge on a blank slate or in an “empty space.” Instead, they were the outcome of over thirty years of natural winemakers expanding across the country. I detailed the origins and broader backdrop of the natural wine movement in France in Chapter 1 to help acquire an understanding of how the movement extended to all the country’s wine-producing regions. This section recounts the unique narrative of the belated and challenging rise of the natural wine movement in the Bordeaux region.

5.2.2.1. *The movement’s late and difficult emergence in Bordeaux: winemakers fed up with the status quo*

A few natural winemakers have existed in Bordeaux since the 1980s, but they have been operating in isolation, and are often viewed as “aliens” by their local peers, even though they are widely recognised by the movement nationally. They include Rousset Peragut in

Sauternes and Château Le Puy near Saint Émilion. In an interview, the son of Jean-Pierre Amoreau, Château Le Puy's original winemaker, declared:

"We were the core [of the natural wine movement] for a while, meaning that today it's easy to make organic wine, very easy. Being biodynamic is also very easy. What I mean, and what people don't necessarily understand, is what Jean-Pierre went through. People used to say, "If you want organic wine, go see the crazy ones on the plateau, the Amoreau are crazy." In the seventies, organic farmers were seen as hippies, or at least they were perceived that way. But Jean-Pierre is far from being a hippie. The same goes for biodynamic practitioners. So, there has always been marginalisation because others didn't want to change their methods. Being organic or biodynamic is a true vocation. It's a lot of work." (Interview Pascal, Le Puy, April 2021¹²²)

Apart from these few figures, the natural wine movement in Bordeaux emerged quite late: wine commentators only started to talk about a real movement in the 2010s. Even today, it is hard to define whether it is a real regional movement with coalitions and community bonds or simply some individual winemakers tied into the broader networks' dynamics of the movement, be it national or even international. Indeed, the story of the emergence of the movement in the region is rather fragmented, and is only possible to understand through the accumulation of individual life stories, and in this sense, the story of the emergence of the movement in Bordeaux seems to be the exception rather than the rule.

More precisely, unlike in other regions such as the Beaujolais or the Swartland (see above), the natural wine movement in Bordeaux is not the story of a joyful group of friends gathering under the same banner to promote another way of making wine. Instead, the late emergence of the movement in the region can be interpreted as a consequence of some of the dysfunctions of the wine sector in Bordeaux. In other words, according to actors within the natural wine movement, the Bordeaux crisis is multifaceted, and it seems as though telling the story of the birth of the natural wine movement locally is the equivalent of unravelling the tapestry of the Bordeaux wine industry.

In the following section, I describe the various frustrations that led winemakers to depart from the traditional path of making and marketing wines in Bordeaux. I argue that an

¹²² *My translation of:* "On a été le tronc [du mouvement nature] pendant un moment c'est-à-dire qu'aujourd'hui c'est facile d'être bio, c'est même très facile. Être en biodynamie aussi c'est très facile. Ce que je veux dire et que les gens ne comprennent pas forcément, c'est ce que Jean-Pierre a vécu, les gens disaient "si tu veux du vin bio va voir les fous sur le plateau", "les Amoreau sont des fous". Les bios étaient des hippies dans les années soixante-dix, en tout cas ils étaient vus comme tel. Mais Jean-Pierre c'est loin d'être un hippie. Et les biodynamistes pareil. Donc il y a toujours eu une marginalisation de ça car les autres ne voulaient pas changer de méthode. Être bio ou biodynamie c'est un vrai sacerdoce, c'est du boulot, c'est énorme comme boulot."

accumulation of these frustrations led individual winemakers to look for alternative ways of producing, and that answers were found in the natural wine movement (which already existed in other regions). This departure by a fringe group of winemakers has been recognised, notably by Itçaina, Roger and Smith in their study of the changes in the Bordeaux wine industry in the early 2000s. They identified “deviant growers as drivers of change” and explained that “whilst the majority of actors from this part of the industry continued to reproduce existing economic and political practices, a minority began to diverge from the status quo and even to become dissidents within their respective vineyards.” (Itçaina et al., 2016, p. 109). Although Itçaina and his colleagues did not identify or name “natural winemakers” as drivers of the change, I believe that this expresses the same idea of a nascent resistance to the status quo. They add that “these connections emerged without these actors all necessarily sharing the same goals or consciously developing common strategies. Instead, these inter-field connections were prompted by deeper shifts within their respective symbolic orders and hierarchies.” (Itçaina et al., 2016, p. 109). Similar patterns are described here, and the next section looks into how the natural wine movement in Bordeaux was borne out of a desire to be emancipated from a wine system in crisis.

As such, the natural wine movement emerges as a counter-reaction to what was perceived as certain key economic and political functions – or rather dysfunctions – of the Bordeaux wine industry. In the coming section, I now identify the driving forces (and barriers) that led to it. While some are common to other wine regions of France, and some are specific to Bordeaux, the focus here will remain on Bordeaux.

➤ **The “Parkerisation” of Bordeaux wines and a wider critique of standardisation**

There was one particular wine critic who played a decisive role in the evolution of the Bordeaux wine scene, and some would argue that he is the most influential wine critic of all time: Robert Parker Jr. Since 1982, his judgments have served as cognitive benchmarks for a large number of players in the world of wine production (Chauvin, 2005, 2011). One of Parker’s primary innovations was his notation system. From the outset, Parker proposed a 100-point evaluation scale, which had the advantage of providing transparent evaluation criteria and greater flexibility in ranking wines. Rating systems based on a 100-point scale have now become an almost universal approach. With its transparent and user-friendly

structure, the notation grid aims to offer more inclusive access to wine reviews, making them not just reserved for wine connoisseurs and professionals but accessible to everyone.

Two major upheavals in the Bordeaux wine scene: The 1976 Judgment of Paris and Robert Parker giving a new lease of life to the 1982 *millésime*

The Judgment of Paris in 1976 and Robert Parker's review of the 1982 vintage are two events that are often viewed as major shifts in the world of wine. A brief summary of them is necessary in order to better capture the challenges they prompt.

First the Paris Judgement. In 1976, the British *negociant* Steven Spurrier organised a tasting at the Hotel Intercontinental in Paris, appointing nine renowned and well-established wine experts for the occasion. They all attended a blind tasting that included both French and Californian wines and scored the wines on a 20-point scale according to pre-agreed criteria such as balance, mouth feel, nose and colour. Against all expectations, two Californian wines ranked first and second. This was incomprehensible for the (mostly French) jury members, who were absolutely shocked, and considered this moment to be a national humiliation. The Judgment of Paris marked the emergence of great wines produced outside Europe, and above all a recognition of them.¹²³ With the Judgment of Paris, American wines outpaced the French classics on their own turf, using classic Bordeaux blend varietals. Traditional rankings were being turned upside down, and a new door opened for other notation-based tasting methods.

A few years later, the young, and then not-so-famous, American critic Robert Parker Jr. made his grand entrance into the world of international wine critics with his singular assessment of the 1982 vintage. Unlike other critics, in the Bordeaux *En Primeur* of 1982, Parker gave a very high rating to the new *millésime*. He even dared to say that "there may not be another vintage this great for 50 years." His opinion was soon echoed by other critics such as Michel Bettane and then by a whole pool of investors. To this day, 1982 is still judged to be a vintage of excellent quality by all wine professionals. Not only is the 1982 vintage considered to mark the beginning of the Parker era, but it also represents Bordeaux's golden years.

Textbox 11. Two major upheavals in the Bordeaux wine scene: The 1976 Judgment of Paris and Robert Parker giving a new lease of life to the 1982 millésime.

Parker's evaluations began to have a distinct influence on prices: each year during the *primeurs*¹²⁴ period, every producer held their breath, awaiting Parker's rating, as it would

¹²³Dubois, Magalie. 2021. "Depuis Quand Note-t-on Les Vins?" *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/depuis-quand-note-t-on-les-vins-159278>.

¹²⁴ The "en primeur" market is a purchasing system in the Bordeaux wine sector that allows buyers to purchase wines before they are bottled and released to the market. It is particularly associated with the sale of high-quality wines, especially those from prestigious Bordeaux wine estates. For more information on the en primeur market mechanisms, see Hay, Colin. 2010. "The Political Economy of Price and Status Formation

be decisive for barrel prices and subsequent sales. According to Réjalot, Parker “determined commercial success or failure, fortune for some, and relegation for others.” (Réjalot, 2019, p. 106). Even today, he remains one of the central figures in the Bordeaux wine scene, and was frequently mentioned spontaneously in interviews.

It quickly became apparent that Parker had a preference for a more “American style” of Bordeaux blend characterised by jammy red wines that were increasingly concentrated and extracted and heavily oaked. The traditional *Grand Crus* from Bordeaux were renowned for their elegance, finesse and ageing potential. Parker’s top-ranked wines, in contrast, tended to lean towards concentrated, opulent wines that were excellent for tasting but weighed down when paired with gastronomic accompaniments; some people would refer to them as “competition beasts.” Even though Parker is acclaimed as the world’s foremost critic by many in Bordeaux, others reject the meritocratic evaluation logic he set up, which they perceive as elitist and perpetuating the established mechanisms of traditional *Grands Crus*. In fact, according to Chauvin, “its prescriptive power did not originate outside the Bordeaux 'clergy', and was guided by the traditional qualitative orders.” (Chauvin, 2005, p. 106). Parker relies on pre-existing rankings to establish his professional legitimacy. In reality, one might posit that the strength of the institutions relies on the interconnectedness between the Parker system on the one hand and the official Bordeaux wine rankings (*Grand Crus Classés*) on the other.

The Parker influence has gone far beyond his notation grid, however, and has exceeded the reach and power of one man. The Parker phenomenon became larger than itself when some Bordeaux producers, having identified a certain “Parker taste” and seeing the influence of his assessments, began crafting wines that aligned with this taste, aspiring to achieve high rankings. A winemaker from Bordeaux’s Left Bank said about this trend:

“Parker is a brand. But in a way you can’t blame him. It is rather the people who blindly followed him and only produced Parker-style wines because it worked economically” (Interview Gilles, winemaker in Bordeaux, 27 April 2021¹²⁵)

The reach of Parker’s influence does not stop at the borders of Bordeaux; it was also mentioned multiple times in South Africa.

in the Bordeaux En Primeur Market: The Role of Wine Critics as Rating Agencies.” *Socio-Economic Review* 8(4): 685-707.

¹²⁵ My translation of: “Parker c’est une marque. Mais quelque part lui on ne peut pas lui reprocher, c’est plutôt les gens qui ont suivi bêtement et qui n’ont fait que du Parker parce que ça marchait économiquement”

“In the early 2000s, we went through a stage where it was all about big bulk alcoholic wines, but then also you can probably blame Robert Parker for that.” (Interview Jack, winemaker in Western cape, 25 April 2022)

This Parkerisation phenomenon resulted in a powerful trend towards uniformity and a standardisation of the taste of Bordeaux wines, at least the reds. In Réjalot’s words, “these “Parkerised” or “body-built” wines have ended up turning wine-lovers away from Bordeaux” (Réjalot, 2021, p. 104). The phenomenon has been identified as being responsible for a standardisation of taste indexed to the Californian style. While in the early years of the Parker era, Bordeaux was the region that gained the most from his system in terms of both prestige and profits, it is also the region that eventually suffered from it the most. Many producers regret this orientation of the sector:

“Even today in Bordeaux, there's this leaden layer, this weight of tradition; Bordeaux must taste a certain way.” (Interview Gabriel, INAO representative, 25 August 2021¹²⁶)

Parker’s influence and the Parkerisation phenomenon marked the first departure by some Bordeaux producers who rejected the trend. As the following extract showcases, Parker’s influence raised some heated debates:

“I exclude generic Bordeaux, Bordeaux Supérieurs, all the ones for which they adopted a crappy low-cost strategy from this... Meaning, you aim for high yields, but then you don't give a damn: you do thermovinification, add oak chips, etc. So, in the end, you have smooth products, no rough edges, no issues – even with rotten harvests, it passes [*laughter*]. The market was flooded with 'buy one, get one free' because during the Parker era, the guys who had allocations of Parker-rated *crus*, they were arrogant with the wine merchants, setting prices and imposing the sale of all kinds of things behind. And with the Parker style, it had to be as black as ink and a teaspoon had to stand up in it. But they ended up with wines that had nothing left; everything had collapsed.” (Interview Serge, Confédération Paysanne representative, 6 June 2021¹²⁷)

It is no surprise that actors in the natural wine movement felt a need to stand apart from Parker’s wines, as it seems they represent nearly everything they stand against: the shackles of the ranking system, the uniformisation and standardisation of taste, and of course an abusive use of oenological techniques. Indeed, Parker’s wines were also heavily marked

¹²⁶ *My translation of:* “Aujourd'hui encore sur Bordeaux, il y a cette chappe de plomb, ce poids de la tradition, Bordeaux ça doit goûter.”

¹²⁷ *My translation of:* “J'enlève de ça les Bordeaux génériques, Bordeaux supérieurs tout ça pour lequel ils ont adopté une stratégie low-cost de merde... C'est-à-dire on fait du rendement mais derrière on n'en a rien à foutre: on va faire de la thermovinification, du copeutage etc. Donc derrière on a des produits lisses, sans aspérités, pas de problèmes, même les récoltes pourries ça passe [*Rire*]. On a inondé le marché avec « une caisse offerte pour une demie achetée ». Parce que quand c'était le monde Parker, les mecs qui avaient des allocations des crus Parker, ils ont été arrogants avec les cavistes et ils fixaient les prix et ils imposaient aux mecs de vendre tout un tas de truc derrière. Et avec le côté Parker, il fallait que ce soit noir comme de l'encre et que la petite cuillère tienne dedans. Mais ils se sont retrouvés avec des vins il n'y avait plus rien, tout s'était écroulé.”

by interventionist technologies in the cellar, notably through cellar work that helped achieve the concentrated, woody and oaky taste that Parker was particularly fond of. This was seen by many producers as an over-use of oenology techniques in which vintages and terroir differences were totally undermined. In the words of one caviste I interviewed “It was a time where the taste of wine was uniform, like Coca-Cola.¹²⁸” Some pioneers of the natural wine movement in Bordeaux use this uniformity to assert how they are different:

“We have lively wines that don't appeal to everyone because we're not in the Bordeaux style where they make wines that are very tannic with vanilla aromas and very oaky things, especially in Saint-Émilion, and material concentrations that appeal to Americans. But I don't sell my wine to Americans alone.” (Interview Antoine, winemaker in Bordeaux, 10 May 2021¹²⁹)

Parker and the emergence of the Parkerisation phenomenon initially led to concerns among certain Bordeaux producers. However, in the eyes of most promoters of natural wine in the Bordelais, it was the broader occurrence of what has come to be commonly called “Bordeaux bashing” that truly precipitated the crisis.

➤ The four components of the Bordeaux bashing phenomenon

“For wine buffs with an indie sensibility, Bordeaux is the equivalent of the Hollywood blockbuster, more about money than about art. Bordeaux bashing has become a new form of wine snobbery” (McInerney, Jay. 2010. “Reawakening a Passion for Bordeaux.” *Wall Street Journal*).

As noted in this extract, Bordeaux has been a place of negative communication, which revealed itself through the Bordeaux bashing phenomenon. As its name suggests, it shows a disenchantment with Bordeaux wine. But where does this phenomenon come from? What are the critiques that came to tarnish the reputation of the region? It appears that the list of prejudices and (mis?)conceptions about Bordeaux wine is quite a long one. In this section, I intend to unpack the various components of Bordeaux bashing in order to better understand where the natural wine movement in the region stands, or rather in spite of what situations it emerged. I have identified four discourses that feed the narrative on Bordeaux bashing: first, a critique of the organoleptic standardisation of Bordeaux wines; second, a critique of their high prices and speculative bubble; third, a critique of Bordeaux’s elitist, conservative image; and fourth, a critique of the large size of the industry and its industrial practices and related environmental damage.

¹²⁸ Interview Greyson, wineshop owner, May 2023

¹²⁹ *My translation of:* “On a des vins vivants qui ne plaisent pas partout. Parce qu'on n'est pas dans le cadre du style Bordeaux où on fait des vins qui sont très tanniques avec des arômes de vanille et des trucs très boisés surtout à Saint-Émilion et des concentrations de matières qui plaisent aux Américains, mais moi je ne vends pas mon vin qu'aux américains.”

○ *Bordeaux found guilty of organoleptic standardisation.*

The first component of Bordeaux bashing is a direct heritage of Parkerisation and the uniformity of taste. Bordeaux wines are often criticised for being “old-fashioned” or “too tannic,” “stuffy” and “difficult to drink.” The golden age of Bordeaux wines – and more particularly Parker-style wines – is slowly fading as a new generation of wine drinkers comes up, a global wave of new consumers that is geared more towards fresher wines with less alcohol. A cellar master in Bordeaux analysed this phenomenon:

“Bordeaux bashing, which is somewhat due to a phenomenon of standardisation – which is already a bit behind us, I believe – of the taste of Bordeaux wines, following Parker, oaking, over-extraction, and things like that. I think it has done a lot of harm to Bordeaux, and it needs to be taken into account.” (Interview Amandine, winemaker in Bordeaux, 14 January 2021¹³⁰)

Ironically, the slogan of Bordeaux’s wine for many years was “*Bordeaux, la couleur du bon goût*” (“Bordeaux, the colour of taste”). It served as a unifying principle and was used in advertising campaigns for over fifteen years, but in the early 2000s many saw it as outdated and wanted a new kind of marketing. This standardisation of taste and the race for ever more extracted and tannic wines in the industry to please certain critics caused a progressive lack of interest in Bordeaux wines. Many winemakers came to regret this lassitude.

“Then we sometimes make wines that are quite average. We’ve produced wines that are a bit too standard, lacking originality, somewhat industrial. And I’m not saying we don’t need those types of wine. But I think we’re making a bit too many industrial and standardised wines.” (Interview Remy, winemaker in Bordeaux, 19 April 2021¹³¹)

Having witnessed and assessed the lack of interest on the part of many consumers, some producers would take the lead in creating a renewed appeal for Bordeaux by establishing new production techniques that stepped away from oenological practices. Most would qualify themselves as natural winemakers:

“But I believe that consumers who want these wines in direct connection with pleasure, with their terroir, it’s just that they don’t find them in Bordeaux wines. And I believe the market is ready... It’s waiting for us to do that. People aren’t saying “We won’t buy Bordeaux anymore.” I think those who have moved away from Bordeaux wines a bit is because they no longer found emotions in the wines.

¹³⁰ My translation of: “Le Bordeaux Bashing, qui est dû un peu à un phénomène d’uniformisation - qui est déjà un peu derrière nous je pense - du goût des vins de Bordeaux, suite à Parker, au boisage des vins, à la sur-extraction et des choses comme ça. Je pense que ça a fait beaucoup mal de Bordeaux, faut le prendre en compte.”

¹³¹ My translation of: “Après on fait des vins parfois, plutôt moyennasse. Et aussi en étant trop à la pointe on a fait des vins un peu trop standards, qui manquent d’originalité, des vins un peu trop industriels. Et je ne dis pas qu’il n’en faut pas. Mais je pense que l’on fait un peu trop de vins industriels et standardisés”

That's what it seems like to me. The proof is that we're doing very well.” (Interview Gilles, winemaker in Bordeaux, 27 April 2021¹³²)

“As I often say, some people ask me, “Are you making natural Bordeaux?” and I reply, “No, I make natural wine in Bordeaux.” It's not the same. I'm not trying to make Bordeaux, I'm making wine. For me, that's the foundation, and if everyone aimed to make wine, well, every Bordeaux would have its own identity. We've lost our identity! Because we wanted to make wine for a certain type of customer, and that's a shame: we've lost the notion of terroir, identity, the notion of the winemaker, diversity of tastes, etc.” (Interview Antoine, winemaker in Bordeaux, 10 May 2021¹³³)

Flying winemakers, a flagship of capitalism and the standardisation of technologies

Bordeaux is being confronted by a curious paradox: as its taste is exported globally, certain opinions around the standardisation of its wines have manifested themselves. This phenomenon is partially attributed due to the activities of so-called “flying winemakers,” as exemplified by eminent oenologists such as Michel Rolland and Stephane Derenoncourt, both of whom hail from the Bordeaux region.

Who are these flying winemakers? Operating as foreign specialists, they are expert oenologists who travel around the world to advise local winemakers. They bring state-of-the-art knowledge and experience to grape cultivation, fermenting, processing and blending to provide guidance to producers. Their knowledge is grounded in the latest technological advances, and it has revolutionised the landscape of vinicultural production. For instance, Michel Rolland has worked extensively on techniques such as grape manipulation and maturity control. In this regard, the flying winemakers can be viewed as authentic 'modernisers' who purposely seek to supplant historically entrenched practices with contemporary technology. Besides advising specific domains, they also play an important role in “facilitating the ‘globetrotting for grapes’” (Lagendijk, 2004, p. 522): that is, spreading the use of grapes with an international reputation such as Bordeaux blends (Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot).

Flying winemakers do not just intervene in the cellar; they have a fine knowledge of marketing and communications strategies, as well as market trends. According to Lagendijk, “they facilitate [...] ‘the commodification of culture’, in which ‘culture’ denotes the constructed identity of a local wine area.” He adds: “Flying winemakers have become quality and marketing symbols themselves” (Lagendijk, 2004, p. 522).

¹³² *My translation of:* “Mais je crois surtout que les consommateurs qui veulent ces vins en prise directe avec le plaisir, avec leur terroir, c'est juste qu'ils ne les trouvent pas dans des vins de Bordeaux. Et je crois que le marché est prêt... Il attend qu'on fasse ça. Les gens ne disent pas "on n'achètera plus de Bordeaux". Je crois que ceux qui se sont un peu sortis des vins de Bordeaux c'est parce qu'ils n'avaient plus d'émotions dans les vins. Moi il me semble que c'est ça. Nous on fonctionne très bien.”

¹³³ *My translation of:* “Comme je dis, il y en a qui me disent "tu fais du Bordeaux nature?", je leur réponds "non je fais du vins nature à Bordeaux", ce n'est pas pareil, je ne cherche pas à faire du Bordeaux, je fais du vin. Pour moi c'est la base, et si tout le monde cherchait à faire du vin et bien chaque Bordeaux aurait son identité. On a perdu l'identité ! Parce que l'on a voulu faire du vin pour un type de client et ça c'est dommage : on a perdu la notion de terroir, d'identité, on a perdu la notion de vigneron, de diversité des goûts etc.”

In these days of global standardisation, however, they have also been widely criticised and denounced as “agents of pervasive globalisation and homogenisation” (Lagendijk, 2004). The oenologist Michel Rolland epitomises this figure of the flying winemaker in Bordeaux, and his activities fuelled ardent critiques in Jonathan Nossiter’s documentary *Mondovino*¹³⁴.

Textbox 12. Flying winemakers, a flagship of capitalism and the standardisation of technologies.

○ *Wine transformed into a financial investment.*

The second narrative that feeds Bordeaux bashing is directly linked to the prices of Bordeaux wines. Wine is a particular commodity that does not fit into mainstream market mechanisms. In fact, wine economics has its own field of research, which has been growing rapidly since the 1980s, and the *Journal of Wine Economics* is now dedicated to this sub-field. Bordeaux wines in particular have been the object of a plethora of research on driving price mechanisms (Cardebat and Figuet, 2004; Combris, Lecocq, & Visser, 1997; Dimson, Rousseau, & Spaenjers, 2015; Jones & Storchmann, 2001; Krasker, 1979; Sanning et al., 2008). In 2012, Storchmann published a literature review on the development of wine economics, and it is no surprise to observe in his article that the vast majority of empirical works are on Bordeaux: the region is used as a prime case study for building price grids or rate of return to holding indexes (Storchmann, 2012, p. 13).

Wine prices are also extraordinarily sensitive to fluctuations from one domain to the next, and from one vintage to the other. In fact, wine is considered by economists to be a hedonistic good because its price is determined by both the internal characteristics of the product and external factors (Benfratello, Piacenza, & Sacchetto, 2009). Fine wine has characteristics that allow it to be treated as an investment vehicle, and it has become a prime good for financial trades (Sanning et al., 2008). This has manifested itself through the proliferation of international wine auctions and bottle prices that exceed several thousand euros. In fact, one can find two Bordeaux Grand Crus, a 1787 Château Lafite and a 1947 Cheval Blanc, in the top five of the world’s most expensive wines. This progressive transformation of the wine sector from a beverage market to a financial investment and trading system has had numerous consequences for the Bordeaux wine industry and has largely contributed to reinforcing the two-tier system developed in Chapter 2, in which the *Grand Crus* and mass-produced wines cohabit, at the expense of the latter.

¹³⁴ Nossiter, Jonathan. 2004. *Mondovino*. France: Les Films de la Croisade.

On Ashenfelter's "Bordeaux Equation" (Storchmann, 2012, p. 8)

In 1986, Ashenfelter, an American economics professor, introduced a newsletter entitled "*Liquid Assets – The International Guide to Fine Wines*," which was dedicated to using quantitative methods to analyse the high-end wine market. Ashenfelter shared auction sales figures and presented various economic evaluation criteria, including a "new objective ranking of Bordeaux châteaux". His approach was seen by many wine investors as remarkably accurate in its evaluation of the quality of Bordeaux vintages and forecasting of the value of mature wines.

Following a series of successful years with *Liquid Assets*, Ashenfelter came up with the "Bordeaux Equation" in 1995. The Bordeaux Equation is a price index for Bordeaux wines, using the age of the wine and various items of weather information as the determining factors. In other words, it quantifies the relationship between vintage, weather conditions and wine prices through algorithms. It played a fundamental role in initiating extensive research on how wine operates as an alternative financial asset, and was used as a reliable quantitative base for many investors.

However, Ashenfelter faced criticism from both wine traders and critics, who accused the Bordeaux Equation of downplaying the significance of the entire wine-tasting experience and the mystique that surrounds it. They also denounced the fact that with the Bordeaux Equation, the role of critics was rendered obsolete by the intrusion of mathematical calculations. The Bordeaux wine experts had valid reasons for expressing their dissatisfaction with the Ashenfelter Equation, particularly given that it implies that quantitative methods are more reliable than wine experts when it comes to predicting the quality of a wine. Robert Parker, for instance, dismissed the Bordeaux Equation outright, arguing that since wine is an experiential commodity, consumers place their trust in the opinions of experts. Nonetheless, wine investors turned towards the Bordeaux Equation and the wave of quantitative economic research that followed Ashenfelter en masse. *Grands Crus* in particular have become the focus of an increasing number of investors and a large wine investment pool has emerged that applies these methods. Analysing the rise of the return on investment of wines, Storchmann commented: "Expectedly, the wine trade declares wine the ultimate asset. Wine generates above-average returns, helps to diversify an investor's portfolio, thus lowering the risk and – if all fails – they can still drink it." (Storchmann, 2012, p. 13). The best example of wine being used as an investment vehicle is probably "Liv-Ex", an international online platform for trading fine wine.

Textbox 13. On Ashenfelter's "Bordeaux Equation"

Bordeaux bashing can also be linked to the soaring prices of the *Grands Crus*, the fuse for which was lit around the time of the late 1990s vintages. It created a wild speculative bubble around Bordeaux fine wines and the *Grands Crus* in particular from the 2000s on. For the

vast majority of consumers, Bordeaux wines are seen as “too expensive” and “exclusively for the wealthiest” or the “wine collectors.” Average middle-class consumers, both French and international, cannot afford these wines and thus tend to turn their attention to other wine-producing regions. They do not recognise themselves either in the traditional *Grand Crus* rankings or in the opinions of experts such as Parker. Bordeaux is the region that benefited the most from these ranking systems, but on the flip side, it is probably the region that suffers the most from it today. As expressed in the following extract, many people associate speculation in Bordeaux wines with a sort of arrogance.

“These are technological wines and too expensive. And there's a detestable pride in Bordeaux.”
(Interview Maxime, winemaker in Bordeaux, 20 April 2021¹³⁵)

Ironically, the criticism of Bordeaux prices is somewhat superficial and the myth of unaffordable wines can easily be debunked, as the average bottle of Bordeaux is sold at barely five euros.¹³⁶ However, the Bordeaux wines that are celebrated worldwide continue to belong to the *Grands Crus*, while the rest of Bordeaux producers remain under the radar, like the submerged portion of an iceberg. One producer interviewed in Bergerac, one of the neighbouring regions of Bordeaux, comments:

“Also, it's true that having quite a few friends who work in viticulture, for example, in Entre-deux-Mers, well, these guys are suffering. I much prefer being in Bergerac than in Bordeaux. In fact, when you're in Bordeaux, you have to be in Margaux, Saint-Émilion, or Pomerol; otherwise, pfff.”
(Interview Hervé, winemaker in Bergerac, 26 April 2021¹³⁷)

Ironically as the polarisation of the market grew, many *Grands Crus* did not want to carry the name Bordeaux. In fact, most *Grands Crus* and renowned appellations such as Médoc and Saint-Émilion do not put “Bordeaux” on their labels, as the producers of these appellations refuse to allow their wines to be associated with mere Bordeaux wines.

○ *The overrated image of Bordeaux and its Châteaux*

The third narrative responsible for Bordeaux bashing is directly linked to the image and reputation of its wine, which has been finely shaped over decades of wine production. The Bordeaux region has long benefited from the commercial success and income associated

¹³⁵ My translation of: “Ce sont des vins technologiques et trop chers. Et il y a un orgueil bordelais qui est infame.”

¹³⁶ According to the 2021 CIVB report, the average price of a bottle of Bordeaux is 5.65 euros. Source: CIVB. 2021. “Bilan 2020 de Commercialisation,” June, p.7

¹³⁷ My translation of: “Après c'est vrai que pour avoir pas mal de copains qui font de la viticulture par exemple dans l'Entre-deux-mers, bon les mecs ils souffrent le martyre. Je préfère largement être à Bergerac que à Bordeaux moi. En fait quand on est à Bordeaux il faut être à Margaux, à Saint-Émilion ou à Pomerol, sinon pfff.”

with wine production, and this long-term development project has been the foundation on which the identity of its vineyards has been developed. Bordeaux has built a bucolic, visually appealing and highly romanticised rural idyll (Howland, 2022). The “Bordeaux aesthetic” worked so well as a model that it was exported and reproduced worldwide as a mark of prestige and fine wine production. Many vineyards in South Africa, for instance in Stellenbosch and Franschhoek, are good examples of the reproduction of this Bordeaux aesthetic. So why is the Bordeaux image outdated, and how does it contribute to Bordeaux bashing? Here again, we see a double-edged sword situation: the prestigious and immaculate idyll created by the Bordeaux wine sector to differentiate their wines and raise them to top-ranking profiles is also responsible for the pompous, arrogant image they now have. In other words, when Bordeaux bases its marketing on terms such as “prestigious”, “*noblesse*” and “traditional”, some hear “snobbery”, “elitist” and “conservatism”. To paint a portrait of Bordeaux, Réjalot refers to the “seniors, status, established codes, family meals and protocol, as well as the solemnity and pretentiousness that create a certain distance with the consumer” (Réjalot, 2021, p. 102). This solemnity and distance are reinforced by the image of the Châteaux.

“Châteaux as the principal identity of Bordeaux wines.

To understand where this snobbery for Bordeaux comes from, one must return to the foundation of its identity, and discuss the notion of *château* in this context. Réjalot reflected extensively on what singles Bordeaux vineyards out from the rest. He identified the “*château*” phenomenon as a central element in Bordeaux’s identity, one that seems to be “what sums up one of the most salient representations of Bordeaux wine” (Réjalot, 2006, p. 124). To what extent should one consider the *château* as emblematic of Bordeaux vineyard landscapes? And why does this image affect the whole reputation of the vineyards today?

Historically, the picturesque Bordeaux countryside was a favourite destination for the urban elite. Starting in the 1850s, the term *château* was applied to the mass of bourgeois residences that led the wine-producing areas. The term found remarkable success in denoting a wine-producing estate and its high-quality wine.

The issue with Bordeaux’s *châteaux* presents an interesting challenge. Surprisingly, wine domains in Bordeaux rarely have grand castle-like structures, in contrast to their counterparts in the Loire region, where castle-like edifices are prominently displayed. The reasoning behind the selection of the word *château* over others remains somewhat obscure, but it is likely that it hinges on its inherent ability to evoke the image of a rural idyll. Given its relatively recent usage, the term *château* was used without any regulation. According to

Roudié, at the end of the 20th century, estimates placed the number of *châteaux* at anywhere between 5,000 and 10,000 (Roudié, 2000b).

Because there was no legal framework or even basic precedent governing the use of the word *château*, numerous winegrowers seized on it. This led to a situation where the use of the term did not necessarily describe any particular type of building, whether it resembled a castle or not. Regulation of the use of the term was only implemented in 1993. As absurd as it may sound, there are castles without castles and castles that can cover several different ones in Bordeaux (Roudié, 2000b). The exportable Bordeaux model is accompanied by the French term *château*, which is often used to denote both new and established businesses involved in producing high-quality wines, but does not refer to the presence of a castle (Roudié 2000, 415). In other words, and counter-intuitively, the term is now used mainly for brand image purposes to designate a specific estate producing, or supposedly producing, fine wines and to guarantee their geographic origin.

What does this semantic and commercial change in the use of the term involve? It has served to build the image of Bordeaux, since the ideal Bordeaux is a *château* with vines behind it. Réjalot points out that the Bordeaux *château* is not the result of ideological determinism but is unquestionably rooted in a representation of the world built on the ideology of the modern, even contemporary, French bourgeois elite. The *château* is the most original and authentic contribution of Bordeaux and France to the universal heritage of vines and wine and a central feature of the exportation of the Bordeaux aesthetic model. One direct expression of this is the designation of Saint-Émilion as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1999.

Textbox 14. "Châteaux" as the principal identity of Bordeaux wines.

Today, Bordeaux wines still have their own specific terminologies, such as *Château*, *Grands Crus*, *Crus Classés* and *Crus Bourgeois*, which are original features that are not found in any other wine regions and which aim to remind drinkers of the idea of lineage and noble origins that is historically associated with Bordeaux. However, it is clear that today, most consumers view this image as outdated or overrated: these built images of Bordeaux are increasingly out of line, and the wine professionals I interviewed are very conscious of this:

"Perhaps Bordeaux also has this somewhat pompous and pretentious image, and all of that has accumulated." (Interview Remy, winemaker in Bordeaux, 19 April 2021¹³⁸)

¹³⁸ *My translation of:* "Peut-être aussi que Bordeaux a cette image un peu pompeuse et prétentieuse et que ça s'est accumulé."

“Because wine in Bordeaux is a given, it’s a historical and cultural asset where we no longer need to make efforts to sell our wine; we don’t need to make efforts because tourists from around the world come to seek Bordeaux wine.” (Interview Sarah, caviste in Bordeaux, 17 April 2021¹³⁹)

Bordeaux is criticised for being at best too “formal” and “complicated” to access, if not “lacking the warmth and hospitality that we expect when we share a bottle of wine.” Wine professionals have criticised Bordeaux for its snobbery and arrogance, which seem to discourage many consumers, or even turn them away.

“Then there’s this unbelievable arrogance of people who think we’re the only place in the world where we make wine, you know. When you’re not from here, you see it. They have a problem; it’s a region that needs collective therapy... You’ll have to anonymise this, or I’ll get killed [laughter]. There are lots of unspoken things and messed-up stuff swept under the rug here.” (Interview winemaker in Bordeaux, June 2021¹⁴⁰)

Winemakers are discouraged by the lack of reflexivity from the CIVB, notably in terms of marketing. In their view, the image of Bordeaux is frozen in time and fails to renew itself. Many of them expressed this idea of an unchanging image that does not match the expectations of the new generations:

“We’re stuck on the glory days of Bordeaux. Like in Sauternes, the glory days of Sauternes are Napoleon I and the Tsar. And we’re stuck there. That doesn’t work anymore! We need to question ourselves.” (Interview Maxime, winemaker in Bordeaux, 20 April 2021¹⁴¹)

To summarise, the prestigious and bucolic idyll of Bordeaux of which the *château* was a perfect illustration is fading and losing its attractiveness. Although the Bordeaux aesthetic has been reproduced globally and has inspired domains worldwide, it is now struggling to renew its image and appeal to a new generation of consumers who cannot find a connection with its standards.

○ *Bordeaux portrayed as “the big machine”.*

The final narrative in the Bordeaux bashing phenomenon revolves around the idea of Bordeaux being a “big machine”: that is to say, a region producing industrial wines led by large corporations. This is a somewhat catch-all category, as it encompasses a wide variety

¹³⁹ My translation of: “Parce que le vin à Bordeaux c’est un acquis en fait, c’est un acquis historique et culturel, où on n’a plus besoin de faire d’efforts pour vendre notre vin en fait, on avait plus besoin de faire d’efforts car les touristes du monde entier venaient chercher du vin bordelais.”

¹⁴⁰ My translation of: “Puis il y a cette arrogance invraisemblable des gens qui pensent que l’on est le seul endroit dans le monde où l’on fait du vin quoi. Quand vous n’êtes pas d’ici vous le voyez quoi! Ils ont un problème, c’est une région qui a besoin d’une thérapie collective... Il va falloir anonymiser là sinon je vais me faire tuer [Rire]. Il y a pleins de non-dits et de trucs foutus sous le tapis ici.”

¹⁴¹ My translation of: “On est resté sur l’heure de gloire de Bordeaux. Comme en Sauternes, l’heure de gloire de Sauternes, c’est Napoléons 1er et le Tsar. Et c’est resté là-dessus. Ça ne marche plus ça! Il faut se remettre en question.”

of critiques ranging from the structure of the industry in Bordeaux to the environmental damage caused by industrial production. Two winemakers I interviewed, expressed similar thoughts on the subject:

“Bordeaux is a massive machine; it’s the largest French appellation, perhaps even European, especially in terms of hectares, and so in quantity and therefore visibility. So it annoys the others a bit” (Interview Remy, winemaker in Bordeaux, 19 April 2021¹⁴²)

“Certainly, there are many factors that have played a role, particularly factors specific to Bordeaux, such as the fact that Bordeaux is top of the class, at least in terms of volume and sales figures; it’s truly a massive machine, so maybe Bordeaux has been criticised a bit for that. Perhaps the prices had become expensive, and some wines were no longer accessible to French consumers. But Burgundy doesn’t suffer as much from this, even though they often have more expensive wines, so it can’t be just that.” (Interview Gilles, winemaker in Bordeaux, 27 April 2021¹⁴³)

This vision of Bordeaux as a “big machine” is partly due to the land concentration process under way in the region; there are fewer and fewer farmers for larger and larger areas of land. A few of the figures in Réjalot’s 2021 article are particularly enlightening. Firstly, the average size of a winegrowing estate in the Gironde was 8 hectares in 1988, and is now close to 19. Secondly, the number of very large farms covering more than 100 hectares has risen considerably: in 1995, only 15 farms were above this threshold, whereas in 2014, there were over 40. These are two revealing indicators of the relentless drive to concentrate land holdings that contribute to the view that Bordeaux wine production is a big machine.

Criticisms related to the structure of the industry are coinciding with other broader concerns, such as a growing environmental awareness within the industry. Indeed, the last twenty years have been marked by an increase in concern for the environment that has attracted mounting attention, due to the many studies that have revealed the contribution of viticulture to climate change, soil depletion and damage to the ecosystem in general.¹⁴⁴ Bordeaux has been in the spotlight on multiple occasions because of environmental damage relating to viticulture activities. As a representative of INAO explained to me: “Bordeaux

¹⁴² *My translation of:* “Bordeaux c’est une grosse machine, c’est l’appellation la plus grosse française, voire européenne, notamment en nombre d’hectares, donc en quantité, et donc en visibilité. Donc ça agace un peu les autres.”

¹⁴³ *My translation of:* “Certainement qu’il y a pleins de facteurs qui ont joué, notamment des facteurs proprement bordelais, notamment le fait que Bordeaux soit le premier de la classe au moins en termes de volume et de chiffre de vente, c’est vraiment une énorme machine donc peut-être que que Bordeaux s’est fait tirer un peu dessus pour ça. Peut-être que les prix étaient devenus cher et que certains vins ne sont plus accessibles à des consommateurs français. Mais la Bourgogne subit beaucoup moins ça alors qu’ils ont des vins plus chers souvent, donc ça ne peut pas être que ça.”

¹⁴⁴ Chazal C., “Les enjeux vitivinicoles face au changement climatique dans les vignobles du Cap (Afrique du Sud et du bordelais (France)”, LAM seminar on current issues, Musée d’Aquitaine, Bordeaux, 8 June 2023.

is in the media's crosshairs when it comes to environmental issues." However, many official representatives of Bordeaux seem to believe that because of its prominence in the wine sector, it is an easy target for accusations of bad environmental practices. One of them is a representative of the CIVB, who commented during our interview:

"Yes, indeed, we often have the image of the bad student... We are seen as the bad students because we're the biggest. It's easier to criticise the biggest." (Interview Manon, CIVB representative, 6 September 2021¹⁴⁵)

These criticisms have been fuelled by other scandals, in particular two *Cash Investigation* television reports¹⁴⁶ produced by Élise Lucet denouncing the massive and dangerous use of synthetic chemicals in the vineyards. Lucet's reports sent a chill through the Bordeaux wine industry, and even producers whose vineyard practices are the most virtuous now fear being the subject of new investigations by a journalist whose attacks were found to be "mainly true but a distortion of the industry." Other mediatised scandals that have contributed to Bordeaux bashing, such as the documentary *Mondovino* (2004) directed by Jonathan Nossiter,¹⁴⁷ which fiercely criticised the standardised wines produced by large multinationals like Mondavi and the flying winemakers, notably the oenologist Michel Rolland, and Isabelle Saporta's book *Vinobusiness*, an edifying investigation into the world of the *Grands Crus* and a sharp critique of their classification systems.¹⁴⁸ More recently, Itxel Delaporte's book *Les Raisins de la Misère* (2018), which has been made into a documentary, caused another backlash in Bordeaux's wine sector. It is an investigation into the hidden face of Bordeaux that denounces the social misery hiding behind the châteaux that are globally renowned for their *Grands Crus*. This accumulation of documentaries and written publications has exacerbated the negative publicity surrounding the Bordeaux wine sector and amplified an already existing crisis in the industry. It has played a significant role in bringing the Bordeaux bashing phenomenon into the mainstream.

¹⁴⁵ *My translation of:* "Mais oui effectivement on a souvent l'image de mauvais élève [...] On est vu comme les mauvais élèves parce qu'on est les plus gros. C'est plus facile de taper sur les plus gros."

¹⁴⁶ Cash Investigation, "Produits chimiques: nos enfants en danger, 3 February 2016, and Cash Investigation, "Pesticides: notre santé en danger", 27 February 2018.

¹⁴⁷ Nossiter, Jonathan. 2004. *Mondovino*. France: Les Films de la Croisade.

¹⁴⁸ Isabelle Saporta and Jonathan Nossiter are both interviewed in the extracts quoted in the introduction to this chapter.

➤ **The consequences of Bordeaux bashing and the defence of the status quo by the governing bodies**

Although Bordeaux is still the market leader worldwide, its market share has been shrinking for the past twenty years for all the above reasons. Bordeaux was selling about 5.2 million hectolitres of wine in the early 1990s, and over 6 million in the 2000s, but as of 2023, this figure has dropped to 3.7 million.¹⁴⁹ Bordeaux wines are the French wines that are losing the most ground in their domestic market (Réjalot, 2021, p. 93). As a direct consequence of Bordeaux bashing, Bordeaux wines have also disappeared from certain sales outlets, as the extracts below confirm:

“There were wine bars or wine merchants that no longer sold a single Bordeaux. That was a shame, and perhaps it was a sign the CIVB should have paid attention to, asking why. I believe that when you’re a wine enthusiast, you shouldn’t overlook an entire region.” (Interview Gilles, winemaker in Bordeaux, 27 April 2021¹⁵⁰)

“It’s more than a crisis; it’s really not going well. They can’t sell their wines anymore. Consumers don’t want them. When you go to a trade show, when they reopen [*i.e. after the Covid pandemic*], you’ll see in organic or natural wine events that they don’t even want Bordeaux anymore. The organisers don’t want them because nobody goes there.” (Interview Maxime, winemaker in Bordeaux, 20 April 2021¹⁵¹)

“I realised at the trade shows I attended that Bordeaux really had a bad image. People walked by my booth without stopping by, probably thinking “Bordeaux is perceived as expensive and not good,” or at least a bit too standardised with overly strong ageing techniques, etc. So yes, there was a kind of negative image of Bordeaux wines. And I’m talking about 2011; it was a long time ago.” (Interview Anne, winemaker in Bordeaux 26 May 2021¹⁵²)

However, despite the negative communications and the numerous warnings from all sides (the international press, wine professionals, public reports, etc.), the institutions responsible for governing the sector seem to favour the status quo in many respects. This state of denial was widely denounced by the winegrowers I interviewed:

¹⁴⁹ Colette Goinère. 2023. “Dans le vignoble de ‘Bordeaux on n’ose pas aborder certains sujets de fond.” Vitisphere. <https://www.vitisphere.com/actualite-99626-dans-le-vignobl-de-bordeaux-on-nose-pas-aborder-certains-sujets-de-fond.html>.

¹⁵⁰ *My translation of:* “Il y avait des bars à vin ou des cavistes qui ne vendaient plus un seul Bordeaux. Ça c’était dommage et c’était peut-être un signal qu’aurait dû entendre le CIVB en se demandant pourquoi. Ça n’a peut-être pas été écouté comme il faut. Moi je crois que lorsque l’on est amateur de vin on ne doit pas raser une région.”

¹⁵¹ *My translation of:* - “C’est un secteur en crise? - Oui plus qu’en crise, ça ne va vraiment pas. Ils n’arrivent plus à vendre les vins. Le consommateur n’en veut pas. Aller sur un salon quand ça va ré-ouvrir [*i.e. après la pandémie de covid*], vous allez voir sur les salons en bio ou en nature, ils ne veulent même plus de Bordelais. Les organisateurs ne les veulent plus parce que personne n’y va.”

¹⁵² *My translation of:* “Je me suis rendu compte dans les salons que je faisais que Bordeaux avait vraiment une mauvaise image, les gens passaient mon stand en se disant “Bah oui Bordeaux ça a l’image d’être cher et pas bon” ou en tout cas un peu trop formaté avec des élevages trop forts etc. Donc oui il y avait une espèce d’image négative des vins de Bordeaux. Et je parle de ça c’était en 2011, c’était il y a longtemps.”

“Do we really need to tell winemakers what they want to hear? The issue is not that; the issue is what consumers want to buy. Perhaps we need to push the industry a little, and we must have the political courage to say OK, things are not working, we need to re-evaluate’.” (Interview Anne, winemaker in Bordeaux, 26 May 2021¹⁵³)

“They can see that in certain restaurants, Bordeaux is no longer on the menu, and the restaurateurs say, 'Bordeaux annoys everyone; it's not appealing,' but there's everything else: the influence of the *Grands Crus Classés*, the major merchant houses, all of that! And the CIVB is represented by them.” (Interview Damien, winemaker in Bordeaux, 12 May 2021¹⁵⁴)

“There are often interests to be served, and when I see the financial acquisitions that have taken place in recent years... Indeed, by maintaining a system like this, we're driving some winemakers into a wall, but well...” (Interview Gilles, winemaker in Bordeaux, 27 April 2021¹⁵⁵)

“But who has the positions in public authorities and who sits on these institutions? We need to look at that, too. When we start to dig a little, we realise that the largest, wealthiest winemakers also have one foot in the INAO, the CIVB, and one foot in the trade unions, etc. And so, they're the ones who will strive to prevent things from changing. It's the 10% in the chemical industry who are thriving who will do everything to resist change. It's unfortunate, but it's a reality.” (Interview Antoine, winemaker in Bordeaux, 10 May 2021¹⁵⁶)

From these extracts, one can discern the tension and disbelief brewing between natural winemakers on one side and the governing institutions such as the CIVB on the other. The Bordeaux bashing phenomenon has exacerbated a crisis of representation in which a significant portion of the industry, primarily motivated by economic concerns, feels that it is not adequately represented or that its interests are not being taken into account inside the current Bordeaux governing structure.

5.2.2.2. “Bordeaux is not dead”¹⁵⁷: alternative winemakers setting new production pathways.

¹⁵³ My translation of: “Est-ce qu'il faut vraiment dire aux viticulteurs ce qu'ils ont envie d'entendre? Le problème ce n'est pas ça, c'est ce que les consommateurs ont envie d'acheter. Et effectivement la filière faut peut-être la pousser un petit peu, il faut avoir le courage politique de dire "ok ça ne va plus, il faut se remettre en question".”

¹⁵⁴ My translation of: “Ils voient bien que dans certains restaurants, il n'y a plus de Bordeaux, et les restaurateurs disent "les Bordeaux emmerdent tout le monde, ça ne donne pas envie" mais il y a tout le reste: le pouvoir des grands crus classés, les grandes structures de négoce, tout ça! Et le CIVB est pas mal représenté par ça.”

¹⁵⁵ My translation of: “Il y a souvent des intérêts à servir, et quand je vois les fusions qu'il y a eu ces dernières années... effectivement à garder un système en place comme ça on envoie une partie des vignerons dans le mur, mais bon.”

¹⁵⁶ My translation of: “Sauf que qui est dans les pouvoirs publics et qui a des sièges dans ces instances? Il faut regarder ça, quand on commence à creuser un peu on s'aperçoit que les plus grands vignerons, les plus riches, ils ont aussi un pied à l'INAO, au CIVB et un pied aux syndicats etc. Du coup c'est eux qui vont lutter pour que les choses ne changent pas. [...] Ce sont les 10% de la chimie qui vivent bien qui vont tout faire pour ne pas changer les choses. C'est dommage mais c'est un constat.”

¹⁵⁷ The expression “Bordeaux is not dead” was heard numerous times on the occasion of the 2024 Vine Expo in Paris and found its way into numerous newspaper articles. See, for example, Sota, Xavier. 2024. “Vins: “Bordeaux n'est Pas Mort”, Une Jeune Génération de Vignerons y Croit.” *Sud Ouest*.

This picture of the situation in the Bordeaux wine sector is admittedly rather dark. It is important to reiterate here that it does not necessarily reflect my own perception of the sector (which is of no analytical interest in any case), and nor does the previous section represent an attempt to present a comprehensive view of the industry in the region. Rather, my purpose has been to focus on the perceived malfunctions in the Bordeaux wine sector that have given rise to an overwhelming feeling of frustration on the part of some independent wine producers, the same producers who have turned away from Bordeaux's legacy to look for other ways of making wine in Bordeaux. Some answers have been found in the natural wine movement, and the next section describes the way the movement manifests itself through individual or collective initiatives.

➤ **The natural wine movement as a way to extricate winemaking from the Bordeaux crisis**

My hypothesis here is that the natural wine movement was born as a response to the status quo, at a time when many independent winemakers were extremely fed up with the system's dysfunctions and were paying the consequences of Bordeaux bashing. In an interesting blog post, the journalist Antonin Iommi-Amunategui announced the arrival of "Bordeaux Unbashing."

"Reducing a region to speculative wines, branded wines, or AOC wines, in short, to disembodied wines, can only lead to a dead end. If this image is disembodied or embodied by businessmen, it cannot be good. So, who embodies – or should embody – Bordeaux today?" (Iommi-Amunategui, Antonin. 2021. "Bordeaux Unbashing." *No Wine is Innocent*¹⁵⁸)

In the following section of his "*Bordeaux Reloaded*" article, he goes on to provide a list of the winemakers who incarnate the new wave of Bordeaux wines, most of whom, unsurprisingly, fall into the natural wine movement. Like Iommi-Amunategui, I also believe that the natural wine movement in the region emerged as a new departure, learning from the errors made in Bordeaux. Several natural winemakers expressed the idea that in order to survive in Bordeaux, it had become essential to "think outside the box," to "reinvent themselves." The testimony of Olivier, the son of a pioneering family of natural

<https://www.sudouest.fr/vin/face-a-la-baisse-de-la-consommation-d-alcool-bordeaux-n-est-pas-mort-une-jeune-generation-de-vignerons-y-croit-18545794.php>.

¹⁵⁸ My translation of: "Réduire une région à des vins spéculatifs, à des vins de marque ou à des vins d'AOC, bref à des vins désincarnés, ne peut que mener dans le mur [...] Si cette image est désincarnée, ou incarnée par des businessmen, elle ne peut pas être bonne. Alors qui incarne — ou devrait incarner — le Bordelais aujourd'hui?"

winemakers in Pomerol, is a good illustration of winemaker's willingness to separate themselves from mainstream Bordeaux production.

Gombaude-Guillot in Pomerol, going against the grain of Bordeaux traditions

The success of the Gombaude-Guillot domain, which is located at the heart of the Pomerol appellation, is a singular story. The winemakers in the Techer family, who have owned the estate since 1860, have departed from the traditional path that was expected of prestigious domains a few decades ago. Not only does Gombaude-Guillot farm entirely biodynamically and produce natural wine with minimal input, but it has also made a statement by emancipating itself from the Bordeaux trading system (*négoce*) and relying solely on its own network for marketing and distribution. In my interview with Olivier, the son who has recently taken over Gombaude-Guillot, he explained: "In fact, my parents had always wanted to distance themselves from trading and not to work with very large merchants, so they dealt directly with importers and retailers, except that we didn't have the skills to do so. We're not salespeople. We didn't study business, you know. We did what we could, well, my mother especially."¹⁵⁹ As a young winemaker, Olivier was proud that his family did not fall into the pitfalls that led to Bordeaux bashing (Parkerisation, standardisation of taste, working with flying winemakers, etc.). He talked about his family's work ethos and the economic sacrifices it involved: "So we don't have the same power as the Bordeaux merchants who with the prestige of Pomerol will sell you almost any Pomerol worldwide, but on the condition that you play their game, which means making them money and, above all, adhering to the Parker ratings and working with Michel Rolland. That's what worked at the time. My parents didn't do any of that. And they were right from an ethical, moral or whatever perspective you want, but clearly not from a commercial standpoint."¹⁶⁰

It is no coincidence that Dominique Techer, Olivier's father and the domain's previous winemaker, was heavily involved in local politics. He started out as the local football coach, and was then the mayor of Pomerol for several years. Now retired, he is a representative of *Confédération Paysanne* and is deeply involved in local battles to prevent and reduce the use of chemical pesticides in viticulture. He is widely recognised in the Bordeaux region today, particularly for his appearances in the media and his contributions during the CIVB's general assemblies, where he was the lone voice courageously raising questions that resonated with many small independent domains across Bordeaux. Despite

¹⁵⁹ My translation of: "En fait mes parents ont toujours voulu s'extraire du négoce et donc ne pas bosser avec des très gros négociants. Et donc du coup s'occuper en direct des importateurs et des cavistes, sauf que l'on n'avait pas les moyens de le faire. On n'est pas des commerciaux, on n'a pas fait d'études en commerce. On a fait un peu comme on a pu, enfin ma mère surtout."

¹⁶⁰ My translation of: "Donc, on n'a pas la même puissance que les négociants bordelais qui, eux avec le prestige de Pomerol, vont te vendre à peu près n'importe quel Pomerol dans le monde entier mais à condition de jouer le jeu. C'est-à-dire de leur faire gagner de l'argent et surtout de jouer le jeu des notes Parker, de bosser avec Michel Rolland - à l'époque c'est ça qui faisait marcher. Mes parents n'ont rien fait de tout ça. Et ils ont eu raison d'un point de vue éthique, moral, tout ce que tu veux, mais d'un point de vue commercial clairement pas."

being at the heart of Pomerol, and thus surrounded by *Grand Crus Classés*, Gombaude-Guillot took initiatives in terms of experimenting with new production and commercialisation pathways at a time when most would have followed the trends of the Bordeaux trading system.

Portraits and field notes 4. Gombaude-Guillot in Pomerol, going against the grain of Bordeaux traditions.

Considering the ethos of the natural wine movement (See Chapter 4), it is not hard to understand that natural winemakers have striven both commercially and politically to avoid the pitfalls that fuelled the phenomenon of Bordeaux bashing. For instance, natural winemakers claim a paradigm shift that moves away from wine being viewed solely as a financial asset and towards being regarded as an experiential product rooted in terroir and craftsmanship. Similarly, they reject the large corporations and the industrial turn of the sector, preferring a return to small-scale production and so-called “traditional” techniques, among other things.

The natural wine movement in Bordeaux is still very much a niche sector in terms of quantity. According to the latest estimates from the Raisin app, natural wine accounts for just 1.81% of French production,¹⁶¹ and as Bordeaux is one of the last French regions where the movement has taken hold, one might expect this figure to be even lower there. Nonetheless, the natural wine movement has received a great deal of media coverage and is apparently over-represented in the media, as the press cuttings used for this research show. When they emancipate themselves from the traditional wine sector locally, winemakers affiliated with the natural wine movement in Bordeaux are often viewed as marginal. This marginality and the alternative pathways are explored below.

➤ **Marginal figures in the Bordeaux wine landscape**

I now return to the argument I developed above that there are often two different stages of mobilisation in social movement studies: cognitive mobilisation and mobilisation through actions. I use this distinction as an analytical framework with which to examine the emergence of the natural wine movement in Bordeaux. The natural winemakers in

¹⁶¹ In a podcast, Jean-Hugues Bretin, the founder of the Raisin app, reported that according to its last report, there are about 75,000 winegrowers in France, and so the share of natural wine is about 1.81%. Source: RadioVino. 2023. “Le Vin Naturel Est-Il Devenu (Trop) Mainstream ? Sous Les Pavés La Vigne Paris.” <https://www.radiovino.fr/le-vin-naturel-est-il-devenu-trop-mainstream-debat-du-13-05-2023-a-sous-les-paves-la-vigne-paris/>

Bordeaux emerged from individuals located here and there, and from a local perspective the movement there seems to be the result of the life trajectories of a few individuals who have crossed paths with other branches of the natural wine movement and decided to mimic what they saw or take inspiration from it to build their own practices. At first, therefore, it resembles a collection of scattered individuals rather than a network, let alone a movement, operated by individuals who diagnosed the multi-faceted crisis that was adversely impacting Bordeaux in its early stages. The initial phase of cognitive mobilisation began from this diagnosis and found resonance in the alternatives they were seeking. My interpretation of the movement in Bordeaux derives from an appreciation of the ways the winemakers invested a space in view of the crisis they were experiencing and then expanded to the mobilisations through actions that emerged here and there.

➤ **The natural wine movement as the new generation of *bio*?**

When one looks closely at the repertoire of claims made by natural winemakers, it becomes clear that the cognitive mobilisations were inherited from the older *bio* movements (the French agroecology/organic movements). During the 1980s and 1990s, *bio* winemakers were regarded as pioneers of an alternative grape-growing method and as activists committed to a transition in viticulture production (Célérier, 2017; Van Dam, Nizet, & Streith, 2012). Today, *bio* winemakers are gradually becoming part of the landscape of the local wine industry, while natural wine producers have taken over the role of contemporary activists. Here, I hypothesise that we are in fact witnessing a generational shift in the militant stance: the 1980s and 1990s were the era of *bio* winemakers who advocated for recognition of the hazards linked to using synthetic chemical products in vineyards (pesticides, herbicides and fungicides). This vision has now become mainstream, and has even been absorbed by capitalistic market dynamics, as well as being largely taken up by public authorities. As a result, organic wine production is now widely encouraged – and even subsidised – but the concept of organic has also been appropriated and deprived of its essential content to the benefit of large corporations: according to recent public reports, the Gironde is the leading department in terms of area dedicated to organic cultivation (almost 20,000 hectares in 2021, 18% of the total planted area¹⁶²). I argue that today it is the natural winemakers who are embarking on new battles, pushing the boundaries of their demands and drawing from the action-oriented, militant spirit of the *bio* winemakers from a few

¹⁶² Bio Agency 2021.

decades ago, leading to a hypothesis of a generational shift in the militant stance from the *bios* to the natural wine producers.

There are other claims that feed the cognitive framework, most of which I detailed in Chapter 4. It is worth noting here that the natural wine movement includes a wide diversity of winemakers with very mixed profiles, but paradoxically not all of them identify with the movement, mainly because most of them do not think of themselves as being “politically engaged”; rather, they define themselves as “farmers first and foremost.” Nevertheless, amidst this diversity of profiles, some producers have gathered under banners to engage in the second stage of mobilisation: through (collective) actions.

➤ The “Bordeaux Pirates,” rebels by nature?

Several collective actions in Bordeaux have given more consistency to the natural wine movement, the most heavily-publicised of which is probably the “Bordeaux Pirates” initiative. In February 2022, an article in the local newspaper *Sud-Ouest* announced:

“Bordeaux Pirates brought together just a small group of about fifteen winemakers. At that time, Covid was not yet known, Bordeaux bashing had been going on for a while and many winemakers were already yearning for a little revolution.” (Article, Jean-Charles Galiacy, 9 February 2022, *Sud-Ouest Gironde*, “Les châteaux “pirates” veulent dépoussiérer les vins de Bordeaux”¹⁶³)

Bordeaux Pirates was the inaugural endeavour undertaken by natural wine producers to establish a collective movement. Led by Jean-Baptiste Duquene, the owner of Château Cazebonne, the initiative seeks to unite winemakers who aspire to distance themselves from the traditional and somewhat rigid reputation associated with Bordeaux wines. The primary objective is to champion a production that counteracts Bordeaux bashing. During our interview, Jean-Baptiste revealed his ambition to introduce a “third path” to combat the two-tier system: an alternative perspective and a distinctive space situated between the *Grand Crus* and mass production:

“The observation was a simple one: it was that in Bordeaux there is only room for *Grands Crus* or bulk wine, and there is no third possible option for independent winemakers. Or should we say, it’s a difficult path for independent winemakers who want to make claims about the quality of their products. So the Bordeaux Pirates group aims to unite all the winemakers who represent this third option. The third option is the Bordeaux Pirate. Shouldn’t the CIVB consider investing massively in this third option instead of adhering to this very binary logic? Bordeaux complains about being unsuccessful at selling wines at 10 or 15 euros, and I say to them, “help the Bordeaux Pirates” ... Well, I don’t actually tell them because I am not of any interest to them. I created the Bordeaux

¹⁶³ *My translation of:* “Bordeaux Pirate rassemble tout juste une petite quinzaine de vignerons. À l’époque, on ne connaît pas encore le Covid, le Bordeaux bashing souffle depuis un bout de temps et de nombreux viticulteurs aspirent déjà à une petite révolution”

Pirate group on Facebook a year ago, and no one from the CIVB has called me in a year.” (Interview Jean-Baptiste, Bordeaux Pirates founder, 17 April 2021¹⁶⁴)

The Bordeaux Pirates’ slogan “*Des vins en dehors des sentiers battus*” (“Wines produced off the beaten path”) illustrates this willingness to set a precedent. Their primary motive is thus to question the binary logic that has been stuck in Bordeaux, with inaccessible *Grands Crus* on the one hand and entry-level wines that are mainly sold in bulk and/or in super markets on the other. In this sense, the Bordeaux Pirates collective is a direct response to the Bordeaux bashing phenomenon:

“- The Bordeaux Pirates will win. Because consumers don’t want to drink a *Grand Cru* or a crap wine; they want to drink Bordeaux Pirate. In fact, I’m hitting the mark with what needs to be told, and by adding Bordeaux Pirate, I’m being a bit cheeky. To say in Bordeaux that one can be a pirate is antinomic. At first, they told me, “You shouldn’t say Bordeaux Pirate, it’s not qualitative.” But the people who told me that didn’t understand anything!

- *Was it your objective to be provocative?*

- Yes, of course! I’m a pirate in the sense that I create chaos every day, and I’m not done causing chaos. I’m ready to do a lot of things, regardless of Bordeaux’s culture and traditions. I’m ready to do anything I find intelligent in the intellectual sense: full of curiosity, taste, and things that will help rethink our cultural heritage.” (Interview Jean-Baptiste, Bordeaux Pirates founder, 17 April 2021¹⁶⁵)

What does this actually translate into? Wine promoted under the “Bordeaux Pirates” banner must be innovative, and there are plenty of ways to go about it, which illustrates the capacity of certain winemakers to reinvent themselves. Some producers are experimenting with vinification in amphorae instead of the traditional oak barrels or trying out grape varieties from outside the region, while others are bringing back production of 100% Carménère wines (a grape variety left behind in Bordeaux). Jean-Baptiste has taken up the

¹⁶⁴ *My translation of:* “Le constat était simple c’était de dire: Bordeaux il n’y a de la place que pour du cru classé ou du vin en vrac, et il n’y a pas de troisième voie possible pour des vignerons indépendants, ou en tout cas la voix est difficile pour les vignerons indépendants qui veulent revendiquer la qualité de leurs produits, et veulent travailler leurs vins. Donc le Groupe des Bordeaux Pirates, c’est de fédérer tous les vignerons qui sont de cette troisième voix. La troisième voix, c’est le Bordeaux Pirate. Est-ce que le CIVB devrait pas - au lieu d’être dans cette logique très binaire - est-ce que Bordeaux n’a pas besoin d’investir massivement dans cette troisième voie ? Et Bordeaux se plaint d’être mauvais pour vendre des vins à 10 ou 15 euros et moi je leur dis "aidez les Bordeaux Pirates", enfin je ne leur dit pas parce que je ne les intéresse pas, j’ai créé le groupe [Facebook] Bordeaux Pirate il y a un an et personne du CIVB ne m’a passé un coup de file en un an.”

¹⁶⁵ *My translation of:* “C’est les Bordeaux Pirates qui vont gagner. Car le consommateur n’a pas envie de boire un grand cru classé, ni un vin de merde, il veut boire du Bordeaux Pirate. En fait je suis dans le mille de ce qu’il faut raconter et en ayant ajouté le Bordeaux Pirate je suis un peu insolent. De dire à Bordeaux que l’on peut être pirate, c’est antinomique. Au début on m’a dit "tu ne devrais pas dire Bordeaux Pirate, ce n’est pas qualitatif". Mais les gens qui m’ont dit ça n’ont rien pigé ! - *C’était le but de provoquer ?* - Oui évidemment ! Moi je suis un pirate dans le sens où je fous le bordel tous les jours et je n’ai pas fini de foutre le bordel. Moi je suis prêt à faire toute chose – indépendamment de la culture bordelaise, ces us et coutumes – je suis prêt à faire toute chose que je trouve intelligente, au sens intellectuel, de la curiosité, du goût, de re-réfléchir à notre patrimoine culturel.”

challenge of replanting forgotten Bordeaux grape varieties, and has even set up a test plot with no fewer than fifty-seven varieties in it so that he can observe their development, organoleptic characteristics and resistance to climate change. He explains:

“There are many with different styles. There are dozens with various embodiments of Bordeaux Pirates. For some, it's having two hectares of vineyards and being self-sufficient. For others, it's practising agroforestry in the vineyards and revisiting vineyard practices in the context of climate change. Another one I'm thinking of has planted Syrah and Cinsault, grape varieties from the Rhône Valley, in Bordeaux, and is producing high-quality wines, etc.” (Interview Jean-Baptiste, Bordeaux Pirates founder, 17 April 2021¹⁶⁶)

Although at first the initiative was just a Facebook group where producers could meet and exchange opinions, it recently became an actual organisation spearheaded by Jean-Baptiste, in September 2022, with a charter and bottles that bear a distinctive “Bordeaux Pirates” logo to make them recognisable to consumers. The objective also extends to enhancing product communications. In their first year (2023), fifty-two *cuvées* were selected for their organoleptic qualities and above all their originality.



Figure 33. The Bordeaux Pirates logo.

However, the collective does not enjoy unanimous support, even within the natural wine movement. Firstly, some people criticise it for being led by one man, and therefore for not

¹⁶⁶ *My translation of:* “Il y en a pleins qui ont des styles différents. Il y en a des dizaines qui ont des incarnations des Bordeaux Pirates différents. Pour certains c’est avoir deux hectares de vignes et être en autosuffisance. Pour d’autres c’est de faire de l’agroforesterie dans les vignes et de revisiter les pratiques du vignoble dans le cadre du réchauffement climatique. Un autre, auquel je pense, replante de la syrah et du cinsault, des cépages de la vallée du Rhône en Bordeaux et il fait des élevages, des supers vins, etc.”

sufficiently highlighting the collective dimension of the initiative. The Bordeaux Pirates' trailblazing leader Jean-Baptiste is a former entrepreneur with long experience in marketing and communications, which he places at the service of the collective, but some, like this winemaker, suspect that he is using the name "Bordeaux Pirates" to market and sell his own production:

"And then, sincerely, to know him a bit, the guy who founded this had an idea in mind. Jean-Baptiste is an investor; he bought forty hectares of vineyards, he has volume to sell, so he wants to showcase himself." (Interview Pierre, winemaker in Bordeaux, 28 April 2021¹⁶⁷)

Furthermore, the scope of the Bordeaux Pirates movement does not align fully with the natural wine movement. In fact, the criteria for defining oneself as a "Pirate" are quite vague. At present, three have been established for winemakers aspiring to be part of the collective: they must be based in Gironde; they must practice organically (they must be organic or at least be converting to it); and they must offer innovative products. However, it is worth noting that for many natural winemakers, possessing organic certification alone does not automatically classify the wines as natural. Hence, the collective includes both "natural Pirates" and others who are simply "organic Pirates", and for many natural winemakers this is not satisfactory:

"It can't work because they wanted to open it up to everyone. And because Bordeaux is falling apart, everyone claims to be a Pirate now, even the most conventional bootlickers of the system are in it. In the end they changed and said, "Bordeaux Pirates must at least be certified organic," so all the guys who felt a bit rebellious, a bit alternative, but who weren't organic were kicked out, and they didn't like it. But you have everything; you can sell to supermarkets, so just that, for me is a no." (Interview Frank, winemaker in Bordeaux, 5 July 2021¹⁶⁸)

It can be argued, therefore, that the Bordeaux Pirates' emphasis is on capturing the rebellious spirit of the movement rather than focusing solely on the technical prerequisites for producing natural wine. This notion is reinforced by the inception of a dedicated Facebook group for the movement:

"Have the right to be here: winemakers and Bordeaux enthusiasts, rebels by nature! Here we will talk about unique blends, all the initiatives that are breaking Bordeaux free from its over-dusty

¹⁶⁷ *My translation of:* "Et puis, sincèrement pour le connaître un peu, le gars qui a fondé ça avait une idée derrière la tête. Jean-Baptiste, c'est un investisseur, il a acheté quarante hectares de vignes il a du volume à vendre donc il veut s'afficher avec."

¹⁶⁸ *My translation of:* "Non mais ça ne peut pas marcher parce qu'ils ont voulu ouvrir à tout le monde, comme Bordeaux ça se pète la gueule tout le monde est Pirates maintenant, même les plus conventionnels des lécheurs de pompes du système ils sont dedans. Bon finalement ils ont quand même dit "bon Les Bordeaux Pirates doivent au moins être certifiés Bio" donc déjà tous les mecs qui se sentaient un peu rebels, un peu alternatifs mais qui n'étaient pas bios ils se sont faits éjecter et donc ils n'ont pas kiffé. Mais tu as de tout, tu peux vendre à la GD, donc déjà moi ... bon voilà."

image! Bordeaux is reinventing itself – let’s talk about it!” (Header of the Bordeaux Pirate Facebook group¹⁶⁹)

Is this “rebels by nature” a nod to the natural wine movement or simply a way of highlighting its member’ rebellious spirit? When I asked Jean-Baptiste during our interview, he answered:

- “*Could it be that the Bordeaux Pirates collective is ultimately just the Bordeaux branch of natural wines?*

- Bordeaux Pirates is nothing at all; it’s just people who want to stir things up and push the boundaries. [...] So the most important things for me are my commitments and my work philosophy.” (Interview Jean-Baptiste, Bordeaux Pirates founder, 17 April 2021¹⁷⁰)

Other more or less *ad hoc* initiatives have emerged that are roughly in alignment with the ethos of the natural wine movement. For instance, there seems to be another initiative under way known as “Bordeaux nouvelle vague”, which was mentioned by various informants: although the project has not been fully formulated yet, its objective is to create an association to organise events for winemakers who produce independently and alternatively and whose production focuses on natural wines in Bordeaux. Unlike the Bordeaux Pirates, Bordeaux Nouvelle Vague would involve a system of co-optation with a strengthened majority for the admission of new members. One of the winemakers behind the initiative shares a vision that is somewhat similar to that of the Bordeaux Pirates but aims to establish stricter criteria for admitting members into the organisation:

- “Well today, the problem is that the leaders in Bordeaux are the *Grand Crus*, they are big entities. The idea behind Bordeaux Nouvelle Vague was to reclaim the media space dominated by the *Grand Crus* and give it back to small artisanal winemakers. It’s a great idea. Now, it needs to be put into action! [...] We want to do the opposite [*of the Bordeaux Pirates*]. For me, it’s about starting from a small basis, not communicating too much about it. Co-opting and then opening to others.

- *So trying to elevate the agenda rather than engaging in a levelling-down approach?*

- Yes, and I think it’s easier to get bigger than smaller.

- *Is it not enough to simply be organic, as with Bordeaux Pirates?*

- No, at least for Bordeaux Nouvelle Vague, the idea is to be completely artisanal. I encourage you to look up the definition; it’s everything that’s not industrial. And when you look at the definition of what’s industrial, it’s quite surprising too. So, in fact, craftsmanship is quite subjective, so we still need to define what we include in our statutes: is it size? A way of doing things? etc.” (Interview Frank, winemaker in Bordeaux, 5 July 2021¹⁷¹)

¹⁶⁹ *My translation of:* “Ont droit de cité ici, les vignerons et amateurs de Bordeaux, rebelles par nature! Ici, on parlera de cuvées atypiques, de toutes les initiatives qui font sortir Bordeaux de son image par trop poussiéreuse! Le Bordeaux se réinvente, parlons-en!”

¹⁷⁰ *My translation of:* Est-ce que finalement le groupe Bordeaux Pirate n’est pas juste une section bordelaise des vins nature? - Bordeaux Pirate ce n’est rien du tout, c’est juste des gens qui veulent foutre le bordel et font bouger les lignes. [...] Donc pour moi le plus important c’est mes engagements, ma philosophie de travail.”

¹⁷¹ *My translation of:* “Bah aujourd’hui, le problème c’est que les leaders de Bordeaux ce sont les Grands Crus, ce sont des grosses machines. Et l’idée de *Bordeaux Nouvelle Vague*, c’était de récupérer la surface médiatique accaparée par les Grands Crus et de la reprendre pour les vignerons artisanaux. C’est une super

Bordeaux Nouvelle Vague is still in its infancy, but no matter whether the project is hatched or not, what is interesting here is this mushrooming of current initiatives that feed off the general ethos of the natural wine movement and oppose the conventional Bordeaux wine system.

➤ **Other ways the Bordeaux natural wine movement has taken shape**

Despite these few examples, many winemakers in Bordeaux have expressed a feeling of a lack of shared initiatives or a lack of sustainability in the initiatives, as one producer admits: “The problem is that we’re all immersed in our own things. We lack the time to come together and sort all of this out.”¹⁷² Rather, they rely on informal support networks of winegrowers that are a manifestation either of friendships or closer ties due to a shared production ethos (see more in Chapter 9).

Finally, there are very few embodiments of the natural wine movement in Bordeaux. A number of wine establishments (such as Vertigo (now Univerre), Le Flacon (now closed), Cousins et Cie, La Buvette and Le Bon Jaja) have dedicated their focus to this type of production, but they remain infinitely small compared to the wide offer for traditional Bordeaux wines. To my knowledge, there are no wine fairs dedicated to natural wine in Bordeaux. A few events have been held in Bordeaux, including an edition of the natural wine fair “Sous les Pavés la Vigne” in 2019 and “Chai Alriq” in 2022, but they showcased natural wines from every French region and were not specifically dedicated to Bordeaux wines.¹⁷³

To conclude this section on the emergence of Bordeaux natural wine, I draw two final conclusions. First, the movement relies very much on cognitive mobilisation, while the second stage – “mobilisation through action” – is still in its infancy. In my view, the

idée! Maintenant il faut la mettre en action. [...] Nous on veut faire l'inverse [*des Bordeaux Pirates*]! Pour moi il faut partir d'une petite base, ne pas trop communiquer dessus. Se coopter et ensuite ouvrir aux autres. - *Donc essayer de tirer l'agenda vers le haut plutôt que de faire un nivellement vers le bas?* - Oui et à mon avis c'est plus facile de grossir que de diminuer. - *Ce n'est pas assez d'être juste en bio comme à Bordeaux Pirates?* - Non, en tout cas pour Bordeaux Nouvelle Vague l'idée c'est d'être artisanal. Je t'encourage à aller voir la définition, c'est tout ce qui n'est pas industriel. Et quand tu regardes la définition de ce qui est industriel, c'est assez dingue aussi. Donc en fait c'est assez subjectif l'artisanat. Donc il reste à définir ce que l'on met dans nos statuts: est-ce que c'est une taille? Une manière de faire? etc.”

¹⁷² Interview Pierre, winemaker in Bordeaux, 28 April 2021

¹⁷³ The wine fair *La Gouleyance*, was cancelled due to the Covid 19 pandemic.

cognitive mobilisation framework of Bordeaux natural winemakers is an assemblage of three things: the general ethos developed by natural winemakers (described in Chapter 4), the legacy of the bio movement; and last but not least a shared diagnosis of the multi-faceted crisis the Bordeaux wine sector is experiencing, as manifested by the Bordeaux bashing phenomenon. As I explained above, however, mobilisation through action has not yet fully manifested itself. There are few attempts at organising through collective actions, and the limited number of initiatives that have emerged either do not align with the general ethos of the natural wine movement (the Bordeaux Pirates) or are still at a draft stage (Bordeaux Nouvelle Vague). The second conclusion can be reached by using a multiscale analysis: the natural wine movement is barely visible when looked at through a regional lens alone: if it exists at all at this level, it is mainly thanks to a group of individuals who share a similar cognitive framework rather than through a real movement, because of the lack of a collective dimension. I believe that the natural wine movement in Bordeaux exists on different levels: national and international. In fact, I would even go as far to say that it is embodied through a translocal dimension in which Bordeaux natural winemakers are just small (isolated) individuals at a regional level but thrive in other settings, such as in specialised international wine fairs or distribution networks.

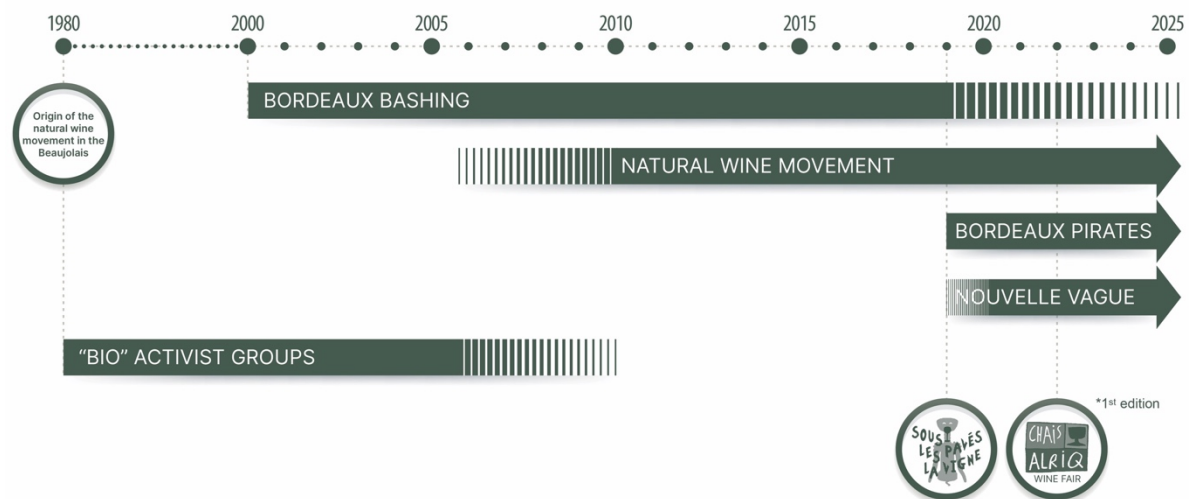


Figure 34. Chronology of events leading to the natural wine movement in Bordeaux. Source: Chazal 2024.

Conclusion

These initial portrayals of the natural wine movement in Bordeaux and the Western Cape as narrated by the actors themselves lay no claim to being comprehensive, mainly because

the movement is developing alongside this thesis and has been growing, spreading and continuously changing as I have been writing it. Indeed, between the data collection (which concluded at the end of 2022) and submission of the manuscript, many new antennae of the movement have emerged, like new local shoots of the rhizome.

From an analytical standpoint, the following concepts have been explored through the narrative of the emergence of the natural wine movement in the two regions. The summary of my conclusions below returns to the analytical framework developed in the introduction to this Chapter (See table 4 below).

The Western Cape Province	The Bordeaux region
The rhizome as an embodiment of the natural wine movement The figure of the rhizome is used to analyse the proliferation of the natural wine movement as an a-centric, non-hierarchical and multiple-entry network shape. The natural wine movement is an international network with a globally shared identity and ethos. It does not have a centre or a leading voice. However, it has a multiplicity of anchors in every wine-producing region. Both the Western Cape and Bordeaux are local antennae of this network. The rhizome of the natural wine movement is best analysed by using a multiscalar lens. Both case studies appear as an embodiment of the figure of the rhizome through their translocal dimension.	
In the Western Cape, many levels come into play and overlap in the construction of the natural wine movement: natural winemakers are strategically using the interconnections and agencies between local – notably in the Swartland – and international influences to build their identity.	In Bordeaux, the natural wine movement is barely visible when it is only viewed through a regional lens: although it exists at this scale, it is mainly thanks to a collection of individuals who share a similar cognitive framework rather than through an actual movement because of the lack of a collective dimension. I argue that the natural wine movement in Bordeaux exist through agencies at other levels, whether national or international. Natural winemakers are isolated at the regional level, but they thrive in other settings, such as in specialised international wine fairs or distribution networks.
Finally, the way the natural wine movement connects and manifests itself at the international level is very real. It is when an international lens is used that the rhizomatic shape takes on its full meaning, as one can clearly see a global movement with a common identity, a shared ethos and a multiplicity of local anchors in every wine-producing region. Although this study focuses on just two examples (the Western Cape and Bordeaux), there is a definite need to investigate the international outreach of the movement. I have identified a gap in the literature, because no research has yet attempted to comprehend the links among the various chapters of the movement.	
The theory of the “empty space” as a privileged space for fostering innovation Actors in the natural wine movement are investing in and rehabilitating wine-growing regions that are not historically renowned for their production of quality wine. I refer to them here as “empty spaces” because of their lack of historical investment in wine quality and the absence of a good reputation for winemaking in this area. I believe that local pockets of the natural wine movement have been able to emerge and build an identity by tapping into the local absence of	

international outreach and prestige. The two regions illustrate this argument, as actors in the natural wine movement have invested in empty spaces (in the Western Cape) and dysfunctional spaces (in Bordeaux) to propose an alternative way of making wine and create a precedent in the wine sector.	
The Western Cape is divided into sub-wine regions. The cradle of the natural wine movement locally is in the Swartland, a historically neglected wine region that has undergone a huge renaissance with the Swartland Revolution events and the rise of the natural wine movement locally. The example of the Swartland in South Africa is therefore particularly expressive of this dynamic: the blank canvas that was the Swartland and the absence of state regulation in the wine business have given winemakers the freedom to explore and experiment.	In a region like Bordeaux, on the other hand, the dynamics are entirely different. Bordeaux is one of the most invested regions historically, and has benefited from an international reputation for its wine production. It is therefore not surprising that it was one of the last French wine-producing regions to be inhabited by the natural wine movement. In this instance, I argue that the natural wine movement did not emerge in any empty space, but rather found ground in the local dysfunctions of the sector.
The two stages of mobilisation Drawing from Mann's (1998) analytical framework, two stages are identified in movements: cognitive mobilisation first, and mobilisation through action later.	
1. Cognitive Mobilisation The cognitive framework of the natural wine movement builds on the ethos described in detail in Chapter 4. Other components that are context-specific also come into play for the purposes of generating the mobilisation.	
In the Western Cape, two fundamental pillars are identified as factors that have allowed the natural wine movement to emerge locally: first the Swartland, and second the international dynamics of the natural wine movement, notably the overseas experiences of some young winemakers and the inspirations they took back home with them. The pioneers of the movement in the Western Cape fed on these two pillars to build their own identity to launch the movement.	The cognitive mobilisation framework of Bordeaux natural winemakers is an assemblage of different factors that include the legacy of the <i>bio</i> movements and a shared diagnosis of the multi-faceted crisis that Bordeaux's wine sector is experiencing, manifesting itself through the Bordeaux bashing phenomenon. The movement in Bordeaux was thus born as a way to protest against the current system, and is arising in parallel with a cognitive framework that was built on shared frustrations about facing the local crisis.

2. Mobilisation through collective action and what it says about the role of the state. The emergence of the natural wine movement in the two regions happened differently, and expresses different ways of resisting.	
In the case of the Western Cape’s natural wine movement, it seems that mobilisation through actions happened together with the building of the cognitive framework. Collective actions manifest themselves through meta-organisations (that is, through collectives of winemakers gathered under the same banner, such as The Swartland Revolution, SIP, Zoo Biscuits and Beards and Barrels). These meta-organisations have several roles: (1) they act as identity markers to enhance visibility both locally and internationally; (2) they enable communications on and marketing of alternative productions; and (3) they serve as platform for knowledge exchange (and through a sort of loop effect also reinforce the collective identity and shared cognitive framework of the winemakers).	In Bordeaux, on the contrary, the movement lacks collective actions, or is still in its infancy stage (see Bordeaux Pirates and Bordeaux Nouvelle Vague). I formulate two scenarios here to explain the absence of collective actions: either it is too early for them because natural winemakers are struggling and lack the resources to organise themselves, or – and I am leaning towards this second hypothesis – natural winemakers have not felt the urge to gather under the banner of a collective or an organisation because the density of the existing social fabric in the wine sector already provides them with sufficient space for learning and knowledge exchanges. Instead, they have turned to informal solidarity ties among winemakers.

Table 4. The main differences in the emergence of the natural wine movement between the two regions. Source: Chazal 2024

6. CHAPTER 6: Investigating the effects on the wine sector of ruptures and continuities in the natural wine movement

Introduction

This chapter investigates the degree to which the natural wine movement expresses itself and its more wide-ranging effects on the wine sector, as well as the ruptures and continuities that have taken place at different levels in both the two regions studied here and, more generally within the wine industry at large.

In the first section, I set out the dynamics of the polarisation of the wine sector that are being exacerbated by the natural wine movement. I investigate the concept of resistance as developed by authors such as James C. Scott and Henry D. Thoreau and the processes of resistance engaged in by, and the marginalisation of, natural winemakers. I argue that this polarisation can be attributed both to detractors of the movement and actors inside it, i.e. ones who actively participate in distancing themselves using a repertoire of actions spanning from built narratives of transgression and marginalization to civil disobedience, even going as far as to take their conflicts to court. This section highlights polarisation in the field and challenges to the status quo, and confirms that the natural wine movement is an effective tool for exposing and shedding light on existing issues in the wine industry.

The second section examines the extent to which actors in the natural wine movement tackle issues that fall outside their main objectives: that is, the environmental and ecological agenda. Here, I use the classic “class-race-gender” triptych as an analytical framework for gaining a better understanding of the positions actors in the natural wine movement adopt *vis à vis* existing hierarchies in the wine sector. Local and contextual dynamics reveal different positions in the Western Cape and Bordeaux, and the conclusions I reach from this analysis are nuanced. First, as I noted previously, actors in the natural wine movement are trailblazers, and the alternative pathways they adopt make it possible to showcase some of the pervasive inequalities in the wine sector, including those relating to class, race and gender. In some specific instances, these winemakers are taking action and championing these causes. I argue that in certain niche areas and in very specific instances, the natural wine movement has also been a platform for new demands that are permeating the wine industry, as in the example of the intersections between the feminist and natural wine movements. In other examples, however – and this is

where I add a nuance – these hierarchies are not being tackled, and the problems are being kept silent. Indeed, in both contexts, the actors in the natural wine are mainly white, males and domain owners, three recurrent characteristics which place them in a position of privilege.

6.1. Aggregation and marginalisation strategies within the natural wine movement and greatly increased polarisation in the wine sector

The array of discourses and initiatives attributable to actors in the natural wine movement is legion, but what they all have in common is their aim to reinvent the everyday experience of the wine sector through radical action, while at the same time dispensing with what they depict as the industry's 'rigid' norms and constraints. Typically, these acts are unorganised and opportunistic, and seek to disrupt the wine sector's conventional norms.

James C. Scott introduced the concept of “everyday resistance” to study how lower-class people resist domination by the upper classes or the state in ways that are both symbolic and ideological. Scott describes this resistance as “virtually always a stratagem deployed by a weaker party in thwarting the claims of an institutional or class opponent who dominates the public exercise of power” (Scott, 1989, p. 52). In this case, the position taken by natural wine movement actors is that they are subjugated by the wider conventional wine industry. According to Scott, “much of the politics of subordinate groups falls into the category of “everyday forms of resistance,” and these activities “should most definitely be considered political, and [...] do constitute a form of collective action” (Scott, 1989, p. 33).

In this section, I investigate the broad range of actions initiated by actors in the natural wine movement, from subtle acts of resistance to open confrontation. The spectrum of practices I review ranges from transgressive discourses to civil disobedience, and even to instances of disputes that have led to legal actions. I argue that some actors in the natural wine movement act as trailblazers, and in so doing create major divides and polarisations in the wine industry as a whole.

6.1.1. *The rise of natural wine's detractors*

The rise of the natural wine movement has garnered a great deal of media attention – some would even argue it has benefited from a disproportionate amount of press coverage – and has therefore provoked many differing reactions within the sector. Unsurprisingly, the verdicts

have not all been positive: the movement has met with a strong backlash that has targeted both natural wine as a product and the general ambitions of the movement itself. Fierce criticisms of natural wine have appeared from all sides: natural wine has been depicted as “deviant” and numerous defects have been associated with it. In my interviews, conventional, or “non-natural,” winemakers pointed out the unorthodoxy and faults of natural wines (including high volatility, excessive amounts of Brett, mousiness in the taste¹⁷⁴ and high oxidation), which can be caused by lenience or neglect, and is often backed up by a “minimal intervention” discourse. It is common for natural wines to be associated with the smell of “stables,” “manure,” “vinegar,” “nail varnish remover,” or “Scotch alcohol.”¹⁷⁵ One conventional producer I interviewed in Bordeaux did not mince his words, when I asked him for his opinion on natural wine, he replied:

“A friend made me taste deviant wines, uninteresting except perhaps for supporting theories or for training tasters to know what a wine with flaws tastes like.” (Interview, Jean-Marc, winemaker in Bordeaux, 4 February 2021¹⁷⁶)

Whether these faults are verified or not, natural wine has a heated reputation that has partly been inherited from the image of organic wines. Some authors have demonstrated a persisting perception of lower quality and taste differentiations associated with organic wines (Delmas, Gergaud, & Lim, 2016; Parga Dans, Alonso González, & Macías Vázquez, 2019). Because natural wine is a distinct but integral branch of organic wine, it comes as no surprise that the lesser image of organic wine has been transferred to natural wine. The criticisms have targeted not only the final product and its organoleptic characteristics but also the producers themselves, who are seen as being on the margins. In Bordeaux and the Western Cape alike, the attitude towards (new) natural winemakers is generally one of scepticism, if not marginalisation. Several winemakers I interviewed expressed a feeling of “not being welcome,” as the extracts below show:

“Back then natural wine was not... I mean no one wanted it. People didn’t understand it at all. It was like getting people to eat kale at lunch twenty years ago. They would laugh at you.” (Interview Dan, winemaker in Western cape, 22 April 2022)

¹⁷⁴ “*Le gout de souris*” – a mousy taste in wine – is a defect produced by lactic acid bacteria or brett yeasts.

¹⁷⁵ Verbatim from various interviews.

¹⁷⁶ *My translation of*: “Un copain ne m'a fait goûter que des vins déviants, sans intérêt, si ce n'est pour servir pour les thèses ou pour les apprentissages aux dégustateurs, pour savoir ce qu'est un vin à défauts”

“In terms of the neighbourhood... Well, there were a few comments, like saying we were crazy. [...] So in 2004, we faced some criticism, people called us crazy.” (Interview Clément, winemaker in Bordeaux, 5 May 2021¹⁷⁷)

“We weren’t necessarily welcomed, it must be said. We were seen as witches or odd people who work with the moon. But it’s changed; now it’s becoming almost ordinary.” (Interview Sandrine, winemaker in Bordeaux, 3 May 2021¹⁷⁸)

There are many reasons behind these attitudes. One part of the industry feels it is under attack from the “anti-establishment” rhetoric used by the natural wine movement and has responded with its own weapons. Traditional winemakers are being targeted for their use of agro-industrial techniques, conventional viticultural practices and interventionist vinicultural methods, and in response they criticise natural winemakers for being “anti-system” and ultimately “anti-everything.” The polarised opinions of natural wine producers are depicted clearly in an article about South Africa by the wine critic Tim Atkins.

“The success of the Swartland has generated a degree of jealousy and resentment elsewhere in the Cape. Critics say that the place is over-rated and over-hyped. It’s too hot, too dry and relies on a handful of star names to sell its other wines, they say, many of which aren’t very special, let alone revolutionary. The criticism is a little extreme, but it’s true that the Swartland enjoys a reputation that is out of proportion with its achievements, at least to date. It has produced some outstanding wines, especially with red Rhône varieties, but the Swartland is still a very young region, albeit one with a lot of potential.” (Atkins, Tim. 2015. “The Stellenbosch Renaissance.” *Tim Atkins Blog*)

One South African winemaker regrets the “extreme” position of some natural wine producers who seem to have put their ideological struggle before the quality of their final product:

“And... I don’t think you are going to catch a terroir with a fifteen-degree alcohol wine that’s got 200% new oak. I don’t think you’re most likely to capture the terroir or the identity of the place, but I also think that at the very left end of the pendulum... toward the natural wine movement, the very extreme, where the wines are so tarnished with faults and just issues, I don’t think the terroir is living there either. I think sometimes it feels to me that those wines are manifestations of human identity and it’s got nothing to do with grapes or terroir. And sometimes they are even more warped than the far right, in a very cynical way.” (Interview Milo, winemaker in Western cape, 7 June 2022)

Overall, then, natural winemakers and their detractors at the opposite end of the spectrum have both participated in the creation of polarisation and major divides within the wine sector. With the emergence of the natural wine movement, a gap has opened up between different ways of *making* wine. The more the natural wine movement has developed, the more its detractors have mobilised and in turn fuelled polarisation. These detractors use strategies and rhetoric to

¹⁷⁷ *My translation of:* “Au niveau du voisinage... bon il y a eu quelques réflexions, comme quoi on était fou. [...] Voilà en 2004, on s’est pris des coups de fusil - enfin façon de parler - on s’est pris des réflexions en se faisant traiter de fou.”

¹⁷⁸ *My translation of:* “On n’était pas forcément bien accueillis, il faut le dire. On était les sorciers ou les gens bizarres qui travaillent avec la lune. Mais ça a changé, maintenant ça devient presque ordinaire.”

undermine the credibility of the natural wine movement: for the less virulent, it is a fad that is doomed to disappear, while others have no hesitation in denouncing changes that are “worsening winemaking practices,” leading to unstable wines in which one has to “get used to a smell of vinegar or horse sweat.”¹⁷⁹ In response, those involved in the natural wine movement have adopted strategies to set themselves apart.

6.1.2. *Transgressive narratives and building collective imaginaries around rebelliousness*

One way of differentiating the movement, of expressing distrust of the conventional system and at the same time building a collective identity for it, is through the extensive use of transgressive rhetoric. Authors like Couégnas and Moutat have conducted in-depth semiotic analyses of the rhetoric of transgression at work in communications regarding natural wines (Couégnas, 2020; Moutat, 2017, 2019). There is no shortage of examples that illustrate the movement’s desire for self-definition through this semantic technique, including self-proclaimed organisations like “Bordeaux Pirates” and the “Swartland Revolution.” According to press articles and eye-witnesses, the Swartland Revolution placed the idea of transgression at the forefront of its narrative. The Revolution events were intended to be an allegory for this idea of transgression and alternative production, and everything from the staging of the event to the discourse around it was geared towards this idea of a rebellious spirit. Similarly, the only criterion established to join the “Bordeaux Pirates” group – apart from being certified *bio* – is to submit “wines produced off the beaten path,” leaving it unclear what the definition covers but once again emphasising the rebellious and alternative spirit of the initiative. Another interesting example among many is the documentary broadcast on *Arte* called “PunkoVino: 10 dissidents of natural wine.”¹⁸⁰ It portrayed ten French natural winemakers, and the whole the series was geared towards emphasising the discursive and fringe identity of the producers, who are alternately called “pirates of the vines” or “punks of the ceps.” Several of the Bordeaux winemakers I interviewed during my fieldwork recognised themselves in these portraits and emphasised that they shared a similar “spirit of rebellion against market forces and hyper-consumption.”¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ “S’habituer à sentir le vinaigre ou la sueur de cheval.” Extract from an interview by the journalist Jacques Dupont (*Le Point Vin*, *Le Figaro*) “Les nouvelles mythologies du vin, tout le monde il est gentil” *Le Figaro*. 11 February 2020.

¹⁸⁰ Yoann Le Gruiec, “Punkovino: 10 dissidents du vin naturel,” *Arte*, 2019.

¹⁸¹ Interview Pierre, winemaker in Bordeaux, 28 April 2021.

➤ Distinctiveness through new narratives and visual identities

Actors in the movement adopt this identity in opposition to the vineyards' image of prestige – the famous *château* effect (See Textbox 14) – which until today has been the supreme marker of wine quality. The break from the conventional sector also embraces a desire to deconstruct its codes and norms. There is no need to remind the reader that wine is a highly symbolic product with strictly regulated codes and customs (Beckert, Rössel, & Schenk, 2017); however, these codes and standards are being challenged, and even mocked, by actors in the natural wine movement. Visually speaking, natural winegrowers have abandoned traditional labels and are playing with amusing variations. Wine labels have become true group markers, with “codes that reassure and allow identification of a process, but also codes to include and exclude, to construct and to refer to a group imaginary.” (Pineau, 2016, p. 4). This radical departure from the traditional wine culture is expressed through transgressive communication strategies that are not confined to labelling rules but are also used as creative leverage for natural winemakers who consistently play the transgression card (Moutat, 2019, p. 70). Examples of this are plentiful, but I especially recall the audacious pun from a winemaker in Bergerac who labelled his wine with a direct (and unflattering) reference to the American agro-multinational *Monsanto*:

“There is a cuvée in Bergerac –they’ve got a nerve, those ones – because now they’re taking on something serious. They called a cuvée “Mon sans to,” which is short for “Mon Vin Sans Toxiques” [*My Wine Without Toxins*]. But when you’ve got a company like Bayer catching wind of it, the guy is heading straight to court. And then it reaches such a level that it becomes a competition of who can come up with the most provocative title! Anyway, it gets... Whew.” (Interview Hervé, winemaker in Bergerac, 24 April 2021¹⁸²)

Meanwhile, a Bordeaux wine merchant specialising in natural wine co-produced a *piquette* and designed a label for it:

“You see, even for the “*piquette*” they told me, “No, Léon don't do that.” Initially, I wanted to create a poster with a bit of a 1950s vibe, saying “Save Bordeaux, drink *piquette*,” but they told me “No, that's asking to be screwed by the CIVB.”” (Interview Léon, wine bar owner in Bordeaux 27 April 2021¹⁸³)

Through their marketing, bottle naming and design and stagings at wine events, among other things, actors from the natural wine movement regularly engage in symbolic rituals that express

¹⁸² *My translation of:* “Il y a une cuvée qui est sortie à Bergerac - et ils sont gonflés - parce que là ils s'attaquent à lourd, ils l'ont appelé “Mon sans to,” c'est-à-dire “Mon Vin Sans Toxique.” Mais tu as la firme Bayer qui attrape ça, le gars il part au tribunal tout de suite. Et en fait après ça devient d'un tel niveau, que c'est à celui qui sortira le plus de provoc'! Enfin bon ça devient... Pfffiou.”

¹⁸³ *My translation of:* “Tu vois là, même sur la piquette, ils m'ont dit “non Léon ne fait pas ça,” moi au départ je voulais faire une affiche un peu année cinquante en disant “sauvez bordeaux, buvez de la piquette” et ils m'ont dit “non là c'est un coup à se faire défoncer par le CIVB””

their resistance to the corporate agri-food system. They play the radical card, and so the movement is beginning to resemble an insurgent model that is adopting a more aggressive approach to communications. These markers are first used to set natural producers apart from conventional wines, but they also help identify peers and create a sense of collective and transnational identity that circulates from one region to another. As the critic and essayist Antonin Iommi-Amunategui argues, this transgressive rhetoric also translates into wider ideas of festivity, solidarity and community ties (Iommi-Amunategui, 2015). Natural winemakers are highly aware of their image, and cultivate this idea of being laid-back and not taking themselves too seriously; they market themselves as “radical” but “light-hearted,” “rebels” but essentially “fun,” and use this subversive attitude as a key to their success. One winemaker from the Bordeaux Pirates collective explains:

“In fact, I hit the mark with what needs to be said, and by adding “Bordeaux Pirate,” I’m a bit cheeky. To say to Bordeaux that one can be a pirate is contradictory. At first, they told me, “You shouldn’t say Bordeaux Pirate; it’s not qualitative.” But the people who told me that didn’t get it!” (Interview Marc, winemaker in Bordeaux, April 2021¹⁸⁴)

➤ **Swartland Revolutionaries storm the 2013 Cape Wine trade event**

One episode that immediately comes to mind to illustrate the rebellious spirit that was developed as a brand identity in South Africa is the storming by the Swartland Independent Producers on the occasion of the 2013 Cape Wine fair. I have recreated the events below from the testimonies of various interviewees, and so they are subject to their personal recollections and the stories they made of it. Cape Wine is the annual fair for South African winemakers, an opportunity to showcase their products to international buyers and distributors. Winemakers apply for a stand to exhibit at the fair, although because Cape Wine is probably the country’s largest gathering, only the most prestigious and profitable domains can rent one. For the 2013 edition, the Swartland Independent Producers (See Chapter 5) all shared a single stand. One winemaker told me: “We got given a very large stand, because we were almost like “orphans,” everyone felt sorry for us “those poor guys from the Swartland, let’s help them.””¹⁸⁵ Their design of the stand took a completely opposite approach to what is expected at this kind of conventional wine fair: “The stand was crazy! It looked like a gypsy *vauxhall* caravan and we had a noticeboard with a lot of little things on it and an innocent spanking scene. I wanted it to be controversial!” Through Cape Wine 2013, therefore, the staging and performance around

¹⁸⁴ *My translation of*: “En fait je suis dans le mille de ce qu’il faut raconter et en ayant ajouté le “Bordeaux Pirate” je suis un peu insolent. De dire à Bordeaux que l’on peut être pirate, c’est antinomique. Au début on m’a dit “tu ne devrais pas dire Bordeaux Pirate, ce n’est pas qualitatif.” Mais les gens qui m’ont dit ça n’ont rien pigé!”

¹⁸⁵ Interview Anton, Wine Kollektive, May 2022.

the idea of the Swartland Revolution was taken beyond the Swartland: its actors succeeded in infiltrating the institutionalised spheres of the wine industry, thereby reaching out to international distributors who might not have heard of the Swartland Revolution. They took their rebellious spirit to the next level by provoking and teasing the most established wine critic, Robert Parker. Anton, the owner of Wine Kollektive recalls the joke they played on Parker:

“- On a board, there was a little slip that said “*Adi [Badenhorst], listen, somebody called Roberto Parquer [spelt wrong on purpose] phoned me. Please call him back*” and then at Cape Wine at 9 a.m. I get a phone call from Marc Kent. He’s pissing himself. He told me “Robert Parker’s scout was here and now he’s seen your note. He was here interviewing people and saw the little note and burst out laughing and said “Now I can call my boss and tell him about it”.”

- *Oh! I guess this could have gone wrong.*

- Yes, but if it had gone the other way he wouldn’t have understood the spirit of the Swartland wines otherwise. And it was an honest attempt to actually believe in what we do, because you’ve got to remember we are talking bullshit here: wine selling and drinking and everything is perception.

- *I guess you created a narrative.*

- We’re not allowed to say it, but it’s the truth. I mean you’re sending a message to France about how pretty and beautiful the people are, and you’re sending that message in a bottle.” (Interview Anton, Wine Kollektive, May 2022)

And so, just like that, through stand design, staging and a little joke, the Swartland Independent Producers made themselves known to Robert Parker and a wider international audience who would not have known about the Swartland Revolution otherwise. The transcripts from my conversation with Anton also clearly show that they are completely aware of their rebellious image and perception. What is more, they play with it to serve their marketing purposes. Other winemakers have used similar communications and marketing methods, including the winemakers from the *Zoo Biscuit* crew, who designed their own stand and turned up at another Cape Wine event dressed as wild animals (with leopard tops and glittery leggings), imposing a breakaway style that set them apart from the expected “suit and tie.”



Figure 35. Illustration of the Zoo Cru stand at the 2022 Cape Wine Fair. Source: Pictures from the Natte Valleij Instagram account

These examples illustrate the focus on discursive and transgressive strategies at play within the natural wine movement. Some winemakers use this marginalisation effect to their advantage by appropriating the concept for their image in their marketing or communication strategies. It is around this idea of a rupture that the movement's identity has been created: a desire to emancipate oneself from the dominant production model lies at the heart of the natural wine approach. Paradoxically, it has also participated in the phenomenon of star-making and heroisation of some winemakers.

6.1.3. *Natural wine actors tapping into the repertoire of civil disobedience*

Actors from the natural wine movement all commit to a “risk culture” not only by engaging in more experimental wine production, but also by exploring new – and sometimes radical –

marketing and distribution methods, going down new paths where everything still has to be cleared (more on this in Chapter 8.3). For Pineau, this risk dimension is intrinsic to the movement: natural winemakers act as trailblazers “open[ing] up new paths, like climbers, mountaineers and navigators” (Pineau, 2019, p. 133). She describes winemakers as professionals “taking risks, projecting oneself into the unknown, literally and figuratively clearing new territories, new practices, this is the common history of all these winegrowers inhabited by passionate feelings.” (Pineau, 2019, p. 136). But how does this culture of transgression and risk-taking manifest itself in winemakers’ practices? Is it only present in discourses and narratives, and might it therefore be summed up as a marketing image or a means to build a collective identity? Or does it actually translate into concrete actions, be they individual or collective?

Together with this idea of transgressive discourse and rebellious spirit comes a whole repertoire of actions that have been extensively studied in the social movements literature. Here again, I borrow from the alternative agrifood movements literature, and especially from “The Revolution Will Not Be Microwaved” by Sandor Katz, in which he joins the battle currently being waged over food processing and pasteurisation in the United States. He argues that “real food, increasingly illegal, is being replaced by processed food products,” and that “corporate mass production has imposed sterility and uniformity on the local food trade” (Katz, 2006). He feeds into the broad rhetoric of AAFM, but what is really interesting about his essay is his take on resistance, when he writes that “Eating well has become an act of civil disobedience” (Katz, 2006, p. xii). I argue that some actors in the natural wine movement have backed up their discourses with concrete actions that might fall within this definition of civil disobedience.

Social movements encompass a vast body of literature that has recently shifted its focus towards understanding not only the ideological motives but also the new forms and actions of the movement. Civil disobedience is a recurrent strategy in collective action, and it has played a pivotal role throughout the history of social movements. As mentioned in the opening pages of this dissertation, Henry D. Thoreau stands out as one of the early proponents of civil disobedience. His life’s work often involved advocating for a fair system, even if it meant defying the law. For instance, Thoreau famously refused to pay taxes to a government that supported slavery, an act he considered a form of “civil disobedience.” This act led to his imprisonment, during which he wrote a philosophical essay titled “Civil Disobedience,” (1849) which has since become a paradigmatic example of such resistance. Later on, from the study

of figures like Rosa Parks and the bus boycott in the United States and the struggle for liberation from apartheid in South Africa (see Textbox 15 below) to the more recent actions of the *Faucheurs Volontaires* in France, civil disobedience has been used by social activists as a means to drive change and create precedents. In their book on civil disobedience, Hayes and Ollitrault proposed the following definition: “For an act of disobedience to qualify as civil, it must be public, non-violent, and the result of a deliberate act of conscience, and it must also be disobedient, meaning the act is contrary to the law” (Hayes & Ollitrault, 2012, p. 14). They also emphasise that the action must be motivated by political aims, with the intention of changing the law in a favourable direction. In this sense, civil disobedience does not seek to overthrow those in power (the state) but rather to correct the shortcomings of the system in place. Civil disobedience had its roots in peasant struggles (Scott, 1989), but recently it has been possible to observe a change of focus, and it is now spreading into new spheres such as ecological activism and anti-globalisation movements.

A peculiar history of civil disobedience in South Africa

South Africa has a peculiar legacy of civil disobedience. The country’s history abounds with examples of it, although they are quite a long way from my use of the concept in this thesis.

The first historically famous episode of civil disobedience in South Africa revolved around the figure of Mahatma Gandhi and his activism against racial discrimination and unjust laws targeting Indian immigrants in early twentieth-century South Africa. In 1914, he launched the first mass civil disobedience movement with his Satyagraha campaign,¹⁸⁶ which aimed to take down national racial policies like the Indian Relief Act.

Civil disobedience would subsequently play a major role in the struggle for liberation in South Africa, especially during the anti-apartheid movement. Soon after its establishment in 1948, the South African apartheid government implemented a series of segregationist policies that were met with significant opposition. As early as 1952, the African National Congress, joined by other political groupings, launched the Defiance Campaign (C. Heyns, 1993), which encompassed acts of civil disobedience such as an open refusal to carry passes, defiance of “whites-only” public spaces and entering so-called “restricted” areas without a permit.

This use of non-violent resistance was later exemplified during the Rivonia trial of 1963-1964, in which Nelson Mandela and his anti-apartheid comrades were charged and sentenced to life imprisonment. The Rivonia trial galvanised the concept of civil disobedience as a communicative enterprise and act of resistance that despite its illegality was fundamentally

¹⁸⁶ Satyagraha, a term coined by Gandhi, refers to the principles of truth (*satya*) and firmness or insistence (*agraha*). Gandhi used this term to campaign for non-violent resistance and civil disobedience.

conscientious. Indeed, during the trial, Mandela and his peers chose to stand up against apartheid by peaceful means, inspiring the masses in South Africa and around the world to join the struggle for freedom and racial equality.

Civil disobedience was again used extensively in the 1980s before the ban on liberation movements was lifted and negotiations began. These acts of resistance deliberately defied the laws of the apartheid government to protest its injustice, and as such are a major embodiment of civil disobedience. These South African examples serve as good historical markers, and figures like Gandhi and Mandela can be considered to be icons and symbols of civil disobedience internationally.

Textbox 15. Civil disobedience in the South African context

The natural wine movement has given rise to a proliferation of instances that might be classified as this type of action and serve as a vehicle for non-violent resistance and a way to express dissent against conventional production practices and mainstream distribution mechanisms. Through civil disobedience, some actors in the natural wine movement have made the transition from a state of conflict manifested through discourse and narrative to one that is displayed through concrete actions. This transition marks the juncture at which cognitive mobilisations evolve into active resistance and collective engagement.

A first example of civil disobedience is associated with winemakers' willingness to protect ecosystems and bring diversity back into their vineyards. To achieve this, natural winemakers sometimes have to act in conflict with the rules of their appellations by going against artificial standardisation, grafting stocks and cloning practices, and by planting grape varieties that are not on the AOC's list of authorised varieties or by avoiding prophylactic methods that they see as detrimental to the ecosystems. Teil identified subversive behaviour on the part of some winemakers as early as 2011 when she described "some winegrowers and nurserymen – sometimes defying bans – [...] saving old plantations or returning to selections that they think are more interesting." (Teil and al., 2011). Several winemakers I interviewed readily admitted to similar practices, such as this producer in Bordeaux:

"It goes further than that because I even have grape varieties that are completely forbidden. So I've also planted grape varieties purely for experimental purposes that I'm not allowed to market. Me, I really don't bother with all those rules. [...] so I don't even ask myself whether it's allowed or not; I just do it. Because in any case, if I do something smart and they prevent me from doing it, public opinion will react.

If they forbid me to do intelligent things, the battle is lost for them and for the institutions in advance.”
(Interview Marc, winemaker in Bordeaux, 17 April 2021¹⁸⁷)

In a similar vein, certain specific wine productions such as *piquette* have no official recognition and consequently face restrictions on marketing. In both France and South Africa, some producers have ventured into the production of *piquette*, although it has not been registered (more in Textbox 21). To safeguard the identities and activities of my interviewees, most of the civil disobedience actions cannot be presented here; however, there is a diverse array of minor practices that skirt the boundaries of legal frameworks and regulations. Some are explicitly designed to incite and to challenge prevailing norms and thus adopt a decidedly radical approach, while others serve primarily to maintain product quality and protect vineyard ecosystems. Disobedience in this context assumes the role of a radical instrument of action for wine producers.

6.1.4. *Taking conflicts to court in the natural wine movement*

As Hayes and Ollitrault’s interpret it, civil disobedience is the symbol of non-violent forms of action that are part of a collective struggle and contestations seeking to change the law (Hayes & Ollitrault, 2012, p. 87). Some instances of civil disobedience can lead to their instigators being prosecuted. This sub-section is dedicated to a closer examination of the conflicts between actors in the natural wine movement and other stakeholders in the wine industry, which in certain cases have ended up with legal action. It is noteworthy that while examples of this in the context of the natural wine movement are rare, they serve as emblematic illustrations of the deep-seated polarisation between the natural wine movement and the broader wine industry. Some instances might be the object of more in-depth examinations, such as the court case against the winemakers Emmanuel Giboulot in 2014,¹⁸⁸ Alexandre Bain in 2017¹⁸⁹ and

¹⁸⁷ My translation of: “Ça va plus loin que ça parce que j’ai même des cépages qui sont complètement interdits. Donc j’ai aussi planté des cépages à titre purement expérimental que je n’ai pas le droit de commercialiser. Parce que les règles ça m’emmerde moi. [...] Et je ne me pose même pas la question de savoir si c’est autorisé ou non, je le fais. Si je fais des trucs intelligents et qu’on me l’interdit, l’opinion public va réagir. S’ils m’interdisent de faire des trucs intelligents, le combat est perdu d’avance pour eux, pour les institutions.”

¹⁸⁸ In 2014, a biodynamic winegrower based in Burgundy, Emmanuel Giboulot, faced a fine of five hundred euros by order of the Court of Dijon. The penalty was imposed due to his steadfast refusal to administer treatments to his vines despite a prefectural decree mandating them. Emmanuel Giboulot maintained that the prescribed chemical treatments ran contrary to the principles of agrobiolgy and ecosystem balance that are inherent in biodynamic viticulture. The trial also served as a platform for him and other biodynamic winemakers to vehemently criticise the prevailing approach to pesticide use in French vineyards.

¹⁸⁹ In September 2015, the natural winemaker Alexandre Bain lost the prestigious *Pouilly Fumé* appellation because of the non-conformity of his wines, and the INAO (National Institute of Origin and Quality) declassified his wine as Vin de France. In 2017, after a fierce legal battle with the help of his lawyer Eric Morain, the decision

Sébastien David in 2019¹⁹⁰, but this chapter will focus on three particular cases that have shaken up Bordeaux's wine sector.

➤ **Alain Déjean: David versus Goliath in Sauternes**

Alain Déjean is a small winemaker in Sauternes, and quite possibly one of the last independent producers in the region. Sauternes is renowned for its production of sweet wines, which enjoyed significant success until the late twentieth century. Because the wines were highly sought after and enjoyed international acclaim, the region attracted numerous international investors such as LVMH, which owns Château Yquem, and the AXA insurance company, which owns Château Suduiraut. However, the market for sweet wines faced challenges from the 1990s on as consumer preferences shifted towards drier wines, and despite its historical fame, the region is now grappling with a diminished market. Alain Déjean inherited the small Rousset Peyraguey domain, which he now cultivates using completely biodynamic and natural methods. His story, against a backdrop of large châteaux owned by even larger corporations, can be likened to the tale of David and Goliath. As the journalist Ixchel Delaporte put it following an interview with the winemaker: “A full-scale battle is raging in the heart of Sauternes” (Delaporte, 2018, p. 154).

Alain Déjean adheres to biodynamic principles and does not use any chemical products to care for his vines. This approach led to problems, however, as his “natural” fertilisers did not meet the specifications established by the Sauternes ODG and the INAO. In 2017, his neighbours, notably Château Suduiraut, took him to court because he refused to use certain chemical treatments, and they feared of disease that could contaminate their own vines. He was fined 150,000 euros by the DRAFF. Eric Morain, a lawyer who defends natural wine producers, denounced the severity of the pressure exerted on him by the Sauternes appellation. In his interview with Delaporte, the winemaker said: “I will not pay this fine. [...] This administration forces the use of poison to the detriment of the population.” (Delaporte, 2018, p. 154). In the end, Alain Déjean was asked to leave the appellation, losing the “Sauternes” appellation for his

was reconsidered by the Administrative Court of Dijon and Alexandre Bain was able to put the Pouilly-Fumé appellation back on his labels.

¹⁹⁰ In 2019, the trial of winemaker Sébastien David served as a poignant illustration of the legal disputes that have impacted the natural wine movement. David, who is a producer from the Loire Valley, was ordered by a Prefectural Decree to destroy over two thousand bottles from his production. The reason behind this lay in the claim that his bottles of Saint-Nicolas-de-Bourgueil appellation wine exhibited an “excessive volatile acidity” when measured against the established standards for the appellation. In a remarkable act of defiance, the producer successfully sold 2,078 bottles under the label “*cuvée interdite*” in the form of empty bottles acquired by individual supporters of the natural wine movement.

post-2010 *millésimes*. Eric Morain and many supporters from the natural wine world denounced the absurdity of this decision, as his wines are now sold as *vins de table* even though his vineyards are situated among the four most prestigious châteaux in Sauternes. Paradoxically, the loss of the appellation does not seem to have tarnished Rousset Peyraguey's commercial success, as Déjean's wines are sold internationally and his domain cannot produce enough to keep up with demand.

➤ **Liber Pater: using legal action as a marketing tool**

Another story caught the attention of the media a few years ago in 2017 when the Graves winemaker Loïc Pasquet won his case against the INAO, which had sued him for the non-conformity of his production. Pasquet is known internationally for replanting old grape varieties in his vineyards, notably ungrafted pre-phylloxera varieties including Saint-Macaire, Tarnay, Marselan, Castets and Bouchalès, to name but a few. Also known as "*cépages oubliés*" (forgotten varieties), Pasquet has used them to promote his wines internationally, and his Liber Pater domain (named after an ancient god symbolising fertility) challenges Bordeaux's traditions in every way: different grape varieties, different planting methods and above all some very surprising prices – the 2008 Liber Pater, for instance, was sold at over 4,000 euros a bottle, far more than the Grands Crus Classés.

These unconventional practices aroused the attention of the INAO, which launched legal proceedings against him in 2015 based on the density of his planting and the height of the weeds in his vineyards. It also accused him of chaptalisation. After a mediated judgment in 2015, he finally won his appeal in 2017. In an interview for the French newspaper *Le Monde*, Pasquet commented: "My lawsuit against the INAO, which I won in 2017, saved me 150,000 euros in advertising, and the prices of my bottles have continued to rise ever since."¹⁹¹ The trial involving the Liber Pater winemaker offers a compelling example of the contentious relationship between certain producers and the CIVB (the Bordeaux wine trade body). Throughout the trial proceedings and in their aftermath, Loïc Pasquet made public statements and social media posts targeting the CIVB (for specific examples, please refer to figure 36,

¹⁹¹ *My translation of:* "Mon procès contre l'INAO, que j'ai gagné en 2017, m'a fait économiser 150 000 euros de publicité, et le prix de ma bouteille n'a cessé de grimper. " in Gasparotto, Laure. 2018. "Loïc Pasquet, Un Viticulteur Frondeur Dans Le Bordelais." *Le Monde*. https://www.lemonde.fr/m-gastronomie/article/2018/12/17/loic-pasquet-un-viticulteur-frondeur-dans-le-bordelais_5398991_4497540.html.

including Facebook posts entitled “Bernard Farges, vous et votre équipe à la tête du CIVB êtes la honte de Bordeaux”).

What can be gleaned from the trials of Loïc Pasquet?¹⁹² His approach diverges significantly from conventional methods as he has not only ventured into planting grape varieties that fall outside the regulatory framework of the Graves appellation but has also leveraged this divergence to establish a unique presence on the global market. Furthermore, he used the media attention he obtained during his 2017 lawsuit with the INAO as a platform from which to propagate his distinctive vision of wine production and articulate his conflictual views *vis-à-vis* the CIVB. Loïc Pasquet has undeniably emerged as a polarising figure, even within the natural wine movement itself, stemming primarily from his use of the media frenzy surrounding his wines and his resurrection of forgotten grape varieties, which he capitalised on by raising his prices significantly (up to 4,000 euros a bottle). This price escalation has been criticised by other producers in the natural wine movement for running counter to the movement’s founding ethos.

¹⁹² It is worth noting that Loïc Pasquet had earlier been the subject of another case in 2015 of an entirely different nature. In this instance, he was accused of fraud by AgriMer and received a twelve-month suspended prison sentence and a €30,000 fine for his involvement in fabricating false financial records in order to secure subsidies for the promotion of his wines in the Chinese market.

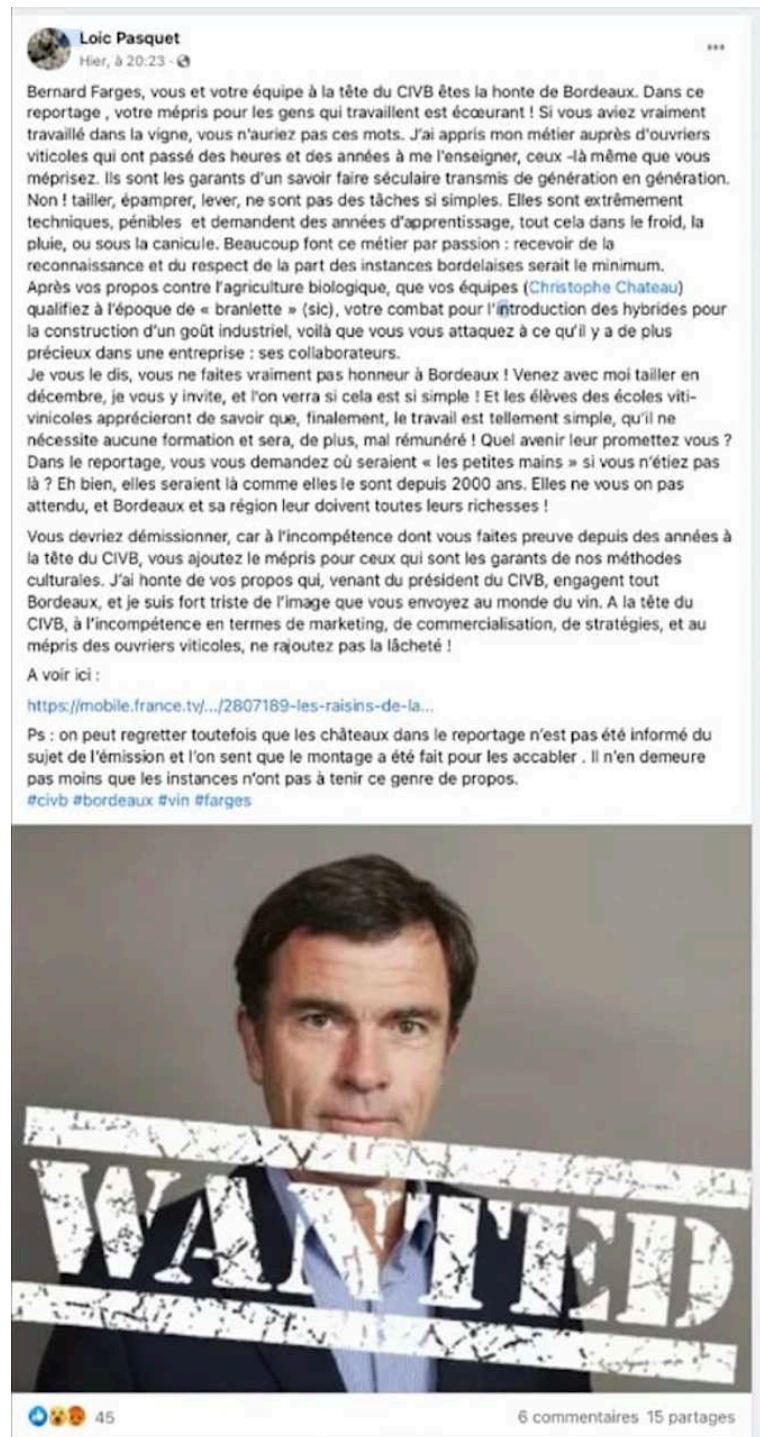


Figure 36. Facebook post by Loïc Pasquet against the President of the CIVB, Source: Facebook, 14 December 2021¹⁹³

¹⁹³ “Bernard Farges, you and your team at the helm of the CIVB are a disgrace to Bordeaux. Your disdain for the workers in this television report is disgusting! If you had truly worked in the vineyards, you wouldn't use such words. I learned my job from vineyard workers who spent hours and years teaching it to me, the very ones you scorn. They are the guardians of an age-old skill that has been passed down from generation to generation. No! Pruning, thinning and removing are not such simple tasks. They are extremely technical, and laborious, and require years of learning, all in the cold and rain or under a scorching sun. Many people pursue this profession out of passion: receiving recognition and respect from the Bordeaux authorities would be the bare minimum.” (Facebook post, Loïc Pasquet, 14 December 2021)

➤ **Valérie Murat: a whistle-blower exposing the dangers of pesticides against the CIVB**

The final example of a legal action in the conflict does not involve a wine producer but an activist close to the natural wine movement. In December 2020, Valérie Murat, who is the President of the *Alerte aux Toxiques* association, was accused of defamation in a lawsuit filed by the CIVB. Her alleged offence was based on her public disclosure of analyses that revealed the presence of pesticide residues in twenty-two bottles of Bordeaux wine notwithstanding their “*Haute Valeur Environnementale*” (HVE) certification. This case should be seen less as an instance of civil disobedience and more as a concerted effort to raise awareness and mobilise the public. The connections between the legal dispute involving the CIVB and Valérie Murat and the natural wine movement are multifaceted. Firstly, a significant contingent of natural winemakers publicly threw their support behind Valérie Murat and actively participated in rallies addressing the issue. This was evident during gatherings on 16 December 2020 at her court hearing in Libourne and on 13 October 2021 at the Bordeaux Court of Appeal, two public demonstrations that illustrated the power of the networks and the close ties among the members of the natural wine movement who gathered to show their support for her (see further details in Chapter 9.3.1.). Secondly, the extensive media coverage of the trial and the attendant mobilisations are indicative of a growing societal awareness of the numerous battles being waged by natural wine actors, including the debates on certain environmental certifications. Paradoxically, this scenario presented an opportunity for the natural wine movement to introduce its demands into the public discourse and, in a curious twist, to facilitate the democratisation of the movement’s practices.



Figure 37. Call for mobilisations by the *Alertes aux Toxiques* association in support of Valérie Murat

➤ Conclusions

The adoption of a transgressive discourse and the cultivation of a marginal image have been a transnational emblem for the natural wine movement, providing a way for actors in diverse wine-producing regions across the globe to establish a sense of togetherness and shared identity. However, the translation of these transgressive discourses and narratives into tangible action, including direct radical measures, civil disobedience and activities that might culminate in legal proceedings remains relatively rare in South Africa. There are several hypotheses that may help explain the variation in the levels of commitment between Bordeaux and Western Cape producers. Firstly, there is the presence of a robust political culture of social movements and activism in France that has permeated deep into the wine industry, especially through the involvement of trade unions. Secondly, there are other pressing priorities in South Africa, such as the prominent socio-economic and racial disparities. Lastly, there are greater freedoms and fewer regulatory constraints in South African wine production that afford greater latitude for innovation, thus reducing the likelihood of crossing legal boundaries. These acts of civil disobedience have been extensively analysed in the context of peasant struggles (Hayes, 2007; Rosalva Aida Hernandez Castillo, 2001; Scott, 1989), but they have received little attention in the wine sector.

These cases are not isolated, and they have played an important role in the natural wine movement, notably for those involved in the legal proceedings. Further research now needs to be conducted from an international perspective so as to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the judicialisation of the conflicts that have impacted actors from the natural wine movement.

6.2. The natural wine movement as a lens to reveal the existing hierarchies in the wine territories

Social mobilisations in the wine sector are not new, and environmental and ecological considerations have been integral to winemakers' collective actions since the emergence of the bio movement in the 1970s. Actors from the natural wine movement have reappropriated and adapted them and given them greater depth by extending their claims not only to the use of pesticides, herbicides and fungicides in vineyards but also to a much more holistic vision of wine production and marketing. Environmental mobilisations by winemakers are experiencing a resurgence that is particularly driven by those involved in the natural wine movement. What

is new is that they have been extended to other types of demand. There is a notable proximity between actors in the natural wine movement and other groups who share similar objectives, as exemplified in particular by the anti-pesticide movement in the Gironde, as the case of the whistle-blower Valérie Murat shows us, as well as other concerns that go beyond the traditional environmental agenda. This leads to the question of whether we are witnessing a convergence of struggles within the natural wine movement, and this section investigates whether additional advocacy objectives have been incorporated and embraced by actors in the movement. I suggest that depending on their individual interests and sensibilities, natural wine producers may use the movement as both a platform and a conduit for championing a variety of causes, thereby expanding the spectrum of their demands, and I seek to explain how the natural wine movement functions as a spotlight that sheds light on the existing hierarchies within the wider wine industry.

I tackle three topics. The first section looks at the working conditions of vineyard workers and analyses the (inherent?) divide between property owners and employees, applying the labour-capital nexus. The second investigates the perpetuating logics of racial segregation in the wine sector and whether natural wine is considered to be a means to reveal or silence the deeper socio-economic and racial inequalities in local contexts. In South Africa, obviously, this is a key issue that cannot be overlooked, but the same question can also be asked about Bordeaux: is the Bordeaux industry hiding social and racial inequalities beneath the mythical reputation of its *terroir*? Lastly, I examine the relationships between feminist movements and the natural movement. Here, I suggest that there is an intersectionality between them and that to a certain extent, the natural wine movement has enabled feminist actions to permeate the wine sector. The “class-race-gender” analytical framework I use here is now a routine part of the humanities and social sciences, but it is also enlightening to see how social hierarchies have operated within the wine sector.

6.2.1. Landowners versus the workforce: The immense taboo of the economic divide

The first lens through which I analyse the actions of the natural wine movement is the economic divide that underlies employment practices in the wine sector. I argue here that capitalist relations of production prevail. In *La Distinction: Critique Sociale du Jugement* (1979), Bourdieu proposed a class analysis of wine, explaining that wine plays a part in the construction of social and cultural capital: drinking it may indicate membership of, or proximity to, a

particular social class, and it remains a product of social distinction to this day. Bourdieu adds that there is a striking gap between “peasant” wine production and “bourgeois” consumption. What is more, production itself is subject to dominant hierarchical relationships between the domain owners on one side and their employees on the other. I move away from Bourdieu’s findings and borrow from a more Marxist reading of the labour-capital nexus to examine the wine industry’s employment structure: that is, the exploitative relationship between domain owners (capitalists) and vineyard workers (labour). The Marxist approach also offers room to analyse the legacy of colonial domination on the labour-capital nexus.

6.2.1.1. Prevalent capitalist relationships in the wine sector and subsequent inequalities in the organisation of work

This section examines how this labour-capital nexus was formed through the distinct histories of Bordeaux and the Western Cape Province and how it has translated differently into the two industries locally.

➤ The poverty corridor in Bordeaux’s vineyards

In Bordeaux, the deteriorating working conditions of vineyard workers have received particular attention in recent years, thanks in particular to the work of the investigative journalist Ixchel Delaporte and her book “*Les raisins de la misère. Une enquête sur la face cachée des châteaux bordelais*,”¹⁹⁴ which was published in 2018 and made into a documentary in 2021. It is uncertain whether the Bordeaux crisis has had repercussions on the working conditions of the workforce in Bordeaux’s vineyards (Réjalot, 2021), or if the worsening working conditions are a legacy of the enduring economic structure of the capital-labour relationship. One thing is sure, however, as a 2011 INSEE report noted: there is an extensive corridor of poverty across Bordeaux’s vineyards, from the city of Pauillac in northern Médoc to Sauternes¹⁹⁵ (See Figure 38). What is more, the vast majority of people living in this corridor have a direct or indirect link with vineyards. Delaporte also demonstrates a disturbing correspondence between the poverty map and a map of the *Grands Crus*. She explains that “by overlapping the map of the “poverty” corridor on that of the *Grands Crus*, the correspondence is obvious: the highest points of unemployment and the RSA¹⁹⁶ blend with our best vineyards, our most beautiful

¹⁹⁴ Delaporte, Ixchel. 2018. *Les Raisins de La Misère*. Editions du Rouerge.

¹⁹⁵ INSEE. 2011. *Pauvreté en Ville et à la Campagne, plus Intense de la Pointe du Médoc à Agen*.

¹⁹⁶ RSA is short for “Revenu de solidarité active,” or “Active Solidarity Income” in English. It is a French social welfare programme.

terroir.” (Delaporte, 2018, p. 16). As Delaporte shows, the prestigious image of Bordeaux’s wine hides a reality of precarious employment and arduous working conditions.

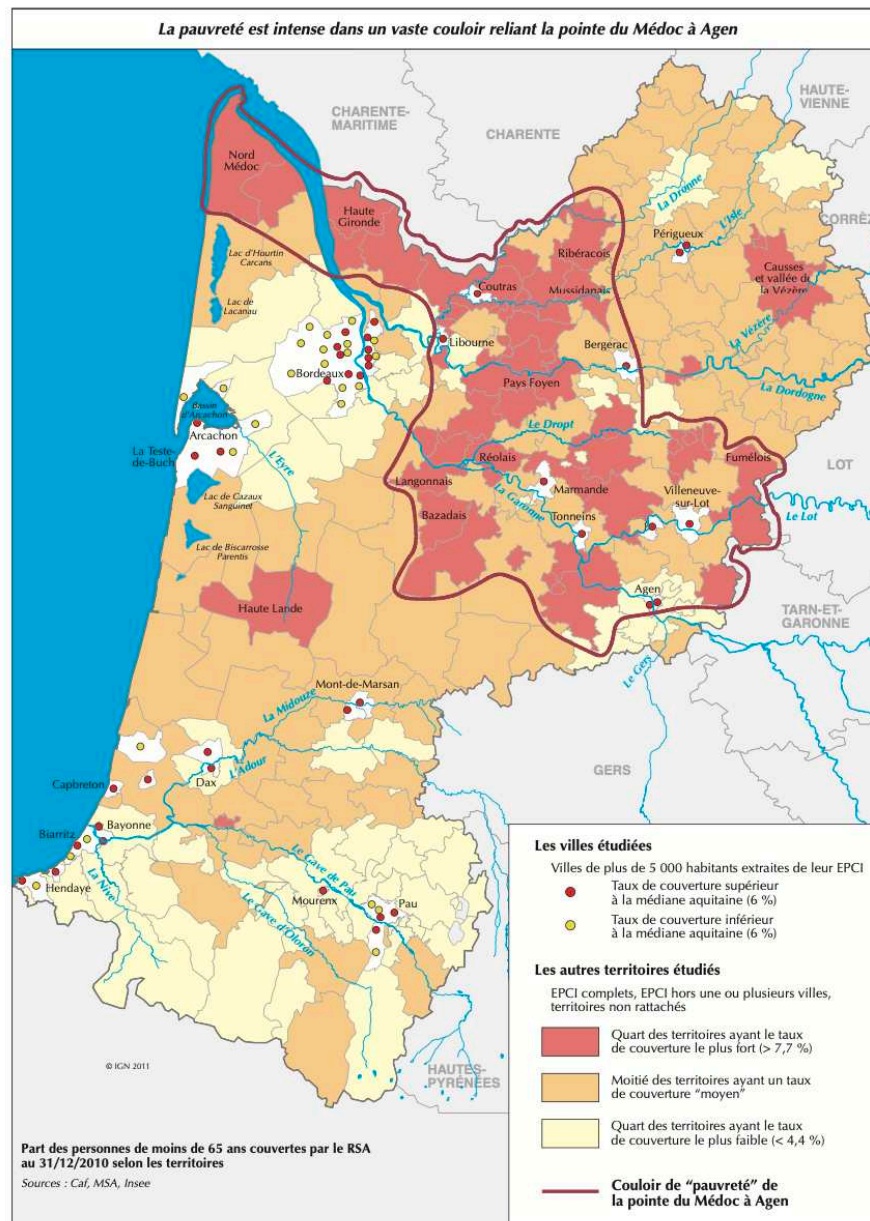


Figure 38. The poverty corridor in Bordeaux. Source: INSEE Aquitaine 2011

➤ The lack of structural reconfiguration in the South African wine industry

Still today, the vast majority of grape farm workers in the Western Cape belong to the landless rural proletariat. Indeed, because of its historical legacy, the relationship between vineyard workers and farmers reflects a logic of racial hierarchies and a paternalistic and authoritarian approach inherited directly from the colonial and apartheid eras (Ewert and Hamman 1999; Du Toit 1993) (see details in Chapter 2). Commenting on the working conditions of rural workers,

Pons-Vignon wrote that “South Africa has experienced, from the eighteenth century onwards, a very violent transition to capitalism, which has deeply transformed social relations in rural areas” (Pons-Vignon, 2015, p. 103). Indeed, in colonial times and under apartheid, the system of dependence and paternalism between white owners and black or coloured vineyard workers was reinforced by land dispossession impacting the workers and the proletarianisation of the agricultural workforce (Moseley and McCusker 2008). Historically, employment was intergenerational, since there was little to no alternative for farm workers to escape from viticulture. As I described in Chapter 2, the dependency path and exploitative domination were reinforced through the “dop” system (a practice whereby a portion of wages was replaced by wine), leading to cycles of debt bondage and persistent alcoholism among the workers (Moseley, 2007). What is the situation today? Numerous authors have shown that despite an intense process of deregulation and re-regulation of the sector (Ewert, 2005) since the transition to a democratic South Africa, there has been little to no structural reconfiguration of the local wine industry, and consequently no substantial improvement in the working conditions of farm workers (Cusmano et al., 2010; Ewert, 2005; Ewert & Du Toit, 2005; Ewert & Hamman, 1999). In 2011, *Human Rights Watch* published a very disturbing report titled “Ripe With Abuse” on the precariousness of vineyard workers highlighting their harsh working and living conditions,¹⁹⁷ and South Africa has regularly attracted the attention of the international community when it comes to the conditions of vineyard workers.

➤ **Similar labour-capital relationships in the two regions and deteriorating working conditions for vineyard workers**

If we take a step back, in fact, we see that the situations in the Western Cape and Bordeaux are not so different, and similar patterns are revealed in the capital-labour relationship. These similarities are explained in the following paragraphs.

First, in both Bordeaux and the Western Cape, workers do arduous work and are locked into low-skill, unvalued chores. Some authors have shown that in spite of their specialised skills (for example, a detailed knowledge of local ecosystems that has sometimes been passed down through generations), “farm workers are only involved in a narrow range of tasks on the farm: with limited understanding of the larger farm operations, little or no exposure to the business side, largely disempowered” (Moseley, 2007, p. 8). This was also emphasised in *Les Petites*

¹⁹⁷ *Ripe with Abuse. Human Rights Conditions in South Africa’s Fruit and Wine Industries*. 2011. Human Rights Watch

Mains de l'Ombre, a book of photographs by the Bordeaux activist Marie-Lys Bibeyran¹⁹⁸ that sheds light on the work of anonymous workers in Bordeaux, who go through “weather vagaries, physical pain and arduous tasks;”¹⁹⁹ their work is the cornerstone of the wine production of the great Châteaux. It seems that in both regions, the viticulture system aims to keep workers unskilled; in fact, there are too few examples of farm workers being upgraded to managerial positions.

The second common pattern in the two regions is the neo-paternalistic attitude of domain owners towards their employees. This has been well documented in the case of South Africa (Du Toit, 1993; Ewert & Du Toit, 2005; Ewert & Hamman, 1999; Moseley, 2007). Under apartheid, the obligations between workers and farmers extended far beyond the receipt of a wage for labour; it formed the basis of a paternalist relationship. Workers depended on the farmer not only to receive their wages but also with regard to housing, water, electricity, the schooling of their children and potential medical bills, among other things. As Du Toit put it, “These are the consequences of workers living on the farm: every aspect of life is bound up with the world inside the *wit hekke* (white gates)” (Du Toit, 1993, p. 315). Since the demise of apartheid, and despite massive efforts to engage in market neo-liberalisation and democratise the industry, in most cases “the farmers still determine unilaterally working rules, wages and housing conditions” for farm workers (Ewert & Hamman, 1999, p. 202). Delaporte describes similar behaviour mechanisms in Bordeaux when she explains that “the days of the *châtelains* who housed and fed their employees gave way to paternalism in the nineteenth century [...] prevent[ing] the winegrowers’ unions and cooperatives from taking off” (Delaporte, 2018, p. 18), and consequently continuing to subject workers to exploitative domination *vis-à-vis* their employers. Similarly, in the Western Cape, farm workers are mostly unorganised, in the sense that there is limited involvement in trade union movements, and so they have very little leverage to bargain with their employers (Pons-Vignon, 2015; Theron, 2010). This contributes to the alienation of the labour force.

Third (and as an indirect consequence of neo-paternalism), we see a progressive externalisation and casualisation of labour for farm workers. In the Western Cape Province, this goes hand in hand with a general deterioration in labour conditions. Casualisation means that workers are less likely to become permanent employees and have to take more seasonal jobs, often in the

¹⁹⁸ Bibeyran, Marie-Lys. 2021. *Les Petites Mains de l'Ombre*. The Book Edition.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid. Bibeyran, 2021.

form of temporary employment provided by local contractors (Theron, 2010). In Bordeaux, Réjalot has recently underlined a significant acceleration in the outsourcing of farm workers, particularly for the least skilled jobs, a trend that can be seen through the proliferation of service companies (local contractors) in the Médoc and Libourne (Réjalot, 2021). Delaporte also describes a confirmed correlation between the rise of sub-contracting and the “poverty corridor.” Both neo-paternalism and labour casualisation are factors that participate in the reproduction of higher levels of dependency and vulnerability for vineyard workers.

There is also a major housing problem affecting vineyard workers in both regions. It is not unusual to see caravans hidden behind prestigious châteaux in Bordeaux (Delaporte, 2018), and in the Western Cape Province, there is no drastic improvement of the housing situation over the last thirty years. In fact, there is sometimes no access to electricity and sanitation infrastructures, and most housing falls into the category of informal settlements or, to use the preferred South African term, townships (Theron, 2010).

Lastly – and although this does not fall completely into the labour-capital division category it is also a direct consequence of it – there is *omertà* around the use of pesticides. Despite the ongoing controversies among academics, politicians and industry representatives, there is now a clear consensus on the dangers of exposure to pesticides, notably the carcinogenic risk factors associated with the use of chemical pesticides to which human populations are exposed.²⁰⁰ This is no small matter, considering that *Roundup* – which contains the glyphosate molecule – is still the most-sold herbicide worldwide (Jouzel, 2019) and that regulations on its use differ considerably from one area to the other. The past decade has seen a thriving body of research on the question, spanning from risk prevention strategies (Goutille, 2022) to the ignorance strategies at stake between the use of chemical pesticides in the vines and the health of vineyard workers (Henry, 2021; Jouzel, 2019) and debates on the efficiency of personal protection equipment (PPE) (Garrigou et al., 2020). In Bordeaux, there is a coalition of organisations tackling the pesticides issue, micro-local associations such as *Alertes Aux Toxiques*, *Collectif Info Médoc Pesticides*²⁰¹ and national organisations like *Génération Futures*. They take action to raise awareness of the risks and associated prevention strategies, and fight for stricter regulations on the use of chemical pesticides (notably near residential areas). The coalition was

²⁰⁰ *Expertise Collective Inserm. Pesticides et Effets Sur La Santé : Nouvelles Données*. 2021.INSERM.

²⁰¹ led by Marie-Lys Bibeyran, who is also the author of *Les Petites Mains de l'Ombre*

the result of the numerous cases of cancer detected in winegrowers in and around Bordeaux's vineyards. In the Western Cape, the Human Rights Watch report also includes stories of contaminated environments and severe health impacts associated with pesticide exposure. Exposure to dangerous pesticides in South Africa is less well documented but even more worrying because there are no strict regulations covering the use of chemicals of the kind the European Union has imposed on French vineyards.

All these factors contribute to deteriorating working conditions for vineyard workers and are a direct consequence of the capital-labour nexus that is an inherent part of the organisation of the wine sector. Several parallels can be drawn between the situation in Bordeaux and the Western Cape to illustrate the economic divide. We must remember, however, that working conditions in South Africa are exacerbated by the alarmingly low minimum wage (25 ZAR an hour, equivalent to 1.25 Euros),²⁰² which makes the two situations hard to compare in terms of wages. The natural winemakers I interviewed, who are generally well-travelled and well-educated, were very conscious of this gap. One winemaker in the Swartland compared the price of a crate of grapes to the minimum wage of vineyard workers to provide the scale of the discrepancy:

"I'm going to tell you something, but I'm not sure you should write it, or at least you should be very careful with it. So, we harvest little crates and the value of that crate for our grapes is more than they [*the workers*] get paid per day. Our grapes are expensive: we sell them for about 5,000 ZAR a ton, which in other countries is not much, but it's a lot for South Africa. So that means that each kilo is 15 ZAR and a crate is 18 kilos. If you do the maths, $15 \times 18 = 270$ ZAR, and that's what they get per day!

- *Is that the minimum wage in South Africa?*

- Yes, and the problem is that if you start putting the prices up then people start to do some mechanical things, so you start harvesting mechanically and then fewer people are employed. So we prefer to use people to harvest." (Interview Nile, winemaker in Western cape, 20 May 2022)

Bearing in mind the generally anti-capitalist ethos of natural winemakers and their discourses on marginality and rebellions, I wondered what their position was with regard to this economic divide, especially since I knew that the ecological dimension is at the core of the natural wine movement, and thus at the forefront of their priorities.

6.2.1.2. Examining the crossroads between the environmental and socio-economic agendas of natural winemakers

²⁰² The minimum rate for farm workers was made level with the National Minimum Wage, at ZAR 25.42 per hour, from March 2023 following a decision by the Department of Employment and Labour: <https://www.gov.za/speeches/minister-thulas-nxesi-hikes-minimum-wage-farmworkers-and-domestic-workers-22-feb-2023-0000>

In the course of my fieldwork, I made a conscious effort to examine the intersection between economic, social and environmental agendas. In all my interviews with winemakers, I would ask the following questions: “*Do you think the environmental and socio-economic agendas are in competition?*” in other words, “*is it an “either-or” situation or do they work hand in hand?*” My objective was to assess whether they saw investments (financial, but also in time and effort) in the alleviation of poverty as a tool and a benefit or as an obstacle to environmental and ecological progress, and conversely, whether it was a way to figure out what natural wine production means in terms of working conditions for vineyard workers. To my knowledge, no work has yet focused on the intersection between the natural wine movement and broader efforts to contribute to the alleviation of poverty and to better socio-economic conditions for workers in the wine industry either in France or in South Africa.

When winemakers were asked directly about the crossroads between the environmental and socio-economic agendas, their answers differed quite significantly. Many responded that the two objectives go hand in hand:

“I think the only driver that matters now is profit. So if you have to abuse people or abuse the land... well... For me, I don’t really distinguish between those two abuses. If you are going to enslave people or enslave the environment what is the difference? [...] What you can do is try your best: pay people properly, look after them as best as you can and try to make the most environmentally friendly wine. Not just environmentally friendly, but a wine that is friends with people, that they can drink and not feel ill.” (Interview Robert, winemaker in Western cape, 21 January 2022)

“I think if it is marketing oriented then people have to make choices, but for me my wines sell, I don’t want to hang my cult on one of those things, but I think you must address all, everything is urgent. I don’t want to choose, there is no choice really. If you have the best vineyards with people that are poor, then you have a shitshow. And if you have the best people but your vineyards are not in a good environmental state then you also have a shitshow. So, it doesn’t matter, for me there is no choice. You have to take both: they are intertwined; it’s all one thing.” (Interview Milo, winemaker in Western Cape, 7 June 2022)

Others pointed out that priority in the South African context had to be given to the socio-economic situation:

“The guys who care about their vineyards, they care about their workers, for sure. In a general picture. But I mean... not to be too controversial but I think there’s more of a social crisis here... it’s much more prominent than the environmental one.” (Interview Lennie, distributor in Cape Town, 12 January 2022)

“I think you have to farm in such a way that you can keep on employing those people with nice salaries. You have to have a sustainable business that you run in such a way, that the people that depend on your business for their livelihood, for school and clothes for their children are ... and yeah maybe farming organically is not the best way for your business. It may be fashionable but maybe there is an inherent risk involved with that, that would end up putting somebody’s job on the line. It adds an element of risk to these potential jobs. So where on the spectrum do you place yourself to make decisions? It is difficult to say that it starts here and ends there.” (Interview Scott, winemaker in Western Cape, 25 April 2022)

While the decision to turn toward greener farming practices (regenerative, organic or biodynamic) is mainly guided by beliefs about producing higher quality wine and not causing unnecessary damage to the vines and surrounding ecosystems, these extracts show that South African winemakers are fully aware of the urgency of the socio-economic crisis. The conversion to environmental farming practices comes at a cost that might be classified as an “investment under uncertainty” (Musshoff & Hirschauer, 2008), as the return on investment depends on a number of factors farmers have very little control over (weather conditions, yields, market prices etc.). At the same time, South Africa is facing an urgent need for decent jobs,²⁰³ and while grapes are a labour-intensive crop, most winemakers are aware of the scarcity of job opportunities and therefore the responsibility they bear as employers. In this situation, turning to more environmental farming practices is admittedly a risk. They navigate this “investment under uncertainty” in the conviction – or at least the hope – that the long-term perspective will benefit both the environmental and the socio-economic agendas.

➤ **When initiatives to improve socio-economic and environmental aspects go hand in hand**

How should the position and attitude of natural winemakers be assessed in the context of this socio-economic divide? Some farmers have chosen organic or biodynamic farming because they are especially aware of the human cost of pesticide use, and the impact of chemical pesticides on health needs no further demonstration. Consequently, there is an obvious health advantage to working in a domain that practices organic or biodynamic farming, as the absence of chemical and phytosanitary products in the vines considerably reduces the risk of exposure. It should also be remembered that natural wine domains are smaller, because the winegrowers have chosen not to use mechanical means and are therefore constrained by manual work. The return to small-scale production and manual activities means that workers are not at risk of being replaced by machines, which might be seen as a way of avoiding casualisation. A wide range of small initiatives to help improve workers’ conditions were mentioned and observed during my fieldwork, including better Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), reducing working hours, adapting working hours to the vagaries of the weather or giving priority to long-term training rather than seasonal contracts. Most winemakers in the Swartland agree that SIP

²⁰³ According to the Quarterly Labour Force Survey, the unemployment rate in South Africa reached a peak of 29.8% in 2022, increasing to 63.9% for people between 15 and 24 years of age. Source: <https://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=15407>

producers have made substantial efforts to improve the socio-economic conditions of their employees. Even though these claims may be hard to verify, my interviews and months of field observations gave me the general impression that it is not necessarily those who have based their marketing on “ethical” production and who brand themselves as such who are doing the most: I have multiple examples of natural winemakers who have worked actively to upskill their staff and have offered them more than decent housing options but did not mention any of this spontaneously. It was a non-topic for them, but their efforts served as a model for other winemakers who shared their stories:

“Someone like Adi Badenhorst in the Swartland, what he’s doing is fantastic! Also from a farming perspective, he’s not necessarily focusing on organic or biodynamic but on sustainability and treating workers very well. And it’s amazing to see someone like that independent, being able to grow to the size that he is. You know if you really want to make a change, you actually need to have that sort of environment anyway, that commercial critical mass, so that you can be able to afford to effect the change you want. I think he’s really cool” (Interview Tim, winemaker in Western cape, 4 May 2022)

These same winemakers reject the pervasive stereotype that vineyard workers are unskilled (or even “unskillable”). For another winemaker from the SIP collective, training his employees and providing them with skills is an integral part of his vision for the success of his production, as he explained in our interview:

“And that goes from elementary stuff like managing finances – because you can’t work if you have financial issues – to things like nutrients, building basic infrastructures. And also, to install initiatives where... I think a lot of people are born marginalised, so I like to create systems where this gets nuanced and changed, so it’s all about having enough systems in place that are... with participants that truly want to excel, and you give them an opportunity to do it.” (Interview Milo, interview in Western cape, 7 June 2022)

This pervasive stereotype of unskilled workers was debunked in 2007 by Moseley, who argued that his “interviews revealed that they [workers] often possess specialised skills. An example of this is the ability to quickly and proficiently prune grape vines and fruit trees. [...] Interviews also revealed that workers are aware of ecological processes and problems. Many are familiar with the problem of pesticide resistance amongst insects and weeds. Workers also notice erosion and they understand what causes it.” (Moseley, 2007, p. 8).

The dual objectives of pruning schools: skilled workers and healthy vineyards.

One initiative that has had great success is the pruning schools organised by the viticulture consultant Rosa Kruger. The first pruning school training was launched at the Reyneke domain, which is one of the only two farming entirely biodynamically in South Africa.

In our interview, Rosa Kruger– who is both an independent viticulture consultant and the founder of the Old Vine Project – stressed the absolute need to have trained, highly-skilled workers: “The people who are planting have been working with me for the last fifteen years, the same team, they are well trained, and it is extremely difficult in South Africa to get people to train workers because there is so little money in farming.” She added that acquiring a solid basis of knowledge in vineyard farming is not something that can be done when farmers employ contractors and “pick up people from the corner of the street,” which resonates with the growing problem of casualisation.

Through the platform of the Old Vine Project, Rosa has made it her mission to generate healthier vineyards by investing in workers. She truly believes that giving people very specific and high-quality skills will actively promote and spread knowledge about better farming practices, contribute to the care and protection of old vines and ultimately equip workers with skills and knowledge that will empower them to break away from path dependency. During the interview, she recounted the numerous benefits of the pruning school:

“That is why we’re doing these training courses. We’re doing five pruning courses a year. We get everybody in a certain area that has old vineyards. We gather the workers, not the winemakers, and we teach them about vines, we teach them about winemaking. And you can change the life and sustainability of a vine like that. You can triple production just by better grape pruning, and we have done that. So it’s not what I think, it’s what I know, and I can prove that to you in different places.”

It is no coincidence that the pruning courses take place at Reyneke’s farm or at Adi Baddenhorst, as they embody the most advanced environmental farming practices to be found in South Africa’s vineyards.

Notes from fieldwork, June 2022

Portraits and field notes 5. The dual objectives of pruning schools: skilled workers and healthy vineyards.

➤ **Limits of the changes observed and little room for maneuver**

Apart from my own findings, some of the reflections I explore here are the fruit of a research project led by colleagues within the TraSAD²⁰⁴ project looking at how working conditions are changing on farms that are embarking on an agro-ecological transition through case studies in winegrowing and a comparison among three French wine regions. The results of the TraSAD project offer a nuanced perspective and highlight the limitations of previous findings. The project shows that *bio* production has had an ambivalent effect on the working conditions of vineyard workers. For example, it leads to greater respect for the environment, but also to a return to manual tasks, sometimes tedious ones such as manual weeding, and arduous physical

²⁰⁴ “TraSAD: Du travail soutenable en agriculture durable.” For more information about the TraSAD project, see <https://www.centreemiledurkheim.fr/projets-de-recherche/trasad/>

postures, difficult climatic conditions and repetitive tasks and gestures, and it generally requires a greater presence in the vineyards. The project's researchers Marie Doga and Émilie Salaméro also highlighted the vulnerability – in particular the economic vulnerability – of farmers during the three-year period of conversion to *bio* farming, which often constrained the farmers and his employees to more tedious viticultural work as a way to safeguard profit²⁰⁵. This could very well be applied to the South African case, where the ability to withstand this kind of hardship is particularly intense in rural and Afrikaner cultures (Swart, 2001). Ibrahima Diallo and Nicolas Roux have also demonstrated that for vineyard workers, it does not really matter whether they are working on a *bio* farm or not. Instead, priority is given to working conditions and the stability of the work rather than to exposure to pesticides and other synthetic products.²⁰⁶ Lastly, I discovered in the course of this research that there is a blurred distinction between what would fall under “improving employees living and working conditions” and “neo-paternalism”: for instance, providing a nursery or access to education for farm workers' children can be seen as both. McEwan and Bek have sought to shed light on the tricky articulation between socio-economic and environmental transformations in the wine industry in South Africa, and in so doing have examined forms of neo-paternalism (Bek et al., 2007; McEwan & Bek, 2009b, 2009a).

6.2.1.3. Solidarity mechanisms and other strategies to escape the capitalistic domination of wine domain owners

In Bordeaux, winegrowers involved in the natural wine movement denounce the discrepancy between the terroir-based rhetoric of the Grands Crus and the absence of their domain owners from their vineyards. In other words, they blame the Grands Crus for the discrepancy between on the one hand a narrative associated with an intergenerational *savoir-faire* passed down through winemakers' lineages as a guarantee of the purity of the wine produced, and on the other the trend towards sub-contracting the entire production to vineyard workers, with the owners confining themselves to managerial and business positions. The absence of domain owners from their vineyards was pointed out multiple times in interviews, including as a way for natural producers to make the point that on the contrary, they are very present on their

²⁰⁵ Doga, Marie, and Émilie Salaméro. 2023. “Transitions et Atteintes Diffuses à la Santé: Le Cas des Exploitant.e.s.” In *Transformation des Conditions de Travail et de Santé dans les Exploitations Entamant une Transition Agro-Écologique, Le Cas de la Viticulture. Journée d'Étude TraSAD*, Bordeaux.

²⁰⁶ Diallo, Ibrahima, and Nicolas Roux. 2023. “Salarié.e.s Agricoles: L'Emploi et le Travail avant Tout ?” In *Transformation des Conditions de Travail et de Santé dans les Exploitations Entamant une Transition Agro-Écologique, Le Cas de la Viticulture. Journée d'Étude TraSAD*, Bordeaux.

“- Personally, I’m talking more about what I see around my area (Pomerol, Saint-Émilion, etc.), so the Grands Crus. Well, there are different speeds, you know... And so for small-scale producers, it’s clear that if you’re not into organic farming, it’s tough.

- *Do they also have an interest in converting to organic?*

- Yes, it’s an immediate necessity. Even if they don’t care about the environment, it’s because they are struggling to make ends meet. If you ask for statistics on suicides [...] there are many suicides. So admittedly, it’s negative publicity, but at the same time it’s something to study because farmers don’t take their lives in their tractor sheds for no reason, you know! (Interview Franck winemaker in Bordeaux, 5 July 2021²⁰⁹)

One limitation of this analysis is that I had relatively little opportunity during my fieldwork to verify the actual working conditions of vineyard workers in either the Western Cape or Bordeaux. It therefore relies on testimonies and field observations from wandering in and around wine domains, which I crosschecked with second-hand data (international or public organisation reports). It could be argued that the natural winemakers’ discourses might have been arranged to make a good impression, or that the few success stories (the alleviation of poverty or the education and training of employees, etc.) might have been waved as a banner of the movement’s progressive vision. More research is therefore needed in this direction to examine the depth of the socio-economic actions of the natural winemakers. One sure thing, however, is that in the two regions of the project, the alleviation of poverty and the (worsening) working conditions of vineyard workers remains a pervasive taboo.

6.2.2. *Colour blindness: Racial inequalities are not being challenged*

The second lens through which I explore the actions of the natural wine movement is the racial divide within the wine sector, the processes of racialisation or de-racialisation of the industry and the pervasive problems of racism. Socio-economic and racial disparities are inherently linked, and racial inequalities are made visible by the labour-capital nexus I analysed in the previous section. With a view to avoiding any repetition, the next sub-section will focus on racial issues over and above their socio-economic implications. It is important to note that racial categorisations have very different meanings in the two contexts of the project and must

cool avec eux, protégeons notre agriculture, engageons-là vers quelque chose de mieux quand on peut, à chaque fois où l'on peut.”

²⁰⁹ *My translation of:* “Moi je te parle plus de ce que je vois à côté de chez moi (Pomerol, Saint-Émilion etc.) donc les grands crus classés. Enfin il y a plusieurs vitesses, tu le sais... Après les petits exploitants, c’est clair que si tu n’es pas en bio c’est chaud. - *Eux aussi ont intérêt à se convertir en bio ?* - Oui c’est la nécessité immédiate. Même s’ils s’en foutent de l’environnement c’est parce qu’ils crèvent la dalle. Tu demanderas des statistiques sur les suicides [...] Il y en a beaucoup de suicides. Alors effectivement c’est de la communication négative mais en même temps c’est un truc à étudier parce que les agriculteurs ne se suicident pas dans leur hangar à tracteur pour rien quoi !”

therefore be treated separately. In France, there is no data collection and there are no statistics on ethnic and racial profiling, which makes a comprehensive understanding of the issue nearly impossible. In South Africa, racial categorisations were built as social and legal categories by the colonial and apartheid regimes. In this work, references to racial groups such as “Black” or “Coloured” do not refer to any scientific or essentialist classifications but are malleable social productions that rely solely on the categories fabricated by the oppressive apartheid regime, which still have an enormous impact on the structure of South African society. I use the notion of “racialisation” and its opposite “de-racialisation” as useful lenses for analysing the social relations of domination by observing what seems to be social discrimination based on racial considerations, and the racist social experiences of domination. Because of South Africa’s segregationist history, the issue of racism and the structural racial disparities in its wine industry have been the subject of myriad academic works (Du Toit et al., 2007; Estreicher, 2014; Moseley & McCusker, 2008; Ponte, Roberts, & van Sittert, 2007; Williams, 2005). Outside academia, however, the fact that the wine industry is predominantly white-dominated is both an accepted fact and a major taboo, a topic that remains largely unspoken. Are the actors in the natural wine movement challenging the status quo? Are they even aware of and sensitive to these inequalities? This is a particularly interesting question in the South African context, where racial and economic issues are deeply intertwined. However, they also raise an important series of questions to be asked in the Bordeaux case.

6.2.2.1. Assessing the wine industry as a historically white space

The wine industry has historically been developed as a white space. Here, I am referring to the definition of “white spaces” offered by Brunsma et al., for whom they can be understood as “a social space where whiteness goes unquestioned” (Brunsma et al., 2020, p. 2002).

Decentring one’s gaze to study “white spaces”

The concept of white spaces is a helpful way to analyse social spaces and “guide research on how social settings are instilled with racial meanings” (Brunsma et al., 2020, p. 2002). The notion of whiteness has been investigated by authors like Toni Morrison²¹⁰, Frantz Fanon²¹¹ and Richard Dyer²¹² to point out the asymmetries in the study of racism. The study of whiteness “involves redirecting the academic gaze: from “racism,” the way in which the centre

²¹⁰ Morrison, T. (2007). *Playing in the Dark*. New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.

²¹¹ Fanon, Frantz. (2007). *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press.

²¹² Dyer, R. (2013). *White: Essays on Race and Culture*. London: Taylor & Francis.

constructs the margins, to the way in which the centre constructs itself.” (M. Steyn, 2005, p. 120). Sara Ahmed uses a phenomenology perspective to assess how whiteness becomes “worldly” (Ahmed, 2007), and suggests that it is used “as a category of experience that disappears as a category through experience.” She explains “how this disappearance makes whiteness ‘worldly’” (Ahmed, 2007, p. 150). A concept like whiteness does not entail a fixed category, and does not refer to any essentialist categorisation; rather, it sustains the shared social space in which “the psychological, cultural, political, and economic dimensions of this privileged positionality are normalised, and rendered unremarkable.” (M. Steyn, 2005, p. 121). A study of whiteness allows us to think about and examine the agency of the white body in social spaces such as the wine sector. I argue here that the wine industry is a predominantly white space, and that this can be verified in two ways: through the preservation of white interests and the subordination of non-whites.

Textbox 16. Decentring the gaze to study “white spaces.”

Wine culture is historically bound up with white Western culture, as has been extensively studied in academic literature (Gillen, 2016; Inglis & Ho, 2021; Jammet-Arias, 2011; Schirmer & Velasco-Graciet, 2010). In the so-called “Old World,” the winemaking culture spread following the diffusion of Christian practices throughout Europe. In France, wine played a very particular role in building a national identity, acting almost as a totem drink for French culture and symbolising the nation (Schirmer, 2012a). David Inglis and Hank Kei Ho studied the complex relations between winemaking on the one hand and ethnicity and ethnic groups on the other. They argue that not only is wine history deeply intertwined with Christianity and nationalism in the Western world, but it is also a feature of colonial legacies in the “New World.” Indeed the spread of wine production in a global setting is a direct result of imperialism, and is profoundly marked by forms of ethnic exploitation and racialised injustices in the Global South (Inglis & Ho, 2021, p. 420).

➤ **South Africa’s wine industry: a socio-history of racism**

A brief look at South Africa’s history of racial oppression is required here so that we can recall the depth of the issue and understand why it is still so prominent in contemporary debates. The Cape Peninsula has always been the geopolitical symbol of the colonisation of South Africa by Europeans, and to take the metaphor a step further, it is safe to say that vineyards historically became the emblem of the exploitation of the local population. The history of apartheid is also one of the land dispossession suffered by South Africa’s indigenous populations. The wine industry has a long history of racial and socioeconomic divides marked by the exploitation of non-white workers and the paternalist ideology of farmers. The post-apartheid transition

towards a democratic South Africa encouraged a structural transformation of the wine industry, but thirty years on, few of these structural changes have been effective (see Chapter 2).

Immediately after the launch of South Africa's democratic regime, the government attempted to enforce an ambitious land reform programme involving the redistribution of vineyard land to non-white groups. By 2006, however, only 4% of formerly white-owned farmland had been transferred, whereas the initial objective had been to reach at least 30% by 1999 (Moseley, 2007). The BEE programmes to deracialise the wine industry have also been fairly unsuccessful (Moseley, 2008; Moseley & McCusker, 2008), as confirmed by the relative absence of black-owned domains and of non-white individuals in senior management roles. Many factors are to blame for these failures: from overly bureaucratic systems and the difficulty of dealing with well-entrenched, economically powerful white farm owners to the lack of political will and interest on the part of the government to invest in the wine industry, which it saw as a white colonisers' commercial activity.

By 2020, 73% of farmland was still owned by white farmers (and this proportion is probably even higher in the Western Cape), and the working conditions of Black and Coloured vineyard workers had not changed much. In 1999, Ewert and Hamman observed that "there have been no dramatic changes in the gender or racial composition of the labour force. Also, the way labour is sourced on the market or the manner in which power is exercised on the farm have not changed much in the neo-liberal, democratic era." (Ewert & Hamman, 1999, p. 203). After almost twenty-five years, one might have thought that conditions would have improved, but local and international organisations such as Human Rights Watch have reported otherwise, confirming the slow pace of change. The myth of *Ubuntu* ("I am so we are") praised by Desmond Tutu in the 1990s as the cement of national reconciliation has collapsed and many South Africans have become disillusioned with his idealised speech about South Africa's democratic transition and the miracle of the "rainbow nation" (Buire, 2012). Of course, because racism is so deeply ingrained in South Africa's recent history of apartheid, the vast majority of academic work on South Africa since its collapse has analysed the country's dynamic through a racial lens. But even Bordeaux is not exempt from a similar line of investigation.

➤ **Reflecting on Bordeaux's comparable racial patterns**

The history of the Bordeaux wine industry is deeply rooted in and connected to the slave trade and colonialism. It is important to acknowledge that a significant portion of Bordeaux's

historical wine wealth was closely linked to the transatlantic slave trade, as Bordeaux and its port were a vital hub during the centuries of slavery and colonialism (Saugéra, 1995). This historical context is further underscored by the fact that numerous vineyards and wine estates experienced substantial growth and prosperity through the colonial period.

During the twentieth century, because of the Bordeaux wine industry's significant commercial growth and a phase of expansion for its vineyards, there was also an increased demand for labour. Historically, most of this workforce has consisted of migrants, primarily from Spain, North Africa (mainly Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia) and Eastern Europe. Delaporte's investigation also sheds light on the significant numbers of Romani in this workforce, particularly in Sauternes. This historical backdrop underscores the diverse, multicultural composition of the labour force in the Bordeaux wine industry. It is imperative to acknowledge the contributions of these immigrant communities to the industry's development and prosperity. The significance of foreign labour in the Bordeaux wine industry became particularly evident during the global COVID-19 pandemic. At a time of lockdowns and closed borders, many domains grappled with a shortage of vineyard labour, highlighting the prevalence of seasonal, and therefore precarious, contracts for the workers.²¹³ The industry's reliance on foreign labour to this day is confirmed by Réjalot, who contends that local contractors mainly hire from low-wage countries on the peripheries of the European Union (Réjalot, 2021, p. 101). The intertwined dynamics of capital and labour in the Bordeaux wine industry contribute to a persistent cycle of poverty and discrimination faced by these foreign workers. For example, Crenn has demonstrated that Moroccan workers in Bordeaux encounter multiple forms of discrimination from their employers, as well as suspicion on the part of local residents (Crenn, 2015).

Finally, a deep-seated structural racism appears to be inherent in the Bordeaux wine sector, where relationships between white French owners and foreign workers often reflect traits reminiscent of a semi-feudal system. In line with these observations, Réjalot's highlights the grim reality in certain towns and neglected areas such as Pauillac, where, as he points out, "we are not far from a form of modern-day slavery." (Réjalot, 2021, p. 102). It should be made clear, however, that in Bordeaux, unlike in South Africa, the structural inequalities are framed

²¹³ AFP. 2020. "Coronavirus à Bordeaux : Les Viticulteurs Redoutent un Manque de Main-d'œuvre." *20 Minutes*. <https://www.20minutes.fr/economie/2747219-20200324-coronavirus-bordeaux-viticulteurs-redoutent-manque-main-uvre>.

less in terms of racial profiling of the individuals (as non-white), and more in terms of their foreignness (as non-French).

Both South Africa, because of its long and violent history of colonialism and apartheid, and Bordeaux, because it built its wealth on the slave trade and a heavy reliance on foreign labour, are good illustrations of this historical construction of the wine industry as being dominated by white Western culture. Two key points that emerge from a review of Inglis and Ho's work are particularly intriguing. Firstly, they contend that the historical expansion of winemaking by European colonisers across the globe still influences where and by whom wine is produced. This often manifests itself in the form of a non-white labour force that bears the brunt of the toil in the vineyards and is often subject to various forms of exploitation. Secondly, they explore the significance of ethnicity in the realm of wine imagery and representations, and highlight how it plays a pivotal role in wine culture and wine marketing. The importance of this is particularly pronounced as it connects with notions such as tradition, heritage and the family lineages of winemakers. In their analysis, Inglis and Ho draw on the concept of globally recognisable symbols such as *château* and *estate*, which subtly imply a predominantly white heritage among winemakers (Inglis & Ho, 2021, p. 419). As a result, the prevailing cultural whiteness in the globalised wine industry tends to marginalise non-white individuals, who are often absent from or in a minority at wine-related events and in representations of wine production or consumption.

6.2.2.2. Pervasive racialisation and structural racism in the wine industry

➤ **A predominantly white fieldwork experience**

My research is based on a predominantly white fieldwork experience. This is hardly surprising considering the preponderance of white culture in the contemporary wine landscape. I must also acknowledge my own whiteness here: my reflexive positioning is necessary in order to highlight how the (a)symmetries of power with field interviewees can have an impact on access to a research object (Quétu, 2023). The research method used for this project was to identify winemakers who were part of the natural wine movement, which I managed to achieve by using snowball sampling and social network strategies and cross-checking references. I did not deliberately set out to meet non-white winemakers, and I only met or interviewed a handful of non-white people during my fieldwork. My Bordeaux fieldwork was entirely white, and the

vast majority of the interviewees were both white and French (34 out of 35²¹⁴). My South African fieldwork was also predominantly white (48 out of 51 interviewees), with a few exceptions: an interview with a black wine bar manager, one with a black civil servant from a state institution, and a black winemaker who is part of the natural wine movement in the Western Cape. However, I must point out that the latter does not fit the general narrative of alleviation of poverty or Black EconomicEempowerment one might expect to find since he converted to natural winemaking after a decade of working overseas as a financial trader, notably in London. His life trajectory presents a complex narrative that defies easy categorisation in the context of the alleviation of poverty. What does this interesting yet disconcerting experience tell us about the structure of the natural wine movement?

Not only did I notice the virtual absence of non-white actors in the natural wine movement but the movement also does not seem to have invested in race-related claims: to my knowledge, there have been no publicised efforts by natural winemakers to engage in the de-racialisation of the industry. What can be said about the range of claims made by the natural wine movement, therefore? Do actions taken against the pervasive economic divide implicitly include motives that seek improved racial equality? Or is the movement just another white space?

➤ **The omnipresence of the racial question in the Western Cape**

South Africa is a very peculiar case in this regard: because of its historical legacy, it is the most emblematic case of racial oppression. It is therefore essential to acknowledge the influence of the racial divide as a prevailing and omnipotent lens in the country. Even in instances where explicit references to race may not feature prominently in a given discourse, the country is constantly grappling with the enduring legacy of the apartheid regime. This entails dealing with the everyday struggle of structural racism while also trying to hold on to Mandela's myth of the "Rainbow Nation" (Chikane, 2018). Because the wine industry is an integral part of South Africa's historical fabric, it is no exception to this overarching dynamic. Owing to its deeply entrenched historical structures and the enduring spectre of racism, it continues to confront issues intertwined with race, including matters relating to land ownership, the control of domains and employment structures. In this sense, the natural wine movement is no different from the rest of the industry. However, this explanation alone falls short of explaining the virtual absence of calls for de-racialisation in the natural wine movement. A deeper

²¹⁴ Belonging groups are presumed here. They are projected by the researcher on to the interviewees.

examination is needed in order to identify the additional factors that might clarify the (quasi) absence of non-white participants in the natural wine movement.

Part of the answer can be found in a paradox that permeates the movement in South Africa: on the one hand, natural wine producers have based their collective narrative and identity on a sense of rebelliousness, transgression and anti-conformism, but on the other, it is clear that they collectively acknowledge their limited involvement in political activism. The discourse among natural winemakers largely lacks a substantial presence of political commitment. When I asked one distributor about what bound natural wine producers together other than producing natural wine, he replied, half ironically:

“Do you think there are other political fights associated with the movement?”

- Maybe anti-vax [*he laughs*]. So you’ll find people who generally think in unconventional ways, but in terms of political views, I think you’ll find they’re mostly liberal. I think it goes hand-in-hand with being conscious of what is going on globally. But otherwise, what would they all agree on? ... Probably surfing! That’s the most common denominator.” (Interview Ian, wine bar owner in Cape Town, 21 December 2022)

This observation echoes a general lack of belief in politics in the South African context, as confirmed in many interviews with natural wine producers: when I asked about the racialisation of the industry or the failure of the BEE policies, their responses revealed a general pessimism and lack of belief in politics:

“The odds are way bigger than us. It’s a political issue. The politicians have to decide, but they don’t care about us. They want things to stay the same so they can carry on with their lifestyle.” (Interview Lugono, winemaker in Western cape, 22 May 2022)

“No, in my own humble opinion, I don’t think they’re looking very strongly at either of them.” (Interview Eric, SAOSO representative, 17 March 2022)

“No, there’s no support from our government. In fact, our government doesn’t like the wine industry much. Because it’s a white-owned industry.” (Interview Liza, winemaker in Western Cape, 16 February 2022)

In the end, therefore, the taboo surrounding racialisation issues in the wine industry even persists in spaces that claim to be radical and transgressive. For natural winemakers, what is at stake is less a lack of desire to change this divide than a consensus that there is no possible room for manoeuvre over racial inequalities. In a few instances, they evoked the weight of the historical legacy, a lack of wine culture in non-white South African groups and a lack of support from public institutions to drive a change. But what was really striking in every case was a general feeling of discomfort about discussing these subjects, and even sometimes a silencing of racial questions. Some openly admitted that it was a very sensitive and risky subject to embark on, even for me as a researcher:

“But also it’s a touchy subject, I mean it really is. And again, if you have power and money in South Africa, you’re seen as the enemy: it’s the oppressor and the oppressed story. Even if you’re Black and rich, you’re the issue. It’s a very tricky conversation to have, especially when you’re recording it [laughter].” (Interview Lennie, distributor in Cape Town, 12 January 2022)

“And also, for the social responsibility and the social development, that’s not the IPW’s focus, so honestly, I don’t think I can fully comment on that. It’s equally not easy and a very politically sensitive subject in South Africa. So, people will get very frustrated with that, and it’s very...

- *Touchy?*

- Yes.

- *But rightly so?*

- Yes.” (Interview Lenard, IPW representative 13 May 2022)

Meanwhile other interviewees played the more standard colour-blindness card:

“My answer is always “wine is white or red, good or bad” but it’s not because it is made by Blacks that it will be... I have a list of people who are asking me to stock wines only because they are Black. And to this I say sorry, I love you, you’re a nice person, but the wine isn’t good, the product isn’t something I can sell, I won’t buy it just because you’re Black.” (Interview Damiano, wine bar owner in Cape Town, 8 December 2021)

“Coming from a consumer or even a workforce perspective. I mean if you live on a farm in South Africa, surely you cannot miss the fact that there is a wrong working class-owner scenario. I don’t think that within my generation we are going to rectify it. but surely with a few questions and a few actions... And it’s not necessarily a Black versus white thing, well it shouldn’t be. You shouldn’t be not treating a human just because he’s Black or white. [...] But we are twenty-six years on now, we’re off the Black and white scenario now. But also, for us to grow, it’s breaking the cycle of history and looking past this whole scenario.” (Interview Amanda, winemaker in Western cape, 21 April 2022)

Overall, actors of the natural wine movement are not much different than other actors of the wine industry: they express a sense of disbelief from the State and its capacity to act to reduce economic and racial inequalities. Some believe in their own agency to move things in their own capacity and at their own scale (providing better employment opportunity, empowerment and fair wages) but most remain quiet or uneasy with this conversation as they primarily want to safeguard the economic benefit of wine production.

➤ **Shining a light on the hidden reality of the situation in Bordeaux through the South African case**

Here, it is not so much a term-by-term comparison that is of interest. Rather it is highlighting the South African example in order to enrich the literature on Bordeaux. The South African case raises implicit reflections, or at least ones that have been insufficiently explored in Bordeaux, including the issue of race. The interplay between racial and socio-economic inequalities in Bordeaux is generally overlooked, especially because of the absence of statistics on racial and ethnic disparities in France, which may contribute to the lack of visibility in the French context. A few authors have begun to address the issues surrounding the predominant

presence of a foreign non-white labour force in the vineyards (Crenn, 2015; Diallo & Roux, 2023), but more research still needs to be done on their working conditions and the precariousness of their situation caused by a lack of access to healthcare, trade unions and stable living conditions, among other things. Finally, in both Bordeaux and the Western Cape, the sense of discomfort around the issue predominates, and therefore, because of the lack of alternatives and solutions, it helps to silence discussions of the racial divide in the industry.

Both case studies showcase a near-absence of debate and actions in the natural wine movement to tackle racial inequalities. While some individual examples demonstrate a heightened awareness of the issue, the fact remains that first, the industry is still excessively white-owned and managed (non-white people are generally limited to menial tasks), and second, despite the fact that a Marxist economic vision is dominant in the natural wine movement, the taboo around racial inequalities persists, as it does in the rest of the wine industry, and the question has been left relatively untouched by actors in the natural wine movement.

6.2.3. The intersectionality of feminist movements and the natural wine movement

The final perspective from which I scrutinise the scope of the natural wine movement's advocacy is gender. Unlike in the previous sections, where the commitment of natural winemakers to improving socioeconomic or racial disparities showed ambivalence or uncertainty, gender has attracted significant attention in the movement. Predictably, this has predominantly been led by women winemakers. While there is no universal consensus, the question has undeniably sparked controversy and debate in the wine sector, so it is clear that the issue has not been relegated to obscurity. In this last section, I analyse the gender divide through a critical lens. I defend that firstly, the wine industry can arguably be characterised as male-dominated, and secondly that some actors in the natural wine movement have been an effective catalyst for a paradigm shift in the industry that has made the transition from feminisation of the industry to the promotion of feminism in the industry possible. I must first clarify two things about the materials and data used in this section. First, because of the contemporaneous nature of the subject, some of the data may evolve rapidly and have become outdated by the time this work is published. Indeed, as the following sections will explain, issues relating to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) in the natural wine movement are of significant concern at the time of writing. Second, the analytical scope of this section

extends beyond the Western Cape and Bordeaux, and focuses primarily on the broader context of the French natural wine movement.

6.2.3.1. Wine, a gendered territory

The wine production industry is deeply entrenched in a gendered framework, as has been confirmed by various authors (Almila & Inglis, 2021; Livat & Jaffré, 2021; Maltone & Santa-Cruz, 2019; Matasar, 2006). The literature has undertaken a critical examination of the role of gender in wine production, illuminating historical and contemporary dynamics that are deeply rooted in patriarchal structures.

The historical exclusion of women and their hidden roles in wine production

Until the 20th century, wine production was an exclusively male domain, an emblem of a patriarchal system in which women were confined to domestic roles, if not outright marginalised. Ann Matasar’s research illustrates how female participation in the wine industry was historically obstructed by inheritance laws, traditional norms and doubts about women’s business abilities (Matasar, 2006). In a similar vein, Florine Livat and Clara Jaffré have emphasised the role of Catholic priests and missionaries in the evolution of the wine industry (in both the Old and New World wine regions), which effectively excluded women, and have underlined the depth of the gendered dimension in the historical development of the industry (Livat & Jaffré, 2021). An array of prejudices, traditions, religious customs, perceptions of physical attributes and social stereotypes have perpetuated these gender biases and the effective exclusion of women from wine production. For instance, one of the recurring arguments used to exclude women from wine cellars was based on superstitions associated with menstruation, including a long-held belief that menstruating women might adversely affect the quality of wine and that it might turn into vinegar in their presence (Bianquis-Gasser, 1992). Another dimension that has reinforced the exclusion of women from the industry relates to the patterns of patriarchal, and at times patrilineal, control that prevail in wine-producing regions. In her study of the family structures of French farmers, Céline Bessière underscores the tradition of male heirs predominantly inheriting farms to ensure generational continuity (Bessière, 2014). However, it would be wrong to assume that women were completely excluded from wine production; in fact, they performed strenuous manual tasks in the vineyards, but their work was made invisible. The invisibility of women in the industry can therefore also be attributed to the roles they historically carried out, as they were typically relegated to small, undervalued tasks such as “épamprage,” “ébourgeonnage,” and “sarmentage.” Their presence in wine cellars and cooperatives was limited, and their role in the vineyards was silenced and hidden.

Textbox 17. The historical exclusion of women and their hidden roles in wine production.

The stereotypes associated with gender are also historically rooted in the consumption of wine by women. Throughout history, women’s interactions with wine have been significantly

different from those of men, often leading to their exclusion from its consumption, and the few instances in which they had an association with wine came with heavy stereotypes according to which wine consumption was assimilated to the conduct of women of questionable moral character (Velasco-Graciet, 2019).²¹⁵ These stereotypes are rooted in patriarchal assumptions that spread the idea that women have an essential nature that dictates their relationship with wine. However, the emergence of a new market segment for women consumers in the wine industry marked a substantial change in these dynamics²¹⁶. Throughout the twentieth century, entrepreneurial capitalism and the globalisation of wine markets further solidified women's position as a new and influential market segment²¹⁷. Finally, from production to consumption, wine is profoundly marked by a strict gender division inherited from patriarchal structures that either marginalised women by keeping them out of the production process, or essentialised them by making use of religious and cultural traditions as well as market forces. Consequently, wine was always a highly gendered space that only began a process of feminisation in the 1980s.

6.2.3.2. From the feminisation of the industry ...

➤ A definite trend toward the feminisation of the wine industry

Despite the gender divisions, the position of women in vineyards is evolving, and there has been a clear feminisation of the sector. Women have been challenging the gendered power dynamics since the 1980s, and with the support of wider feminist movements that permeate various sectors, a general trend toward the feminisation of professions can be observed that also impacts sectors like agriculture and viticulture.

²¹⁵ Indeed, historically, the consumption of wine by women has been entangled with perceptions of “chaos,” and their enjoyment of wine has been viewed as a challenge to patriarchal social structures, institutions and cultural norms (Almila & Inglis, 2021, p. 311). This cultural association between wine (and alcohol in general) and women as a sign of drunkenness and rumoured sexual abandon has maintained its importance over time.

²¹⁶ Pascal observed this transition as a journey between women and wine: “from one myth to another, [...] from the cursed woman to the innovative woman” (Pascal, 2019). In a similar vein, Velasco-Graciet suggests that the images and stereotypes surrounding women and wine have evolved, with the image of “women of questionable virtue” gradually giving way to that of the “liberated woman in pants, with short hair and a cigarette in her hand” (Velasco-Graciet, 2019).

²¹⁷ However, the rise of consumerism, which introduced various products and advertisements tailored for women, raised concerns: interestingly, it was not so much the “modern working girl” who was targeted but the “traditional housewife,” which raised questions about female agency in the process (Almila & Inglis, 2021, p. 315). Paradoxically, women were viewed both as being novices in terms of oenological knowledge, which infantilised their taste and capacity for appreciation, and at the same time having a significant purchasing power that the markets could not ignore (C. Pineau, 2015).

1980, the belated recognition of women as winemakers in wine farm operations

In France until the 1980s, viticulture and agriculture in general were shaped around two gendered categories that were considered to be as complementary: the winemaker on one hand, and his spouse on the other (Assegond, Chazal, & Sitnikoff, 2023). As a result, women had no official status and therefore no protection, and their work remained unpaid, even though they were fully involved in manual work in the vineyards and household tasks. The process of feminisation was achieved in practice by the attribution of a professional status in the Agricultural Orientation Law of 1980, which granted a status to women who were associated with or actively involved in a farming operation. This was soon followed by the opening of professional training opportunities for women to facilitate their access to all activities from grape cultivation and winemaking to business and marketing. The recognition of the status of female grape growers and farm managers is especially emphasised by Assegond as a pivotal moment for many women, who can now claim the title of “*vigneronne*” (female winemaker) and break into this previously male-dominated bastion. With the feminisation process, women are entering wine cellars and wineries, places that were previously “considered as spaces of power and socialising exclusively for males” (Le Brun, Annes, & Guétat-Bernard, 2023, p. 233).

Textbox 18. 1980, the belated recognition of women as winemakers in wine farm operations.

Women have increasingly created a place for themselves and gained acceptance in the wine industry, notably by creating their own networks and promoting the development of women-led groups (Le Brun, Guétat-bernard, & Annes, 2024). Several initiatives in France have contributed to the feminisation of the wine sector by highlighting the role of women in winemaking. First, there is the *Women Do Wine* organisation, which was formed in 2017 and now numbers over three hundred female winemakers, acting as both a catalyst and a safe space for women. Another good example is the first wine fair dedicated to women winemakers, *Canon*, which was launched in Nantes in 2019 by Elodie Louchez and Marie Carroget. This “female producers only” wine fair actively participates in the recognition and legitimization of women’s work in the wine sector. Several recent documentaries such as *Vigneronne (Dahu)* and *Worldwine Women*, as well as the *Filles de Vignes* podcast, to name but few, also celebrate women in the wine industry.

➤ **But a feminisation process “en clair obscure”²¹⁸**

The ongoing feminisation of the agricultural sector is significant, but it must be placed in context, as the majority of positions are still occupied by men. In an academic blogpost (Rasplus, 2022), Valéry Rasplus cautions against an overreliance on percentage-based assessments, and underscores that while the proportion of female farmers increased from 8% in 1970 to 27% in 2016, a closer examination of the data reveals that the number of male farm managers has decreased by a factor of four over the course of fifty years, whereas the number of female farm managers has shown very marginal growth. Therefore, while the share of women farmers has increased, their numbers in absolute terms have remained relatively similar over the last few decades.

Various scholars have described the limitations and numerous barriers that impede the process of feminisation of the wine industry. In his analysis of the Chinon appellation in France, Jean-Louis Escudier recalls the entrenched traditional male monopoly of the transmission of viticultural knowledge (Escudier, 2014). The story of this winemaker in Bergerac confirms his argument. Sébastien represents the eighth generation of winemakers working in this domain, but the absence of male heirs and the fact that it was passed down through women has “forced” the domain to change its name multiple times:

“As I was telling you, the estate has existed for at least eight generations, perhaps more. However, because it was often passed down through women, the name has changed a lot. But we've been able to trace it back to the early 1800s.” (Interview Sébastien, winemaker in Bordeaux, 26 April 2021²¹⁹).

Cacouault-Bitaud and Testenoire have also drawn attention to the “devaluation effect” that occurs alongside the process of feminising a profession (Cacouault-Bitaud & Testenoire, 2001), a mechanism that appears to apply particularly in the wine industry. Similarly, as Chauvin has highlighted, women have had to invest a substantial effort to obtain authority and recognition in the sector, primarily due to the prevailing belief that the prestige and reputation of wine require a strong male identity (Chauvin, 2010). Furthermore, Bryant and Garnham have demonstrated that the media portrays female winemakers in a decontextualised manner as glamorous elite figures, thereby obscuring the actual experiences of women in winemaking

²¹⁸ The notion of “*une féminisation en claire-obscur*” (semi-darkness) is developed in Assegond, Christèle, Hélène Chazal, and Françoise Sitnikoff. 2023. “De la Femme de Viticulteur à la Vigneronne: Évolution des Places et Rôles des Femmes en Viticulture dans la Région Centre-Val de Loire.” In *Vignes et Vignerons. Évolution des Métiers, des Pratiques et des Territoires*, Tours: Presses Universitaires François Rabelais, 247–66.

²¹⁹ My translation of: “Comme je te disais, le domaine existe depuis au moins huit générations peut-être plus, mais parce que ça a été souvent transmis par les femmes donc ça a beaucoup changé de nom, mais on a pu remonter à début 1800.”

and farming (Bryant & Garnham, 2014). Finally, despite the wider acceptance of women as wine consumers today, pervasive stereotypes persist. Pineau posits that marketing that targets female consumers is often influenced by collective representations of a presumed “feminine” palate or a “particular affinity of women for sparkling wines” (C. Pineau, 2015), and she suggests that it is imperative to debunk essentialist arguments regarding a distinct feminine taste. Several instances during my fieldwork bear witness to the ambient sexism and these pervasive clichés. A winemaker from Saint-Émilion, for instance, explained to me that he grew up with these sexist narratives:

“My grandfather used to say, and he was a bit macho, “Pomerol is a wine for women, Saint-Émilion is a wine for men.” He meant that Pomerol has a predominance of Merlot, while Saint-Émilion has a predominance of Cabernet Franc, resulting in wines with more character and more tannins.” (Interview Antoine, winemaker in Bordeaux, 10 May 2021²²⁰)

To summarise, a substantial body of literature has examined the relationship between women, gender and the wine industry, with recent works concentrating on the ongoing process of feminisation in the sector. They also remind us that this trend towards feminisation is only partial, and that the industry is still largely male-dominated. At this point, I want to posit a distinction between feminisation and feminism in the wine industry. As we have seen above, feminisation refers to the expansion of access to the wine sector by women. It focuses on breaking down barriers and promoting equal opportunities for women to enter and thrive in the traditionally male-dominated world of wine production. Feminism in the context of wine, on the other hand, challenges the conventional gender dynamics prevalent in winemaking and explores how these dynamics relate to broader identities. It delves into the complexities of the power structures and gender norms that have historically shaped the industry (from winemaking to marketing and consumption). Feminism challenges representation and agency and examines how gender intersects with various aspects of identity, such as race, class and sexuality. This leads us to a couple of questions: Have feminist movements made inroads into the wine industry, and if so, how have actors in the natural wine movement contributed to this transformation? These are the questions I aim to explore in the following section.

6.2.3.3. to feminism in the wine sector

²²⁰ *My translation of:* Mon grand-père me disait et c'était un peu macho “le Pomerol c'est un vin de femme, le Saint-Émilion c'est un vin d'homme.” Pour dire que Pomerol c'était une prédominance merlot et le Saint-Émilion un prédominance Cabernet Franc qui faisait que l'on avait des vins qui avaient plus de caractères et plus de tannins.”

➤ **The intersectionality between the natural wine movement and feminist movements**

I argue here that the natural wine movement has been used as a platform, or rather as a channel, for feminist claims and feminist initiatives to penetrate the wine sector. At times, the feminisation of the wine business has followed paths that have now been disavowed by many women in the industry, who call for different approaches. For instance, the idea of cultivating a specific femininity or feminine taste in a wine has been discredited,²²¹ and it has become clear that the demands are no longer just about integrating women into the industry but also about legitimising their presence and questioning the hierarchies and dynamics of power. What is more, a shift in paradigm is under way from feminisation to the penetration of feminist struggles into the industry. I also believe that there is a clear intersectionality between feminist movements and the natural wine movement. Intersectionality explores how the interplay of power dynamics impacts social interactions in a variety of societies and shapes individual experiences in their daily lives. As an analytical tool, it views categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, ethnicity and age as interrelated and mutually shaping one another (Collins & Bilge, 2020). Within the wide range of claims encompassed by the feminist movements I distinguish two types: first, I look at the initiatives undertaken by women natural winemakers to fight for the emancipation of women (producers and consumers), thereby promoting a new gender-centred approach to social structures; and second, I investigate the role of women in the natural wine movement in calling out and fighting sexual and gender-based violence and discrimination in the wine industry as a whole.

➤ **Debunking gender myths and promoting a new gender approach in social structures.**

- “*Cuvées militantes*”: *Debunking social etiquette by playing with wine labels*

²²¹ Velasco Garciet (2015) recalls the case of an association called *Les Aliénors du Vin de Bordeaux*, which was established in 1994 and coalesced around what they referred to as a “feminine sensibility;” today, a classification like this would likely be seen as outdated. Perspectives around gender have evolved and the framing is now no longer about differentiating through a feminine sensibility but, on the contrary, demonstrating that gender is not a criterion for differentiation. Using the example of the famous Champagne owner Madame Pommery, Matasar illustrates how the rejection of feminism by many accomplished female winemakers who exclusively passed control of their wineries to men has contributed to this feminisation in *claire-obscur* (Matasar, 2006). Le Brun et al. also highlight the profiles of “female business managers who construct their professional identity without fundamentally challenging the male dominance of the profession.” (Le Brun et al., 2023). This vision of the feminisation of the industry is outdated, and has even been cancelled by some feminist winemakers. These examples are an effective illustration of the distinction between women in the wine industry and feminist advocacy.

One initiative that has garnered a great deal of attention is the “*cuvées militantes*” offered by the French trading and distribution company Vins et Volailles. The concept is a relatively simple one: it involves creating unique *cuvées* by taking wines purchased from female winemakers and bottling them under names with evident feminist connotations. Bottles with names like Putes Féministes, Male Tears, Cancel Culture and Fizzy Witch can now be bought at numerous natural wine retailers. Fleur Godart, the driving force behind the project, operates at a perfect intersection between feminism and natural wine. Her personal definition of natural wine and a manifesto titled “Des Vins Engagés!” can both be found on her website (Figure 40).



Figure 39. Labels of the Cuvées Militantes from Vins et Volailles

Des vins engagés !

Comment faire vivre le plaisir du partage du vin sans s’asseoir sur ses convictions ?

En envoyant des bouteilles à messages !

Et vu qu’elles contiennent des vins qui en racontent déjà, des histoires, on n’avait plus qu’à les mettre en résonance.

Longtemps nous nous sommes contentées de remercier le milieu du vin de tolérer notre présence. Aujourd’hui nous sommes fatiguées de travailler dans un milieu encore trop masculin et sexiste (ils disent « grivois »), très blanc, très bourgeois, très hétéronormé...

Nos cuvées sont des collaborations exclusives avec les domaines que nous distribuons, ce sont donc des vins vivants, digestes et joyeux.

En faisant de l’étiquette un espace militant, elles viennent dénoncer des inégalités et discriminations systémiques, et ont pour ambition d’inscrire ces problématiques au menu des conversations (et sur les cartes des vins).

Il paraît que les féministes sont des harpies rageuses moralisatrices... Tiens Jean-Hubert, reprends donc un peu de ce délicieux « On ne peut plus rien dire ». Parce que oui, la dégustation du vin est

un endroit de plaisir, de partage et de convivialité, que beaucoup de personnes ne se sentent pas invitées à pratiquer.

Et c'est aussi un des aspects importants de notre projet : permettre à tout le monde de trouver son rapport intime au vin et de se sentir autorisé.es et légitimes à exprimer son ressenti.

Chaque étiquette est dessinée par une personne concernée par la problématique explicitée, et dans la mesure du possible les personnes aux manettes de la vinification le sont aussi.

Nous faisons le pari de la représentation et de l'identification, et on espère que dans 20 ans le milieu sera plus hétérogène !

Chaque cuvée donne 7% de ses bénéfices à une association qui agit sur le terrain, les détails sont à la fin de chaque présentation.

Ce projet a permis de récolter en 2021 un peu plus de 18000€ pour les différentes associations citées, vous êtes super !”

Des Vins Engagés !” manifesto on the Vins et Volailles website

Figure 40. The “Des Vins Engagés !” manifesto, Vins et Volailles.²²²

The primary objective here is to debunk social etiquette by playing with labels. The idea behind these *cuvées* was to use their labels to subvert the representation of women as objects and depict them as “proud and powerful women.” In the case of Fizzy Witches, for instance, the label portrays menstruating women crushing grapes in a tank, a representation that challenges historical and pernicious superstitions about menstruation and cellar spaces. As the *cuvées militantes* emerged, their messages began to address other discriminatory social practices, including with the Differently-Abled *cuvée*, which tackles the issue of disability, and Don't Touch My Hair, which addresses racism. The *cuvées militantes* are a prime example of the intersectionality of feminist action and the natural wine movement serving as platforms to support these causes. It is worth noting that a portion of the proceeds from the sale of *cuvées militantes* is donated to various associations related to the cause highlighted on the label.

○ *Oenologouine: wine tasting workshops “en mixité choisie”*

Another project that simultaneously promotes natural wine and feminist values is the growing trend for non-mixed, or “*en mixité choisie*,”²²³ wine tastings. This initiative was launched by the caviste Delphine Aslan. Frustrated by the too numerous episodes of mansplaining and maninterrupting she encountered in wine tastings, she began offering oenology workshops for women and queer people. Renamed “Oenologouine” (a pun between oenology and “gouine,” which is a derogatory term for lesbian in French), the objective of the workshops is to make

²²² Source: <https://www.vinsetvolailles.com/categorie-produit/vins/cuvees-militantes/>

²²³ In her narrative, Delphine Aslan makes a distinction between a non-mixed event (only for women) and events she calls “*en non-mixité choisie*” (for women and queer people).

wine tastings accessible to everyone. In an interview with *Libération*, Delphine Aslan discussed how wine is still perceived as a symbol of masculinity, and shared her desire to use her workshops to provide a space without men so that women (and queer people) can learn about wine²²⁴. Her initiative sparked a torrent of strong, and often violent, reactions, particularly following her interview in *Libération*, reflecting the pervasive discord on these topics. Nonetheless, the initiative has not been in vain; it has given rise to several similar projects, including one in Bordeaux, where Margaux Brasseur, an itinerant independent wine merchant, offers wine pairing dinners exclusively for women. This serves a dual purpose: to highlight the work of women in the wine industry and to provide a safe space for women for tasting, education in oenology and dialogue.

➤ **Fighting SGVB and discrimination in the wine industry**

(Female) natural wine producers have been vehement about denouncing sexism at all levels, from sexist promotions and communications (sexist labels like “*Cuisse de Bergères*” or another called “*GHB, pour pécho*” that glorifies sexual assault) to cases of sexual violence in the industry. It is important to note that this does not mean that the natural wine movement is immune from these forms of violence: rather, it means that the feminist demands stem from individuals, mostly women, and predominantly women winemakers who evolved in or near the natural wine movement. In other words, I make the point that some female natural winemakers act as whistle-blowers to warn against SGBV in the wine industry at large.

²²⁴ Laystarie, Emilie. 2021. “Dégustation. “Avec Œnologuine, on Découvre le Monde du Vin sans Sexisme, ni Paternalisme.”” *Libération*.



Figure 41. Label of the “Cuisse de Bergère,” rosé from Anjou.



Figure 42. Label of Marc Soyard’s “GHB pour pécho” wine.

Some male natural winemakers have become embroiled in scandals and legal proceedings following complaints of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). The “GHB pour Pécho” label depicted above was released by a natural winemaker. On 13 March 2023, the online magazine *Vitisphere* ran the headline “SGBV: Natural wines free from sulphites but not from sexist pressure,”²²⁵ while an investigation by *Mediapart* confirmed that there has not been a #MeeToo moment for wine, and that consequently, cases of SGBV have been making headlines in the wine industry in recent years.²²⁶ Three case studies will be examined here that shine a

²²⁵Abellan, Alexandre. 2023. “Des Vins Nature Libérés des Sulfites mais pas de la Pression Sexiste.” *Vitisphere*. <https://www.vitisphere.com/actualite-98896-des-vins-nature-liberes-des-sulfites-mais-pas-de-la-pression-sexiste.html>.

²²⁶Reux, Julie. 2023. “Les Combats Féministes Révèlent le Côté Obscur du Vin Naturel.” *Médiapart*.

light on the extent of gender-based discrimination and violence in the industry. They also highlight the determined response of certain female actors in the natural wine movement who have addressed and seized control of these underlying issues.

○ *The case of Fleur Godard and Sand G versus En Magnum*

The first case involves two figures from the feminist natural wine movement. The first is Sandrine Goeyvaert (better known as Sand G), a Belgian *caviste* specialising in retailing natural wine and the founder of the *Women Do Wine* association. She has published extensively on the issue of women in the wine sector, including a “manifesto for an inclusive wine”²²⁷ in 2021. The second figure is Fleur Godard, the founder of Vins et Volailles and the *Cuvées Militantes* project. In November 2020, the renowned wine magazine *En Magnum* published a cartoon in one of its issues depicting a young female agent offering sexual favours to a wine merchant in exchange for purchasing wine. Sand G and Fleur Godard believed that they were being directly targeted. The publication was quickly followed by a media escalation between the parties in messages on social media. Fleur Godard and Sand G denounced the sexist nature of the cartoon and filed a complaint, claiming sexism and cyberbullying, and they pursued a legal action against *En Magnum* through their lawyer Éric Morain for public insult and defamation of an individual based on gender.

²²⁷ Goeyvaerts, Sandrine. 2021. *Manifeste pour un Vin Inclusif*. Nouriturfu.



Figure 43. Cartoon published in the December 2020-February 2021 issue of *En Magnum*.

The case was extensively mediatised because it put eminent figures from the wine scene in opposition to each other: on the one hand Sand G and Fleur Godard, two of the most visible representatives of feminist natural wine movement, and on the other the famous wine critics Michel Bettane and Thierry Desseauve, the CEO of *En Magnum*, who are fierce representatives of traditional wine spheres, and are especially well-known for their annual wine guide “Bettane et Desseauve.” As Eric Morain emphasised in a social media post, the mediatisation effects of the trial helped to mainstream the issue:

“The green revolution in viticulture is under way, but there remains another Bastille to conquer: that of the machismo and sexism pervasive in this industry. As a lawyer, I receive numerous testimonies. For decades, men have claimed ownership of vineyards and cellars, and some, comfortably established in their roles as guides, bloggers, self-proclaimed influencers or ubiquitous party guests enjoying free drinks, cannot bear the idea that contemporary women might do anything other than clean the glasses they empty. There are exceptional female winemakers and equally remarkable female wine sellers, and

remarks that demean them based on their gender must be eradicated.” (Facebook post, Éric Morain, 2 December 2020²²⁸).

This example illustrates the determination of some female actors in the natural wine movement to decry the persistent sexist practices and gendered stereotypes in the wine sector.

➤ **#PayeTonPinard, a social media account to break the silence on SGBV in the wine sector**

Since the #MeToo movement, many professional sectors have reported issues of everyday sexism, and there has been an outpouring of testimonies denouncing discriminatory behaviour based on gender, and even cases of sexual harassment and assault. Up to that time, the wine industry had for the most part seemed to be unaffected by the #MeToo wave. But in September 2020, recognising the shared silence within the wine industry, the caviste Sand G and the winemaker Isabelle Perraud launched the Instagram account *#PayeTonPinard*²²⁹ with the aim of sharing anonymous testimonies from individuals who had been victims of SGBV in the wine sector. Since then, testimonies have been pouring in, and the account has shared over a hundred and fifty stories ranging from misogynistic jokes to lewd comments or behaviour, and even sexual assault. The account serves as a rallying platform for feminist figures in the natural wine movement: it provides opportunities for a unified voice for women in the wine sector and to dig out stories that have become the subject of legal proceedings.

○ *The court case between Isabelle Perraud and Sébastien Riffault: the sexual harassment scandal dividing the natural wine movement*

Several testimonies on the #PayeTonPinard platform exposed the conduct of Sancerre natural winemaker Sébastien Riffault. In all, approximately a dozen incidents of sexual violence were alleged to have involved him. In May 2022, Isabelle Perraud, the driving force behind the #PayeTonPinard Instagram account, issued a statement acknowledging these allegations against Sébastien Riffault. Riffault was accused of rape and sexual assault, including reported incidents in France and Denmark. He was summoned to appear before the court of Bourges in

²²⁸ My translation of: “La révolution verte dans la viticulture est en marche mais il reste une autre Bastille à prendre: celle du machisme et du sexisme qui est partout dans ce milieu. En tant qu’avocat pénaliste, je reçois quantité de témoignages. Pendant des décennies, les hommes se sont appropriés les terrains de la vigne et du chai, et certains, bien installés dans leur confort de guides, de blogs, de soi-disant prescripteurs ou d’invités partout à boire gratis, ne supportent pas que des femmes d’aujourd’hui fassent autre chose que nettoyer les verres qu’ils vident. Il y a des femmes vigneronnes exceptionnelles, des femmes cavistes qui le sont tout autant et les propos indignes du fait de leur sexe doivent être bannis”

²²⁹ The name #PayeTonPinard is a direct reference to the broader French hashtag #BalanceTonPorc, or its English equivalent #MyHarveyWeinstein.

April 2023. In return, he countersued Isabelle Perraud for defamation. The case was a complex one, as no formal complaints have been filed against the winemaker and most victims prefer to remain anonymous. However, Riffault has been blacklisted by numerous restaurants, natural wine merchants and distributors.

In the April 2023 court proceedings, Riffault won his defamation lawsuit against Isabelle Perraud, who was ordered to pay approximately 26,000 euros in damages and legal expenses on 2 June 2023. The Court's decision was influenced by the lack of "fundamental caution in recalling the cardinal principle of the presumption of innocence" in the initial post on #PayeTonPinard. However, it was acknowledged that her actions were aligned with the #MeToo movement's objectives of encouraging women to come forward and speak out against sexual misconduct. The case became even more complicated when Isabelle Perraud and other women who had testified were targeted by an anonymous individual who began to blackmail them, posing as a journalist and attempting to intimidate them.

The case sparked intense divisions within the natural wine movement. Supporters emerged on both sides: some prominent figures in the movement stood by Sébastien Riffault, portraying him as an authentic, honourable winemaker whose wines and career had allegedly been harmed by Isabelle Perraud's allegations. Many others aligned with Isabelle Perraud, condemning sexual harassment and everyday sexism. This also offered an occasion to highlight concerns about a form of "celebrity culture" pervasive in the world of natural wine in which certain winemakers are placed on a pedestal, potentially overshadowing or discrediting the accounts of assault victims. Ultimately, on 6 June 2023, over six hundred people from the wine sector signed a statement supporting Isabelle Perraud that was published in the *Libération* newspaper. A few weeks later, the Paye Ton Pinard association was founded, sharing its name with the Instagram account. The organisation's objective is to establish a unified voice for feminist advocates in the wine industry, using Perraud's case to engage in a more collective battle.

These three cases underscore the increasing presence of feminist movements in the wine industry. Certain female figures in the movement have positioned themselves strategically at the intersection between feminist advocacy and the natural wine movement, effectively leveraging the existing platforms in the natural wine community to reveal issues of sexual violence in the wine industry in general. Importantly, these cases are closely interconnected. The natural wine movement is an epiphenomenon, and the feminist movement within it is a

niche within a niche. Consequently, the few leading figures who are spearheading these feminist initiatives find themselves intricately involved in multiple cases, collectively championing the cause of women in the industry (as with women like Sand G, Isabelle Perraud and Fleur Godard). Furthermore, the involvement of Eric Morain, who is now renowned for representing natural winemakers, in supporting Isabelle Pérraud's fight illustrates the influence of tightly-knit networks in activist movements.

➤ **Feminist movements and the natural wine movement reinforce each other**

To say that the natural wine movement is a feminist space would be wrong, or at least simplistic. Instead, I argue that feminism has penetrated the natural wine movement as a space for collective action to tackle SGBV issues that would otherwise be silenced. This is hardly surprising: in fact, a rapid review of the literature on other activist movements such as political ecologies and alternative agro-food movements also reveals a powerful feminist presence (D. Rocheleau & Nirmal, 2015; Thivet, 2017). The natural wine movement is intended to reflect an industry in flux, one that is not only undergoing a process of feminisation but also questioning power dynamics and gendered stereotypes. It is no coincidence that some of the best-known natural wine critics are female, including Isabelle Legeron (the founder of the first international natural wine fair, RAW) and the American author Alice Feiring. Furthermore, the new *Méthode Nature* charter proposed an amendment in September 2022 to openly position itself as fighting SGBV. In line with the idea of a feminist and inclusive natural wine movement, *Méthode Nature* has adopted a motion that promotes awareness on sexism and condemns SGBV (See Figure 44 below). The association is also working on a kit to raise awareness of SGBV among organisers of natural wine fairs.

Le Conseil d'administration du Syndicat de défense des vins naturels s'engage activement contre les violences sexistes et sexuelles.

Les vignerons et vigneronnes « nature » font le choix d'élaborer des vins dans le respect du vivant, au sens le plus large possible ; le vin nature ou naturel est par conséquent porteur de valeurs, d'une véritable éthique, qui n'est pas simplement technique mais concerne absolument tout son écosystème, depuis le grain de raisin cultivé avec soin jusqu'à la personne qui boit le vin en passant par celle qui le conçoit ou celle qui le vend – autant de valeurs qui ne doivent donc pas s'arrêter au bout du rang de vigne ou au seuil du chai.

L'avènement récent des femmes – vigneronnes, sommelières, cavistes, agentes, autrices, journalistes, communicantes, amatrices... – chaque jour plus nombreuses dans le milieu du vin, et dans celui du vin nature en particulier, nous ramène incontestablement à ces valeurs du

bien vivre en société, indissociables en théorie du mouvement des vins naturels. En effet, leur présence accrue ne justifie en rien qu'elles soient la cible de certains hommes qui, sous prétexte d'alcoolisation ou profitant d'un contexte festif, ou encore abusant de leur position privilégiée dans le milieu, agissent en véritables prédateurs et les agressent verbalement voire sexuellement, et ce encore trop souvent en toute impunité.

Ce temps-là est révolu. Les acteurs et les actrices du vin nature doivent désormais se mobiliser pour écarter de leurs rangs tous ceux qui adoptent ces comportements au mieux déplacés, au pire criminels. Le Syndicat de défense des vins naturels entend bien être acteur de ce changement indispensable et reste particulièrement vigilant de ce point de vue.

Texte issu du Site Web du Syndicat Méthode Nature²³⁰

Figure 44. Excerpt from the Syndicat Méthode Nature website.

Individuals at the intersection of the natural wine and feminist movements are using the two types of claim simultaneously, creating a symbiotic relationship in which feminist and natural wine narratives mutually reinforce each other. Despite the absence of statistics on the proportion of women in organic, biodynamic and natural farms, several studies have focused on issues related to their representation. In her analysis of natural wine production in Italy, Viecelli declared that women “represent powerful new social actors and active agents of change” (Viecelli, 2021, p. 2). Similarly, in her study of organic wine production in the Rhône and Bordeaux regions, Célérier asserts that “women appear to play a significant role in intellectual movements that explore the connections between the environment, food and health, even though it is tricky to explain this phenomenon without falling into certain stereotypes.” (Célérier, 2017, p. 217). An intriguing paradox that merits further investigation emerges from this. On the one hand, women’s involvement in viticulture is often linked to ideas of being connected to nature, the land, Gaia, fertility and an emphasis on a more sensitive approach to the environment. On the other hand, feminist movements have worked to debunk essentialist stereotypes regarding women’s positions in the wine industry, challenging pervasive ideas such as the belief that women are unsuitable for certain jobs and the notion of a feminine taste.

Conclusion

This chapter has described the extent to which resistance from actors in the natural wine movement has manifested itself in the regions of this study. The first section makes the

²³⁰ Source: <https://vinmethodenature.org/le-conseil-dadministration-du-syndicat-de-defense-des-vins-naturels-sengage-activement-contre-les-violences-sexistes-et-sexuelles/>

argument that the emergence of the natural wine movement has contributed to a rampant polarisation of the wine sector fuelled by both supporters and detractors of natural wine. It also investigates the means and tools used by actors in the movement to distance themselves from the conventional segment of the wine industry. Based on the concept of resistance as imagined by authors such as Scott or Thoreau, I demonstrate that natural winemakers use a repertoire of actions that goes from transgressive rhetoric to the use of civil (or professional) disobedience, and in some cases to legal action. These common narratives and shared repertoires actively contribute to building an identity that travels across the movement's various local antennae and is embraced and reappropriated internationally.

The second section uses the “class-race-gender” triptych to investigate the appropriation (or lack of appropriation) of existing hierarchies and inequalities in the broad wine industry by actors in the natural wine movement. The “class-race-gender” lens reveals very different interests and mobilisations on the part of actors in the natural wine movement that shed light ruptures or continuities with the broader wine industry. First, the interests and claims of the movement differ depending on the local dynamics (the South African context, for instance, requires a closer examination of the racial questions, whereas the French context is more conducive to an investigation of gender issues). Second, the three topics are invested in by actors in the movement in very different ways. The class dimension, which I have investigated through the labour-capital nexus, lies at the heart of the reflections of many natural wine producers. This is unsurprising, as the question arises in the context of the broader anti-capitalist and anti-establishment position adopted by most actors in the natural wine movement. On the other hand, my fieldwork in Bordeaux and the Western Cape alike revealed a pervasive taboo, if not utter discomfort, with regard to dealing with the issues of racial inequalities, and as in the rest of the wine industry, the issue has remained relatively untouched by the natural wine movement. Finally, the gender question also represents an interesting case. We should recall that because of a lack of data, I have only looked at it in the French context, and more research needs to be conducted in the South African industry. The French natural wine movement has not just been accompanied by a broader process of feminisation of the wine industry; it has also enabled feminist movements to permeate the wine sector. The recent emergence of an intersection between the natural wine and feminist movements has given rise to an acute polarisation within the wine industry and in the natural wine movement itself, but it has also allowed feminist claims to reach the public agenda.

More generally, this research has also uncovered an intriguing paradox regarding the perception that actors in the natural wine movement are subjugated. On the one hand, natural winemakers position themselves as subaltern – as a group dominated by the conventional wine sector – but on the other, when we examine the wider demographic of natural wine producers in the context of “class-race-gender,” it becomes evident that the majority of natural winemakers fit the description of the dominant group, which is typically made up of white male vineyard owners. These different positions are not contradictory; rather, they confirm the fact that an analysis of power relationships depends heavily on where each actor stands and the analytical lens one selects in order to study them and their actions.

PART 3 – HOW REBEL WINEMAKERS FOSTER RADICAL INNOVATIONS: THE NATURAL WINE NETWORK AS AGENCY FOR INCREMENTAL YET STRUCTURAL CHANGE

The second part of this dissertation focused on understanding the emergence of the natural wine movement, deciphering its hot causes and cool mobilisations. It analysed and situated the movement's ethos and praxis. Ethos, defined as the underlying values and principles guiding behaviors and shaping identity, builds a shared cognitive framework and common representations. Praxis involves the practical application of that theory for social change and subsequent actions. This analysis has allowed us to identify alternative practices and resistance to conventional and industrial production, or at least resistance to the status quo. It also raises questions about the changes the natural wine movement has brought to the wine industry at large.

Drawing from Rao's formulation, this third and final part investigates how rebel winemakers shape radical innovation in the market. Following a heterodox political economy approach, I consider that markets can be shaped and constrained by social movements and grassroots resistance. As such, I argue that the natural wine movement can be seen as a political project triggering incremental yet structural change in the wine industry. By creating alternative voices, actors from the movement have shown that other paths of production (as well as of marketing and distribution) are possible.

Consequently, the third and last part of this thesis examines the challenges posed by the arrival of these new winemakers in the wine industry. Having witnessed the normalisation (institutionalisation and mainstreamisation) of the natural wine movement within the wine sector, the aim here is to understand the dynamics and relationships between actors from the natural wine movement and the rest of the industry. The challenges emerging from this normalisation of the natural wine movement are discussed from three angles, each of which constitute the final three chapters of this thesis: First, I seek to understand the dynamics of political and administrative recognition of the movement and its relationship with public authorities (Chapter 7). Next, I discuss the integration of natural wines within market dynamics, and this by studying innovations and hybrid economic settings in the global wine market (Chapter 8). Finally, I investigate diffusion from the movement in question through exploring it as a network of knowledge production and dissemination (Chapter 9).

7. CHAPTER 7: Identifying the natural wine movement's tipping points: from resistance strategies to market institutionalisation.

Introduction

Over the last couple of decades, a gradual integration of the natural wine movement within the viticultural sector has occurred. This has meant firstly that it is no longer possible to ignore its existence. Despite the relatively small quantitative niche it represent, as I have shown in previous chapters, this new group of actors has set a precedent in the wine sector through their ethos and actions. The general argument I present here is that acknowledgment of the natural wine movement by the wine industry is under way and that it has already generated opportunities to reflect on the movement's organisation and institutionalisation processes as well as its political and administrative recognition and its implications.

This chapter focuses on the pivotal moment at which the movement transitioned from being on the margins to becoming more organised and integrated within the industry as a whole. I analyse this tipping point by studying two processes: first, the way the movement has created a legal and administratively recognised framework for itself, and second the way natural winemakers have engaged more generally with public authorities. I examine specific moments in time when the movement's actors come together with those responsible for governing the industry, metaphorically sitting at the same table to discuss the possibilities of reconciling visions that had hitherto been viewed as antithetical. I argue that because of their alternative way of producing wines, actors from the natural wine participate actively in revealing the defects and pitfalls of the regulations and conventions currently in place. By so doing, they create opportunities for adding new issues to the policy agenda. I delve into the relationships between public authorities and actors of the natural wine movement to explore the following three issues: whether natural winemakers have room for manoeuvre to effect change; whether they are active agents in policy changes in a dialogue with, and with the support of, public authorities which go beyond the dynamics of resistance; and whether they might even be considered to be entrepreneurs in matters of policy learning?

The first section examines the moment at which the natural wine movement shifted from its previous identity as “anti-establishment” and confined to the margins, and evolved into a more organised entity. I discuss the movement's organisational process, in the sense of the work

undertaken to have it recognised and anchored within legally and administratively recognised structures such as the *Méthode Nature* label in France and the creation of ‘the Alternative Categories’ in South Africa. The technical management structures and new legal frameworks are analysed so as to better understand the potential consequences of recognising the natural wine movement for the movement itself and for the rest of the industry.

In the second section, the room for manoeuvre and opportunities for a dialogue with public authorities are discussed in the light of the literature on advocacy coalitions, policy transfer and agenda settings. I look at the relationship between natural winemakers and the public institutions responsible for governing the industry, with a specific focus on those in charge of quality standards, the appellations. I review the often-conflicting relationships between the natural wine movement and the appellations (AOC in France, WO in South Africa) and identify three strategic alternatives chosen by natural producers to exit from, adapt to or reform the appellation systems.

The third section studies the interactions between actors in the natural wine movement and public authorities more generally, and in so doing, raises questions about the potential for new issues that might be put on the policy agenda, even including potential evolutions of certain environmental policies in the industry. I look into how some conflicts have crystallised between a desire for change and a call by natural wine actors to reform the ways wine is produced, distributed and consumed on the one hand, and the status quo defended by other interests groups and public bodies on the other. I hypothesise that natural winemakers are active agents of learning, and contribute to the transfer of new cognitive frameworks, acting as soft transfer entrepreneurs. The last section takes the case of the opposing views held by those who promote the idea of quality linked to origin (the AOC system) and environmental quality in Bordeaux. In particular, it explores the way natural winemakers have – or have not – enabled policy changes in this area.

7.1. From rebels to operators with conventions: the political, legal and administrative recognition of natural wine

Institutionalisation involves the formal establishment and integration of practices, rules or systems within an institution and/or organisation. According to Jullien and Smith, institutions are not only constraints on market competition but also provide the very conditions under

which such competition can persist over time (Jullien & Smith, 2008). The institutionalisation process is pivotal to transforming practices or norms from shared beliefs into a more permanent and recognised element of market structures. In essence, it gives these practices permanence and legitimacy, making them an integral part of the existing content and wider functioning of an institution. In line with François and Dubuisson-Quellier's concept of market institutions (2011), in which the institutionalisation process serves as a stabilising agent, this section explores the institutionalisation process of the natural wine movement (or the lack of it). To use the words of these authors, institutionalisation is a process through which institutions are born, driven by the identification of a crucial issue and the appointment of an arbitrator tasked with resolving conflicts (Dubuisson-Quellier & François, 2011). They therefore arise as a response to the needs and demands of a group of actors, serving to provide a framework for addressing these needs and regulating disputes effectively. As institutions become established and recognised, they bring stability to the environment in which they operate, and so the process of institutionalisation is intrinsically linked to the stabilisation and functioning of the broader systems within which it operates. After the institutionalisation process, the question then arises of the organisation and official recognition of the particular movement. The next section analyses how in both France and South Africa, the natural wine movement has shifted over the past decade from a collection of ad hoc, unorganised dissident groups to more or less organised structures in its attempt to become legitimised as such.

7.1.1. A movement without legal recognition

The natural wine movement was born out of a spirit of rebelliousness and with the idea of emancipating the dominant system of the wine industry, but it grew and developed, and with this came a real need to be recognised and legitimised. This meant that the blurred, complex nature of the movement gradually gave way to one that was framed in conventional terms. Despite the fact that some winemakers were resistant to the idea of imposing frameworks and fixing a definition, the majority wanted to establish limits and regulate the use of the term “natural wine.” In 2011, Teil had raised similar questions about the conventionalisation of *bio* wines, wondering whether conventionalisation was not in fact an eventual outcome of differentiation, and explaining that “differentiation is not self-evident; one must question how its advocates go about making it known and valued by a larger audience.” (Teil et al., 2011). Similarly, Dubuisson-Quellier and François make the argument that “the ambiguity of categories largely explains their 'political' dimension, as struggles over categorisation often

revolve around defining their boundaries.” (Dubuisson-Quellier & François, 2011, p. 84). This is precisely what I seek to illustrate in the process of organisation of the natural wine movement, and this section examines the various attempts made by actors from the natural wine movement to gather under the same banner, be it through an association, a charter or a label, as well as the political questions this has raised in terms of both representation and influence.

The absence of any legal recognition of natural wine as a product and a movement has attracted considerable attention because it has left a legal void, and therefore ambiguities and doubts about how to deal with it. In Viecelli’s view, natural wine is a disputed category without legal recognition. She explains that natural wine does not exist as a legal product category at the European Union level, contrary to organic wines (which have been included in EU Regulations as part of a broader set of rules on organic products since 2007 and were then reassessed in the 2012 reform) (Viecelli, 2021, p. 67). Pariseau has also investigated the lack of legal norms involving natural wine as a product, and brings a paradox to light: on the one hand, he emphasises that wine is a transnational legal entity subject to specific rules and influenced by economic factors, while on the other he underlines the lack of a normative framework and official legal status for natural wine specifically (Pariseau, 2022). Raffray approached the subject of natural wine from a legal perspective, and he has reflected at length on the singular nature of the norms, and the absence of legal rules, surrounding natural wine (Raffray, 2024; Raffray, 2022; Raffray & Pineau, 2022).

There are various factors at stake when it comes to an official recognition of the movement. First, it needs a definition that would help protect its specific commercial interests in the wine sector and limit fraudulent use of the concept. Second, there is a growing need to provide consumers with a reasonable understanding of what the notion covers. Lastly, in an interesting blog post about the polarisation created by the natural wine movement, Tim Atkins pointed out that because there is no legal recognition, the movement’s detractors are also fighting chimeras:

“There’s no group, no charter, no rules,” [...] People who are opposed to natural wines are fighting with thin air. They’re trying to create a countermovement to a movement that doesn’t exist. Natural wines cover a rainbow of styles; they are incredibly diverse. So how do you define something that’s so nebulous?” (Atkins, Tim. 2011. “An Agnostic’s View of Natural Wines.” *TimAtkins.com*²³¹)

²³¹ Source: <https://timatkin.com/an-agnostics-view-of-natural-wines/>

7.1.2. Several attempts to structure the movement

Despite the movement's somewhat unorganised character, several winemakers have attempted to join together in collectives or meta-organisations. As Raffray has emphasised, the legal identity of natural wine has been built in several stages: it was initiated by natural winemakers themselves as a sort of “spontaneous law,” and an initial conventionalisation of the product followed through mediation by small organisations and the drafting of charters that gave a framework to production. (Raffray, 2024). In France, the first group of its kind was the *Association des Vins Natures* (AVN), a trade association that proposed an early definition supported by a production charter. The AVN later gave rise to the *Syndicat de Défense des Vins Nature*, which drafted the *Méthode Nature* production charter. Another organisation was created alongside the AVN under the acronym SAINS (*Sans Aucun Inérant Ni Sulfite Ajouté* [Without Inputs or Added Sulphites]). The SAINS production charter is similar in some respects to the AVN's, but the members of SAINS take pride in the fact that their rules are even stricter, in the sense that producers are committed throughout their entire production and on an annual basis, whereas the AVN only authorises a per cuvée labelling, which means that producers can opt in or out whenever they please. Both organisations were created soon after the 2012 European Union reform of organic production (see textbox 2) as a sign of discontent and protest. To provide a sense of scale, the two organisations only brought together a few dozen members and represented gatherings of groups of friends or like-minded winemakers rather than representatives of homogenous production. In fact, this friendship dimension is even highlighted in the SAINS charter, which states: “A winegrower in the SAINS Wine Association has a spirit of mutual aid, participation, friendship and conviviality.”²³²

²³² Source: Charte des Vins S.A.I.N.S., <https://vins-sains.org/>



Figure 45. Logos of the main natural winemaker collectives. From left to right: S.A.I.N.S, the Association des Vins Naturels (AVN) and the Syndicat de Défense des Vins Nature.

The South African movement is even less structured, and there are no associations responsible for representing natural winemakers, only informal collectives of winemakers such as the *Zoo Biscuits* crew I mentioned in Chapter 5. Other authors have attempted to review the various collectives or associations of natural winemakers internationally and have emphasised the worldwide lack of legislation on and regulation of natural wine production, and the subsequent confusion among consumers. In their efforts to identify these collectives, Parga Dans and Alonso Gonzáles cite Raw Wine in the United Kingdom, Vini Veri and VinNature in Italy and APVN in Spain (Parga Dans & Alonso González, 2020). Legeron has provided a similar list, which also includes the Burgundian association Renaissance des Appellations (Legeron, 2014, p. 253).

I should emphasise that these attempts at organising and gathering together under a banner or a charter do not seem to compromise the relevance of the rhizome as a means of describing the natural wine movement as a headless phenomenon (see Chapter 5): these are meta-organisations, no more than ad hoc or regional, and they are quantitatively small and do not involve or represent the large majority of French natural wine producers. As a result, they do not undermine the movement’s non-centric and non-hierarchical dimensions. As Robert Shaw suggested when commenting on Deleuze and Guattari’s essay *Plateaus*, rhizomatic networks “are not perfect, they are not free from topographies of power, instead there are knots of arborescence in rhizomes, and rhizomatic offshoots in roots” (Shaw, 2015, p. 9).

The few associations that do exist are self-regulated and run by private actors, and so while their existence must be acknowledged, there is still a very real need for a public, officially

recognised definition. Raffray made this same observation when he commented: “It is often said that natural wine has no legal existence. This is true in terms of the viticultural public legal framework, but it becomes more nuanced when considering associations and the work of regulation they do” (Raffray 2019, p. 6). As Chevallier has theorised, the state is not the only producer of law but is one among others: “The production of law seems to result from initiatives taken by multiple decision-makers, with an increasingly wide margin of appreciation” (Chevallier, 1998). As regards natural wine, Raffray notes that “spontaneous law” has evolved in the space of a few years into “negotiated law,” with a multiplicity of actors engaged in the process (Raffray, 2024). As the next section reveals, efforts to implement a legal framework for natural wine have begun, a process that has led to the adoption of the *Méthode Nature* charter in France and the establishment of the Alternative Categories in South Africa.

7.1.3. In France, the implementation of the Méthode Nature charter

The organisation of the natural wine movement is at a more advanced stage in France. The efforts of the Syndicat de Défense des Vins Nature (which translates as the Union for the Defence of Natural Wines) have resulted in the implementation of the twelve-point *Méthode Nature* charter, which offers a definition of natural wine. The Syndicat de Défense des Vins Nature, which was established in September 2019, carries on the efforts begun by the AVN a decade earlier to organise and structure natural wine producers under a common flag. There was a pivotal moment in March 2020 when the syndicate proposed the first steps towards legitimising natural wine through the introduction of the *Méthode Nature* charter, which raised questions about the objectives of this logel recognition and the conditions for implementing the charter.

The initiative to put an official definition of natural wine in place was first begun in 2012 by members of the AVN, who engaged in discussions with the INAO to gain official recognition for natural wine. A scientific commission was formed and an initial definition was drafted with the AVN’s support. As reported by Legeron: “The Association des Vins Naturels (AVN), a French association of natural wine growers, met up with the fraud squad and other officials in Paris to discuss the possibility of submitting a definition of their production methods for official registration so that it might be used to verify wines hitting the market as “natural”.” (Legeron,

2014, p. 33). This initial effort yielded no results, however, and the CNAOC²³³ shelved the project. The issue remained dormant for many years, with the INAO adopting a cautious stance, as expressed in a February 2016 press release, in which an INAO representative stated that: “At the moment, there is no question of legislating but rather of questioning the real need to regulate these concepts.”²³⁴ Raffray also wrote that “a report that had been prepared was seemingly buried by INAO under pressure from the representatives of the appellations of origin, indicating that differentiated production methods could also pose a threat to the unity of the appellation.” (Raffray 2019, 7). These developments reveal the obstacles to establishing a public definition for natural wine.

A few years later, a group of winemakers founded the Syndicat de Défense des Vins Nature which is now the main French association for the defence of natural wines. It gathers winemakers and supporters of the movement together, and seeks to engage in dialogue with the public authorities to advocate for greater recognition of natural wine. Jacques Carroget, its president, returned to negotiations with INAO with the newly-drafted *Méthode Nature* charter and a clear ambition to establish strict production guidelines to limit fraudulent use of the natural wine concept. The charter includes a twelve-point framework for the production of natural wine. The objective is to transform the charter into a private label and then potentially into a pan-European brand. The *Méthode Nature* charter was presented to the fraud department of the Ministry for the Economy in 2020²³⁵. It has been reviewed by the fraud department (The DGCCRF), but no decision has been made in conjunction with INAO thus far. In other words, it is not publicly recognised, as there has not yet been any official recognition from the INAO, and so it simply exists as a private label. An INAO agent who has followed the negotiations closely commented during our interview:

“For me, the problem is that they lack ambition and structuring. Today, it's still a movement trying to build itself on an associative movement, like if we were still in May 68, but it should enter a structure. Today they have no employees, they have someone playing a role but part-time, but when we see the reach of this brand today, they should have more ambition and structure much more. [...] So, it's very good, but it needs a more entrepreneurial vision.” (Interview Christian, INAO representative, 25 August 2021²³⁶)

²³³ CNAOC stands for “Confédération Nationale des producteurs de vins et eaux de vie de vin à appellations d'Origine Contrôlées” and is the representative of French AOC wine and spirit unions.

²³⁴ “Faut-il Réglementer le Concept de Vin Naturel ?” 11 February 2016. *Mon-Viti.com*.

²³⁵ The fraud department in France is known as the DGCCRF. The acronym stands for Direction Générale de la Concurrence, de la Consommation et de la Répression des Fraudes.

²³⁶ *My translation of*: “Pour moi, le problème est qu'ils manquent d'ambition et ils manquent de structuration. Aujourd'hui c'est encore un mouvement qui essaye de se bâtir sur un mouvement associatif, passez-moi l'expression mais post-68tards enfin il faudrait que ça rentre dans une structure. Aujourd'hui ils n'ont pas de salariés, ils ont quelqu'un qui joue un rôle mais sur un mi-temps, mais quand on voit aujourd'hui la portée de cette

It is still too early to determine whether the *Méthode Nature* charter will eventually become officially recognised by the INAO, and even by the European Union, as its founders first intended. Nevertheless, today, it has spread in the form of a private label, and the first bottles labelled *Méthode Nature* have been introduced into the market, with two options: a first label reading “no added sulphites” and a second reading “fewer than 30 mg/L of added sulphites” (as shown in the figure below Figure 46).



Figure 46. Logos of the *Méthode Nature* charter

Raffray reflected on the existing legislation and available tools to regulate natural wine production, and offered a clear understanding of the challenges at stake: “Natural wine, as an emerging legal entity, raises two “natural” questions for legal experts: the issue of its definition and the matter of its regulation.²³⁷ On these two fronts, it is worth noting that the concept and legal framework of natural wine will need to evolve within the framework established by its producers, the INAO and the organic sector, which are attentive to the emergence of the movement.” (Raffray 2019, p.6). Indeed, several points regarding the *Méthode Nature* label need to be clarified. For instance, other associations such as SAINS have lamented the adoption of per cuvée labelling instead of labelling for the entire production of a domain. Another official working for the INAO, who was also a member of the commission for natural wine, also admitted his scepticism about the low level of the controls planned by the syndicate. Finally, some actors have voiced their concerns about the potential international spread of this label.

marque il faudrait qu'ils aient plus d'ambition et qu'ils se structurent beaucoup plus. [...] Donc c'est très bien mais il faut une vision un peu plus entrepreneuriale.”

²³⁷ L. Dawid, “Éthique du vin et “vide juridique”: le défi des vins naturels”, in R. Raffray (ed.), *L'éthique et le vin. Le droit comme levier d'une nouvelle qualité ?* Dr. et Patr. no. 281 (2018).

Would it be recognised outside France? Could international natural winemakers also apply for this certification? Would it require a merger between the Méthode Nature charter and other efforts abroad to structure the natural wine movement (as I mentioned above, countries like Italy or Spain have already drafted their own definitions)? Several of the South African winemakers I interviewed – probably the best travelled ones – were aware of the existence of this new charter, and although most recognised the efforts it makes to structure and officially define the movement, they almost all agreed that in the event the charter became an international standard, they would not see the need to use it.

7.1.4. In South Africa, the creation of the “Alternative Categories”

There is no equivalent of the Méthode Nature charter in South Africa; in fact, the South African wine industry has generally been reluctant to develop and impose certifications, let alone environmental certifications (more on this in Chapter 8). We should also recall that in legal terms, the notion of natural wine in South Africa is used to describe wines that are non-fortified and non-sparkling.²³⁸ If one follows this line of argument, natural wine should be used to describe wine compared to sparkling wine or brandy. Today, this use of the term is obsolete in common language, but the space for a legal definition of natural wine has already been filled. However, in 2015, the WSB (Wine and Spirit Board) and SAWIS (the South African Wine Industry Information and Systems) enacted the Alternative Categories, a series of new categories that could very well match the commonly understood definition of natural wine. Because of the lack of publicly available information on the matter, I have reconstructed the story of the creation of the Alternative Categories using the stories of various winemakers I interviewed.

The inspiration for this initiative is Craig Hawkins, the winemaker behind Testalonga, and the first natural winemaker in South Africa. In 2009, Craig wanted to export his 2008 vintage to international buyers, notably some famous British importers who were willing to purchase a large part of his production. But when he submitted his wines to the South African regulation system headed by SAWIS, they passed the analysis phase but failed the tasting committee phase. Craig’s wines faced a strange and paradoxical situation: on the one hand, they were not deemed “right” for marketing by the tasting committee, while on the other, international buyers loved them and were willing to purchase them in quantity. Plus, his wines did not meet the

²³⁸ This definition was provided by SAWIS.

expected standards for the “dry white” Chenin category, but this seemed perfectly logical to him as he purposely makes skin-macerated whites. In our interview, he commented:

“What ended up happening is that they refused the export because it was “oxidised” or “too volatile” but you must remember, back then, there was no category for skin-contact whites. [...] But at the end of the day also, the market will decide. If your wines are not good, you are not going to sell them because nobody wants to be selling dodgy wines.

- *And you already knew that the guys from Les Caves de Pyrene [the British importers] were ready to take it, so there were no reasons for the SAWIS to refuse.*

- Exactly!” (Interview Craig, Testalonga, April 2022)

Craig saw this situation as a shortfall in the legislation, or rather as a void that needed to be filled, and was instrumental in creating the Alternative Categories. After several cases of his wines being rejected by tasting committees, he was left with two options: either to sue SAWIS or to engage in negotiations with the WSB and SAWIS to propose the creation of new categories into which these wines could fit. After several years of bargaining, Craig submitted a proposal for the creation of the Alternative Categories in 2011, the main criterion being that the threshold for sulphites would be set at 40 mg per litre. In addition, winemakers would also have to declare that their wine would comply ahead of the production process. The two measures were meant to prevent opportunists from submitting “their faulty wines” as part of the Alternative Categories. Craig justifies those two limitations in this way:

“Was it part of your initiative as well to put a sulphites limitation in the criteria?”

- Yes! Because what can we do to limit everybody to come in and jump into that category?

- *To limit opportunists.*

- Yes, but it wasn't about trying to hinder other people. It was more about trying to safeguard the categories because if we were going to go through the whole effort of making new categories, we might as well...

- *Make it a quality category.*

- Yes, especially for natural wine. I mean this was ten years ago. The only limit was sulphites – and no added sugar of course.” (Interview Craig, Testalonga, April 2022)

Other winemakers who strongly supported Craig’s initiatives recall the situation between SAWIS and the natural winemakers, and why acting at the sulphites level was so crucial to the creation of the Alternative Categories:

“So and he [Craig] pretty much created it so he would have something to put his wines in. Cause he was sick and tired of ...

- *Being rejected?*

- Yes, he was also the first to submit "dirty" wines to the Wine & Spirit Board, because all our wines... I mean to get your wine certified you need that little seal. And to get them certified you're going to go through a tasting panel. And ... the tasting panels, most times they couldn't handle the fact that the sulphite levels were low and also they couldn't handle it if the wine was cloudy or a little bit dirty. So it has taken a long time to educate the guys from the Wine & Spirit Board. [...]

- *There may be a lot of people who are trying to bend the rules*

- And that's why they made the limit of sulphite levels at 40. It was purely to try and stop a big winery from jumping on the concept. Because in South Africa it's a fairly new concept." (Interview Stephen, winemaker in the Western Cape, 23 March 2022)

The Alternative Categories system was finally enacted by the WSB in July 2015,²³⁹ together with the other categories necessary to fit the “new” styles of wine, such as skin-macerated whites (also known as orange wine) and Méthode Ancestrale (The South African equivalent of the Pet-Nat natural sparkling fermentation). For the submission of the final document in July 2015, Craig benefited from the support of other winemakers who rallied to his cause, such as the natural wine producers Jurgen Gouws and Johan Meyer and some of the Swartland Revolution pioneers, who were facing similar issues.

The government's decision to amend the Liquor Products Act in July 2015 to allow alternative wine styles has been identified as a significant milestone for natural wine producers. In Steyn's words: “While it allowed the vanguard to access export markets, the legislation was accompanied by stringent conditions to eliminate quality risks and ensure consistency” (J. D. Steyn, 2021, p. 162). In a recent report on South African wines by VinIntell, natural wines are still described as a category with “no certification”, as wines that can be grown organically but do not require third-party certification.²⁴⁰ The same report concludes about natural wine: “There is also the question of regulation and certification with as yet a lack of standardisation globally.” While the Alternative Categories do not explicitly entail the legal recognition of natural wine as a product, they serve as a good benchmark for identifying wines that might fit the movement. What is more, natural wine could in fact very well end up at the intersection between the charter implemented by the Swartland Independent Producers (more on the SIP, see Chapter 5), which lays down a strong basis in terms of viticultural recommendations, and the Alternative Categories, which restrict the use of sulphites in the vinification process. However, while this intersection has been identified by a handful of producers who match both the SIP and Alternative Category criteria, it remains a very small niche, and one that has yet to be identified by consumers. It seems, in fact, that consumers do not know how to decipher these

²³⁹ The Liquor Products Act, Act no. 60 of 1989, was amended by GN R628, published in the Government Gazette on 24 July 2015, which introduced skin-macerated white wines, extended barrel-aged white/gris, natural pale/non-fortified pale, Méthode Ancestrale, alternative white/red, and Sun Wine. More information on the Alternative Category is available on the SAWIS website: <https://www.wosa.co.za/The-Industry/Varieties-and-Styles/Wine-Styles/>

²⁴⁰ Marie-Luce Kühn and SAWIS. 2019. From Traditional to Biodynamic and Everything in between: A View on Alternative Wine Styles. VinIntell, issue 42, November 2019.

certifications and labels, and that very few would recognise the Alternative Categories mentioned on the bottle label.

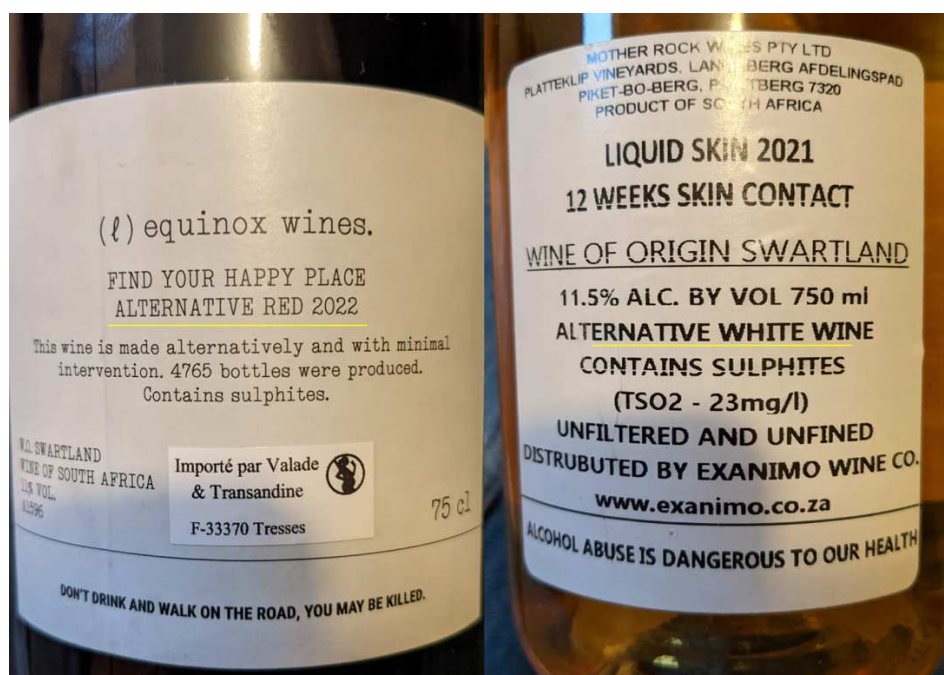


Figure 47. Examples of bottles with the mention "alternative".

A few of the South African winemakers I interviewed compared the Alternative Categories to the Méthode Nature charter, which has had greater publicity. Méthode Nature was set up to create a definition of what is and is not natural wine (and therefore, to prevent “marketing opportunists” from joining the category). In South Africa, on the other hand, the Alternative Categories were implemented to resolve a practical problem being encountered with the SAWIS tasting committees, and the fact that it entailed a sort of first-ever definition of natural wine was only a side effect. In this sense, the South African example is comparatively forward-thinking, in that it managed to both tackle the tasting committee issue and provide a framework for natural wine production in a single reform.

To sum up, as of today, there is still no internationally recognised definition of natural wine. Natural winemakers navigate among the different layers of regulations they have to obey (mainly national norms, but also EU Regulations in the French case). While many people have expressed the need for an official definition, some winemakers are happy to surf the trend of “natural wine” precisely because its definition is vague. It is also important to highlight the fact that there is a gap between the concurrent dynamics of structuring and legal recognition on the

one hand and success and impact on the other. I will conclude by emphasising that the natural wine movement does not necessarily require a legal status to exist in its essence. Instead, as I have demonstrated throughout this thesis, the ongoing dynamics aim for the establishment of natural wine beyond mere organisation and product standardisation and play a part in the process of institutionalisation. These institutionalisation dynamics involve the creation of shared beliefs and an individual commitment to specific production practices and uses, among other things. In other words, despite the fact that legal recognition for the movement is at an embryonic stage, a maturation process appears to be underway, “fermenting” the establishment of natural wine as a new market institution.

This first section has looked at the attempts made by natural winemakers to organise, structure their movement and obtain a publicly recognised framework to regulate the production of natural wine. The next sections explore the complex relationships between actors in the natural wine movement and public authorities and other institutions responsible for the governance of the wine sector, with a specific focus on the relationship between natural winemakers and institutions responsible for the denominations of origin and quality.

7.2. Debunking the appellation system: Strategies for exiting or reforming it

Here, I use Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith’s advocacy coalition framework as a theoretical framework to argue that actors from the natural wine movement are a group with shared interests that can effect policy change (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993). The advocacy coalition framework is a helpful device for improving one’s understanding of changes in the public policy field, as it provides a structured approach to recognising how policy changes when a group of actors (specialists in a particular policy field) seeks to influence a decision within a specific public policy sub-system. As Sabatier emphasises: “Its fundamental principle is that actors are grouped into one or more cause coalitions, whose members share a set of normative beliefs and perceptions of the world, and they act together to translate their beliefs into public policy.” (Sabatier, 2014). Keeping the advocacy coalition framework concept in mind, I see a duality in the role of natural wine actors, as they can be considered to be acting both externally (as members of a social movement of resistance) and internally (as wine producers, and thus professionals in the field). What is interesting, however, is how they navigate this threshold, and – depending on their interests – sometimes act as dissidents of the

system, and at other times as professional experts whose voices should be heard to enable policy change.

7.2.1. The appellation schemes and why they are perceived to be malfunctioning

In both cases – Bordeaux and the Western Cape – the conflictual relationships between natural wine producers and the institutions in charge of governance of the industry were observed. They peaked – or at least were made most visible – with the geographical indication system, which is also sometimes referred to as signs of quality. In France, this takes the form of the Appellation d’Origine Contrôlée (AOC). In South Africa, the term used is Wine of Origin (WO).

7.2.1.1. Origins and objectives of the appellation systems in France and South Africa.

➤ In Bordeaux, the AOC system as a fundamental pillar of the wine industry

The Appellation d’Origine Contrôlée (AOC) system in France originated in the early twentieth century as a way to safeguard and promote the quality and unique characteristics of wines. It has since become a critical component of the governance and marketing of French wines. Rooted in the concept of terroir, AOCs are designed to ensure the origin and authenticity of the products they represent.²⁴¹ The establishment of wine territories began in 1905, and was confirmed in 1935 with the promulgation of the AOC system (Legouy & Dallot, 2019). AOCs were born in response to a crisis of unprecedented fraud and overproduction in the early twentieth century, echoing the struggles of the “Midi Rouge,” as well as to counteract the damage caused by the phylloxera crisis that affected the whole of Europe until the 1930s. The earliest AOC designations focused especially on renowned vineyards that have been classified as “elite zones” (Roudié, 2000a), allowing regions such as Bordeaux to institutionalise the exceptional quality of their terroirs through the appellation system. Today, Bordeaux includes 65 appellations divided among five sub-regions (Médoc, Libournais, Bourgeais-Blayais, Entre-deux-Mers and Graves-Sauternais).

²⁴¹ According to the definition provided by the INAO (Institut National des Appellations d’Origine), terroir is “a specific geographical area where production takes its originality directly from the specific nature of its production area. Terroir is based on a system of interactions between physical and biological environments, and a set of human factors within a space which a human community built during its history with a collective productive knowledge” (source: INAO website: <https://www.inao.gouv.fr/eng/Official-signs-identifying-quality-and-origin/PDO-AOC>).

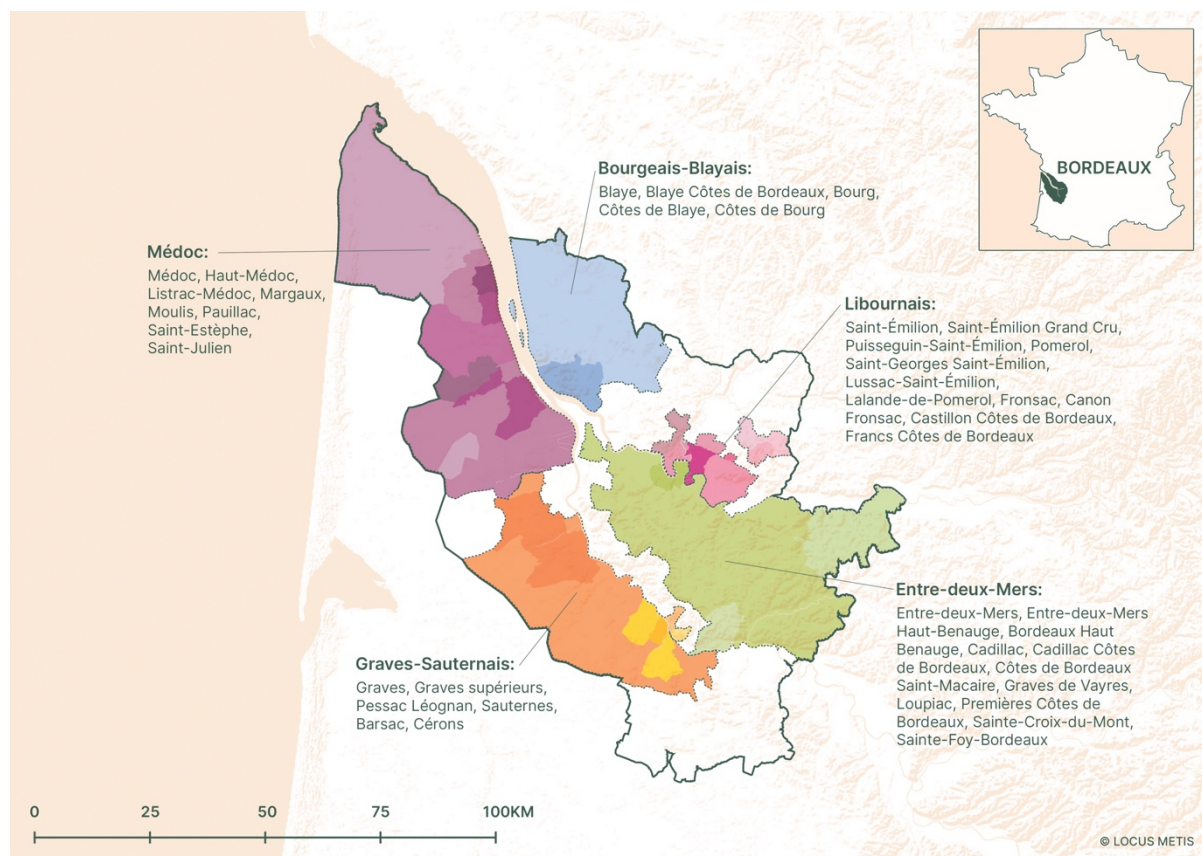


Figure 48. *Appellation d'Origines Contrôlées* in Bordeaux. Source: CIVB 2023.

AOCs operate according to a bottom-up system in which each AOC is overseen and regulated by a specific *Organisme de Défense et de Gestion* (ODG).²⁴² ODGs collaborate with local producers to establish the detailed specifications of the appellation and ensure that they are properly implemented. These specifications, which are called “*cahiers des charges*” in French, cover various aspects, including approved grape varieties, viticultural and winemaking techniques and ageing practices. What is notable is that AOC system was originally designed not to be set in stone; producers have the opportunity to propose changes and update the *cahiers des charges* by submitting proposals to the ODG, a principle that was intended to ensure the flexibility and adaptability of the appellations (Legouy & Dallot, 2019). The system is thus characterised by this bottom-up approach, with the national authority, the INAO (*Institut National des appellations d'Origine*),²⁴³ overseeing the proper functioning of AOCs and ensuring that they reflect the evolving landscape of French wine production.

²⁴² The ODG (*Organisme de Défense et de Gestion*) is a collective organisation – similar to a professional union or association – governed by the Law of 1 July 1901. It is responsible for the defence and management of a product under an official sign of identification and quality (in this case the AOC label). ODGs must be officially recognised by the INAO (National Institute of Origin and Quality).

²⁴³ The INAO (*Institut National des Appellations d'Origine et de la Qualité*) is a public administrative institution under the supervision of the Ministry of Agriculture. Its mission is to support producers involved in qualitative

Initially, the specifications proved to be highly beneficial, as they enabled a qualitative ambition for appellations to be established. This in turn drove prices up and created a virtuous circle of value that has enriched numerous winegrowers through the years. The AOCs have played a vital role, especially in regions like Bordeaux, in sustaining diverse wine production and stabilising the local economy based on the principles of terroir and quality. A producer in Graves recalled the role of AOCs in constructing a collective brand image that extends beyond individual winemakers, thus allowing them to benefit from an international reputation.

“Wine can only be valorised if one manages to build a brand, and the winemaker may not have the commercial and marketing power to establish an individual brand due to low production. Therefore, the brand has become the AOC (Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée). In other words, I am not selling Château X; I am selling AOC Margaux. [...] In cases like mine, in the Graves appellation, the appellation has more value than Château X because there are millions of customers in France who recognise Graves, and there are importers on the other side of the world who know Graves but do not know Château X. So the AOC has had the virtue of creating collective brands that have enriched winemakers.” (Interview Marc, Winemaker in Bordeaux, 17 April 2021²⁴⁴)

This collective approach has been instrumental in shaping the enduring success of Bordeaux wines on the global stage. The AOCs allow winegrowers associated with the collective brand to benefit from a symbolic added value that is correlated to the market value of their products. Over time, the AOC system evolved into an empirical framework aimed at elevating the entire French wine industry and influencing significant portions of the global wine production landscape (Feredj, 2007, p. 53).

➤ **Similar intentions in South Africa with the creation of the Wine of Origin scheme**

In a similar vein, South Africa introduced a system of appellations in 1973 that was directly inspired by the French AOC system. Because of the need to export its wines, the South African scheme, which is known as Wine of Origin (WO), has the explicit primary aim of appealing to the European market by ensuring product provenance and quality (Rouvellac et al., 2011). It includes four layers of geographical units that operate based on a Russian dolls system:

processes. It oversees signs of origin identification (particularly AOCs) and quality for products manufactured in France.

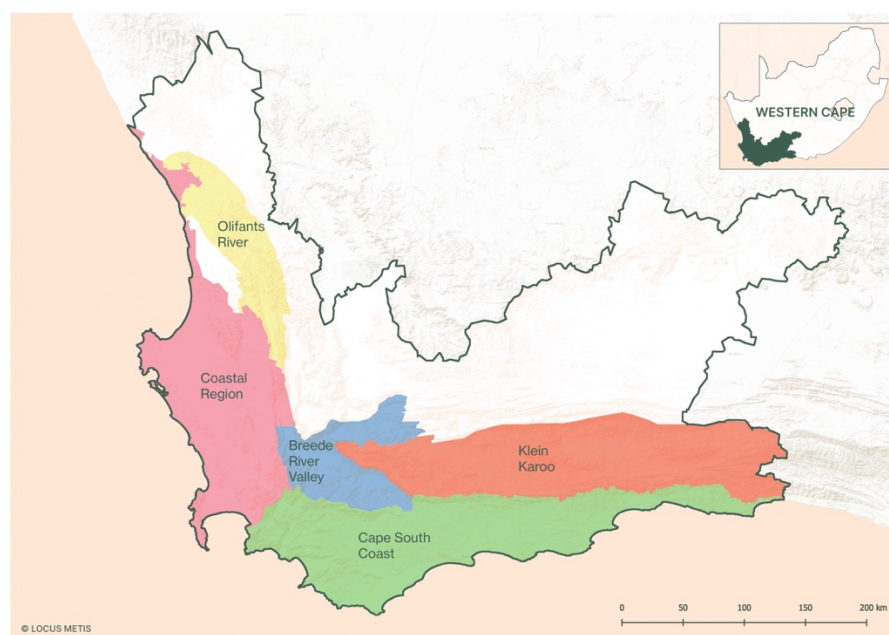
²⁴⁴ *My translation of:* “On ne peut valoriser du vin que si on arrive à bâtir une marque et le vigneron n'est pas capable de bâtir une marque car il n'a pas la puissance commerciale et marketing dû à sa faible production pour bâtir sa marque individuelle. Donc la marque est devenue l'AOC. C'est-à-dire que je ne vends pas du Château Tartempion, je vends de l'AOC Margaux. [...] Quand on est comme dans mon cas en appellation Graves, l'appellation a plus de valeurs que Château X, parce que Graves, il y a des millions de clients en France qui connaissent les Graves et il y a des importateurs à l'autre bout du monde qui connaissent Graves mais ne connaissent pas Château X. Donc l'AOC a eu cette vertu de créer des marques collectives qui ont enrichi les vignerons.”

provinces, regions, districts and wards. The Western Cape is one of these provinces and includes five regions, 20 districts and 98 wards (see Figure 49 below).

While all South African wines intended for export must be certified as a “Wine of Origin,” the appellation system is relatively undervalued by South African producers. As in other New World wine regions, the construction of a brand image goes through other channels and the grape variety often remains the primary factor in wine valuation (Heyns, Herbst, & Bruwer, 2014). As such, bearing in mind the neoliberal orientation of the South African market, we see that the WO scheme was first and foremost implemented to prevent fraud, as one winemaker emphasised:

“I also realised that this system is there to protect us rather than work against us. It is one of the most sophisticated regulating bodies in the wine sector in the world. And now it is set up in its record keeping. I think it is a good thing that it is there, otherwise there would be a shit load of frauds in South Africa. We all know that fraud is bred by third-world countries and poverty. And in situations where there are corrupt leaders, fraud is imminent. So having SAWIS there from the seventies is the best thing that could have happened to our industry. But now there is resistance, and it feels like almost “*Vive la France*” kind of demand for freedom and liberty for everything. But we can't go without them.” (Interview Rob, winemaker in the Western Cape, 4 May 2022)

Finally, with its Geographical Indication, South Africa is in the middle of this spectrum but leans closer to the New World wine system: indeed, while several layers of geographical indications are used to delineate terroir, unlike in France there are no imposed specifications in terms of authorised cultivars, viticulture practices and winemaking techniques (Ponte & Ewert, 2007, p. 27)



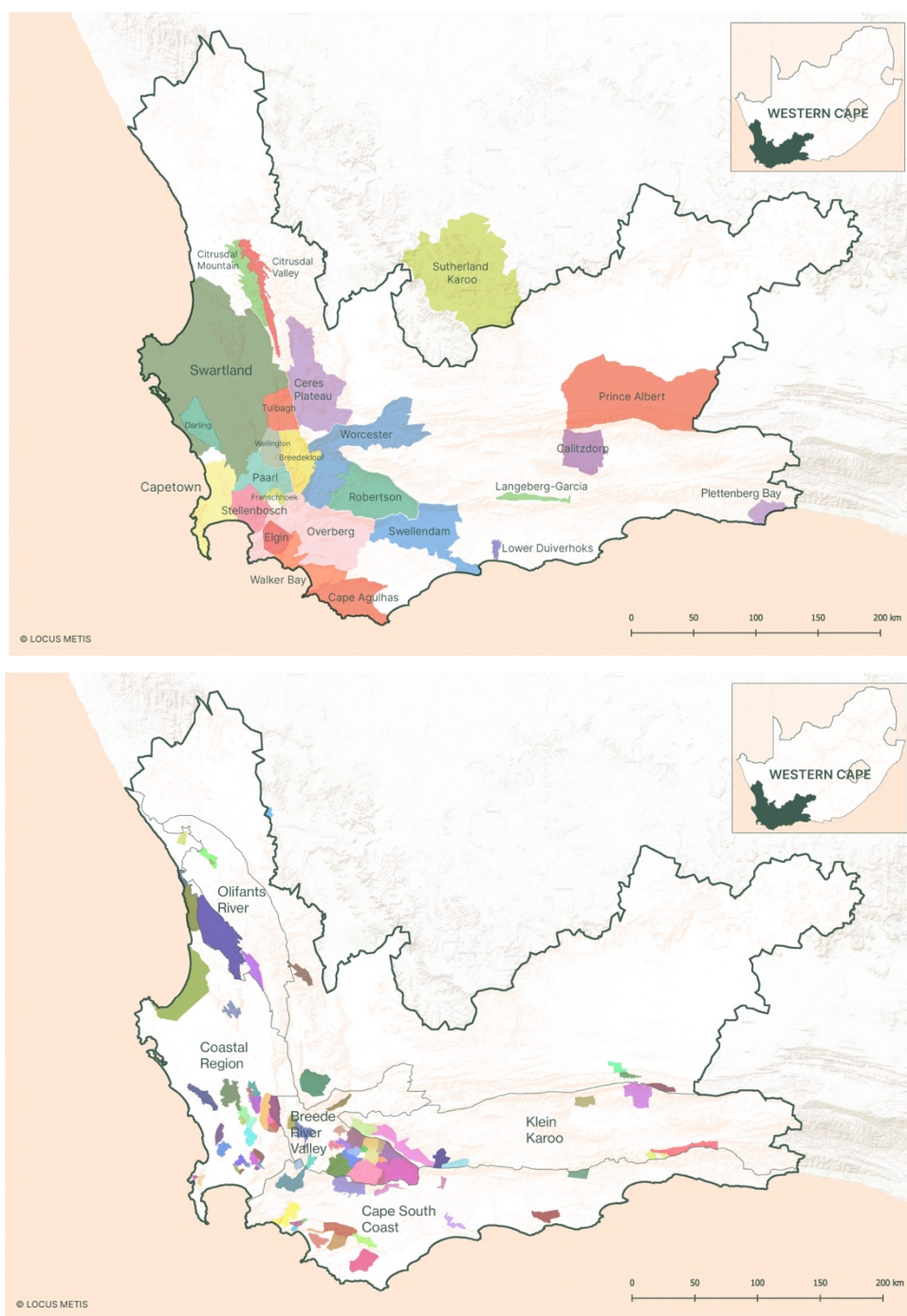


Figure 49. Regions, districts and wards. The Wine of Origin scheme in South Africa. Source: SAWIS, 2022.²⁴⁵

The table below represents an attempt to sum up the main differences between the two schemes responsible for ensuring quality of origin, the AOC in France and the WO in South Africa.

²⁴⁵ <https://www.sawis.co.za/cert/productionareas.php>

	Bordeaux	Western Cape
System in place	Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée (AOC)	Wine of Origin (WO)
Date of implementation	1935	1973
Regulatory body	INAO (National Institute of Origin and Quality) and locally by the ODG responsible for the specifications of each appellation	WSB (Wine and Spirit Board) with the help of SAWIS (South African Wine Information and Data System)
Governance system	Bottom-up (From the ODG locally to the INAO nationally)	Nationally regulated (WSB as the policymaker and SAWIS as the bookkeeper)
Structure of the wine region	Bordeaux: 5 sub-regions 65 AOCs	The Western Cape Province: 5 regions 20 districts 98 wards

Table 5. Differences between the French AOC and the South Africa WO schemes. Source: Chazal 2024

The evolving nature of the notion of “terroir”

In the classic French tradition, the components of terroir are viewed as “natural” and encompass soil composition and micro-climatic conditions, suggesting that terroir is largely unaffected by human intervention. As Ponte and others have highlighted, “In its strictest and quasi-religious interpretation, terroir means that “the land speaks for itself”” (Ponte & Ewert, 2007, p. 55). However, this definition is unsatisfactory for researchers in political ecologies, so I have turned to authors such as Bérard, Fourcarde and Demossier, who have explored the evolving concept of terroir in the wine industry. Beginning with its purported “French birthplace,” their work delves into the essence of terroir and its interplay between physical terrain and its cultural construction and significance in the wine sector.

Historically, the notion of terroir was rooted in the specificities of the region from an ampelographic²⁴⁶ and climatic perspective. However, the influence of human experience on the final product has gradually become more significant, prompting terroir thinkers to incorporate notions of agricultural expertise, local traditions and savoir-faire accumulated over centuries. In this sense, the understanding of terroir proposed by Bérard and Marchenay is better suited, as it presents it as a nuanced spatial and ecological concept that links together the actors in wine production, their histories, their social organisations and, most importantly, their agricultural practices (Bérard & Marchenay, 1995). Thus, terroir is viewed as a complex system of interactions between natural and human factors.

The evolving concept of terroir reflects a paradigm shift from a purely naturalistic understanding to one that acknowledges the significant role of human intervention, particularly

²⁴⁶ The term ampelography refers to the study of grape varieties, and encompasses their historical, botanical, genetic and lexicological aspects.

that of winemakers and their responsibility for the quality of wines. Demossier (2011) contends that this shift represents a politicisation of the concept of terroir, and has identified the politics of terroir, wherein “a wide range of actors have become involved in the social construction of the present, which in turn provides a platform for self-identification” and cultural representation.” (Demossier, 2011, p. 687). This politicisation is particularly evident in the implementation of geographical indication schemes like the AOC in France and the WO in South Africa. These schemes have contributed to shaping the reputation of specific wine-producing regions by emphasising the importance of origin and enforcing local quality standards, actively blurring the distinction between natural and human variables. This process, which also participates in a process of “patrimonialisation of wine,” was used to justify hierarchies in the wine industry based on the perceived quality of terroir (Fourcade, 2012). The notion of terroir serves as a social construction and a cultural process and has become an integrated strategy in wine value chains: terroir serves as a strategic tool for market positioning and differentiation, highlighting the importance of heritage and tradition in wine production.

This reflection on terroir and the evolving dimension of the concept also confirms the flaws of the Old World-New World categories. It has long been said that the concept of terroir was rejected by New World wine producers, and even decried by them as “snobbish monopolistic practices” of Old World producers (Fourcade, 2012). This vision turns out to be outdated, and this thesis reveals that great attention is paid to terroir and the empowerment of the notion by natural winemakers from all regions.

Textbox 19. The evolving nature of the notion of “terroir”

Despite their supposed ability to evolve, however, the appellation schemes in both France and South Africa have faced criticism because of their inability to anticipate certain changes in the wine sector. Natural winemakers in particular have expressed strong reservations about the governance of the appellation system. First, they have questioned the general outcome of the AOCs and engaged in a broader critique of taste standardisation. Second, they have denounced shortcomings in the accreditation procedures, often finding themselves excluded from an appellation because of decisions made by a tasting panel. Third, they have criticised appellations for their contradictory visions of the quality of origin and environmental quality. This section seeks to capture the ongoing debate on vitivincultural practices in AOCs. I argue that the questioning of the appellation schemes is a result of an increasing number of alternative production models (which natural winemakers represent) and new challenges that do not fit into the old classifications, thus potentially delegitimising them.

7.2.1.2. Natural winemakers questioning the appellation systems and condemning the standardisation of taste

The initial criticism of the appellation system revolves around the question of the standardisation of taste, reflecting an inherent ambivalence that is deeply embedded in the appellation system: on the one hand, an AOC aims to express the diversity of the wines produced within a specific terroir, while on the other it endorses the principle of wine typicity. These two concepts sometimes conflict, which raises the question of the ultimate purpose of an AOC: is it there to preserve the diversity or the typicity of the terroir? This paradox was explicitly expressed by this natural winemaker from a prestigious appellation on the Bordeaux Left Bank as he describes the tasting committee phase compulsory to get wine accredited within an AOC:

“The organoleptic tasting is done blindly, and it's bothersome because, you know, the purpose of AOC in its origins, for me, is to showcase the diversity of terroirs and microclimates and the influence of humans. So we are here to highlight the beauty of this diversity and to reveal as much as possible. Suddenly, in pursuit of catching up with techniques and approval systems from a few decades ago, we ended up making it so that during the approval tasting, wines had to be typical of an AOC. And that word “typical” is disastrous because it's very standardising. An AOC wasn't supposed to have a taste, and we have started getting into something dangerous where diversity doesn't exist.” (Interview Gilles, winemaker in Bordeaux, 27 April 2021²⁴⁷)

The term “typicity” gained traction in the 1990s. The typicity of a wine refers to its similarity to other wines in the same appellation, meaning that a wine should aim to represent its appellation. Typicity reflects the consensus of the profession in a given location and is much sought after in tasting evaluations (Fassier-Boulanger, 2020, p. 288). However, some natural producers have denounced it as a deviation from the founding principles of the AOCs. In their view, the AOC system was built as a defence against the homogenisation of wines and with the goal of enhancing terroirs, while this quest for “typicity” and consensus encourages wine standardisation to meet the demands of large distribution channels, which fundamentally contradicts the notion of the diversity of wine produced in a single terroir. Lionel, a natural winemaker in the Libournais, decries the commodification of the appellation caused by this standardisation:

“Standardisation is a problem in Bordeaux, but it has become the same issue everywhere. From that point on, certain products within the appellations started causing problems because they didn't have the same taste profile. However, that taste profile is the authentic expression of a berry produced naturally in healthy soil. [...]

²⁴⁷ *My translation of:* “Par contre la dégustation organoleptique est faite à l'aveugle, et c'est embêtant parce que si vous voulez, l'origine des AOC pour moi c'est pour faire voir toute la diversité des terroirs, des microclimats et de l'influence de l'humain dessus. Donc on est là pour mettre en évidence la beauté de cette diversité et donner à voir le maximum de diversité. Et tout d'un coup, à force de vouloir rattraper des techniques, des systèmes d'agréments il y a quelques décennies de ça, on en est venu à faire en sorte que lors de la dégustation d'agrément, il fallait que les vins soient typiques d'une AOC. Et ce mot typique il est catastrophique car très standardisant. Une AOC devait avoir un goût et là on a commencé à rentrer dans quelque chose de dangereux qui enlève la diversité.”

So what happened? The merchants have contributed to turning major appellations into commodities, into commoditised products. Because with very large appellations, we erase differences, we erase identities. It worked for a very long time, and it still works for some, but the problem is that this “some” is only 2%, and even for them, it's not working all that well.” (Interview Lionel, winemaker in Bordeaux, 7 April 2021²⁴⁸)

As a result, an increasing number of winemakers are claiming their right to diversity and terroir expression as long as it complies with the AOC-imposed specifications. I argue that these emerging criticisms reflect a growing segmentation of the viticultural production world, with the natural wine movement at the forefront. This same idea had already been proposed in 2016 by Olivesi, who, in his analysis of AOCs as a contested model, noted the “emergence of new branding logics with what can now be called “artist wines”” (Olivesi, 2016, p. 328). Natural winemakers might be included in this “artist wines” category as dissidents within the system. This issue of taste standardisation is directly linked to the second criticism, which targets the general objective of the appellation system but is also more specifically concerned with the process of accreditation, and calls the role of tasting panels into question.

7.2.1.3. The pitfalls of tasting panels denounced by natural winemakers

In both France and South Africa, winemakers must go through a two-phase process to have their wines accredited by an appellation. First, there is an analytical phase, during which their wines undergo a series of tests to confirm that they conform to specifications and have no organoleptic defects. This is followed by the second phase, a tasting panel in the form of a jury to which wines must be submitted. Those two phases are compulsory and a condition precedent for accreditation of a wine. However, the second step appears to pose major challenges for certain winemakers, including natural winemakers, as natural wines are often considered at best to be lacking the typicity of the appellation, if not to be actually deviant.

²⁴⁸ *My translation of:* “Enfin c'est le problème de Bordeaux la standardisation, mais c'est devenu partout la même problématique. Et à partir de ce moment-là, certains produits dans les appellations ont commencé à poser problème parce qu'ils n'avaient pas le même profil de goût, mais ce profil de goût c'est l'expression authentique d'une baie qui est produite de façon naturelle sur un sol sain. [...] Et donc si vous voulez les négociants ont participé à faire des grandes appellations des commodités, des produits commoditaires. Parce qu'avec de très grandes appellations, on efface les différences, on efface les identités. Ça a marché très longtemps et ça continue de marcher pour certains, mais le problème c'est que ce certain c'est 2% et en plus ça ne marche pas si fort que ça pour eux.”

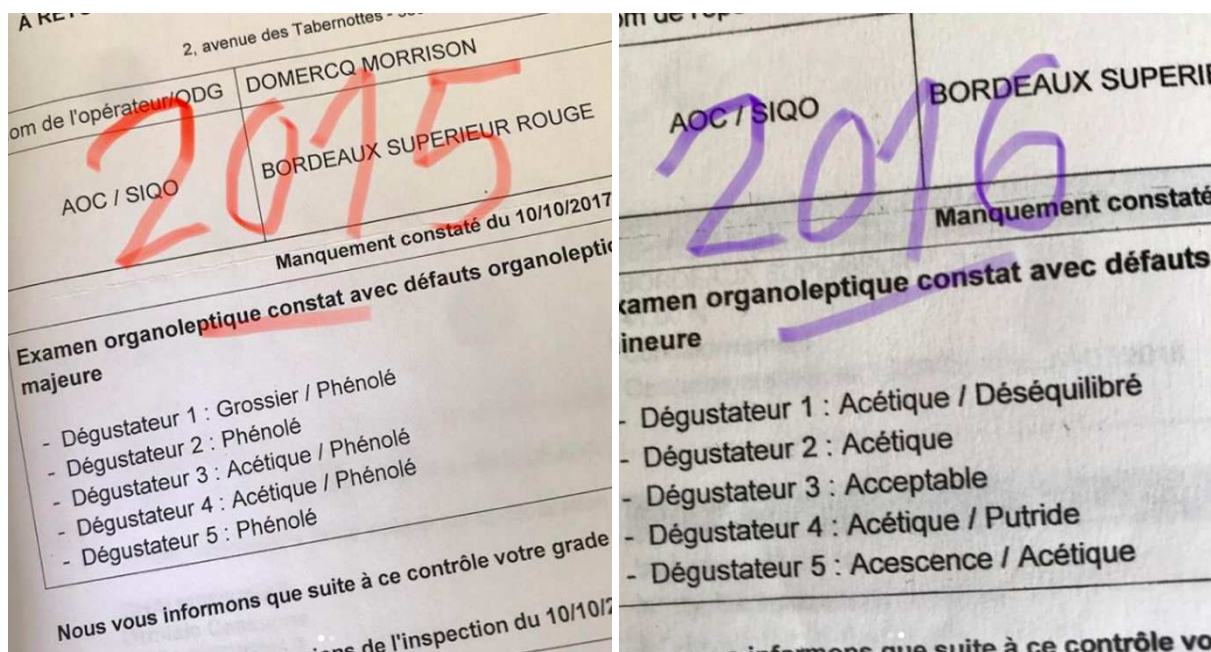


Figure 50. Comments from tasting panels received by Ormiale, 2015 and 2016.

In Bordeaux, tasting panels are made up of a jury appointed by the ODG and operate according to a point-based process: after the tasting, the wine receives a score, and a winemaker can keep or lose points. Natural winemakers have criticised the red tape involved in this process.

In Saint-Émilion, a multigenerational fight to stay in the appellation

David is a natural winemaker near Saint Émilion, with a vineyard surrounded by Grands Châteaux and prestigious domains. He is the fifth generation of winemakers working in this domain. Everything is produced using biodynamic methods, and his father is well-known nationally as a natural wine pioneer: in fact, he was one of the founders of the old Association des Vins Nature (AVN). During our interview, David told me of a conflict that began between his father and the ODG decades ago and has not been settled:

“My father fought against the union, so in 1988 I asked if we could turn the page and start afresh. My father had been downgraded in 1992. He took part in a kind of fair organised by butcher boys in 1994 or 1995. He took a barrel of his downgraded wine and created a poster that read “Taste this wine made by a sinner and rejected by the appellation.” So very provocative. My father was very, very provocative...

Then in 1999 he filed a complaint against the union because he had been downgraded again, stating that the classification principles were completely arbitrary, wacky and influenced by lobbying behind the scenes, and that the tasting process was... Well, he was against the whole set of principles, and he also thought it was a kind of mafia... I won't say what I think, but to give you an example, when you're in a Grand Cru region, you have to pay right from the harvest, knowing that our wine won't be analysed and tasted until the bottling stage, and if we're downgraded, we're not reimbursed. So, already, my father found this principle somewhat unacceptable; he said we were being shaken down left and right by the unions.

And above all, we produce very lively wines that don't please them at all. Because we're not in the Bordeaux style where wines are very tannic with vanilla aromas and woody notes. These are organoleptic styles that appeal to Americans, but I don't only sell my wine to Americans!"

Today, do you still encounter issues with the tasting committee?

Yes. Every year, because our wines don't please them."²⁴⁹

The story recounted by David illustrates the opposition – sometimes conflictual – that can arise between natural producers and the tasting committee of the Appellation. The case of David is far from being unique and was encountered multiple times during fieldwork.

Portraits and field notes 6. In Saint-Émilion, a multigenerational fight to stay in the appellation.

In Bordeaux, natural wine producers find themselves in situations in which they are unable to pass the AOC tasting panels because their wines taste different, even though in principle they meet all the AOC criteria and no major defaults are identified during the analytical phase. Deviance or difference, the result is the same: an impasse from the tasting panels. An INAO official I interviewed commented:

"Today, and even more so in Bordeaux where there is this heavy influence of traditions, the expectation is that Bordeaux wines must meet certain taste standards. And here are these products that often have warm, cheerful profiles... so it's destabilising for tasting committees." (Interview Christian, INAO representative, 25 August 2021²⁵⁰)

This echoes the wider criticism of taste standardisation linked to the Parkerisation of Bordeaux wines discussed in Chapter 5. The examples of natural winemakers whose wines are being rejected are too numerous to be listed, but those that have received the most media attention

²⁴⁹ *My translation of:* "Mon père s'est battu contre le syndicat donc moi en 2018, j'ai demandé que l'on tourne la page, qu'on recommence sur une page blanche. En 1992, mon père avait été déclassé. Il avait fait un genre de salon organisé par les garçons bouchers en 1994 ou 1995, mon père avait emmené une barrique de ce vin déclassé et il avait fait une affiche "goûtez ce vin de mécréant, rejeté à l'appellation." Donc très provoc'. Mon père était très très provoc'... Et en 1999, il a porté plainte contre le syndicat car il avait encore été déclassé sur le 1999, en disant que le principe du classement était complètement aléatoire, farfelu, soumis au lobbying derrière et que la dégustation était ... Alors c'était tout un tas de principes, déjà il trouvait que c'était la mafia... Bon je ne dirais pas ce que je pense, mais pour vous donner un exemple, quand on est en grand cru, on paye dès la récolte donc sachant que notre vin ne sera analysé et dégusté qu'au moment de la mise en bouteille et si on est déclassé on n'est pas remboursé, donc déjà ce principe-là mon père le trouvait un peu inadmissible, il disait que l'on était raquetté à droite et à gauche par les syndicats. Et surtout on a des vins vivants qui ne plaisent pas du tout. Parce qu'on n'est pas dans le cadre du style Bordeaux où on fait des vins qui sont très tanniques avec des arômes de vanille et des trucs très boisés surtout à Saint-Émilion, des concentrations de matières qui plaisent aux Américains mais moi je ne vends pas mon vin qu'aux américains. - *Aujourd'hui vous avez toujours des problèmes au niveau du comité de dégustation?* - Oui. Chaque année, parce que nos vins ne leur plaisent pas."

²⁵⁰ *My translation of:* "Aujourd'hui et encore plus sur Bordeaux où il y a cette chappe de plomb, ce poids de la tradition, Bordeaux ça doit goûter tester, etc. et voilà ces produits-là qui sont souvent des profils chaleureux, joviaux... donc ça déstabilise lors des dégustations."

include Domaine Rousset Peraguet, which has lost its Sauternes appellation (see text box Chapter 6), Château Le Puy (which I discuss below) and more recently Ormiale, a natural wine producer that announced on its social media platforms in 2021 that for lack of a better choice, he was leaving the appellation (this case is discussed in more detail below). This does not hold true just for French natural winemakers; the same criticisms and frustrations emerge from winemakers I interviewed in the Western Cape:

“So for example, when I bottle this wine, I need to send three bottles to SAWIS. The inspectors come here and then they do micro-tests, they do a tasting, lab analysis, etc. And then they have a blind panel for the tasting, in which they say "Chenin blanc should taste like peaches, apricot, a little bit of lime, ash, a fucking green pepper,” and if it doesn't taste like that in that portfolio you're out, gone. And "Pinotage should taste like coffee, banana, fucking whatever else,” etc.” (Interview Justin, winemaker in the Western Cape, 6 April 2022)

“Yes, I have been personally involved with that, there are some tribunals that you have to go sit before. And being reviewed about certain wines that might have been made in an oxidative style.” (Interview Rob, winemaker in the Western Cape, 4 May 2022)

The rejection of natural wines from appellations (AOC or WO) typically revolves around the contested criterion of a supposed “lack of typicity.” As recalled by Olivesi, “The ordeal of approval tasting crystallises these strategic oppositions. Differences in taste reflect the growing gap between the worlds of wine, which, under the influence of divergent market logics and the segmentation of the wine world, tend to become autonomous” (Olivesi, 2016, p. 336). The issue becomes even more complex because this “lack of typicity” is rooted in subjective standards, given that tasting engages the senses and is a uniquely personal experience for everyone (reinventing tasting is, in fact, a key aspect of the natural wine movement’s demands), as emphasised by winemakers such as the interviewees cited below:

“Tasting is very subjective, so if all of a sudden you have a wine that is very different, even without any actual flaw, it's much more likely to be criticised and dismissed. Firstly, because tasters are a bit disoriented when faced with different profiles. So, it's often the difference and not the defect that leads to elimination.” (Interview Gilles, winemaker in Bordeaux, 27 April 2021²⁵¹)

“The way we work, the taste is different, and that's what we're also looking for. I understand that the somewhat average taster who doesn't know natural wine, well... they can be a bit lost in the tasting.” (Interview Sébastien, winemaker in Bordeaux, 26 April 2021²⁵²)

“They [*the tasting panels*] are not rigid, but biodynamics really brings identities and characteristics to wines that go beyond standards. However, the judges are trained to find flaws. So, in essence, are we

²⁵¹ My translation of: “Une dégustation c'est très relatif, donc si tout d'un coup vous avez un vin qui est très différent, même sans qu'il soit à défaut, il va avoir beaucoup plus de chances de se faire accrocher et de passer à la trappe. D'abord parce que les dégustateurs sont un peu perdus dès qu'il y a des profils différents. Donc c'est la différence souvent et non le défaut qui vient le faire éliminer.”

²⁵² My translation of: “Nous en bossant comme on boss, ça goûte différemment et c'est ce que l'on cherche aussi. Et je comprends que le dégustateur un peu lambda qui ne connaît pas le vin nature bah ... il est un peu perdu dans la dégustation.”

judging a wine based on its flaws or its originalities, which are often considered flaws by the ODGs? There's a significant gap forming in how our wines are received within the ODGs. Personally, I continue to maintain my presence in AOC Côte-de-Bourg, but honestly, sometimes I question it. I think, frankly, my wines are not necessarily understood each year for what they are, even though they are recognised by prominent professionals. But within the ODG standard, there is a kind of reduction, and it's a shame because it disconnects wines from their environment.” (Interview Sandrine, winemaker in Bordeaux, 3 May 2021²⁵³)

This issue is even more problematic in South Africa, where obtaining a “Wine of Origin” classification is a prerequisite for having the right to export. This leaves some winemakers in a precarious situation, as their international distributors are counting on them, but the wines are stuck in South Africa because of obstacle within the tasting procedures. This problem is expressed by South African winemakers whose production is highly valued internationally:

“It got to a point where you are sending in nine bottles of wine, the analysis is fine but on tasting it is not fine. Or if the wine is slightly hazy, and so it is out. So at one point, we said “fuck it, we’re sending bottles, we have a market for those wines, we need to sell the wines. Normally it would take ten to fourteen days to get it certified, but now it takes me four months sometimes!” (Interview Justin, winemaker in the Western Cape 6 April 2022)

“I had to write letters sometimes describing the wine, and saying actually my Japanese importer wants to buy this wine. It’s ready to export. Please let it go!” (Interview Greg, winemaker in the Western Cape, 5 April 2022)

In response, some natural winemakers have proposed a reform of the tasting process, and several options have been mentioned, for example, either training tasters on these new and alternative wines or integrating natural winemakers directly into tasting committees. Others simply wish to remove tasting from the accreditation process, as evidenced by the excerpts below:

“Why aren't there any natural winemakers on these panels? Naturally, they tend to downgrade all the natural winemakers because their wine doesn't match their palate, which is normal. However, in that case, there should be a natural wine jury and an effort to find compromises.” (Interview Sarah, caviste in Bordeaux, 17 April 2021²⁵⁴)

“They have a check box, and it is either a red light or a green light and they have to tick the boxes for the wine to be exported. And I just think it’s silly the wine should be... I mean I don't mind an approval thing, but I think it should just be analytical. But that was for me the issue is that you are sitting around this

²⁵³ *My translation of:* “Ils ne sont pas frileux, mais la biodynamie amène vraiment des identités et des caractères dans les vins qui sortent des standards, or les jurés sont formés pour trouver les défauts. Donc en fait est-ce que l'on juge un vin par rapport à ses défauts ou par rapport à ses originalités qui sont considérées très souvent par les ODG comme des défauts. Donc on a là un grand fossé qui se creuse entre l'accueil de nos vins au sein des ODG, moi si vous voulez, je maintiens toujours ma présence en AOC Côte de Bourg, mais en toute sincérité parfois je me pose des questions. Je me dis mais franchement mes vins ne sont pas compris forcément chaque année pour ce qu'ils sont, alors qu'ils sont reconnus par des grands professionnels et de grands établissements. Mais dans le standard de l'ODG il y a une sorte de réduction, et c'est dommage parce que l'on se coupe du vivant par cela.”

²⁵⁴ *My translation of:* “Dans ces jurys-là, pourquoi n'y a-t-il pas de vignerons naturels? Forcément ils ont tendance à déclasser tous les vignerons naturels car ça ne correspond pas à leur palais, c'est normal, mais dans ce cas-là il faudrait mettre un jury nature, et essayer de trouver des compromis.”

table with the management committee, but it's all winemakers and I mean no one from the Swartland, but guys from Stellenbosch, Franschhoek and guys that have been in the industry for a long time. And they're deciding your faith, which I think is crazy. Look, I've got better things to do now than fighting that system, I don't honestly have the time." (Interview Ryan, winemaker in the Western Cape, 22 April 2022)

Natural winemakers do not just frame the issue in terms of “diversity” versus “typicity”; they also refer to a situation of war over “quality” and decry the multiple failures of attempts at a dialogue with the institutions in charge of this procedure (the ODG and INAO in France and the WSB in South Africa). Why has the situation changed so little despite shared views in many appellations? It is mostly because natural winemakers remain marginal in numerical terms, and so there is little incentive to carry out reforms.²⁵⁵ What remains from these struggles is primarily the administrative complexity of the procedures and the rigidity of the specifications of the appellations. In their original purpose, the Appellations aimed to guarantee quality (through origins), but they have struggled to adapt to recent market developments, and today, they face criticism for standardising taste and are ill-equipped to accommodate alternative productions such as natural wine. The institutions impose strict norms and rules on their members, and because they adhere to these rules, their members confirm their existence. For natural winemakers, playing with these rules is a means of weakening the institutions, challenging their institutional order. In an essay entitled “OPA sur la viticulture - Entre fatalité et espoir”, Roland Feredj comments about the AOCs: “The system have tended to become self-absorbed, to transform into a besieged fortress, and to lock itself into ideological immobility. Has the wine establishment opposed new techniques to preserve a sort of phantasmal “original purity”? While at the same time, it could often show a different and more dangerous form of tolerance. [...] The coexistence between a conservative system and impatient agents of change could only last for a while.” (Feredj, 2007, p. 56). His tirade sums up the tensions at stake between different worlds of wine that are today more polarised than ever.

7.2.2. The consequences of natural winemakers exiting the appellation systems

Sylvaine Fassier-Boulanger pinpointed this gradual lack of interest on the part of some winemakers in the appellations scheme in a 2020 article entitled “Does the AOC no longer inspire dreams?” and arrived at similar conclusions: “The tasting panel thus crystallises tensions, but it also conceals the emergence of different sales logics and the lack of recognition

²⁵⁵ As a reminder, despite the absence of official statistics, it is estimated that the production of natural wine accounts for 1% of worldwide production.

for original and atypical wines.” (Fassier-Boulanger, 2020, p. 288). Faced with the immutability of appellations and the numerous setbacks winemakers encounter, many natural winemakers have chosen to leave their appellation. I have identified three strategic alternatives chosen by natural producers: the first is one of “hard exit,” which means leaving the appellation system and opting for Vin de France (VdF); the second is a strategy of “soft exit,” which is only possible in South Africa thanks to the creation of the Alternative Categories; and the third and most daring is “playing the appellation system by its own rules,” which involves leaving the appellation and creating their own. These three options are investigated in more detail in the following sections.

7.2.2.1. “Hard exit”: shifting to *Vin de France*

In the face of this quagmire, some natural winemakers end up leaving their appellation, and in the French case, they are forced to turn to the less prestigious “Vin de France” label. For some winemakers, this shift is a downgrade, or even a sacrifice, and they express their regret that the appellations are incapable of finding a way to better integrate them:

“And you don’t want to make Vin de France?”

- No, because... Bordeaux is something else, but my appellation is Castillon, my appellation is my identity, including geographically. I'm not egotistical enough to say “these are Remy’s wines.”” (Interview Remy, winemaker in Bordeaux, 19 April 2021²⁵⁶)

“At that time, all the wines my father made were AOC. He didn't make anything Vin de France. When I set up, my idea was to stay on the very narrow line of natural wines in AOC, meaning to make natural wines that are straightforward and clean, and can fit within the AOC framework. We succeeded for a few years [*he laughs*]. Today, it's becoming more and more complicated. [...]

Then, we face another problem because our entry-level wines are called “Bergerac,” and we’re in the Bergerac AOC. If I switch to Vin de France tomorrow and keep this name, the fraud authorities might come after me, saying the name resembles the AOC too closely, and you're deceiving the customer. So that's where we're a bit stuck. I don't want to change the cuvée name. So, do we say “too bad” and try it as a Vin de France? Well for now, we're keeping the AOC” (Interview Sébastien, winemaker near Bordeaux, 26 April 2021²⁵⁷)

²⁵⁶ *My translation of:* “- Et vous ne voulez pas faire du vin de France?- Non parce que... Bordeaux c'est autre chose. Mais mon appellation c'est Castillon, mon appellation c'est mon identité, dont géographique, je ne suis pas suffisamment mégalomane pour dire "ce sont les vins de Remy.”

²⁵⁷ *My translation of:* “A l'époque tous les vins que faisaient mon père étaient en AOC. Il ne faisait rien en Vin de France d'ailleurs. Moi quand je me suis installé mon idée c'était de rester sur le fil très étroit des vins naturels en AOC, c'est-à-dire de faire du naturel, net et qui peut fonctionner en AOC. On a réussi pendant quelques années. [*Rire*]. Aujourd'hui ça devient de plus en plus compliqué. [...]Après là devant on est devant un autre problème où nos entrées de gammes s'appellent "Bergerac" et on est dans l'AOC Bergerac. Si je me mets demain en VdF en gardant ce nom, la répression des fraudes peut peut-être me taper dessus en disant voilà le nom fait trop penser à l'AOC, tu trompes le client. Donc c'est là qu'on est un peu embêté, je n'ai pas envie de changer le nom de la cuvée. Donc est-ce que l'on se dit tant pis on le tente en Vin de France? Bon pour le moment on garde l'AOC. ”

But for a majority, or at least the most virulent and visible segment, leaving an appellation is a first step towards more freedom, and is sometimes even a statement against the appellation system and specifications they consider to be “set in stone” and/or “obsolete”.

In Bordeaux, the decision to leave an appellation is quite surprising at first, considering that historically Vin de France, which might be compared to table wine, has been used for relatively low-quality wines. As Itçaina et al. have noted: “The term “table wine” has become a stigma in most of Europe and elsewhere. Potentially produced from grapes that could come from anywhere in the European Union and without constraining rules about yield levels in particular, by the mid-2000s many experts, merchants and even growers considered that table wines had become virtually unmarketable.” (Itçaina et al., 2016, p. 164). By leaving their appellation, producers openly distance themselves from the system and embrace, and even assert, what might be seen as a downgrade. Contrary to what the above quote about table wine suggests, however, both political and economic arguments can be made to justify the decision to leave an appellation and move toward VdF.

For some people, abandoning the appellation is a political statement. By leaving an AOC, winemakers no longer have to restrict themselves to the specifications, and therefore gain back some freedom in terms of cultivars, viticulture techniques and winemaking practices. As I described in Chapter 4, the ethos of the natural wine movement emphasises the figure of the winemaker and their personal story, and so by leaving an appellation as a collective brand, winemakers refocus attention on themselves and the uniqueness of their product.

“And honestly, there's a cool aspect to being outside the AOC as well. For example, when I created 'l'Echappée,' [the Escapee], the name truly captured the essence of the bottle because it was about escaping from what I already knew, breaking free from the appellation. In short, I think there's a playground. It doesn't mean we should turn away from the appellation; I think there are interesting things that need to evolve, but I needed this playground and freedom, which is fantastic in Vin de France.” (Interview Damien, winemaker in Bordeaux, 12 May 2021²⁵⁸)

[*Talking about the AOC system*] “From a biodiversity protection, it has become an insular community. That's why there are so many Vin de France wines in the natural wine movement. In fact, we can very

²⁵⁸ *My translation of:* “Et sincèrement il y a un côté chouette aussi [*à être hors AOC*]. Par exemple quand j'ai créé “l'Echappée”, le nom portait vraiment la bouteille, parce que c'était s'échapper de ce que je connaissais déjà, échapper à l'appellation, bref, je pense qu'il y a un terrain de jeu. Ce n'est pas pour autant qu'il faut se détourner de l'appellation, je pense qu'il y a des choses intéressantes qui doivent évoluer, mais j'avais besoin de ce terrain de jeu et de liberté, qui est génial dans les Vin de France”

well talk about terroir even in Vin de France.” (Interview Léon, wine bar owner in Bordeaux 27 April 2021²⁵⁹)

Some winemakers also highlight the inconsistency between the bad reviews they received from the tasting panels and the success they meet in the (international) wine market. Indeed, numerous natural winemakers find themselves in a somewhat absurd situation. On the one hand, their wines are sought after in some of the most renowned restaurants and wine shops worldwide, while on the other, they encounter significant challenges when it comes to obtaining accreditation to benefit from the appellation they produce in. The public statement issued by Ormiale on leaving the appellation in 2021 after too many discrediting remarks is highly evocative of this phenomenon:

“Souvenirs from few years ago. “Grossier. Putride. Acétique. Phénolé. Acescence. Déséquilibré.” Please read carefully 1>2 Here are the tasting notes we received from the Bordeaux appellation on our Ormiale 2015 and Ormiale 2016 wines. These blind tastings are organised by the appellation in order to decide if your wines are good enough to represent the production area, in our case Bordeaux. Now I guess it is clear to all why from 2017 all our wines are “Vin de France”, including Ormiale. It is sad, but we had really had enough of reading insulting comments about our work from anonymous tasting “experts”, most of them conventional winemakers. Even if we are deeply convinced that we are as close as we can be to a true expression of Bordeaux wines, they don’t want us. No problem. Better be free, above all. The funniest part, on other hand, is that I get e-mails and phone calls from the same entities to ask me to take part in fancy dinners with celebrities to promote Bordeaux wines in Paris, with hotel, transport and expenses all paid...No thanks! Ha ha!” (Extract from Ormiale Instagram page, 10 September 2021²⁶⁰)

Similar testimonies were collected in South Africa, although some winemakers also admitted that against all the odds, they actually benefited from rejection by tasting panels as it created a buzz in the wine world and gave them “free publicity.” In a strange turn of events, the story of this South African winemaker not receiving the necessary accreditation benefited him:

“You know when you’re young it is almost cool: your wines are rejected. And honestly, they made my market! They created my brand for me.

- *Because there was a buzz around the story?*
- Yes, it was huge! I had international support like Jamie Good and the wine magazines writing articles on it, so I was just like “Thanks guys, you’re selling my wines for me.” But then eventually it gets tiring because every year it’s the same thing.” (Interview Ryan, winemaker in Western cape, April 2022)

Apart from the few protesters who have left their appellations to make a political statement, for the majority of winemakers, turning to VdF was an economically strategic decision. Indeed, in some cases it is not especially absurd to leave, as some AOCs do not enjoy a high reputation and thus sometimes the appellations drag the prices of the wines they represent down,

²⁵⁹ *My translation of:* “D’une protection de biodiversité, c’est devenu un entre-soi. C’est pour ça qu’il y a autant de Vin de France dans les vins naturels. Parce qu’en fait on peut très bien te parler de terroir même en Vin de France.”

²⁶⁰ Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CToiS3ytxQq/>

especially wines from AOCs such as Bordeaux or Bordeaux Supérieur, which include most of the struggling vineyards of the region. This is particularly true in Bordeaux, where the two-speed system is still in place, and some small Bordeaux producers are encouraged to leave the AOC scheme to survive the crisis, as observed in this newspaper article:

““Viticulture is moving at two different speeds, and the gap is widening. The locomotives are no longer pulling the regional appellations,” says Magali Vérité, vice-president of the Chamber of Agriculture. One solution among others is to move away from less lucrative AOCs and turn to “VSIG”: wines without a geographical indication. Freed from the regulatory constraints imposed on AOC wines, they can be sold under the Vin de France label. This does not necessarily make more expensive but with more freedom” (Lherm, Denis. 2022. “Viticulture : Les “petits Bordeaux” Incités à Sortir des AOC Pour survivre à la Crise?” *Sud Ouest*²⁶¹).

What seemed unthinkable a few decades ago is therefore now a market reality: some producers can sell their wine for a higher price as a Vin de France than if they remained in their appellation, as this young producer in Blaye confirmed:

“Here, we have left the AOC on some of our cuvées. Firstly, it's difficult to sell Blaye in Paris; it's not marketable. And in general, nobody wants Bordeaux, so switching to Vin de France was already a solution.” (Interview Marius, winemaker in Bordeaux, 11 May 2021²⁶²)

I propose two hypotheses here: first, natural winemakers can give their wines added value through other channels, such as environmental certifications (for example, Agriculture Biologique, Demeter, Biodyvin and Méthode Nature); and second, it seems that the creation of collectives such as the “Bordeaux Pirates” (see Chapter 5) is a way to add value to wines that have been excluded from the AOC. Indeed, the Bordeaux Pirates call for originality in cuvées, and their statement in a press release almost reads like an alternative to the Bordeaux AOC specifications:

“What is a Pirate cuvée? “Bordeaux Pirate” is an informal term that refers to wines produced outside the strict regulations of the Bordeaux appellation. These wines come from estates that are located in the Bordeaux region but have chosen to break free from the traditional rules and conventional practices of local viticulture.” (Instagram post, Bordeaux Pirates, 8 November 2023²⁶³)

²⁶¹ *My translation of:* “Il y a une viticulture à deux vitesses et l'écart se creuse de plus en plus. Les locomotives ne tirent plus les appellations régionales », estime Magali Vérité, vice-présidente de la Chambre d'agriculture. Une solution parmi d'autres: sortir d'une AOC peu porteuse et se tourner vers les « VSIG »: les vins sans indication géographique. Dégagés des contraintes réglementaires qui pèsent sur les vins sous AOC, ils peuvent se vendre sous le label Vin de France. C'est-à-dire pas nécessairement plus cher, mais avec plus de liberté.”

²⁶² *My translation of:* “Ici on a quitté l'AOC sur certaines de nos cuvées. Premièrement, c'est difficile de vendre du Blaye à Paris, ce n'est pas vendeur. Et d'une manière générale, personne ne veut du Bordeaux, donc passer en Vin de France c'était déjà une solution.”

²⁶³ *My translation of:* “Qu'est-ce qu'une cuvée Pirate? “Bordeaux Pirate” est un terme informel qui désigne des vins produits en dehors des réglementations strictes de l'appellation Bordeaux. Ces vins sont le fruit de domaines situés dans le Bordelais mais qui ont choisi de s'affranchir des règles traditionnelles et des pratiques conventionnelles de la viticulture locale.”

Finally, as other authors have argued (Fassier-Boulanger, 2020; Feredj, 2007; Olivesi, 2016; Teil et al., 2011), the appellation is now a contested model whose pitfalls and failures to integrate alternative wines reveal a system that is struggling to renew itself to accommodate the expectations and constraints of the contemporary market. The “hard exit” of many natural winemakers from appellations and their move to VdF thus has both political and economic motives. It is a strategic decision, especially in territories where the appellation has failed to reflect the quality and thus increase the price of its producers’ wines.

7.2.2.2. In South Africa, the Alternative Categories as a “soft exit”

The second strategy – a softer exit – only applies in South Africa. It should be noted that the appellation system in South Africa has a very different meaning, and does not have the historical legacy of the French system. This means that not belonging to an appellation is above all a constraint on exporting, and producers are relatively less attached to the notion than they are in Bordeaux. A “soft exit” was made possible by the creation of Alternative Categories. Indeed, as I explained above, the primary objective of the Alternative Categories was to provide a practical solution for winemakers facing repeated obstructions from tasting committees during accreditation. Despite the fact that governance of the wine industry is dominated by relatively neoliberal thinking, South African institutions are known to be some of the most sophisticated and highly regulated, especially SAWIS, which is responsible for collecting data and processing the accreditation of wine as WO. Many winemakers therefore realise that the system is there to protect them rather than work against them, but before the creation of the Alternative Categories in 2016, the specifications simply failed to integrate alternative production methods. The work of Craig Hawkins and his peers in 2016 provided a new framework for all these winemakers, and they are very aware of the opportunity:

“So Craig was instrumental in creating that category and he pretty much created it so he would have something to put his wines in. Because he was sick and tired of ...

- *Getting rejected?*

- Well, you have to get rejected three times before showing up with the wines and explaining to the panels why they are the way they are. And then they’d get accepted. So it wasn’t the fact that they didn’t like the wines. But the terms of acceptance were wrong. You only have two boxes to tick, “clear” or “cloudy”, and if you tick “cloudy” then you’re in the wrong.” (Interview Lennie, wine distributor in the Western Cape, 12 January 2022)

The implementation of the Alternative Categories marked a shift in mentality, and according to natural winemakers it enabled the reduction of a large amount of red tape:

“Yes, and the only reason I managed to get my Costa del Swart Chenin Blanc certified – because I bottled it unfiltered [...] so it’s a little bit cloudy – and if you put it in a natural wine category instead of a

commercial wine category, then they kind of go “Oh, OK, heads up first, it’s not a mistake, it’s meant to be done like this”.” (Interview Kevin, winemaker in the Western Cape, 11 March 2022)

This is why the South African winemakers’ case is more akin to a soft exit than the French option, as they do not entirely leave the WO scheme but rather create an alternative path. They have therefore managed with one measure to both tackle the issue of the tasting committee and integrate new wine productions, taking into consideration the evolution of the wine market, and ultimately – as a side effect – to provide a sort of definition for natural wine.

7.2.2.3. The daring strategy: winemakers creating their own appellation

The third and final strategy used by producers who leave the appellation system is probably the most audacious, as it involves producers who have left their appellation and are willing to create their own. For obvious reasons of time and resources, this last option has only been adopted by a few individuals, but it has been observed in both Bordeaux and the Western Cape. For these actors, leaving their appellation did not involve an economic downgrade because they target international niche markets, and therefore “the AOC did not bring them any additional visibility and recognition” (Olivesi, 2016). Rather tired of being rejected by tasting committees or having to restrict their production to comply with specifications they find to be outdated, they intended to play the institutions by their own rules by leaving the appellation and proposing the creation of a new one that suited them better. In the process, they emphasise the value of the ampelographic characteristics of the terroir, as well as their particular viticultural and winemaking techniques. They then submitted this set of specifications to the relevant institution (the INAO in Bordeaux and the WSB in the Western Cape) in the hope that they would have no other choice than to accept it. Two examples are presented in some detail below: Le Puy in Bordeaux and Johan Meyer, who set up the Picket-Bo-Berg appellation in the Western Cape.

➤ **Château Le Puy, leaving the Francs-Côtes de Bordeaux AOC**

Over the centuries, Château Le Puy has earned a reputation as one of the world’s finest wines. In 1610, the Amoreau family acquired Château Le Puy, and today, the 15th generation of winemakers is working there. Château Le Puy is located on the same plateau as Saint-Émilion and Pomerol but is in the Francs-Côtes de Bordeaux AOC. For over four hundred years, it has maintained its commitment to cultivating grapes in biodynamic vineyards and has established

itself as a pioneer of natural wine by abstaining from the use of chemical inputs such as sulphites.

“Drops of God” and how it affected Château Le Puy

Interestingly, Chateau Le Puy already had a well-established and prestigious reputation, but it was further enhanced by an unexpected turn of events. A Japanese manga called “Drops of God” played a significant role in consecrating its reputation. A television version was made that attracted millions of viewers and prominently featured a bottle of the 2003 vintage of Château Le Puy Cuvée Émilien in a blind tasting scene. Soon after, the Cuvée was declared to be the best wine in the world. The frenzy generated by the TV show transformed it into a much sought-after financial asset for Japanese investors. In response to the extraordinary demand, Chateau Le Puy’s winemaker decided to withdraw all the 2003 vintage from the market, and the remaining bottles are safely stored in his cellar, as he confirmed during our interview. The decision to withdraw the vintage from the market was motivated by a desire to “prevent speculation and ensure that this wine, which has been chosen as a mythical vintage, remains accessible to everyone.” This episode and other successes of the domain are related in a book published by the winemaker himself in 2019 entitled “Plus Pur que de l’Eau” (Amoreau, 2019). The book offers us a comprehensive understanding of the philosophy and ethos that underlie the production of Le Puy’s wines.

Portraits and field notes 7. “Drops of God” and how it affected Château Le Puy.



Figure 51. Extract from the manga “Drops of God” showing the 2003 Emilien from Château Le Puy.

With such attention being paid to it, it is easy to understand that Château Le Puy’s exit from the Francs-Côtes de Bordeaux AOC was emblematic. The distinctive characteristics of Le Puy’s production prompted the domain to leave its appellation in 2017. Like many natural wine

producers, the owners realised that they had diverged significantly from the stringent criteria established by the INAO, which they believed were no longer truly aligned with their winemaking objectives. Since they left the appellation, the label no longer bears the “Château” designation, and Château Le Puy has become simply “Le Puy.” But the story does not end here, and the Amoreau family is now determined to create their own appellation. As they explained in our interview:

“After 2005, that's when Jean-Pierre started thinking because there were many comments, not just the type of “your wine is dirty,” but more like “your wine is too different,” implying different from the rest of the appellation. At some point, Jean-Pierre said, “Let's turn the tide.” If they say we're so different, let's analyse our difference, let's analyse the soils, bacteria, etc. in detail, and think “since we're so different, we deserve a different appellation,” and therefore total freedom of action. Because when you obtain your appellation, there are specifications that are unique to it, so the idea was also to be able to say we do it as we want. This doesn't mean doing the minimum; on the contrary, it means constantly questioning ourselves. And today, the fight for our appellation is also about that: recognition of fifteen generations of hard work, perseverance, marginalisation, etc. The history is that in 2009, I believe, there was a European regulation that said any farmer with a product in an appellation area who had a unique typicity reflected by the expression of a unique product that was different from the appellation could claim their own appellation.” (Interview Pascal, Le Puy, 7 April 2021²⁶⁴)

To date, the creation of a new appellation has not been confirmed by the INAO, but the Amoreau family, who are also well connected to decision-makers nationally, are still embroiled in negotiations over this issue. However, they also emphasised that since they switched to Vin de France, the domain has been able to experiment with new techniques that they believe are more suited to the local terroir and climate change, such as planting new grape varieties that are resistant to warmer temperatures.

➤ **“Picket-Bo-berg”, a new ward in Swartland**

Let us now move back to South Africa, where some individual producers have also worked towards setting up their own appellations. Unlike the Amoreau family, Johan Meyer does not come from a winemaking background and built his reputation as an ambassador of natural wine in South Africa relatively recently. His production is somewhat on the “new age” side of the

²⁶⁴ *My translation of:* “Après 2005, c'est là où Jean-Pierre a commencé à réfléchir, car il y avait beaucoup de commentaires et pas seulement du style « votre vin est sale » mais plutôt « votre vin est trop différent » sous-entendu du reste de l'appellation. Et à un moment donné Jean-Pierre, après 2005, s'est dit « on va inverser la vapeur », c'est-à-dire s'ils nous disent que l'on est si différent on va analyser notre différence, on va analyser tout en détail les sols, les bactéries etc. Et se dire « puisqu'on est si différent on mérite donc une appellation différente » et donc une liberté totale d'action. Puisque quand vous obtenez votre appellation il y a un cahier des charges qui est différent par appellation. Donc l'idée c'était aussi de pouvoir se dire on fait comme en veut. Ce qui ne veut pas dire on fait le minimum mais au contraire ça veut dire que sans cesse on se réinterroge. Et aujourd'hui pour notre combat d'appellation c'était aussi ça: la reconnaissance de tout le travail de quinze générations, d'acharnement et de marginalisation etc. L'historique c'est que en 2009 je crois, il y a eu un règlement européen qui disait que tout agriculteur a un produit dans une zone d'appellation a une typicité unique qui se reflète par l'expression d'un produit unique différent de l'appellation peut revendiquer sa propre appellation.”

movement, and his funky labels appeal to young urban consumers worldwide. After several years of buying grapes from parcels scattered across the Western Cape, Johan decided to purchase a piece of land in Northern Swartland to establish his own farm, Platteklip Vineyards. It did not take long for him to realise the unique characteristics of the land: a different climate, an elevated plateau, and so a higher altitude, cooler temperatures, a breeze from the Atlantic Ocean, etc. According to the winemaker himself, the terroir is more similar to Elgin than to the rest of the Swartland:

“It’s so different, and you probably saw it when you drove up here. It’s all apples and pears. The landscape is so different.” (Interview Johan Meyer, JH Meyer, April 2022)

Realising the potential of the place, Johan Meyer began the procedure to create a different appellation.

“It just makes sense because I planted Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Noir and imagine drinking a Pinot Noir Wine of Origin Swartland! It just doesn't make sense: who is this idiot? So that is kind of one of the reasons. So we’ve got our own appellation now. I applied to SAWIS and we did four years of weather reports and intense studies, so it’s called Picket-Bo-berg now. I mean it’s in Swartland [*the district*] but it will be Picket-Bow-Berg [*the ward*].

- Has this been approved by SAWIS?

- Well, yes. It’s a ward in the Swartland. I can use it on my label saying Wine of Origin.” (Interview Johan Meyer, JH Meyer, April 2022)

In June 2022, the Picket-Bo-Berg ward was officially established as part of South Africa’s WO scheme. Essentially, this meant that Picket-Bo-Berg’s soil, climate and geography were different enough from the neighbouring production areas, and wines from the ward were expected to consistently reflect that uniqueness. This was a significant triumph for Johan Meyer, who started the brand and revitalised vineyard cultivation in the area. The land in question was almost entirely planted with fruit trees until a few years ago, but since Johan Meyer invested in the area, other winemakers who were eager to become landowners have also bought land in Picket-Bo-Berg and planted vines in the surrounding fields.

However, the creation of new appellations does not please everyone, and official representatives find themselves in disarray as the appellation scheme is “twisted to accommodate individual needs.” In a conversation about the recent establishment of the Picket-Bo-Berg ward (this conversation took place before the ward was approved by the WSB), one official representative admitted:

“I mean yes, Johan is busy proclaiming that he needs a ward. In my opinion, I don't think they should allow a ward in a region where there’s only one producer. You cannot proclaim a ward for anyone who would like to put something different on their label. You need to have at least - I mean if I were the Wine

and Spirit Board, I would say that you need at least five producers in the area before you even look at the application.

- *But he claims that there are different terroirs in the Swartland.*

- But at the end of the day what you want is to sell wine. And OK, some people want to be different than the rest. But our main purpose is to propose Swartland Wine of Origin. [...] There's enough competition out there. Why would you want to create some more?

The Wine and Spirit Board demarcation is getting too much if you ask me. It's getting too complicated.”
(Interview Sue, Wine Route representative, 6 April 2022)

With this third, more audacious, option, winemakers are playing the appellations by their own rules to reveal the pitfalls and shortcomings of their system and to attempt to shed light on these dysfunctions. Especially in the case of Le Puy, since the appellation does not have a high reputation, the departure of Le Puy can be seen as a major loss. The appellation has lost one of its best domains, one that was contributing to elevating its status. The problem can become a thorny one when a winemaker's exit results in a loss of fame, not for the producer who is leaving but also for the appellation itself. One might hypothesise that there would be a drop in the average selling price of wines from the appellation, which in the long run would have an impact on the small to medium-sized producers that remain in it.

To sum up, thanks to their shared interests and common beliefs, natural wine producers constitute an advocacy coalition framework in the face of the failures and inadequacies of appellation systems. As appellation schemes fail to integrate new alternative productions like natural wines, I have observed many situations in which natural winemakers find themselves constrained to leave their appellation despite claiming to comply with all the required specifications. The words of Olivesi on this matter are revealing, when he explains that: “The misunderstanding would turn into a farce if it were not followed by incomprehension and, above all, resentment on the part of winemakers who believe they are embodying the path to excellence, embodying the defence of their terroir, and worse, meeting the expectations of an increasingly numerous group of consumers concerned with consuming natural products with a strong typicity, without chemical additives, and in harmony with the environment” (Olivesi, 2016, p. 336). Natural winemakers facing this adversity have chosen either to leave or to reform the system. Three strategies have been identified in Bordeaux and the Western Cape: the hard exit, the soft exit and the daring re-entry. In the case of all three, the same criticisms are expressed by actors in the natural wine movement. First, there is taste standardisation, which ultimately points towards a prevailing trend for a downward levelling of the appellation scheme, where the primary commercial outlet for production is the mass retail market. As other authors have noted, this emphasis on large-scale distribution often leads to a focus on cost

efficiency, and therefore a dilution of quality. Second, the criticisms all highlight a certain conservatism in the appellations, which are portrayed as becoming obsolete because they are trapped by bureaucratic constraints and red tape. Above all, several winemakers expressed a feeling of being dispossessed by their own profession, and leaving the appellation was also seen as an attempt to reappropriate their freedom to make wine that in both technical and gustative terms is far away from objectives of “typicity”, and thus from interventionist oenology. And finally, beyond these technical arguments, what is also at play here is a marketing and commercial battle led by actors who anticipate new narratives to capture tomorrow’s consumers.

7.3. Dialogues with institutions and opportunities for policy learning and adaptation

So far, the focus has been on natural winemakers engaging in conflictual dynamics with the rest of the industry’s players and the institutions responsible for governing the wine sector. As explained above, this chapter offers an opportunity to examine the tipping point at which winemakers shift from a posture of marginalisation and conflict to one where they actively participate in policy learning. In other words, they seek to engage in a dialogue with institutions to influence change and policy adaptation. This next section focuses specifically on the process of policy learning and adaptation.

If we draw from Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith’s concept, we see that policy-oriented learning unfolds within advocacy coalitions. In our case, the natural wine movement operates as an advocacy coalition: that is, it is a collective of actors that share common beliefs and interests and are able to collaborate to drive policy learning and adaptation.²⁶⁵ The effectiveness of policy learning in advocacy coalitions becomes apparent during interactions with decision-makers, in this case particularly the public authorities responsible for governing the wine sector. As Thierry Delpuech has noted, policy learning takes place in policy transfer studies when policymakers refine their cognitive understanding of policy development and adjust policies based on new knowledge (Delpuech, 2009). As these advocacy coalitions engage with

²⁶⁵ There is an extensive body of literature on policy transfers (Cairney, 2011; De Oliveira & Pal, 2018; Delpuech, 2009; Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996; Stone, 2001) that allows us to better understand who the key actors engaged in the mechanics of transfer are, what the processes of decision-making dynamics within political systems entail and what role agencies play in transfer processes.

decision-makers, their capacity to influence policies in line with shared beliefs and interests emerges as a pivotal element in the policy development process.

In this analysis, I leverage the concept of “soft transfer” as articulated by Diane Stone (Stone, 2004). In her view, soft transfer mechanisms such as the dissemination of norms and knowledge are a necessary complement to the hard transfer of policy tools, structures and practices (Stone, 2004, 546). The traditional understanding of “policy transfer” focuses on the state, and suggests that ideas, behaviours, perceptions and discourses can be transported and adapted from previous experiences. However, we also know that the process of policy transfer involves a diverse array of actors, including both state and non-state entities. This also contributes to the intuitions of Chevallier that an increasing amount of non-state actors contributes to establishing norms and laws. These actors have varying levels of resources, and their capacity to influence the transfer process is not uniform. Stone’s notion of “soft transfer” directs our attention to non-state actors in advocacy coalitions and suggests that despite limited resources they can excel at the “soft transfer” of broad policy ideas, influencing public opinion and policy agendas. Soft transfers therefore involve consolidating “symbols, language, and “cognitive frames” that portray “morally compelling” issues in a concrete manner to which the public can respond.” (Stone, 2004, p. 556). The next section investigates how actors in these coalitions tend to maintain their concepts and solutions, and use their expertise to influence the perceptions, beliefs and frameworks of policymakers, and consequently set new issues in the political agenda.

I argue that natural winemakers take the role of soft transfer entrepreneurs in the realm of policy. They go beyond merely disseminating information, and engage in the critical tasks of persuasion directed at political-administrative decision-makers (Delpeuch, 2009, p. 158). Furthermore, as soft transfer entrepreneurs, these winemakers take on the challenge of educating policy communities, which are typically stable networks of policy actors who are highly integrated into the decision-making process of policy, and resistant to substantial change. They operate in the early stages of the policy process – particularly in agenda setting, policy formulation and legitimation – and play a key role in shaping the policy landscape and influencing the trajectory of policies in their domain, even in a context of resistance. The ongoing challenges facing the appellation scheme in Bordeaux offer a relevant case study for demonstrating how this works.

7.3.1. Contradictory visions between the appellation system and natural winemakers' environmental practices

In line with previous assessments, the IPCC's latest report, which was published on March 2023, revealed an anticipated temperature rise of 1.5 degrees by 2030 and, of between 2 and 5 degrees by the close of the 21st century, depending on various scenarios. The swift progression of climate change and its effects on vineyards need no further demonstration (Ollat & Touzard, 2020; Ollat, Touzard, & van Leeuwen, 2016). It is also an acknowledged fact that viticulture as a monoculture and particularly in its industrial form, contributes to the acceleration of climate change. Indeed, the longstanding intensive viticultural production model that for many years had been promoted as being synonymous with progress is now openly seen as a danger to the environment, and the very existence of appellations is being threatened by climate change. Natural winemakers are highly conscious of the environmental threats and have engaged in (sometimes radical) transitions in their professional practices in both the vineyards and the cellar to adapt their production to the current challenges. As emphasised in Chapter 4, they are at the forefront of environmentally sensitive viticultural production. By positioning themselves as such, they can also apply a set of variables in which they have previously invested in order to carry out their marketing strategy.

One of the main issues raised by natural winemakers is the inability of appellations to adapt to these new environmental challenges. In order to better understand the issue at stake, let us now look at the technicalities of the two sets of norms: the regulations of the appellation scheme responsible for ensuring origin quality on the one hand, and the regulations ensuring environmental quality on the other. As I described above, the valorisation of quality linked to origin (the AOC system) was established at the beginning of the 20th century, and is the central matrix of the French wine sector, whereas environmental certifications are more recent. Environmental quality is closely linked to the organic standard (Agriculture Biologique).²⁶⁶ In addition to organic certification, there is also a proliferation of public and private environmental initiatives ranging from Méthode Nature or biodynamics certifications to the HVE (High Environmental Value) labels and RSE standards (ISO 140001) (see Chapter 8 for more details on environmental certifications and labels). Environmental certifications are all optional (voluntary) and depend on individual initiatives. With regard to the quality of origin,

²⁶⁶ Organic farming has been officially recognised by the authorities since the Agricultural Orientation Law of 1980, and is regulated by the European Union. The specific rules regarding organic wine were laid down in Regulation no. 203/2012 of 8 March 2012, as explained in text box Chapter 1.

as I explained above, the appellation system operates based on a bottom-up framework that was designed to empower wine producers when it came to taking decisions about their practices. A vote by a majority of the ODG board is necessary to modify the specifications of AOCs. However, the system has become obsolete and is now criticised as being “too rigid” by winemakers, who are endeavouring to enhance their practices amid environmental and ecological challenges.

The distinction between origin and environmental quality standards is being challenged by proponents of the natural wine movement. They condemn a conflicting, and at times irreconcilable, perspective between AOC and environmental practices. This prompts the question of what latitude is currently afforded to winemakers for the evolution or reform of this system. The immutability of the institutions, particularly those responsible overseeing quality, has previously been scrutinised by Teil, who pointed out as early as 2011 in her analysis of organic wines that “For the INAO (and this was already widely debated during the institutionalisation of organic farming), taste quality and environmental quality are two distinct qualities that should not be mixed. And it is the AOC quality that continues to dominate.” Later, she added: “These organic wines, advocating for a reinterpretation of the good quality of wines, find common cause here with terroir wines that call for a revision of the accreditation procedure and a rewriting of appellation decrees that take into account the need to adapt viticultural techniques to ensure the sustainability of AOC terroirs” (Teil et al., 2011).

What is new is that the growing determination of winemakers in the natural wine movement to distance themselves from appellation standards that are perceived to be either over-restrictive or too lenient is not just tied to rejection by accreditation committees: it also involves much deeper issues of “greening” viticultural production. In some interviews, certain criteria of the AOC’s specifications were pointed out as being ill-suited, particularly in the light of evolving environmental practices and the predominant challenges posed by the impact of climate change on vineyards. The examples of ill-suited specifications are numerous: from the winemaker who was expelled from the Sauternes appellation because he was using biodynamic methods and refused to chemically treat his vines to the producer in Blayes who risked exclusion from her appellation because of vine density (See portrait below).

Pioneer biodynamic winemaker threatened with exclusion from her appellation because of a five-centimetre difference in vine density.

Sandrine is the winemaker at a multi-generational estate in Bordeaux. All her production follows biodynamic principles. In 2019, her 1.5-hectare vineyard plot was excluded from the appellation because it did not comply with its specifications. The reasoning behind this decision stems from the density of the planting between the vines. During our interview Sandrine explained:

“You see, we did some replanting (sometimes we uproot to clean and then replant), and I always planted with high density, meaning 80 centimetres between each vine, which is what I had historically done. However, I didn't pay attention to the AOC specifications, which stipulate that it should be 85 centimetres.”²⁶⁷

This five-centimetre difference caused Sandrine to lose the appellation for this historic plot. She appealed to the INAO and the ODG to contest a decision she believed to be absurd because in her view, higher density means higher grape quality. In the face of the ODG's silence on her appeal, she had no choice but to turn to the press and local officials to raise awareness of her situation:

“So I reached out to the press, or rather to a local political appointee, through an association called Solidarité Paysan, which defends the farming sector – I am not at all involved in politics – so they crafted a nice letter that I signed, explaining the situation and asking for help from this politician.”²⁶⁸

Shortly thereafter, the ODG ruled in her favour and agreed to modify the specifications so that her plot could remain within the appellation. This example is particularly revealing of the administrative rigidity of the appellations and situations that could operate against “greener” viticultural practices.

Portraits and field notes 8. Pioneer biodynamic winemaker threatened with exclusion from her appellation because of a five-centimetre difference in vine density.

The call to redefine the qualitative distinction of AOC wines has been echoed by various authors in the field, each of whom has emphasised the need for a fundamental reconsideration of the current system. Teil criticised the industrial turn of AOC production, accusing AOCs of “abandoning quality while still claiming terroir” (Teil et al., 2011). In her opinion, a change is

²⁶⁷ *My translation of:* “Voyez, on a fait des replantations (parfois on fait des arrachages, pour faire un nettoyage et donc replantation) et j'avais toujours planté avec une densité importante, c'est-à-dire avec 80 cm entre chaque cep, c'est ce que j'avais fait historiquement. Or je n'ai pas fait attention au cahier des charges de l'AOC qui stipulait que c'était 85 cm.”

²⁶⁸ *My translation of:* “Ca ne bougeait pas, j'ai donc fait appel à la presse, enfin à une déléguée locale politique, par l'intermédiaire d'une association qui est solidarité paysan qui défend le monde paysan - parce que moi je ne suis pas du tout dans la politique - donc ils ont fait une jolie lettre que j'ai signé, en expliquant la situation et en demandant de l'aide à cette politique pour qu'ils comprennent ma position de recherche de qualité.”

needed to bring the commercial organisation of AOC back to its founding principles and advocating for an independent notion of quality irrespective of market demand. More recently, and along the same lines, Raffray stressed the necessity to include a sustainability perspective in AOCs. In 2023, he contended that “in the face of the sustainability challenge, the segmentation of quality labels – environmental quality (agriculture biologique), superior quality (label rouge), product quality signs, and origin-related quality (AOP and IGP), which represent terroir quality signs – appears outdated” (Raffray 2023). He stressed the need to address contemporary environmental challenges, and called for the design of a more consistent framework in that respect. I join these authors in wanting to question the efficacy and adaptability of the current AOC system and advocating for a re-evaluation and potential fusion of quality standards so they can be better aligned with evolving perspectives on wine production, sustainability and ecological challenges. This is also increasingly expressed by natural winemakers in Bordeaux, who are at the forefront in terms of environmental practices and condemn the detracting of terroirs due to AOC legislation that has allowed the use of intensive and industrial viticultural techniques that do not respect the terroir. They advocate a rethinking and reform of the AOC system. Renowned winemakers near Saint-Émilion who exemplify this movement are actively championing the need for a profound reform of AOC practices.

“To come back to this specific point, there is a huge problem at the level of the governance of our activity. The appellation system legitimises the use of these phytosanitary chemicals. And do you know how they legitimise it? It's all very insidious.

There was a project here in Côtes de Franc, which was to say, we're only sixty winemakers, why don't we become the first Bordeaux appellation to be 100% organic? We said at that time, “OK if we do that, we're ready to help. Come to the estate, and we'll explain what to do and what not to do.” Well, more than half of the people said no, they didn't want to. Some just don't want to hear about it.” (Interview Jean-Yves, winemaker in Bordeaux, 7 April 2021²⁶⁹)

This calls for a more in-depth analysis to understand the role of natural winemakers as potential soft transfer entrepreneurs – that is, as active agents in the learning process – and their capacity to instigate change, thereby influencing the adaptation or reform of the appellation system.

²⁶⁹ *My translation of:* “Parce que pour revenir à ce point précis qui est qu’il y a un énorme problème au niveau de la gouvernance de notre activité. Le système des appellations légitime l’usage de ces produits chimiques phytosanitaires. Et vous savez comment ils le légitiment ? C’est très insidieux tout ça ! [...] Il y a eu ici un projet dans les côtes de Franc, qui était de dire, on est que soixante vignerons, pourquoi on ne deviendrait pas la première appellation bordelaise 100% bio ? Nous on a dit à ce moment-là banco, si on fait ça, on est prêt à aider, vous venez sur le domaine et on vous explique ce qu’il faut faire et pas faire. Bah il y a eu plus de la moitié des gens qui ont dit non, qui n’ont pas voulu. Mais il y en a qui n’ont pas envie d’entendre parler de ça.”

7.3.2. Discussion groups and learning opportunities to adapt the appellation system

In the face of a desire to stay in the appellation on the one hand and commit to a greener production path (organic, biodynamic or natural production) on the other, a number of winemakers have decided to become active agents in the decision-making process and have joined an ODG board, as this winemaker in Haut-Médoc explained:

“However, we are fighting, we are on the tasting committee. My partner is part of the Haut-Médoc tasting committee to try to defend our vision from within. It's the position we've had from the beginning. We might get tired of it because it's true that as time goes on it's becoming more and more difficult to obtain the appellations. There is a real battle going on, so we might exhaust ourselves, but for now we still want to continue with this.” (Interview Anne, winemaker in Bordeaux, 26 May 2021²⁷⁰)

Some winemakers have become involved in ODG committees so that they will have a say in the decision-making process, while others have gone further by setting up focus groups to overcome these contradictory intentions. The example of Michel, one of the few natural winemakers in the Medoc, is a good example of policy discussions initiated by an individual.

Natural winemaker initiates focus group in his appellation to discuss possible developments

I remember interviewing Michel, a natural and biodynamic winemaker in Haut-Médoc, and instantly noticing the gentleness and sincerity of his discourse. Michel was one of the first winemakers I encountered who has openly engaged with the public authorities in a political sense. In his own words, he seeks to “improve the system from within and dedicates the little time he has to try to make things move.” In 2019, he established a focus group with the Haut-Médoc ODG to create opportunities for exchange and learning, with the hope to adapt the appellation’s specifications. He explains:

“I have chosen – and I believe that paradoxically the region is quite open for discussions, compared to what one might hear sometimes – not to cause friction but to try to move things from within. Thus, in both AOCs [Haut-Médoc and Margaux] we are truly in the process of creating discussion and proposal groups to ensure that these wines, which are a bit on the margins, are not rejected for their uniqueness.”²⁷¹

²⁷⁰ *My translation of:* “Par contre on bataille: on est en comité de dégustation. Ma partenaire fait partie du comité de dégustation Haut Médoc pour essayer de défendre notre vision de l'intérieur. C'est le positionnement que l'on a depuis le début, on s'en lassera peut-être parce que c'est vrai que plus le temps passe et plus on a de difficultés à obtenir les appellations, il y a vraiment une bataille qui est en train de se jouer donc on va peut-être s'épuiser mais pour le moment on a encore envie de continuer là-dedans”

²⁷¹ *My translation of:* “Moi j'ai choisi - et je crois que la région est paradoxalement, par rapport à ce que l'on peut entendre parfois, assez ouverte - et donc j'ai choisi de ne pas me mettre en friction mais d'essayer de bouger les choses de l'intérieur donc dans les deux AOC on est vraiment en train de créer des groupes de réflexions et de propositions pour essayer de faire en sorte que ces vins qui sont un petit peu à la marge, ne soient pas recalés pour leur différence en fait.”

These pluri-annual focus groups are an opportunity not only to share some best practices and “greener” procedures, but also to reflect on the pitfalls of the appellation specifications and on how to adapt them to the new environmental challenges. Michel is very careful not to criticise his fellow winegrowers or farmers who do not work with biodynamic methods as he does, and does not hesitate to highlight the economic difficulties of the sector to justify the lack of conversion to more agroecological practices or organic farming. He is convinced that discussions and learning can lead to policy adaptation, and believes in the capacity of the appellations to evolve according to contemporary needs:

“For example, the Haut-Médoc syndicate has been well led in recent years, with an openness and questioning about all of this. But these are machines that are slow to evolve.”²⁷² He adds: “But the original foundation of the AOC appeals to me, when I see how it was created, and yes, today they need to reinvent themselves a bit and be able to show that there are not only industrial wines in the AOC, otherwise they will die. They will die if they are not able to follow this evolution. Despite everything, I remain attached to our AOC if they can show that they are youthful.”²⁷³

Portraits and field notes 9. Natural winemaker initiates focus group in his appellation to discuss possible developments.

There are very few examples (in the Bordeaux region at least) of formal discussions between natural winemakers and representatives of governing institutions. Most of the winemakers I interviewed talked about being caught up in the tiring and time-consuming activities their job imposes on them (being a daily presence on the farm and in the cellar and taking care of the marketing and distribution of their wines etc.), which leaves them little or no time to engage in more extensive conversations with policymakers. It should also be noted that in the few instances when these conversations take place, they are restricted to a micro-scale – in this case the local appellation – which also says something about cognitive transfer being limited to the local level. One might wonder whether this is because the winemakers only feel that they are entitled to act and influence policies at the scale of local institutions (the ODG in this case), or if it is simply because ODGs are the most accessible bodies. In any event, some winemakers reported that they do not feel equipped to tackle issues at a national level, and most of them define themselves as “too depoliticised” to have a voice in these debates. However, as a result of keeping the focus local, a very interesting policy adaptation has emerged in a few appellations in recent years: the introduction of mandatory environmental certification for all

²⁷² *My translation of:* “Par exemple là, le syndicat des Haut-Médoc depuis quelques années est très bien dirigé, il y a une ouverture et un questionnement sur tout ça. Mais ce sont des machines qui sont lentes à faire évoluer.”

²⁷³ *My translation of:* “Mais le fondement original des AOC me plaît, quand je vois comment ça a été créé et aujourd'hui il faut qu'elles se réinventent un peu et être capables de montrer qu'il n'y a pas que des vins industriels dans les AOC, sinon elles meurent. Elles mourront si elles ne sont pas capables de suivre cette évolution. malgré tout moi je reste attaché à nos AOC si elles peuvent être capables de montrer qu'elles sont jeunes. ”

producers in the appellation. This single, yet trailblazing, reform may open the door to the greener viticultural production natural winemakers have been advocating for.

7.3.3. Experiments: Introducing environmental certification into appellations

A few years ago, a highly important discussion emerged out of a desire expressed by certain appellations to introduce environmental measures into their specifications. This request was initiated and well supported by groups of producers, and particularly by winemakers who were already engaged in organic, biodynamic farming practices, or even natural winemaking. This is easily understandable, as these producers have a keen interest in seeing the appellation evolve so that they will be able to showcase their products for both their environmental qualities and their appellation. In the course of my research, I encountered two examples of ODGs that had incorporated mandatory environmental certification as a condition of being part of their appellation. The cases are still too few, but at least they open the way to a new vision of quality that can reconcile environment and origins. I investigate this new development through two case studies: the Saint-Émilion ODG, which was the first in France to adopt this reform, thus setting a precedent in the wine sector, and the Pauillac-based ODG, which is responsible for three appellations, Médoc, Haut-Médoc and Médoc-Listrac, and is attempting to institute a similar reform. Before looking into these two cases, it is worth noting that the French EGalim Law of 2018 also proposed making environmental certification compulsory for all official signs of quality and origin (including appellations) by 2030. However, the decree to establish the conditions for this reform is yet to be published, and several informants in the field expressed doubts about whether the law would be enforced by 2030.²⁷⁴

➤ The prestigious Saint-Émilion sets a precedent as the first appellation to adopt mandatory environmental certification

The first ODG in the Bordeaux region to implement a reform mandating that all producers in its appellation must demonstrate environmental certification was Saint-Émilion. It is one of the world's most prestigious appellations, and is possibly the most well-renowned. Its vineyards are an ecotourist destination, attracting over a million of visitors a year to explore the area's scenic beauty. The introduction of an environmental certification requirement in Saint-

²⁷⁴ Certification environnementale obligatoire pour ces 4 vins AOC: <https://www.vitisphere.com/actualite-94797-certification-environnementale-obligatoire-pour-ces-4-vins-aoc.html>

Émilion's vineyard is of particular significance, especially in the light of its recent inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage list.²⁷⁵

By a decree dated 27 July 2023,²⁷⁶ the Saint-Émilion ODG approved the introduction of a mandatory environmental certification for all its producers. Discussions on the matter had been begun as early as 2017 and were the subject of an extraordinary general assembly that brought together all the producers of the Appellation. It was adopted by a majority, and 65% of producers already had certification or were in the process of obtaining it. The reform therefore mainly impacted the remaining 35%, who had until the adoption of the Decree to convert their production to one of the recognised environmental certifications. After several years of negotiations with the INAO to validate the legal and technical arrangements for incorporating environmental specifications into an appellation specification, the INAO had finally approved the measure a few months earlier.²⁷⁷ The process was explained by Franck, the president of the Saint-Émilion ODG:

“From there, we already had a technical committee dealing with environmental issues, so we really wanted to set up an environmental and biodiversity committee. We launched a sort of assessment of practices in the vineyard, the expectations and questions of our winemakers. So in 2017, our winemakers adopted the reform for mandatory environmental certification in the specifications to produce in our appellations by 1 January 2023.

- *By 1 January 2023, will all vineyards have to have environmental certification?*

- Yes, because on 1 January 2023, the new specifications – or sometime in January because we'll see with the INAO circuits, which are sometimes a bit obscure – but at that time, our specifications will come into effect. In order to produce wines from our appellations, every winemaker must have environmental certification. So this quickly generated some side effects because it posed an existential problem for the INAO: that is, we were relying on external elements... Well, the specifications that are supposed to be the bible of the appellation partly relied on an external element.” (Interview Franck, ODG Saint-Emilion, 8 September 2021²⁷⁸)

²⁷⁵ We should recall that the terroir of Saint-Emilion was registered by UNESCO in 1999 as the first vineyard landscape on the World Heritage List.

²⁷⁶ Cahiers des charges homologués par arrêtés du 27 juillet 2023, et publiés au boma du 24 août 2023. Source: <https://fgvb.fr/cahiers-des-charges-des-aoc-saint-emilion-saint-emilion-grand-cru-et-puisseguin-saint-emilion>

²⁷⁷ “Label HVE, Bio, SME... Obligatoire Pour Les Vins de Saint-Emilion et Puisseguin.” 2023. *Mon-Viti.com*.

²⁷⁸ *My translation of*: “De là, on avait une commission technique qui traitait déjà des sujets environnementaux et donc on souhaitait vraiment mettre en place une commission environnement et biodiversité et on a lancé une sorte d'état des lieux des pratiques dans le vignoble, des attentes, des interrogations de nos viticulteurs. Et donc nos viticulteurs en 2017 ont adopté l'obligation d'une certification environnementale dans les cahiers des charges pour produire dans nos appellations à l'horizon du 1er janvier 2023. - *D'ici le 1er janvier 2023, toutes les exploitations devront avoir une certification environnementale?* - Oui, puisque le 1er janvier 2023, le nouveau cahier des charges - courant janvier parce qu'on verra avec les circuits INAOesque qui sont parfois un peu obscures - mais à ce moment-là nos cahiers des charges rentreront en vigueur et tout viticulteurs, pour produire des vins de nos appellations, devra détenir une certification environnementale. Et donc là ça a vite généré quelques effets de bord parce que ça pose un problème existentiel à l'INAO c'est-à-dire que on faisait reposer sur des éléments externes, des éléments... Enfin le cahier des charges qui est censé être la bible de l'appellation faisait reposer partie de lui-même sur un élément externe.”

Frank gave January 2023 as the date for implementation of the Decree during our interview, but in fact it was only passed six months later, in July. It can be assumed that red tape delayed implementation, and the complexity of bargaining with the INAO was in fact highlighted by Franck himself in the above extract. Implementation of the decree also implies support from the ODG to assist the appellation's 960 producers with complying with one of the environmental certifications recognised by the ODG. As Frank emphasised, the technical meetings and training are a fundamental part of the process to avoid leaving some producers lagging behind:

“But once we made this decision, that's not all, we need to accompany the change. So our goal was to say we're not going to leave the winemakers by the side of the road. So, I think that's unprecedented too, but I asked for it to be organised by certification (because there's not just one, there's not just HVE, there's also Terra Vitis, AB, Demeter, etc.). Oh yes! So, the idea beyond these certifications – all this work is under way to bring all the lost sheep back on to the right path.

- *And what about the recalcitrants?*

- Yes, so now we're going to enter the tough phase because, obviously, the first ones are always the easiest, the hardest part is those who remain.

- *And do they run the risk of losing their appellation?*

- Well, they won't have the right to do it [*claim the appellation*]. So I think it will fall into place quickly.” (Interview Franck, ODG Saint-Émilion, 8 September 2021²⁷⁹)

With the implementation of this measure, Saint-Émilion set a ground-breaking precedent, becoming the first appellation in France to institute a mandatory environmental certification. As I mentioned above, it is a unique case. Given the appellation's prestige and renown, it is conceivable that it sought to distance itself from the numerous criticisms associated with Bordeaux Bashing (see Chapter 5). Environmental concerns were not only recognised but also addressed relatively early by the team overseeing the ODG. This is precisely what Frank, the president of the ODG, revealed in a press article:

“First and foremost, I would say that we are going back to traditional methods, but with today's technology. It's very important to understand this.” [...] In Saint-Émilion, there is a tradition of innovation and research. We didn't wait for ecology to be “in fashion”. (Saint-Émilion, *Le Vin et l'Environnement*. L'Interview Vérité avec Franck Binard.” 2020. *My Saint-Émilion*).

From my perspective, adoption of this measure signifies the assimilation of knowledge, narratives and ethos from the natural wine movement into a public institution, the ODG. As

²⁷⁹ *My translation of:* “Mais un fois que l'on a pris cette décision, ce n'est pas tout, il faut accompagner le changement. Donc notre volonté c'était de dire: on ne va pas laisser les viticulteurs sur le bord de la route. Donc je pense que ça aussi c'est inédit, mais j'ai demandé à ce que l'on s'organise par certification (parce qu'il n'y en a pas qu'une, il n'y a pas que HVE, il y a aussi Terra Vitis, les Bios, Demeter etc.). Ah oui! Donc l'idée au-delà de ces certifications - tout ce boulot est en cours pour ramener toutes les brebis égarées sur le droit chemin. - *Et les récalcitrants?* - Oui alors là on va rentrer dans la phase dure parce que, évidemment, les premiers c'est toujours les plus facile, le plus dur c'est ceux qui restent. - *Et ceux-là prennent le risque de perdre leur appellation?* - Ah bah ils n'auront plus le droit de le faire [*revendiquer l'appellation*]. Donc je pense que ça va assez vite rentrer dans l'ordre.”

such it exemplifies the learning process that actors from the natural wine movement can be a part of or what might be referred to as a re-foundation of the institution through its narratives. The interview with Franck, the president of the Saint-Émilion ODG, provides insight into the process and technicalities of adopting this reform, as well as the compelling reasons that propelled such a transformative shift.

➤ **An initiative soon to be followed by other appellations: the efforts in that direction by ODGs in the Médoc**

It is anticipated that numerous appellations will follow in the footsteps of Saint-Émilion. In Pauillac, for instance, discussions on the implementation of mandatory environmental certification have been going on for several years, as Hélène, the head of the Pauillac ODG, which oversees the Médoc, Haut-Médoc and Médoc-Listrac appellations, explained:

“Yes, we started in 2016. But, between the evolution of the texts and validation at a general assembly, validation by the Board of Directors, etc. And indeed, for us at the ODG, and it's very fresh because we had a general assembly yesterday to modify our specifications. It's a process that we initiated in 2016; we had the viticulturists vote for a first amendment in March 2018, which required a commitment to environmental certification. The problem we encountered was that the commitment was not enough, and even for ODG communications, we were not necessarily comfortable because we could not prove that we were truly committed since there was no paper to justify it. So yesterday we confirmed it, and the viticulturists validated the obligation to have environmental certification or add “Agriculture Biologique”.” (Interview Hélène, ODG Haut Médoc, 6 July 2021²⁸⁰)

The decree has not yet been approved, but some other environmental measures have been adopted. The ODG president listed them:

“So two modifications to the specifications?”

- No, there are 17!

We added variations of interest regarding climate change, we modified the density on the row, we added the obligation of soil analysis, we maintained the prohibition of irrigation, we added, like Bordeaux, the obligation to remove dead vines, we added the calculation of the IFT for awareness, we asked to modify the ageing durations, packaging dates and consumer availability dates, etc.” (Interview Hélène, ODG Haut Médoc, 6 July 2021²⁸¹)

²⁸⁰ *My translation of:* “Oui on a commencé en 2016. Et donc entre l'évolution des textes et la validation en AG, la validation au Conseil d'Administration etc. Et effectivement nous à l'ODG, et c'est tout frais puisque l'on avait l'assemblée générale hier, pour modifier nos cahiers des charges. C'est une démarche que l'on avait initiée en 2016, on avait fait voter une première modification aux viticulteurs en mars 2018, qui obligeait un engagement de certification environnementale. Et le souci que l'on a rencontré c'est que l'engagement ne suffit pas et même pour la communication de l'ODG on n'était pas forcément à l'aise car on ne pouvait pas prouver que l'on était vraiment engagé, parce qu'il n'y avait aucun papier pour le justifier. Et donc hier on a confirmé et les viticulteurs ont validé l'obligation de certification environnementale ou agriculture bio.”

²⁸¹ *My translation of:* - *Donc deux modifications pour le cahier des charges?* - Non il y en a 17! On a rajouté des variétés d'intérêts au changement climatique. On a modifié la densité sur le rang. On a rajouté l'obligation d'analyse du sol. On a maintenu l'interdiction de l'irrigation. On a rajouté comme Bordeaux l'obligation de retirer les pieds morts. On a rajouté le calcul de l'IFT pour une prise de conscience. On a demandé de modifier les durées d'élevages, dates de conditionnement et dates de mises à disposition des consommateurs. Etc.”

The adoption of these measures has been welcomed by most stakeholders, especially actors from the natural wine movement, who have always been at the forefront of this approach. We should recall that unlike Saint-Émilion, Pauillac is at the heart of the “poverty corridor” that is a feature of Bordeaux’s vineyards (see Figure 38 in Chapter 6). These changes could, it is hoped, lead to job creation and a situation in which eco-social uplift and environmental care can mutually reinforce each other. Behind the formal pronouncements, however, some stakeholders remain unconvinced that the reforms were driven solely by environmental concerns. There is also a clear economic incentive associated with environmental certification, as the per bottle price can increase with strategic marketing on environmental certification, especially in the higher-end appellations that already enjoy a prestigious reputation (such as Saint-Émilion, and to a lesser extent those in the Médoc). In the end, despite the efforts of several ODG representatives as seen above, most natural winemakers have a sense that there is a relative stagnation.

➤ **Towards AODs, “Appellations d’Origine Durable”?**

In a recent article, Raffray proposed a (now fictitious) scenario in which the quality of origin and environmental quality would be merged under a single sign, which he calls the “Appellation d’Origine Durable” (Raffray, 2023). According to Raffray, there is an urgent need to harmonise typicity and sustainability. As demonstrated above from the examples of the ODG in Saint-Émilion and the three ODGs in Médoc, this work is already under way, and some progress has been made to encourage a greener production path. However, what Raffray proposes is a systematic harmonisation that would reconcile the visions of origin quality signs and environmental quality signs by merging the regulations governing them under a single, unified label. As he emphasises, “This is a pivotal period for wine law, which must best accompany the industry in its environmental revolution without disrupting the balances patiently constructed by wine legislation.” (Raffray 2023, 2). Having demonstrated that the contradictory injunctions between the appellation schemes and the environmental certifications are the crux of the problem, I too believe that this scenario is the only way of moving forward, especially considering the exponential threats of climate change that will impact vineyards in the very near future.

These reflections pave the way for a study of other examples of soft transfer and agenda-setting opportunities. For instance, on 8 December 2023, the European Union announced a decision

to require the display of all ingredients on bottle labels.²⁸² It is noteworthy that over 150 products can be added to conventional wines (and over 50 in organic wines). This call for transparency has been championed by actors in the natural wine movement, who advocate for minimal intervention in the cellar and for a production method in which nothing is added to the wine (except for small amounts of sulphites at times). According to Eric Morain, the lawyer who supports the natural wine movement, “This battle, in the absence of a lobby for natural wines in the European Union, is led by the anti-obesity lobby to obtain the sugar content.”²⁸³ This demand had previously been buried because of the power of the lobbies in the conventional wine world.

More broadly, investigations into policy transfers are particularly interesting and complex case studies in French situations because of the density of the administrative layers that govern the wine sector. The French wine industry operates according to an opaque system that Feredj has classified as “an immoderate taste for the least simple solutions,” later noting that “coexistence is becoming increasingly difficult between dynamic, enterprising, imaginative actors and a rigid and absurd complex system that manages to impose its rhythm, until the moments of rupture that we are experiencing” (Feredj, 2007, p. 22).

To date at least, the predominance of the neoliberal mentality in the South African case has not provided the opportunity to study such cases of policy learning, although it might be argued that the efforts of Craig Hawkins and his peers to create the Alternative Categories are also an important example of soft transfer entrepreneurship.

Conclusion

The first section of this chapter examined the administrative and legal recognition of the natural wine movement, which has manifested itself in diverse ways, depending on the context. In France, multiple attempts to congregate in winemakers’ collectives have been made, with the Syndicat de Défense des Vins Nature emerging as a leading force. This group has proposed a comprehensive twelve-point production charter and advocated the establishment of a publicly recognised European brand on top of the new *Méthode Nature* private label, which is progressively gaining prominence across the national landscape. In South Africa, meanwhile, there is no legally defined framework for natural wine production, but the creation of the

²⁸² La liste des ingrédients bientôt indiquée sur les bouteilles de vin, DGCCRF website, 16 September 2022.

²⁸³ Senneville, Valérie de. 2021. “Eric Morain, Cet Avocat Qui Défend les Vignerons.” *Les Échos*.

Alternative Categories has proved to be an ingenious way of providing a legal structure that enables producers of natural wines to continue their production, marketing and export activities while also asserting their differences with the rest of the industry.

The second and third sections applied several classic concepts from the literature on public policies and the sociology of public action, including the Advocacy Coalition Framework, mechanisms of learning and soft transfers and agenda setting. In the second section, these concepts were applied to analyse how actors within the natural wine movement navigate the constraints in the existing policies and normative frameworks that govern the wine sector. These frameworks are often perceived as being too rigid or outdated, as being unable to adapt to contemporary market changes and alternative production methods. The shortcomings of the appellation schemes in both Bordeaux and the Western Cape have been examined in depth. The natural wine movement, which is at the forefront of viticultural and winemaking practices, not only disrupts the current systems but also exposes their deficiencies, and actors within the movement devise strategies to exit from or reform the existing appellations.

The third section looked closely at specific instances in which actors from the natural wine movement act as soft entrepreneurs and actively engage as agents of learning, playing a pivotal role in constructing new cognitive frameworks and disseminating shared knowledge and beliefs. Especially in Bordeaux, these actors have effectively underscored the disparities between the objectives of origin quality and environmental quality. In some appellations, efforts have been begun to reconcile these divergent visions, hinting at a trajectory towards a more environmentally conscious approach to production, an incremental move aligned with the practices advocated by members of the natural wine movement.

However, it should be noted that the prevailing sentiment in the field is that there is a state of relative inertia in the wine sector, and in fact, few changes can be observed at the wider institutional level. First, it is crucial here to acknowledge the brief timeframe of the research, as the initial steps towards institutionalisation were taken relatively recently (the *Méthode Nature* label dates from 2019, the Alternative Categories system was implemented in 2016 and the first environmental certifications were imposed by Bordeaux ODGs in 2023). There is therefore a clear need for a longer-term study to analyse and verify the effects (or lack of effects) the natural wine movement has had on the rest of the industry. Furthermore, recognition of this inertia and the limited changes within the movement (this frustration with

the status quo in the wine sector was discussed in detail in Chapter 6) have prompted other winemakers to join the ranks of the natural wine movement. In this example, as in the study of social movements in general, we have seen that because of their radical nature or excessively innovative characteristics, pioneer dynamics often encounter more deadlocks than successes.

Overall, the study of the natural wine movement in this chapter has enabled an exploration of the links between agenda-setting and subaltern/subversive groups and the clarification of a blind spot: the tipping point between resistance dynamics and dynamics of learning and policy adaptation with institutional actors. Ultimately, this section raises a question regarding the stability of the natural wine movement in the wine industry: is it heading toward exhaustion or consolidation?

Despite their alleged capacity to evolve, the appellation schemes in both France and South Africa have faced criticism for their inability to anticipate certain changes in the wine sector. Natural winemakers in particular have expressed strong reservations about the governance of the appellation system. Firstly, they question the general outcome of the AOCs and engage in a broader criticism of taste standardisation. Secondly, they denounce shortcomings in the accreditation procedures, often finding themselves excluded from an appellation because of decisions reached by a tasting panel. Thirdly, they confront the appellations on the contradictory visions between the quality of origins and environmental quality. This section has sought to capture the ongoing debate surrounding AOCs. I argue that the questions raised about the appellation schemes are a result of the application of alternative production models (which natural winemakers represent) and new challenges that do not fit into the old classification, thus potentially delegitimising it.

8. CHAPTER 8: Upgrading and mainstreaming the natural wine movement? An analysis of innovations and hybrid economic settings in the global wine market

Introduction

Along with the institutionalisation of the natural wine movement that has taken place over the past few years,²⁸⁴ natural wine has also integrated into the global wine market – in so doing it has transformed from a product to a market good (Smith Maguire, Inglis, & Almila, 2019). This chapter takes this initial observation as its point of departure and addresses the process of mainstreamisation of the natural wine movement from a political economy perspective. It is essential to emphasise the intrinsic connection between politics and economics here. The political economy approach proves particularly valuable as a means of understanding the dynamics of the movement's integration into the global wine market and the intertwining of public action and capitalism through a focus on controlling value chains, quality conventions and social and environmental standards.²⁸⁵ In many respects, the development of the wine value chain has followed its own course: as we have seen, the wine industry has perhaps one of the most complex and sophisticated value chains, which includes its very own set of quality infrastructures. By examining the global dimension of this value chain – the dynamics of economic globalisation and international trade – this chapter sheds light on the variety of sustainability initiatives driven by natural winemakers.

To do this, this chapter must necessarily examine Stefano Ponte's concept of upgrading. Upgrading can be defined as a path to “move up the value chain” (Ponte & Ewert, 2009). It refers to a wide variety of processes that allow access to new markets or increased competencies. In other words, it refers to processes “by which actors modify or alter production systems and practices that result in positive (or reduce negative) [*environmental*] outcomes” (Krishnan, 2017: 117; emphasis in the original) (Ponte, 2021). Conveniently, Ponte applies this concept of upgrading to the global value chain of the South African wine industry, thereby providing me with a useful base from which to conduct my own research on this topic. However, there are two main differences between Ponte's approach and mine. First, Ponte

²⁸⁴ See previous chapter for more details on the organisation and institutionalisation of the movement.

²⁸⁵ Additionally, the political economy perspective allows for the incorporation of a third dimension into the equation, the “ecological” dimension, examining the relationship between ecology, economics, and politics, as suggested by Smith and Carter²⁸⁵ (Smith & Carter, 2020).

focuses on lead firms and their influence on the wine sector at large, whereas I focus on small independent producers because of the intrinsic traits of natural wine producers. Secondly, unlike Ponte (Ponte & Ewert, 2009), I do not make a distinction between the processes of upgrading in developed and developing countries. Rather than anticipating a situation in which the economy of Bordeaux wines would be considered “traditional” and the South African situation would present a “catching up” trajectory, I posit that the main differences between the initiatives taken in Bordeaux and the Western Cape simply illustrate different trajectories. In fact, while Ponte chose to study “upgrading that includes any trajectory or strategy that is likely to yield a positive impact on developing country firms” (Ponte & Ewert, 2009, p. 1637), I use a definition of the term that is closer to the one proposed by Morrison et al., who perceive upgrading as “innovation producing an increase in the value-added” (Morrison, Pietrobelli, & Rabellotti, 2008, p. 45). For my purposes, it is therefore undertaken by actors from the natural wine movement to produce “wines off the beaten path,” to reuse an expression employed by the Bordeaux Pirates – in other words, a means to find added-value for a product while respecting a certain ethos in the production process. I hypothesise that efforts in the area of quality and environmental upgrading constitute differentiation strategies mobilised by actors in the natural wine movement to navigate along their respective pathways in the global wine market. Throughout this chapter, I apply three lenses to reflect on the upgrading trajectories adopted by actors from the natural wine movement, and the sections of this chapter are divided accordingly: quality upgrading, environmental upgrading and process upgrading.

First, I analyse upgrading dynamics by applying the notion of “quality” and investigate the ability of the natural wine movement to manipulate the different meanings of the word. I use the concept of the “quality turn,” which frequently appears in the literature on alternative agro-food movements (AAFM), to capture the current state of the notion and the move being made by actors in the natural wine movement to market natural wine based on a newly-defined conception of quality. In line with previous work on AAFMs, I argue that the natural wine movement has been participating actively in the process of re-embedding the notion of quality into local ecologies and close networks. This section develops a theoretical framework for understanding the multifaceted approach to quality and the evolution of the notion in terms of different sources of “quality-driven-ness,” which will resonate with the empirical findings developed in the other sections.

In the second section, I look into environmental upgrading. I covered the issue of how natural winemakers propose a new environmentally-aware production ethos in Chapter 4. This section, conversely, focuses on environmental standards as both indicators of quality and market tools, and makes the case for the commodification of environmental certifications. It provides an opportunity to reflect on the differences in how the wine industries in France and South Africa are structured based on the different levels of state involvement in the sector. I contend that the saturation of regulations in the case of Bordeaux and the lack of a regulatory framework in the Western Cape have led to distinct marketing strategies. This section focuses on South Africa, where with the exception of Ponte's research, political economy of the wine industry remains a largely unexplored field.

The last section of the chapter investigates process upgrading: that is, a form of upgrading that takes place along the global value chain (but not directly as regards the product). It happens at different stages along the wine commodity chain, from the structuring of a wine enterprise to innovative ways of commercialising and distributing a product in the global market. I argue that these hybrid economic settings are used as a differentiation strategy by actors from the natural wine movement, actors who have not only capitalised on the novelty of their product but have also invented new paths along the global value chain to differentiate themselves from the conventional wine markets and ultimately challenge the capitalist wine economy (by moving towards an economy that refocuses attention on close human relationships and local ecologies). Finally, I claim that the mainstreamisation of the natural wine movement – its subsuming of the logic of global wine markets – inevitably leads to the conventionalisation of (hitherto) alternative markets and even to greenwashing by other actors in the wine sector, who see natural wine only as an opportunity for new marketing strategies.

8.1. Quality upgrading? The natural wine movement and a new “quality turn”

First, I apply the concept of “quality turn,” a notion that is consistently mobilised in food studies to analyse transformations in the way the idea of quality is constructed, perceived and used by different actors to value a product in the global market. As Winter notes, “Quality is socially constructed and the way it is measured and signified is constantly subject to change and adaptation as its key constitutive concepts” (Winter, 2003, p. 25). Here, I examine how quality assessment criteria differ across various networks within the same market. In the wine industry, assessments of the quality of wines vary significantly between natural winemakers

and the more conventional market segment because they use distinct criteria and judgments. I hypothesise that the emergence of the natural wine movement is reshaping the landscape, introducing new perspectives and imposing distinct criteria for quality assessment. This section investigates the ability of the natural wine movement as a new network in the wine industry to manipulate the very meanings of quality.

The quality turn is unfolding in a global wine market characterised by several notable trends. In the first place, there has been a significant decline in per capita consumption in the traditional winemaking and wine-consuming countries often referred to as the “Old World.” Concurrently, New World wines have steadily gained prominence in the global market, and have disrupted conventional marketing and sales strategies. Furthermore, as I argued in Chapter 2, the traditional distinctions between Old World and New World wine regions are being shunned, and the cards are being reshuffled in favour of a global wine market within which alternative quality conventions are now making themselves heard within the wine industry as a whole.

8.1.1. Leveraging the concept of “quality turn” from the literature on AAFNs

Let us begin by defining what quality is, and why the concept of the quality turn is a useful way of understanding shifts in the meaning of the word. I use the theory of conventions developed by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello to describe the evolution of capitalism through different networks and to understand the emergence of different – yet sometimes overlapping – “value systems” (Chiapello & Boltanski, 1999). The theory of conventions helps us understand the co-existence of the multiple dimensions associated with the notion of quality. An analysis of quality conventions as they apply to the wine market is particularly interesting, as wine is a singular product whose market is both highly regulated – it has its own norms and conventions – and in constant evolution. First and foremost, wine quality is perceived to be price-dependent, and the quality associated with a particular wine can transform it into a luxury good. As Ponte underlines, however, price alone cannot evaluate quality, and so “economic actors adopt other conventions to solve uncertainty about quality” (Ponte, 2009). Thus, wine quality has traditionally been defined by means of a combination of variables, including domestic conventions such as geographic indication of origin,²⁸⁶ brand names and/or grape

²⁸⁶ In the wine sector, wine quality associated with local provenance is asserted by appellation schemes, as described in Chapter 7.

varieties, as well as other conventions such as identity or terroir reputations. The quality turn announces a shift in focus to consumer concerns that encompass new criteria such as human health, food safety, the environmental consequences of globalised and industrialised agriculture and fair trade. These new sets of “civic” or “environmental” conventions associated with the quality turn are encapsulated by environmental and socio-economic standards and labels. This brief overview of quality conventions underscores the absence of a single defining set of characteristics anchored in the concept of quality. Instead, a myriad of occasionally contradictory and at times overlapping features come into play (Ponte, 2009, p. 242). This chapter examines the ways in which the definition of quality has been changed by actors in the natural wine movement.

Research on the quality turn has largely been carried out alongside an analysis of the emergence and development of alternative agro-food movements (see Chapter 4 for more details). Indeed, many authors have made a connection between AAFMs and the notion of the quality turn (Goodman, 2003; Parga-Dans & Alonso González, 2017; Ponte, 2009, 2016; Sage, 2003; Winter, 2003). The literature on AAFMs has seen the emergence of a perspective wherein economic dynamics transition from a “productivist logic of treadmill agriculture and mainstream agribusiness” (Sage, 2003, p. 47) to one that is geared towards a new kind of quality products – generally food, and in our case wine.

8.1.2. Reflecting on the notion of “quality” as a means of re-embedding quality in local ecologies and close social networks

“Quality is coming to be seen as inherent in more “local” and more “natural” foods,” and thus “quality food production systems are being re-embedded in local ecologies” (Murdoch, Marsden, & Banks, 2017, p. 108).

Murdoch et al.’s affirmation has been key to a broader understanding of the quality turn, and has served as the basis for the analysis of numerous studies on AAFMs. I will also use Murdoch’s position to examine the quality turn that is currently being driven by the natural wine movement. In the discussion below, I revisit the concept of “re-embeddedness” and divide it into two components: re-embedding within local ecologies on the one hand, and re-embedding within close social networks on the other.

➤ Understanding “re-embeddedness” as a shift in quality conventions

An understanding of the socially embedded nature of AAFMs is becoming increasingly prevalent in scholarly discourse, drawing inspiration from a critical re-evaluation of Polanyi's work.²⁸⁷ The appropriation of the concept of embeddedness by Murdoch et al. is a pivotal point for understanding the encapsulation of AAFMs in wider market exchanges. Authors writing about AAFMs have used the notion of “re-embeddedness,” to mount strong criticisms of the globalisation and industrialisation of agro-food systems. Their argument underscores an initial shift from industrial conventions (rooted in the logic of mass production) to domestic conventions (grounded in tradition and place), and a second shift from domestic conventions to civic and environmental ones (re-embedding in local ecologies and close social networks). Notions of ties between locality, ecology and close networks therefore emerge as key factors that collectively establish the socially embedded character of AAFMs (Goodman, 2003; Sage, 2003). I argue that these alternative conventions and efforts at “re-embeddedness” are potentially a remedy to rescue the wine industry from a threatened “globalised “fast-food” fate”²⁸⁸ (Banks & Overton, 2010, p. 60).



Figure 52. Shifts in the meaning associated with the notion of quality. Three waves of quality turn. Source: Chazal 2024

➤ Untangling the complex polysemic meaning of “localities”

As Murdoch and colleagues noted, the re-embedding of quality is intertwined with locality. The literature on AAFMs bolsters the growing acknowledgment of the critical role of locality

²⁸⁷ The concept of embeddedness comes from the economist Karl Polanyi, who introduced the notion in *The Great Transformation* (Polanyi, 1944). In his view, embeddedness refers to the idea that economic activities are inherently embedded in social and cultural institutions, and so economic systems are not self-regulating or separate from the larger social context. Instead, markets are deeply embedded within social relationships, cultural norms and political structures.

²⁸⁸ Banks and Overton use the expression “globalised “fast-food” fate” to depict a disturbing homogenisation and decontextualisation of products that are divorced from their intrinsic geography and history and driven solely by fierce competition over price points (Banks & Overton, 2010, p. 60)

in a globalised food system. However, the term locality also covers various meanings. I return to the polysemic dimension entangled in the concept of locality to argue that wine quality can be associated with both provenance and a special care for local ecologies. The use of words like “authenticity,” “terroir” and “appellations” to claim and give value to provenance has been a traditional quality convention in the wine sector. The quality turn is used here as a way of better understanding the vision of the natural wine movement, in an attempt to move away from a vision of “quality” derived solely from institutionalised terroir and appellation conventions and reflect on quality with a specific focus on local ecologies (attention to and care of nature and local ecosystems). The framing of local ecologies in this sense should therefore be understood more as meaning specific attention to ethical and green farming practices and finding a new place for craftsmanship.²⁸⁹

To analyse the polysemic notion of localities, it is also important to make a distinction between caring for and paying attention to “local ecologies” and localism, which entails a preference for closed circuits, which is a defensive and conservative policy (Winter, 2003). There is a powerful paradox at work here as far as the wine market is concerned: on the one hand, it can be difficult to apply defensive localism to the wine economy because wine is a global good and is rarely confined to local circuits; on the other hand, the quality conventions associated with wine are closely linked to this idea of provenance, of re-asserting a local identity, of an attachment to a terroir. In order to move away from this paradox, the concept of “placed-based,” as understood by Arturo Escobar or Gerda Wekerle can be applied to depict the processes of re-embedding in local ecologies.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁹ Ponte and others authors have argued that this attention to localities is the result of consumers turning away from industrial agro-food products and towards “high quality” products, including those using organic or low external input practices, from specific locations or regions, and products supplied through farmers’ markets, short/local food supply chains, and agro-tourism or other kinds of multifunctional agricultural enterprises. (Ponte, 2016, p. 9). In this sense, the quality turn is driven by a growing awareness and reflexivity on the part of consumers in relation to their products.

²⁹⁰ Wekerle reiterates the differences between placed-based movement and local as depicted by Escobar. As she puts it: “Based on his research, Escobar (2001, 147) concludes that social movements may strategically defend place-based identities and practices through their participation in transnational networks” (Wekerle, 2004, p. 381). In this sense, social movements often engage both in “place-based strategies that rely on the attachment to territory and culture” and “global strategies through meshworks [Escobar’s term for networks] that enable social movements to engage in the production of locality by enacting a politics of scale from below” (Wekerle, 2004, p. 381).

➤ **Paying attention to close social networks**

The second aspect of re-embeddedness stresses the need to pay the necessary attention to “close networks”, proximity and close relationships. As with the first aspect, re-embedding quality in close relationships does not mean limiting agencies to local circuits; rather, it involves reinvesting in human experience all along the global value chain. Investment in community ties and close relationships is very dear to actors in the natural wine movement and is manifested through trust contracts, as I will explain below. The concept of embeddedness, which is rooted in Polanyian thought, aligns with an acknowledgment that economic transactions frequently unfold within networks of social relationships, as demonstrated by academic studies on social networks, such as those carried out by Mark Granovetter. At its core, the notion of embeddedness underscores the indispensable role of social relations in all economic transactions (Granovetter, 1985).²⁹¹



Figure 53. The quality turn in the natural wine movement. Re-embedding quality in local ecologies and close social networks. Source: Chazal 2024.

This analytical framework offers a fresh interpretation of the “re-embedding in local ecologies” adage proposed by Murdoch et al. for my purposes of analysing the natural wine movement

²⁹¹ Moving away from the “under-socialised” vision of neo-classical economists or the “over-socialised” view such as that of Talcott Parsons, Granovetter’s reading of Polanyi’s embeddedness enables a focus on social actions (and agencies within networks) in order to conceptualise economic behaviour in the global value chain (Granovetter, 1985).

(see Figure 53 above), and helps with the analysis of quality upgrading which is developed in the following sections.

8.1.3. Different "quality turn" trajectories in Bordeaux and the Western Cape

How has this quality turn manifested itself in the two regions? One very interesting difference between Bordeaux and the Western Cape is the distinctive way quality turn is perceived: because of the regions' contrasting socio-historical trajectories, the concept of quality turn has different temporalities and meanings.

In quality terms, Bordeaux has historically enjoyed an excellent reputation, it was a benchmark, if not an actual role model, for other wine regions worldwide throughout the twentieth century. It is only recently, with the now visible damage caused by the industrial agro-revolution and the intensive use of technologies and inputs in wines, that Bordeaux has been criticised for its production pathway, which has resulted in a perceived decrease in quality. It is therefore difficult to talk about a quality turn in Bordeaux precisely because it is the lack of a turn that has led Bordeaux to the current Bordeaux Bashing crisis (which I discussed in detail in Chapter 5): Bordeaux has just stuck to its guns and failed to reflect on how to re-embed quality. A good illustration of this is Parkerisation, which democratised the grading of wines based on a simplistic 100-point scale, and was the major contributor to the de-contextualisation of wine. The Parker effect promoted quality by means of rankings, to the detriment of quality based on locality/provenance, let alone attention to local ecologies. This chapter suggests that a timid (but incremental) quality turn is on the way, led in particular by actors from the natural wine movement.

Conversely, South Africa has followed a very different trajectory and offers an instructive example of upgrading the global value chain. First, we should recall that due to the embargo against the apartheid regime, the South African wine market was insulated until 1994. It was only after the first democratic elections that South African production was opened up for export. The first quality turn was therefore marked by its integration into the global wine market. Until then, it had been known for its production of bulk wine: that is, wine produced with high volumes as the objective. With the opening of the export trade, the industry encountered an unprecedented array of new requirements of product quality, style and process that were significantly different from its customary practices. As Ponte reminds us, South Africa had to strategically define its normative stance, manoeuvring between the styles of Old

World and New World wine producers (Ponte, 2009, p. 239). This first quality turn, happening in the 1990s, was aptly described by Joachim Ewert as a lynchpin moment in a move away from the mass production of bulk wine to better quality wine: “Today it is a truism in the South African wine industry that “the future” lies in re-orienting production away from bulk wine and developing the ability to produce for the quality market” (Ewert, 2005, p. 5).

My research suggests that a second quality turn is on the way in the winelands of the Western Cape with the emergence of the natural wine movement, or as the natural winemaker Craig Hawkins likes to call it: “the rise of the alternative wine movement.” This idea of two quality turns was summed up provocatively yet humorously by this wine merchant:

“And money came around when South Africa became cool. I mean you had Bono buying a farm in Franschhoek and other stars, etc. Everyone was buying around the wine regions in South Africa. And it was also the time of the Australian wine uprising, you know “sunshine in a bottle.” And Robert Parker was rating California wines. It was a time where wine taste was uniform, like Coca-Cola. This was the rise of all those big farms where you have a finance department, a marketing department, a viticulture department, etc., and they all fight against each other around the table. So, lots of viticulturists and winemakers travelled around the world, and when they came back they said “we’ve got to rejuvenate!”” (Interview Grayson, caviste in the Western Cape, 22 May 2022)

There are several factors that support this idea of a second quality turn. The first quality turn was brought about by the pressures of international demand, including the growth of supermarket wine retailers and an increasing demand for a premium and super premium wine market of branded wines that promised to deliver not only quality but also consistency.²⁹² The second turn is also driven by international demand, but one of a new kind that includes environmental concerns (the rise of civic and environmental conventions, as we saw above) and therefore a demand to re-embed quality by means of new conventions. It is therefore the very notion of quality that is being revised: as used in the second quality turn it not only means good taste and consistency, but also guarantees environmentally friendly production, ethical and fair labour and healthier wines as a result of minimal inputs during the vinification process.

I argue that both in Bordeaux and South Africa, the emergence of the natural wine movement is leading to a quality turn in which quality is re-embedded in local ecologies and close social networks. In Bordeaux, this shift is a reaction to the persisting Bordeaux Bashing phenomenon, while in South Africa, the initial quality turn took place in the 1990s with the integration of

²⁹² UK supermarkets are of the utmost importance to the direction taken by South African wine production, as they import a large share of South African wine, and impose phytosanitary and technical requirements, as well as ethical trading practices (McEwan & Bek, 2009b).

South African wines into the global market. Numerous observations in the field have led me to posit that the second quality turn is currently under way. I investigate the empirical evidence of this turn in the following sections.

8.2. Environmental upgrading: Questioning the existing environmental certification landscape

In a short article on the quality turn in the wine sector, Eva Parga-Dans and Pablo Alonso-González described the prospects and avenues for research, arguing that “it is necessary to revisit the “quality turn” and open up new lines of investigation that delve deeper into and shed light upon questions such as the productive practices associated with quality, food traceability and its certification, and the relation between such processes and territorial governance and sustainability” (Parga-Dans & Alonso González, 2017, p. 8). Based on this reflection, I now investigate the role of environmental certifications as quality signs.

The quality turn and the emergence of environmental and civic concerns have resulted in the proliferation of differentiated products and market segmentation, which translates into increasingly complex normative and labelling systems that focus on differentiation.

8.2.1. *Environmental standards: quality convention or market tools?*

➤ **A growing awareness of environmental challenges but a lack of knowledge regarding wine production**

The contemporary global wine market reflects a growing awareness of a number of negative externalities in wine production, including the impact of viticulture on climate change, the environmental damage caused by intensive agro-industrial practices, concerns around health and food safety and ethical demands, notably with respect to labour conditions. Numerous authors have pointed out this increasing demand for greener wine and greener production pathways (D’Amico et al., 2016; Galati et al., 2019; Heyns et al., 2014; Parga Dans & Alonso González, 2020; Weightman, Bauer, Terblanche, Valentin, & Nieuwoudt, 2019). Despite this increased awareness, however, there is a relative lack of knowledge about the different winemaking process, or rather confusion on the consumer side. Parga-Dans and Alonso González have made similar observations, and have urged for concerted efforts “to help consumers make informed decisions based on wine labels and certifications” (Parga-Dans & Alonso González, 2017). Because of the pressing environmental dimension, these are rapidly

being translated into new requirements or requests for information (Ponte, das Nair, & Chisoro, 2023) and so in the past few years, the wine industry has experienced a proliferation of environmental standards that serve to compensate for this lack of information, but might have resulted in greater confusion. I now investigate the role of environmental standards in the global wine market.

➤ **Environmental standards as a quality convention? The need for a common framework in the global wine market**

Environmental standards and certifications are a way to attest to and guarantee certain specifications in terms of environmental production. They are tools for verifying the environmental quality of a product and its production pathway and include sets of specifications that producers are required to meet if they want to adhere (these environmental standards are not compulsory and remain on a voluntary basis).

With the globalisation of the wine market, previous endorsements and quality conventions such as reviews or rankings proved unable to keep up with global demand and failed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the environmental qualifications of all wines, thereby creating uncertainties with regard to environmental quality. The creation of environmental certifications was instrumental in solving this uncertainty. They were created to be readable by all actors, including consumers, and to be potentially applied by all producers. They act to ensure environmental criteria in production paths and as performance indicators, thereby helping winemakers and consumers navigate the global value chain. These standards exist in a great variety of forms. First, there is a distinction to be made between public and private environmental standards, and second, they apply to different scales (some internationally, while others only have regional or national relevance). The figure below does not aim to be comprehensive, but it gives an idea of the different categorisations of environmental standards that apply to wine production, focusing on those I encountered during my fieldwork.

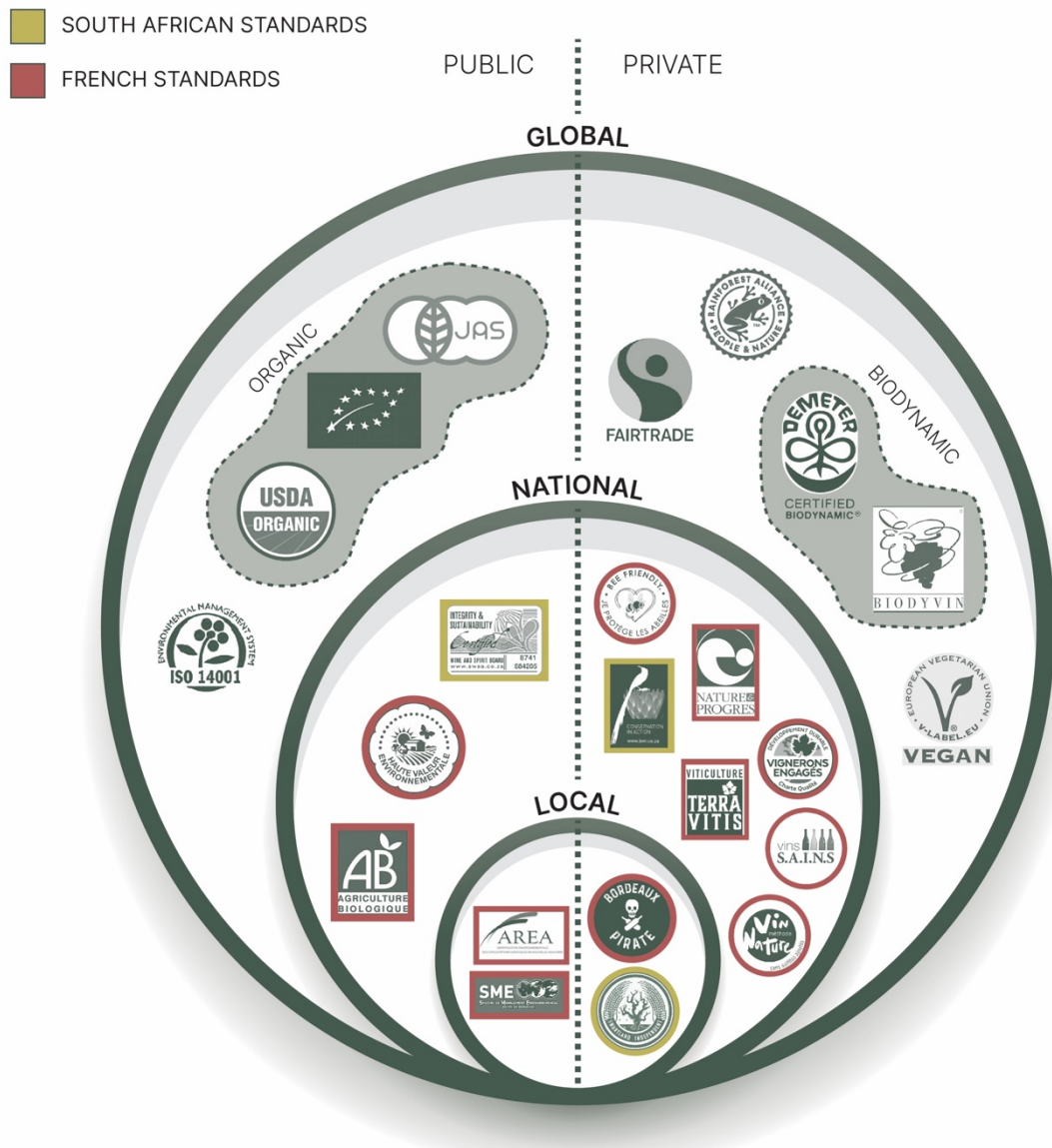


Figure 54. Categorisation of environmental standards applied to wine production and encountered during fieldwork.
Source: Chazal 2024.

In the face of this proliferation of environmental standards, the certification system as a whole is becoming increasingly complex. Some authors have argued that there is a growing need for harmonisation and a common framework for environmental indicators in the wine industry internationally (Merli, Preziosi, & Acampora, 2018), while others have warned of a commodification of the environmental certification system.

➤ **Environmental standards as market tools? The commodification of environmental certification and its dangers**

Environmental standards are implemented through third-party accreditation. In other words, they work through “the actions of an external party that determines common norms or standards and enforces them via instrument-based testing, inspection and certification” (Ponte, 2009, p. 240). However, this tripartite regime is now being criticised for participating in the commodification of the environmental certification system. As Ponte noted, “this capitalist project is said to be striving not only to “commodify” new product qualities but also to commodify information about them” (Ponte, 2009, p. 241). Eve Fouilleux and Allison Loconto have made an argument for this commodification of environmental standards (Fouilleux & Loconto, 2017). Using the case of organic agriculture, they describe the quagmire of the certification regime and the difficulties encountered with the untangling of the actors in charge of standardisation, accreditation and certification. They also reveal the emergence of the myriad private eco-labels that work on top of publicly implemented certifications and act at different levels, with overlapping, and sometimes competing, sets of requirements. This issue of the overlapping of standards is summarised in the figure below, which provides a sense of the complexity of the system (see Figure 55).

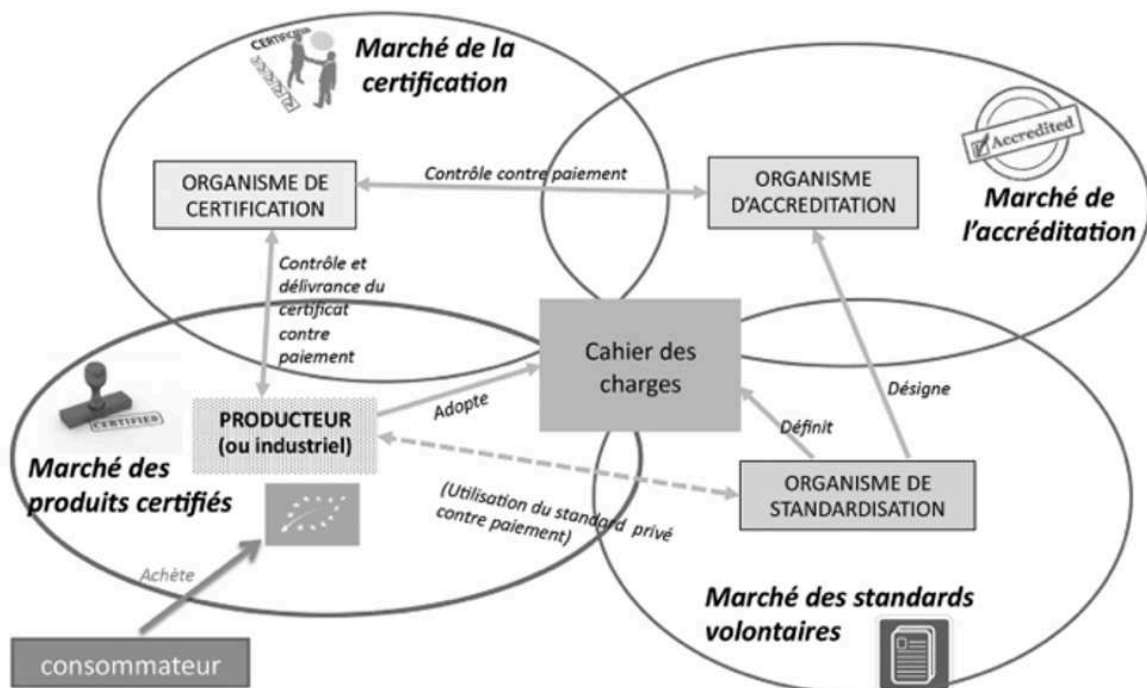


Figure 55. The overlapping market of the tripartite standardisation regime. From Fouilleux and Loconto, 2017.

Because of the capitalist nature of the global market, some actors saw an economic opportunity in the environmental standards markets and began to offer third-party certification services for “valuation” mechanisms, thus contributing to increasing the competition between these actors. Fouilleux and Loconto have underlined the limits and dangers of the system and its commodification. One of the most obvious limitation can be found in the bureaucratisation the system generates. Fouilleux and Loconto have also highlighted the fact that the professionalisation of controls has resulted in the removal of the activist dimension of the certification process and in fact, that the commodification of the certification market has fuelled significant internal criticisms within the organic movement. As the authors note, “These processes also raise questions in terms of associated values. The original political project of organic agriculture, which aimed at the emancipation of agronomy and farmers in the face of industrialisation, is partly denied by the spread of these multiple market mechanisms and the bureaucracy associated with them” (Fouilleux & Loconto, 2017, p. 520). I observed most of their conclusions in my fieldwork, or else they were reported directly by the actors I interviewed. There are different ways of politicising the environmental question in the wine sector, and winemakers have resorted to environmental standards as an affirmation tool. However, some actors in the natural wine movement reject the commodification of environmental certifications, which in their view deviates from its primary functions. To make their opposition public, they openly position themselves as “anti-system” or “anti-labels” and choose to navigate the global value chain without any form of certification. It seems that “this gap between the values of the organic movement and the drifts of its regulatory model has (re)emerged alternative forms of control, once again driven by activists on the ground, as a form of resurgence of criticism.” (Fouilleux & Loconto, 2017, p. 520). The next section analyses how these alternatives manifest themselves in the two regions. I pay particular attention to the South African case, which is largely understudied.

The gap between the transition of practices and the demand for certification reveals two distinct hypotheses. In Bordeaux, where the industry is highly regulated, there is an overlap, and even competition, between various standards and regulations (environmental certifications, quality labels, etc.). The regulatory landscape is complex, with multiple standards vying for attention. Conversely, the South African context is driven more by a neo-liberal economic order with fewer legislative constraints. There, the sector is less organised by public authorities, and stakeholders rely on networks, resources and strategies to navigate, often leaning away from environmental certifications. The contrasting dynamics in the two regions highlight the

interplay between regulatory frameworks and economic orientation, and influence the adoption of environmental certifications for winemakers. Despite these differences, the outcome is consistent in both scenarios: the surge in environmental certifications introduces a progressively more intricate and demanding set of specifications. As Cheryl McEwan and David Bek have observed, the majority of these environmental certifications are poorly understood, and they proliferate in spite of the confusion experienced by consumers (McEwan & Bek, 2009b, p. 255). This opinion is shared by many actors from the natural wine movement, who deplore this deviation from the initial purpose of environmental standards:

“It [*the landscape of available certifications*] is an absolute mess. It is a real sort of rabbit haven of a situation: there are like tunnels and things going on everywhere. It is a hard one to keep your head around and be 100% confident in speaking about absolute. It’s like in wine – there are not many absolutes in wine. It all depends on how you define the terms, etc.” (Interview Lennie, distributor in Cape Town, 12 January 2022)

The complexity of the environmental certifications has been underscored in both the Western Cape and Bordeaux, leaving consumers feeling cut off and bewildered by the intricate landscape. I will now look at each of the two regions to understand the dynamics surrounding environmental certification (or its absence) locally.

➤ **In Bordeaux, a wine industry governed by certifications and labels**

The Bordeaux wine industry uses a variety of frameworks and certifications to evaluate the quality of its wines. Previous chapters have highlighted the significance of rankings as exemplified by the Classification of 1855 and the Classification of the Grands Crus of Saint-Émilion. Additionally, the implementation of the indication of origin system, which is commonly referred to as the AOC scheme in 1935, has played a crucial role in the appraisal of wine quality. Alongside these traditional assessments, a growing environmental awareness since the 1980s has led to a proliferation of environmental certifications in the wine sector. Noteworthy public schemes include the European organic production certification, Agriculture Biologique (with its comprehensive 2012 reform outlining specifications for organic wines). The private sector has also contributed to this trend with examples like the Demeter and Biodyvin biodynamic labels and the numerous other private environmental certifications that have gained prominence in the industry, reflecting a broader commitment to sustainable, eco-friendly practices. The figure below sums up the different environmental standards used by the wine industry in Bordeaux (see Figure 56).



Figure 56. The different environmental standards in Bordeaux. Source: CIVB 2020.

The Bordeaux wine industry has accumulated different grids and certifications to assess wine quality, as reported by this AOC representatives in the Médoc and Libournais:

“Aren't you losing some visibility for the average consumer who already struggles to read the wine market?”

- Absolutely, that's really one of the arguments. Another argument beyond visibility is credibility. Because ultimately it means that you're creating your own little thing that says you're doing well. So it's always a bit subject to doubt. (Interview Frank, Saint-Émilion ODG, 8 September 2021²⁹³)

In France, one might hypothesise that the wine industry is governed by labels. According to Bergeron et al., using labels as a public policy instrument has several objectives: it makes it possible to “transform the practices of the actors, to play on and instrumentalise both the desire of the actors to distinguish themselves and that of other collectives to imitate those who try to stand out in the competition – be it political, symbolic, social, or economic – they engage in” (Bergeron, Castel, & Dubuisson-Quellier, 2014, p. 27). An environmental label as a public policy tool thus serves as both an example to be followed and a means of distinguishing oneself in order to remain competitive.

²⁹³ My translation of: “Mais du coup est-ce que l'on ne perd pas un peu de visibilité par rapport au consommateur derrière qui déjà a du mal à s'y retrouver? - Alors yes, total, ça c'est vraiment un des arguments. Et autre argument au-delà de la visibilité c'est de la crédibilité. Parce qu'au final ça veut dire que tu te fais toi-même ton petit truc qui dit que tu fais bien. Donc c'est toujours un peu sujet à caution.”

I contend that the wine sector in France is significantly influenced by robust policies advocating for the adoption of (environmental) certifications. It is a double-edged sword, however, and we need to consider the potential saturation effects of this political instrument. Firstly, the proliferation of various layers of wine regulations might over time result in a bureaucratic maze of paperwork and challenges for many winemakers, and create an additional workload for producers seeking certification to distinguish their products. Secondly, environmental certifications are relatively new, and consumers may not fully understand the meaning of the different labels. In fact, although certification schemes were intended to provide consumers with clarity and reassurance, they often contribute to causing considerable confusion from a consumer perspective. To sum up, in the French case, where the industry is ultra-regulated and the state is heavily involved in the wine sector, environmental certifications are used to govern quality conventions. Other wine regions, on the other hand, are dominated by neoliberal economic thinking, with very little state involvement. In these regions, it is to be expected that the environmental standards and eco-labels market operates differently. The next section on the situation in South Africa offers a chance to address these questions from a new angle.

8.2.2. South Africa: Dealing with the relative absence of environmental certifications

The South African case is very different. As this section reveals, the relative absence of the state from wine-related businesses has left room for a variety of private actors to take action in the area of environmental certifications and other schemes. However, the use of these certifications by winemakers seems to be fairly limited, and they are mainly used by larger wine enterprises.

8.2.2.1. The “integrated production of wine” (IPW): The main framework for quality standards in South Africa

In addition to the “Wine of Origin” certification (which guarantees a product’s origin, vintage and cultivars²⁹⁴), the South African government has implemented a number of national policies to address the environmental challenges of wine production. In 1998, a technical production guide entitled “Integrated Production of Wine” (IPW) was drafted, providing guidelines for “Good Agricultural Practices on Farms” and “Good Manufacturing Practices in Cellars.” The IPW scheme is managed by the Wine and Spirit Board (WSB) and aims at the production of

²⁹⁴ For more details on WO, see Chapter 7.

wines that are “healthy, clean and environmentally friendly,”²⁹⁵ following principles similar to what is known in France as *agriculture raisonnée*. Although it is officially voluntary, the IPW scheme is a mandatory condition for export, leading to over 94% of the wine produced being IPW certified, with the remaining 5% catering to the domestic market. An official representative in charge of IPW implementation explained in our interview that the IPW guidelines are based on a mixture of South African environmental legislation,²⁹⁶ recommendations from research institutions such as the Agricultural Research Council and international standards such as ISO 140001 or others recommended by the OIV.²⁹⁷

Finally, we should note the “Integrity and Sustainability” seal, a recent addition to the IPW scheme that has integrated the certification of geographic origin and sustainability since 2010. Aligned with the guidelines laid down by the Biodiversity Wine Initiative (BWI) programme, the seal also governs viticultural production, but with objectives that focus on biodiversity preservation and conservation. This is particularly crucial because 95% of South African vineyards are located in the Cape Floral Kingdom, a biodiversity hotspot that is subject to stringent protection standards. The Integrity and Sustainability Seal is a combined seal that has guaranteed both WO (Wine of Origin) and IPW certification since 2010.



Figure 57. The Integrity and Sustainability seal in South Africa, active since 2010.

With the IPW scheme and the recent “Integrity and Sustainability” seal, South Africa became one of the first countries in the world to develop a sustainability certification system specifically for wine. It is therefore all the more surprising to see that South Africa lags behind in terms of organic standards.

²⁹⁵ Integrated Production of Wine (IPW) (2004). The South African System of Integrated Production of Wine (IPW). Stellenbosch.

²⁹⁶ The Environmental Management Act or the Biodiversity Act or the Waste Act

²⁹⁷ Interview Lenard, IPW representative, 13 May 2022.

8.2.2.2. South Africa: Still awaiting implementation of a national organic certification

Outside these programmes, it is surprising to note that South Africa lacks a national regulation covering organic agriculture, as is the case in the European Union (with the “Agriculture Biologique” label), the United States (with the USDA NOP (National Organic Program)) or Japan (Organic JAS) (see Figure 58 below). According to a 2019 report by the French Agence Bio, 103 countries had established regulations for organic agriculture. South Africa is not on this list²⁹⁸. In South Africa, the government’s commitment to organic agriculture is notably weak, and there are no subsidies available for organic producers.



Figure 58. European Union, American and Japanese organic standards.

A national framework for organic farming has been under consideration for over a decade, and yet it remains in the state of being a mere proposal. The failed attempts to recognise an organic certification in South Africa is a story that remains untold and that I intend to narrate it here. Alan, a key representative of the SAOSO (the South African Organic Sector Organisation), has shared with me the numerous – unsuccessful – attempts by his non-profit organisation to establish a national organic standard. In the early 2000s, Alan and his team collaborated on an initial draft, which they submitted to the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF). However, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) later rejected the proposal because of technical errors.

“I collaborated with a number of people. We were working with biodynamic agriculture and with organic agriculture. And we knew that our fundamental goals were the standards. In the United States, you can't have organic agriculture and not have a standard. So we embarked on all that process to try to initiate

²⁹⁸Source: Les carnets internationaux de l'Agence Bio, Edition 2020, Agence Bio. https://www.agencebio.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Carnet_MONDE_2020-1.pdf

standards, which we also did with the Department of Agriculture (DAFF). But eventually, the whole initiative fell by the wayside. [...]

And a year or two later, when we tried to pick it up again, to look at standards, we were referred to the South African Bureau of Standards, and they crafted a South Africa standard based on what the DAFF had created.” (Interview Alan, SAOSO representative, 17 March 2022)

Alan’s story reveals a story of red tape caused by lack of leadership, government staff turnover, technical difficulties and the absence of available public funding, among other things, which eventually led to repeated failures to implement a national organic standard.

“About two years ago [*in 2019*], we decided we would abandon working with OSSIC.²⁹⁹ You know, every time we met with them it was a different representative. So there are four government departments involved, everybody is sending you different people to every meeting, and there’s no continuity and no ability to make decisions because the people that were sent to the meeting were not the generals, so they were sending the sergeant, and the sergeant says “Now I have to go back to my office.” So it really got nowhere. And we felt that they were inhibiting our potential to move forward.” (Interview Alan, SAOSO representative, 17 March 2022)

Meanwhile, the non-profit organisation SAOSO is continuing its close collaboration with organic producers in the country, and has recently instituted a private organic standard that has been recognised by the international organic organisation IFOAM.

“So in 2019, we had taken the revised version of this drafted standard and we had sent it to IFOAM and asked them if it could be accepted as the South African organic standards, which obviously would have been under the IFOAM family of standards. And it was accepted. We then had to find a SAB accredited certification body who would do the inspections, because SAOSO can't do that.

- *And that's Control Union?*

- Yes, right. That's Control Union. They'll be with us for the next couple of years, before we open the door to other certification organisations like ECOCERT or CERES.” (Interview Alan, SAOSO representative, 17 March 2022)

For SAOSO’s team, the recognition of a private South African standard by IFOAM was a “major step forward in SAOSO incarnation.”³⁰⁰ They are aware of the limitations of such initiatives, however. First, they need to keep working closely with the government in the hope that one day there will be legislation on a public standard; second, they know that the main limitation of the current standard is that as it stands it is not recognised in either the US or Europe; and third, since there is no real demand for organic wine domestically, the value-added of the SAOSO organic standard for wine producers is fairly limited.³⁰¹ The implementation of

²⁹⁹ OSSIC stands for “Organic Sector Strategic Implementation Committee”. This ad hoc institution was created in 2008 following a national study on organic needs better known as *The Fridge Study*. OSSIC comprises the DAFF (Department of Agriculture, Fishing and Forestry), Rural Development, DTI (the Department of Trade and Industry) and CORPSA (Corporate Governance in South Africa).

³⁰⁰ Interview Alan, SAOSO, 17 March 2022

³⁰¹ “With 72% of the wine produced in South Africa still being sold for below R50 a litre, it means organic wines, with their lower yields and increased costs, have a very small market to play in.” Beer, Petri de. 2022. “Organic? Fad or the Future?” Wine.co.za. <https://news.wine.co.za/News.aspx?NEWSID=40545>.

a national organic standard that would be equivalent to the EU's Agriculture Biologique or the American NOP is a real challenge for a country like South Africa. It also raises further questions regarding policy transfer and the adaptability of the global market, as well as the potential and limitations of South-driven environmental standards (Schleifer, Fiorini, & Fransen, 2019). Further research needs to be done in this direction.

8.2.2.3. The flourishing international private eco-labels ...

In the absence of public support for implementing environmental certifications, private eco-labels have emerged and proliferated in the wine industry. Following a global trend, certifications and labels governing wine production have multiplied to address the growing international demand in the area of climate change and environmental protection. Consequently, programmes relating to environmental protection have surfaced, thereby complicating the certification landscape further. Their objectives are diverse, and include carbon neutrality, energy efficiency, veganism (Vegan), biodiversity conservation (Biodiversity Wildlife Initiative, WWF Wine Farm Champion, the Rainforest Alliance), and more broadly Environmental Management Systems referred to as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) standards such as ISO14000 or ISO26000.

Overview of the regulations and voluntary standards that apply to the South African wine industry

The objective of this text box is to review and paint a broad picture of the regulations on South African wine production so as to have a comprehensive vision of regulations and voluntary standards.

The primary framework: the Wine of Origin (WO) and Integrated Production of Wine (IPW) schemes

The WO scheme guarantees the origins of grapes, vintages and varieties, while the IPW scheme provides guidelines for “Good Agricultural Practices” on farms and “Good Manufacturing Practices” in cellars. Together, they have given birth to the Integrity and Sustainability seal. The WO and IPW are primary conditions for export, and so over 95% of the wine produced in South Africa is certified by these schemes.

Hygiene and food safety standards

Now firmly integrated into the global market thanks to its first quality turn, the South African wine industry faces various imperatives: quality standards, ethical regulations and more

recently a growing demand for environmentally friendly production. Initially, the industry had to adhere to regulations driven by international demand that encompassed technical guidelines, risk analyses and the use of phytosanitary products (such as the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) systems for food safety). This was mainly the outcome of the Trade, Development and Cooperation Agreement (TDCA)³⁰² between the European Union and South Africa. Large retailers like UK supermarkets also put significant pressure on South African suppliers by insisting on transparent production methods aligned with European norms and regulations. While these export conditions have made a significant contribution to the qualitative advancement of South African wines, they have also led to a form of standardisation because producers are focused on meeting the minimum quality required by the standards.

Civic conventions (ethical and social standards)

Since the democratic transition in 1994 and the subsequent integration of the wine industry into the global market, the South African government has actively confronted the ethical and developmental challenges associated with the post-apartheid transformation. The primary focus has been on addressing the political and moral imperatives aimed at dismantling racially delineated socio-economic disparities (McEwan & Bek, 2009b, p. 256). In alignment with these endeavours, the predominant publicly supported standards in South Africa have mainly revolved around social and ethical considerations, falling within the realm of civic conventions rather than environmental ones. Apart from the global Fairtrade initiative, mention should be made of the Wine and Agricultural Ethical Trade Association (WIETA), the principal certification for ensuring decent labour conditions and ethical trade in the wine industry.

Environmental standards

There is no public organic standard, but in 2019 SAOSO implemented a private South African standard. Winemakers can also apply to international organic standards such as the NOP or AB by using an intermediary certification body such as ECOCERT, CERES or Control Union. The Demeter international biodynamic production certification is also available in South Africa and can be obtained either through a conventional application or through the PGS (the Participatory Guarantee System).

As stated above, private eco-labels are also available. They have their own focus and sets of specifications.

Textbox 20. Overview of the regulations and voluntary standards that apply to the South African wine industry

A concise overview of the standards I encountered during my fieldwork is provided in the table below. Each winemaker I interviewed was asked to list the standards they adhered to.

³⁰² The TDCA is a wine trade agreement between the European Union and South Africa promulgated in 2002 by the 2002 Agreement on Trade in Wine. Under this agreement, South African exports are required to comply with the sanitary, phytosanitary and other technical requirements and rules of origin set forth in the TDCA. For more details see Ponte & Ewert, 2007.

Environmental conventions	Focus	Scale	Implementation date	Main actors in charge	Guiding Principles	Winemakers certified from our sample (x/48)
WIETA	Ethical / Social	South African	2002	Wine and Spirit Board, Trade Unions and NGOs	No child labour; freely chosen employment; the right to a healthy and safe working environment; the right to freedom of association; non-excessive working hours; the right to a living wage; prohibition of unfair discrimination; rights to worker's housing and tenure security	11
Fairtrade	Ethical/ Social	International	2003	FLO	Sustainable development: fairtrade premium paid for community development purposes	1
Biodiversity Wine Initiative (BWI)	Conservation and Biodiversity protection	South African	2005	WWF-SA, WOSA (Wine of South Africa)	No further loss of habitat in critical sites; positive contribution to biodiversity conservation by setting aside natural habitats in contractual protected areas; changes in farming practices to enhance the suitability of vineyards as habitats for biodiversity; reduction in farming practices that have negative impacts on biodiversity	5
WWF Conservation Champion	Conservation and Biodiversity Protection	South African	2017	WWF-SA	Land and water stewardship programme for wine farms. Champions are considered to be environmental leaders in the wine industry for their commitment to conservation, responsible production practices and integrated environmental management systems, and for spearheading innovations in water, energy efficiency and climate adaptation	1
SAOSO	Organic production	South African	2019	IFOAM, SAOSO, Control Union		1
NOP		International	2002	Certification organisations such as ECOCERT, CERES or Control Union	USA – American National Organic Program	12
Organic JAS		International	2000		Japanese National Organic Programme	
AB		International	2010		European Union Organic Programme	
Demeter	Biodynamic production	International	1997	Demeter; BDAASA (Biodynamic Agricultural Association of Southern Africa)	Certification through PGS groups	2

Table 6. Voluntary standards in the South African Wine Industry encountered during fieldwork. Source: Chazal, 2024³⁰³

8.2.2.4. ... and why South African wine producers are reluctant to adopt them

As the table shows, the number of winemakers interviewed who adhere to the certifications is quite low. This is no coincidence. Official figures are lacking, but the percentage of South African vineyards benefiting from organic certification is estimated to be less than 1%. According to the latest census from the Biodynamic and Organic Wine of South Africa website, in 2022 barely thirty estates had organic or biodynamic certification.³⁰⁴ Likewise, in a recent article on the wine.co.za blog, the economist Petri De Beer reported: “organic wine grape production [is] hard to measure in South Africa. The current figures indicate there are about 900 ha to 1000 ha of locally certified organic vineyards.”³⁰⁵ This is very low compared to other wine-producing countries such as France, Spain and Italy, where about 20% of vineyards are currently certified organic. This situation is not only true of organic certification: the percentage of South African winemakers using eco-labels at large is similarly small.

Does this mean that there has been no environmental upgrading in South Africa? It does not: my investigation into South Africa’s production practices quickly revealed that there has been a clear positive upgrading in terms of biodiversity conservation and decreasing agrochemical applications, with wine farms converting to organic or biodynamic methods and better environmental stewardship of the land and water resources at large. The real issue here is the lack of certification. So why is the proliferation of private eco-labels not being repeated in South Africa? In the next section, I investigate why winemakers from the natural wine movement in the Western Cape are regulation-averse, and what the motivations and incentives are that keep them navigating the wine value chain without resorting to certifications.

➤ Natural wine producers are admittedly regulation-averse

Despite the diversity of eco-labels and available certifications, the majority of small independent producers do not use them. The lack of adoption of these frameworks by vineyard professionals is evident, and amidst all these existing conventions, most winemakers in South

³⁰³ Some data also taken from McEwan and Bek 2009, p. 259.

³⁰⁴ Source: website <https://biodynamicorganicwine.co.za/>

³⁰⁵ Beer, Petri de. 2022. “Organic? Fad or the Future?” *Wine.co.za*.
<https://news.wine.co.za/News.aspx?NEWSID=40545>.

Africa remain regulation-averse. This observation was clearly expressed in many interviews, and was well summed up by this wine-shop owner in Cape Town:

“I think it’s dangerous in South Africa, because a lot of the natural winemakers are by definition quite regulation-averse. They don’t like regulations. So you might find that a lot of them don’t certify and don’t bother to certify as organic, even if that’s how they’re farming. So, I doubt that they would suddenly want to certify their wine as natural. It’s a kind of belief, an attitude.” (Interview Ian, caviste in Cape Town, 21 December 2021)

The reasons behind this are many. Firstly, winemakers fear that complying with a certification will lead to a loss of freedom in their farming and production practices. Many said that certification would constrain them too much, and indicated that they feared not being able to adjust in the case of climatic events, and so they want to maintain the freedom to retire from organic practices if need be.

“I’ve seen that in a few places. People farm organically but they don’t sell the grapes as organic, or they don’t put it on the bottle. And I have spoken to a guy who said let’s say there’s a problem with one vineyard, one year, then he can spray it. He’s not going to lose his production and he’s not going to lose his certification and all of that. So I think people definitely do have that attitude of “OK. This is the way I want to farm because I think it’s the best way for me to farm, but I’m not farming for the sticker.” I don’t think you should ever be dogmatic about it.” (Interview Scott, winemaker in Western Cape, 25 April 2022)

“So I think that’s the main difference, sort of working with nature as far as you can but falling back if you need to and ensuring that you still have a harvest for the next year. Whereas organic and biodynamic are a lot stricter.” (Interview Edwin, caviste in Cape Town, 29 December 2021)

This lack of commitment to environmental standards such as organic certification on the part of natural winemakers is also often justified by this idea of “staying away from dogmas.” Natural winemakers would rather emphasise a desire to “feel the land,” or to “better understand the terroir and its evolution”:

“Sometimes, I’ll go to wine domains where it almost becomes like a religion. Where it’s just like this. And most often, unfortunately, the recipients are very dogmatic. And dogma is dangerous because it kills inquisitive questioning and such. I mean I have huge respect for Rudolf Steiner and the state the world was in at that point and there was a real ask about how we can neutralise and improve our soil... But by the same token, he never came to the Swartland. And since the early 1900s a lot of very other clever people were also born who have made huge contributions to the world of agriculture. And often people will just study that and then they are like “Ok I am hanging my hat on that and that’s it.” ...Some people prefer a set recipe and hang out their hat on something. I think it’s at that point now where I would rather not be part of any formalised organisation and rather just do all of those things. And the other thing is that if you are too long in one channel you have a sterilisation of ideas and thoughts. Your thoughts are sterilised because they’re always the same. Because your influence sphere is not being challenged you’re always talking to the same tribe.” (Interview Milo, winemaker in Western Cape, 7 June 2022)

Another point we can extract from Milo’s message is the lack of adaptation of these international standards to South African specificities (soil, environmental and climate

conditions). Many winemakers feel that foreign organic standards do not meet their needs and would rather resort to local, vernacular techniques. Some have insisted that “all countries are different, so the farming needs to adapt to the local context,”³⁰⁶ and that methods and practices that “apply in Roussillon or in Burgundy, don’t apply to [*them*]! Even from here to the Paardeberg Valley things don’t apply the same. So you need to understand where you farm and where you sit.”³⁰⁷ This critical standpoint and aversion to certification are also fed by the neoliberal economic culture that dominates the South African wine industry.

When they assert that context matters and that agricultural practices must keep being questioned and evolving, Milo and many other natural winemakers fall into line with Fouilleux’s argument that certifications are often entangled in a capitalist logic of commodification, which can lead to their being unable to critically assess practices. South African natural winemakers propose that agricultural practices should not be assessed by adherence to eco-certifications and labels. Instead, they suggest that evaluations could use new analytical grids that emphasise adaptation to local imperatives, a capacity to adjust and the tangible involvement of winemakers in networks engaging in the dissemination of knowledge and know-how. (I will explore these aspects in greater detail in Chapter 9).

“For me, it’s counter intuitive for the development of your soil to say at any point “I’ve arrived. I belong to this game. This is my tribe.” No! I think it’s more paperwork, more audits, more people that must fly out, it’s more... It’s not logical. Rather ask someone how many forums he is involved in, how many chat groups, how many agricultural study groups.” (Interview Milo, winemaker in Western Cape, 7 June 2022)

In a few instances, this lack of adaptability has driven winemakers to pull out of a certification, as was the case with the famous Waterkloof estate, which recently withdrew from the Demeter biodynamic certification (see portrait below).

Waterkloof, a large wine estate reverses its decision to certify biodynamically with Demeter

Waterkloof is a stunning, almost 100-hectare wine estate overlooking the False Bay coast. Unlike most of the domains I sampled for this study, Waterkloof is not a one-person business, but rather a large enterprise with a state-of-the-art architect-designed cellar and visitor space. Founded in 2003, the estate is setting a path in terms of fine wine and environmental production. Not only has the estate’s owner made organic and biodynamic production a priority (inspired by years of international travel), but the estate was also named Wine Farm Champion

³⁰⁶ Interview Liton, winemaker in Western Cape, 23 May 2022.

³⁰⁷ Interview Justin, winemaker in Western Cape, 6 April 2022.

by the World Wildlife Fund's Biodiversity & Wine Initiative in 2008. After taking several years to set up the domain, convert the soil and organise agricultural practices to fit the biodynamic standard, Waterkloof was certified by Demeter in 2015, but the certification did not last long and by the next audit, Waterkloof's management had decided to pull out of the certification. Emma, its communications manager, told me the story: "So initially, we decided that we were going to farm biodynamically. Obviously, it's quite a process. In 2015, we finally met Demeter's criteria. At that stage, everything was converted into biodynamic. But from that point on, it became a nightmare."

Emma explained the numerous difficulties they encountered while they were Demeter certified. "Because we farm in South Africa, with the local challenges, with a body [Demeter] that sits in Europe that is not necessarily responding every time and is not necessarily aware of the local challenges. If you specialise in what's happening in Europe, you're not aware of what is happening in South Africa." She adds: "We were also forced to buy biodynamic products that were certified by Demeter that are costly and it was time-consuming to get them here. And... even at the point where we were actually certified biodynamic, we weren't using the logo on any of our bottles because you have to pay a royalty to be able to have the logo."

Understandably, with all these obstacles, plus the challenges to maintain such large production (almost 100 hectares) using biodynamic methods and low yield, Waterkloof struggled to make a return on its investment. Emma continued: "It was so petty. OK, you want a sustainable business but if they make it impossible for you to have a sustainable business, then what's the point? And it's not that we weren't believing in the philosophy, but it was almost like impossible to do it, and you become so limited and put in a box that ... I mean you need almost unlimited money to be able to do it. And at some point, we had to say this isn't working for us anymore, but we can still farm the way we farm. So anyway, then we made the decision that we would carry on as much as possible with the biodynamic practices but not with the certifications."

She stressed the fact that withdrawing from the Demeter certification did not mean they would stop farming biodynamically, but rather that they would adapt biodynamic practices to the needs of the farms. In fact, they are now certified organic with regular audits from ECOCERT but do not advertise it on either their labels or their website. Finally, I asked Emma if it should be alarming to see winemakers pulling out of environmental certifications. That is her answer: "So take our wines because you believe in our wine. You believe that they'll sell in your market, and you like drinking them. And yes, there's a moral and ethical story behind them. We can show you we're sustainable, we're still a champion within our biodiversity wine initiative, so we make sure that we take out all our alien vegetation and that we keep our natural fynbos and that there's an ecosystem. I mean we're doing everything to the extent we can, but at the end of the day, don't buy our wines because you want to put them in an organic section."

Portraits and field notes 10. Waterkloof, a large wine estate reverses its decision to certify biodynamically with Demeter.

➤ A lack of economic incentives and public support

The second reason why winemakers do not resort to environmental certifications is what they consider to be a lack of economic incentives. In addition to being indexed by international organisations and sometimes being deemed too rigid and restrictive, the large majority of these certifications are based on foreign currencies, which is a massive obstacle for local producers.³⁰⁸ It appears that the certifications are primarily intended for the more industrialised segment of the sector, notably because they entail significant costs, which smaller wine farms and independent winemakers can simply not afford. The certification schemes can therefore marginalise small producers and function as market exclusion mechanisms (McEwan & Bek, 2009b). Another aspect is that the environmental quality turn in the wine industry is not supported by the South African government. For instance, unlike French winemakers, who can benefit from European Union and national subsidies when converting to organic vineyards, South African winemakers receive no support from their government.³⁰⁹ This means that a large majority of small independent producers are discouraged from obtaining official certifications. It became evident from my fieldwork and interviews that most natural winemakers do not see the value-added in certifying their products.

“We’re a wine country, but at the same time, certifications are expensive, there’s a lot of red tape in getting these things done. People are getting more involved in the vineyards; we do generally farm organically. But now when you start asking the small independent farmers to try to get their certification, it’s just that the money to do it isn’t there. So hence you continue under that.” (Interview Gina, caviste in Cape Town, 20 December 2021)

“I mean, for instance, if you sell organic carrots or organic potatoes, the average organic product is 30% more expensive than the conventional one. But for wine it’s very different and very difficult to establish. So some wine farmers will automatically say “there’s no price difference.” But it’s also because nobody tries to sell their wine for a higher price because of the certification.” (Interview Arnold, CERES representative, 10 February 2022)

Furthermore, although the value-added of organic wine in European markets has been asserted³¹⁰ (D’Amico et al., 2016; Di Vita, Pappalardo, Chinnici, La Via, & D’Amico, 2019), the political economy of the wine industry in South Africa remains largely understudied and the conditions for winemakers to convert and their incentives to certify are unexplored. This

³⁰⁸ To give a sense of scale, in 2023, 1 euro equalled approximatively 20 Rand.

³⁰⁹ The lack of government involvement in the wine business can be explained both by the historical background of the industry (the structure of the wine industry is a legacy of the apartheid regime and is still predominantly dominated by white-owned businesses) and by the neoliberal economic governance that dominates the wine regions of the Southern Hemisphere like South Africa.

³¹⁰ In 2023, the French purchased three times more organic wines than five years earlier. Sales increased by 6.3% to reach 1.5 billion euros. Source: Millésime Bio, Circana 2024.

https://www.millesimebio.com/files/download/fichiers_mb24/Etude_Mill%C3%A9simeBIO2024.pdf

economic incentive, which is often a prime motivation for French winemakers to be organically certified, has no equivalent in South Africa. Moreover, the normative and moral injunctions present in European organic wine markets do not seem to apply in the South African case. Consequently, certification is often seen as a “purely commercial or marketing decision”³¹¹ and is only a rational choice when dealing with selected export partners. Cyan, an agent working for an organic accreditation third party in South Africa confirmed this:

“It’s economic motivation, yes. It has to make business sense for the guys. Because on the one hand certification is to me purely a business move. It’s not necessarily something you do “because it’s the right thing to do”. You farm sustainably because it’s the right thing to do, but certification is something that should be beneficial for you to reward you for the ways that you’re farming and selling.” (Interview Cyan, ECOCERT representative, 16 February 2022)

Ultimately, we must remember that wine production in South Africa is still divided between grape growers and winemakers, and if the incentives for winemakers are meagre, they are even more limited for grape growers, who fail to see any value in certifying organic.³¹²

“And you must remember, most of the farmers, it’s probably a guy who doesn’t make his own wine. He just owns 1,000 hectares of land where 80% is farmed with sheep, 19% is weeds and 1% is vineyards. So the guy has all this farming happening, so for him to go through all the process of certification, the paperwork, the book-keeping etc. It’s a lot! So those guys rightly say “You can do it but I don’t have the time or energy to do it myself.” And that makes it complicated.” (Interview Justin, winemaker in Western Cape, 6 April 2022)

Testimonies from both winemakers and grape growers lamenting the administrative and financial burdens associated with certifications are abundant and resonate in this context. Despite the proliferation of environmental standards, the economic prospects for South African wine producers and grape growers remain problematic, and their margins are still low.³¹³ Delving deeper into the issue, Ponte underscores the fact that while South African wine producers have made significant advancements in terms of economic and environmental upgrading processes, “these strides have not translated into positive economic outcomes on a broader scale” (Ponte, 2021, p. 157).

³¹¹ Interview Sam, Lambson, 4 May 2022.

³¹² The topic of the upgrading dynamics between grape growers and winemakers is developed in the section below.

³¹³ “According to a 2005 study of all South African wineries with a revenue of less than R25 million (approximately US\$4 million), 36 per cent were making a loss, and of those with a revenue of R25-90 million (US\$4-14 million), 25 per cent were making a loss. The average profit in small wineries was reported to be R13 (US\$2) per 9-litre case, compared with R20 (US\$3.1) in Australia. If we fast-forward to 2016, the picture becomes even worse, with returns on investment dropping to less than 1 per cent. Data from VinPro indicate that only 13 per cent of the 3,300 producers operate at sustainable income levels, 44 per cent are operating at break-even, and 40 per cent are making a loss.” (Ponte, 2021, p. 157)

➤ Conclusions

Where there are no economic incentives or government assistance to pursue certification, it is understandable that winemakers choose to abstain from adhering to (costly) environmental standards, even though they engage in organic or even biodynamic agriculture, and sometimes have no reason to envy their European peers in terms of their agricultural methods. Here, my conclusions are similar to those reached by Ponte and colleagues on the difficulties for a country like South Africa to adapt to the global market of environmental standards: “South-driven sustainability governance instruments, despite their pervasive nature and sophistication in South Africa, have not been able to soften the blow of North-driven factors.” (Ponte et al., 2023, p. 11)

Based on these reflections, it is easier to understand clearly why South African producers gravitate towards natural wine. It is perceived not merely as a label but as a philosophy, and actors in the movement say that it can be used as a flexible ethos to be embraced and adapted rather than being an “inflexible dogma.” This helps explain why the natural wine movement is gaining ground in neoliberal countries such as South Africa that do not heavily rely on a robust certification culture and strong government support. As I reported earlier, public sector involvement in the wine industry in general is minimal, a situation that is even more pronounced in the case of small independent winemakers like natural wine producers, who lack any predisposition for government institutions. In fact, during our interviews, the head of communications at WOSA (Wines of South Africa) explicitly stated that they do not recognise natural wine as a distinct product or as an existing market category.³¹⁴ The concluding section of this chapter will examine how natural winemakers have innovatively added value to their products through alternative channels.

Finally and this true for both Bordeaux and the Western Cape, natural winemakers are often concerned about the fate of environmental certifications and their ongoing commodification. As illustrated by Etienne Davodeau in the drawing below, some producers do not wish to rely on those certifications as quality indicators of their wine and would rather resort to other innovative path, as this last section will describe.

³¹⁴ Interview Melissa, WOSA representative, 1 June 2022.



Figure 59. Extract from Davodeau, Étienne. 2011. *Les Ignorants : Récit d'une Initiation Croisée*. Futuropolis. p.70

8.3. Upgrading within the global value chain: The emergence of new hybrid forms in wine sector global value chains

Because natural winemakers in the Western Cape (and in other wine regions alike), have ignored environmental certifications, they use other upgrading strategies along the global value

chain, both upstream and downstream of production, which are also referred to as “process upgrading”.³¹⁵ These strategies eventually impose themselves as “niche”, but portable, quality conventions.

Based on my study of these upgrading strategies, I can make two observations. First, they help natural winemakers add value to their products: through innovation and hybrid economic settings, they are part of the differentiation strategies used by natural winemakers to distinguish themselves from the conventional wine economy. These added value and differentiation strategies also help secure spots for natural wine in “fine wine” categories and thus have an influence on price mechanisms, to the benefit of producers. Second, as a self-reinforcing phenomenon, they also contribute to assert the winemakers’ identification and affiliation with the natural wine movement while at the same time building a transnational shared identity.

What are the distinctive elements – both upstream and downstream of the wine production process – that help make them different from the rest of the wine market? To what degree are natural winemakers’ markets in opposition to the mainstream sector? These questions are explored in the coming section. The main hypothesis here is that natural winemakers engage in value-adding activities by tapping into a pool of practices and knowledge that is shared by the movement at a transnational level. Natural winemakers are reinventing paths in the global value chain with new managerial models, new structures of enterprise, different ways of exposing themselves to wine markets and innovations in wine trading techniques.

8.3.1. Upstream upgrading: Rethinking the production and processing phases

Our focus here is on process upgrading (as opposed to product upgrading) will be the focus here, and this section is organised into an upstream and downstream categorisation. Upstream refers to everything that happens ahead of the production process, involving ownership structures, land tenure set-ups, infrastructure acquisitions and suppliers’ organisations, among other things. The downstream phase designates everything that occurs during the commercialisation, marketing and distribution of the product. This section is not intended to provide a comprehensive overview of the upstream and downstream processes; rather, it

³¹⁵ “Giuliani et al. (2005: 552) define upgrading as innovating to increase value-added and this has particular resonance in wine sectors of the New World. Process upgrading can involve investment in new winery technologies (stainless steel tanks able to rigorously control the temperatures of the fermentation process being a key example), improvements in communication between vineyard management and winemakers and transforming the inputs (wine grapes) more effectively into what international markets require.” (Gwynne, 2006, p. 384)

focuses on key elements that have been reinvented by natural winemakers, innovative processes that allow differentiation and upgrading.

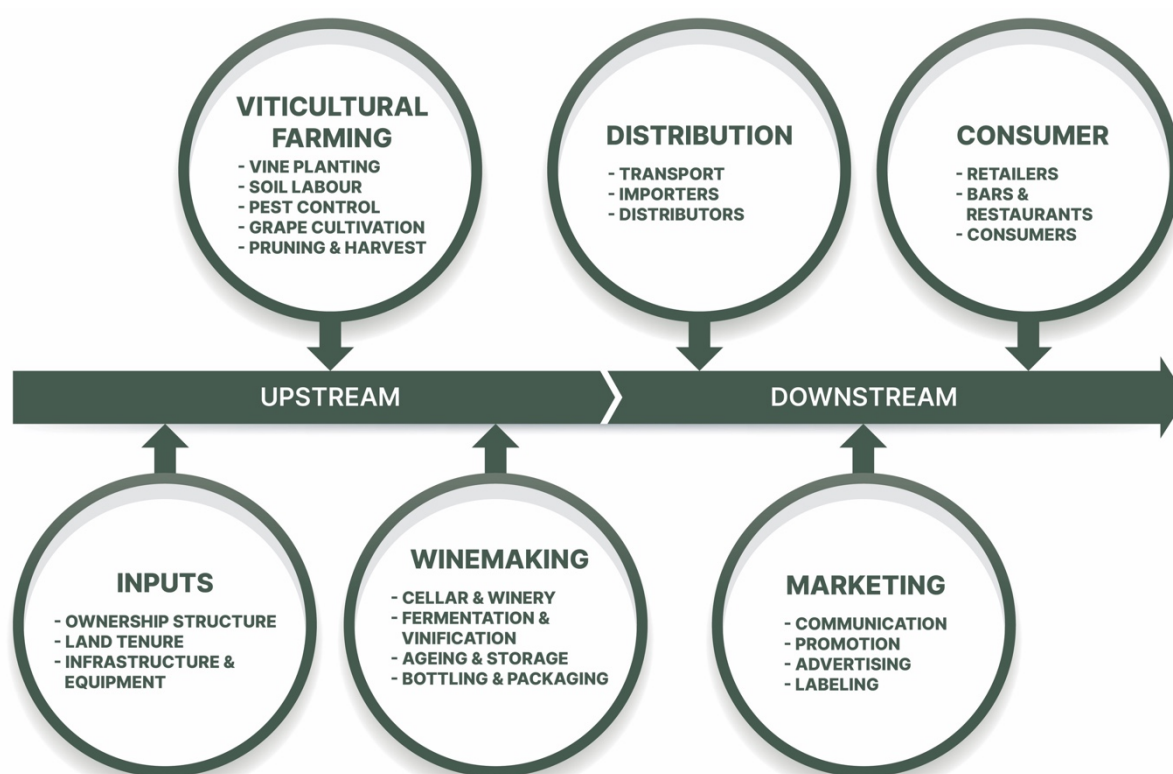


Figure 60. Upstream and downstream of the wine value chain

8.3.1.1. New economic structures and ownership patterns of wine domains

One aspect that is not unique to the natural wine movement but happens to be very present in it is the broader reflection on land ownership and production structure. What types of enterprises and businesses do natural winemakers set up?

➤ Natural winemakers as “profit sufficers”

Historically, viticulture has been reserved for an economic elite who possess family-owned land capital or initial financial capital to invest in land and infrastructures, and often both. However, as suggested in previous chapters, natural winemakers do not necessarily fall into these categories: some are neo-rural farmers, while others are landless producers. More generally, the natural wine movement can be framed into a Marxist economic perspective, which criticises ownership of private property. This affiliation with a Marxist vision of the economy is not explicitly present in all natural winemakers, but it manifests itself through

certain actions and narratives. For example, some natural winemakers resist turning their product into a mere financial asset, and opt to set their per bottle prices within a range that compensates producers fairly while keeping their wine relatively affordable. Similarly, they intentionally keep their operations small, rejecting the prevailing logic of economies of scale. In this regard, one might argue that natural winemakers take a position against the well-known “get big or get out” adage used in agroeconomics. This idea is echoed in an article by Amory Starr on local food culture, in which he writes: “The adage in agriculture to “get big or get out” is being turned on its head by growers who are staying small, and getting much more profitable (Schneider, 2004)” (Starr, 2010, p. 380). This argument matches with some observations in the natural wine movement, in which expansion is more often associated with a loss of quality of the final product.

“So, I think the idea for myself, was ... and I mean we only make 12,000 bottles per year maximum, most years we make 6,000 bottles, so I have no interest in the mass-produced product, and we don’t try to market it in that way... And people who buy our wines pay quite a lot more than supermarket prices... But also there are no sulphites etc. I don’t care if people buy or not. I don’t care. I’m not driven by these requirements.” (Interview Robert, winemaker in Western Cape, 21 January 2022)

“And most producers would only truly question or change their wines because of financial and commercial reasons. It is not like something they pursue from inside their stomach. And then you have, obviously the small cohort of producers around the world that are against all odds, and against all costs They’ll aspire to become the absolute best at what they can possibly be. And we are definitely in that category.” (Interview Milo, winemaker in Western Cape, 7 June 2022)

This narrative is reinforced by the distribution channels that only sell natural wine and favour small, independent wineries:

“Yes! I mean it just so happened to be that the small independent wine guys tend to go for the natural style of wine. It’s not a corporate gig for them. It’s their own small thing so they want to do as much as they can.” (Interview Sean, caviste in Cape Town, 18 December 2021)

“You start to understand me. I prefer the small independent fighters” (Interview Damiano, caviste in Cape Town, 8 December 2021)

Looking more deeply into the economic stance and ideology embraced by natural winemakers, I posit that they align with the concept of “profit sufficers” rather than “profit maximisers” (Sage, 2003), in line with their environmental concerns and their broader integration into a particular moral economy. As Sage has emphasised, this “reveals the significance of moral considerations in economic behaviour and the willingness of actors to offset purely personal financial incentives against social criteria involving collective, community or environmental benefits” (Sage, 2003, p. 47). It brings forth an awareness of decisions that balance a rational self-interest with a concern for non-economic goals. The notion of being “profit sufficers” – in

contrast to “profit maximisers”, who adhere to a mainstream capitalist logic – surfaced consistently in my interviews.

➤ Hybrid tenure and new economic settings for natural winemakers

By using innovative methods and hybrid economic structures, natural wine producers have reinvented new modes of ownership of both land and infrastructures. I explore a few cases of this below.

Traditional wine culture relies heavily on property, which is often referred to as estates in Western Cape or châteaux in Bordeaux. Some natural winemakers have adopted a contrary stance, and take pride in being landless winemakers: they do not own domains, their bond to the land is created through the time and efforts they invest in the vineyards rather than through property contracts, and instead they often rent small parcels of land. The story of Anne and Joelle in Bordeaux is evocative. When I first met them, Laurence explained how they set up the domain:

“And as we continued to meet people, someone offered us to farm a few rows in a vineyard. It was a friend in Barsac who said, “If you want to start slowly, I’ll let you have fifty ares, and so you can enjoy yourselves.” So, it was a gradual installation over seven years on leased vineyards. That’s how we started, not with capital, just some savings from our previous jobs. We had vineyards on a lease basis and a cellar that we renovated from that old house right here. So, we work on very small surfaces. We didn’t need a bank loan, well, almost not. Just a small loan for the renovation, but that granted us a lot of financial freedom because there was no significant investment – our investment was our time. We had hardly any equipment; we really started with very little.

- *And today, are you landowners?*

- We still don’t own anything. We have expanded since we now have 4.5 hectares, whereas we started with just half a hectare. And that’s something important for me, for the freedom that we have to make the wines we love. And you know, land here is very expensive, so if we had wanted to buy, we would have been very dependent on financiers or subsidies. But in this case, we started without financing, without public subsidies or anything.” (Interview Anne, Closieries des Moussis, 26 May 2021³¹⁶)

³¹⁶ *My translation of:* “Et au fur et à mesure des rencontres, on nous a proposé une vigne, c’est un ami à Barsac qui nous a dit “si vous voulez démarrer tranquillement, je vous laisse 50 ares et faites vous plaisir”. Donc ça a été une installation progressive sur 7 ans, sur des vignes en fermage. Voilà on n’est pas arrivé avec du capital mais juste quelques économies de travail que l’on avait pu faire en tant que salariées, et donc des vignes en location de type fermage, et un chai que l’on a réhabilité c’était une ancienne maison juste ici. Et donc on est sur des toutes petites surfaces. On n’a pas eu besoin de prêt bancaire, enfin quasiment pas, juste un petit prêt pour la restauration mais beaucoup de liberté financière parce que pas d’investissement enfin notre investissement c’était notre temps en fait. On n’avait quasiment pas de matériel, on est vraiment partie la fleur au fusil. - *Et aujourd’hui vous êtes propriétaire?* On est propriétaire de rien, toujours pas. On s’est agrandi depuis puisque l’on a 4,5 hectares, alors que l’on avait démarré avec un demi-hectare. Et ça c’est un truc qui est important pour moi dans la liberté que l’on a eu de faire les vins qui nous plaisaient, c’est que pour le coup, le foncier ici c’est très cher donc si on avait voulu acheter on aurait été très dépendant des financeurs ou de subventions. Alors que là pour le coup on a démarré sans financements, sans subventions publiques ni rien.”

One might easily say that Anne and Joelle set up against all the odds: the domain is managed by two women who farm using biodynamic agricultural methods and produce natural wine by renting several small plots of land scattered around prestigious appellations in Médoc such as Moulis-en-Médoc and Margaux. With so many elements that go against traditional winemaking, it is no surprise that they were first viewed by the locals as aliens. When I asked them what the reception was like when they settled there, they replied:

“I think the local winemakers were a bit surprised. After all, we set up so small, we didn’t make much of a splash. They thought, “There are two women working the vines a bit strangely.” They were a bit surprised and amused, but they didn’t talk to us much.

- Still, someone once told us: ‘You’re doing creative leisure.’ [*laughs*].

Some people talked about us because we were so atypical, so you know... and, trouble also comes when you stand out.” (Interview Anne and Joelle, Closeries des Moussis, 26 May 2021³¹⁷)

Anne and Joelle’s case is not particularly atypical in the natural wine movement, however. Many winemakers start small by choice or by default without owning anything. In South Africa, where winemaking practices are less standardised, young winemakers find ingenious ways to start producing without the need for initial capital.

More details are needed here about the specific aspects of land tenure in the South African system. The land ownership structure in South Africa has favoured the construction of large farms and estates, which is an important characteristic of the structure of the wine industry in South Africa and part of its historical legacy. Still today, individuals are not legally allowed to buy a property smaller than twenty hectares. This makes it rather difficult for young winemakers to purchase land, and so small producers are generally not landowners, and continue to buy their grapes from grape growers. This structure was often mentioned by natural winemakers as a barrier. Inspired by the figure of the *vigneron*, a common presence in the French setting, most South African winemakers would ideally like to be able to farm their own grapes to produce wine, but they find themselves hindered by land ownership constraints, as these two natural winemakers explained:

“I don’t own it because in this country it’s very complicated. It’s not Europe where you can buy one hectare – here you need to buy a whole farm. So if I ever want to get my own vineyard, I would probably have to buy a farm, which hopefully I can do sometime in the future. So yes, we rent a vineyard, which I farm. I really love it.” (Interview Jack, winemaker in Western Cape, 25 April 2022)

³¹⁷ *My translation of:* “Je crois que les vignerons du coin étaient un peu étonnés, après on s’est installée tellement petites, on n’a pas fait de vague. Voilà il se sont dit “il y a deux nanas, qui travaillent des vignes un peu bizarrement”, ils étaient un peu surpris et amusés mais on ne nous en parlait pas trop. - On nous a quand même sortie une fois: “vous faites du loisir créatif. ” [*rires*]. [...] - Il y a des gens qui parlaient de nous parce qu’on était tellement atypique que bon forcément... Et les emmerdes ça arrivent aussi quand on fait parler de soi.”

“I think I’m very privileged to do it, because there are a lot of guys, winemakers that wants to have a property, but it’s not easy in South Africa. Here it’s really difficult to buy a small property because of the sub-divisions and rules and regulations around it. So, you either buy 40-50 or 100 hectares but not less. It’s not like in France, where you can buy 2 rows or a hectare here and there. So it’s completely different.” (Interview Justin, winemaker in Western Cape, 6 April 2022)

How do they operate in the face of these constraints? During my fieldwork, I encountered a multitude of innovative small cellar setups. Restricted by land tenure laws and limited initial capital, young winemakers often organise by renting shared cellar spaces. A good example of this is Karibib, a cellar shared by eight young winemakers in Stellenbosch. This new economic setting allows both small production and the spread of knowledge. Sometimes, the setups are even smaller and less formal – several winemakers indicated that they started by renting a single tank or a few barrels from another cellar where they had worked previously and producing barely a few thousand bottles a year. This is often done informally within peer networks. They also pool their resources to invest in equipment, establishing a kind of resource-sharing hub. These new setups are different from the traditional image of the vigneron and the holistic approach advocated by the natural wine movement; however, they enable small producers to exist by using ingenious means and innovative cooperative modes. We might ponder whether we are witnessing the emergence of a new generation of cooperatives. Cooperative structures are not a new concept in themselves, of course, especially in South Africa, where the viticultural model has historically been built on a robust cooperative system. Also, as I mentioned earlier, natural winemakers tend to be small independent producers who have distanced themselves from the historical cooperative system because they see it as compromising both the quality of the products and their revenue. I contend, however, that by pooling equipment and cellar spaces, and sometimes even sharing rows of leased vines, small winemakers are reinventing the concept of cooperatives to their advantage.

To expand on this notion, the natural wine movement in other wine regions has also established estates built on models of social and solidarity economies. The natural wine movement in the wine regions of Bordeaux and the Western Cape may still be at too early a stage to be able to manifest these initiatives, but in other regions, such as Alsace and the Cévennes in France, collective solidarity-based non-profit estates have taken root. These estates³¹⁸ group together members, each of whom has a share in the domain. They are not vineyard professionals, but individuals from civil society or ordinary consumers who become co-owners, co-managers and

³¹⁸ See for instance *Le Mas des Justes*, in the Cévennes, France.

co-producers, as they invest and participate in the decision-making process for their estate, as well as in vineyard work and harvests, under the guidance of the winemakers. Together, they ensure that the vineyard becomes a virtuous viticultural model with organic and biodynamic vines, experimentation with future cultivation methods, and a vinification method that adheres to natural wine principles. These innovative forms of marketing are, in fact, less dependent on markets, but more importantly, they provide opportunities for consumers to become investors or participate intermittently in the production process. More generally, these new forms of wine estate are a partial response to the calls for a change in paradigm in people's relationships with property and production. As Ponte et al. note, "Calls have been made for enhanced sustainability governance that is embedded in a more cooperative paradigm instead of the more traditional top-down compliance paradigm" (Ponte et al., 2023, p. 1).

8.3.1.2. Redefining professions and agencies between actors in the supply chain

➤ **In the Western Cape, finding ways to move beyond the historical "Grape Growers vs Winemakers" divide**

Another notable feature of the South African wine industry is the longstanding division between grape growers and winemakers. This is partly linked to the cooperative system and land tenure regulations alluded to above. It poses a significant challenge for natural winemakers, who often encounter limited control over and traceability of the grapes they purchase, as this natural wine merchant explained:

"There are not a lot of natural wines in South Africa, because I believe you need to be organic or biodynamic. Humm... there are a lot of guys that are farming sustainably, but the problem we have in South Africa is that a lot of the smaller producers don't own vineyards and they don't own land, so they need to buy in grapes or rent blocks from farmers. And most of the time, the farmers don't see the point in converting to organic because there are a lot of guys buying from them anyway. And also they're selling in quantity, so the higher the yields, the more money they get. Obviously the smaller producers are looking for lower yields, less grapes but more concentrated, and obviously farmed in the right way." (Interview Edwin, caviste in Cape Town, 29 December 2021)

This compartmentalisation of the industry contradicts the holistic approach advocated by natural wine – "from the vineyards to the bottling," to borrow Maurel's expression. By depending on contracted wineries, grape growers and winemakers become distinct entities, which introduces an additional intermediary into the overall value chain. Natural winemakers have expressed their concerns that due to this division, growers lack incentives to invest in environmental care or to adopt sustainable farming methods, let alone to transition to organic or biodynamic farming. With grapes being sold by the ton, high yields are still encouraged, and

organic or biodynamic farming generally provides higher-quality grapes but lower yields. This is particularly disconcerting for natural winemakers considering the economic challenges faced by most of the country's grape growers. Some authors have illustrated the struggles of average grape growers coping with a global oversupply of wine and the impact of a weak South African currency (Ponte & Ewert, 2007). In such a challenging economic environment, allocating additional resources to environmentally friendly production takes a back seat, and grape growers still prioritise an approach geared towards volume and consistency.

Natural winemakers have resorted to innovative ways to farm or influence the farming methods of the grapes they purchase, encouraging growers to pay attention to environmental practices in their vineyards. Conventionally, winemakers would buy grapes from growers with little to no attention being paid to farming methods. To enhance the traceability and quality of their products, small independent winemakers have started to rent small parcels or just a few rows of vines from grape growers, which they monitor throughout the year, and in some cases they lease parcels so that they can farm the vines themselves and/or in cooperation with the vineyard owner. The testimony of Thomas, a natural winemaker in Stellenbosch, offers an informative description of this shift in paradigm that impacts both grape sales logic and agricultural methods. Thjomas and Jeanette have set up a small cellar where they produce natural wine only from single vineyards in and around Stellenbosch. Thomas believes that wine made from a single vineyard offers a unique tasting experience, as it provides a sense of place. They have not yet been able to purchase land, and so they are using four different grape growers scattered around the Stellenbosch area to source their grapes. Their approach to their grape growers and their relationship with them are definitely off the beaten track, and have allowed the paradigm shift described above. In our interview, Thomas explained:

"You're farming your vineyards?"

- No, sadly not. I mean we are very much involved but there is only so much you can do if you don't have land and you don't have tractors. So we chose our growers based on their ability to sort of work with us. And yes, I think we've got some cool growers now: we make six wines under Craven and we have four growers. And they're all awesome. But they all come from a background of farming quite conventionally.

I mean they all do still farm conventionally. We're under no illusion that these guys need to make money. It's the reality, especially here where people don't necessarily pay a lot for grapes. So they have to farm a bit more conventionally, a bit less riskily, but with us they are willing to work in a much more sort of organic direction. Which is awesome." (Interview Thomas, winemaker in Western Cape, 11 May 2022)

How were Thomas and Jeannette working in close collaboration with their growers? What did it involve exactly? And what was there that benefitted the growers? Thomas provided some concrete examples of their arrangements:

“Our growers are great and all very open-minded. And it always comes down to a conversation about – and I hate to say it – but for them it’s about money as well. So it’s like: “Guys, we don’t expect you to do anything that’s going to cost you money, we’ll cover the costs.” You know the common thing in this country is to pay by the ton, but that – in my eyes – put all the risks on the growers. So if we do have a shitty year because you know our cover crops didn’t work so well or we didn’t want to use Roundup, and if that affected the yields, it shouldn’t affect the growers, because it was our decision, we asked them to farm this way.

- *So, you’re still paying them whatever quantity you’re getting out of it?*

- Yes exactly, and some years we win and some years they win, and it’s about that happy medium, but they take fewer risks.” (Interview Thomas, winemaker in Western Cape, 11 May 2022)

Purchasing grapes by the row or hectare instead of by the ton is definitely a game-changer in the sales logic, and it has profoundly modified the agency between the grape grower and the winemaker, to the benefit of both: the winemaker can monitor production more closely and incentivise the grape growers in terms of farming practices, gearing them towards organic viticulture. Thomas concludes:

“So it has taken us quite a few years to build that trust with the growers and also grow. And so now we take a hectare instead of one row. And then it just gives us a bit of manoeuvre. So in the last three to four years, we feel we know what we are doing so it’s more about going outside and spending more time in the vineyard. It’s great for us because that’s what we want to do, but also for them: you know, it gives them a licence to experiment or to see a different side of the story.” (Interview Thomas, winemaker in Western Cape, 11 May 2022)

With this “licence to experiment” and the drive towards new farming practices the winemakers encourage the grape growers to agroecological farming practices and actively contribute to the spread of knowledge and the incremental transformation of vineyard. This will be investigated in greater depth in Chapter 9. What must be emphasised here is the capacity of natural winemakers to create new economic and working relationships with grape growers and reinvent the economic agency between the two actors. Thomas’s story is not unique: many small independent winemakers have turned towards grape growers to purchase their grapes and in the hope of obtaining better-quality grapes and they have had to use innovative economic structures to incentivise the grape growers to adopt organic – or at least more environmental – viticultural practices. In turn, several of the grape growers mentioned that thanks to these new partnerships they had slowly been able to move away from contracts with the big cooperatives, and second, they had room for experimentation and could engage into a gradual conversion of their vineyards without bearing all the economic risks associated with it. Job opportunities have also emerged from these new arrangements for viticulture consultants who can establish links between traditional grape growers on the one hand and small independent winemakers on the other to enable monitoring and ensure good farming practices on the leased parcels throughout the year. Finally, I should also note the complexity of the traceability of the products this

compartmentalised systems lead to, which adds to my previous argument about the difficulties of being certified with environmental labels in this context. This lack of traceability engendered by the compartmentalisation of production was confirmed by a representative of the accreditation body:

“Yes. That is one of the big things we check specifically, the traceability of the product. Especially when people produce both conventional and organic, you have to make sure there is a separation in place and that you can track all the way back to the very field it came from, but luckily the wine industry is very strictly governed, actually by SAWIS, so everything is on record.” (Interview Cyan, ECOCERT representative, 16 February 2022)

➤ In Bordeaux, modernising negociants’ activity and investing in urban cellars

Innovative production structures that diverge from the traditional vigneron model, in which production is entirely dependent on a single individual, are also emerging in Bordeaux. The emergence of urban cellars warrants particular attention. Urban cellars are constructed in densely populated urban areas and thus do not cultivate grapes *in situ*. This means that with the development of these urban cellar initiatives and their need to purchase grapes, it is the activities of the negociants that are modernised, making room for a proliferation of merchant-winemakers (*négociant-vignerons*).

The example of Les Chais du Port de la Lune in Bordeaux is a perfect illustration of this phenomenon. It was started up in 2017 by Laurent and Annica, two oenologists who were eager to create their own wine. Thanks to a city rehabilitation programme, they were able to establish their cellar in a former World War II blockhouse in the heart of the port of Bordeaux, which was formerly called Le Port de la Lune. On their website, winemaker Laurent emphasises his “desire to make wine where it is first consumed: in Bordeaux, in the historical heart of the “mondovino”.³¹⁹” The two partners then established a *négoce* activity to bring grapes for vinification to their cellar in the heart of Bordeaux. They travel around France in search of high-quality organic grapes, regularly monitoring agricultural practices and participating in the harvesting of grapes they then vinify in their urban cellar. This activity, which lies halfway between *négoce* and natural winemaking, allows them to create unique wines with sometimes unprecedented blends while also making a major effort to respect natural wine vinification methods. Once again, the example of Les Chais du Port de la Lune is not unique, and other structures have emerged in the last few years to participate in the rehabilitation of the *négoce*

³¹⁹ Chais du Port de la Lune: <https://leschaisduportdelalune.com/les-chais/>

activity³²⁰ while also promoting attention to quality grapes and natural vinification methods. In this sense, this new generation of French *négoce-vignerons* is much closer to what is happening in South Africa, and the historical differences between the two models is fading in favour of new wine-producing models.

Whether it be a question of domain structure, land ownership, grape purchasing or cellar spaces, natural winemakers have ingeniously established new economic hybrid arrangements in order to overcome the constraints of the current market. In so doing, they sometimes sidestep capitalist logics and carve out new niches within the wine industry. These initiatives and arrangements are not unique to the natural wine movement – they also apply to small independent winemakers in general – but this idea of producing wines using an anti-establishment and solidarity-based economy is an integral part of the natural wine ethos (described in Chapter 4) and aligns with wider reflections on exiting capitalist and profit accumulation dynamics. The natural wine movement has been instrumental in process upgrading all along the supply chain (upstream), but it also has a lot to offer in terms of downstream strategies. The next section investigates the process upgrading that intervenes during the commercialisation, marketing and distribution processes.

8.3.2. Downstream upgrading: Reinventing commercialisation and distribution processes

Let's now turn to downstream upgrading. In this section, I investigate global distribution and the provisioning networks for commercialisation, focusing on the culturalisation of the economic process – how economic patterns are shaped and perceived in a cultural context. Building on the concept of social embeddedness I discussed earlier, I align myself with Callon's perspective on economic sociology. In his view, actors are not inherently economic calculative agents; instead, they are influenced and situated within a market context, and deeply embedded in social dynamics (Callon, 1998). In other words, in contrast to the neoclassical economic approach, I believe that markets are socially constructed and that economic actors are entangled in a web of relations and connectedness, and therefore the economic systems in which they operate are not dissocialised and the economic conventions are subject to evolution.

³²⁰ Historically, *négociants* are an integral part of the institutional order of Bordeaux wines³²⁰ (Costa & Smith, 2006). They are organised through large trading houses and promote “branded wines” (as opposed to *château wines*). They are grouped together under the authority of the Union des Maisons de Bordeaux (UMB) and make up a historically well-established elite, representing over 70% of the total wine commerce in Bordeaux and exports to more than 160 countries (Bouzdine-Chameeva & Ninomiya, 2011). However, they have not escaped the impact of the Bordeaux Bashing phenomenon or, more broadly, the economic and representation crisis Bordeaux has faced in the last decade (see more details in Chapter 5).

This re-embeddedness of economic conventions has been well summed up by Lagendijk: “New entrants with different perceptions and ambitions, shifts in product definitions, changing consumer awareness and other factors meddle with the existing framing of market relationships, causing “overflowing” and the need to reform and renegotiate conventions” (Lagendijk, 2004, p. 516). I show that for actors in the natural wine movement, re-embedding involves creating alternative supply chains. This is also reflected in the literature on AAFMs that studies resistance to globalisation in the food industry. This resistance often manifests itself through re-embedding strategies, including the creation of alternative spaces in which economic transactions are shaped by close social relationships, values and practices. I explore the mechanisms of this re-embedding in the natural wine movement through alternative supply chains, and extract three main hypotheses from my observations: first, these alternative supply chains prioritise shorter and more transparent routes from producers to consumers; second, they operate in a closed circuit, outside the traditional channels of wine industry commercialisation; and finally, they emphasise the “trust factor” as a primary economic convention to substantiate the quality of a product.

8.3.2.1. Hand-to-hand transactions: fewer intermediaries and the trust factor

➤ **Provisioning networks outside the mainstream channels**

Global competition puts significant pressure on today’s wine industry. How do natural wine producers navigate and leverage opportunities from these global dynamics? Actors in the natural wine movement have taken a firm stance, reshaping supply chain dynamics by forging new market pathways, including alternative sales channels. The movement has successfully established its own networks, as can clearly be seen from the specialised wine fairs, dedicated wine shops and restaurants. Natural wine producers intentionally avoid marketing their products through large-scale retail outlets, opting instead for alternative distribution channels, particularly small-scale enterprises, and short supply chains facilitated by specialised events or direct sales.³²¹ By challenging both conventional distribution channels and the standard mechanisms for selling wines, natural wine producers play a pivotal role in creating new niche markets for their products. The supply channels operating in the natural wine movement are intended to be shorter, to reduce the number of intermediaries and to operate independently of

³²¹ In 2013, direct sales made up 45% of organic winemakers’ volumes, a notable contrast to the 28% recorded for conventional producers (Célérier, 2017, p. 334)

mainstream economic agents, the aim being to re-establish a direct connection between consumers and producers.

The alternative nature of these markets is not confined to their ethical agenda alone; they also create sales pathways for wines that do not fit the standard expectations of the large mainstream economic players. Krzywoszynska made a similar comment in her thesis on organic wine, explaining that alternative markets “enable the sale of products which do not fit the pacification requirements of mainstream markets” (Krzywoszynska, 2012, p. 203). She went on to add that mainstream markets often experience difficulties due to the “unexpected and uncontrollable liveliness of such products as organic wines.” This is even more relevant in the case of natural wines because of their ever-changing characteristics: as we saw in Chapter 1, natural wines are more likely to differ from one vintage to another, and even from bottle to bottle, making them unstable objects of value.

➤ **Hand-to-hand sales and the importance of the implicit trust contract in market exchanges**

Another omnipresent aspect of the natural wine movement is the importance of the trust factor. In line with the sociology of economics approach supported by authors such as Callon and Granovetter (Callon, 1998; Granovetter, 1985), which stresses the role of social embeddedness, my research has revealed the importance of social relations when it comes to generating the necessary trust for economic trades to take place – or in the words of Winter, embeddedness “as a euphemism for market relations based on close social and inter-personal interactions and relations of loyalty” (Winter, 2003).

What I have termed the “trust factor” for the purposes of this research was previously investigated by Sage using the concept of “regard.” In his analysis of social embeddedness in AAFNs, he introduced the notion of regard to describe “market exchange where personal acquaintance is immaterial and the material gains from trade are all that matter, reciprocal exchange embodies a “process benefit, usually in the form of a personal relationship”” (Sage, 2003, p. 48). In these kinds of market exchange, economic conventions are redefined and based on “selling with a story” (Freidberg, 2003). This idea emerged numerous times during my interviews with natural winemakers:

“I think our story is a stronger bond than anything else. 100% stronger. And we’re starting to see the results now: we’re selling through our trust. And that all links quite nicely to why we aren’t certified

organic and all of that. We sell through who we are.” (Interview Ryan, winemaker in Western Cape, 22 April 2022)

“You have to build a relationship. You want people on your own doorstep to know who you are and what you’re standing for.” (Interview Amanda, winemaker in Western Cape, 21 April 2022)

According to Sage, “a sense of “entanglement” arises from the hybridity of moral and money economies that impose certain obligations and responsibilities on both transacting parties” (Sage, 2003, p. 49), which allows the regard or trust factor to perform. Arguably, reintroducing a sense of morality is a prominent feature of alternative agro-food networks, and it is undoubtedly also inherent in the ethos of the natural wine movement. The notion of trust works as a means of guaranteeing market exchanges within the alternative supply chains that characterise the natural wine movement. There are plentiful examples of observations and discourses that feed the trust factor. They mostly stress the fact that while bowing to transnational exchanges, the natural wine movement is restricted to relatively small and tight networks where “you get to know everyone and everything about everyone,”³²² and so individuals who do not play by the rules or respect the notion of trust “would quickly be found out.”³²³ In fact, winemakers have reported several examples of other producers who “burnt their wings” and ruined their reputations by making false promises and failing to respect the trust contract that bound them to their buyers.

“I don’t want to mention the estate, but I saw on Instagram a photo posted by an importer of that estate who had taken pictures during a visit. In the photo, it was evident that the area around all the vines was scorched, indicating the use of chemical herbicides, possibly Glyphosate. So, I sent him a message warning him about the photo; it was a bit too obvious.” (Interview Lionel, winemaker in Bordeaux, 7 April 2021³²⁴)

“We had a farmer last year who sprayed Roundup in the vineyard, and we always used to buy from him – myself and Ryan. I went there one day and saw that some of the weeds were dead. I was like “That looks like spray” and I spoke to him. So now imagine people start saying “You know, Jack and Ryan they’re natural, but they buy grapes from a guy who sprays Roundup!” Then the next thing at the Real Wine Fair people would wonder what the fuck we’re doing here. It’s a small world, so just be true and honest to what you are doing, that’s the easiest way.” (Interview Jack, winemaker in Western Cape, 25 April 2022)

While a minimum number of intermediaries is optimal, this trust contract is embodied all along the wine chain from producers to consumers. Each actor takes this trust responsibility very

³²² Interview Liza, winemaker in Western Cape, 16 February 2022).

³²³ Interview Edwin, caviste in Cape Town, 29 December 2021.

³²⁴ *My translation of:* “Je ne veux pas citer le domaine, mais j’ai vu sur Instagram, une photo d’un importateur de ce domaine qui avait pris des photos lors d’une visite, mais sur la photo on voyait que au niveau de tous les pieds c’était brûlé, donc il y avait eu du désherbant chimique, voire du Glyphosate. Donc je lui ai envoyé un message en lui disant “dégages ta photo”, c’était un peu trop évident.”

seriously and makes it a point of honour to continue the story of the product and the producer. This was confirmed by several wine shop owners and distributors:

“And then, when you’re having a conversation from the winemaker to the customers, that’s where we come in because we understand “OK, that was farmed organically, that’s an orange wine, etc.” That’s the information I can get and I can transmit it to the customer without the necessity to have all the stickers [*labels on the bottle*].” (Interview Gina, caviste in Cape Town, 20 December 2021)

The historical *négoce* activity in Bordeaux does not accommodate this logic. As Bouzdine-Chameeva explains, “the presence of an intermediate actor in the Bordeaux wine chain interferes with the natural wine clients’ desire because they prefer to know all the details of the wine production process and often want to meet personally with the winegrower” (Bouzdine-Chameeva & Ninomiya, 2011, p. 71). The role of the *négoce* in traditional sales in Bordeaux adds another intermediary and comes to hinder the “trust contract” wished by natural winemakers.

➤ **Trust as a substitute for environmental certifications?**

I would go even further, and argue that in many cases this trust contract has emerged as a substitute for environmental certification. This is particularly visible in South Africa, where environmental certifications are hard to come by due to the numerous obstacles I have cited above. In the absence of certification, trades are based on these informal and implicit trust contracts. When some natural winemakers were asked if they were certified with any environmental labels, they replied:

“No actually, because we’re a small business, small operation. Bigger wineries get asked to do it. My friends in Stellenbosch are converting now and they say it will help them a lot but I think the nice thing, and that is where natural wine comes handy, is that with the natural wine approach and the kind of importers we have, what happens is that my wines are imported to reliable sources and people that are super reliable. It makes it a bit easier.” (Interview Jack, winemaker in Western Cape, 25 April 2022)

“No, because all my importers know what I’m doing in my vineyards. I don’t sell to anyone who hasn’t been in my vineyard or doesn’t know the whole process from scratch to the glass I work with. And guys are smart enough to know that this is the proper way of doing it. So there’s no pressure to do it.” (Interview Rob, winemaker in Western Cape, 4 May 2022)

“So I think just the complication around certification is the reason why I haven’t done it, and to be honest, I work in very close relationship with all my importers. They come out here once a year at least and we go to the vineyards, so they see what happens in the vineyards; they see the process. For me, this is the message they need to carry out to their clients and again they also have smaller, more intimate connections with their clients because everything is smaller: we aren’t sending big amounts and huge brands out in supermarkets, etc. I think the hand-to-hand sale helps with that.” (Interview Justin, winemaker in Western Cape, 6 April 2022)

The “hand-to-hand” approach emphasised by Justin reflects a desire to bring a human dimension back into trade, and could be used as a perfect metaphor for describing short circuits and the trust contract, the moment when the parties shake hands and agree on the story that will serve to sell a product. These trust contracts apply all along the distribution channels, not only between producers and their importers, but also at each stop between the importers and the final customers. Thus, the more intermediaries there are along the chain, the greater the risk that this trust contract will be broken, as the winemaker’s story may become twisted. Actors in the movement are aware of the risks, and highlight the importance of honesty, loyalty and transparency as key conventions in natural wine market exchanges. To what extent can this trust variable be effective? More research needs to be done here, but as it stands, what is particularly fascinating with the natural wine movement is that betting on the trust contract is also the preferred option at an international scale. This may be because the movement revolves around alternative supply chains that exist alongside the mainstream wine markets, and that are comprised of tight, strongly homophilic networks that adhere to the same ethos (more in Chapter 9).

8.3.2.2. Communications and marketing: new codes and languages

➤ The cultural identity of natural wine

The embeddedness of economic interactions within the natural wine movement is further strengthened by novel codes of communication and marketing. This phenomenon initially manifested itself through the distinctive visual identity of wine bottle labels, which contrasts sharply with established conventions in the wine industry. Natural wine labels are very visual, colourful and artistic. Some use pop culture references, while others are punk, outwardly graphic or even deliberately gaudy. This visual identity serves as a powerful group marker, and according to Pineau, it functions as both an “outlet and a place for identification and emancipation from the dominant system” (Pineau, 2017, p. 12). In the absence of a label that specifically designates a wine as natural (with the recent exception of the *Méthode Nature* label), this visual identity helps consumers recognise natural wines, thereby contributing to their position in the market and distinguishing them from conventional production. This robust identity is therefore arguably the primary factor that allows the average consumer to identify a natural wine. Surprisingly, very little research has been conducted to explore this aspect in detail. Natural wine producers use wine labels as a prime medium for humorous puns and

wordplay, quite often with a provocative tone. This wine shop owner in Bordeaux plays this game in a somewhat comical way:

“I always find catchy names, and I have this amazing friend who’s a graphic designer, and he loves creating. So, it’s a collaborative process: each time, there are three names on the bottle – the producer, the graphic designer and me. The idea is to unsettle people a bit, you know. And each time, I write little texts for the labels. On the upcoming bottle, as a punchline I wrote, “It’s not just viruses that mutate.” And there you go [*he laughs*].” (Interview Léon, wine bar owner in Bordeaux, 27 April 2021³²⁵)

Léon is not the only one to have used artists to design labels: indeed, the natural wine movement can boast its own, such as Michel Tolmer, Pauline Dupin-Aymard and Les Fols de Silène, all of whom are established artists whose work can be found on labels and posters for trade shows and festivals or in specialised restaurants and wine bars (see Figure 63 below). The movement also benefits from the support of international stars who appeal to a young, urban and trendy audience to promote natural wine. One example is the documentary series for food enthusiasts produced by the American hip-hop star Action Bronson.³²⁶ This contrasts considerably with the solemnity associated with Bordeaux wines and the elitist image of the Château. In fact, natural winemakers strive to distance themselves from the identity crisis that has befallen Bordeaux (Réjalot, 2021) through their distinctive visual identity. Sébastien, a young winemaker in Dordogne, exemplifies this intention as he takes over from his father and endeavours to modernise the overall image of the domain:

“Yes, indeed, we’re trying, and I think it’s part of the natural wine movement: there’s an increasing number of natural wines, and I believe it’s natural wine that initiated this trend of labels breaking the traditional codes, moving away from the Château with its gothic letters and gold embellishments. Enough of that... We try to make a different wine in the bottle, and it’s accompanied by a rather distinct packaging. I believe it represents us better. You see, we don’t own châteaux, I don’t feel like a lord of the manor, so there’s nowhere on our bottles that says “château.” The whole château thing is outdated; maybe it was a good selling point in its time, claiming to be wealthy and bourgeois to sell wine, which is quite strange I think. Now, our labels resemble us and our clientele. I think we mostly sell to young people, and they don’t like the classic label.” (Interview Sébastien, winemaker near Bordeaux, 26 April 2021³²⁷)

³²⁵ *My translation of:* “Moi je trouve toujours des noms accrocheurs et j’ai un super pote qui est graphiste et lui il s’éclate à produire. Et du coup c’est collaboratif : à chaque fois il y a les trois noms derrière – le producteur, le graphiste et moi – et puis surtout ça marche quoi. L’idée c’est de désarçonner un peu les gens quoi. Et puis à chaque fois j’écris des petits textes pour les étiquettes. Et sur la prochaine bouteille comme chute j’ai écrit “il n’y a pas que les virus qui mutent”. Et effectivement voilà [*Rire*].”

³²⁶ See the YouTube series “From Paris with Love. Action Bronson Drinks France’s Top Natural Wine” or “Natural Wines with Clovis.”

³²⁷ *My translation of:* “Oui, oui, on essaye, et je crois que ça fait partie du vin nature: il y a de plus en plus de vin nature, et je crois que c’est le vin nature qui a lancé ce mouvement des étiquettes qui cassent les codes et changent du château avec les lettres gothiques et la petite dorure et tout ça. C’est bon il y en a assez comme ça... Nous on essaye de faire un vin différent dans la bouteille et ça s’accompagne aussi d’un packaging assez différent. Et je crois que ça nous ressemble aussi mieux. Tu vois on n’a pas de château, je ne me sens pas châtelain et donc nulle part il n’y a marqué “château” sur nos bouteilles. Ce truc de château s’est dépassé, peut-être que ça a fait vendre à une époque, il fallait dire que l’on était riche et des bourgeois pour vendre du vin, ce qui est quand même un peu

In addition to clearly distinguishing natural wines from the rest of the industry, this visual identity is transnational, and playfully blurs the distinction between wines produced in the so-called “New World” and “Old World” wine regions. Meanwhile, natural winemakers have successfully cultivated their own customer base of younger, more urban and highly internationalised consumers. This group sees the purchase of a bottle of wine as more than a mere act of consumption; it becomes a civic gesture and a way to become an active participant in societal choices such as respect for the environment or support for small-scale, artisanal viticulture. This non-traditional consumption is viewed by some as a radical act that aligns with the theory of the rebel consumer wherein individuals can subvert the system through their autonomous style of consumption (Katz, 2006).

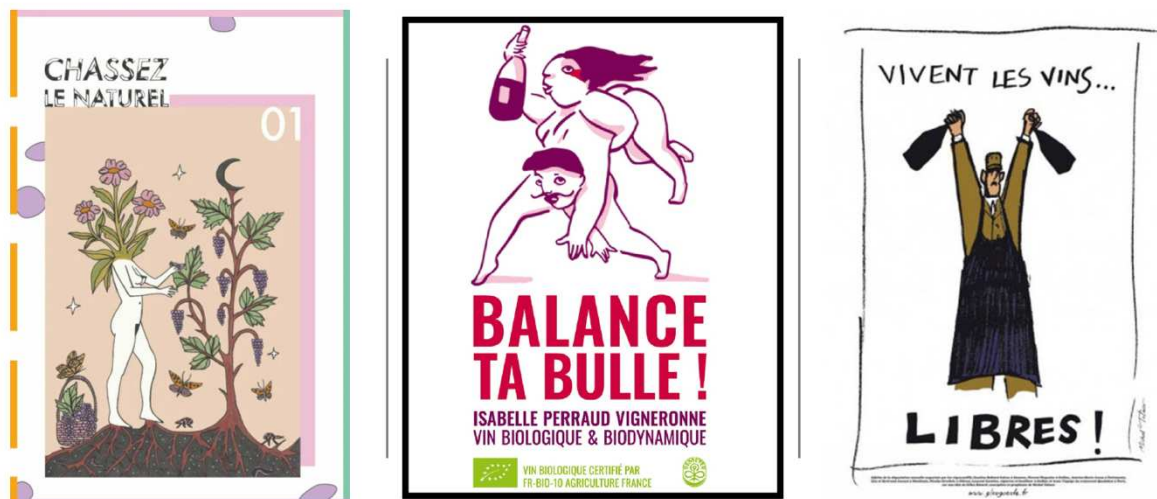


Figure 61. From left to right: 1. The cover of Pauline Dupin Aymard's first book "Chassez le Naturel"; 2. A label of the feminist winemaker Isabelle Perraud designed by the artist Les Fols de Silène; and 3. A poster by Michel Tolmer.

To cater to this new segment of consumers and maintain the “innovative” or even “rebellious” dimension of this act of consumption, natural winemakers also highlight products that have traditionally been overlooked. Thus, the range of wines in the natural wine movement no longer only includes red, white, or rosé wines, but also offers a broader palette of products, featuring orange wine (also called macerated white or skin-contact wine) and Pet Nat (short for Pétillant Naturel). In an article in the New Yorker, the journalist Rachel Monroe describes this appealing new taste for natural wine:

bizarre par ailleurs. Et puis voilà des étiquettes qui nous ressemble et qui ressemblent aussi à notre clientèle. Je crois qu'on vend surtout à des jeunes et ça les fait chier d'avoir l'étiquette classique quoi.”

“In place of Parker’s muscular Bordeaux, the wines of the moment were often described as glou glou, French for “chuggable”: light reds frequently made via carbonic maceration, a fermentation technique that results in fresh, fruity wines. (It’s also quick; the wines are often ready to sell a few months after the grapes are harvested). They sometimes tasted self-consciously unconventional. Millennials with appetites for difficult beverages – sour beers, bitter spirits, kombucha, apple-cider vinegar – appreciated wines that were cloudy and effervescent, with a noticeably fermented funk. Wine bars celebrated previously obscure styles and regions: pét-nat, skin-contact, Georgian, Slovenian” (Monroe, Rachel. 2019. “How Natural Wine Became a Symbol of Virtuous Consumption.” *The New Yorker*).

This goes even further and extends to the packaging of products: natural wine is now offered in kegs so that establishments can serve it directly on tap at their counter (as is usually the case with craft beer), and in recent years even in cans. All these strategies can be seen as a form of process upgrading that radically disrupts the existing economic conventions of the wine sector.

The revival of the Piquette

“La piquette” is a popular term in France to describe a low-quality wine, the kind you might find on the bottom shelf of a supermarket. While the term is commonly used to refer to cheap wine often associated with the meals of the working class, historically and technically, piquette has a different meaning. It refers to an alcoholic beverage made from grape marc and water. Indeed, for many years, during the grape harvest, vineyard workers would collect the grape marc, mix it with spring water, and let it ferment. The remaining sugars and fermented materials from the marc would create the famous piquette, a beverage similar to wine but produced at a lower cost.

Over the years, piquette became a term used to denigrate the quality of a wine. However, today, there is a resurgence of piquette, driven by certain winemakers from the natural wine movement. The revival of the piquette is led by two factors, first an ecological and holistic vision to transform the entire product (with piquette the marc of grape is transformed instead of being wasted) and second a growing demand for low-alcohol wines and alternative beverages. However, the commercialisation of piquette is not possible (yet?) as the beverage is prohibited (in both France and South Africa). Its prohibition in France dates back to the events of the Midi Rouge episode mentioned earlier (see Textbox 3) and the subsequent enactment of the 1907 law. Today, winemakers who produced Piquette can either keep it for their own consumption or have to find subterfuges to get around the law (for instance playing with the “flavoured wine” category).

Textbox 21. The revival of the Piquette.

➤ Promoting an inclusive drinking culture

The distinctiveness strategy extends to wine tasting. Natural winegrowers do not try to correct their wines to fit expected standards; on the contrary, they reinvent the tasting process and the terms that go with it, inviting consumers to reformat their palates.

In the natural wine realm, there are no amateur clubs in the traditional sense, or as Monroe describes them, ““Wine geeks” – men, mostly – discuss[ing] wines in terms of chemical compounds and quantifiable metrics: pH, total acidity, months of barrel ageing.”³²⁸ Natural winemakers diverge from this approach and encourage a reconsideration of the semiotics surrounding the tasting experience to reinvent the entire tasting palette. Rather than relying on scientific terminology, which can be viewed as obscure and intimidating for people who are not well-versed in wine, natural winemakers often advocate for a more emotionally connected approach, urging individuals to “speak from the heart” and to describe a wine based on their personal feelings. This desire to break free from conventional tasting norms has also been highlighted by other authors. In 2019, Parga-Dans et al. wrote that the “cultivation of a “taste for uncertainty” associated with the variability and uncertain characteristics of organic wines is considered a way to benefit from product differentiation” (Parga Dans et al., 2019, p. 136). In the same year, Moutat published the results of a study on wine semiotics that indicated that natural winemakers, who have been alienated from the gustative standards imposed by AOCs, had an aroma wheel that differed significantly from the one used for conventional wines (Moutat, 2019, p.70). She therefore called for further reflections on the creation of new lexical entries entailing the implementation of adapted tasting grids.

8.3.2.3. Drawing a new map of the global wine economy

➤ **Production almost entirely geared for export**

Another feature of natural wine is that it is almost entirely geared towards export. Indeed, owing to their small-scale production, natural winemakers effortlessly sell their entire stock each year, particularly to markets that have a fondness for natural wines such as England, Japan and the Scandinavian countries. The predominantly export-based strategy is motivated by several factors, the first of which is the limited likelihood of finding interested consumers locally, especially in South Africa, where the wine culture is marginal and reserved for an economic and cultural elite.³²⁹ By exporting, natural winemakers maximise the chances of their wine being purchased and enjoyed by natural wine enthusiasts. A South African producer of natural wine in Stellenbosch commented:

³²⁸ Monroe, Rachel. 2019. “How Natural Wine Became a Symbol of Virtuous Consumption.” *The New Yorker*.

³²⁹ Local wine consumption is 6.7 litres per capita per year, while beer accounts for 55 litres per capita per year. Source: *Compte Rendu Afrique du Sud par Vignoble du Sud-Ouest* 2018.

“- And you would hope that they could appreciate what we do! But I just don’t think that’s the case. So we just don’t care. At the end of the day, we export most of our wines. We export 95% of our production. Which actually I hate. I don’t hate it, but I really wish we could sell more locally, and there are people doing good things to change that. But yeah...

- *The wine drinking culture in South Africa is quite small, right?*

- It’s tiny, and then drinking our style of wine is even smaller!” (Interview Thomas, winemaker in Western Cape, 11 May 2022)

According to a recent WOSA report, South Africa exported 46% of the wine it produced in 2022.³³⁰ However, this figure is very modest when compared to the export share of natural wine production. Indeed, in my sample, the average export share for natural wines was 82%,³³¹ underscoring a significant trend towards higher export levels for these producers. Finally, thanks to exports, natural wine producers are not constrained by the South African price range and have greater flexibility when it comes to increasing their prices, thereby ensuring a return on investment. This trend towards exporting in the natural wine world is confirmed by an infographic published by the French app *Raisin*, which ranked cities according to the number of selling points of natural wine identified (see Figure 62³³²). Cultural capitals like Paris, New York, Copenhagen or London clearly appear as the top spots for natural wine consumers.

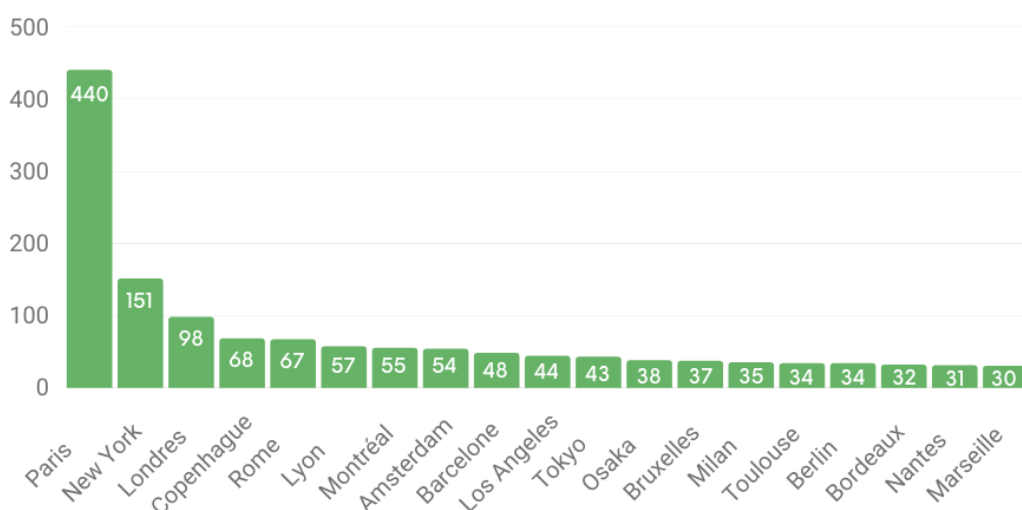


Figure 62. Ranking of cities in the world where natural wine can be found. Source: *Raisin app*, 2021.

³³⁰ Source: South African Wine Export Report 2022

<https://www.wosa.co.za/knowledge/pkdownloaddocument.aspx?docid=17961>

³³¹ The winemakers I interviewed were asked to provide the share of their wine they exported, but the figure was not always available.

³³² The figure does not pretend to be exhaustive or give a full representation of the natural wine restaurants, bars and shops. The *Raisin* app was developed in France, and so it is easy to understand why more points of sale were identified in France, and why Paris is over-represented.

Two comments on this topic recurred during my interviews. Firstly, some people raised concerns about the “trendiness” of natural wine, fearing that the tendency to export everything and not give wines the chance to age would contribute to their reputation as wines that do not age well. Secondly – and in my opinion this merits further investigation, because the vast majority of production is intended for export and the local market is already very limited – local distributors reported that they felt neglected by winemakers. The remaining few bottles that are not sold to foreign importers are typically distributed through allocations, which creates frustration for both local distributors and points of sale (bars, restaurants and cellars), which are left in despair. These frustrations and worries were expressed by a wine merchant in Cape Town:

“So I do get a bit annoyed actually sometimes, because with my fellow bars, we’re left a scrap with tiny volumes of these wines and made to feel grateful to get that. I am never really getting the feeling that they need us at all. So it makes it slightly annoying, and that slows down the whole process. Because they don’t feel invested in telling that story.” (Interview Ian, caviste in Cape Town, 21 December 2021)

In a vicious cycle, this lack of effort on the part of natural winemakers towards their local market also reinforces the pervasive absence of a wine culture among the South African population at large, and consequently the relatively low domestic consumption. It has to be admitted that there is a glaring paradox between the desire to reconnect with the land advocated by the natural wine movement and a production that is directed towards a (cultural and economic) elite and depends on very closed (almost confidential) circuits. As a result, natural wines find themselves far removed from local consumption. Most of the natural wines produced in South Africa are consumed outside the country (one might even say outside the continent), because all the natural wine hotspots are based in Westernised urban spaces, thereby contributing to a geographical and social divide.

➤ **Alternative geographies of the wine economy**

The quality turn driven by natural winemakers has led not only to a new economy of wine but also to an alternative geography of the wine economy that has impacted both wine production regions, the geography of trades and the places where wine is consumed. In their study of the quality turn in AAFNs, Murdoch et al. anticipated that “the turn towards quality in consumption may then reveal a very different mosaic of productivity, one that contrasts in important respects with the dominant geographic distribution of food production activities” (Murdoch et al., 2017, p. 108). One can easily draw a parallel here with the new world map that is currently being drawn by the economy of natural wine on a global scale.

Interestingly, the maps of conventional wine markets and the natural wine movement differ in many respects. On the production side, although they overlap because the production of wine remain restricted to regions that have a suitable climate for viticulture, as we have seen numerous times in this research, new (sub)regions that did not historically have a reputation for quality wines, such as the Swartland in South Africa, are being (re)invested in by natural winemakers (see Chapter 5). Furthermore, it should be expected that this pattern will be emphasised in the coming decades by the emergence of new regions that will become more favourable to grape growing because of climate change (Ollat & Touzard, 2020; Ollat et al., 2016). The wine geography is also rapidly changing on the consumption side, and new establishments specialising in natural wine, especially wine bars and *caves à manger*, are mushrooming in most urban spaces. What is more, a large majority of high-ranking gastronomic restaurants have a large selection of natural wine on their wine lists, as epitomised by *Noma*, which was named the best restaurant in the world and a temple of natural wine.³³³ More broadly, as pointed out above, consumption patterns are changing, with less wine being consumed in Europe and a new generation of drinkers emerging in fast-growing countries such as China or India.

This alternative wine geography highlights a triumph for natural wines that have climbed the value-added ladder and natural winemakers who have successfully invested in process upgrading, both downstream and upstream, in order to establish product differentiation and tap into new niche markets. Further research is required to examine the consumption phase and explore how the natural wine movement is providing fresh new frameworks for consumption standards.

8.3.3. *From marginals to the mainstream: Reproducing existing market mechanisms?*

As I noted above, natural wine producers are often associated with profit sufficers rather than profit maximisers. However, despite the fact that they prioritise moral considerations and adhere to certain ideologies, the economic reality for most producers remains profit-oriented. Producers must generate returns on their investments, and for the majority these returns

³³³ Noma, a renowned restaurant located in Copenhagen, Denmark, was awarded the title of "Best Restaurant in the World" by the World's 50 Best Restaurants list in 2010, 2011, 2012, 2014 and 2021.

constitute their primary source of income. It would therefore be too idealistic to claim that the natural wine movement is divorced from economic goals. On the contrary, as we have seen, producers actively pursue differentiation strategies by enhancing quality, implementing environmentally sustainable practices and upgrading production processes. These endeavours are undertaken to increase the overall value of the final product in the global wine market. Many natural winemakers express their political resistance in this regard less explicitly, often engaging in individualised forms of activism. This perspective resonates with an argument presented by Boutroue in her examination of the individualisation of advocacy and ecological commitment in permaculture. She contends that “these movements manifest both as calls for collective transformations and as calls for individual action as a premise for social change” and can thus be characterised as a “self-reform” movement (Boutroue, 2019, p. 7). Because the natural wine movement is constrained by economic needs, these dynamics of individualisation of engagement also apply to the movement and translate into the two market mechanisms explored below. Firstly, the conventionalisation of alternative markets indicates a transition from the political engagement associated with the natural wine movement to a movement absorbed by global capitalist market dynamics. This marks a paradigm shift as natural wine moves from the margins to the mainstream arena. Secondly, it is followed by the emergence of marketing opportunism and greenwashing practices wherein the concept of natural wine is diverted from its primary objectives to serve purely economic interests.

8.3.3.1. The conventionalisation of niche alternative markets

To pursue a hypothesis I have proposed several times in this work, natural wine production and consumption can be seen as an act of militancy carried out by a form of alternative elite in the sense of an informed segment of consumers. However, “alternative markets” and “informed alternative practices” are umbrella terms, and some authors have called out the conceptual vagueness of so-called “alternative consumption.”³³⁴ Tapping into the idea of “alternativeness”, commercial actors draw on alternative marketing rhetoric to appeal to these

³³⁴ In his analysis of the Slow Flood movement, for instance, Luca Simonetti denounces counterculture consumptions as notions empty of meaning. He explains: “The consumer society, in fact, is seen as a system of rigid, inflexible uniformity; as a consequence, non-standard acts of consumption are considered in themselves to be politically radical acts. This where the theory of the rebel consumer – that is, a person who through their ‘individual’, autonomous consumption style can subvert the System – begins.” But, he goes on, “The list of the things have been declared to be “subversive” in the past fifty years only to be swiftly adopted by the majority (smoking, long hair, bikinis, jazz, scooters, tattoos, heroin, marijuana, postmodernism, organic food, rock and punk) is impressive.” He concludes: “The melancholy observation that counterculture and anti-consumerism are ineffective ways of overthrowing the System is still only a part of the truth.” (Simonetti, 2012, p. 4)

consumers' demands for something different. Smith-Maguire et al. add that this "alternativeness is a potent form of cultural capital in contemporary consumer markets" (Smith Maguire et al., 2017, p. 500). One might therefore wonder to what extent natural wine production has remained loyal to its primary objectives, and what the risks are that the movement will bend to adapt to this alternative trend and consumer demand.

➤ **The mainstreamisation of natural wine**

"Natural wine's move into the mainstream posed problems, too. Marissa Ross told me, "The spotlight is really wonderful but also detrimental." The community had positioned itself against the behemoth of conventional wine; now that it was accruing more capital, celebrity, and attention, it was increasingly prone to lengthy dissections of who was legit and who was just cashing in on a trend, and which makers were claiming to be more organic than they really were" (Monroe, Rachel. 2019. "How Natural Wine Became a Symbol of Virtuous Consumption." *The New Yorker*).

The integration of natural wine into mainstream markets highlighted by Monroe in this article aligns with what Smith-Maguire et al. term the "conventionalisation of alternative markets" (Smith Maguire et al., 2017). This process involves the assimilation of offerings and narratives from niches or alternative markets by commercial actors into new marketing materials, thereby leading them into the mainstream market. A similar argument was proposed by Rao as he contends that radical innovations also produce pervasive market effects in which market rebels (involuntarily) contribute to the renewal of capitalist markets (Rao, 2008). I argue that the natural wine movement provides a compelling case for the conventionalisation or mainstreamisation of an alternative market. In essence, this proliferation of a differentiated product and market segmentation in the global wine market risks diluting the core distinctiveness of the movement.

➤ **Is the future of natural wine set to suffer the same fate as organic wine?**

Scholars have studied the conventionalisation – also known as the mainstreamisation – of organic movements extensively (Goodman, Maye, & Holloway, 2010; Guthman, 2004; Teil et al., 2011). Like the natural wine movement, the organic movement had its roots in an environmental commitment, and was intended to offer "alternative" products. However, these aspirations have become diluted through the assimilation of organic products into mainstream markets. This argument has been previously discussed by Teil et al., and has signalled the end of a niche economy and the concurrent emergence of industrial and corporate organic production, which has been accused of impoverishing the perception of organic quality. Teil

explains the threats associated with the rise of industrial organic production thus: “If this commercial compromise, which consists of reducing organic to an environmental qualification, becomes a true collective vision, there is a fear that these commercial crisis solutions will durably transform the market space that the producers faithful to their approach have managed to create and preserve until now, ultimately prevailing over it. The organic's goal of seeking to create other market relationships may even be at risk of sinking.” She adds: “By losing its soul, organic also loses its credibility” (Teil et al., 2011, p. 151).

As a consequence of the conventionalisation of organic wines, many winemakers have turned to natural wine production, because in their view “following the principles of organic agriculture was not enough.”³³⁵ They criticise organic viticulture for becoming industrial or commercial, in contrast to the more artisanal or peasant agriculture that is now defended by natural winemakers. They denounce the industrial reorientation of organic towards a mere label affixed to products. A winemaker in Bordeaux also mentioned the economic risks associated with this mainstreaming of organic viticulture:

“Because the downfall of organic comes when everyone is practicing it. If organic becomes the norm, everything will decline. It's a matter of supply and demand. Even people in organic farming tell me, “If tomorrow everyone is into organic, it will become a market price. Instead of it being more valued, we'll revert to a relatively low market price.”” (Interview Hervé, winemaker near Bordeaux, 26 April 2021³³⁶)

Over a decade after Teil’s observations on the mainstreaming of organic wines, the growing market share for corporate organic wines is now a reality. It is therefore essential to ask whether the natural wine movement is destined to suffer the same fate. Are we witnessing early signs of a mainstreamisation of natural wine and the emergence of a corporate natural wine market segment? One might argue against this, emphasising that the natural wine movement sets itself apart from the organic movement because it does not (or at least does not yet) rely on existing certifications but on a movement united by a shared ethos. The movement is therefore still predominantly driven by a cognitive rather than a normative dimension. However, there are multiple signs that point towards mainstreamisation, notably the growing attention being paid by traditional institutions to natural wine, whereas they had previously shown no interest in it. For instance, in 2017, the CIVB (Interprofessional Committee of Bordeaux Wines) began to organise events in partnership with *The Fooding*. The concept was a simple one: the CIVB

³³⁵ Interview Antoine, winemaker in Bordeaux, 10 May 2021.

³³⁶ *My translation of:* “Parce que la mort du bio c'est quand tout le monde sera en bio. Si le bio devient la norme, tout va rechuter. C'est une question d'offre et de demande. Mais même des mecs en bio me le disent "si demain tout le monde est en bio" ça va être le prix du marché. Et en fait au lieu que ce soit plus valorisé, on va revenir sur des prix de marché plutôt bas.”

invited a few winemakers to represent Bordeaux at various food events organised across France (including Paris and Lyon) in partnership with famous chefs. The initiative was a promotional campaign targeting a young, trendy consumer audience, in order to “de-stigmatise Bordeaux wines in the eyes of fashionable restaurateurs.” Against all the odds, the CIVB featured natural wines prominently at these events and largely sought out winemakers from the natural or biodynamic movement, and so pioneering natural wine domains were put at the forefront of these events. The natural winemakers I interviewed criticised the lack of substance of these initiatives, and bemoaned the fact that the CIVB only invited them to “save the brand image of Bordeaux”:

“For example, at the CIVB, about five or six years ago, they initiated campaigns where they selected winemakers who were already involved in somewhat environmental practices or producing wines that deviated from the classic Bordeaux standards. They collaborated with *The Fooding*, bringing in trendy chefs, mostly from Paris, and financing their visit here with a little wine tour. Later, we were invited to Paris to present our wines within these networks.

- *What were the main objectives of these events?*

- The goal was to present a different image of Bordeaux, as Bordeaux Bashing had been going on for several years. So it was about countering that and saying "Bordeaux is not just about the Grands Crus, heavily oaked wines, or the €1.50 Bordeaux found in supermarkets, and it's not just about chemicals either." And through our work, we were able to showcase an alternative approach, something different.” (Interview Damien, winemaker in Bordeaux, 12 May 2021³³⁷)

“It's a PR move for them... and something that doesn't represent Bordeaux's overall policy because they select people who have genuinely built themselves outside the system to tell trendy restaurants, especially in fashionable places in Paris, "Yes, we also have that in Bordeaux," even though we are truly on the margins. And most importantly, they have never supported us in any way.” (Interview Anne, winemaker in Bordeaux, 26 May 2021³³⁸)

8.3.3.2. “Marketing opportunism” practices

We might go even further here, and note the fact that the mainstreamisation of natural wine has led to the emergence of marketing opportunism and greenwashing practices, where the natural

³³⁷ *My translation of:* Par exemple au niveau du CIVB, il y a cinq ou six ans, ils avaient monté des opérations où ils avaient sélectionné des vigneronns qui avaient déjà une démarche un peu environnementale, qui étaient engagés ou qui faisaient des vins qui sortaient un peu des standards classiques de Bordeaux et puis avec le *Fooding*, ils faisaient venir des restaurateurs un peu branchés, surtout parisiens ici, ils finançaient leur venue ici avec un petit wine tour. Et nous après on était convié à Paris pour aller présenter nos vins dans ces réseaux. - *C'était quoi l'objectif ?* - C'était de montrer un autre visage de Bordeaux, le Bordeaux bashing date quand même d'il y a quelques années. Donc c'était aller contre ça et dire "Bordeaux ce n'est pas que les grands crus classés, ni les vins très boisés, ni les Bordeaux à 1,50 qui sortent en GD et ce n'est pas non plus que du chimique". Et nous on devait un peu à travers notre boulot, montrer une autre façon de faire.”

³³⁸ *My translation of:* “C'est une opération d'image pour eux...Et quelque chose qui n'es pas représentatif de la politique du Bordelais, parce qu'ils prennent des gens qui se sont vraiment construits hors système pour dire aux restaurateurs qui veulent des vins nature notamment les endroits à la mode à Paris "oui oui nous aussi on a ça à Bordeaux" sauf que l'on est vraiment marginaux. Et puis surtout ils ne nous ont jamais été soutenu d'une quelconque manière.”

wine concept is used opportunistically by global corporations for marketing purposes and to enhance their reputations.

In the face of the mediatisation and global success of natural wine, what had been considered up to then to be an “alternative” niche became valuable, and larger commercial interests, notably large-scale retail outlets, attempted to capture a share of the market. One example that comes to mind because it was fairly mediatised is the release of the *Naturae* cuvée in supermarkets. Gérard Bertrand, the owner of a massive wine estate in Languedoc, released his “*Naturae*” cuvée, a sulphite-free wine he marketed by playing on the blurriness around the notion of natural wine. The reader may recall the ban on mentioning “natural wine” on bottles discussed in Chapter 1, and with this misleading name “*Naturae*”, winemakers feared that consumers might be deceived. In their view, the production of *Naturae* goes against many of the principles of natural wine: first, it claims to be “natural”, but if we look closer we see that it is only made “without added sulphites”, which contributes to consumer confusion; second, although it is certified organic, it comes from a huge estate of over 1,000 hectares; and third, production is standardised, and the wine is sold in supermarkets with a “use by” date. A member of the INAO who worked closely on the implementation of the *Méthode Nature* consumers recounts:

We were already considered outsiders in the world of outsiders that is organic and biodynamic agriculture. [...] Yet we were in close proximity to very large operators nearby dealing with 128 million euros, so massive operations. They had a *Naturae* range that was sulphur-free but employed a lot of technology... Pfff [*he laughs*].” (Interview Gabriel, INAO representative, 25 August 2021³³⁹)

The production of these flash-pasteurised cuvées by Gérard Bertrand raises concerns about the proliferation of frauds to be found in particular in retail wine shops or supermarket aisles. It was in part to curb the abusive use of the concept that the *Méthode Nature* charter was created and presented to the fraud department in 2019 by the Syndicat de Défense des Vins Nature (see Chapter 7). This sentiment is shared by other natural winemakers:

“But using the word “natural”... Well, I've seen some “natural” cuvées in Bordeaux and it drives me crazy: the label is white, there's a green pine tree that gives the impression of being organic, it says “natural cuvée” or something like that, even though it's not even organic! They play a lot on the packaging, but in reality it's just a conventional wine.” (Interview Damien, winemaker in Bordeaux, 12 May 2021³⁴⁰)

³³⁹ *My translation of*: “Nous on était déjà des marginaux dans ce monde de marginaux qu'est la bio et la biodynamie. [...] Mais on côtoyait de très grands opérateurs à côté de chez nous, qui fait 128 millions d'euros, donc des trucs énormes. Et qui avait une gamme *Naturae*, qui était sans soufre, mais avec beaucoup de technologie. Pfff [*rires*]”

³⁴⁰ *My translation of*: “Mais utiliser le mot nature... Bon j'ai vu des cuvées nature moi à Bordeaux, ça me rend dingue: l'étiquette est blanche, il y a un pin vert qui fait penser au pin bio, il y a marqué “cuvée nature” ou un

“I believe what’s important about the Méthode Nature label is that it has established a framework because at one point there were too many deviations, with people self-proclaiming their wines as natural. But I’ve seen conventionally produced wines loaded with pesticides and sulphites which were labelled “natural wine.” [...] On the other hand, there are those who reject any certification, and it becomes a block for them. They benefit from the notoriety of the “natural wine” concept even though they lack certification! Some claim to be “better than organic,” but how can they prove it? I understand the reluctance towards certification, but in that case, one shouldn’t claim to make natural wine.” (Interview Arthur, representative of Vignerons Bio Nouvelle Aquitaine, 19 July 2021³⁴¹)

In South Africa, where the wine industry is less subject to regulations and environmental certifications and where the Méthode Nature label does not even exist, marketing opportunists are less frowned upon.

“Yes, there are a lot of opportunists here. Like there are a lot of bigger wineries that are making wine natural in the sense that they are not adding any... Well, in fact it’s just natural fermentation. And they might want to jump on that bandwagon as well and market it as natural wine.” (Interview Simon, winemaker in Western Cape, 23 May 2022)

“And they also realised that there’s a huge market for these so-called “natural” or “dirty” wines. So I think their minds have been broadened somehow.” (Interview Stephen, winemaker in Western Cape, 23 March 2022)

Somehow, in the South African context, this marketing misrepresentation is less perceived as a political confrontation; in a sense, winemakers are much more aware of or at ease with the purely economic strategies at play in the wine market. When I asked one South African wine professionals if they thought the concept of natural wine was being abused, they replied:

“Yes, 100%, but that happens regardless of whether you have the sticker or not. Look at all the organic wines and even biodynamic... and you know that it’s not. I don’t mind that because if people are trying to take advantage of the natural wine scene it means that it’s been something good, so let them do that, it’s fine. At the end of the day, you need to only worry about yourself. And it’s not going to harm you. I think it would be quite silly to think that.” (Interview Ryan, winemaker in Western Cape, 22 April 2022)

“Some companies started to propose to me – those same distribution companies that own farms but also have winemakers working for them – they start proposing “natural wines” without a story behind them! Not because they have a farm that produces natural wine but because they saw that there was a share of the market they didn’t have access to. This is interesting! You see this means that the share of the market of natural wine is increasing! Because people start to be aware how healthy, how much better it is to drink natural wine.” (Interview Damiano, caviste in Cape Town, 8 December 2021)

quelque chose comme ça, alors que ce n'est même pas en bio! Ils jouent énormément sur le côté packaging mais en fait c'est du conventionnel.”

³⁴¹ *My translation of:* “Je pense que ce qui est important dans la *Méthode Nature* c'est qu'elle a mis un cadre parce qu'à un moment donné il y avait trop de dérives de gens qui s'auto-proclamaient vin nature. Mais moi j'ai vu des vins en conventionnels bourrés de pesticides et de souffres et les gens marquaient "vin nature". [...] Et il y a les autres qui refusent toute certification et pour qui ça bloque. Et ce sont eux qui profitent de la notoriété du concept 'nature' alors même qu'ils n'ont pas de certification ! On voit des gens qui disent qu'ils sont "mieux que bio, " mais comment le prouver. Je comprends que l'on ne veuille pas la certification, mais dans ce cas-là on ne se revendique pas.”

These opportunistic marketing practices feed the sense of vagueness experienced by consumers because they maintain the confusion over what is and is not natural wine. Finally, it could even be argued that commercial actors who have identified the value-added in natural wine and abused the concept are engaging in greenwashing practices. Further research needs to be done to evaluate whether these industrial commercial actors can demonstrate actual improvements in environmental performance in wine production and compliance with the general ethos of natural wine. If they fail to do so, there could be accusations of “greenwashing.”

➤ **A growing debate around identification within the movement.**

As conventional winemakers and other commercial actors begin to market their wines as natural, some “authentic” natural winemakers have just stopped using the word. Indeed, some producers, and even some distributors, no longer wish to be identified with the movement because of abuses of the terminology, in a similar way to what happened with other words such as “hipster” or “foodie,” which now have negative connotations. Several winemakers interviewed confirmed this sentiment:

“I only partially identify with the term. I don't claim to be a natural winemaker, even though I work with a natural philosophy. For communication purposes, overall, I don't use any products in the vineyard. I have healthy grapes that ferment on their own with natural yeast, I don't add any vinification additives and I use a bit of sulphur before bottling. So do I make a natural wine? You tell me.” (Interview Christophe, winemaker in Bordeaux, 17 April 2021³⁴²)

“Most winemakers who genuinely don't use chemicals or additives don't label themselves as natural winemakers nowadays. [...] They don't feel the need to attach the “natural” label to themselves; for them, it's already an integral part of their lifestyle, and that's sufficient.” (Interview Sarah, caviste in Bordeaux, 17 April 2021³⁴³)

“Marketing your product as a natural wine may not be ideal for exports. Personally, I prefer to say that my wine is “clean and non-inoculated,” and that the terroir is “respected” (Interview, Jeanette, winemaker in Western Cape, 12 May 2022³⁴⁴)

Today, identification with the natural wine movement is partial and somewhat confusing, as one can find producers who comply with all the values of natural wine production but do not

³⁴² *My translation of:* “Je ne me reconnais que partiellement dans le terme. Je ne revendique pas d'être un nature moi, même si je travaille avec une philosophie nature. Pour des raisons de communication, globalement oui je ne travaille pas de produits dans la vigne, j'ai un raisin sain, il fermente tout seul, levure naturelle, je ne mets aucun additif de vinification et puis je mets un peu de soufre avant la mise en bouteille et voilà, est-ce que j'ai fait un vin nature?”

³⁴³ *My translation of:* “La plupart des vignerons qui vraiment n'utilisent pas de produits chimiques ou pas d'intrants, ne se disent pas vignerons naturels. [...] ils n'ont pas besoin de se mettre une étiquette de “vigneron nature”, pour eux ça fait partie déjà de leur façon de vivre, pour eux c'est déjà suffisant.”

³⁴⁴ *My translation of:* Après le vin nature, ce n'est pas forcément bien pour les exportations. Moi je préfère dire que mon vin est ‘clean, non inoculé, et que le terroir est respecté.’”

identify natural wine producers, and at the other end of the spectrum, winemakers who claim to be part of the natural wine movement but whose production does not respect some of its main principles, with a bit of everything in between, all of which contributes to a depoliticisation of the notion of natural wine.

Conclusion

By merging two strands of literature – one that has reflected on the notion of the quality turn deriving from AAFNs and from social movements more broadly, and another that is structured around the notion of upgrading, drawing from the literature on global value chains and more widely from a political economy approach – this chapter has proposed its own interpretation of the notion of upgrading and applied it to the natural wine movement.

First, it has provided an opportunity to reflect on quality upgrading. By defining quality as a social construct, I have questioned the polysemic, rapidly-evolving nature of the notion of quality in the light of the “quality turn” concept, which includes the emergence of new environmental and civic quality conventions. I argued that the natural wine movement in its transnational settings has marked a new quality turn in the wine sector that manifests itself in different ways depending on the local context. What is common to all local antennae of the natural wine movement, however, is the importance of re-embedding in local ecologies and re-embedding in close social networks.

Second, I have used the concept of environmental upgrading and quality conventions to investigate the landscape of environmental certifications that currently apply to the wine industry. With the increase of global exchanges and global competition, these certifications serve as normative indicators and policy tools to guarantee both the environmental quality of a product and its production path. I have argued, however, that in the face of the proliferation of environmental certifications, we are witnessing the commodification of the certification market with increasingly complex certifying mechanisms and overlapping sets of specifications. As such, the capitalist logics of the market have removed certification from its primary objectives of environmental protection and quality guarantees. Because of their distinct socio-historical trajectories, the French and South African cases have taken very different positions with regard to environmental certifications. In France, the wine industry is heavily governed by certifications, which are a deeply-rooted policy tool that is promoted by both public institutions

and private actors. Whereas in South Africa, where the state is largely absent from the wine industry, the existing environmental regulations and certifications are perceived differently. There, the natural wine movement, which is composed mainly of small independent producers, is predominantly regulation-averse, and despite a proliferation of private eco-labels, most producers choose to navigate through the global value chain without resorting to them.

The final section focused on process upgrading, which does not take place on the product directly, but along the value chain (upstream and downstream of production). I contend that in its transnational setting, the natural wine movement has succeeded in adding value to its products, thereby differentiating itself and creating a new market segment that exists in almost complete isolation from the mainstream wine market. These differentiation strategies encompass a wide range of innovations and hybrid economic settings within a holistic vision. They include new forms of land ownership and innovative economic structures for wine domains. Because the movement has to deal with the contemporary economic constraints, it has also reinvented professional activities by moving beyond the historical antagonism between the vigneron on the one hand and the compartmentalisation of grape growers and winemakers on the other. Downstream of the production phase, it has also participated in reinventing commercialisation, distribution and marketing. A heavy emphasis is placed on the importance of trust in the agency between producers and consumers and between every intermediary. The natural wine movement promotes short circuits and re-embedding human interactions in trade exchanges. This being the case, the informal trust contract that characterises the sale of natural wines is a guarantee of the story of the winemakers that is being told. This hand-to-hand and trust dimension in exchanges is particularly important for winemakers who do not use official certifications and eco-labels. Finally, I argue that the natural wine movement has contributed to the emergence of alternative geographies of both wine consumption and production, with renewed codes and conventions that manifest themselves through communications aesthetics, an updated language surrounding the wine tasting experience and the appeal to “alternativeness”. However, this alternativeness is called into question as global market dynamics prevail. The niche market the natural wine movement has occupied so far is slowly being integrated into mainstream markets, and like most alternative markets, one might argue that the movement is undergoing a process of conventionalisation. This conventionalisation of natural wine into mainstream markets also raises further questions about opportunistic marketing practices.

9. Chapter 9: The dynamics of knowledge production and diffusion in the natural wine network

Introduction

Natural winemakers can be seen as active actors in wine production paradigm shifts and as radical innovators who are seeking to cope with evolving demand and needs. In order to identify the paradigm shifts and radical innovations emerging within the natural wine movement with precision, we also need to pay close attention to the new knowledge that enters the movement and the patterns of circulation and diffusion of this new knowledge and know-how. Based on my finding that radical learning and innovations have played a crucial role in the emergence of the natural wine movement and its differentiation from mainstream practices, this chapter will now focus on the processes of knowledge diffusion and seek to parse out the key success factors and channels that have brought about its results.

In this chapter, knowledge diffusion is considered to be more than just a tool to enable the emergence of the movement in its local and transnational settings. Instead, I argue that the transmission of new knowledge by actors in the natural wine movement should be seen as an act of social militancy, as a form of soft power in action that plays a part in the construction of an ideological framework. Indeed, in the absence of collective or organised actions, the natural wine movement's political project manifests itself through an everyday activism that is woven into natural wine producers' professional activities. In other words, the movement is not just about working and producing wine differently; it is also about contributing to the promotion of an alternative way of life and educating peers on these alternative mindsets. This takes the form of teaching an ethos and know-how to other wine professionals. Geneviève Pruvost, who has analysed individuals committed to alternative ecological lifestyles in France, proposes a similar argument that active learning and knowledge diffusion are part of militant trajectories and are "integrated into the schedule as a legitimate and necessary activity" (Pruvost 2013). In her analysis of the militant diffusion process, she comments: "It has been shown that far from being self-sufficient, the encountered alternatives are organised in a dense network of mutual knowledge, leading to strong local and militant sociability. The diffusion of the model follows the paths of slow conversion through civil society, gradually spreading." (Pruvost, 2013, p.

55). In line with Pruvost's argument, I believe that the best way to analyse the flow and diffusion of ideas within the movement is through network analysis.

This chapter examines network theories that reveal several mechanisms for learning, apprenticeship and knowledge diffusion and pay close attention to agency. My research follows the line of previous studies of innovations in agriculture and the diffusion of agricultural knowledge, highlighting the role of social networks in the spread of knowledge to incrementally transform production practices (Rockenbach, Sakdapolrak, & Sterly, 2019, p. 686). This final chapter therefore adopts a social network approach to reveal the social fabric underlying the innovation processes in the natural wine movement and the diffusion of these radical innovations. Applying Berry and Berry's definition of diffusion as "the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among members of a social system" (Berry & Berry, 1999, p. 171), I emphasise this cognitive aspect in shaping claims and influencing the movement's ability to disrupt both the political and economic spheres. While the previous two chapters conceptualised the capacity of natural winemakers to innovate and thereby to adapt their wine production to contemporary challenges, this chapter assumes that this capacity for change is critically dependent on communication networks among various actors. Specifically, I use network analysis as a theoretical anchor here in order to develop a series of perspectives on networks, including actor-network theory, political economy and theories of innovation and learning.

The first section explores the very concept of a network. In it, I unpack the broader literature on network analysis and explain how I have used notions of social spaces and networks to capture the dynamics of knowledge diffusion and learning strategies and the circulation of innovations within the natural wine movement across different scales. I propose applying social network analysis as both an analytical framework and a methodological visualisation tool. I employ networks as an iterative and experimental methodology that complements the qualitative approach I have used thus far.

The second section describes the natural wine movement network in the two regions under study. I use visual representations of the movement in its local settings to ask the question whether this knowledge emerges simultaneously from different places (as a sort of *zeitgeist*) or if it circulates along the rhizome, traveling translocally across its different antennae. Network analysis also makes it possible to draw comparisons between the two cases and to

highlight the influence of governance structures within the organisation of local networks. I also examine the proximity and connections – or lack thereof – between the natural wine movement and the rest of the wine industry. The section ends with a brief analysis of the different types of knowledge mobilised within the network and how they combine or compete in the knowledge diffusion process.

Finally, in the third section, the dynamics of knowledge circulating among the network's actors and the opportunities for and barriers to flows are identified and unpacked. The section is divided into three parts: it first looks at the natural wine movement in Bordeaux, then in the Western Cape and lastly it takes a critical step back and examines dynamics at an international level by considering the movement globally, and more precisely by looking at knowledge circulation across the movement's different local antennae. I mobilise the concept of agency and apply empirical case studies to investigate how the natural wine network has disseminated its radical innovations. I explore the role of cognitive perceptions and representations in the circulation of ideas, and examine how these manifestations differ across the two regions. Finally, I use the chapter's translocal and interscalar analysis of the natural wine movement to develop proposals for avenues for further research.

9.1. Using Social Network Analysis to decode the relational dynamics of natural wine actors

The natural wine movement is analysed here as a social reality, as a social world that operates as a network – in the form of a rhizome, as we saw in Chapter 5. In this chapter, I seek to understand the circulation and diffusion of knowledge within this network. In order to do so, I use Social Network Analysis (SNA) as an inductive exploratory tool to help me understand this social world and its internal dynamics of knowledge circulation. This chapter presents SNA as both an analytical framework and a methodological tool. Analytically, social networks serve as a lens through which to comprehend the relational dynamics inherent in the natural wine movement and to examine how these dynamics facilitate or impede the dissemination of new knowledge. As a methodological tool, they complement the qualitative field research I have reported thus far, and provide a means of understanding and (visually) representing the network as a dynamic process that creates space for further research. The next section uses the literature on social network analysis to carefully contextualise my view and approach within the existing body of knowledge on the subject. Overall, in this section, I encourage the use of

network sociology to stress the role of networks in knowledge diffusion and learning processes; however, I move away from using SNA as a theoretical matrix and instead turn toward SNA as an exploratory tool for understanding a social reality.

9.1.1. Theoretical positioning and the main bodies of literature on network analysis

It is essential to introduce and contextualise social networks within the realm of social science, and I believe that a concise, targeted review of the literature is necessary in order to critically analyse existing theories and position my work within the academic landscape. The concept of “network” has evolved into a pervasive metaphor that is widely used to delineate complex systems of relationships, providing a comprehensive understanding of organisational dynamics and “specific sets of linkages between a defined set of social actors” (Mitchell, 1969, p. 2). The analysis of networks has led into a well-established sub-field in the social sciences, spearheaded by influential figures such as Ronald Burt (Burt, 2000, 2004), Mark Granovetter (Granovetter 1983) and Ian White (White, 1992). Social network analysis currently uses a diverse array of approaches that span the whole spectrum of social sciences, including economics, human geography, social anthropology and sociology. What unifies this broad spectrum of social network studies is a shared emphasis on relationships between actors, as network analysis is inherently relational.

Structuralist vs interactionist: different views of social space

The growing interest in network analysis is not surprising, given the increase in exchanges, flows of goods and people and the international circulation of information, as underlined in “The New Spirit of Capitalism” (Chiapello & Boltanski, 1999). For Boltanski and Chiapello, network analysis is even the product of transformations in capitalism. From this proliferation of flows and exchanges, a growing interest in social space and relational data in social sciences has emerged.

Numerous authors have endeavoured to theorise social space to provide an understanding of space as a relational and dynamic phenomenon (Knoblauch, Löw, Knoblauch, & Löw, 2020; Löw & Knoblauch, 2019). Two main approaches are identified in social space theories: structuralist (which remains the dominant tradition) and interactionist. Pierre Bourdieu’s approach is probably one of the most prominent examples of the structuralist tradition. At the heart of his sociological theory we find the concept of “social space,” which he described in his 1979 book *La Distinction*, which envisages society as a collection of “social positions” determined both by capital (economic and cultural) and interdependent and competitive relationships (de Nooy, 2003; Dubois, 2024; Glevarec, 2021; Roger, 2020; Sapiro, 2006). This approach focuses on objective relations within social structures delineated through a set of

attributes, and examines relationships of domination based on these various forms of capital (whether inherited, acquired or internalised). Bourdieu's structuralist approach has given rise to multiple corresponding analyses that are often conducted using Geometric Data Analysis (GDA) methods (Lebaron & Roux, 2009), which can be considered to be complementary to SNA or an alternative method to it.

In contrast to the structuralist approach, several authors have opted for a perspective that centres on interactions when examining social spaces. This alternative viewpoint will be explored in greater depth below. Interactionists diverge from the structuralist approach, believing that network analysis is driven by an "anti-categorical imperative," and they reject attempts to describe human behaviour based solely on the social categories assigned to individuals. Instead, the emphasis is directed towards intersubjective relations and relational thinking. In other words, the interactionist approach moves beyond the paradigm of "functionality", which describes society in terms of class, in order to better acknowledge the connections between the structural aspects of networks and the actors involved within them. As such, interactionists are particularly concerned with the systematic integration of individuals' capacity to act and actively shape their (social) environment (Hollstein, 2014). The interactionist approach has given rise to the wide sub-field of social network analysis we know today.

Textbox 22. Structuralist vs interactionist: different views of social space.

➤ **Social network analysis and positionality within the subfield**

Social Network Analysis has its origins in the early works of social anthropology. The term "social network" was initially introduced by John Barnes, and features prominently in numerous works from the Manchester school of social anthropology between 1950 and 1960 (Barnes, 1954; Bott, 1957; Mitchell, 1969). Connections can also be made to Elias's figurational sociology, which aimed to explore the intricacies of interdependent social relations among actors and used relational processes as its main unit of analysis (Elias, 1939). Today, two traditions can be identified within the analysis of social networks: a formal structural approach and a focus on the meaning and embeddedness of ties. The former investigates formal network structures and the position of actors within a network. Formal (also called structural) network analysis distanced itself from its social anthropology precursors and developed into its own distinct quantitative method. It is interested in various quantitative measures of network structures, including centrality, betweenness, in and out degrees and closeness, as well as sophisticated analytical procedures and calculation models. It also makes it possible to interconnect what may appear to be separate structural levels by bridging the gap between micro and macro analysis, and helps us see how closely interwoven different spatial scales can be.

A number of scholars have distanced themselves from the initial stream of formal structural SNA, expressing concerns about the detachment of formal networks from their social, cultural and geographical contexts. Criticism has also centred around the insufficient attention paid to the meanings inherent in relationships. The second tradition, in contrast, is more closely aligned to the Manchester school (Eve, 2002), and adopts deeper cultural and reflexive approaches to network analysis. My research is closely aligned with this second stream. Building on the legacy of the Manchester school, some contemporary network studies have sought to conceptually integrate agency by delving into phenomenological network theory (White, 1992). It is from this second strand that the Actor-Network Theory (ANT) emerged and was later conceptualised by Michel Callon and Bruno Latour (Latour, 1996). ANT falls within post-structuralist social network theory and offers a (rather) radical account of the way assemblages of human and non-human entities (which together are called actants) within a network interact with each other. It conceives the world as “a collection of heterogeneous activities, constantly in motion and conceives of “sociotechnical” networks.” (Routledge, 2008, 200). Within this second stream of social network analysis, authors have emphasised the social embeddedness of networks and turned their attention to the meaning of ties. Jan Fuhse and Sophie Mützel, for instance, have called for a type of qualitative network analysis that is specifically concerned with the study of “social and cultural phenomena.” They argue that “analysis that emphasises the structure of networks tends to offer deterministic explanations of social phenomena, without providing any insight into the processes by which network relations form, or the meanings and norms that govern their functioning” (Fuhse and Mützel 2011). In line with the analytical framework of ANT proposed by Callon and Latour and with the approach of Fuhse and Mützel, which calls for a study of networks as a configuration of social relationships interwoven with meaning (Fuhse 2016), this research is especially concerned with the dynamics of knowledge diffusion and circulation within the natural wine movement.

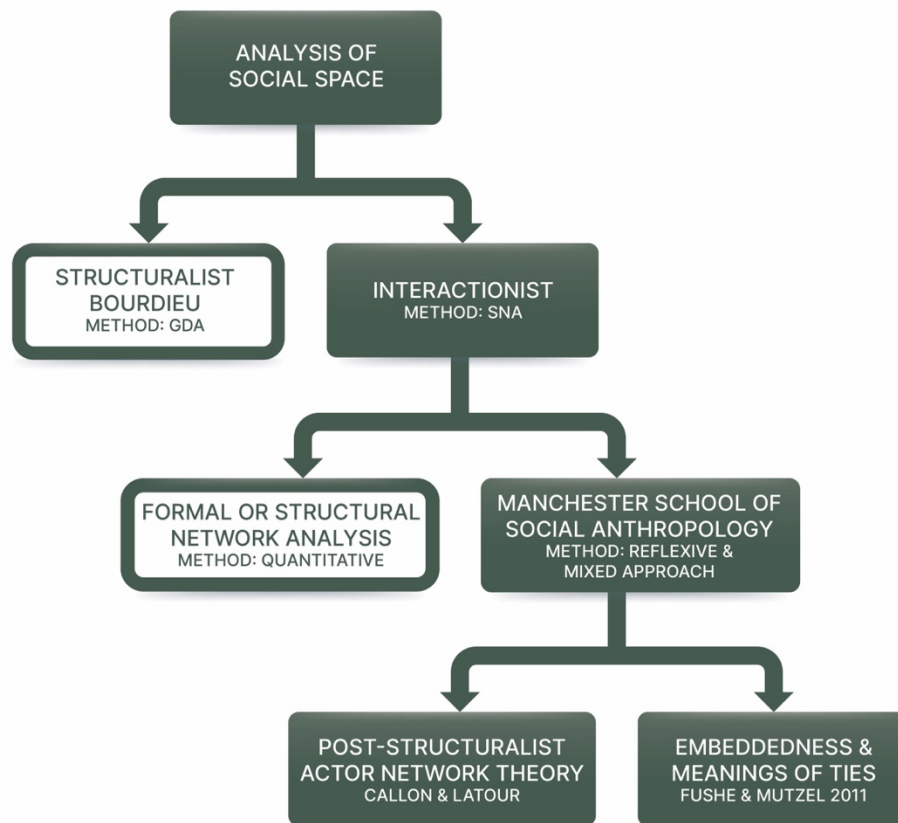


Figure 63. Positioning this chapter within the literature on social network analysis

➤ Social network analysis to capture circulation and diffusion of knowledge

The use of SNA in this research is geared towards obtaining a clearer understanding of the diffusion and circulation of new knowledge within the natural wine movement. I suggest here that network sociology is an effective way to highlight the role of networks in establishing new ideas, innovations, norms and underlying learning processes. Many authors have used network analysis as a tool to understand the diffusion of knowledge (Chiffolleau, 2005; Gluesing, Riopelle, & Danowski, 2014; Lagendijk & Cornford, 2000; Leahey & Moody, 2014; Rockenbach et al., 2019; Routledge, 2008). Within this stream of literature, authors have studied innovation trajectories, learning processes, knowledge diffusion and circulation mechanisms. This chapter explicitly draws on this approach to using networks to demonstrate that social relationships and agencies are active agents that are fostering change and innovations within the natural wine movement. I have sought to identify innovations and new knowledge and know-how in the movement throughout this thesis, particularly in Chapter 8, which includes an in-depth analysis of the different upgrading strategies proposed by natural wine actors to drive change and navigate the wine industry's global value chain in innovative

ways. The purpose of this chapter is thus less to identify innovation and learning processes, and more to focus on their channels of diffusion and the opportunities for and constraints on circulation within the movement (and to a lesser extent the rest of the industry).

I align myself with Yuna Chiffoleau to suggest that social networks go beyond merely serving as vectors of influence; they constitute social spaces in which knowledge is generated for innovation: “Social networks thus appear as the meeting point between innovation and learning approaches” (Chiffoleau, 2005). The exploration of knowledge circulation within networks has found its expression in studies drawing on Actor-Network Theory. ANT claims that the diffusion of innovation is an intricate process that emphasises movements, flows and transformations within a network while being attentive to the local context and entangled social fabric (Latour, 2005, Chiffoleau 2005). This theoretical framework underscores the strategies employed by actors to construct and stabilise socio-technical innovation networks. Likewise, investigations of knowledge flows have been carried out in network analysis, focusing on the meanings of interactions. For instance, David Marshall and Lynn Staeheli studied the obstacles to and facilitators of knowledge circulation in civil society organisations internationally and challenged the idealised normative model of the “network as a smooth plane through which knowledge freely circulates” (Marshall & Staeheli, 2015, p. 60). Similarly, my research examines the processes of forming and negotiating interactions, investigating how knowledge that moves through these interactions is facilitated, obstructed or altered by various actors to align with their individual interests.

My main hypothesis here is that in order for radical innovations³⁴⁵ to emerge, new knowledge must enter the network and spread within it in order to foster concrete technical change. More fundamentally yet, because the network I investigate here is made up of different wine professionals, I argue that learning processes take place through the transmission of necessarily argumentative and practical knowledge within the network.

9.1.2. Methodological application of network analysis in this research

This research combines network analysis with qualitative research: the network analysis either confirms or dismisses previous hypotheses formulated through qualitative field research. SNA is used both as an analytical device and a tool that allows for new research questions to emerge.

³⁴⁵ The concept of “radical innovations” is borrowed from Rao (Rao, 2008).

Throughout this iterative process, visual representations of the network can also be used to make qualitative and interpretive analyses more robust.

➤ **Networks as analytical devices and methodological tools**

This research adopts a post-structural and constructivist perspective to conceptualise networks as outcomes of the research process itself.³⁴⁶ The objective is to consider network visualisation as a method that generates new space for research, echoing Sapiro's argument: "The network is conceptualised here as a method rather than a reality of the social world" (Sapiro, 2006). In this framework, the network reveals a set of relationships at a specific moment in time. Marshall and Staeheli also support this notion when they state: "Diagrams provide a useful visual way of formally expressing these abstractions, not as a final, definitive representation of an actually existing civil society, but as a starting point for further research to complicate this view" (Marshall & Staeheli, 2015, p. 65). I do not perceive networks as a tangible reality, therefore; rather, I consider both networks and their representations to be conceptual and analytical tools. This approach fosters a more reflexive analysis, potentially leading to new issues that can be explored using complementary qualitative methods. Visualisations are an essential component of network analysis and are a part of the inductive research process. In the SNA tradition, visual representations take the form of graphs also known as diagrams. These diagrams depict the dynamics of nodes and ties produced from empirical data, and offer a wealth of information: for example, they illustrate the flow of knowledge within these networks and reveal variations in connectedness or disparities in resources among actors. The following sections set out the iterative process of building the dataset and network analysis for this research.

➤ **An application of SNA methods to our two local networks**

Alongside my interviews and observations, I carried out a qualitative network analysis with the objective of taking a snapshot of the local natural wine movement. The purpose here was to provide an image of the constellation of actors, highlighting their ties and relationships, in part to help identify the key actors and channels facilitating the dissemination of knowledge

³⁴⁶ Not surprisingly, the poststructuralist branches of social network theory resonate with the ideas proposed by Deleuze and Guattari, which emphasise research that examines social processes rather than structures. If one embraces this rhizomatic perspective, one might argue that actors in the natural wine movement are not endpoints, but rather dynamic nodes in a network within which each actor has unique degrees of centrality, connectedness and influence. Paying attention to the various strategies actors employ to forge relationships with one another, as well as considering the specific historical and political contexts in which these network interactions occur, therefore becomes crucial.

and know-how in the industry. I was faced with an absence of official data or an existing dataset for the natural wine movement (as discussed in Chapter 1), and so I collected data during my fieldwork and interviews.

This data was collected using two avenues. The first revealed a series of ties shedding light on the different kinds of relationships among the actors. At the end of each interview, the winemakers or other wine professionals were prompted to provide a list of their professional and kinship ties, and to delineate their affiliations with groups.

- The professional ties primarily included scenarios like “X buys grapes from Y,” “X work for Y,” “X provides consulting for Y,” and so forth.
- Kinship relationships were manifested in various forms, such as “X married Y,” “X lives with Y” and “X is the son/daughter of Y.”
- As regards memberships or affiliation ties, they encompassed adherence to institutions like eco-labels and environmental certifications, as well as memberships in more or less formal organisations like varietal associations, local gatherings, wine routes, tasting clubs and ad hoc winemakers’ collectives.

The ties are not directed, as I assumed that the relationships were reciprocal. The absence or existence of ties between nodes was coded 0 or 1 accordingly and integrated into a matrix that served as the database for the production of diagrams (see Figures 62 and 63 below).

The second data collection method involved identifying actors who had a reputation as potentiel leading figure or could be reached out for advice. At the end of each interview, the winemakers were requested to provide a list of the individuals they believed were the most influential in the natural wine movement locally. The following prompts helped identify potential influential actors:

“Who, according to you, are the game-changers in the natural wine movement locally? Who do you consider to be a role model? Who would you turn to for advice or inspiration? Who do you look up to in terms of new environmental and innovative practices both in the vineyards and in the cellar? Who would you recommend I speak to moving forward for this research?”

A matrix was constructed from this second set of data collected (see Figures 64 and 65 below). In this reputational network, the ingoing ties indicate “X seeking advice from Y.” Finally, desktop work and information I collected during my field observations were used to complete

the two data sets. SNA has specialised software for the analysis and visualisation of data, and the GEPHI programme was used for this research to generate visual representations of these networks.

➤ **Methodological challenges and tricks in developing SNA**

However, as this section also demonstrates, the current use of SNA in natural wine movement networks is constrained by methodological challenges that make it a difficult tool to use on its own, and thus was better integrated with complementary qualitative methods. The methodological barriers and challenges faced during this research and my attempts to overcome them are described below.

First, despite asserting the transnational feature of the movement, I was not able to provide a comprehensive picture of the network's transnational dimension. Therefore, despite a theoretical commitment to bridging the gap between the different scales, this work focuses mainly on the regional dynamics of the natural wine movement in Bordeaux and the Western Cape. The last sub-section of this chapter attempts to compensate for this absence by examining the role of the transnational network in identity building, relying solely on qualitative field data.

Second, the network presents challenges relating to boundaries and definitions. One of the first essential steps in network analysis is to define which actors are included in the network being studied. For instance, in Emmanuel Lazega's work, the network is defined by the employees of a professional organisation, but in the case of my research, the natural wine movement lacks definitions (Chapter 1) and cannot show a comprehensive organisational structure (Chapter 7), and so its borders are debatable, and sometimes even contested and porous. As Gisèle Sapiro has pointed out, informal networks are characterised by porous boundaries and relatively random or circumstantial interactions (Sapiro, 2006). This meant that during the data collection phase, I had to set up boundaries for the network and establish criteria to determine who was and was not part of it. Identifying the core of the network was a somewhat intuitive process, as it was at the heart of my fieldwork immersion; but establishing its boundaries was a difficult task, and so I decided to include all the actants in the complex assemblages that characterise the natural wine movement and to let the snowball effects of informant recommendations guide my next moves until the possibilities had been exhausted, meaning that there were no new names of natural winemakers emerging during interviews.

A third challenge arose when I embarked on building my own qualitative dataset. While most research on social networks relies on existing data, especially formal structural SNA, which deals with extensive quantitative datasets (de Graaff & Valeeva, 2021; Eckl, Ghanem, & Löwenstein, 2019; Zhang, Bu, Ding, & Xu, 2018), I had the opportunity to start from scratch and build my own matrix based on interview responses and self-collected data. I therefore constructed the network from a constellation of clues and through in-depth qualitative analysis, which enabled me to better understand the meanings of the ties. This data collection method gave me a head start compared with complex data extractions or large-scale data analyses, where the analysis of meaning is often lacking or superficial. However, these data collection methods also introduced biases, including potential issues of accuracy and consistency in the self-reported information. These challenges also compounded the more common obstacles of information availability and asymmetry.

Other issues have arisen regarding the temporality of this research. My field data collection started in Bordeaux in early 2021 and ended in the Western Cape at the end of 2022. Bearing in mind the vibrancy and contemporary nature of the changes in the natural wine movement over the last few years, it is possible – if not probable – that some of the data might have evolved and I have not included these changes in the study. As Fuhse and Mützel remind us, networks are sets of social relations, and are therefore constantly in flux, “continuously created, reproduced, and modified in the social process.” (Fuhse and Mützel 2011, 1078). Accordingly, every representation of a network captures an image that is fixed and stable to describe something that is inherently fluid and changing.

Last but not least, the main obstacle was the technical difficulties I encountered when dealing with SNA programmes (the entry cost to be able to use and navigate SNA IT programmes like R Studio or GEPHI). However, what may have initially seemed like potential obstacles ultimately presented opportunities for innovative approaches and prompted me to acquire a deeper understanding of qualitative analysis in the field. This included considerations of network boundaries or the omission of certain actors, which were “controlled” by my awareness of the nuances and complexity of the fieldwork. Ultimately, as I outlined in Chapter 3, the small size of the natural wine movement locally enables me to make the claim that while it might not have been possible to be exhaustive, I have acquired a comprehensive image of the network, and my research has reached a saturation point. To conclude these reflections on

the methodological challenges, I argue that they do not invalidate the findings I describe below, echoing Marshall's perspective: "These methodological challenges underscore the extent to which the networks analysed and visualised by researchers are artefacts constructed through the research itself more than they are representations of actually existing network structures." (Marshall & Staeheli, 2015, p. 61). I repeat my assertion that network analysis is meant to open up spaces and opportunities for further research, thereby outlining pathways for more grounded enquiries.

9.2. Translating the network: representations of the Natural Wine movement in Bordeaux and the Western Cape

Bearing in mind the barriers and opportunities this method provides, this section presents representations of the structure of the natural wine network in the two regions of the project. The diagrams below offer an initial reading of the structure of the movement and helps to comprehend how it differs depending both on the socio-historical trajectory of the wine industry locally and (especially) the level of state involvement in the wine sector. These diagrams will also serve as the basis for further discussions at a later stage.

9.2.1. *Differences in the structure of the industries visible through SNA*

➤ **Different structures of the natural wine movement**

The first diptych is constructed around the first database, and shows the ties among the actors (professional, kinship and memberships ties are all gathered together on the same plan). The diagrams exhibit a one-mode network in which all the nodes are of the same type. Following the Actor-Network Theory (ANT) approach, individuals (such as winemakers, institutional representatives and distributors) and intangible objects (including environmental certifications, wine events and organisations) are treated as constitutive elements of the network. As this process is applied, network analysis encompasses both human and non-human elements and treats them equally as actants. For visualisation purposes, natural winemakers are represented in turquoise, environmental certifications in orange, meta-organizations in blue, natural wine events in pink, trade unions in olive green and consultants in yellow. The ANT approach justifies the presence of these diverse types of node by focusing on the relational configuration of a heterogeneous network. For example, there is a tie between a winemaker and an environmental certification where the winemaker complies with the certification. Similarly, a tie is established between an individual and a wine event where the individual participates in

it. This relational perspective highlights the political and material underpinnings and effects of the natural wine movement. The ANT approach is a valuable way of describing how knowledge circulation operates within complex assemblages of both human and non-human elements. The diagrams reveal interesting sets of thematic connections among different types of actors, but above all they confirm that the natural wine movement is shaped differently depending on the relevant country's socio-political history, its legal framework and its institutional governance structure.

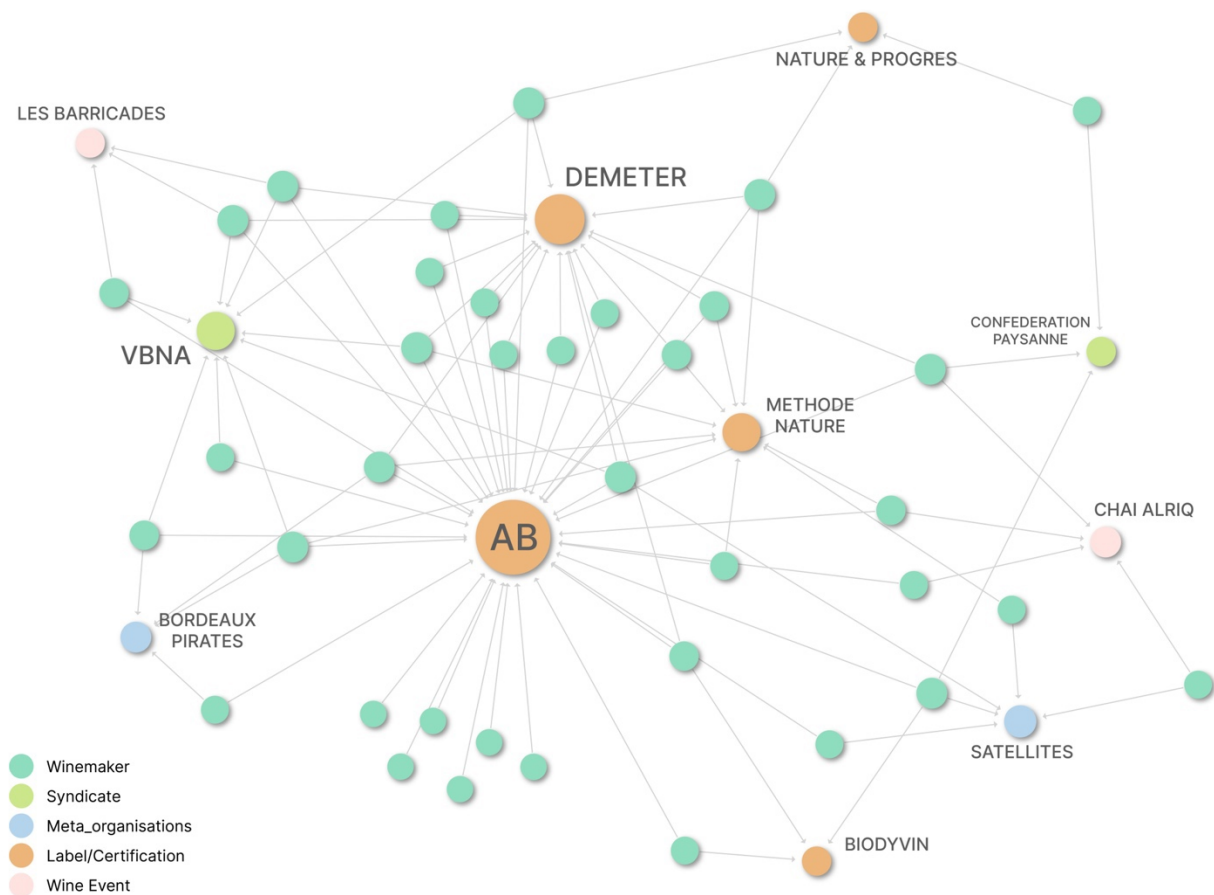


Figure 64. The natural wine movement in Bordeaux, Network structure³⁴⁷.

³⁴⁷ Nodes are ranked by degree (density: 0.042)

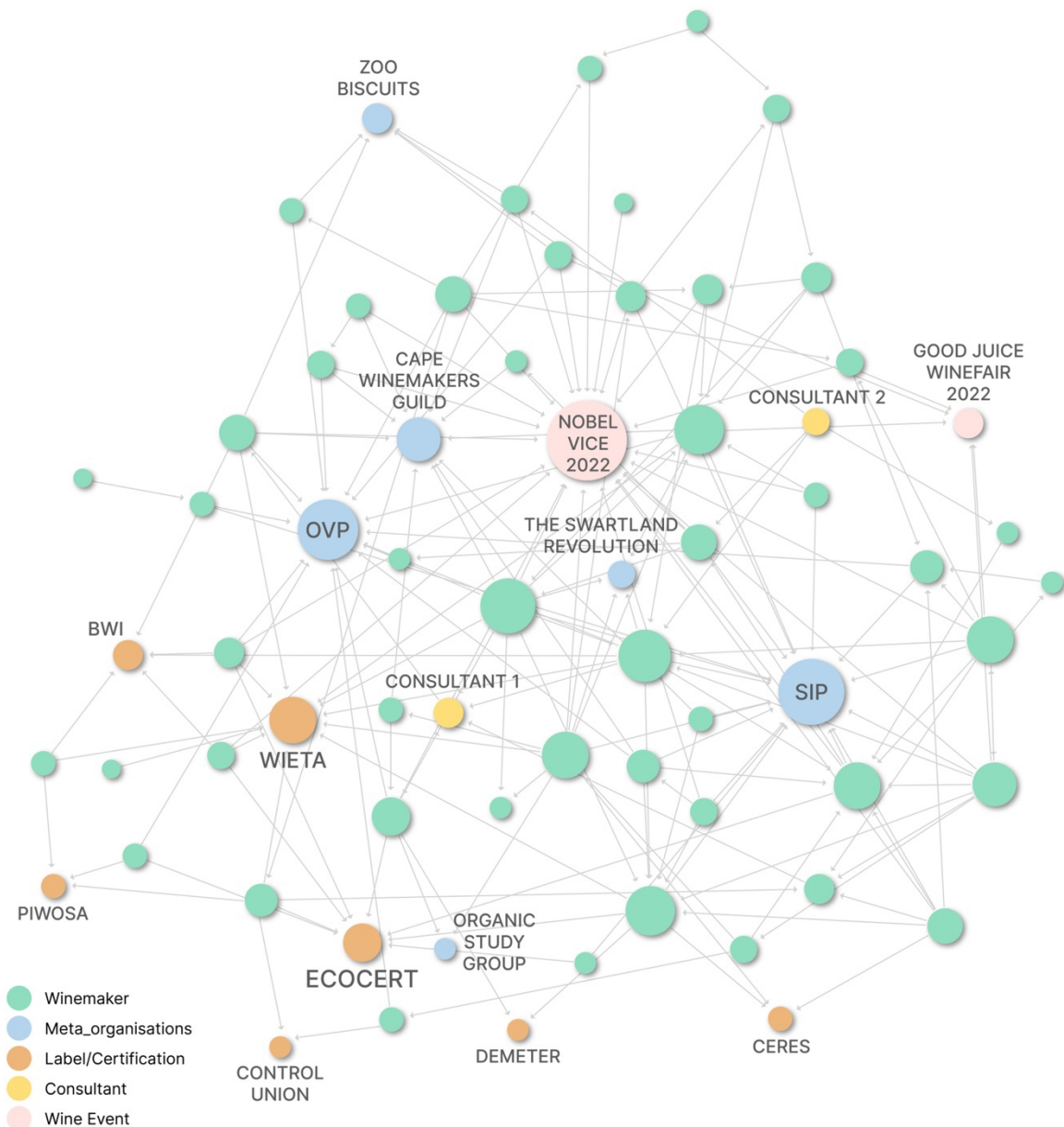


Figure 65. The natural wine movement in the Western Cape, Network structure.³⁴⁸

Several hypotheses can be drafted from this first diptych. Firstly, in Bordeaux, the natural wine movement is largely structured around environmental certifications such as AB, Demeter Biodyvin and Méthode Nature. These environmental standards are seen locally as providing adequate guarantees in terms of production methods and ethics (as argued in Chapter 8), and so local natural wine producers use them as identity markers. Conversely, in the South African example, environmental certifications and eco-labels do not serve as structuring agents of the movement. One might say that in the absence of public intervention and governance by labels,

³⁴⁸ Nodes ranked by degree (density: 0.036)

natural wine producers organise themselves around collectives (or meta-organisations) that act as markers and confirm a belonging or proximity to the natural wine movement. I go further and hypothesise that these winemakers' collectives facilitate the dissemination of knowledge, notably technical innovations and new information on environmental practices (in the vineyard and the cellar).

Reputational networks: what are the channels of knowledge diffusion and who are the key actors in the network?

The second diptych I present below is based on the second database, and illustrates the reputational network of the natural wine movement. Here, each tie represents X potentially seeking advice from Y, or X considering Y as a potential game-changer, a leader in the movement, meaning that all the ties are directed. One notable difference from the diagram above is the inclusion of public institutions. This was prompted by interviewees highlighting the structuring roles of other types of actors, such as institutions, syndicates and distributors (this can be easily explained by the fact that the interviews were conducted with actors who in turn indicated whom they considered to be the influential actors in the movement). How should this reputational network be interpreted? After several trials in which outdegree and indegree calculations were manipulated, the graphs revealed “indegree,” indicating that the larger nodes have significant influence because they were recommended multiple times by other actors in the network.

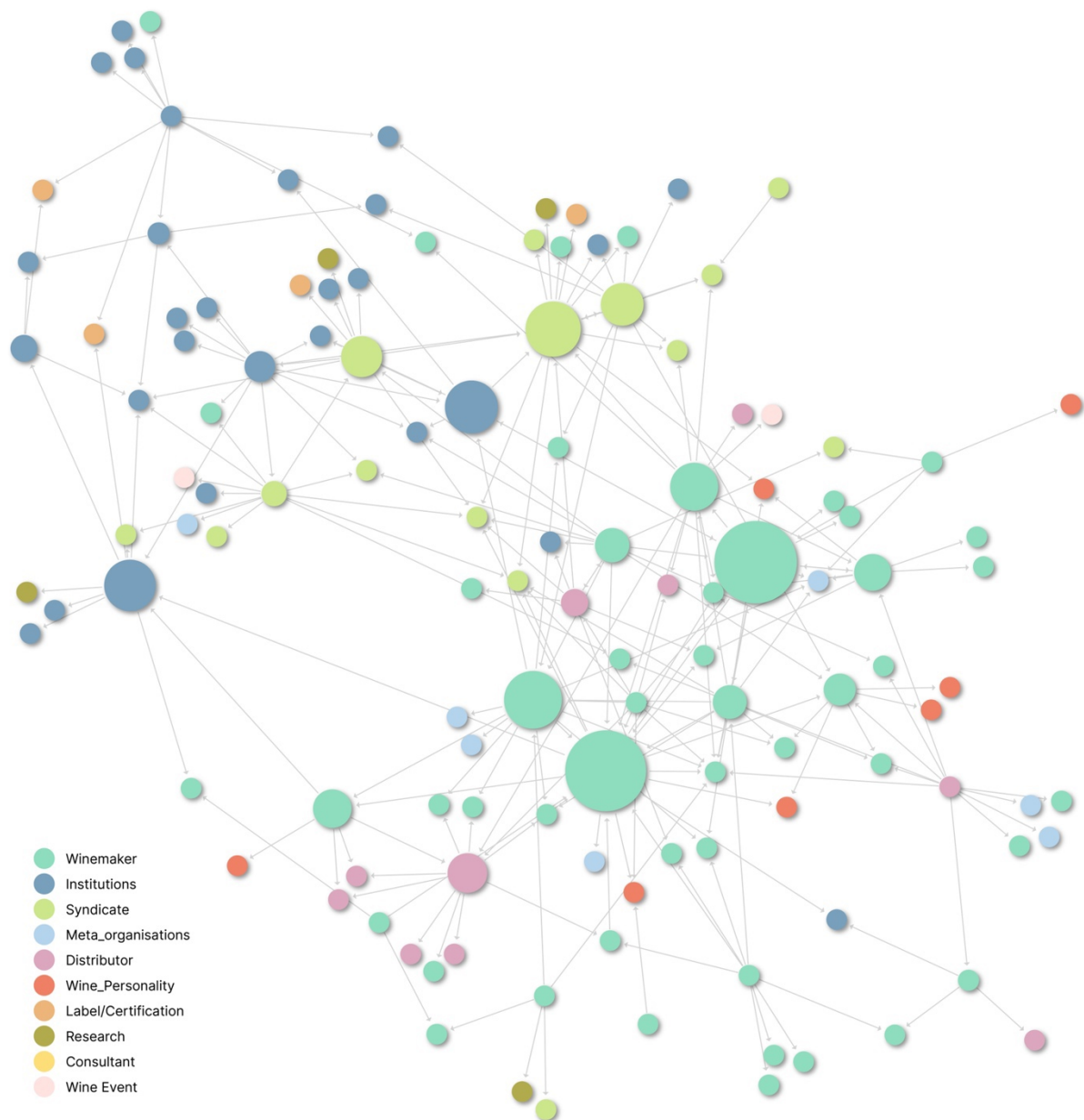


Figure 66. The natural wine movement in Bordeaux: reputational network (in degree).

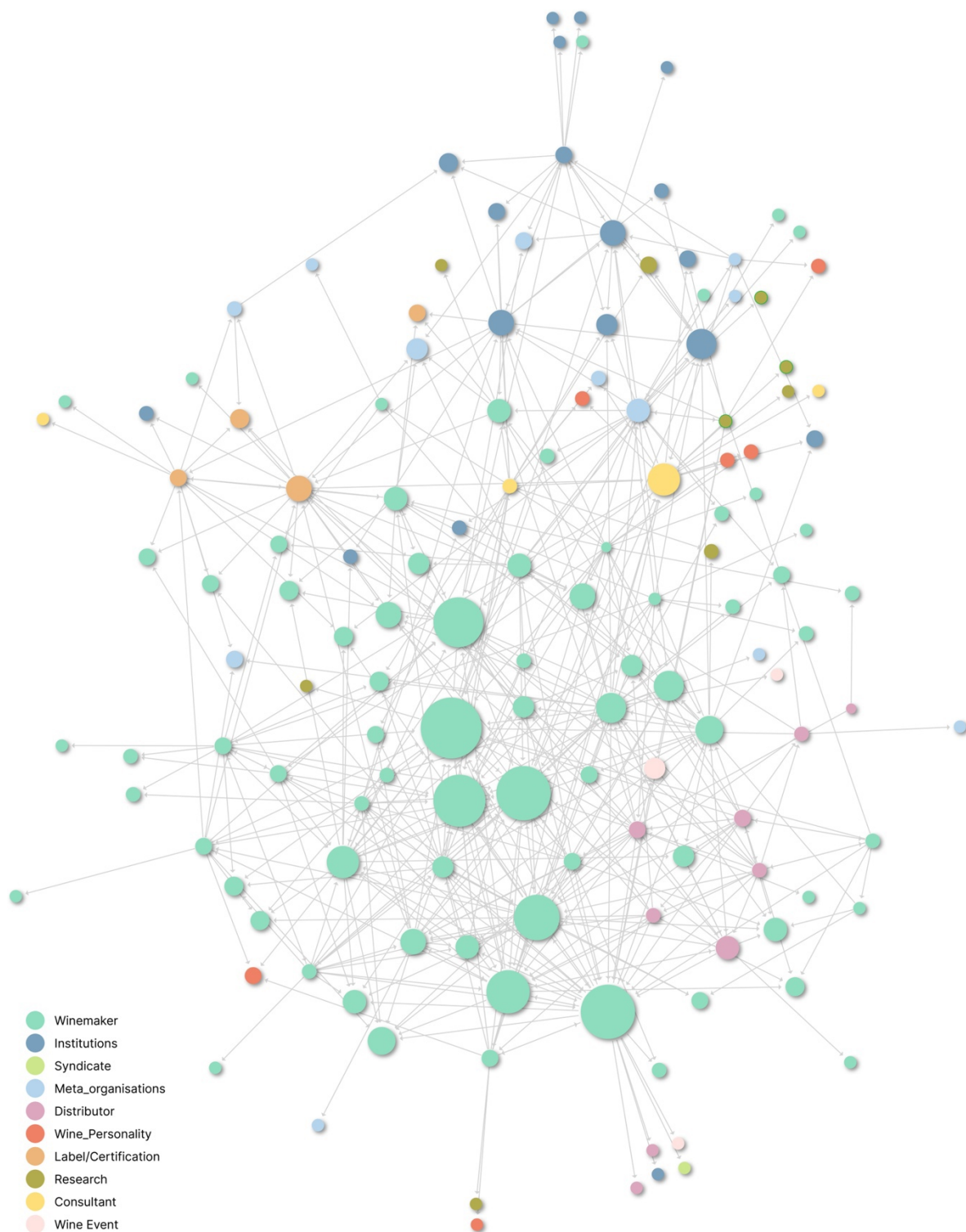


Figure 67. The natural wine movement in the Western Cape: reputational network (in degree).

The Bordeaux case offers a traditional perspective of sector organisation in which professional syndicates and trade unions (such as the Syndicat de Défense des Vins Nature or Vigneron Bio Nouvelle Aquitaine) act as key intermediaries between winemakers and institutions. Furthermore, although several winemaking figures are central, the network remains relatively

fragmented. By contrast, the equivalent diagram in the context of the Western Cape reveals that certain winemakers emerge as central figures in the network. These individuals can be viewed as knowledge hubs as well as influential role models. Notable among them are the four domains behind the Swartland Revolution (discussed in Chapter 5), which have been identified as pivotal in the emergence of alternative wine production since 2010, alongside the three pioneers of the natural wine movement. The diagram also illustrates the role of brokers or weak ties in bridging the gap between institutions (represented in dark blue) and winemakers (represented in turquoise). In the absence of a structured landscape of organisations (trade unions, NGOs, etc.), this bridging function is fulfilled by various actors, including informal wine collectives, wine personalities and private consultants.

To sum up, the diagrams reveal a variety of local organisations that are influenced by the institutional governance structure and state involvement in the wine industry. While the diagrams have helped me formulate hypotheses and avenues for further reflection, however, it is equally important to examine the gaps in the network and the unconnected clusters closely, as they prompt us to ask what can they reveal. Using SNA as an iterative and experimental method, the four diagrams presented here form the foundation for the discussions that drive this chapter forward.

9.2.2. A network operating in silos from the rest of the industry?

As I discussed previously (Chapter 7), there are few links, if any, between the natural wine movement and the public institutions responsible for governing the industry. Natural winemakers operate like free electrons, with their own production and distribution networks (Chapter 8). This isolation is reinforced by the opposing stances adopted by the natural wine movement's defenders and detractors, which feed a widening gap between the polarised visions of the wine sector (Chapter 6). The natural wine network is therefore evolving in virtual isolation from the broader industry: one might even say that it is operating in a vacuum. This section addresses this widening gap and explores the various factors that are contributing to the divergence of the natural movement from the broader wine sector.

➤ Obstacles to the expansion of the movement

The natural wine movement continues to be a niche market, encompassing at most 1% to 3% of total global wine production. The vast majority of natural winemakers express a sense of

marginalisation, and feel that they are perceived as outsiders and poorly understood by the broader industry. Is the movement destined to remain a niche and a marginal phenomenon, or, as some might even argue, is it a trend that is fated to vanish? What are the barriers and obstacles that have impeded the movement's growth? There are numerous obstacles that hinder conversion to organic, biodynamic farming practices and natural winemaking. A lack of information and a fear of change are often cited as the main barriers for those who resist the shift towards more environmentally virtuous practices. However, aside from the lack of information (or because of misinformation), it appears that practical economic constraints and administrative barriers are additional reasons that compel the vast majority of conventional producers to settle for the status quo. This argument applies not only to wine production but to agro-production at large, as numerous authors have noted (Purseigle and Hervieu 2022; Ansaloni and Smith 2021), and as the national protests by French farmers in early 2024 reminded us.³⁴⁹ On top of the common arguments such as disinformation, a fear of additional costs and red tape, another obstacle that emerged quite explicitly during my fieldwork is the distance between professional training in viticulture and oenology schools and the ethos and production methods of natural winemakers. On numerous occasions, natural wine producers expressed a feeling of being constrained by a scarcity of information and resources:

“I would like a time machine to be able to go back ten, twenty or even thirty years in time and not waste my time doing conventional things; I would like to be able to understand that from the beginning. Because at that time it was the only path; we were only taught that. We were really in a bubble of conditioning.” (Interview Gilles, winemaker in Bordeaux, 27 April 2021³⁵⁰)

“I guess my training was very conventional. It wasn't in an organic kind of set up and the first wineries I worked at were conventional wineries. But as I was kind of getting into wines and tasting wines, I realised that a lot of the wines I liked were organic or biodynamic or at least had quite an intense philosophy of associating themselves with the terroir, the soil and the site.” (Interview Marsh, winemaker in Western Cape, 19 January 2022)

“People want to get away from chemicals, but they don't quite know how to do the fertilisation in the organic way. Because they all learn through the university that you must feed a certain number of nutrients for your plant to grow. And they haven't learnt how to grow on compost.” (Interview Arnold, CERES representative, 10 February 2022)

³⁴⁹ Chrisafis, Angelique. 2024. “‘The World Is Changing Too Fast for Us’: Organic Farmers on Urgency of French Protests.” *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/jan/26/world-changing-too-fast-organic-farmers-french-protests>

³⁵⁰ *My translation of*: “Je voudrais une machine à remonter le temps pour pouvoir revenir dix, vingt voire trente ans en arrière et ne pas perdre mon temps à faire du conventionnel, je voudrais pouvoir comprendre ça dès le départ. Parce que à l'époque c'était l'unique voie, on ne nous apprenait que ça. On était vraiment dans une bulle de conditionnement.”

This is particularly relevant in the Western Cape, where schools of viticulture or oenology are thin on the ground. The South African Grape and Wine Research Institute at Stellenbosch University and the Cape Institute for Agricultural Training at Elsenburg are the two main degree programmes, and the vast majority of wine actors encountered attended one or the other.

This South African natural winemaker commented about his degree:

“Actually, I went to Elsenburg Agriculture College, which actually – interestingly enough – 10 years ago, 80% of the industry studied there. Elsenburg is more practical, and Stellenbosch was more academic and theory-focused. I think maybe we just grew up in a country where at school, you get taught that you have to make high-alcohol wines, and a more sugary style, and more serious wine, with dark red wines, etc. And all in a second, we all came, and we were like “now we’re going to change a bit and do it on the flip side.” So that was also a very cool thing.” (Interview Jack, winemaker in Western Cape, 25 April 2022)

What is clear from Jack’s comments is a desire to be emancipated from university curricula and the freedom regained from working with natural wine production techniques. In France, despite a wider supply of training programmes, winemakers expressed the same acknowledgement of a failure on the part of agro-engineering colleges to adapt and transform their programmes to encompass the new environmental and ecological challenges.

“And it’s exactly the same thing for education. Teachers need to be much more directly engaged with ecological issues. Because if teachers are already twenty years behind, what are they teaching the new generation? It’s a real problem! So we really need teachers to be aware of everything that’s happening: the expectations of society and trying to understand where the world’s heading. This way, they can also train winemakers who won’t be behind as soon as they enter the market.” (Interview Gilles, winemaker in Bordeaux, 27 April 2021³⁵¹)

Natural winemakers emphasise the disparity of the available resources and their scepticism about whether public colleges will incorporate new knowledge geared towards a production that is more sensitive to environmental protection. It was therefore quite surprising to see the launch of the first School of Natural Wine in Spain in 2023. The programme, which was created, is divided into two sections: the first focuses on production techniques (“Soil. Grapes. Vines”), and the second is geared towards “Tasting. Marketing.” One can read about the school ambitions:

“The aim of this Project is to found the University of Natural Wine with the target of forming a community of new winemakers, strongly linked to traditional and authentic techniques by revitalising

³⁵¹ *My translation of:* “Et c’est exactement la même chose pour l’enseignement. Les enseignants doivent être beaucoup plus en prise directe. Car si les enseignants ont déjà 20 ans de retards, qu’est-ce qu’ils enseignent à la nouvelle génération? On est mal! Donc on a vraiment besoin que les enseignants puissent enseigner des acquis et qu’ils soient en mesure d’être au fait de tout ce qui se fait, des attentes de la société, et essayer de comprendre vers où le monde va pour pouvoir aussi former des vignerons qui ne seront pas en retard dès qu’ils arrivent sur le marché.”

such outstanding area and at the same time to give job opportunities to new generation” (Description of the project on the RAW website³⁵²)



Figure 68. The first school of natural wine in Sierra de Gredos, Spain.

This first school of natural wine is still in an experimental stage, as only one cohort of students has attended so far. One might suggest that it is geared towards individuals who already have a sensibility for natural wine and want to professionalise themselves, but in the end, except for this one project, it seems that there is little professional viticulture or oenology training that offers alternatives to conventional practices, which contributes to further distancing natural wine producers from mainstream production.

➤ **A network fostering homophily and transitivity**

Here, homophily and transitivity are examined as mechanisms that foster network dynamics reinforce the natural wine networks and yet simultaneously contribute to its distancing and polarisation within the industry. Homophily captures social affinity and resemblance and can be used to describe how people tend to make connections in a given network with people who are similar to themselves (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001; Zhang et al., 2018). Homophily is not rare in these types of networks, in which professional trajectories tend to look alike. Transitivity is another common phenomenon in social network analysis, which indicates a high probability that two nodes will be connected if they are connected to one (or more) common nodes: in other words, the tendency of one's friends' friends to be one's friends

³⁵² RAW website: <https://www.rawwine.com/profile/the-school-of-natural-wine/about>

as well (Granovetter 1983; Zhang et al. 2018). This feeling of transitivity is expressed with a ferocious sense of humour by this caviste in Bordeaux who likes to call himself the “social lub” of the natural wine network locally:

“I don't do much except have ideas, mobilise people, and make them circulate on networks. And above all, the network has shown me that my thing is to connect people. They call me the 'social lubricant'. I'm here to create dynamics so we can move forward together.” (Interview Léon, bar owner in Bordeaux, 27 April 2021³⁵³)

Networks with strong ties tend to show more homophily and transitivity. I argue that this is the case in the natural wine movement. Homophily manifests itself through informal support networks among winemakers and the significant number of advice-seeking relationships. Furthermore, many natural winemakers confirmed that they established friendships within the movement. These relationships are often more than just “peer-professional”; they showcase strong ties through “friendships” among actors in the network, as expressed by those winemakers:

“You might know those domains... we work kind of similarly and we're all about the same age too. And we're buddies, we see each other often. But we don't have an association, we just help each other out. We're not competitors – we're colleagues, but there are no formalities.” (Interview Sébastien, winemaker near Bordeaux, 26 April 2021³⁵⁴)

“It's a small community of winemakers, actually there's a kind of cocoon around certain natural winemakers that formed not so long ago, for about five years, I would say.” (Interview Anne, winemaker in Bordeaux, 26 May 2021³⁵⁵)

A strong sense of community emerged from my time in the field, both in Bordeaux and in the Western Cape. The idea of complementing social network analysis with ethnography took on remarkably tangible forms throughout the fieldwork, as on numerous occasions I found myself deeply immersed in what might be described as “living the network analysis.” During the grape harvest in Bordeaux, I documented this in my notebook.

³⁵³ *My translation of:* “Moi je fais pas grand chose à part avoir des idées, mobiliser les gens, les faire circuler sur les réseaux. Et surtout le réseau m'a montré que mon truc c'est de mettre les gens en contact. On m'appelle le "lubrifiant social". Je suis là pour créer des dynamiques et qu'on avance ensemble”

³⁵⁴ *My translation of:* “Tu connais peut-être des domaines là, on boss un peu tous pareille, on a un peu tous le même âge en plus. Et on est pote, on se voit souvent. Mais on n'a pas d'assoc', on s'entraide. On n'est pas concurrent, on est collègue, mais il n'y a pas de formalités.”

³⁵⁵ *My translation of:* “Oui c'est un petit milieu autour des vignerons, en fait il y a une espèce de cocons autour de certains vignerons natures qui s'est constitué depuis pas si longtemps que ça, mais depuis oui 5 ans.”

Living the network

Something I hadn't anticipated but that unfolded during these fifteen days of grape harvesting was that I got to experience the network, the same network I was busy building for my thesis. I chose to come and participate in the harvest at Les Closeries des Moussis partly because I knew – thanks to the interviews I had conducted beforehand and my ongoing database construction – how central Laurence and Pascale's work was in the natural wine movement in Bordeaux. They appeared as central figures in my network, emblematic of the natural wine movement in the region. However, I was not expecting that I would be able to observe the network taking shape during the two weeks I spent with them.

Firstly, we went to harvest some rows of vines at other domains in Blayais and Libournais owned by some of their friends, where grapes were cultivated biodynamically, of course. They were just a few rows Laurence and Pascale leased. Second, almost every day, local winemakers (mostly women!) would come by for a quick coffee to inquire about the ripeness of a certain grape variety or seek advice on a tank where fermentation was taking a bit too long. I particularly remember this young female winemaker, barely 25 years old, who was taking over her father's domain, which had recently been converted to organic farming. She spent a few days with us before going to harvest her own rows, and there was a great sense of sorority and a desire for knowledge transmission in these relationships. Later that week, another woman, a cellar master from a neighbouring domain, sought our help as she was short-staffed for harvesting in her estate.

The network I was trying to outline in broad strokes by collecting nodes and ties in my database was taking shape before my eyes. Unexpectedly, I was living (in) the network.

Notes from fieldwork notebook, 10 October 2021

Portraits and field notes 11. Living the network.

I made similar observations in the Western Cape. In both regions, the natural wine movement exhibits a great degree of homophily and tight interpersonal relationships, and once I had succeeded in building a few connections with wine professionals, I quickly became immersed in the network and was more easily able to trace how the network was configured and constituted.³⁵⁶

³⁵⁶ As I became an actor in the network I was studying, it also raised the question of how to act within it. A certain degree of reflexive engagement seemed to be necessary here, as well as questioning whether the researcher should be included within the network constitution (Routledge, 2008). I concluded in this case that because the movement pre-existed my research and I did not create additional ties within the natural wine network, I could conduct the network analysis without including myself as a protagonist: that is, as a node.

An approach that is individualistic above all else?

Despite the significant interconnections among the actors and a strong sense of homophily and transitivity in the natural wine movement, it would be idealistic and utopian to claim the existence of robust collective action and a profound sense of unity. Throughout this thesis, I have sought to illustrate the fact that the boundaries of the natural wine movement are porous, and even from within, there is no consensus on what exactly constitutes natural wine. Notably, there are factions within the movement that reveal not only technical disparities in the production of natural wine, but more crucially differences in ethos and vision. Additionally, the primary reason some might resist labelling it a “movement” is that the natural wine network demonstrates minimal collective action. As I mentioned earlier, its actions are predominantly individualistic, and the few instances of collective endeavours tend to be ad hoc and disorganised, and to lack a clear political stance. Finally, most natural winemakers identify as “farmers,” “peasants” or “people working the land,” and consider themselves to be minimally oriented towards political engagement, as emphasised by those South African winemakers:

“I think it seems that everybody has gone over their own little hurdle, and everyone’s doing their own thing in a way.

- *Back to individual initiatives?*

- Yes, not that we don’t mix, but everybody’s trying to get their stuff sorted. And it has become more and more difficult to do things... trying to get bottles, and labels, and even paper for labels, everything has gotten more complicated.” (Interview Stephen, winemaker in Western Cape, 23 March 2022)

“People are too focused on their own work and the collective is not important any more, because people are too busy.” (Interview Grayson, caviste in Western Cape, 22 May 2022)

Similarly, Betina Boutroue’s investigation into permaculture movements in France has emphasised the individualisation of environmental commitment. In her view, the concept of “self-reform” is a valuable tool for scrutinising how professional practices function as a primary vector for ecological commitment (Boutroue, 2019). Geneviève Pruvost has also shown how modern forms of ecological movement are characterised by strong continuities between housework, professional activity and militancy (Pruvost, 2013). If one wished to expand on these points, one might also look at the reciprocal dynamic and look at how environmental activism influences labour. This insight into the interplay between personal and professional spheres contributes to a nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between professional practices and environmental engagement, and better illustrates the lived reality of actors in the natural wine movement.

➤ **Conclusions: a network that has evolved in isolation from the rest of the industry**

There are numerous barriers that prevent conventional winemakers from even contemplating a transition towards natural winemaking, including entry costs, red tape and a lack of information in viticulture and oenology training programmes. At the same time, winemakers who are integrated into natural wine networks have built their identity in opposition to conventional practices, and manifest a high degree of homophily and transitivity that might be off-putting or intimidating for non-natural producers. This is accentuated even further by the lack of collective action and the absence of a clear programme. All these obstacles contribute to maintaining the natural wine movement as a marginalised, niche movement operating in isolation. Whether by choice or default, therefore, natural winemakers mention that they have limited contact with institutions. Some embrace an “anti-system” stance and have deliberately cut themselves off from traditional and public actors in the wine industry, while others regret not being more actively engaged by governance institutions. In general, it appears that the network is evolving alongside the broader wine sector, in silos. This is best illustrated by this comment from a natural winemaker who argues that Craig Hawkins, a trailblazer for the natural wine movement in South Africa and a world-renowned natural producers, remains unrecognised by the vast majority of wine professionals locally:

“And it’s hilarious that a lot of winemakers in this country wouldn’t know that Craig is probably one of the most well-known South African winemakers in the world, if not the most well-known.” (Interview Thomas, winemaker in Western Cape, 11 May 2022)

Although the natural wine movement operates somewhat independently of the broader wine sector, some tangible innovations and new knowledge are nevertheless being advocated by the movement’s actors, encompassing innovations in production methods and marketing, commercialisation and distribution strategies. Is this new knowledge and radical innovation destined to remain confined to the realm of natural wines? How does the influx of new knowledge occur within the movement, and how is it subsequently disseminated? In the next section, I explore the various forms of knowledge mobilised within the network and examine how these different configurations of knowledge and the transmission of novel ecological know-how can be viewed as a form of activism.

9.2.3. Intertwined realms of knowledge mobilised within the network

The focus of this chapter is to grasp the circulation and dissemination of knowledge and new skills within the natural wine network. It is therefore essential to explore the nature of the

knowledge that is being mobilised. This section looks into the various realms of knowledge encountered that circulate throughout the network and shape the agency among different actors in the natural wine movement. The objective here is to capture the diversity of knowledge at play among practitioners and embark on a brief deconstruction of the hierarchies of knowledge and values, systems of meaning, paradigms and models. I have identified three intertwined types of knowledge: the first is rooted in the traditions and transmitted beliefs that are, commonly referred to as “know-how” (or better embodied in the French translation “savoir-faire”); the second involves scientific knowledge and technical innovations; and the third taps into a broad spectrum of shared beliefs that fluctuate between environmental considerations (often linked to the notions of care and sensitivity) and spiritual, or even esoteric, beliefs. In line with previous publications (Chiffolleau, 2005; Foyer, 2018; Ollitrault, 1996), this section presents the syncretism between different kinds of knowledge, and analyses how natural winemakers navigate this blurred zone in which knowledge, beliefs and know-how overlap.

➤ **Affirming ancient traditions and savoir-faire**

Natural winemakers maintain that attending to the land is linked to the ancient knowledge of peasants and farmers. This connection is particularly evident in their vineyard practices, which are imbued with stories and traditions that have been passed down through generations, and are commonly referred to as *savoir-faire*. The initial channel of transmission, which is often referred to as peasant knowledge, therefore draws upon and extensively alludes to ancient wisdom and practices inherited from ancestors (Foyer, 2018; Pineau, 2017). These frequent references to ancient peasant know-how also serve to underscore the fact that viticultural practices date back to the pre-agro-industrial revolution era, before the advent of advanced agricultural technology, sophisticated machinery and especially phytosanitary products. Laying claim to inherited ancient know-how not only reinforces an affiliation with the *terroir* and a quest for authenticity, but also signifies a practice that is closely aligned with nature, which one must “reconnect with” and actively “listen to.” The assertion of ancient knowledge and know-how also calls for the preservation of memory and heritage. For instance, one natural winemaker in Bordeaux has been on a quest since 2016 to replant and cultivate all the grape varieties that have a history in the region. He explained how and why he identifies, cultivates and valorises these grape varieties, and discussed his ambition to “revive forgotten tastes:”

“I’ve worked extensively on the history of wine; I’ve read a lot, hundreds of related 19th century Bordeaux wines. When I realise that there were 52 grape varieties planted in Bordeaux vineyards – 52 that I am sure of! – I have found historical traces of grape varieties that were planted in our vineyards in the 1900s. Well, why today do we have only 7 or 8?”

And so my job is to replant – it's going to take me years because it costs a lot of money – to replant all the grape varieties that existed in Bordeaux in the 19th century. They disappeared solely because of the AOC: the specifications said, “If you plant Merlot, you can make Graves, but if you plant Mérie, then you can't.” And since the collective brand was stronger, everyone abandoned these grape varieties. They disappeared quite late, in the 1960s.

- *So quite recently in the end?*

- Yes, and it's astonishing to see how the winemakers have no memory of it, even though it was still in their vineyards until the 1960s. But then when you ask the older ones who were born in the 1930s or 1940s, they remember: “Yes, now you mention it, I had Bouchalès in the vineyards” (Interview Jean-Baptiste, winemaker in Bordeaux, 17 April 2021³⁵⁷)

Other viticultural techniques (such as cover crops and (re)introducing natural predators into the vines) and vinification techniques (natural bottom fermentation in tanks, natural yeasts, carbonic maceration, etc.) are all tools that form part of the range of practices claimed by natural winemakers. These practices are directly inherited, and are even celebrated as a return to ancestral, or at the very least traditional, methods.

They contribute to the process of (re)learning how to produce without relying on the tools of the agro-industry and synthetic or chemical products. It does not, however, entail a complete denial of the advances of the last fifty years, and this notion of nostalgically reconnecting with ancient lifestyles needs to be nuanced. Instead of embracing a purely nostalgic approach, natural winemakers have an experimental and at times creative mindset. They draw inspiration from their peers and openly embrace recent agro-cultural trends such as agroforestry, permaculture and regenerative agriculture. Ultimately, a depiction of their practices underscores the intricate blend of ancient know-how and multiple contemporary influences, all bound together by a shared rejection of intensive and chemical agriculture. It is also important to recall that what prevails is learning based on each individual's pragmatic experience, the time spent in the vineyards with its share of trial and error. A mandatory “learning by doing” process takes place as each producer must create a unique production recipe based on the challenges and specificities of their local context (climate, soil, grape variety, etc.).

³⁵⁷ *My translation of:* “J’ai beaucoup travaillé sur l’histoire du vin, j’ai lu énormément de choses, j’ai lu des centaines d’ouvrage du 19^{ème} siècle ayant trait aux vins de Bordeaux et quand je m’aperçois qu’il y avait 52 cépages qui étaient plantés à Bordeaux dans les vignes - 52 dont je suis sûre! - j’ai retrouvé des traces historiques de cépages qui étaient plantés dans nos vignes en 1900. Eh bah pourquoi aujourd’hui on en n’a plus que 7 ou 8? Et du coup mon job c’est de replanter - ça va me prendre des années car ça coute beaucoup d’argent - replanter tous les cépages qui ont existé à Bordeaux au 19^{ème} siècle. Ils ont disparu à cause uniquement de l’AOC: le cahier des charges disait “si tu plantes du Merlot, tu peux faire du Graves, mais si tu plantes de la Mérie, non”. Et comme la marque collective était plus forte, tout le monde a abandonné ces cépages. Ils ont disparu assez tard, dans les années 60. - *C’est assez récent finalement?* - Oui et c’est hallucinant de voir comment les vignerons n’ont aucune mémoire de ça alors que c’était encore dans leurs vignes en 1960. Et quand on demande aux anciens, qui sont nés dans les années 30 ou 40, ils se rappellent « oui, maintenant que tu me le dis, j’avais de la Bouchalès dans les vignes”.”

➤ **The dual relationship with scientific knowledge**

Sylvie Ollitrault argues that ecology is a good illustration of a situation in which there is a strong connection between scientific knowledge and activism. She also states that environmental activists have the ability to legitimise scientists' analytical frameworks by appropriating them, playing on the permeability between scholarly and activist discourses (Ollitrault, 1996). Following Ollitrault's analysis, my initial intuition at the outset of this research was that due to their heightened sensitivity towards vine ecosystems and nature at large, natural winemakers would display a greater awareness of the risks related to climate change. However, after eighteen months of fieldwork and discussions with numerous winemakers, I was unable to confirm this. On the contrary, it appears that even though natural wine producers are more in tune with nature and advocate for greater respect for their environment, few make a direct connection with the effects of climate change. I am not saying here that most natural winemakers are uninterested in climate change or that a majority of them might be classified as climate sceptics. My point is that there was no dominant opinion among all the producers I interviewed, and that the responses varied from producers who were hyper-alert to and highly educated in climate risks to others who saw no link between changing climate patterns and global warming. Some who fell into the second category were cautious about identifying global warming as the primary cause of the observable changes in climate patterns, arguing that their lifetime experience was too short to distinguish between climate cycles and global warming; while others expressly stated that they were reluctant to believe IPCC reports or the broader scientific community regarding climate change. Here, my findings align closely with the conclusions drawn by Geneviève Teil in her 2020 article "Are vine-growers climate change sceptics?" in which she argues that wine producers exhibit a paradoxical relative indifference to climate change: "Wine producers agree with researchers on a set of changes occurring in grapes and wines; however, they attribute these changes less to global warming than to the technical shifts that have occurred since the mid-1980s" (Teil, 2020). It is even more surprising that my finding should align with Teil's because my research focuses solely on natural winemakers, who should have a greater propensity to be aware of or sensitive to ecological challenges because of their work practices and ethos.

I contend that there is a notable lack of bridges between stakeholders in the natural wine movement and the scientific sector, which results in limited avenues for the circulation of scientific knowledge within the natural wine community. In the same article, Teil mentions "a

sort of *a priori* rejection of knowledge and predictions emanating from scientists.” (Teil, 2020, p. 2). Yuna Chiffoleau lends further support to this notion when she highlights the fact that “Scientific knowledge is not directly useful for practitioners because it constitutes a different form of knowledge (“demonstrative scientific knowledge,” as opposed to “argumentative practical knowledge”)” (Chiffoleau, 2005). In the light of this, I argue that there is a clear need for more industry events aimed at delivering academic and scientific findings to winemakers directly. Some events like this are being organised: I attended workshops in both regions where researchers presented their latest data that were specifically tailored to wine producers and were often hosted at a producer’s domain. However, I must also point out that most producers are primarily interested in tangible technical innovations and actionable takeaways or recommendations that can be applied at a farm level. Some of the data that were presented may have been either too macro or abstract for winemakers, who have expressed a lack of capacity for practical engagement. In the light of increasing climate-related risks and a growing body of research demonstrating the contribution of viticulture to climate change, these questions on how to better engage producers and how to build better ties between the scientific sector and professional winemakers also need to gain traction.

➤ **From sensitivity to esotericism**

The philosophy of biodynamics and its applications in viticultural farming have sparked endless debates within both the wine industry and academic circles. Some criticise its historical ties to Steiner’s anthroposophy and label it as occultist, or even cult-like, while others view it as a farming method and a vision of the farm that advocates for a greater focus on nature and sensitivity. In a 2018 article, Jean Foyer provided an insightful account of how biodynamic winemakers manage to reconcile the knowledge they derive from registers that are generally considered to be antonymic, and explored how the intertwining of these diverse forms of knowledge creates the unique syncretism employed by biodynamic winemakers (Foyer, 2018).

Distinguishing between anthroposophy and biodynamic principles applied to viticulture

The root principles of biodynamic farming were detailed in Chapter 1, where I noted that the foundational text for biodynamics is Rudolf Steiner’s Agriculture Course (1924). Biodynamic production remains highly controversial, with two main aspects contributing to the controversies that are often confused but should be distinguished. Firstly, there is its affiliation with anthroposophy, which is viewed as an international occultist movement, as evidenced by lobbying efforts on certain businesses, and which has been widely criticised for its sectarian

dynamics.³⁵⁸ Secondly, it is a set of guiding farming principles that could be deemed esoteric, including considerations of various cosmic cycles and the dynamisation of various preparations aimed at enhancing soil fertility. The novice reader must be warned not to be confused by these two branches, and should avoid the mistake of equating anthroposophy with the principles of biodynamics as they apply to viticulture. While these two concepts originate from the same source, they represent distinct manifestations.

However, the esoteric dimension of biodynamic farming adopted by Steiner³⁵⁹ was carried on in essence by his disciples. Indeed, other biodynamic thinkers like Maria Thun have also followed the same path: for instance, in 1963, Thun established a sowing calendar that highlighted correlations between the moon's position in the zodiac and the growth of plants (see Figure 69 below).

Textbox 23. Distinguishing between anthroposophy and biodynamic principles applied to viticulture.

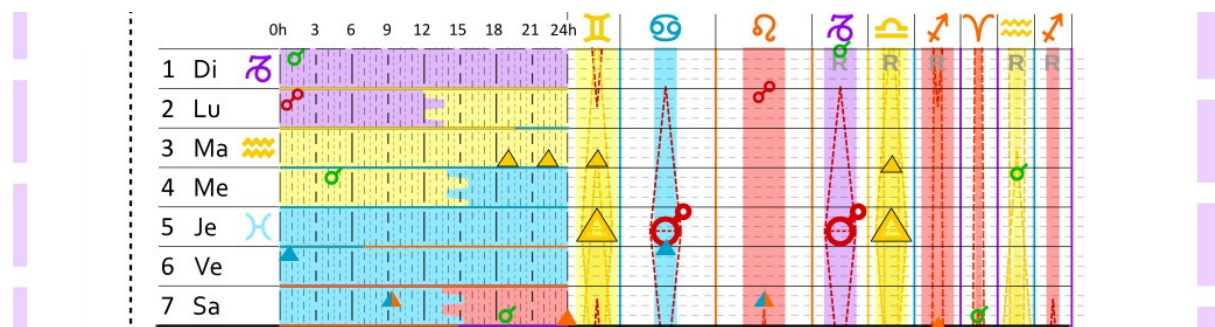


Figure 69. Biodynamic Lunar and Planetary Calendar 2024 for Sowing and Planting. Source: Biodynamic Agriculture Movement.

My immersion in the natural wine movement also revealed a form of knowledge that leans towards experience and sensitivity and sometimes shifts towards esotericism or, to re-use Foyer's terminology, (supra)sensitivity. I align with Foyer's perspective, and contend that there is a shift, or rather a permeability and intertwining, between the experiential and the sensory that actively contributes to collective beliefs that are central to the natural wine movement. On numerous occasions, natural winemakers expressed a sensory – and sometimes aesthetic, poetic and even magical – connection to their vines and wines. The examples below illustrate various ways in which winemakers appropriate this sensitive knowledge. The first winemaker openly taps into a spiritual dimension, deploying a magical and spiritual narrative that feeds his identity. References to the cosmos are displayed on his labels. In our interview, in a strange

³⁵⁸ Malet, Jean-Baptiste. 2018. "L'anthroposophie, Discrète Multinationale de l'ésotérisme." *Le Monde Diplomatique*. <https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2018/07/MALET/58830>.

³⁵⁹ Steiner, Rudolf. 2023. *La Science Occulte...* Legare Street Press.

twist, he justified not being able to make wine with organic grapes by referring to some kind of divine intervention:

“I guess the thing is that if I could get grapes from biodynamic vineyards I would, but at the moment, I can’t. I mean, I’m just trying to keep things close to me to keep it local and the quality of the grapes here is amazing, even though I don’t think they’re organic. But that’s fine, that’s why I try to bring my own energy in the way I make the wine. And you know, I put crystals on the barrels, even if they’re not here now, I still need to bring them. I’m trying to bring cosmic energy and the earth together. I use crystals to kind of counterbalance what I might have brought from the vineyards.” (Interview Greg, winemaker in Western Cape, 5 April 2022)

This particular case of knowledge of a magical or metaphysical nature in such an explicit manner is quite singular. In most of my encounters, spiritual knowledge served to justify biodynamic methods. Furthermore, while most people acknowledge the significant role played by romantic, almost mystical, narratives in biodynamic principles, they also concede that biodynamics has an element of the unexplainable, something that works but cannot be fully articulated, as exemplified by the story of this winemaker. Paul is a pioneer, and remains almost the only reference to biodynamic farming in South Africa viticultural production. He has spent the last thirty years learning, experimenting with biodynamic farming methods. In our interview, Paul placed great emphasis on this reconnection with nature, including human and non-human entities, and stressed the role of each entity in the farm:

“And what biodynamic does is that it develops a sense of sensitivity in the farm to appreciate the things that never get acknowledged, that never get seen. And you don’t limit it only to the people, you take that back to the animal kingdom. Before, when I thought about the value of a cow, I would think “Is she milk or is she meat? And what is value of it?” but now it’s much more than that. They bring life to the farm. They bring me much joy. Those are free gifts in a life that people can’t see. The thing with that is that what we do, in the old way, you dehumanise the cow, you cut off her horns, give her a number. But now the cow has a name and a role in the farm. She moves from a subject to an object.” (Interview Paul, winemaker in Western Cape, 26 January 2022)

When I inquired about the reluctance most producers show to biodynamic farming principles, Paul proved to be extremely aware of the debate, but his narrative esoteric and even spiritual dimensions of biodynamics do not contradict a more cartesian vision of agriculture:

“The first time I was sceptical. But honestly, after a while, I couldn’t believe my eyes. We gave it a try in a few rows in one of the vineyards, and those rows changed, they changed a lot. They became darker in colour in the soil.

- *So, you could see a clear impact?*

- A very big difference! It was a completely different experience. So then I needed to think about why it was working. I couldn’t figure it out myself, so I started to read Rudolf Steiner. And I just became even more confused! And then I thought: you know what... there are different ways to look at it, if you look at the old generations, they didn’t know about micro-systems, nitrogen systems etc. They just thought they were blessed with a good harvest. And I think biodynamics come from that time, a time when people had a spiritual understanding of farming, but today we have a scientific one.

- *And we do want cartesian answers.*

- Exactly. I have the same cartesian desire to put a scientific explanation behind the thing. But what I've said to myself is "how did the old people see it?" If you look at languages in English and Afrikaans, we have words such as "mother nature", "lunatic", or "holy cow" and that tells you that our ancestors had a different experience from us, and we have traces of their thinking that are still used as metaphors in our languages." (Interview Paul, winemaker in Western Cape, 26 January 2022)

Other winemakers called for "ancient knowledge" or an "old way of farming" in an attempt to justify resorting to biodynamic farming methods, demonstrating a greater confusion between traditional know-how and the spiritual dimension of biodynamic farming.

"Everybody's been farming kind of automatically. A hundred years ago, we were better farmers than today. By the time Steiner started proposing new ways of farming that were trying to capture ways of farming of the past and understanding what the influences of the planet were, and the stars and moon and the behaviour and the quality of the final product.

So I think at the moment we're going through a huge discovery of what we used to do 100 years ago.

- *Knowledge that's been lost?*

- Before, people used to transfer their knowledge within the family and then you know, now with the Industrial Revolution, synthetics, nitrogen and fertilisers, we lost all of that." (Interview Nile, winemaker in Western Cape, 20 May 2022)

Three things can be inferred from this intricate interweaving of different realms of knowledge. First, various types of knowledge can be identified, from farmers' traditional, ancestral savoir-faire to scientific, scholarly knowledge, and even to experiential and sensory knowledge. However, they are so deeply intertwined in the trajectory of learning and initiation that they cannot be separated. Foyer goes further in this direction, arguing that "the boundaries between what pertains to knowledge and what pertains to beliefs prove to be highly permeable" (Foyer, 2018, p. 317). I argue that knowledge and beliefs both contribute to building shared representations and a cognitive framework that builds the foundations of the natural wine movement. Secondly, around this entanglement of different forms of knowledge there is a stake in their legitimisation, and therefore a struggle over the imposition of rules and regulations for the economic and social space. The third conclusion to be drawn from this analysis of mobilised knowledge is that even though they share many principles, natural winemakers nonetheless make up a heterogeneous constellation.

But what is it that holds this interweaving of knowledge together? The hypothesis I develop in this chapter revolves around the importance of the initiatory professional trajectory. Initiatory trajectories can be acquired through "learning by doing" (that is, through individual experiments and innovative capacities) or through learning "from others" (capitalising on ties in the social network). In the third and final part of this chapter, I look more closely at this second stream – "learning from others" – which emphasises the importance of networks and

the diffusion of knowledge among actors within the same network. Winemakers absorb and reproduce the knowledge of their peers through the effects of contagion or mimicry. What is more, in the case of the development of the natural wine movement, the appropriation of new knowledge is clearly visible, as it has generated a paradigm shift in production methods from mainstream practices. Winemakers in the natural wine movement develop both new agro-cultural practices (in the vineyard and the cellar) and new strategies that disrupt the traditional codes of the industry in terms of marketing and distribution, and even tasting. The channels and mechanisms of this form of knowledge development will now be studied through the lens of network analysis. In his analysis of the legitimisation of wine knowledge at a European level, Antoine Roger emphasises the fact that the accumulation of different types of knowledge gives rise to coalitions among various actors (producers, academics and government authorities) serving specific interests (Roger, 2010). In this final section, I will explore the coalitions and arrangements with the natural wine movement that contribute both to the dissemination of knowledge and the legitimisation of the social representations advocated by these actors.

9.3. New channels and processes for the diffusion of knowledge and know-how on winemaking

Entering the natural wine movement entails delving into the intricate web of connections, interactions and knowledge that permeate the network. This section asks the following questions: What are the new channels that foster innovations within the natural wine network? What is the meaning of the ties that potentially enable paradigm shifts in wine production? And ultimately, what do my network analyses say about the natural wine movement? I examine these questions in three stages: I look at relational dynamics first in the Bordeaux region, then in the Western Cape Province and finally through the network's international dimension. In each of these sections, I question the meaning of ties and the manifestation of new knowledge in the natural wine movement, and how it flows within its networks.

9.3.1. *In France, a tightly knit configuration of actors in the wine sector*

9.3.1.1. Associations and public support for knowledge diffusion

The French wine sector is noteworthy for the significant involvement of the state, with various public institutions overseeing governance at different levels. These institutions operate from

the microlocal scale, where ODGs manage local appellations, to the national level, where INAO is influenced by the European Union, including regionally. Apart from these public bodies that are responsible for organising and regulating the wine sector, there is a dense network of organisations established by and for wine producers. They include traditional farming unions like *Confédération Paysanne* and multiple professional guilds and syndicates focusing on organic production, such as *Syndicat des Vignerons Bio de Nouvelle Aquitaine* (VBNA), *Agro-Bio Gironde*, *Bio Nouvelle Aquitaine*, *Fédération Nationale de l'Agriculture Biologique* (FNAB) and CIVAM bio. These syndicates and organisations play pivotal roles in structuring the sector and have made a significant contribution to the increase in organic conversion in Bordeaux vineyards. There is also a plethora of smaller grassroots organisations that have had a major influence in shaping the movement and facilitating the dissemination of knowledge. These organisations come in various forms – private, academic or community-led – and each has a unique environmental agenda, ranging from biodynamic practices and agroforestry to pesticide reduction and biodiversity protection. Examples of these organisations include the *VitiRev* Project, *Les Biodynamistes*, *Bulles d'Oxygène Bordeaux*, *Collectif Pesticides Médoc*, *Alertes Pesticides Hautes Gironde* and *Verre de Terre Production*. Identifying all these entities would require further in-depth investigation, but the key takeaway is that the Bordeaux wine sector is characterised by a rich tapestry of actors, all of whom contribute to the dissemination of new environmental knowledge, which impacts production choices for winemakers and contributes to a growing sensitivity towards environmental issues in the wine sector. The role played by these grassroots and often individually-led organisations has been noted multiple times throughout this thesis. This natural wine distributor in Bordeaux provides a typical view:

“There are plenty of networks of organic or biodynamic winemaking professionals. For example, there’s the *Bulles d'Oxygène* network in Bordeaux. There is also the *Biodynamistes* network created by Alain Déjean, which follows some biodynamic principles, especially the natural volcanic sulphur they use. He produces the natural sulphur himself and distributes it. Henri Duporges, for example, is part of the *Biodynamistes* network.” (Interview Solenne, caviste in Bordeaux, 1 April 2021³⁶⁰)

This extensive network of syndicates and grassroots organisations regularly provides training and workshops for winemakers covering a wide range of topics, from biodynamic preparations to implementing cover crops, reintroducing biodiversity in vineyards, finding alternatives to

³⁶⁰ *My translation of:* “Il y en a plein des réseaux de professionnels de vignerons bio ou biody’. Il y a par exemple les bulles d’oxygènes de Bordeaux. Il y a le réseau biodynamistes qu’a créé Alain Déjean avec quelques préceptes biody’ et surtout du soufre naturel volcanique qu’ils utilisent. Et c’est lui qui produit le soufre et qui le distribue. Et Henri Duporge fait partie de Biodynamistes par exemple.”

herbicides and vinifying with fewer inputs. While these training sessions do not cater directly to natural winemaking practices, they make an active contribution to establishing strong, environmentally friendly foundations for wine production locally. The training and events offered by these grassroots organisations³⁶¹ have the advantage of being mostly open to everyone and often free of charge. To sum up, the Bordeaux natural wine network is influenced by the public sector at large, state's regulations in the wine sector; governance through environmental standards and eco-labels; and a dense network of organisations (trade unions, professional syndicates, grassroots organisations, etc.) spearheading the progressive conversion of vineyards towards environmentally sound practices. These three factors collectively foster and intensify the dependency on formalised external relations within the wine industry in Bordeaux.

9.3.1.2. Connections with the anti-pesticides struggle

Furthermore, while natural winemakers in Bordeaux operate outside the wine sector's conventional channels, they are not entirely isolated from local goings-on. On the contrary, there are strong ties between natural winemakers and other local actors, notably some of the grassroots organisations I mentioned above. These connections are exemplified by two cases: first, the creation of the anti-phyto (short for anti-phytosanitary products) or anti-pesticides network, which includes several winemakers and associations who are fighting the intensive use of chemical pesticides in viticulture; and second, the coalition of actors including natural winemakers that have come together to raise awareness of and combat the recent *Haute Valeur Environnementale* certification, also known as HVE. Those two empirical cases are intertwined and reveal the success of a genuine coalition of actors with a clear environmental political project. Both demonstrate actions taken by whistle-blowers to alert people to the dangers of agrochemical pesticides and the environmental risks related to intensive viticulture, and both reveal a close proximity with leading actors from the natural wine movement.

➤ A coalition between natural winemakers and anti-pesticides campaigners

The dangers of the use of chemical pesticides in the wine industry have been the focus of a substantial amount of research, and need no further demonstration (Albert and Garrigou 2019; Ansaloni and Smith 2014; Jouzel 2019; Jouzel and Prete 2024). In Bordeaux, natural winemakers have been significantly involved in larger activist groups fighting the use of

³⁶¹ Those grassroots organization fall under the French regulatory framework “Associations, Loi 1901.”

chemical pesticides. This anti-phyto network has formed a robust coalition that was particularly evident during the two trials involving the whistle-blower Valérie Murat, who is also the president of the *Alerte aux Toxiques* association, and the CIVB (for more on this episode, see Chapter 5). During these trials, when Valérie Murat faced accusations of denigrating Bordeaux wines, a strong coalition of supporters gathered at the courts of Libourne (December 2020) and Bordeaux (October 2021). The actors one would expect to be there, such as the French NGO *Générations Futures* and local organisations like *Collective Pesticides Médoc*, *Alertes Pesticides Hautes Gironde*, *le Collectif de Soutien aux Victimes de Pesticides de l'Ouest*, and *Les Pisseurs Involontaires* were all present. Natural winemakers from the region also lent their support individually, demonstrating their personal commitment and political engagement by participating in the protests in large numbers. The coalition between the anti-pesticide associations and the natural wine movement was solidified on 13 October 2021 during an intervention by Jacques Carroget, president of the Syndicat de Défense des Vins Nature, who publicly expressed support for Valérie Murat on behalf of the syndicate, affirming solidarity and openly expressing dedication to the cause.

➤ **One more “soap opera” conflict in Bordeaux: the controversy around HVE certification**

The catalyst for the trial between Valérie Murat and the CIVB in Bordeaux was the introduction of the *Haute Valeur Environnementale* (HVE) environmental certification. It all began when Valérie Murat submitted over twenty bottles of Bordeaux wines that had been certified under the HVE for analysis, which revealed residues of pesticides prohibited by the HVE specifications. The Bordeaux anti-phyto network rallied into an even larger coalition targeting wines labelled HVE. HVE is a certification scheme introduced in France in 2007 that was intended to promote sustainable agricultural practices. It operates as a public certification programme and enjoys extensive support from the public authorities. According to the government, the label is intended to enable the identification of farms that while not fully organic, actively preserve biodiversity and minimise the environmental impact of their operations.



Figure 70. The HVE certification logo.

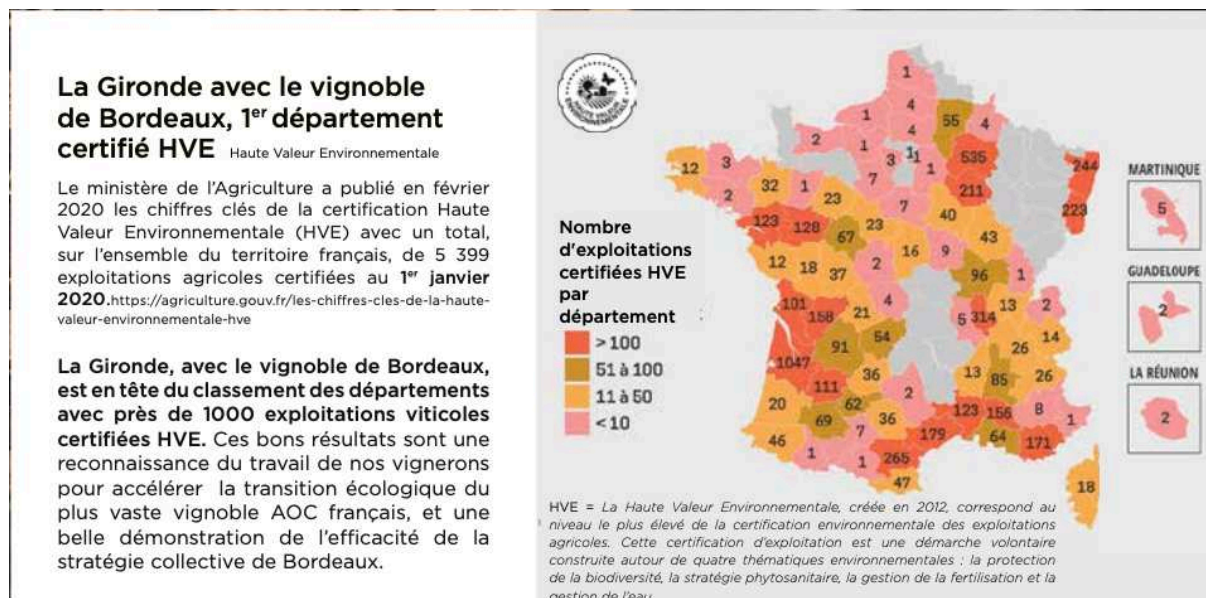


Figure 71. Gironde, the first department in France to be certified HVE³⁶²

In its 2022 report, the CIVB declared that Bordeaux was the department with the highest numbers of farms that had been certified HVE. However, HVE is currently under scrutiny and has been the subject of fierce criticism nationally. Some actors, such as representatives of the *Confédération Paysanne*, have denounced it as an “illusion of agroecological transition,”³⁶³ while other environmental and organic farming advocacy organisations have condemned it as a “Trojan horse for greenwashing.”³⁶⁴ Alongside these coalitions, actors from the natural wine

³⁶² Source: CIVB, 2022. La RSE. Dossier de Presse 2021-2022.

³⁶³ Chapelle, Sophie. 2020. “Le Nouveau Label “Haute Valeur Environnementale” pour l’Agriculture: “Un Foutage de Gueule Phénoménal.” *Basta*.

³⁶⁴ Richet, Enola. 2020. “Le Gouvernement Accusé de Faire du Label Haute Valeur Environnementale un “Cheval de Troie du ‘Greenwashing’.” *Le Monde*.

movement have expressed a desire to “restore truths,” or at least to prepare counter-discourses to expose the smoke and mirrors of HVE certification, as highlighted by these extracts from my interviews with winemakers below:

“HVE is a bit of a sham, it’s paperwork, it’s just paper. But it doesn’t change people’s practices. It just means that now they have to document what they do. But they can continue to weed or treat as they please ... they just have to write it down.” (Interview Sébastien, winemaker near Bordeaux, 26 April 2021³⁶⁵)

“HVE is a big smokescreen. It’s really the epitome of greenwashing.” (Interview Léon, wine bar owner in Bordeaux, 27 April 2021³⁶⁶)

The reasons behind these criticisms are numerous. Some point out that HVE was not designed for viticultural production but for agriculture in general and is therefore not stringent enough. Others are concerned about a lowering of standards, as the quantitative targets for the number of farms being HVE certified have been set at 90% by the Ministry of Agriculture. These two winemakers in Bordeaux expressed their concerns about the leniency of the HVE specifications:

“But in the end, what is the HVE label? It’s just going to provide a distinction for things that are already mandatory at the legislative level. In fact, for example, wastewater treatment, that’s already mandatory, but there are many properties that still weren’t doing it due to lack of means or lack of prioritisation.” (Interview Amandine, winemaker in Bordeaux 14 January 2021³⁶⁷)

“Listen, farmers were known to be people of common sense, I think we all agree on that. And now, they’re presented with something that says, “You were fools, from now on you’re going to think rationally.” HVE is the same: “You plant a hedge, you’re HVE. Yaaaaaay, hooray!” I mean, what’s the story?

- *Do you think they kind of disguise what they put into the soil?*

- No, not even that, they use the same products. They don’t need to change the products: with glyphosate, you’re HVE, no problem. It’s just taking a small measure on a farm... A measure multiplied by thousands or millions of farms that exist might maybe make a small step. But at no point does it engage people in an ideological reflection on their mode of production. It’s just for having a label. And we’re not addressing the issue in the right way.” (Interview Lionel, winemaker in Bordeaux, 7 April 2021³⁶⁸)

³⁶⁵ *My translation of:* “HVE c’est un peu du pipeau, c’est de la paperasse, c’est du papier, c’est tout. Mais ça ne change pas les pratiques des gens sauf qu’ils doivent marquer ce qu’ils font quoi. Ils peuvent continuer à désherber ou traiter ce qu’ils veulent ... mais faut l’écrire”

³⁶⁶ *My translation of:* “Le HVE qui arrive, c’est une grosse enfumade, c’est vraiment mais la définition même du *green washing*”

³⁶⁷ *My translation of:* “Mais finalement qu’est-ce que le label HVE? Ça va donner une distinction pour des choses qui sont déjà obligatoires au niveau législatif en fait, par exemple, le traitement des effluents, ça c’est obligatoires mais il y a beaucoup de propriétés qui ne le faisaient pas encore par manque de moyens ou par manque de priorisation.”

³⁶⁸ *My translation of:* “C’est-à-dire qu’avant les paysans étaient réputés pour être des gens de bon sens, je pense que l’on fait l’unanimité là-dessus. Et là, on leur sort un truc en leur disant “voilà vous étiez des cons, à partir de maintenant vous allez raisonner”. On leur a mis des ceillères. HVE c’est un peu pareil: vous plantez une haie, vous êtes en HVE. Yaaaaaeh, yallah! Enfin je veux dire c’est quoi l’histoire? - *Ils maquillent un peu ce qu’ils mettent dans le sol?* - Non même pas, ils mettent les mêmes produits. Ils n’ont pas besoins de changer les produits: avec le glyphosate, vous êtes HVE, il n’y a pas de problème. C’est juste de prendre une petite mesure dans une exploitation... Une mesure multipliée par les milliers ou les millions d’exploitations agricoles qui existent ça peut

Finally, some fear that HVE may lead to competition with the organic certification (AB), particularly regarding subsidies and the discussions surrounding the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). They denounce the fact that HVE has become a diluted version of organic instead of a springboard to organic certification, as was expressed in multiple interviews:

“And if I may add one thing, there was another article recently about the HVE certification. One might think it’s a step closer to organic farming, but it’s false. In fact, what they specifically want is the opposite, that is to say, to destroy the organic certification to simplify it with the certification of certain products, to allow for intensive production. What they want is to create a watered-down version of organic farming.” (Interview Jean-Yves, winemaker in Bordeaux 7 April 2021³⁶⁹)

“I feel like the communication from the CIVB is mostly focused on HVE and less on organic certification. Is that right?”

- Well, indeed we can see that the communications strategy of the CIVB revolves around promoting the SME and HVE. Which is a good approach, but in my opinion, where they made a mistake, and I’ve often told them this, is that it’s not an end in itself, it’s a support to move towards more virtuous practices.” (Interview Arthur, Syndicat Vigneron Bio Nouvelle Aquitaine, 19 July 2021³⁷⁰)

Natural winemakers and the large coalition of actors against HVE certification demand that HVE should be no more than a stepping stone towards organic farming. They denounce a government agenda that made HVE a competitor of organic farming rather than a transition towards it. Now, the statistics no longer look at the percentage of organic farming but the percentage of domains with environmental certifications without distinguishing between organic (AB) and HVE. For natural winemakers, this is nothing less than a technique developed by the government to be able to communicate an ongoing ecological transition in vineyards without having to structurally change production practices. In a similar vein, for the sociologists Doga and Salaméro (2023), HVE should be considered “a non-event,” a relatively painless transition.

Finally, the conflict between the pro- and anti-HVE coalitions is epitomised by a conflict around biodiversity preservation. In an attempt to save it from the criticism, some HVE

peut-être faire un petit pas. Mais à aucun moment, ça n’engage les gens à une réflexion idéologique sur leur mode de production. Ce n’est que pour avoir un label. Et on ne prend pas le problème dans le bon sens.”

³⁶⁹ My translation of: “Et puis si je peux ajouter une chose, il y a encore eu un article très récemment sur la certification HVE 1, 2 ou 3. On peut se dire que c’est un pas de plus pour amener les gens vers la bio mais c’est faux. En fait ce qu’ils veulent précisément c’est l’inverse, c’est-à-dire amener ... détruire la certification bio pour la simplifier avec la certification de certains produits, pour permettre la production intensive. Ce qu’ils veulent c’est nous créer une version édulcorée de la bio.”

³⁷⁰ My translation of: “J’ai l’impression que la communication du CIVB est quand même plutôt centrée sur les certifications environnementales HVE et moins vers la bio? - Alors effectivement on s’aperçoit que l’axe de communication du CIVB s’est de communiquer sur le SME et l’HVE. Ce qui est une bonne démarche, mais là où à mon avis ils ont fait une erreur et je leur ai souvent dit c’est que ce n’est pas une finalité, c’est un accompagnateur pour aller vers des pratiques plus vertueuses.”

representatives have attacked organic and biodynamic labels and denounced the fact that there are no explicit mentions on these labels of the importance of preserving biodiversity. Organic and natural winemakers felt that they had been personally attacked by the accusations by officials of the HVE group that their labels (AB, Demeter or Méthode Nature) did not include an explicit, formalised mention of attention to biodiversity. According to this natural winemaker in Bordeaux “These attacks show a strong lack of understanding of what organic farming is”³⁷¹ This representative of a local organic viticulture syndicate also commented:

“It’s completely absurd because biodiversity is part of the DNA of organic farming. You can’t have a living soil if there’s no biodiversity. It’s a whole package! And people who say that don’t know what organic farming is. Organic farming inherently integrates biodiversity and the environment. It’s a philosophy, a comprehensive approach. It’s not just a product that can be used in organic agriculture to produce this or that. It’s much more than that. And that’s what HVE doesn’t have. In terms of indicators and points given for everything related to biodiversity, environment, etc., it’s even lower than the indicators of the CAP on all ecological infrastructures. So it’s really... It’s nothing! Just having two metres of grassy headlands and you’re HVE. The proof is that all the organic producers who ask to be HVE are automatically HVE, while not all those who are HVE are organic because synthetic chemical products are usable in HVE.” (Interview Fanny, AgroBio Gironde representative, 16 July 2021³⁷²)

To conclude, what characterises the natural wine movement locally in Bordeaux is its strong ties with broader environmental coalitions such as anti-pesticide networks or anti-HVE groups. While these are the two most widely publicised examples, Bordeaux natural winemakers in general often engage with local ecological initiatives. It should be noted, however, that Bordeaux is perhaps the least vocal French wine region in terms of collective actions led by the natural wine movement. A national analysis would swiftly reveal that the majority of public initiatives and the central clusters of the natural wine movement are located in other regions, such as Languedoc, the Loire and Beaujolais.

9.3.2. In South Africa, winemakers collectives compensate for a lack of state support

The South African wine industry has a very different structure, one characterised by neoliberalism and the very limited involvement of the State in the wine business. Moreover, as explained in the previous chapter, the industry does not seem to be governed by the economic

³⁷¹ Interview Gilles, winemaker in Bordeaux, 27 April 2021,

³⁷² *My translation of:* “C’est une philosophie, une approche globale. Ce n’est pas uniquement un produit utilisable en agriculture biologique pour produire ça ou ça. C’est beaucoup plus que ça. Et c’est ce que n’a pas HVE. Au niveau des indicateurs et des points qui sont donnés par sur tout ce qui est biodiversité, environnement etc. c’est même inférieur aux indicateurs de la PAC sur toutes les infrastructures écologiques. Donc c’est vraiment mais ... C’est rien ! Il suffit d’avoir 2 mètres de tournières enherbées et on est HVE. La preuve c’est que tous les bios qui demandent à être HVE le sont automatiquement alors que tous ceux qui sont HVE ne sont pas bios puisque des produits chimiques de synthèse sont utilisables en HVE.”

pressures of environmental standards. The lack of state involvement is one of its most characteristic features, and it was highlighted by winemakers on multiple occasions:

“South Africa is a very “work hard, do it yourself” kind of country. There’s no help. Everything I do is 100% myself.” (Interview Greg, winemaker in Western Cape, 5 April 2022)

“Look, in this country you’re very much on your own, and sometimes it’s actually pleasant because we’re pretty free to do what we want to do. It’s not regulated in that sense, but like you say, it’s not easy.” (interview Jack, winemaker in Western Cape, 25 April 2022)

Network analysis proves to be very useful in this case as it provides an alternative to a heavily institutionally-focused approach, instead making it possible to focus on relational patterns. The rhizome philosophy advocated by Deleuze and Guattari finds a resonance in the structure of the South African wine industry. The rhizome is often used as a critique of the predominance of the state and its influence on society, as emphasised by Igor Krtolica: “The rhizome program, aimed at relativising the form of the State by showing the real existence and logical consistency of a nomadic organisation capable of warding off the formation of a State apparatus or its equivalents in a group or in thought” (Krtolica, 2021, p. 48). In South Africa, in response to the absence of the state, natural winemakers have established informal meta-organisations (J. D. Steyn, 2021) that have mushroomed like the shoots of a rhizome and form the basis of the natural wine movement. Indeed, in the absence of a formal organised structure, interpersonal relationships – from which winemakers’ collectives were born – have a significant influence on the structure of the natural wine movement broadly. The importance of interpersonal networks was expressed quite straightforwardly by two young winemakers:

“It’s tough, but at the same time I think it makes us a bit more resilient because we have to figure out a way and you rely on your colleagues and friends more to help you, which I think is ultimately a good thing, really. I think it’s created a huge part of why SA wine is getting so much better. Because back thirty years ago, a lot of winemakers never spoke to each other. They were very rigid in their thinking, they always thought that they were better than their neighbours, whereas now we’re very much friends. We speak to each other, we communicate.” (Interview Thomas, winemaker in Western Cape, 11 May 2022)

“I think it’s quite unique to be in an industry where people want to help one another so much. That’s something that really catches me off guard and also I believe that’s how South Africans work by nature. We like to help out where we can, because the State doesn’t intervene.” (Interview Tim, winemaker in Western Cape, 4 May 2022)

I now unravel the ad hoc, and sometimes unexpected, network dynamics that structure the wine industry locally and allow radical innovations such as those brought about by the natural wine movement to purchase land in the Western Cape. I investigate the meaning of ties, and how they are embedded in broader political economic and cultural settings.

9.3.2.1. Private market initiatives as active agents of learning

In this section, I observe how economic incentives can influence the spread of new knowledge in the wine industry and lead to more environmental practices such as conversion toward organic farming. I investigate two empirical cases that showcase the profound influence of global economic markets in the local wine industry and the influence of the private sector in structuring the local wine scene. The first example illustrates a vertical network perspective – that is, networks that link different actors along the global value chain – while the second reflects the more horizontal network approach of peer exchange mechanisms.

➤ A vertical network perspective

The influence of winemakers on grape growers described in the previous chapter can also be looked at from a network perspective (Chapter 8). If one applies a vertical network perspective, in this case linking the global wine sector to local rural production spaces, one can see how a shift in international wine demand can drive change in local viticulture practices.

Rick's story epitomises the way vertical network mechanisms operate. He is an established grape grower in the Swartland. He has been farming grapes for over 25 years and – like most growers in the region – used to sell his production to the local cooperative. When he talks about the past, he reflects on an era dominated by purely commercial farming practices “It was 100% commercial farming. There was no talk of organic and natural farming or anything like that. It was straight chemical fertilisers, herbicides and pesticides.” The whole industry prioritised high yields, with tonnage being further boosted by the introduction of drip irrigation techniques. But in the semi-arid region of the Swartland, where financial resources were limited, irrigation remained out of reach for Rick, leaving him to contend with intense competition: “We [*Swartland*] had really good wines going to supermarkets and selling at fantastic value until those irrigated wines came in. And then we started struggling. We were actually in the wrong game.” Rick's journey has followed very interesting turn of events since that point. Struggling with unfair competition and finding it difficult to sell his grapes to the local cooperative, Rick began exploring alternative avenues for his produce. This led him to Bryan MacRobert, who purchased a few rows of his grapes. At the time, MacRobert was working for Eben Sadie, one of the founders of the Swartland Revolution. This initial connection opened doors for Rick, leading him to Radford Dale, a premium wine estate, as well as to Craig (Testalonga), Jurgen (Intellego) and Johan (JH Meyer), the three pioneer figures of the natural wine movement in the Western Cape and so on. Over time, Rick secured

contracts with all these domains, enabling him to sell his entire grape production to independent winemakers. By 2011, a date that coincides with the beginning of the Swartland Revolution events, he was in a position to stop selling to the cooperative: “It got to a stage where now every single row is presold. I mean before the harvest; each row is dedicated to someone. It is actually written down.”

Aside from Rick’s emancipation from the cooperative system, what is particularly intriguing is the profound impact his personal connections with independent natural winemakers had on his farming methods. Despite coming from a conventional farming background, Rick now boasts a vineyard that is entirely organically cultivated. This gradual shift towards organic practices was undeniably spurred by the influence of natural winemakers, who demanded organic grapes for their wine production. As described in the figure below (Figure 72), in order to free Rick from carrying the burden of the risks associated with transitioning to organic farming on his own, the natural winemakers proposed buying his grapes by the hectare rather than by the ton, thereby relieving the pressure of yield expectations. Interviews with some of the natural pioneers corroborate that transitioning to organic practices involves a substantial investment, and that the responsibility for this transition should be shared between the grape grower and the winemaker:

“This is why a lot of the guys I work with like Rick, I won’t just come and say “would you farm organically for me?” and then only buy one ton of grapes. What’s in it for him? So I would buy most of his vineyard and then there’s a proper working relationship and that’s the difficult part when you are young and just starting out.” (Interview Craig, winemaker in Western Cape, April 2022)

Rick’s decision to transition to 100% organic farming was driven not only by the economic incentives provided by independent and natural winemakers but also by the notable improvement in grape quality he observed first-hand in his vineyard. In search of more expertise, he occasionally used the services of Rosa Kruger, a renowned viticulture consultant known for her work with top-end independent domains in the region, particularly for her advice on soil health and vitality. Ultimately, taking a critical step back, it was the increasing international demand for natural wine, and consequently organically farmed grapes, coupled with his direct collaboration with natural winemakers that led Rick to experiment with and convert to organic farming. This story illustrates an unexpected, and yet not unique, pathway for the dissemination of new knowledge within the industry, where transition toward greener vineyards is driven neither by public policy incentives nor by the economic incentive of an environmental label, but by interpersonal relationships and top-down market incentives.

Finally, Rick's experience serves as a compelling example of the absence of organic certification in the South African wine industry; instead, it underscores the pivotal role of trust throughout the value chain, as exemplified in the excerpt below.

“Do you have organic certification?

- No

- Is it something you would ever consider?

- If somebody else pays for it, yes. The way I thought about it is that all the guys that I sell the grapes to, they are incredibly reputable people internationally, so when they tell their costumers or their agents that their wine is made organically or made from organic grapes then that's good enough for their buyers.

- There's a trust relationship because they're already known within the natural wine movement internationally?

- Yes, so if they need a certificate from me to say "here is the proof", is it going to change anything? I don't think so.

- They haven't been asking you for accreditation?

- No, because they trust me, they spend time here in the vineyards with me.” (Interview Rick, grape grower in Western Cape, 21 April 2022)

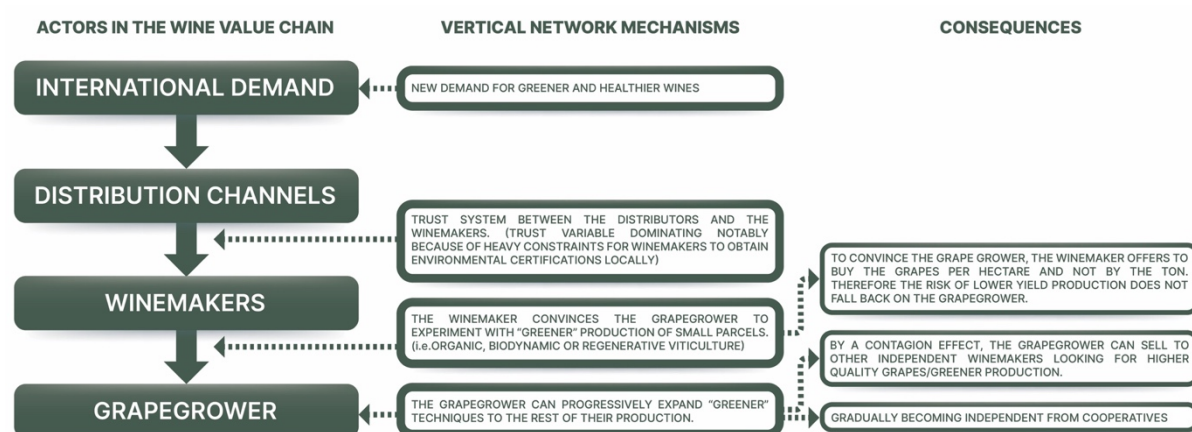


Figure 72. Vertical network and descending incentive for grape growers to farm organically. Source: Chazal 2024.

Rick's story is not unique, and many other people I encountered during my fieldwork would testify to these vertical or descending knowledge transfer mechanisms that eventually lead to grape growers converting to greener farming practices. Because it happens without public policies or environmental certification incentives, I contend that identifying these agencies merits more attention, and should be the focus of further research.

➤ A horizontal network perspective

Another compelling illustration of innovative knowledge dissemination channels within the wine sector locally is the emergence of the Participatory Guarantee System, better known as the PGS. As I outlined in Chapter 8, winemakers face numerous hurdles when it comes to obtaining internationally recognised environmental certifications. These certifications

traditionally rely on third-party verification systems involving regulatory bodies that set production standards and independent certifiers that formally accredit domains after completing a technical audit. Official organic regulation in Europe is based on this third-party certification system, but South Africa lacks an equivalent, and private third-party accreditation is often prohibitively expensive for independent producers. Consequently, peculiar situations arise where some producers practice organic or biodynamic farming but are not formally certified, as demonstrated by the experience of Rick.

This is where the PGS emerges as an innovative solution. It is not unique to South Africa; in fact, it is a prime example of successful policy transfer that is applied internationally, particularly in Latin America, and notably in the agro-ecological sector. Adriana-Maria Chaparro-Africano and Miguel Páramo have provided a comprehensive definition of the PGS: “To meet the demands of conscious consumers without facing the costs and procedures required by third-party certification, small-scale producers around the world have organised themselves into cooperative networks based on trust, pedagogy, and mutual knowledge to guarantee the quality of their products, developing alternative certification systems, such as Participatory Guarantee Systems – PGS.” (Chaparro-Africano & Páramo, 2022, p. 1308). The system has recently been adopted by biodynamic winemakers in South Africa. I argue that it is used both to guarantee certain standards and ethics in production and as an innovative channel that allows the diffusion of new knowledge within a professional community. Unlike the case above, the PGS dynamic is characterised by horizontal network mechanisms in which knowledge circulates among peers. The form of PGS adopted by South African winemakers is based on collective decision-making and peer review visits from one domain to another. These mechanisms lead to endorsement of the membership, as explained by actors who have been directly involved in its implementation.

“Presume there are ten people in the PGS. They all go and visit each other, and it’s based on trust and transparency. It’s a value chain to participate in, so that your input suppliers, they engage in a meeting on a particular farm and that group who are there determine whether that farm qualifies to be certified or not.” (Interview Alan, SAOSO representative, 17 April 2022)

“I am part of a PGS group. At the moment we are eight farms part of that project. It’s driven by the biodynamic association of South Africa (BDAASA) with the supervision of Demeter. The idea with that group is that we aim at self-certification: every month we visit one of the farms, we see what they’re doing. We chat about it or we recommend changes. And in a way Demeter is watching what we do and maybe we’ll be eligible to say, “OK, this farm is really doing nicely now, we really consider the farm to be biodynamic”.” (Interview Nile, winemaker in Western Cape, 20 May 2022)

The PGS mentioned above is a way for South African producers to be recognised by the biodynamic label Demeter without having to go through the official procedure. As such, the PGS mitigates the barriers to environmental certification in the South African context and fosters a peer-learning scheme by providing a platform for horizontal knowledge diffusion. As the winemakers themselves emphasise, because the PGS is based on consensual and collective decision-making it also leaves room for local adaptations according to specific social, economic or geographic needs. Finally, it reflects the ethos of alternative agri-food networks, as these ad hoc grassroots initiatives are driven by objectives that align with AAFN, such as a particular attention to re-embeddedness in local ecologies, with an emphasis on the importance of local community and trust at their core. As Mamen Cuéllar-Padilla has underlined, “These systems are designed for people with a collective and political view of agri-food systems, in line with the political dimension of Agroecology.” (Cuéllar-Padilla & Ganuza-Fernandez, 2018). Finally, PGS takes the form of a peer-to-peer learning initiative that empowers small groups of professionals. However, it is not yet clear how these schemes are included and recognised from an international perspective.

The two examples I have described highlight vertical and horizontal network perspectives in which economic factors come to play in the organisation of the natural wine movement, the transformation of practices and the circulation of new knowledge within the network locally. I will now focus directly on interpersonal relations.

9.3.2.2. The power of local networks: from organised collectives to informal and interpersonal relationships

Small independent winemakers often align with the neoliberal philosophy that dominates the wine industry locally, and so they tend to have limited involvement with the few local institutions that exist, like wine routes (such as the Swartland Wine and Olive Route, the Stellenbosch Association or the Bot River Association) or cultivar associations (like the Chenin Blanc Association or the Pinotage Association). Several winemakers described these institutions as “old centres of power” with “hidden political agendas,” or expressed the feeling that they were “not adequately represented” by them. If they are indeed moving away from pre-established institutions, one might wonder how the network emerges and how knowledge circulates within the community. This section highlights the crucial role of peer networks in establishing a community of like-minded professionals. My central hypothesis is that the natural wine movement is evolving primarily through informal and interpersonal connections.

This position is reinforced if one examines the various branches of the network that facilitate the exchange of new knowledge and foster radical innovations in the sector. These branches range from ad hoc but structured organisations to small winemakers' collectives. I also outline the primary role played by informal and personal relationships within the network, which echoes the emphasis on homophily and transitivity described above. The following section analyses knowledge agencies and the power of local networks in the spread of knowledge at a micro scale using three case studies that go gradually from structured platforms to informal relationships.

➤ **The Old Vine Project, a learning platform**

To address the lack of government and public structures in the South African wine industry, other organisations have emerged that play significant roles in connecting professionals and creating distinctions between the different segments of the wine industry, such as PIWOSA (Premium Independent Wineries of South Africa) or the Cape Winemakers Guild. One of these associations has a particularly distinctive and innovative role: the Old Vine Project (OVP). Credit must be given to Rosa Kruger, who has been instrumental in building the network that has gradually formed around the OVP. She acts in three capacities: firstly, as a renowned viticultural consultant, she has collaborated with leading wine estates in the Western Cape for the past two decades; simultaneously, she has spearheaded the establishment of pruning schools across the region, equipping and empowering farm workers (further details can be found in portrait 5); and lastly, she is the founder of the Old Vine Project (OVP), an initiative I will study further in this analysis.



Figure 73. The Old Vine Project seal.

What is the Old Vine Project? It certifies South African vineyards that are thirty-five years of age and older. The project subscribes to the position that as vines age, their yields decrease but they produce grapes that impart a unique character to their wines. The OVP first identifies old vineyards across the Western Cape, and then provides technical farming advice to farmers who

own old vines geared to organic farming, conservation and agroecology. Additionally, it has developed a competitive business model based on product differentiation in order to commercialise these wines in higher-end markets (Priilaid & Steyn, 2020). In 2016, the Old Vine Project implemented its “Certified Heritage Vineyard” seal, which can be stamped on wine bottles, a pioneering initiative internationally that has garnered significant attention, including from the OIV.³⁷³ I also believe that by centring its discussions around old vines, the Old Vine Project serves as a learning platform on which Rosa Kruger and colleagues can share years of viticultural experience, with a strong focus on agroecology and other sustainability practices. As Ponte has highlighted, “The project has thus developed from a sustainability perspective; old vineyards tend to consume less water and exhibit more resistance to high temperatures. Since replanting a vineyard is very expensive, farmers can also ensure economic sustainability by saving on replanting costs” (Ponte et al., 2023). As an independent private entity, the Old Vine Project is one of the most influential catalysts for knowledge in the wine sector locally. It also partners with local academics and researchers to disseminate findings on climate change and viticulture.³⁷⁴ The example of the OVP is a vivid illustration of how private initiatives can enable an incremental shift in local farming practices.

➤ **The role of independent winemakers’ collectives in structuring the community**

The emergence of the natural wine movement is also characterised by the formation of friendship groups in which like-minded professionals share experiences and similar paths. In numerous instances, small independent winemakers have come together in collectives or meta-organisations, ranging from informal to more structured groups that are more or less explicitly focused on natural wine production. As I have described in previous chapters, the wine industry in the Western Cape is shaped by these collectives, a trend that began with the Swartland Revolution (2010-2016), which led to the establishment of the Swartland Independent Producers (SIP). Subsequently, various other collectives have emerged, such as Zoo Biscuits (a group of young winemakers that are not bound by a region but by similar production practices) and, more recently Barrels & Beards (a group of independent winemakers in Bot River). In a similar vein, young independent winemakers in Stellenbosch have expressed a

³⁷³ International Organisation of Vine and Wines.

³⁷⁴ This was especially showcased during two events I attended: The Old Vine Project workshop, Klein Joostenberg, Stellenbosch, 31 May 2021; and Les enjeux vitivinicoles face au changement climatique dans les vignobles du Cap (Afrique du Sud) et du bordelais (France), *séminaire d’actualité LAM*, Musée d’Aquitaine de Bordeaux, 8 June 2023.

desire to distance themselves from traditional production and are considering forming a collective, while some already share collective cellars, equipment and leased parcels. Additionally, the three pioneers of the natural wine movement are contemplating organising an annual gathering to promote natural wine production and their identity. Although the initial objective of these meta-organisations is to establish a collective brand identity for winemakers with shared practices and to promote their wines collectively, they also play a vital role in disseminating innovations and new practices through regular meetings at which winemakers gather to exchange ideas and discuss best practices, thereby fostering a culture of knowledge-sharing within the community.

This knowledge diffusion role is particularly enlightening in the story of Eben Sadie, who is both a founder of the Swartland Revolution and an active member of the SIP collective. In 2021, Eben published a manifesto on the impact of climate change on viticulture techniques entitled “Planting for Tomorrow’s Sun.” In collaboration with private consultants and research teams such as Vititec, he has been using advanced GIS³⁷⁵ technologies to monitor climate patterns. He has also allocated certain parcels of land to experiment with grape varieties that show resistance to hydric stress and heat. His insights on climate change and viticulture have been extensively disseminated, primarily by using SIP as the initial platform for sharing knowledge and relying on its ripple effect. He serves as a prime example of winemakers who have successfully leveraged their experience for the benefit of the community.



Figure 74. Photos from Eben Sadie 2021 "Planting for Tomorrow's Sun."

³⁷⁵ Geographic Information Systems.

➤ **From “pizza nights” to the Swartland winemakers’ cricket team: tapping into informal networks as pools of knowledge**

Apart from the formal organisations, winemakers’ collectives, and annual gatherings, what has proved to be most influential in shaping the natural wine movement locally and disseminating new knowledge within the sector is undoubtedly interpersonal relationships and personal connections. These relationships can take the form of peer-professional bonds, friendships and sometimes even kinship ties, all of which underscore the strong sense of community emerging among small independent winemakers who share a common ethos and praxis. A natural winemaker from Stellenbosch explained how his professional connections and inspirations are bound to this younger generation of winemakers, who are mostly based in the Swartland:

“All the natural wine scene seems to resolve around the Swartland. But I guess I don’t really even know how we were perceived here. My wife is from here [*Stellenbosch*] so we know a lot of the people here, the sort of old-school guys, but we never really socialise with them. All our friends were from the Swartland, so we spent most of our weekends in the Swartland, with those guys.” (Interview Thomas, winemaker in Western Cape, 11 May 2022)

There is perhaps no better example to illustrate the depth of these interpersonal connections than Adi Badenhorst’s domain in the Swartland. Adi is a co-founder of the Swartland Revolution and SIP collective, and is also involved in various initiatives such as the Old Vine Project and serves as a mentor in the Cape Winemakers Guild. Above all, however, he is known for his exceptional social skills and his ability to innovate and catalyse new ideas, and envision changes in the community. While many people may describe his winemaking approach as rather “traditional,” Adi is widely regarded as an inspiring central figure in the community, as highlighted by the insights shared by fellow winemakers below:

“Adi Badenhorst, he does very interesting stuff, he’s always one step ahead. He just started to make *Piquette* now for instance. It’s becoming a big thing in Europe.” (Interview Dan, winemaker in Western Cape, 22 April 2022)

“Someone like Adi Badenhorst in the Swartland, what he’s doing is fantastic, also from a farming perspective. He’s not necessarily focusing on organic or biodynamic but on sustainability and treating workers very well. And it’s amazing to see someone like that independent, being able to grow to the size that he is now. You know if you really want to make a change, you actually need to have that sort of environment anyway, that commercial critical mass, so that you can be able to afford to effect the change that you want, so I think he’s really cool.” (Interview Tim, winemaker in Western Cape, 4 May 2022)

“Adi is an honest, down-to-earth human and an inspiration to a lot of people.” (Interview Thomas, winemaker in Western Cape, 11 May 2022)

“I suppose it [*The Swartland Revolution*] happened in a perfect storm. I mean, nobody can be cooler than Adi Badenhorst. I don’t know if you know much about Greek mythology. There was a guy called Dionysus, he was the god of agriculture, the stinking goat. But anyway, there’s a quote saying “Dionysus

is so cool that even Dionysus wants to be like Dionysus.” You should put that in your thesis! [*Laughter*].” (Interview Grayson, caviste in Western Cape, 22 May 2022)

Several people I interviewed who work with or under the wing of Adi Badenhorst highlighted the importance of building a community and sharing his vision of production and farming practices widely. There is one event that epitomises this desire to build a community of like-minded independent winemakers: the “Pizza Nights” at Adi’s. This weekly gathering is nothing more than what its name suggests: an evening at Adi’s farm where winemakers gather around pizzas and wine. Adi Badenhorst’s Kalmoesfontein farm is an ideal setting for these weekly events: wood-fired pizzas and outdoor seating with a relaxing view of the vineyards and the Paardeberg valley, sometimes accompanied by live music from local bands. According to numerous testimonies, the Pizza Nights are the heart of knowledge exchanges and the circulation of new ideas, as these winemakers explain:

“I would recommend you come for the pizza nights. Actually, at the beginning it was only local winemakers that would join for that, and now even some people from Stellenbosch, Cape Town or even further come to join in. [...] Actually, people bring their wines from all over and taste together, and during harvest for the last three years, a lot of the winemaker’s interns would also come and, you know, it’s a place for people to meet and talk to each other. I think on an informal level that is actually, quite important.

- *It’s amazing to have these kinds of network.*

- Yes, you create an environment where people can learn from each other... Because wine is also something that you share. It’s a lifestyle, it is not just a 9-to-5 job.” (Interview Amy, winemaker in Western Cape, 8 June 2022)

Other influential channels that can often seem surprising from an outsider’s perspective have shaped the natural wine movement. One such example is the Swartland winemakers’ cricket team. A winemaker from the Swartland described how he became involved with the SIP collective after being introduced to the cricket team:

“I think it was 2016, and back then I was already living here for three years, so I knew pretty much everybody. And I didn’t know if it was really necessary to be part of the SIP. And then actually we started to play cricket. It was pretty much the SIP cricket team. So I said “OK, if I want to join the cricket team I have to be a member of SIP!” But ironically later on lots of people joined the cricket team and they weren’t even members of the SIP, they were just friends. Anyway.” (Interview Scott, winemaker in Western Cape, 25 April 2022)

I argue that network analysis often overlooks or too hastily dismisses the role of informal and interpersonal relationships in knowledge diffusion. This is largely due to the complexity of these ties, which are ever-changing, multifaceted and challenging to define. Only a nuanced understanding of the field and immersion in a community of practices can reveal their significance. However, especially in neoliberal contexts like South Africa, where the public sector plays a limited role in structuring the wine industry and resources in the private sector

are often scarce, professional communities emerge as crucial drivers of knowledge and innovation. These communities of practice are frequently nurtured through interpersonal connections and facilitated by charismatic individuals such as Adi Badenhorst who serve as central figures and provide platforms for the community to coalesce and thrive.

9.3.3. The role of transnational networking in identity-building

As demonstrated throughout this thesis, the natural wine movement takes the shape of a transnational network and manifests itself through a common identity and shared norms and values across the movement. My work has focused mainly on two local antennae of the movement, but as we approach the end of the thesis, it seems appropriate to take a critical step back and look at the movement from its transnational perspective. The transnational dimension of the natural wine movement could be the subject of an entire doctoral thesis, but this section just seeks to shine a light on the local appropriation of global knowledge, or in other words, to analyse the innovations and changes in practices that have been generated by imported knowledge. Network sociology is a particularly useful way of enabling interscalar analysis – jumping from one scale to another, bringing the micro and the macro together – and translocal analysis – knowledge diffusion from one wine region to the other. In this last section, I concentrate on the interscalar and translocal character of the natural wine movement and attempt to identify avenues for new research to analyse the natural wine movement as a global phenomenon.

At first sight, geographic distance may seem to be a potential impediment to social learning and the diffusion of innovation. However, while acknowledging the significance of spatiality and scale, it is possible to bridge the divide across different scales and engage in a multiscalar analysis by centring the discussion around network sociology. In this study, the natural wine movement is identified as a Transnational Social Movement (TSM) (Hendrikx et al., 2017), and network analysis helps elucidate its relational dynamics and social circuits. Globalisation, along with the consequent establishment of international sectorial networks, provides opportunities to enhance the adaptive capacity of local winemakers. Simply put, translocal networks are increasingly instrumental in facilitating the exchange of information, ideas and knowledge among diverse wine regions. Within this framework, the sharing of advice among winemakers from various wine-producing regions, all of whom are involved in the natural wine movement, is a hallmark of the translocal natural wine innovation network. In the next section,

I investigate the role of translocal networks in enabling adaptive changes in viticultural farming and wine production across regions.

In order to do this, I have developed two hypotheses. Firstly, I argue that within the natural wine movement, which largely operates in isolation from the broader wine industry, a significant amount of advice comes from translocal sources. Drawing upon Till Rockenbach's analysis (Rockenbach et al., 2019), I posit that translocal advice predominantly flows across the weak ties that link various wine regions. Secondly, I contend that natural winemakers are highly interconnected internationally, potentially more so than their conventional counterparts. This heightened connectivity can be attributed to the niche character of the movement, in which natural winemakers rely heavily on transnational networks for distribution, commercialisation and identity-building. These hypotheses will be examined critically in the subsequent sections.

9.3.3.1. A translocal perspective: Natural winemakers acting as brokers between different wine regions

In their study on the role of translocal networks in agricultural innovations, Rockenbach and his colleagues argue that “translocal advice is dominantly provided through weak and formal ties with extension agencies and shared by few highly central larger-scale farmers within sparse local networks” (Rockenbach, 2019). The objective here is to highlight how “spatial distance between network actors is positively related to the adoption of sustainable land use practices, as farmers are more likely to learn something “new” from distant peers.” (Rockenbach et al., 2019, p. 687). Building upon Rockenbach's framework, I depict a similar scenario within the natural wine movement, where the flow of innovations is propelled by brokers (Burt, 2004) or weak ties (Granovetter, 1983). The main difference between Rockenbach's analysis and mine is that here innovation is not facilitated by larger-scale farmers but by small independent yet trailblazing winemakers.³⁷⁶

³⁷⁶ Both Ronald Burt's Broker Theory and Mark Granovetter's Strength of Weak Ties Theory offer insights into social networks and their impact on information diffusion and access to resources, but they approach the subject from different angles. Burt's theory emphasises the role of individuals known as “brokers” who bridge structural holes between otherwise disconnected clusters within a network. He contends that brokers have unique access to diverse information and opportunities due to their positioning at the intersection of different social circles. Meanwhile, Granovetter's theory highlights the significance of weak ties in providing access to novel information and opportunities. In his view, the strength of weak ties lies in the fact that they facilitate the flow of information between distant social clusters that strong ties do not typically connect.

➤ A first generation of well-travelled winemakers in South Africa

It is important to remember that until the 1990s, because of the travel sanctions imposed by the international community during apartheid, the majority of winemakers learned and practiced exclusively in South Africa. However, there has been a notable generational shift since the end of apartheid marked by a new cohort of well-travelled winemakers. These young producers actively seek out overseas experiences to broaden their knowledge and skills beyond the confines of South Africa. Placing a focus on the mobility of winemakers within this network offers valuable insights into how the emergence of the natural wine movement is not solely a result of local paradigm shifts, but is also influenced by the innovative and radical practices observed in other wine regions worldwide. South African natural winemakers are not too shy to admit that they “have mentors all around the world, people that make amazing wines.” Their willingness to import knowledge acquired overseas is evident in the excerpts below:

“When they left varsity and did their *stages* all over the place, there was already a movement then overseas with guys starting to make natural wine. I think that’s what enabled them to bring it back here and go “Hey guys, this is really cool stuff, we want to do the same here”. They’re not trying to be rebels, they’re not going to be like “we don’t like the traditional wine.” On the contrary, I think they love the natural wine, but it’s more like “why don’t we give this a try?”, because the markets are opening up all over the place, people want new things.” (Interview Sean, caviste in Cape Town, 18 December 2021)

“The reason why it happens is because the second generation of guys coming out were able to go overseas. The first generation that travelled, they went to the big producers of the time, the mid-90s, like the Robert Parker time. So they were all making wines that were very broad, very large, delicious wines but you know... whereas five or ten years later, when the next generation started to travel, they tended to go to smaller producers, they realised that not all Bordeaux and not all Burgundy tasted the same. So they were seeking out similarly minded producers in other areas.

And so when they came back they tried to use that same philosophical approach and apply it to the local conditions. And it took them five years to sort it out. Some would say they’re still trying to figure it out now [*Laughter*]. But that is super exciting!” (Interview Lennie, distributor in Cape Town, 12 January 2022)

“Listen, if I could do it all over again, I think the day I got my diploma I would get on a plane and go work overseas for five years. But I didn’t do it, I worked straight in South Africa and it kind of got me stuck back there. And also, it wasn’t such a thing to be able to travel when you have a job.” (Interview Dan, winemaker in Western Cape, 22 April 2022)

“I also set up some interviews before starting Scions of Sinai to get names of people whose wines I’d tasted before and that inspired me: travelling there and sitting with them and seeing how that resonates with me or not. It’s also a lot about speaking to farmers. And that slowly brings a more inquisitive mindset, so when I come back to my terroir, there’s a set of questions that I can ask my terroir.” (Interview Rob, winemaker in Western Cape, 4 May 2022)

Some international figures stand out as particularly important for the emergence of the South African natural wine movement, such as Tom Lubbes, a South African winemaker who has been working in Languedoc (France) for the last twenty years. Tom Lubbes is considered by

many to be the godfather of natural wine in South Africa. He started to investigate natural vinification in South Africa in the 1990s, but did not stay in the country and moved to France to set up his own vineyard, Domaine Matassa, in the Languedoc region, where he has been living ever since. It is no coincidence that the “big three” pioneers of natural wine in the Western Cape (Craig Hawkins, Jurgen Gouws and Johan Meyer) all went to work as interns for Tom Lubbes at Matassa before starting their own production. Lubbes can be compared to a broker, or rather a weak tie, according to Granovetter’s definition, as thanks to his position in France, he offers access to alternative winemaking perspectives and resources that go beyond the typical South African traditional social circle and lead to increased opportunities for innovation and knowledge circulation. The “big three” in natural wine epitomise this dual influence of the South African movement: the legacy of the Swartland Revolutions and the international dynamics of the movement.

This confirms the hypothesis of a second Renaissance in South Africa (See Chapter 5). The first took place in the post-apartheid era, and was marked by South Africa’s entry into the global wine market after the lifting of the embargo and its adaptation to international competition, norms and demand. The second took place in the 2010s as a new generation of young winemakers travelled abroad and returned with new visions and knowledge to be implemented in South Africa. In essence, the first Renaissance coincided with the global wine market entering South Africa, whereas the second was characterised by South African winemakers gaining experience in wine production overseas.

➤ **Why attention is still being paid to “Old World” wine regions and why the wine industry would benefit by integrating South-to-North dynamics more systematically?**

It is worth noting that while Bordeaux’s natural winemakers readily draw inspiration from their peers in other wine regions, this circulation of knowledge remains largely confined within national (or perhaps European) borders. I posit that despite the fact that the natural wine movement claims to be an international network, the circulation of new knowledge within it still largely follows traditional patterns, with “New World” wine regions learning and gaining experiences from their “Old World” counterparts. The natural wine movement has yet to break free of the common “North to South” dynamic prevalent in many sectors. I suggest that “South-to-North” dynamics should be integrated more systemically. This is particularly relevant in this case as South African winemakers have had to adapt their viticultural practices and find

innovative solutions quite a few years before Bordeaux, as they have already been hit by several climate crisis, such as consecutive years of intensive drought.³⁷⁷

9.3.3.2. A multi-scalar perspective: Specialised international wine fairs as identity markers

Last but not least, the proliferation of specialised wine fairs and events worldwide not only contributes to the democratisation and international spread of natural wine, but also facilitates the exchange of ideas and knowledge among winemakers. Because natural winemakers often operate in relative isolation from the mainstream industry, their local communities are too niche and their production practices are too radical, and so it is understandable why they should gravitate towards international events to gain new insights. These natural wine fairs have become too numerous to list here. Further research in this direction is imperative to provide a comprehensive network analysis of natural winemakers from a global perspective. Complementary work would also be needed to map these events more systematically, identifying their organisers, locations and participants. Nonetheless, among the main annual gatherings one might cite the Real Wine Fair in London, La Dive Bouteille in Angers (France), and the RAW fair, which always changes its location. Some winemakers recalled that these events were significant springboards that launched their careers.

“And my knowledge... I will be forever thankful for things like the Real Wine Fair and other things like that.

- *Is it the Isabelle Legeron's one?*

- That's RAW. But Real Wine is also in London, it's mainly *Les Caves de Pyrene*, my importer. I love going out there to meet the producers and get that knowledge and taste. And there's a lot of them now.” (Interview Ryan, winemaker in Western Cape, 22 April 2022)

These events are identity markers for winemakers, and have also helped with the building of a common narrative among natural winemakers internationally. As Maria Elena Bou Alameda and her colleagues remind us, narratives can play a crucial role in knowledge sharing and foster the creation of a common identity: “Stories are relevant because of the role they play. They have helped the entrepreneurs to build the community and to create their identity. Besides, they have been a tool for sharing knowledge about the wine industry: how to cultivate the grapes and produce better wine” (Bou, Sauquet, & Canestrino, 2008). Natural wine producers also share the same provisioning networks. As emphasised by Jamie Goode and Sam Harrop,

³⁷⁷ This argument was set out fully in the following talk: Les enjeux vitivinicoles face au changement climatique dans les vignobles du Cap (Afrique du Sud) et du bordelais (France), *séminaire d'actualité LAM*, Musée d'Aquitaine de Bordeaux, 8 June 2023.

natural winemakers “are linked by means of sharing the same importers for export markets, being stocked by shops specialising in natural wines, or participating in the same tastings” (Goode & Harrop, 2013, p. 141). Johan’s testimony is a vivid illustration of this phenomenon:

“When I started, we did the RAW wine festival in 2012, that’s where it started. I never in my life contacted someone to sell my wines. I’ve always been contacted. And I give that to the natural wine movement. If it wasn’t for it, I don’t know how I would have had it, because today people google “natural wine South Africa” and me and Craig pop up. I mean the connections you have through these lines are incredible... Most of my importers I met there.

- *So would you say that your international network of natural winemakers is even stronger than your local network?*

- For sure! I have a lot more international contacts. I mean obviously locally you know everyone because it’s a small industry. But networking-wise... And Craig was a very big influence and a big help for me as well, because he’s the godfather of natural pioneers, in South Africa at least. He started the whole natural movement in South Africa, and we’re quite good friends. So when we did the first RAW it was Craig, me and Jurgen. We were kind of together, and everyone came and tasted Craig’s wine and we were next door.” (Interview Johan, winemaker in Western Cape, April 2022)

For certain winemakers, international channels are so prominent that they acknowledge a complete dependence on them over local ties. This is exemplified by a natural winemaker who attributes his reputation and commercial success almost entirely to his participation in international wine fairs abroad:

“And I mean that’s the funny thing. Here, I have never really done any big wine festivals or any wine shows, because we’re never invited to them in South Africa. We’re invited to them in London or in Japan. But the following that we had in South Africa is purely from people liking the wine.” (Interview Lugono, winemaker in Western Cape, 22 May 2022)

As I argued in the preceding chapter, these wine fairs play a crucial role in shaping alternative geographies within the wine sector. They elevate consumer hubs such as London to central positions in the natural wine network, as exemplified by the perspective of this winemaker.

“I always say “once you get into London, you just fucking spread,” because you have so many international people there. Once you’re there, you kind of just continue. So I think we’ve had a good run so far and for the future ahead, I have a certain vision in my head and certain goals with the vineyards, which is nice. It’s something you get people kind of waiting for and kind of hyped up about.” (Interview Justin, winemaker in Western Cape, 6 April 2022)

Another thing that characterises these events is their ability to connect local knowledge and small, terroir-oriented production to global markets, thereby fostering the development of an international identity and enabling an interscalar analysis of the movement. At these wine fairs and gatherings, the multitude of connections formed among natural wine actors blurs the distinctions between wine regions and context-specific differences. Moreover, given that most of these events are held in consumer hubs like London, New York and Tokyo, they also serve to reduce the divide between “the rural” and “the urban,” blending into a seamless gradient of networked space. Ultimately, what insights can we glean from these international knowledge

exchanges? Firstly, well-travelled natural winemakers function as brokers or weak ties between wine regions. Secondly, it becomes evident that through specialised events and international natural wine fairs, homophily and ties within peer-professional communities are stronger than geographic distance. Both these mechanisms contribute to the proliferation and dissemination of the ethos associated with natural wine production, and play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between the translocal dimension of the natural wine network and the tightly-knit networks of local winemakers.

Conclusion

The first section of this study leverages social network theories to position its framework within existing literature. Here, natural wine is not only conceptualised as a movement but also as a dynamic network, where knowledge and information circulate, contributing to the dissemination of the natural wine ethos and its influence within the wine industry. Social network analysis includes a set of tools and methods aiming to use networks as the main device for inquiry. In this research, networks serve as an iterative and exploratory tool, complementing the qualitative methods employed thus far. Drawing from network theories, I used Actor-Network Theory to identify “actants” rather than “individuals”, considering a variety of actors (humans and non-humans) as nodes taking part within the network. Additionally, insights from network analysis, which delve into the meaning and embeddedness of ties, were instrumental in observing the flow of knowledge within the natural wine network. The focus was on discerning channels of knowledge diffusion, identifying both opportunities and constraints inherent in this circulation within the movement, as well as its intersections with the broader industry landscape.

Translating the network into diagrams in the two regions of the project revealed some interesting differences in the structuring of the network locally, highlighting the role of public governance structures and environmental certifications in Bordeaux, and in the Western Cape. Several hypotheses were explored from this network analysis. First, the analysis confirmed the role of certain actants as knowledge hubs and central figures within knowledge diffusion patterns. Then, the natural wine network appears to be shaped by homophily and transitivity mechanisms that simultaneously contribute to bringing network actors closer to each other and distancing them from the rest of the industry. Finally, numerous obstacles contribute to maintaining the natural wine movement as a marginalised and niche movement operating in

near isolation from the rest of the industry, including a lack of information circulating outside of the network. This chapter also investigates the interweaving of different types of knowledge mobilised by actors in the network. I identify a heterogeneous constellation of knowledge, including farmers' traditional and ancestral *savoir-faire*, scientific and scholarly knowledge, and even experiential and sensory knowledge. I argue that actors from the natural wine movement utilise an assemblage of these realms of knowledge to legitimise their representations and drive a paradigm shift in the industry.

The final section underscores how this accumulation of various types of knowledge fosters coalitions and arrangements among different actors serving specific interests. I explored the ad hoc and sometimes unexpected network dynamics that shape the wine industry locally and enable radical innovation. In Bordeaux, the natural wine movement demonstrates strong connections with broader environmental coalitions, such as the anti-pesticide network and the anti-HVE coalition. Natural winemakers in Bordeaux often participate in local ecological initiatives tapping into the dense and pre-existing social fabric, which includes numerous professional unions, syndicates, and environmental NGOs. Conversely, in the Western Cape, the network is characterised instead by informal collectives of winemakers. In the context of the Western Cape, I analyse how economic incentives influence the dissemination of new knowledge in the wine industry, thus providing opportunities for paradigm shifts and radical innovations to emerge. This section concludes with an examination of knowledge diffusion from a transnational perspective, highlighting the role of international wine fairs and the overseas experiences of winemakers who can then bring back new knowledge.

Finally, this chapter raises the question of the cohesion and the “social glue” within the network. Network analysis reveals that this “social glue” – the things that hold the network together – relies a complex interplay of variables and interactions that reinforce the network's integrity. This cohesion emerges from shared experiences, mutual knowledge exchange, and collective endeavours, fostering alliances and delineating boundaries within the network. This chapter also shows that the legitimisation of the movement is achieved through a sense of proximity and homophily among movement actors, and conversely a sense of exclusion or marginalisation from the rest of the industry —a phenomenon akin to what Rao describes as “hot causes.” Beyond mere theoretical constructs, the network materialises through tangible affiliations, be it in local associations, industry collectives, or international forums like wine fairs. These shared affiliations, functioning as nodes in the network, facilitate the exchange of

best practices, collective learning, and the cultivation of common interests propelled by market dynamics. In essence, the network operates as a tapestry of interconnected nodes and ties, weaving together disparate elements into a cohesive whole. It is through this intricate interplay of connections and exchanges that the network thrives, challenging the existing landscape of the wine industry. This knowledge diffusion is indeed associated with a paradigm shift in production methods. The two take-homes from this chapter are: first that networks constitute social spaces where knowledge is generated allowing radical innovation to emerge; and second that the diffusion of new knowledge within the network can be seen as an act of militancy contributing to the legitimation of the cognitive framework built by the actors of the movement.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

This thesis has explored the emergence and spread of the natural wine movement as a political resistance movement in the wine industry. The initial question arose from the lack of a consensus on a definition of natural wine among industry insiders and academics alike. This, coupled with the controversies it has inspired, offered an opportunity to analyse natural wine from a fresh perspective. By setting aside the technical aspects of natural wine production – which are not the primary focus of social science research – this thesis has examined the natural wine movement as both a form of collective resistance and a market shift.

The choice of case studies for this research might initially might have come as a surprise to readers who are familiar with natural wine. Most publications on the movement have focused on regions like Beaujolais, Languedoc-Roussillon and the Loire Valley. Bordeaux and the Western Cape seem almost to be counter-examples in comparison. Typically, the natural wine movement is closely associated with Old World wine regions, predominantly France and Italy, which makes the Western Cape in South Africa an unexpected focus. Bordeaux, on the other hand, is often seen as the epitome of a conservative, conventional wine region in which the natural wine movement remains in relative obscurity. What is more, the movements in Bordeaux and the Western Cape are small in terms of quantity, and their status as a niche, if not marginalised, phenomenon continues to be preserved there. However, a comparative analysis between these two regions yields numerous benefits. Firstly, it reinforces the argument that natural wine is a transnational movement that has proliferated in nearly all wine-producing regions. Secondly, both regions have experienced a similar timeline of emergence of the movement, beginning in around 2010. This supports my theory of “empty space” (which I developed in Chapter 5), which posits that regions that have historically been neglected or underinvested by the wine industry are fertile ground for the emergence of counterculture and alternative initiatives like the natural wine movement. While the Swartland in South Africa is the epitome of this, the Bordeaux region has been a showcase for the late emergence of the natural wine movement compared to other French wine regions. It is therefore a counter-example, and I have argued that the natural wine movement there has tapped into local dysfunctions in the industry. Finally, while the comparative design of this research has highlighted the local singularities of the natural wine movement in each context, it also confirms the construction of a shared identity for the movement at a transnational level. This identity transcends regional boundaries, and echoes the shared challenges faced by small

independent winemakers who pursue ecological agendas and strive to reconnect with the natural world on a global scale.

This conclusion is divided into three parts: first, I sum up the empirical contribution of my thesis to the literature on the wine industry, and propose a four-dimensional concept for understanding the natural wine movement. I then return to the three main threads I proposed in the introduction to anchor this thesis theoretically in wider streams of literature, and lastly, I open up some avenues for further research.

[An empirical contribution to the literature on the wine sector](#)

I first propose a novel understanding of natural wine that stems from dynamics of resistance. These departures from conventional practices offer a direct challenge to the four Institutionalised Relationships (IRs) outlined by Jullien and Smith (2008), which traditionally support the stability and economic viability of any sector, including the wine industry. Here, rather than analysing these IRs in relation to the sustainability of the industry as a whole, I have used them to explore how a small cohort of actors has been able to disrupt it by challenging its institutional order.

Drawing upon the results of my thesis, I am now in a position to propose a definition of natural wine that can be encapsulated by four characteristics that align with Jullien and Smith's (2008) institutional relationships (IRs): sourcing/production – a hands-on approach in the vineyard and a hands-off approach in the cellar; commercialisation – a hand-to-hand approach to sales; employment – hands in the dirt; and finance – joined hands in the market. This four-characteristic framework is what I term the “‘handy’ approach to understanding natural wine,” and it can be described as follows.

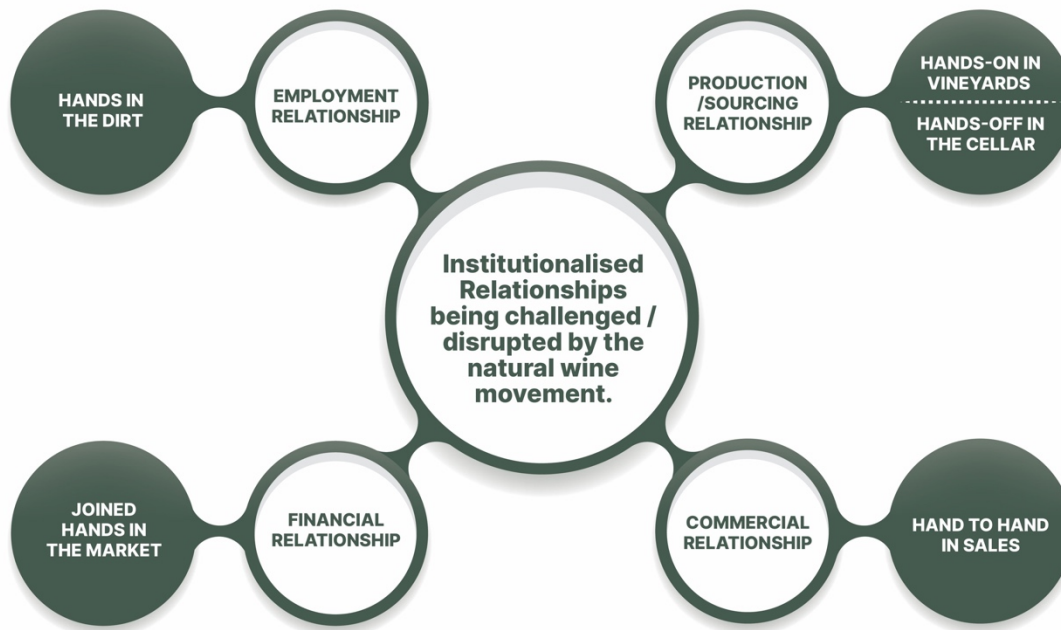


Figure 75. The 'handy' approach to understanding natural wine.

➤ **Sourcing/Production: A hands-on approach in the vineyard and a hands-off approach in the cellar**

The natural wine movement is fundamentally characterised by a strong “hands-on” approach in the vineyard, paired with a “hands-off” approach in the cellar (Chapter 4). This first set of characteristics underscores the movement’s dedication to agroecological viticulture and minimal intervention. The practices applied in the vineyard are consistent with other agroecological methods such as organic, biodynamic and regenerative farming. Natural winemakers invest a significant amount of time and effort in maintaining the health of their vineyards, including the surrounding ecosystems, soil, biotope and climate. This care is encapsulated by a belief that “90% of the job is done in the vineyard,” as recalled by many winemakers during interviews, highlighting the critical role of sustainable agricultural practices and thus their commitment to wider ecological agendas. In the cellar, natural winemakers advocate for minimal intervention. This “hands-off” approach involves avoiding the use of chemical or synthetic additives and eschewing technological manipulation during the vinification process. The focus is on allowing the natural processes to unfold, the intention being to preserve the integrity and natural expression of the wine and reflect the terroir and vintage. The “hands-on approach in the vineyard” and “hands-off approach in the cellar” pairing fits into the sourcing and production relationship well, emphasising authenticity and natural processes in both cultivation and winemaking.

➤ **Commercialisation: *A hand-to-hand approach to sales***

The second defining feature of the natural wine movement is the “hand-to-hand” approach to commercialisation. This concept emphasises the importance of trust and personal connections in the marketing and sale of natural wines. It means reducing the number of intermediaries between the winemaker and the consumer, and promoting direct, transparent transactions. This approach is what I refer to as the “trust contract” (Chapter 8), where the story and ethos of the winemaker are communicated, challenging traditional quality standards and certifications by promoting direct interactions between producer and consumer. What is particularly interesting here is to observe how the “hand-to-hand” approach has bypassed traditional quality standards such as the Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée, and even new standards such as environmental certifications (for example, Agriculture Biologique). Instead, this hand-to-hand approach has fostered a closer relationship between producers and consumers, thereby ensuring that the values and practices of the winemaker are preserved and appreciated. This underscores the value of short distribution channels, direct sales and the personal stories of winemakers through concepts such as authenticity and integrity, all of which are crucial to the natural wine movement.

➤ **Employment: *Hands in the dirt***

The third key characteristic can be described as “hands in the dirt” (Steyn 2021; Voronov, De Clercq, and Hinings 2013). It encapsulates the lived reality of natural winemakers, who are deeply involved in the physical, hands-on aspects of farming and winemaking. Drawing an analogy with Henry D. Thoreau’s thinking, the “hands in the dirt” approach emphasises toiling in the fields and fostering a direct relationship with nature, promoting a renewed relationship with work and labour. In the first place, this method opposes a business-centric script, and instead portrays images of craftsmanship and celebrates the lifestyle of farmers. This renewed relationship with work can be seen as a deliberate claim of a struggle against the disappearance of peasant farmers documented by Mendras (Mendras 1984), and instead as a celebration of a “*retour à la paysannerie*”. Indeed, this pursuit of authenticity extends beyond the end product to encompass the broader lifestyle embraced by natural winemakers (Pruvost 2013), and underscores the renewed relationship with work proposed by proponents of natural wine. This approach reflects how the dedication and personal investment of winemakers are fundamental to the philosophy of natural wine and its quest for products rooted in tradition and a deep connection to the land, highlighting the genuine, unrefined nature of the product.

➤ **Finance: *Joined hands in the market***

Finally, the concept of “joined hands” in the market is borrowed from Rao, and is an intentional contrast with Adam Smith’s concept of the market’s “invisible hand” (Rao 2008). The aim here is to highlight the collaborative efforts of resistance to challenge the status quo in the wine industry. As articulated by Rao, this idea underscores the agency of activists and movements of resistance in driving radical innovation and market disruption. The “joined hands” represent collective action and solidarity among natural winemakers, consumers and other stakeholders who work together to promote sustainable practices and challenge the status quo in the wine industry. By working together, these actors create new market dynamics that prioritise environmental sustainability, social equity and economic innovation. This collective effort is an essential element of advocating for systemic changes in the wine industry and beyond. The “joined hand in the market” concept, which is inspired by the collaborative efforts of activists and allies, addresses the financial aspects of the natural wine movement. It suggests that financial success in the natural wine industry is achieved through cooperative efforts and shared goals rather than purely individualistic pursuits.

To sum up, the natural wine movement is characterised by a commitment to ecological and sustainable practices in the vineyard, minimal intervention in the cellar, direct and trust-based commercialisation practices and a collaborative approach to market innovation. Collectively, these characteristics define the ethos and philosophy of natural winemaking, emphasising authenticity, integrity and a deep connection to the land and community. By mapping these characteristics to Jullien and Smith’s institutional relationships, we can better understand the natural wine movement’s overall impact on the industry. This alignment not only highlights the movement’s innovative practices but also shows how these practices intersect with and challenge traditional industry structures. Further research into these aspects can provide valuable insights into the transformative potential of the natural wine movement and its implications for the broader wine industry.

A theoretical contribution at the crossroads between political ecologies, political economy and sociology of social movements

Next, I revisit the three main principles presented in the introduction. I briefly discuss the natural wine movement as a movement of resistance, a transnational and multiscalar movement, and a network fostering incremental change within the industry.

Understanding a resistance movement from ethos to praxis

This research lies at the intersection of several strands of academic literature, including the sociology of social movements, political ecologies, and political economy. This original framework provides a foundation for examining the natural wine movement as both an act of resistance and a transformative force in the market. Drawing upon Rao's conceptual framework, two essential key phases for understanding the emergence of the movement were cited: "hot cause" and "cool mobilisation" (Rao 2008). Upon further contemplation, it becomes evident that Rao's model mirrors other conceptual frameworks employed in this study, such as Mann's delineation of cognitive mobilisation followed by mobilisation by action (Mann 1998). It also corresponds to the sequential development observed in what I have called the construction of a shared ethos within the movement and the development of its praxis.

	1. The sparking of passionate causes and cognitive awakening	2. Subsequent mobilisations into tangible action and active engagement
Rao (2008)	Hot cause	Cool mobilisation
Mann (1998)	Cognitive mobilisation	Mobilisation by action
Chazal (2024)	Ethos	Praxis

Table 7. Two stages identified in the development of the natural wine movement: a conceptual framework.

From ethos...

Defining the ethos of the natural wine movement means exploring what binds its actors together amidst a diversity of practices. In the first place, there is a shared recognition within the movement of the industry's dysfunctions, which serves as a unifying force. This collective acknowledgement of a multifaceted crisis in the wine industry fuels a sense of shared frustration among its participants, fostering a collective identity, or what might be termed a "we feeling." Secondly, natural winemakers coalesce around a common adversary that despite variations in nomenclature can be defined as a dominant system characterised by a

standardisation of wine, industrialised production methods, chemical-intensive viticulture and the dominance of capitalist market forces. This shared desire to combat these entrenched norms brings natural winemakers together in a quest for an alternative approach. Lastly, the ethos of the natural wine movement is deeply rooted in environmental and agroecological agendas inherited from various branches such as the bios movement, biodynamics and anti-corporate movements. The natural wine movement echoes the principles of other alternative agro-food movements, embracing sustainability, biodiversity and a rejection of conventional industrial practices, thereby further solidifying its ethos as a holistic and progressive force in the wine industry.

... to praxis

Defining the praxis of the natural wine movement involves understanding the multifaceted paths of resistance taken by natural winemakers, who embark on an alternative production pathway that ultimately seeks to employ holistic methods that not only reconsider viticultural and vinification practices but also disrupt the mainstream approach to commercialisation, labour relations and capital investment. The intricacies of resistance dynamics in this context are particularly compelling because of the wine industry's deeply entrenched norms, economic barriers to entry and rich cultural heritage. Wine as a commodity boasts a unique global value chain with its own set of quality conventions, pricing mechanisms and governance structures rooted in concepts like terroir, reputation and rankings. These entrenched norms create formidable barriers to change. Consequently, what is particular to the wine industry is that even without resorting to overtly confrontational or disruptive measures, any departure from mainstream production methods can be perceived as a subversive act. I argue that by producing wines off the beaten path and through diverse forms of resistance – from transgressive rhetoric to civil disobedience, and even the judicialisation of disputes – natural winemakers challenge the status quo and set a precedent in the industry. They engage in a spectrum of activities aimed at disrupting the industry's conventional *modus operandi*. This praxis appears to be spontaneous rather than concerted, and is often disorganised, *ad hoc* and led by individual initiatives. Nevertheless, it encapsulates a collective yearning for transformation shared globally by numerous small independent winemakers who are pioneering agroecological practices while grappling with economic pressures. Rebel winemakers therefore embody a cause that ripples through the industry, shaping the practices of their peers and infusing abstract ideals with tangible outcomes, thus fostering a nuanced form of institutionalisation within the natural wine movement.

Using network analysis to study the dynamics of a transnational, multiscalar movement

I have demonstrated that the natural wine movement is a transnational phenomenon: it is present in nearly all wine-producing regions, conveying a shared identity, a common ethos, and a similar praxis, while also showcasing the unique characteristics of its local hubs. Once the hypothesis of the movement's international existence has been established, the fundamental question then becomes how it emerged. Did it appear independently in different social spaces (like a sort of *zeitgeist*) or through the diffusion and circulation of a model from one region to another? Network and multiscalar analyses suggest the latter.

Transnational and multiscalar analyses are a puzzle that makes it possible to examine the movement closely across its different localities (with a focus here on Bordeaux and Western Cape) and through its intertwined levels, from the micro-local (a domain or vineyard) to the global (the global market), moving across the regional and national levels that are often preferred in the literature on wine. This analysis understands the natural wine movement as an accumulative, multiscalar process. My microlocal analysis – which was made possible through immersion in my fieldwork – highlights the contagion effects among winemakers. Regional and national scales were primarily used to understand the influence of public actors, the production of norms and the rules governing the industry, while my analysis of the global scale has helped me comprehend the impact of global market forces and identify the shared identities and hotspots of natural wine globally. Throughout this thesis, I have used a multiscalar approach to address both the interrelations between actors from the natural wine movement and the rest of the industry and the dynamics of knowledge and skill circulation relating to alternative practices.

I used network analysis to understand the dynamics of the movement's emergence and circulation. I demonstrated that the natural wine movement can be seen as a specific type of network figure: the rhizome. Like a rhizome, the natural wine movement proliferates in a non-centric, non-hierarchical manner, its values circulating through horizontal alliances and the interactions of multi-situated actors. In a recent essay, Abby Peterson also characterised the rhizomatic dimension of contemporary political protests when she described a movement that “does not necessarily originate from one single place, nor does it necessarily follow one single path over an overt political terrain; rather it is often constituted of tiny micro-movements of

resistance from a number of points and travels often on many paths towards many destinations with many aims (cf. Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). We can at best momentarily discern ephemeral constellations of actions by militant groups that only allude to an imagined unity in the struggle.” (Peterson 2018, 8). I go further, arguing that the network and rhizome approaches provide insights into the circulation of knowledge and practices. The focus on relational dynamics sheds light on this circulation of knowledge and practices, and makes it possible to understand the interplay of different registers of knowledge (scientific, experiential and sensory) that actors in the natural wine movement use to legitimise their ethos and praxis. What is more, the transmission of new knowledge by actors in the natural wine movement is considered here to be an act of social militancy, a form of soft power in action that plays a part in the construction of a new cognitive framework.

In the end, this multiscalar and network approach to the study of natural wine movement has enabled us to understand the evolving geographies of militant spaces, and to showcase the fact that places of militant social action are embedded in circulating knowledge and multiple layers of meanings, and thus in multiple scales (Peterson 2018). I argue that natural wine exists as a “movement” through the diffuse, ever-evolving nature of its network, as well as the multi-sited and multi-scalar dimensions of its actions.

Rebel winemakers fostering innovations and incremental changes within the wine industry

The final thread in the overall argument developed in this thesis relates to what underlies the natural wine movement’s transformative power within the industry. I have shown that the institutionalisation dynamics of the movement have involved two processes: first, the establishment of shared practices and beliefs (enabled by the emergence of a shared ethos and praxis, as discussed above), and second, processes around the official and legal recognition of the movement and its organisation into collectives of winemakers, as well as the development of new quality conventions (Chapter 7). The development of shared beliefs and representations has helped institutionalise natural wine from a moral and ethical standpoint, while the labelling and standardisation of natural wine has helped stabilise its commercial and legal viability. Furthermore, this thesis has argued that natural wine not only represents a new market segment but also enacts the emergence of new discourses, alternative practices and innovations that can fundamentally challenge mainstream practices in the wine industry.

From this angle, my thesis has revealed the emergence of a group of disruptive actors who have challenged the status quo and heralded the rise of new paradigms. The numerous anomalies and the environmental and economic crises affecting the wine industry are causing the collapse of traditional knowledge and norms and leading to the emergence of alternative reconstructions, and ultimately of new paradigms. Natural winemakers have been able to position themselves as trailblazers, and have pioneered the emergence of these new paradigms. What we see first of all is product innovation – that is, the production of natural wine, which stands out as an alternative product – but this thesis has also shed light on a tapestry of innovations that are not directly related to the product and have contributed to rethinking the entire production chain with both upstream and downstream innovations, which I refer to as “process upgrading” (Chapter 8). What is apparent from this research is that individual natural winemakers do not tackle all these challenges at once: it is through their collective efforts and the accumulation of individual efforts that a holistic refoundation of production, commercialisation, labour and investment relationships has been made feasible. Ultimately, natural winemakers have demonstrated that it is possible to produce in a different way by circumventing the constraints of the traditional segment of the wine industry, and in so doing they have set a precedent and created alternative pathways that might encourage a wider adoption of agroecological practices at large.

The adoption of innovations in the natural wine movement is a complex process that is distributed among numerous actors who are joined together as a network rather than an institution. My thesis has demonstrated that while the natural wine movement and rebel winemakers have fostered radical innovations, they are often only implemented at a niche level, or essentially incrementally. Network analysis reveals that the contagion effects beyond the movement itself have so far only been limited because of the lack of proximity to other actors in the industry. As Rao has emphasised, radical innovations have high costs of adoption because adopters must overturn existing conventions. Rao refers to this obstacle as “the complex contagions of radical innovations.” Thus, natural winemakers appear to operate in near isolation from the rest of the industry.

Paradoxically, it is by leveraging their differences and their polarisation from the rest of the industry that natural winemakers thrive. In the main, they are entrepreneurs capable of capturing niche markets, which they can then successfully cultivate using their own communication and marketing codes. Their collective action has unquestionably amplified

their media impact, thereby enhancing the value of their niches. A good example of this is their capacity to invest in what I have called “empty spaces”: territories that have not historically been invested in by the wine industry. Through their investment in these empty or dysfunctional spaces, they have been able to cultivate a fertile ground for innovation and a counter-culture that embraces their cognitive framework.

To conclude, the main focus of this thesis has been to propose an analytical framework and understanding of the natural wine movement that breaks away from technical considerations and instead analyses it from the perspectives of a social movement of resistance and a market shift. This has shed light on a movement whose actors’ agency has created alternative cognitive frameworks that have actively participated in revealing the pitfalls and malfunctioning of a wine industry in crisis. By setting a precedent and proposing alternative paths with radical innovations, the natural wine movement has enabled the emergence of a new paradigm that is geared toward a greater agroecological commitment and enables incremental change within the industry through experimental and network dynamics. Finally, this thesis has highlighted several areas of the viticultural socio-economic and political system that are in need of reform in terms of both governance and market dynamics, and ultimately has raised the question of why the vast majority of conventional producers choose to maintain the status quo.

Going further

Is the natural wine movement breaking away from capitalist dynamics?

Throughout this thesis, I have investigated multiple examples of projects where natural winemakers have resisted the dominant capitalist system and instead cultivated forms of production that might be described as “pericapitalist” (Centemeri 2019; Maurines 2021). Similarly, we have seen that a majority of natural wine producers take pride in being “profit sufficers” rather than “profit maximisers.” (Chapter 8). This also aligns with the four characteristics outlined in the “‘handy’ approach to understanding natural wine” (see figure 75 above), particularly the quest to re-embed production and work ethics within local ecologies. However, while natural wine producers aim to create wines that break away from conventional methods and remain untainted by technological interventions or mass production, it would be naive to think they are emancipated from the market system. Much like Henry D. Thoreau, who was often seen as a romantic – or even a utopian – we might note a cognitive dissonance in the discourse of natural winemakers. On the one hand, they seek to liberate themselves from

capitalist domination and embody a vision of reconnection with nature, but on the other, they are not free from the market model, and in some cases they actually manipulate market rules to their advantage, aligning their strategies to suit their marketing narratives.

One notable aspect of natural wine is how it has been transformed into a unique product. Natural winemakers have succeeded in creating a market segment characterised by agroecological farming practices, place-based and craftsmanship production and minimal intervention. The differentiation they seek is based on quantitatively small production, greener and cleaner production methods and their own vernacular skills. As a result, they have successfully transformed their wine into a unique products: they make high-end wines that command higher prices and attract targeted consumers (Smith Maguire et al., 2019). This dynamic of positioning their production as unique is nothing new, and has been observed in other sectors such as craft beers and coffee. These niches emphasise quality over quantity and boast a narrative over agro-industry, and natural methods over chemical interventions. Almost ironically, this unique products dynamic echoes the “tipo Bordeaux” wines the natural wine movement has actively sought to debunk. One might therefore argue that the natural wine movement’s marketing strategy now needs to involve building new normative models in order to dethrone the conventional ones more effectively. This raises further questions about the struggle for normative production capacity within industries.

Disruptive research and a new analytical framework for thinking about agroecological knowledge beyond a North/South categorisation

Finally, one of the overarching goals of this research has been to move away from the traditional North/South categorisation, or even a vision geared toward a “North to South” trajectory. In the wine industry literature, the division between the Old World and New World wine regions is still excessively dominant. Acknowledging that this categorisation is flawed was a challenging breakthrough. I drew inspiration from the broader trend advocating disruptive research which has been calling for such innovations for many years. These breakthroughs are often characterised by shifts in concepts and perspectives, as well as the identification of previously unnoticed anomalies.

By analysing the natural wine movement as a movement of resistance, I have openly challenged traditional analytical frameworks in the wine literature, and I believe strongly that this vision paves the way for further research. First, the conventional dichotomy of Old World

versus New World has been abandoned in this thesis in favour of addressing the shared issues and challenges faced by wine-producing regions globally. This new perspective aligns, *inter alia*, with the anticipated reconfiguration of the geography of wine territories brought about by climate change. Additionally, the fundamental pillars and traditional concepts of the wine industry have also been called into question: this thesis has highlighted the pitfalls surrounding notions such as *terroir*, Grand Cru, and designations of origin (AOC). My intention here has not been to undermine the validity of these concepts, but rather to encourage an examination of their adaptability in the face of the new economic and environmental challenges the industry is being confronted with. I have argued that the normative power of these overwhelmingly dominant concepts needs to be questioned and potentially reshaped and reformed to adapt to evolving global market needs. This vision echoes broader concerns and global debates on how to equip political and market institutions with better tools to govern agricultural and viticultural practices that contribute to low-carbon production and ecological resilience. More broadly, it calls for further research that will contribute to the current studies on sustainability science, specifically on the hybridisation of knowledge related to ecological issues in agricultural models, and their highly political and collective action dimensions.

RÉSUMÉ LONG DE LA THÈSE EN FRANÇAIS

Du Cap de Bonne Espérance à la Pointe de Grave : une étude du mouvement des vins nature et de ses enjeux politiques – Mobilisations environnementales et transformation de l'industrie vitivinicole

INTRODUCTION

“Live in each season as it passes;
breathe the air, drink the drink, taste the fruit,
and resign yourself to the influence of the earth.”
(Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*)

A. Henry David Thoreau, le rêve prémonitoire de l'écologie comme analogie du mouvement des vins nature

Dans *Walden, ou la Vie dans les bois* (1854), Henry David Thoreau relate son séjour seul dans une forêt près de l'étang de Walden (Massachusetts, États-Unis), construisant sa propre cabane, aspirant à l'autosuffisance et invitant ses lecteurs à repenser leur relation à la nature. Thoreau est aujourd'hui considéré comme l'un des pionniers de la pensée écologique, et il est notamment connu pour avoir posé les bases d'une philosophie fondée sur le principe de la nécessité d'une reconnexion avec la nature, cela bien avant l'émergence de la définition formelle de l'écologie. Sa philosophie souligne la dépendance entre l'homme et le monde naturel et réaffirme que les humains font « partie intégrante de la nature bien avant d'appartenir au monde des lois humaines » (D. Latour, 2010, p. 4). La philosophie de Thoreau est également associée au transcendantalisme, s'alignant sur une quête d'émancipation et de non-conformisme. Thoreau préconise une économie de simplicité, incarnée dans la notion de « faire mieux avec moins ». Dans cette posture ouvertement anticapitaliste, l'auteur plaide pour la recherche de la libération des attentes sociétales incitant à une réflexion plus profonde sur l'aliénation et le rapport au travail. Enfin, Thoreau est un précurseur du concept moderne de « désobéissance civile » et met l'accent sur la responsabilité individuelle de chacun à défendre le projet sociétal qu'il juge juste³⁷⁸.

Je propose d'initier cette thèse en esquisant une analogie entre la philosophie développée par Thoreau et le mouvement des vins nature. Cette analogie est particulièrement utile pour son pouvoir évocateur dans la caractérisation d'une manière de penser. En effet, la perspective visionnaire thoreauvienne résonne profondément avec l'éthos du mouvement du vin nature. En utilisant cette analogie, j'explore la manière dont Thoreau et les défenseurs du mouvement du vin nature préconisent une relation symbiotique entre les humains, les vignes, leurs

³⁷⁸ D'ailleurs, certains auteurs, notamment Hannah Arendt ont reproché à Thoreau de ne pas défendre un projet de transformation collective, car son plaidoyer en faveur de la désobéissance civile souligne d'avantage l'importance des capacités de transformation individuelles.

écosystèmes et la terre, ouvrant la voie vers une compréhension plus profonde de la conscience écologique et invitant à une réflexion éthique sur les pratiques de production et les modes de travail. Les « rêveries du promeneur solitaire » de Thoreau exemplifiée par sa retraite près de l'étang de Walden, reflète l'immersion du vigneron nature dans ses vignobles et les réflexions éthiques qui en émanent. Ensuite, tout comme Thoreau qui cherchait à se libérer du moule économique dominant et construire un environnement propice à l'auto-suffisance loin des distractions de l'industrialisation et des possessions matérielles, les producteurs de vin nature visent à créer des vins qui se détachent de la production conventionnelle, c'est-à-dire des vins ni affectés par les interventions technologiques et œnologiques ni contraints par la production de masse standardisée. La marginalité de Thoreau et son positionnement anticapitaliste trouvent également un écho dans les principes du mouvement des vins nature : en adoptant une approche de vinification plus simple et durable, les producteurs de vin nature remettent en question l'hégémonie des modes de production dominants et les dynamiques du marché capitaliste. Ce faisant, Thoreau et les vignerons nature, chacun à leur manière, tentent de défier les normes sociétales et embrassent des voies alternatives, cherchant une plus grande autonomie et authenticité dans leurs entreprises. Enfin, Thoreau met l'accent sur la responsabilité individuelle dans la défense de ses propres principes et en appelle à l'importance de la conscience personnelle face à l'adhésion aveugle aux normes ou lois sociétales. Ces dimensions à la fois émancipatrices et dissidentes font écho aux principes du mouvement des vins nature qui encourage les producteurs à remettre en question les pratiques conventionnelles de l'industrie et à adopter des approches alternatives pour rompre avec le statu quo. En ce sens, à la fois Thoreau et les praticiens du mouvement des vins nature prônent une forme de résistance qui privilégie la conviction personnelle et la responsabilité éthique, visant finalement à contribuer à des transformations plus larges vers un avenir qu'ils estiment plus juste et plus durable.

Cette analogie me permet surtout de poser les prémisses de cette thèse, d'interroger les trajectoires des acteurs du mouvement des vins nature, dans ces dynamiques de contestations et de militantisme écologique. Dans son analyse des textes de Thoreau, qu'il nomme « le rêveur éveillé », David Latour concluait en soulignant sa volonté de « vivre par l'exemple » et de mener un projet centré sur le vivant et l'expérimentation pour lancer « une provocation par l'exemple, un cri d'alarme pour réveiller les potentialités humaines » (D. Latour, 2010, p. 10). Cette volonté de rompre avec les chemins de production conventionnels et de construire des voies alternatives, à travers leurs propres expérimentations de niche, est également au cœur du mouvement des vins nature et sera le principal fil conducteur de cette thèse. Au fur et à mesure que l'argumentation se déroule, nous verrons comment l'héritage de Thoreau inspire – même inconsciemment – des modes de production présentés comme holistiques et durables, soit les principes fondamentaux du mouvement du vin nature.

B. Le mouvement des vins nature, un mouvement social de résistance ou un changement de paradigme dans le marché ? Énigme et cadre théorique

➤ L'énigme autour du mouvement des vins nature

Le mouvement des vins nature est difficilement réductible à une seule définition. Cette dernière est protéiforme et s'est nourrie d'innombrables influences. En d'autres termes, le vin nature n'est pas seulement une méthode de production mais englobe un spectre de pratiques, valeurs, revendications visant, dans son sens le plus large, à se libérer du modèle conventionnel. Certes, il inclue de nouvelles méthodes de production aussi bien à la vigne qu'au chai, mais il représente également un segment de marché distinct avec ses propres points de vente, ses propres codes de communication et de marketing, et surtout, il peut se targuer d'un répertoire de valeurs, de revendications et une identité partagée. Qui plus est, malgré son caractère de phénomène de niche, il a attiré une attention considérable de la part des producteurs vitivinicoles, des médias spécialisés et des critiques internationaux, provoquant des réactions vives de toutes parts.

Dans un article de presse datant de 2023, l'économiste viticole sud-africain Petri de Beer résumait parfaitement cette réalité protéiforme du mouvement des vins nature, il déclarait alors : « Plutôt qu'un style de vin ou une méthode de viticulture, le vin nature est en réalité la dernière itération d'un mouvement social »³⁷⁹. Cette citation met en lumière le paradoxe entre la volonté de cantonner le vin nature à une définition technique et la réalité des changements sociaux, économiques et politiques qu'il fait émerger. On verra par ailleurs que l'enjeu de la définition du vin nature est très réel car sujet à débats. Ainsi, en l'absence d'une définition technique admise par tous et officiellement reconnue, cette thèse explore le mouvement des vins nature dans une dimension plus large, à la fois comme mouvement social et comme changement de paradigme au sein du marché. Ainsi, bien qu'il a fait l'objet de très peu de recherches scientifiques, et encore moins dans les sciences humaines et sociales, le mouvement des vins nature est aujourd'hui une réalité dans le secteur vinicole, et ne peut plus être considéré seulement comme un épiphénomène. En tant que tel, le mouvement mérite d'être mieux compris tant par les professionnels de cette industrie que par les académiques, pour tenter d'analyser ce qu'il peut nous dire sur les défis actuels de l'industrie du vin et au-delà.

➤ Des nouveaux cadres cognitifs qui viennent défier l'ordre institutionnel de l'industrie vitivinicole

Dans ce travail, j'utilise le concept d'industrie pour définir le contexte dans lequel l'analyse se déroule. L'utilisation du concept de l'industrie du vin³⁸⁰ plutôt que celui du domaine ou du

³⁷⁹ « As such, natural wine is but the latest iteration of a social movement rather than a wine style of farming style. » Beer, Petri De. 2023. "Do You Know What Is in Your Glass? The Enigma of Natural Wine." *Wine.co.za*.

³⁸⁰ Je distingue d'ailleurs au sein de cette industrie, deux pans: premièrement ce qui concerne le travail à la vigne, et la culture du raisin, que je nomme industrie viticole, et deuxièmement, ce qui se rapporte à la production de vin proprement dite, soit les étapes de transformation des raisins en vin, ici je parle d'industrie vinicole. Les deux pans de l'industrie sont généralement mentionnées ensemble sous la désignation de l'industrie vitivinicole.

secteur me permet de saisir à la fois les dynamiques économiques et politiques à l'œuvre dans la filière. Ma compréhension du terme « industrie » est orientée par la définition fournie par Bernard Jullien et Andy Smith (2008) qui conceptualisent les industries comme des cadres comprenant des règles, des normes et des conventions (relativement stables) qui influent sur la manière dont les acteurs sont perçus, se perçoivent eux-mêmes et interagissent les uns avec les autres. L'analyse de l'industrie se construit autour des ordres institutionnels et des relations institutionnalisées qui constituent ces ordres (les quatre principales étant la production, l'emploi, la finance et la commercialisation). La stabilisation de ces relations institutionnalisées (que l'on nommera ici IRs pour *Institutionalised Relationships*) engendre des arrangements institutionnalisés correspondants. En choisissant l'entrée de l'industrie du vin, la thèse vise à illustrer comment les ordres institutionnels peuvent subir des disruptions, faire face à des contestations, voire des perturbations qui visent à les transformer. Pour reprendre les questionnements de Marie Douglas, cette recherche explore les questions suivantes : « Comment un groupe social génère-t-il sa propre vision du monde et définit-il son style de pensée ? Qui gouverne les schémas d'interaction ? » (Douglas et al., 1989). En se concentrant sur le petit groupe d'acteurs qui constituent le mouvement du vin nature, et sur sa dimension cognitive, la thèse examine d'abord comment ils s'insèrent dans l'ordre institutionnel de l'industrie du vin, leur position à l'intérieur de celui-ci, et comment ils viennent challenger, disrupter ces IRs à travers les cadres cognitifs et symboliques qu'ils ont construits. Ensuite, je mets en lumière les stratégies politiques que ces interprétations ont engendrées, ainsi que les oppositions et les alliances qui en ont résulté. À travers cette approche, je vise à souligner comment, au cours des deux dernières décennies, l'industrie du vin et ses relations institutionnalisées ont été perturbées par un nouveau groupe d'acteurs. À travers ce l'étude de ce groupe d'acteur niche mais influent, j'analyse les mécanismes de résistances, les dynamiques de conflit mais aussi de celles de négociation, de diffusion de savoirs et de mise à l'agenda qui en découlent.

➤ Agencement du cadre théorique

La thèse utilise deux cadres théoriques généraux qui permettent d'expliquer le mouvement des vins nature. Tout d'abord, le mouvement des vins nature est compris comme un mouvement contestataire et mobilise donc à ce titre trois pans de la littérature en science politique : la sociologie des mouvements sociaux (Hrabanski, 2011; Siméant, 2010; Starr, 2010; Wekerle, 2004), les *political ecologies*³⁸¹ (Blaikie, 1985; Robbins, 2012; D. E. Rocheleau, 2008) et l'économie politique (Chiapello & Boltanski, 1999; Polanyi, 1944; Rao, 2008; Roger, 2020). Ensuite, je soutiens que, parce que le mouvement des vins nature se constitue en tant que mouvement transnational, il nécessite une analyse multi-scalaire pour examiner l'*agency* (la capacité d'agir) de ses acteurs intervenant à différentes échelles et sur différents territoires. Les

³⁸¹ Je choisis ici de garder la traduction originale anglaise du concept, premièrement car les *political ecologies* sont un courant majoritairement anglophone (Blaikie, 1985; Robbins, 2012; D. E. Rocheleau, 2008) mais également car sa traduction française renvoie vers une notion distincte. En effet, en français, l'écologie politique peut être comprise comme l'incorporation progressive des préoccupations environnementales dans les arènes politiques, ou comme la mise à l'agenda des enjeux écologiques dans les partis politiques. Gautier et Hautdidier décrivent l'écologie politique comme « un scénario intellectuel pour le mouvement vert français » (Gautier & Hautdidier, 2015, p. 57), soulignant ainsi les potentiels écueils de la traduction.

repères théoriques énumérés ci-dessus soulignent également que si le vin nature reste l'objet principal de cette thèse, son champ académique peut s'étendre bien au-delà de la littérature de l'industrie vinicole et s'intégrer dans des débats plus larges.

Cette recherche se centre sur les mouvements environnementaux qui accompagnent l'émergence des vins nature, et s'insère ainsi dans des débats plus larges sur les mouvements disruptifs qui portent la transition écologique au sein du système de production et des changements socio-écologiques qui en découlent. Elle révèle également comment le mouvement des vins nature peut être étudié à mi-chemin entre les mouvements sociaux et les changements de marché. Elle offre des perspectives sur plusieurs débats critiques, notamment les stratégies de résistance des subalternes face à la mondialisation et aux marchés capitalistes dominants et plus particulièrement les mouvements alternatifs agro-alimentaires (Starr, 2010; Wekerle, 2004), le tournant transnational des mouvements sociaux (Hrabanski, 2011; Siméant, 2010), la construction sociale de l'échelle (McFarlane, 2009) et les mouvements « glocal » qui comblent la dichotomie entre le niveau local et le global (Swyngedouw, 1997).

C. Ambitions et structure de la thèse

Afin de mettre en lumière l'ancrage local du mouvement des vins nature dans l'industrie vitivinicole, je fais varier l'échelle d'analyse et examine le phénomène dans deux régions viticoles de renommée mondiale : Bordeaux en France et la province du Cap-Occidental en Afrique du Sud. À travers cette analyse comparative, la thèse poursuit trois objectifs parallèles.

➤ Hypothèses et axes de recherches

Premièrement, je soutiens que le mouvement des vins nature est un segment de marché de niche qui tente de résister face au fonctionnement traditionnel du secteur vinicole en révélant ses failles et ses lacunes, porteur d'un agenda environnemental et écologique fort. Ainsi les acteurs du mouvement développent et négocient constamment de nouvelles façons de produire, de commercialiser et d'approvisionner le vin en dehors des canaux traditionnels de la filière pour affirmer leurs différences par rapport au reste de l'industrie. J'interroge comment ils se construisent en mouvement de résistance face aux vins dit, par opposition, « conventionnels » ou « industriels » et réussissent via l'émergence de nouveaux cadres cognitifs à créer un précédent dans le marché, et à montrer que des voies alternatives sont possibles, sinon souhaitables.

Deuxièmement, le mouvement des vins nature est analysé comme un mouvement transnational porteur d'une identité partagée et des valeurs communes, mais également marqué par les spécificités des contextes locaux et des savoirs situés. Ce faisant, je soutiens que non seulement le mouvement des vins nature est apparu dans toutes les régions viticoles productrices, à la fois dans les régions dites de la « Vieille Europe » mais aussi celle du « Nouveau Monde ». Pour aller plus loin, j'utilise le mouvement des vins nature comme un outil analytique pour mettre en lumière les failles de ces catégorisations conventionnelles (Nord/Sud ou Vieille Europe/Nouveau Monde) encore prédominantes dans nos grilles de lecture. Enfin la

nature transnationale du mouvement permet de révéler les défis communs rencontrés par les régions viticoles à l'échelle mondiale, notamment les pressions économiques face au marché global et celles environnementales liées aux menaces des changements climatiques.

Enfin, je considère le réseau des vins nature facilite un projet politique de production et de diffusion de nouveaux savoirs et savoir-faire à l'échelle internationale, permettant ainsi des innovations dans l'ensemble de la chaîne de production vitivinicole. En analysant le mouvement des vins nature en tant que réseau ancré et multi-situé et à travers le prisme de l'*agency*, je peux observer à la fois les controverses et les conflits, mais également la construction d'un cadre cognitif partagé et évolutif et les dynamiques d'apprentissage et de circulation des nouveaux savoirs entre les acteurs du mouvement des vins nature et le reste de l'industrie.

Ce travail de doctorat est explicitement nourri par des épistémologies constructivistes et relationnelles. Il repose sur des méthodes qualitatives qui incluent dix-huit mois d'immersion sur le terrain (Bordeaux et Cap-Occidental), des entretiens semi-directifs, des observations participantes et la construction d'une analyse de réseau. L'ensemble de la thèse est construit en trois parties et neuf chapitres et se déroule comme suit.

➤ **Plan de la thèse**

La première partie vise à établir le contexte pour comprendre le mouvement des vins nature en explorant sa définition, son émergence et ses caractéristiques, ainsi que le cadre comparatif et méthodologique utilisé dans la recherche. Le chapitre 1 examine les enjeux autour de la définition du vin nature, à la fois en tant que produit et en tant que mouvement. Le chapitre 2 présente les cas de Bordeaux et du Cap-Occidental, et précise comment cette comparaison est en réalité un choix judicieux pour fournir une compréhension transnationale du mouvement. Le chapitre 3 pose le dispositif méthodologique de cette recherche, examinant travail de terrain, l'emploi des méthodes qualitatives et les questionnements épistémologiques et réflexifs de cette recherche. Cette première partie apparaît surtout comme une mise en contexte approfondie qui permet de poser les bases nécessaire à l'analyse du mouvement des vins nature, son émergence et sa diffusion.

Les parties 2 et 3 s'appuient sur le cadre conceptuel proposé par Hayagreeva Rao dans son ouvrage *Market rebels: How activists make or break radical innovations* (Rao, 2008) pour étudier comment les producteurs de vin nature défient l'*establishment* vinicole. Cette approche, située à la croisée de la sociologie des mouvements sociaux et de l'économie politique, s'avère particulièrement utile pour analyser comment les vignerons rebelles créent des innovations radicales dans l'industrie du vin. Ou en d'autres termes comment un petit groupe d'acteurs constitue un mouvement de résistance et façonne le marché en proposant des voies de production alternatives.

La deuxième partie se concentre sur les dynamiques de résistance et de conflit du mouvement des vins nature au sein de l'industrie vinicole. Le chapitre 4 se penche sur l'éthos du

mouvement, explorant quelles sont les représentations communes et les croyances fondamentales qui unissent les producteurs de vin nature, mais aussi comment la crise multifacette que subit le secteur vinicole a uni les producteurs de vin nature contre un adversaire commun. Le chapitre 5 analyse la praxis du mouvement, examinant les pratiques alternatives et les résistances qu'il incarne localement, à la fois à Bordeaux et au Cap-Occidental. Le chapitre 6 examine comment le mouvement se différencie des autres acteurs du marché tout en questionnant son engagement à lutter contre des hiérarchies plus profondes dans le secteur vinicole.

La troisième et dernière partie étudie comment les vignerons rebelles façonnent des innovations radicales sur le marché vitivinicole. Suivant une approche issue de l'économie politique, je considère que les marchés sont façonnés et contraints par des mouvements de résistance. À ce titre, je soutiens que le mouvement des vins nature peut être considéré comme un projet politique déclenchant des changements de paradigmes incrémentaux mais structurels. En d'autres termes, la partie 3 examine les défis posés par l'arrivée de ces nouveaux vignerons dans l'industrie du vin. Le chapitre 7 explore les dynamiques de reconnaissance politique et administrative du mouvement et sa relation avec les autorités publiques en charge de la gouvernance de la filière. Le chapitre 8 examine l'intégration des vins nature dans les dynamiques du marché et étudie les innovations proposées par ses acteurs sur le marché mondial du vin. Le chapitre 9 analyse la diffusion du mouvement des vins nature en tant que réseau, explorant la production et la diffusion de nouveaux savoirs et savoir-faire à travers ce réseau.

PARTIE 1 : MISE EN CONTEXTE

Cette première partie vise à présenter le mouvement des vins nature comme un mouvement de fond plutôt qu'un épiphénomène. Alors qu'au départ, le vin nature est simplement envisagé comme une méthode de production qui fait intervenir des changements de pratiques tant à la vigne qu'au chai, je soutiens dans cette thèse que le mouvement des vins nature peut être considéré au-delà de ces considérations techniques. En effet, je démontre qu'il illustre une tendance sous-jacente de mouvement de résistances et qu'il induit des changements plus profonds à l'intersection de divers enjeux de sociologie politique, englobant des aspects environnementaux, économiques et sociaux.

Cette première partie est dédiée à la mise en place du cadre de cette thèse à travers une exploration de l'objet de recherche, du contexte, du chercheur et de ses outils. Tout d'abord, j'examine le mouvement des vins nature comme un phénomène contemporain en mouvement dont les caractéristiques et les frontières sont contestées et restent à définir (Chapitre 1). Ensuite, le design comparatif de cette recherche est présenté : les régions viticoles de Bordeaux (France) et du Cap occidental (Afrique du Sud) apparaissent comme une paire inattendue d'études de cas qui mérite une comparaison audacieuse (Chapitre 2). Enfin, je dissèque l'appareil méthodologique de cette recherche et introduit les principales méthodes employées : l'immersion sur le terrain, les réflexions épistémologiques et d'autre réflexives sur le

positionnement du chercheur face à ses terrains et son objet (Chapitre 3). Finalement, ces trois premiers chapitres posent les bases fondamentales qui permettront de mieux comprendre l'émergence et la diffusion du mouvement des vins nature qui suit dans les parties 2 et 3.

1. CHAPITRE 1 : Les défis liés à la définition du vin nature et du mouvement des vins nature

Les bases techniques posées dans ce chapitre permettent de mieux saisir les enjeux liés à l'objet étudié – le vin nature – et d'apprécier la complexité de l'élaboration de sa définition. Partant de l'absence d'une définition légale comme point de départ de cette thèse, ce chapitre pose les premiers jalons pour comprendre les controverses qui animent les débats sur le vin nature.

1.1. Le vin nature, un objet nouveau en mal de définition

Pour comprendre les défis exigeants de la définition du vin nature, je commence par explorer directement la diversité des définitions proposées par les acteurs sur le terrain (vignerons, cavistes, représentants d'organisations dans la filière, etc.). Les points de controverses sont nombreux et impliquent à la fois des considérations techniques (des vignes cultivées en agriculture biologique comme minima, l'ajout de sulfites à petite dose, l'utilisation des levures, le recours à des interventions techniques tel que la pigeage, la filtration, ou la thermovinification etc.), des considérations sémantiques (de quoi parle-t-on ? De vins naturels, nus, sauvage, d'intervention minimale etc.), voire des considérations épistémiques et philosophiques (une définition du vin nature est-elle souhaitable ? Comment définir sa « naturalité » ? Le vin nature existe-t-il ? Si oui, par opposition les autres ne le sont pas, qu'est-ce que cela dit de ces derniers ?). Il apparaît d'emblée que les définitions proposées s'enchevêtrent, parfois se contredisent, perpétuant une confusion latente quant à ce qu'est vraiment le vin nature. Je me tourne ensuite vers les quelques travaux universitaires sur le sujet et la littérature spécifique à l'industrie vinicole pour situer mon travail. Le vin nature apparaît comme un objet nouveau, relativement peu étudié dans les sphères académiques, encore moins dans les sciences sociales³⁸². Pour le lecteur profane avec la production vinicole, il s'agit tout de même de caractériser le vin nature dans ses grandes lignes. On pourra en retenir deux points clés. Premièrement, si l'on considère la production de vin sur un spectre, on aurait d'un côté le vin dit « conventionnel », une production standardisée ou industrialisée, et de l'autre les vins bios ; le vin nature se trouve dans la famille des vins bio, il constitue en soi une niche dans une niche, et se situe à l'extrême opposé des vins conventionnels. Deuxièmement, la production de vin nature prône une approche holistique de la vigne à la mise en bouteille, et minimaliste (ou non-interventionniste) au chai, c'est-à-dire qu'elle rejette l'utilisation de produits chimiques de synthèse au moment de la vinification (d'ailleurs le vin nature est souvent simplifié et confondu

³⁸² Je tiens néanmoins à souligner le travail de Christelle Pineau qui s'est emparé de cet objet avec une approche anthropologique (C. Pineau, 2017, 2019), ainsi que les travaux des chercheurs qui ont mené des recherches sur des sujets connexes qui ont servi de base pour cette recherche (Célérier, 2017; Krzywoszynska, 2012; J. D. Steyn, 2021; Viecelli, 2021)

avec le « vin sans sulfites ajoutés », car le sulfite reste le principal intrant au moment de la vinification).

1.2. Le vin nature, du produit au mouvement

La seconde partie de ce chapitre établit une distinction entre le vin nature en tant que produit et le vin nature en tant que mouvement, et rappelle que c'est ce dernier qui est l'objet principal de cette thèse. La section est consacrée à détailler l'émergence du mouvement des vins nature et à retracer ses origines multiples : des premiers vins jamais produits en Géorgie en 6000 avant notre ère, jusqu'au berceau du mouvement des vins nature tel que nous le connaissons aujourd'hui dans le Beaujolais dans les années 1980, avec le travail de pionniers tels que le biochimiste Jules Chauvet et le vigneron Marcel Lapierre. Alors que jusqu'à présent, le mouvement des vins nature est principalement analysé dans sa dimension micro, en ayant recours à l'analyse ethnographique et en s'intéressant à son existence dans des territoires très circonscrits, dans cette thèse au contraire, je décris la diffusion du mouvement à échelle mondiale et je soutiens qu'il est désormais présent dans la plupart, sinon toutes, les régions viticoles productrices. Cette section présente aussi l'opportunité d'interroger la prégnance du mouvement dans l'industrie viticole : que représente-t-il quantitativement ? En raison du manque d'une définition stable, on s'aperçoit très vite qu'il n'existe pas de données statistiques fiables sur la production de vin nature et *de facto*, quantifier le mouvement reste une tâche difficile. Néanmoins, en croisant plusieurs sources, on peut affirmer qu'il s'agit d'un mouvement de niche, qui ne représenterait pas plus de 1 à 2 % de la production de vin mondiale. Ce bref état de l'art nous aide à comprendre pourquoi le vin nature est un objet dont les frontières et les définitions sont toujours sujettes à débat. Plus généralement, l'appréhension de cette controverse sur l'absence de définition du vin nature et les débats qui en émanent constituent un des fils rouges de ce travail de thèse.

2. CHAPITRE 2 : Une analyse comparative entre les régions viticoles de Bordeaux et du Cap-Occidental comme socle de l'étude du mouvement des vins nature

Il s'agit ensuite de présenter les deux études de cas, deux régions viticoles productrices qui constituent deux antennes locales de ce phénomène transnational : la région de Bordeaux (France) et la province du Cap-Occidental (Afrique du Sud). Ce chapitre justifie le choix de ces deux régions, définit les contextes spécifiques dans lesquels se déroule la thèse dans son ensemble et caractérise le design de la comparaison.

2.1. Différences et similitudes : une brève socio-histoire de l'industrie viticole dans les deux régions

J'introduis les deux études de cas : la région de Bordeaux et la province du Cap-Occidental et retrace la socio-histoire de l'industrie vinicole, mettant en avant des éléments contextuels clés qui aideront à comprendre l'émergence du mouvement localement. L'analyse contextuelle de ces deux régions viticoles prend pour point de départ une brève restitution de l'histoire du secteur viticole localement, et s'attache ensuite à comprendre les spécificités de son ordre

institutionnel et de ses modes de gouvernance. Ensuite, cette partie apporte un éclairage sur les défis économiques et environnementaux auxquels l'industrie viticole est actuellement confrontée. En effet, les deux régions sont en proie à des défis économiques majeurs : Bordeaux a perdu sa place de leader mondial incontesté (Réjalot, 2021) et l'Afrique du Sud, malgré un tournant qualitatif considérable, traîne toujours l'héritage de l'Apartheid marqué par des inégalités structurelles colossales (Dellier et al., 2013; McEwan & Bek, 2006; Ponte & Ewert, 2009). Dans les deux cas la viabilité économique de la production de vin repose sur un équilibre fragile. Par ailleurs, comme l'ont rappelé les rapports du GIEC, le changement climatique menace la production viticole (Ollat & Touzard, 2024). Les régions de Bordeaux et du Cap Occidental, chacune à leur manière, font face à des enjeux écologiques et environnementaux grandissants et se doivent d'adapter leurs méthodes de productions vers une résilience des territoires et des terroirs du vin. Cette comparaison des deux contextes régionaux, et l'étude de leurs différences et leurs proximités, vise à jeter les bases qui servent à saisir l'émergence du mouvement des vins nature dans chacun des cas. Malgré des différences significatives de l'industrie du vin entre les deux régions et des socio-histoires contrastées, je soutiens que dans les deux contextes, les composantes économiques et environnementales des crises que subit actuellement l'industrie ont fourni un terrain fertile pour l'émergence de productions alternatives et de mouvements de résistance, dont le mouvement des vins nature est le reflet direct.

2.2. Défis et opportunités de la mise en place de cette analyse comparative

Il s'agit ensuite d'explorer les subtilités et les défis de la comparaison entre Bordeaux et le Cap-Occidental. Avec des cas de premier abord aussi différents, on aurait pu s'attendre à ce que la comparaison soit fondée sur une conception de « systèmes les plus différents » (Przeworski, 1970) ou sur la méthode de la comparaison par « contraste dramatique » (Gazibo, 2002). En effet, à première vue, les différences entre les deux régions viticoles sont nombreuses. D'un côté le vignoble bordelais bénéficie d'une réputation historique et d'un rayonnement international majeur. Ce vignoble d'influence mondiale est connu notamment pour sa production de vins haut de gamme et son système de grands crus classés mais également pour avoir ouvert la voie en termes de systèmes d'appellations et avoir développé la notion de terroir. De l'autre, la province du Cap-Occidental en Afrique du Sud est généralement catégorisée parmi les régions viticoles dites du « Nouveau Monde », où l'industrie du vin est plutôt dominée par une approche économique néolibérale et une production guidée par des critères de quantité plutôt que de qualité. Malgré les différences visibles entre ces deux cas, j'applique une comparaison « terme à terme » entre les deux régions. Mon objectif principal étant de souligner que la comparaison ne nécessite ni ressemblances ni similarités, il s'agit simplement d'y identifier des points de contact. Dans ce cas, l'analyse comparative est utilisée pour examiner le mouvement des vins nature à la fois dans son identité globale et dans ses spécificités locales.

2.3. Sortir de l'antagonisme « Vieille Europe » et « Nouveau Monde » pour aller vers une grille d'analyse en termes de multiples mondes des vins

Enfin, la mise en place de l'analyse comparative de cette recherche implique de réfléchir davantage aux particularités de mener une telle comparaison. Les défis liés au design de cette comparaison sont nombreux : comment traiter de tels cas asymétriques ? Comment construire un design comparatif impliquant un cas africain et un cas européen ? Comment ces deux cas peuvent amener à une compréhension globale du mouvement ? En m'appuyant sur des auteurs qui prônent la décolonisation des savoirs (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012; Wai, 2015; Young, 2014) ainsi que sur la géographie (urbaine) critique (Myers, 2014; Robinson, 2011), je soutiens que cette comparaison inattendue a du sens dès lors que les régions viticoles du monde entier se rapprochent en faisant face à des défis économiques ou environnementaux communs. À travers ce design comparatif, j'affirme que cette recherche va au-delà des comparaisons traditionnelles qui visent à opposer des modèles et des trajectoires « Nords » et « Suds ». Plus spécifique au jargon de l'industrie du vin, cette recherche entend dépasser la dichotomie traditionnelle entre les régions viticoles dites de la « Vieille Europe » et celles du « Nouveau Monde ». Pour de multiples raisons évoquées dans ce chapitre et reprises tout au long de la thèse, cette catégorisation me semble inadaptée, voire obsolète, et j'adopte au contraire un cadre analytique en termes de multiples mondes du vin (Banks & Overton, 2010).

Le design de cette comparaison implique tout d'abord, bien que le mouvement soit initialement apparu en France, pour cette analyse, je considère l'émergence régionale du mouvement – qui semble s'être produite sensiblement autour de la même période, dans les années 2010 – dans les régions de Bordeaux et du Cap-Occidental. Deuxièmement, je ne suppose pas que le mouvement des vins nature dans la province du Cap-Occidental ait été influencé par le mouvement à Bordeaux, et donc rejette la présupposition d'une circulation du nord vers le sud. Au lieu de cela, j'adopte une approche multi-scalaire dans cette recherche pour observer la circulation du mouvement depuis sa dimension micro (ses antennes locales, à l'échelle d'une région, voire d'un domaine) jusque dans sa dimension transnationale (le marché de vin international). Ainsi, cette recherche s'opère dans une double perspective : tout d'abord, une approche horizontale rendue possible grâce à la comparaison terme à terme entre deux antennes locales du mouvement, à savoir le vignoble bordelais et celui du Cap-Occidental ; et deuxièmement, une approche verticale opérée par une analyse multi-scalaire s'étendant de l'échelle du domaine (micro) à celle du marché mondial (macro). Cette double perspective aide à élucider l'émergence du mouvement, sa diffusion et les dynamiques de circulation des savoirs qui le caractérisent.

3. CHAPITRE 3 : Dispositif méthodologique et immersion dans les vignobles de Bordeaux et du Cap Occidental

Ce chapitre revient sur la méthodologie et souligne les défis auxquels j'ai été confrontée sur le terrain. Tout d'abord, je décris les différentes méthodes employées (le travail sur le terrain, les entretiens semi-directifs et les sessions d'observations participantes, ainsi que l'analyse de

réseaux) et explique comment ces méthodes viennent au service des ambitions de cette recherche.

3.1. Bricolage méthodologique : de l'immersion sur le terrain à l'analyse de réseaux

Les données ont été collectées par le biais d'un travail d'immersion sur le terrain dans la région de Bordeaux d'avril à octobre 2021 (huit mois) et dans la province du Cap-Occidental de novembre 2021 à juillet 2022 (neuf mois). Le matériel empirique a été principalement créé à partir de 83 entretiens semi-structurés et de nombreuses sessions d'observations participantes (participation à des campagnes d'activistes écologistes, à des événements à destination des professionnels de la filière, à des foires et festivals de vin, et participation à la production de vin auprès de vignerons sur plusieurs étapes de production depuis les vendanges à la mise en bouteille). Ces méthodes traditionnelles de la sociologie et de la science politique m'ont permis d'appréhender et d'aller à la rencontre d'une diversité d'acteurs de l'industrie vitivinicole : des professionnels du vin (vignerons, distributeurs, cavistes) et des représentants d'institutions publiques et privées, d'ONG, de collectifs de vignerons, de syndicats, etc.

Ces périodes relativement longues de travail sur le terrain dans chacune des régions viticoles du projet ont été complétées par des méthodes complémentaires. J'ai notamment réalisé une veille documentaire pour recueillir des données secondaires notamment de la presse en ligne, des publications sur les réseaux sociaux, des blogs spécialisés, et des rapports officiels de l'industrie. J'ai également pris l'initiative de réaliser une analyse de réseaux (SNA, *Social Network Analysis*) et ai construit la base de données nécessaire pour cette analyse de réseau. Cette méthode relativement innovante en science politique m'a permis de compléter l'analyse qualitative avec une approche exploratoire et itérative et de pallier la relative absence de travaux académiques sur le mouvement des vins nature.

3.2. Réflexivité épistémique : la place du chercheur, son rapport à l'objet et aux terrains

J'adopte ensuite une approche réflexive et discute de l'éthique de la recherche et du positionnement vis-à-vis à la fois de l'objet de recherche (le vin nature) et de l'expérience sur le terrain (notamment de la dualité d'un terrain proche, Bordeaux, et d'un terrain loin, le Cap). Dans cette partie, je reviens sur la genèse de ce projet et mes connaissances préalables du vin nature avant de m'engager dans ce parcours doctoral. J'insiste sur l'importance de l'expérience intangible qui a largement influencé les résultats de cette thèse. Je reviens sur les expériences pratiques de la production et de la dégustation du vin, mais également sur l'impact profond de l'esthétique sensorielle et de la réflexivité épistémique d'une telle recherche. Ensuite je profite du temps de l'écriture pour revenir sur mon expérience de terrain et questionner certains de enjeux qui m'ont marquée : les défis de travailler dans un champ largement dominé par des hommes blancs, et fortement marqué par le capital symbolique et les traditions. J'y examine comment j'ai réussi à négocier mon accès au terrain et à naviguer dans ces différentes dimensions. Enfin, ce chapitre vise à donner le ton sur les choix d'écriture de cette thèse en

justifiant l'utilisation de la première personne, le « je » et, ce faisant, en justifiant la place du chercheur dans cette étude en particulier.

PART 2 – LES DYNAMIQUES DE RÉSISTANCE ET DE CONFLIT DU MOUVEMENT DES VINS NATURE FACE AU RESTE DE L'INDUSTRIE VITIVINICOLE : DE L'ETHOS À LA PRAXIS

La deuxième partie de la thèse explore les dynamiques de conflit et de résistance du mouvement des vins nature vis-à-vis de l'industrie vitivinicole, le mouvement des vins nature est envisagé à l'interstice de deux perspectives : celle d'un mouvement social de résistance et celle d'un changement de paradigme sur le marché. S'inspirant du cadre analytique proposé par Hayagreeva Rao (Rao, 2008), j'y étudie comment les vigneron·ne·s nature initient un précédent dans la filière et s'engagent dans des mouvements de résistance contre l'*establishment* vinicole.

Face à une crise multifacette dans l'industrie vitivinicole, certains vigneron·ne·s se sentent exclus des canaux conventionnels, ou simplement déconnectés des normes et des attentes du marché. Selon Rao, « Dans de tels cas, des mouvements identitaires, animés par un sentiment de « *we feeling* », émergent pour défier les organisations ou catégories dominantes et cherchent à créer de nouvelles identités collectives en construisant de nouvelles organisations qui mettent en avant la démocratie, la participation et l'autonomisation » (Rao, 2008, p. 45) En utilisant le cadre conceptuel proposé par Rao, j'analyse la formation d'une identité collective parmi les vigneron·ne·s rebelles. Celle-ci se déroule en deux phases distinctes : initialement, une « cause brûlante » (*hot cause*) déclenche des émotions partagées et favorise la cohésion, ensuite des « mobilisations cool » (*cool mobilisations*) solidifient les cadres cognitifs partagés et soutiennent leur engagement (Rao, 2009). Le couple « cause brûlante » et « mobilisations cool » permet la formation de nouvelles identités, en amenant les vigneron·ne·s rebelles à modifier leurs comportements, à s'engager dans des révoltes et des actions contestataires, ainsi qu'à improviser et expérimenter des nouvelles voies de productions et d'innovations.

La thèse utilise ce cadre pour explorer l'émergence du mouvement des vins nature, de son éthos à sa praxis. L'éthos est défini comme les valeurs et principes sous-jacents guidant les comportements et façonnant une identité commune, il permet de construire un cadre cognitif et des représentations partagées. La praxis implique l'application pratique de cette théorie, elle vise à créer un changement social et s'observe par les actions qui découlent de cet éthos. Premièrement, j'examine comment la crise multifacette du secteur viticole a galvanisé des émotions partagées parmi les vigneron·ne·s du mouvement des vins nature, les unissant contre un adversaire commun : la production agro-industrielle conventionnelle. Cette « cause brûlante » forme le cœur de l'éthos du mouvement, suscitant des identités insurgentes en opposition aux normes prédominantes de l'industrie vitivinicole (Chapitre 4). Ensuite, j'analyse comment les « mobilisations cool » ont facilité la formation de nouvelles identités et ont engagé les vigneron·ne·s du mouvement dans des voies de production alternatives. Une analyse des facteurs sous-jacents à ces mobilisations permet d'élucider l'émergence du mouvement des vins nature dans les deux régions du projet (Chapitre 5). Enfin, j'étudie comment les acteurs au sein du

mouvement des vins nature se différencie des autres acteurs du marché par des comportements et des expériences alternatives, je défends ici qu'ils participent à une polarisation de l'industrie et que leurs revendications permettent de révéler des hiérarchies préexistantes au sein de l'industrie vinicole (Chapitre 6).

4. CHAPITRE 4 : Éthos du mouvement et positionnement contre un adversaire commun

Ce chapitre analyse les principes fondamentaux du mouvement des vins nature, ainsi que ce qui unit ses acteurs, les « causes brûlantes » telles que conceptualisées par Rao. Il analyse l'émergence de nouveaux cadres cognitifs qui viennent constituer la philosophie, les valeurs et les revendications exprimées par les acteurs du mouvement – en d'autres termes, le but de ce chapitre est de caractériser l'éthos du mouvement des vins nature.

4.1. Situer le mouvement nature : depuis le courant des *political ecologies* à l'étude des mouvements agro-alimentaires alternatifs

Je m'inscris ici dans un cadre théorique à la croisée de deux courants académiques : les *political ecologies* (PE) et l'étude des mouvements agro-alimentaires alternatifs (*Alternative Agro-Food Movements*, AAFM). Le courant des *political ecologies* s'avère particulièrement utile pour s'emparer des questions liées la gestion des ressources naturelles et aux dynamiques de pouvoir et de hiérarchies qui en résultent. Ici, je m'intéresse aux enjeux liés à la production vitivinicole, depuis la vigne, ses sols et ses écosystèmes, jusqu'au chai et donc en prenant en considération les différents intrants utilisés lors du processus de vinification. Ensuite, je me tourne vers la littérature sur les mobilisations collectives, et plus particulièrement celles qui s'intéressent aux AAFM et aux systèmes agro anti-corporatistes et altermondialistes. Je soutiens qu'il existe des proximités entre ce courant de littérature et le mouvement des vins nature. En effet, la vision fondatrice et la philosophie sous-jacente à ces mouvements, ainsi que leur émergence transnationale et leurs nouvelles formes d'action collective, apparaissent comme des clés de lecture essentielles pour comprendre le mouvement des vins nature. Deux études de cas servent d'analogies instructives : *Via Campesina* pour sa dimension transnationale (Hrabanski, 2011; Thivet, 2017) et le mouvement *Slow Food* pour la proximité de ses revendications (Siniscalchi & Counihan, 2017). Ce cadre théorique et la vue d'ensemble de ce corpus de littérature qu'il apporte, m'aide à comprendre l'éthos du mouvement des vins nature développé ensuite.

Afin de saisir l'approche partagée qui unit les acteurs du mouvement, je propose l'approche suivante. Je considère qu'il existe deux façons de dépeindre le mouvement des vins nature, dit grossièrement : d'un côté, ce pour quoi il se bat, et de l'autre, ce contre quoi il se bat. Ces deux axes sont explorés dans la seconde partie de ce chapitre.

4.2. À la vigne et au chai, des pratiques communes qui lient les vignerons du mouvement

Tout d'abord, il s'agit d'examiner ce que représente le mouvement des vins nature et ce qui unit les vignerons qui s'identifient à lui. J'enquête d'abord sur sa vision fondatrice et sa philosophie en examinant la manière dont il pose des questions novatrices sur la relation entre les producteurs et leur environnement, et, à un niveau plus profond, réexamine la dichotomie nature-culture. Plus concrètement, je soutiens que le mouvement des vins nature peut être encapsulé par deux principes fondamentaux : une approche pratique dans le vignoble (*hands-on approach in the vineyards*) et à une approche non interventionniste au chai (*hands-off approach in the cellar*). Alors que cette attention particulière dans le vignoble n'est pas réellement novatrice et présente des affinités avec d'autres pratiques agroécologiques telles que les principes de l'agrobiologie ou de la biodynamie, c'est l'approche au chai, pour l'étape de vinification, qui distingue les acteurs du mouvement des vins nature des autres courants agroécologiques, en leur fournissant un cadre de pensée plus holistique. Au-delà de ces considérations techniques, d'autres caractéristiques définissent les vignerons nature notamment une relation renouvelée avec la nature fondée sur les notions de "*ecological care*" (soin écologique), et de "*stewardship of land*". Je soutiens que les vignerons nature se perçoivent comme les gardiens d'un certain patrimoine vitivinicole, de leur terre et de leurs ressources naturelles, et plus généralement, se voient comme des écologistes. Enfin, un autre trait commun à tous les vignerons engagés dans le mouvement est cette approche renouvelée du travail qui passe notamment par une valorisation des métiers de la terre, de la paysannerie, ainsi que par la défense d'un artisanat vinicole.

4.3. La définition d'un adversaire commun : la production vinicole industrielle et conventionnelle

Pourtant, ce qui unit étroitement les acteurs du mouvement des vins nature, au-delà de la diversité des pratiques vitivinicoles observées et au-delà des différences contextuelles propres à chaque région viticole, c'est une opposition collective à certains phénomènes. Cette opposition commune dépasse les valeurs partagées et je soutiens que les différentes branches du mouvement sont liées par leur opposition résolue à un adversaire commun, nommé différemment selon les acteurs, mais généralement identifié comme le système viticole fordiste, les forces du marché capitaliste ou la standardisation et l'industrialisation de la production de vin. Cette position anti-corporatiste, anti-conventionnelle et anti-industrielle sert de point de ralliement contre un adversaire partagé et englobe des réalités diverses au sein du mouvement des vins nature. Cette opposition à un ennemi commun est particulièrement visible : les acteurs du mouvement se rassemblent en opposition aux acteurs qui dominent le discours hégémonique de l'industrie viticole et, ce faisant, se perçoivent comme une sorte de contre-culture ou de groupe subalterne (et peuvent donc être considérés dans le cadre plus large de la littérature sur les AAFM).

Je reprends ici le concept de relations institutionnalisées (IRs) comme défini par Jullien et Smith pour mieux caractériser les couches complexes de règles, de réglementations et de structures

qui régissent l'industrie viticole à l'échelle mondiale et dans les deux contextes étudiés. Cependant, alors que Jullien et Smith utilisent surtout le cadre conceptuel de l'IRs pour caractériser les dynamiques qui permettent la stabilité et la viabilité d'une industrie, de mon côté, j'adopte ce cadre afin d'analyser comment les acteurs du mouvement des vins nature ont construit une identité et un éthos communs en opposition à certaines de ces IRs traditionnelles en révélant leurs lacunes et/ou en proposant des voies alternatives. Le principal point à retenir de cette section est qu'en adoptant une position contre les pratiques viticoles conventionnelles et le système de production dominant de manière plus large, le mouvement des vins nature a exprimé des critiques qui ne sont plus simplement techniques, mais sont au cœur d'une véritable bataille idéologique. Cela accroît à son tour la nécessité d'examiner le travail politique effectué par les différents acteurs impliqués dans l'industrie. Dans ce cas, une analyse du mouvement des vins nature s'inscrit clairement dans le cadre plus large de la littérature sur les *political ecologies* et des *AAFM*s.

Cependant, il convient de noter le manque d'homogénéité et l'absence de leadership au sein du mouvement, qui n'a pas de règles claires ou de frontières définies. La diversité des valeurs et des approches que le mouvement englobe est compensée par une opposition partagée à l'ennemi commun – la production industrielle. Dans les chapitres à venir, j'analyse plus en détail l'histoire de l'émergence du mouvement des vins nature, la construction d'une identité partagée et les symboles d'agrégation et d'exclusion qui y sont associés.

5. CHAPITRE 5 : L'émergence locale du mouvement et sa diffusion en rhizome transnational

Le chapitre 5 constitue le cœur empirique de la thèse. Les acteurs du mouvement nature, ces vignerons rebelles, parviennent à créer une identité collective et s'engagent dans des mobilisations à partir d'une cause qui suscite l'émotion, ce que Rao nomme les « cools mobilisations ». Au travers de ces « cools mobilisations », les vignerons s'insurgent contre l'héritage d'une industrie vinicole qui leur semble dysfonctionnel et participent activement à en révéler ces dysfonctionnements en challengeant le statu quo. On observe que le récit sur l'émergence du mouvement des vins nature est souvent accompagné d'un champ lexical de la « révolte » voire la « révolution ». Ce chapitre retrace l'émergence du mouvement des vins nature dans les deux régions du projet et se demande si la révolution tant annoncée par les acteurs du mouvement est réellement en cours. Il semble que le terme de « révolution » soit utilisé spontanément par les acteurs sur le terrain et dans le récit du mouvement des vins nature dans son ensemble pour décrire les changements en cours, les résistances et les tentatives de disruption créées par le mouvement au sein de l'industrie. La notion de « révolution » doit ici être comprise en termes de récit utilisé par les acteurs du mouvement plutôt qu'un choix académique. Ce chapitre interroge l'utilisation prédominante de ce récit, et démontre que ce récit sert davantage à des fins de marketing et de visibilité, plutôt qu'il ne décrit une révolution réelle dans le secteur viticole. Finalement le récit de la « révolution » s'avère surtout être un prisme utile pour narrer l'histoire de l'émergence du mouvement des vins nature et montrer les événements tels qu'ils se sont déroulés à Bordeaux et dans le Cap Occidental. En outre, les

réécits de l'émergence du mouvement des vins nature dans les deux régions révèlent certaines revendications et stratégies de résistance, ainsi que des tentatives de disruptions et des mobilisations contre le système viticole conventionnel.

Le mouvement des vins nature se cristallise dans la lutte entre de petits groupes militants et le système conventionnel dominant. Il prend délibérément des formes nouvelles et originales et va au-delà du cadre strict des mobilisations professionnelles. Dans ce chapitre, j'interroge les façons dont le mouvement des vins nature se manifeste : Comment se distingue-t-il du reste de l'industrie ? Quelles stratégies ont été utilisées par les acteurs du mouvement des vins nature pour résister et se différencier ? Sont-elles conscientes ou inconscientes, individuelles ou collectives ?

Pour atteindre cet objectif, je développe et applique trois hypothèses tout au long du chapitre. Tout d'abord, j'établis un parallèle entre la prolifération du mouvement et la figure du rhizome. J'utilise le rhizome pour décrire la morphologie du mouvement dans ses paramètres polycentriques transnationaux ainsi que ses dimensions acentriques et non-hiérarchiques. Ensuite, j'é mets l'hypothèse que le mouvement des vins nature est plus susceptible d'émerger dans des régions viticoles historiquement délaissées. J'introduis ici ce que j'appelle la théorie de « l'espace vide » comme espace fertile et propice à l'innovation et à l'émergence de contre-cultures. Enfin, je m'appuie sur la sociologie des mouvements sociaux pour identifier deux étapes de la mobilisation : cognitive et par des actions collectives. Ces trois hypothèses sont examinées au travers du récit de l'émergence du mouvement des vins nature dans les deux régions du projet. En raison du manque de reconnaissance du mouvement et de l'absence d'un organe représentatif officiel, le récit est quelque peu diffus, et c'est pourquoi il a principalement été reconstitué analytiquement en s'appuyant principalement sur les témoignages des acteurs sur le terrain, et étayé par des données secondaires principalement via des articles de presse.

5.1. Le rhizome comme incarnation du mouvement des vins nature

La figure du réseau rhizomique est utilisée pour analyser la prolifération du mouvement des vins nature en tant que réseau acentrique, non-hiérarchique et à entrées multiples. Comme vu précédemment, le mouvement des vins nature se dessine comme un réseau transnational avec une identité et un éthos partagé à l'échelle mondiale. Il n'a ni centre, ni leader, ni représentant officiel, il apparaît plutôt comme un réseau avec une multiplicité d'ancrages, autant d'antennes que de régions viticoles – le Cap-Occidental et Bordeaux constituant deux des antennes locales de ce réseau. C'est d'ailleurs lorsque l'on adopte cette perspective internationale que le rhizome prend tout son sens, car on peut clairement identifier un mouvement transnational, et s'intéresser à sa diffusion à échelle globale, ainsi qu'aux circulations de ses mobilisations au travers des régions viticoles. Par ailleurs, au-delà de sa forme, le rhizome offre une manière particulièrement intéressante de tisser des liens entre la philosophie développée par Deleuze et Guattari et l'éthos du mouvement des vins nature tel qu'il est décrit dans le chapitre précédent (Krtolica, 2021).

5.2. La théorie de l'« espace vide » comme terreau fertile pour l'innovation

Les acteurs du mouvement des vins nature investissent et réhabilitent des régions viticoles qui, malgré la prédisposition d'un climat et d'un terroir adaptés à la viticulture, n'ont pas été historiquement investies pour la production viticole, ou en tout cas, ne bénéficient pas d'une réputation internationale comme territoire de vin de qualité. Ces territoires forment ce que je nomme ici des « espaces vides » et apparaissent comme des espaces privilégiés pour favoriser l'émergence de contre-cultures et d'innovations. Je fais l'hypothèse que des antennes locales du mouvement des vins nature ont pu émerger et se construire une identité en exploitant l'absence de rayonnement international et de prestige de sous-régions viticoles. Les deux régions du projet viennent confirmer cette hypothèse : la région du Swartland au sein du Cap-Occidental en est l'illustration parfaite, le Bordelais se dresse en contre-exemple. En effet, la province du Cap-Occidental est divisée en sous-régions viticoles. Le berceau du mouvement des vins nature localement se trouve dans le Swartland, une sous-région (*a district*) viticole historiquement négligée qui a connu une véritable renaissance avec les événements de la *Swartland Revolution* (2010-2016). L'exemple du Swartland en Afrique du Sud est donc particulièrement expressif de cette dynamique : la toile vierge qu'était le Swartland et l'absence de réglementation étatique dans le secteur viticole ont donné aux vignerons la liberté d'explorer et d'expérimenter, créant un terreau fertile pour le mouvement des vins nature. Dans une région comme Bordeaux, en revanche, les dynamiques sont totalement différentes. Bordeaux est l'une des régions les plus investies historiquement et bénéficie d'une réputation internationale sans équivalent pour sa production de vin. Il n'est donc pas surprenant que ce soit l'une des dernières régions viticoles françaises à avoir été investie par le mouvement des vins nature. Dans le cas bordelais, je soutiens que le mouvement des vins nature n'a pas émergé dans un « espace vide », mais a plutôt trouvé un terrain dans les « espaces dysfonctionnels » du secteur viticole, en se dressant comme une voie de sortie contre le phénomène du Bordeaux bashing, comme l'illustre très bien d'ailleurs la devise du collectif des *Bordeaux Pirates* qui prône de « faire des vins en dehors des sentiers battus ».

5.3. Mobilisation cognitive puis mobilisations par l'action

Enfin, en m'appuyant sur le cadre analytique proposé Mann (Mann, 1998), j'identifie deux étapes de mobilisation dans le mouvement : d'abord la mobilisation cognitive, puis la mobilisation par l'action. Le cadre cognitif du mouvement des vins nature s'appuie sur l'éthos décrit en détail dans le chapitre 4. D'autres composantes spécifiques au contexte local entrent également en jeu et viennent alimenter cette « cause brûlante ». Dans le Cap-Occidental, deux piliers fondamentaux sont identifiés comme des facteurs ayant permis l'émergence du mouvement des vins nature : d'abord l'influence du Swartland et le renouveau que la région a insufflé localement, et ensuite les dynamiques internationales du mouvement des vins nature, notamment les expériences à l'étranger de certains jeunes vignerons et les inspirations qu'ils ont ramenées chez eux. Les pionniers du mouvement nature dans le Cap-Occidental se sont nourris de ces deux piliers pour construire leur propre identité et lancer le mouvement localement. Le cadre de mobilisation cognitive des vignerons nature à Bordeaux est un assemblage de différents facteurs qui incluent l'héritage des mouvements bio et un diagnostic

partagé de la crise multifacette que connaît le secteur viticole bordelais, se manifestant notamment au travers du phénomène de *Bordeaux bashing*. Le mouvement à Bordeaux est donc né comme un moyen de mettre en lumière et de protester contre les dysfonctionnements du système actuel. Le cadre cognitif construit sur des frustrations partagées face à la crise locale.

L'émergence du mouvement des vins nature dans les deux régions s'est produite différemment et exprime différentes façons de résister. Dans le cas du mouvement des vins nature du Cap-Occidental, il semble que la mobilisation par l'action ait eu lieu conjointement avec la construction du cadre cognitif. Les actions collectives se manifestent à travers la mise en place de collectifs de vignerons, c'est-à-dire des méta-organisations qui visent à rassembler les producteurs sous la même bannière, tels que les *Swartland Revolutions*, les *Swartland Independent Producers*, les *Zoo Biscuits* ou encore les *Beards and Barrels*. Ces méta-organisations ont plusieurs rôles : premièrement, elles agissent comme des marqueurs d'identité et participent à améliorer la visibilité du mouvement tant localement qu'internationalement ; ensuite elles favorisent la communication et la promotion de productions alternatives ; et enfin elles servent de plateforme d'échange de savoirs. À Bordeaux, au contraire, le mouvement manque d'actions collectives, ou en est encore à ses débuts : je montre notamment que la mise en place de collectifs de vignerons tels que *Bordeaux Pirates* et *Bordeaux Nouvelle Vague* est encore timide ou mal définie. Je formule ici deux scénarios qui peuvent expliquer l'absence d'actions collectives à Bordeaux : soit le mouvement est encore à un stade embryonnaire et les vignerons nature manquent de ressources pour s'organiser, soit – et je penche plutôt vers cette deuxième hypothèse – les vignerons nature ne ressentent pas le besoin de se rassembler sous la bannière d'un collectif car la densité du tissu social existant dans le secteur viticole leur offre déjà un espace suffisant pour l'apprentissage et l'échange de savoirs. Dès lors, ils se tournent plutôt vers des liens de solidarité informels entre vignerons.

6. CHAPITRE 6 : Analyse des effets de rupture et de continuité du mouvement face au reste de l'industrie vinicole

Ce chapitre questionne les échelles et les dynamiques de résistance des acteurs du mouvement des vins nature. Il interroge jusqu'où vont les revendications du mouvement et quels sont ses effets plus larges sur le secteur viticole. En d'autres termes, il cherche à mettre en lumière les ruptures et continuités produites par les acteurs du mouvement dans l'industrie vitivinicole, à différents niveaux et dans les deux régions du projet.

6.1. La polarisation de l'industrie vitivinicole engendrée par le mouvement

Dans la première section, je fais l'hypothèse que l'on assiste à une polarisation du secteur viticole qui est exacerbée par le mouvement des vins nature. En m'appuyant sur le concept de résistance tel que développé par des auteurs comme James C. Scott et Henry D. Thoreau, je soutiens que les dynamiques de résistance du mouvement nature créent *de facto* une

marginalisation de ces acteurs par rapport au reste de l'industrie. J'observe, par ailleurs, que cette polarisation est alimentée à la fois par les prescripteurs et les détracteurs du vin nature. En effet les acteurs du mouvement participent activement à leur distanciation en utilisant un répertoire d'actions allant de l'utilisation de rhétoriques transgressives (Couégnas, 2020; Moutat, 2019) à la désobéissance civile (Hayes & Ollitrault, 2012), allant même jusqu'à la judiciarisation du conflit (comme illustré à travers trois études de cas de conflits portés devant les tribunaux à Bordeaux). Pour autant la marginalisation est aussi le fait des détracteurs du vin nature et d'autres acteurs de la filière pour qui la disruption du système viticole n'est pas dans leur intérêt. Cette section met en lumière la polarisation de l'industrie viticole engrangée face aux résistances du mouvement, et confirme que le mouvement des vins nature est un outil efficace pour exposer et mettre en lumière les problèmes existants dans l'industrie vinicole. Enfin, ces récits communs et ces répertoires partagés contribuent activement à construire une identité qui traverse les diverses antennes locales du mouvement, pour ensuite être adoptée et réappropriée à l'échelle internationale.

6.2. Les acteurs du mouvement nature, des défenseurs de causes ?

La deuxième section examine dans quelle mesure les acteurs du mouvement des vins nature abordent des problèmes qui dépassent leurs objectifs principaux, soit des causes qui sortent de l'agenda environnemental et écologique *per se*. Ici, j'utilise le triptyque marxiste classique « classe-race-genre » comme cadre analytique pour mieux comprendre les positions adoptées par les acteurs du mouvement vis-à-vis des hiérarchies existantes dans le secteur vinicole et questionner à quel point ils s'emparent de ces problématiques. En d'autres termes, au-delà de l'agenda écologique, les acteurs du mouvement des vins nature se positionnent-ils comme des défenseurs de causes ?

Le prisme « classe-race-genre » révèle des intérêts et des mobilisations très différents de la part des acteurs du mouvement des vins nature et met en lumière les ruptures ou les continuités avec l'industrie vinicole dans son ensemble. Les acteurs du mouvement des vins nature sont des pionniers, et les voies alternatives qu'ils adoptent permettent de mettre en lumière certaines des inégalités persistantes dans le secteur vinicole. Pourtant, les dynamiques locales et contextuelles révèlent différentes positions dans le Cap-Occidental et à Bordeaux, et les conclusions que je tire de cette analyse sont nuancées, notamment vis-à-vis de leurs capacités à s'emparer des questions liées à la classe, à la race et au genre. Les trois thèmes sont investis par les acteurs du mouvement de manière très différente.

La dimension de classe, que j'ai étudiée à travers le nexus travail-capital, est au cœur des réflexions de nombreux producteurs de vin nature. Cela n'est pas surprenant, car ces questions s'intègrent généralement dans un positionnement anticapitaliste et *anti-establishment*, souvent adoptés par la plupart des acteurs du mouvement des vins nature. En revanche, les recherches de terrain à Bordeaux et au Cap-Occidental ont révélé un tabou persistant, voire un malaise total, en ce qui concerne le traitement des questions des inégalités raciales, et – comme dans le reste de l'industrie vinicole – la question reste relativement inabordée pour les acteurs du mouvement des vins nature. Enfin, la question du genre représente également un cas

particulièrement intéressant³⁸³. Je soutiens que dans certains cas très spécifiques, le mouvement des vins nature a été une plateforme pour que de nouvelles revendications puissent imprégner l'industrie vinicole, comme dans l'exemple de la dimension genre. Je montre ici que le mouvement des vins nature français n'a pas seulement permis un processus plus large de féminisation de l'industrie du vin ; mais qu'il a également permis aux mouvements féministes de pénétrer le secteur vinicole, créant une récente intersection entre le mouvement nature et les mouvements féministes.

Malgré ce constat de la perméabilité des questions féministes dans le mouvement des vins nature français, dans de nombreux autres exemples les disparités de genre ou économico-raciales ne sont pas remises en question, et les problèmes sont tus. Plus généralement, cette recherche et l'utilisation du prisme classe-race-genre, a également mis en lumière un paradoxe intrigant concernant la perception selon laquelle les acteurs du mouvement des vins nature se considèrent comme subalternes. En effet, bien que la plupart des vignerons nature se positionnent comme un groupe dominé par le secteur viticole conventionnel, lorsque l'on examine la démographie de ses producteurs dans son ensemble, il devient évident que la majorité des vignerons du mouvement correspond à la description d'un groupe dominant – soit des hommes, blancs et propriétaires de vignobles, ce qui les place dans une position de privilégiée. Ces perceptions différentes (dominant-dominé) ne sont pas contradictoires ; elles confirment plutôt que l'analyse des relations de pouvoir dépend fortement de la perspective adoptée et de l'objectif analytique choisi.

PARTIE 3 – LES VIGNERONS REBELLES ET L'INNOVATION RADICALE : LE RÉSEAU DU VIN NATURE COMME AGENT DE CHANGEMENT INCRÉMENTAL MAIS STRUCTUREL POUR L'INDUSTRIE

La deuxième partie était axée sur la compréhension de l'émergence du mouvement des vins nature, décodant ses causes profondes et ses mobilisations. Elle a analysé et situé l'éthos et la praxis du mouvement. Cette analyse nous a permis d'identifier des pratiques alternatives et des résistances à la production conventionnelle et industrielle, ou du moins des résistances au statu quo et une mise en lumière des dysfonctionnements et des crises que traversent l'industrie viticole. Cela soulève maintenant des questions sur les changements apportés par le mouvement des vins nature dans l'industrie vinicole dans son ensemble.

Selon Rao, « En s'opposant au statu quo, les militants jouent un rôle majeur, encore que fréquemment sous-estimé, dans le succès ou l'échec d'une innovation économique radicale. L'importance de ce rôle est liée à la nature même de l'innovation, qui remet en cause les normes, valeurs, pratiques sociales, relations et intérêts existants. » (Rao, 2009, 76). En m'appuyant sur la formulation de Rao, cette troisième et dernière partie examine comment les

³⁸³ Nous devons rappeler qu'en raison d'un manque de données, je l'ai seulement examinée dans le contexte français, et davantage de recherches doivent être menées dans l'industrie sud-africaine

vignerons rebelles façonnent l'innovation radicale sur le marché. Suivant une approche hétérodoxe de l'économie politique, je considère que les marchés sont façonnés et contraints par les mouvements sociaux et les mouvements de résistance. À ce titre, je soutiens que le mouvement des vins nature peut être vu comme un projet politique dont le but est d'enclencher un changement incrémentiel mais aussi structurel dans l'industrie du vin. En effet, en s'engageant dans des chemins alternatifs, les acteurs du mouvement démontrent que d'autres voies de production (ainsi que de commercialisation et de distribution) sont possibles.

La partie 3 examine les défis posés par l'arrivée de ces nouveaux vignerons dans l'industrie vinicole. En témoignant de la normalisation (institutionnalisation et conventionnalisation) du mouvement des vins nature, l'objectif ici est de comprendre les dynamiques et les relations entre les acteurs du mouvement et le reste de l'industrie. Ces défis sont abordés sous trois angles qui constituent les trois derniers chapitres de cette thèse : tout d'abord, je cherche à comprendre les dynamiques de reconnaissance politique et administrative du mouvement et sa relation avec les autorités publiques (Chapitre 7). Ensuite, je discute de l'intégration du mouvement dans les dynamiques du marché global, en étudiant les innovations et les configurations économiques hybrides qu'il propose (Chapitre 8). Enfin, j'explore la diffusion et la circulation du mouvement. Dans ce dernier chapitre, le vin nature est examiné non plus en tant que mouvement mais en tant que réseau afin d'analyser sa capacité à produire et diffuser des nouveaux savoirs et savoir-faire (Chapitre 9).

7. CHAPITRE 7 : Identifier les points de bascule du mouvement des vins nature : depuis ses stratégies de résistance jusqu'à la mise en place d'une institution de marché

Nous assistons à une intégration progressive du mouvement des vins nature dans l'industrie viticole, en tout cas, bien que mouvement de niche, il n'est plus possible d'ignorer son existence. En effet, malgré le créneau quantitatif relativement petit qu'il représente, ce nouveau groupe d'acteurs crée un précédent dans le secteur du vin de par leur éthos et leurs mobilisations. L'hypothèse principale de ce chapitre est que la reconnaissance du mouvement des vins nature est en cours et qu'elle ouvre des opportunités de réflexion sur le processus d'institutionnalisation du mouvement, ainsi que son organisation et sa reconnaissance politique et administrative. Ce chapitre identifie les points de bascule, ces moments où le vin nature passe d'un mouvement de marge, porté par des actions ad hoc, individuelles et improvisées à un groupe d'acteurs organisé et officiellement reconnu. J'analyse ces points de bascule au travers de deux processus : d'abord, la manière dont le mouvement tente de mettre en place un cadre légal et administrativement reconnu pour lui-même, puis la manière dont certains vignerons nature se sont engagés dans des dialogues avec les autorités publiques. J'étudie des moments spécifiques où les acteurs du mouvement se réunissent avec les acteurs en charge de la gouvernance de la filière, se retrouvant, métaphoriquement, autour de la même table pour discuter des possibilités de concilier des visions jusqu'alors considérées comme irréconciliables. Je soutiens qu'au travers de ces processus les vignerons nature participent activement à révéler les défauts et les écueils des réglementations et conventions actuellement

en place et ce faisant, créent des opportunités d'ajouter de nouveaux enjeux à l'agenda politique. Cet examen approfondi des relations entre les autorités publiques et les acteurs du mouvement des vins nature me permet d'explorer les questions suivantes : Quelle est la marge de manœuvre des vignerons nature pour effectuer des changements réels dans l'industrie viticole ? Au-delà des dynamiques de résistance étudiées jusqu'à présent, peuvent-ils être considérés comme des agents actifs participant au dialogue avec les autorités publiques ? Peuvent-ils même être considérés comme des entrepreneurs politiques qui permettent l'émergence et la diffusion de nouveaux cadres cognitifs ?

7.1. Vers une reconnaissance administrative et légale de la production de vin nature

La première section examine le moment où le mouvement des vins nature est passé de son identité précédente d'*anti-establishment* et confinée à la marge, à une entité qui tente de s'organiser. Il s'agit ici de discuter le processus organisationnel du mouvement et d'analyser son travail de reconnaissance administrative et légale. Cela se traduit de manière diversifiée selon le contexte. En France, plusieurs tentatives de regroupement au sein de collectifs de vignerons ont été entreprises, d'abord via l'Association des Vignerons Naturels (AVN), puis avec l'émergence du Syndicat de Défense des Vins Nature qui est aujourd'hui la force principale du mouvement. En 2021, ce groupe a proposé une charte de production en douze points et créé un label privé nommé *Méthode Nature*, qui gagne progressivement en importance dans le paysage national. Le syndicat plaide aujourd'hui en faveur de l'établissement d'une marque européenne publiquement reconnue mais un accord avec l'INAO et le département des fraudes semble difficile à trouver. En Afrique du Sud, en revanche, il n'existe aucun cadre légalement défini encadrant la production de vins nature. Mais il convient de retracer la création des *Alternatives Categories* en 2016 qui s'est établi après des débats prolongés entre le pionnier du mouvement des vins nature en Afrique du Sud, Craig Hawkins et instances en charge de la gouvernance de la filière (notamment le *Wine & Spirit Board* et *SAWIS*). La création des *Alternatives Categories* s'est révélée être un moyen ingénieux de fournir un cadre légal permettant aux producteurs de vins nature de poursuivre leurs activités de production, de marketing et d'exportation tout en affirmant leurs différences avec le reste de l'industrie. Ces nouveaux cadres juridiques sont analysés ici afin de mieux comprendre les implications et conséquences potentielles de la reconnaissance du mouvement.

7.2. Opportunités de dialogues avec les pouvoirs publics : le cas des appellations d'origine

Dans la deuxième section, les marges de manœuvre et les opportunités de dialogue avec les pouvoirs publics sont discutées à la lumière de la littérature sur les politiques publiques et la sociologie de l'action publique, et en mobilisant les concepts de l'*Advocacy Coalition Framework* (AFC) (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993) et la mise à l'agenda (Garraud, 2014). Ces concepts sont mobilisés pour analyser comment les acteurs du mouvement liés par des intérêts communs, naviguent dans les contraintes des politiques existantes et des cadres normatifs qui régissent le secteur viticole. Ces cadres sont souvent perçus comme étant trop

rigides ou dépassés, ils sont décriés par les acteurs du mouvement comme incapables de s'adapter aux changements du marché contemporain et aux méthodes de production alternative. En prenant pour cas d'étude ici la relation entre les vignerons nature et les institutions publiques en charge de la gouvernance des normes de qualité et des appellations d'origine (Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée, AOC en France et *Wine of Origins*, WO en Afrique du Sud), je passe en revue les relations – souvent conflictuelles – entre les acteurs du mouvement des vins nature et les appellations d'origine. Les lacunes des appellations à la fois à Bordeaux et dans le Cap-Occidental sont examinées. Premièrement, les vignerons nature s'engagent dans une critique de la standardisation du goût, remettant en question la finalité de l'AOC d'expression du terroir et la notion de typicité. Deuxièmement, ils dénoncent les lacunes dans les procédures d'accréditation, se retrouvant souvent exclus d'une appellation en raison de décisions prises lors des panels de dégustation. Troisièmement, malgré leur capacité supposée à évoluer, les systèmes d'appellations sont critiqués pour leur incapacité à anticiper certains changements qu'il s'agisse de nouvelles contraintes environnementales ou l'évolution de la demande. Le mouvement des vins nature, pionnier en termes de nouvelles pratiques viticoles, vient non seulement perturber les systèmes actuels mais expose également leurs lacunes. Trois alternatives stratégiques investies par les producteurs nature pour contourner ses cadres normatifs sont identifiées ici : sortir du système d'appellations, le réformer pour l'adapter à ses besoins ou créer sa propre appellation.

7.3. Questionner l'adoption de nouveaux cadres cognitifs par les institutions

La troisième section étudie les interactions entre les acteurs du mouvement des vins nature et les autorités publiques de manière plus générale. J'examine comment certains conflits se sont cristallisés entre le désir de changement et l'appel des acteurs du vin nature à réformer les modes de productions d'une part, et le statu quo défendu par d'autres groupes d'intérêts et pouvoirs publics de l'autre. J'émetts l'hypothèse que les vignerons nature contribuent à l'émergence et à la diffusion de nouveaux cadres cognitifs, agissant comme des entrepreneurs de *soft transfert* (Stone, 2004), jouant un rôle essentiel dans la circulation de savoirs et de croyances partagées. Le cas bordelais est particulièrement intéressant sur ce point car il permet de souligner le fossé entre les objectifs de qualité d'origine promus par les AOCs et ceux de qualité environnementale sous le patronnage de certifications environnementales tels que l'Agriculture Biologique (AB). Des vignerons nature s'impliquent dans les Organismes de Défense et de Gestion (ODG) de leurs appellations, certains ont même lancé des groupes de discussions pour tenter de faire évoluer les cahiers des charges des appellations vers une plus grande prise en compte de la qualité environnementale. Dans certaines appellations, comme à Saint-Émilion ou à Pauillac, des efforts ont été entrepris pour concilier ces visions divergentes, laissant entrevoir une trajectoire vers une transformation des modes de production alignée sur les pratiques plus respectueuses de l'environnement comme préconisées par le mouvement des vins nature.

Dans l'ensemble, l'étude du mouvement des vins nature dans ce chapitre permet d'explorer les liens entre la mise à l'agenda de nouvelles problématiques, notamment en matière de politiques environnementales, et les groupes subalternes/subversifs de la filière tels que les acteurs du

mouvement des vins nature. L'étude de ces points de bascule entre les dynamiques de résistance et les dynamiques d'apprentissage et d'adaptation des politiques avec les acteurs institutionnels permet la clarification d'un angle mort. Cependant, il convient de noter que, malgré ces quelques avancées, le sentiment dominant dans le mouvement est qu'il persiste un état de relative inertie dans le secteur viticole. Plusieurs pistes de réflexions viennent étayer ce constat. Tout d'abord, il est crucial de reconnaître la contemporanéité de cette recherche, car les premières étapes vers l'institutionnalisation ont été entreprises relativement récemment (le label *Méthode Nature* date de 2019, le système des *Alternatives Categories* a été mis en œuvre en 2016 et les premières certifications environnementales ont été imposées par les Organisme de Défense et de Gestions des AOCs de Bordeaux en 2023). Il existe donc un besoin clair d'une recherche à plus long terme pour analyser et vérifier les effets (ou l'absence d'effets) que le mouvement des vins nature peut avoir sur le reste de la filière locale. De plus, la reconnaissance de cette inertie et des changements limités au sein du mouvement – cette frustration vis-à-vis du statu quo dans le secteur viticole – a incité d'autres vignerons à rejoindre les rangs du mouvement des vins nature.

8. CHAPITRE 8 : Vers une conventionnalisation du mouvement des vins nature ? Une analyse des stratégies d'innovation et de systèmes économiques hybrides dans le marché du vin global

En parallèle de l'institutionnalisation du mouvement, on peut également observer l'intégration du vin nature sur le marché mondial – sa transformation d'un produit marginal en un bien intégré dans le marché (Smith Maguire et al., 2019). Partant de cette observation initiale, ce chapitre aborde le processus de conventionnalisation du mouvement des vins nature du point de vue de l'économie politique. L'approche de l'économie politique s'avère particulièrement précieuse pour comprendre les dynamiques de l'intégration du mouvement sur le marché mondial du vin, ainsi que l'enchevêtrement entre l'action publique et les forces du marché capitaliste, en se concentrant sur des notions telles que les chaînes de valeur du vin et les conventions de qualité. À bien des égards, le développement de la chaîne de valeur du vin suit son propre cours, l'industrie du vin possède peut-être l'une des chaînes de valeur les plus complexes et sophistiquées, qui inclut ses propres conventions de qualité. En examinant la chaîne de valeur du vin dans sa dimension internationale, ce chapitre met en lumière un large panel d'initiatives innovantes et de systèmes économiques hybrides proposés par les vignerons nature.

Dans cette perspective, ce chapitre mobilise le concept de *upgrading* tel que proposé par Stefano Ponte. La notion d'*upgrading* fait référence à une variété de processus permettant d'accéder à de nouveaux marchés ou d'accroître les compétences, elle peut être vue comme une manière de « progresser dans la chaîne de valeur » (Ponte & Ewert, 2009). En d'autres termes, *upgrading* fait référence à des processus « par lesquels les acteurs modifient ou altèrent les systèmes de production et les pratiques qui entraînent des résultats positifs (ou réduisent les résultats négatifs) (Krishnan, 2017 : 117 ; souligné dans l'original) » (Ponte, 2021). De manière pratique pour cette thèse, Ponte applique ce concept d'*upgrading* à la chaîne de valeur de

l'industrie des vins sud-africains, fournissant ainsi une base utile à partir de laquelle mener mes propres recherches sur ce sujet. Dans ce qui suit, l'étude des procédés de *upgrading* est donc entreprise par les acteurs du mouvement des vins nature comme un moyen de trouver une valeur ajoutée pour le produit, tout en respectant un certain ethos dans le processus de production. Je fais ici l'hypothèse que les efforts d'*upgrading* de la qualité, de l'environnement et tout au long de la chaîne de production constituent des stratégies de différenciation mobilisées par les acteurs du mouvement des vins nature pour naviguer sur le marché mondial du vin. Dans ce chapitre, trois perspectives sont utilisées pour réfléchir aux trajectoires d'*upgrading* initiées par les acteurs du mouvement et correspondent à la division des sections dans ce chapitre : *quality upgrading*, *environmental upgrading* et *process upgrading*.

8.1. « *Quality upgrading* » : une évolution des conventions de qualité en faveur des producteurs de vin nature

Tout d'abord, ce chapitre analyse les processus d'*upgrading* à travers la notion de qualité et étudie la capacité du mouvement des vins nature à manipuler les représentations autour de la notion de qualité. En partant du principe que la qualité doit être appréhendée comme une construction sociale, j'interroge le caractère évolutif de la notion de qualité à la lumière du concept de « tournant qualitatif », (*quality turn*) souvent mobilisé dans la littérature sur les AAFM. Ce tournant qualitatif se caractérise par l'émergence de nouvelles conventions de qualité, on passe ainsi d'une qualité définie par des conventions domestiques et/ou industrielles à une qualité définie par des conventions environnementales et civiques. Cette évolution significative de la notion de qualité est manipulée par les acteurs du mouvement des vins nature à leur avantage pour commercialiser leur production. Je soutiens que le mouvement des vins nature participe au renouvellement de la notion de qualité, en se centrant notamment sur deux principes : le ré-encastrement de la notion de qualité dans les écologies locales et des réseaux proches (Murdoch, 2000).

8.2. « *Environmental upgrading* » : le rôle des certifications environnementales comme indicateurs de qualité et leurs marchandisations

Ensuite, j'utilise le concept de *environmental upgrading* pour enquêter sur le paysage existant des certifications environnementales applicables à l'industrie viticole. Je pars ici du principe que les certifications environnementales sont des conventions de qualité nouvelles. En effet, avec l'augmentation des échanges mondiaux et de la concurrence mondiale, ces certifications servent d'indicateurs normatifs et d'outils politiques pour garantir à la fois la qualité environnementale d'un produit et son parcours de production de manière globale. Je soutiens que d'une part nous assistons aujourd'hui à la prolifération des certifications environnementales, et d'autre part que cette prolifération met en lumière le processus de marchandisation de ces certifications environnementales, avec des mécanismes de certification de plus en plus complexes et des cahiers des charges qui se chevauchent, parfois se contredisent. En tant que tel, les logiques capitalistes du marché ont détourné les certifications

de leurs objectifs premiers de protection de l'environnement et de garantie de qualité, et ces certifications deviennent elles-mêmes un produit marchand.

Les cas français et sud-africain, en raison de leurs trajectoires socio-historiques distinctes, se positionnent très différemment en ce qui concerne ces certifications environnementales. En France, l'industrie du vin est fortement régie par les certifications, c'est un outil politique bien ancré, poussé à la fois par les institutions publiques et les acteurs privés. Au contraire, en Afrique du Sud, l'État est largement absent dans l'industrie vinicole, et les réglementations et certifications environnementales existantes sont peu appropriées par les producteurs. Le mouvement des vins nature, composé en majorité de petits producteurs indépendants, est réticent à l'adoption de ces certifications environnementales et la plupart des producteurs choisissent de naviguer dans la chaîne de valeur mondiale sans y recourir.

8.3. « *Process upgrading* » : Des innovations en amont et en aval de la production comme stratégies de différenciation et porteuses de valeur ajoutée.

La dernière section se concentre sur les *process upgrading*, c'est-à-dire les améliorations qui se produisent, non pas directement sur le produit, mais le long de la chaîne de valeur en amont et en aval de la production. Je soutiens que dans son contexte transnational, les producteurs de vins nature réussissent à ajouter de la valeur à leurs produits, se différenciant ainsi et créant un nouveau segment de marché qui existe presque en silo par rapport au reste du marché vinicole traditionnel.

En amont, ces stratégies de différenciation englobent un large éventail d'innovations et de configurations économiques hybrides et se démarquent par leur vision holistique. En amont de la chaîne de production, ces innovations incluent un rapport renouvelé à la propriété foncière et des structures économiques innovantes pour les domaines viticoles pour mieux faire face aux contraintes économiques contemporaines. Par ailleurs, les vignerons nature contribuent également à réinventer les formes de travail et les structures professionnelles essayant de dépasser l'antagonisme historique entre viticulteurs et vinificateurs. En aval de la phase de production, le mouvement nature participe également à repenser les modes de commercialisation, de distribution et de mise sur le marché du produit. Une forte emphase est mise sur l'importance de la variable « confiance » (*the trust contract*) entre producteurs et consommateurs, et au niveau de chaque intermédiaire. Ce faisant, le mouvement des vins nature trouve des manières innovantes de promouvoir les circuits courts et la réintégration des interactions humaines dans les échanges commerciaux. En tant que tel, le contrat de confiance informel qui caractérise la commercialisation du vin nature est une garantie pour que l'histoire du vigneron soit transmise en toute transparence. Cette dimension de confiance et de transmission dans les échanges est particulièrement importante pour les vignerons qui n'ont pas recours à des certifications environnementales.

Enfin, je soutiens que le mouvement des vins nature a contribué à l'émergence de géographies alternatives de la consommation et de la production viticole, avec des codes et des conventions

renouvelés qui se manifestent à travers l'esthétique des communications, le langage actualisé entourant l'expérience de dégustation du vin, l'appel à des pratiques alternatives et rebelles. Cependant, cette altérité est remise en question alors que les dynamiques du marché mondial prévalent, le marché de niche constitué par le mouvement des vins nature jusqu'à présent est progressivement intégré dans les marchés traditionnels, et comme beaucoup d'autres marchés alternatifs, de nombreux signes laissent entrevoir une conventionnalisation du vin nature, voire l'émergence de pratiques d'opportunisme marketing qui s'approprient la notion de vin nature mais en la vidant de son sens, à des fins purement commerciales.

9. CHAPITRE 9 : Dynamiques de production et de diffusion de nouveaux savoirs et savoir-faire dans le réseau du vin nature

Ce dernier chapitre analyse les vignerons nature comme des acteurs influents dans les changements de paradigme en cours de la production vitivinicole, ainsi que des acteurs qui innovent radicalement pour faire face à l'évolution de la demande et des nouveaux enjeux de l'industrie. Afin d'identifier avec précision ces changements de paradigme, ce chapitre analyse la production de nouveaux savoirs et savoir-faire dans le mouvement, et s'intéresse aux dynamiques de circulation et de diffusion de ces nouveaux savoirs.

Dans ce chapitre, la circulation des savoirs n'est pas seulement considérée comme un simple outil permettant la prolifération du mouvement et sa diffusion vers de nouvelles antennes locales. Je soutiens que la transmission de nouveaux savoirs par les acteurs du mouvement peut être vue comme un acte de militantisme social, comme une forme de *soft power* en action participant à la construction de nouveaux cadres cognitifs qui viennent perturber la filière. En effet, en l'absence d'actions collectives, organisées et revendiquées comme telles, le projet politique du mouvement des vins nature se manifeste à travers un militantisme quotidien intégré aux activités professionnelles des producteurs de vins nature. En d'autres termes, le mouvement des vins nature ne consiste pas seulement à travailler et produire du vin différemment, mais aussi à contribuer à la promotion d'un mode de vie alternatif et à éduquer les pairs à ces mentalités alternatives. Cet engagement militant prend forme via la diffusion de nouveaux savoirs et la transmission pédagogique de l'éthos du mouvement à des cercles plus larges.

9.1. Le recours à l'analyse de réseau comme outil conceptuel et méthodologique pour traduire le réseau du vin nature

Dès lors, dans ce dernier chapitre, le vin nature n'est plus seulement envisagé comme un mouvement mais surtout comme un réseau. Je me plonge ici dans les théories des réseaux qui révèlent plusieurs mécanismes d'apprentissage et de diffusion des savoirs et accordent une attention particulière à la notion d'*agency* tel que défini par Callon et Latour (Callon, 2006). En lien avec des recherches précédentes sur les innovations et la diffusion des savoirs agricoles (Chiffolleau, 2005; Lagendijk & Cornford, 2000; Rockenbach et al., 2019; Routledge, 2008), je mets ici en évidence le rôle des réseaux dans la diffusion des savoirs et leurs capacités à

transformer de manière incrémentielle les pratiques de production. L'approche par les réseaux révèle le tissu social sous-jacent aux processus d'innovation au sein du mouvement des vins nature et la diffusion de ces innovations radicales dans le reste de l'industrie.

J'explore le concept même de réseaux et retrace brièvement les grands courants de la littérature sur l'analyse des réseaux et explique comment les notions d'« espace social » et de « réseau » ont été déployées dans mes recherches pour saisir les dynamiques de diffusion des savoirs, les stratégies d'apprentissage et la circulation des innovations au sein du mouvement des vins nature à différentes échelles. À partir de cette littérature, je propose d'utiliser l'analyse de réseaux comme un outil méthodologique exploratoire et plaide en faveur d'un processus itératif de l'analyse de réseau qui vient compléter l'approche qualitative utilisée jusqu'à présent (J. Fuhse & Mützel, 2011).

9.2. Le réseau du vin nature et son évolution quasi en silos du reste de l'industrie

La deuxième section traduit le réseau du mouvement des vins nature dans les deux régions étudiées. Les deux bases de données utilisées pour cette analyse sont présentées : la première se concentre sur les liens entre les acteurs (liens professionnels, de parentés ou d'appartenance à des organisations, par exemples des syndicats ou des collectifs de vignerons), la seconde s'intéresse aux enjeux de réputations, et identifie les acteurs-clé dans le réseau. Les représentations visuelles du mouvement des vins nature sous forme de diagrammes permet également de tirer des résultats de la comparaison entre Bordeaux et le Cap-Occidental, mettant notamment en évidence l'influence des structures de gouvernance dans l'organisation des réseaux locaux.

Plusieurs hypothèses ont été explorées à partir de cette analyse de réseau. Tout d'abord, la traduction du réseau en diagrammes dans les deux régions du projet révèle des différences intéressantes dans la structuration du réseau au niveau local, soulignant, entre autres, le rôle des structures publiques et des certifications environnementales à Bordeaux et leur relative absence au Cap-Occidental. Ensuite, l'analyse a confirmé le rôle de certains actants en tant qu'intermédiaires clés dans la diffusion des savoirs. Ensuite, le réseau des vins nature semble être façonné par des mécanismes d'homophilie et de transitivité qui contribuent simultanément à rapprocher les acteurs du réseau les uns des autres et à les éloigner du reste de l'industrie. Enfin, de nombreux obstacles contribuent à maintenir le mouvement des vins nature en tant que mouvement marginalisé et de niche, opérant presque en silo par rapport au reste de l'industrie, avec finalement peu d'informations et de connaissances qui circulent en dehors du réseau.

Ce chapitre examine également l'entrelacement de différents répertoires de savoirs mobilisés par les acteurs du réseau et identifie trois types de savoirs mobilisés : le savoir-faire traditionnel, soit un savoir paysan et local transmis de manière intergénérationnel, le savoir scientifiques et académiques, et enfin le savoir sensible, c'est-à-dire expérientiel et sensoriel.

Les acteurs du mouvement des vins nature utilisent un assemblage hétérogène de ces savoirs pour légitimer leurs représentations et provoquer un changement de paradigme dans l'industrie.

9.3. Dynamiques de diffusion et circulation de nouveaux savoirs dans le réseau : perspective depuis Bordeaux, le Cap-Occidental et transnationale

La dernière section souligne comment cette accumulation de différents types de connaissances favorise les coalitions et les arrangements entre divers acteurs et est mise au service d'intérêts spécifiques. J'explore les dynamiques de réseau ad hoc et parfois inattendues qui façonnent l'industrie du vin localement et permettent ces innovations radicales.

À Bordeaux, le mouvement des vins nature démontre de solides liens avec des coalitions environnementales plus larges, tel que le réseau anti-pesticides et la coalition anti-HVE (en référence au label Haute Valeur Environnementale). Les vignerons nature de Bordeaux participent souvent à des initiatives écologiques locales et s'insèrent dans le tissu social dense préexistant, qui inclut notamment les syndicats professionnels et des ONG environnementales, pour faire valoir leurs intérêts et participer à une diffusion plus large de leurs savoirs. Au Cap occidental, les vignerons sont très peu engagés dans des actions collectives environnementales via un tissu social associatif. En revanche, la diffusion de nouveaux savoirs localement est rendue possible par des nouvelles configurations économiques dans la filière, offrant ainsi des opportunités pour des changements de paradigme et des innovations radicales, ainsi que par un réseau caractérisé par des collectifs informels de vignerons qui agissent comme des plateformes clés dans l'échange et l'apprentissage. Cette section se termine par une analyse de la diffusion des savoirs d'une perspective transnationale, soulignant le rôle des événements internationaux (notamment les foires et festivals de vins nature qui sont des vrais marqueurs identitaires pour le mouvement), ainsi que les expériences à l'étranger des vignerons qui peuvent ensuite rapporter de nouvelles connaissances.

Enfin, ce chapitre pose la question de la cohésion et de la « colle sociale » au sein du réseau. L'analyse de réseau révèle que cette cohésion émerge d'expériences partagées, d'échanges de savoirs et d'efforts collectifs, favorisant les alliances et participant à la construction d'une identité commune. A contrario, le sentiment de proximité et d'homophilie parmi les acteurs du mouvement, et à l'inverse le sentiment d'exclusion ou de marginalisation par rapport au reste de l'industrie, participent tous deux à la légitimation du mouvement. Le réseau se matérialise également par des affiliations tangibles à différentes échelles, que ce soit via des syndicats professionnels, des associations environnementales locales, des collectifs de vignerons ou des forums internationaux comme les salons spécialisés. Ces affiliations partagées, fonctionnant comme des nœuds dans le réseau, facilitent l'échange des bonnes pratiques, l'apprentissage collectif et la culture d'intérêts commun.

Finalement les deux points clés de ce chapitre peuvent être résumés comme tel : premièrement, les réseaux constituent des espaces sociaux fertiles à la production et la circulation de nouveaux savoirs et permettant de fait l'émergence d'innovations radicales ; ensuite, la diffusion de

nouveaux savoirs au sein du réseau peut être vue comme un acte de militantisme contribuant à la légitimation du cadre cognitif construit par les acteurs du mouvement. L'aspect cognitif est ici un outil qui permet d'observer la capacité du mouvement à perturber l'ordre institutionnel de l'industrie viticole.

CONCLUSION

Pour conclure, l'objectif principal de cette thèse a été de proposer un cadre analytique et une compréhension du mouvement des vins nature qui s'éloignent des considérations techniques et l'analysent plutôt du point de vue d'un mouvement social de résistance et d'un changement de marché. Cette perspective a mis lumière un mouvement porteur de nouveaux cadres cognitifs et de pratiques alternatives qui ont activement participé à révéler les écueils et les dysfonctionnements d'une industrie viticole en crise. L'analyse des acteurs du mouvement dans la région de Bordeaux et du Cap-Occidental a permis d'identifier des pratiques disruptives, mais surtout de nouveaux canaux de diffusion des connaissances dans l'ensemble du secteur viticole, offrant des moyens alternatifs de produire et d'innover. En proposant des voies de productions alternatives et à travers des innovations radicales, le mouvement du vins nature a permis l'émergence d'un nouveau paradigme orienté vers un engagement agroécologique plus fort. Il a également permis un changement incrémental au sein de l'industrie vitivinicole grâce à des dynamiques expérimentales et en investissant sur les dynamiques de réseau. Ce travail s'inscrit dans un ensemble de recherches qui visent à doter les institutions politiques et commerciales d'outils mieux adaptés pour gouverner et valoriser les pratiques agroécologiques, contribuant ainsi à une production bas carbone et à la résilience des territoires. Aussi, cette recherche fait écho à des préoccupations plus larges et à des débats mondiaux sur la science de la durabilité porté et plus précisément sur l'hybridation des savoirs liés aux enjeux écologiques dans les modèles agricoles.

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