

Beyond *terroir*: territorial construction, hegemonic discourses, and French wine culture

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Starting from the anthropological investigation of Burgundian viticulture, my article examines the major issues attached to the territorial construction of the French wine industry around the concept of *terroir*. It discusses the diverse strategic deployments of *terroir* encountered in Burgundian viticulture since the 1990s by arguing that a paradigm shift has occurred from the geological argument to the recognition of the wine-grower as the mediator in the expression of *terroir*. Moreover, there is a tendency to use *terroir* as a local governance tool leading to homogeneity and rootedness, while supplying a means for individuals in localities to respond to globalization.

Over recent years, place has come to play a central role in defining the character and quality of agricultural products as part of a response to globalization (Gade 2004: 848). As a result, a growing number of academics from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds and different national traditions have turned their attention to the concept of *terroir*.¹ The literature ranges from in-depth analysis of particular products to sociological and cultural approaches to the study of governance and political processes and their translation into the international arena. An analysis of *terroir* has permitted scholars to shed new light on the complex relationship between different levels of governance and between production and consumption and social actors and consumers.

Social anthropology has until recently occupied a marginal place in this debate, despite its primary role in contributing to the definition of the concept of *terroir* (Bérard & Marchenay 1995; Bessière 1998; Terrio 1996). Much of the debate has focused on 'giving insights into the processes by which typical products are bestowed with meaning [and] value and also tends to focus on production or supply rather than consumption' (Tregear 2003: 92). In their work, social scientists have traditionally defined *terroir* as a system in which complex interactions are created between a whole series of human factors, including technical or collective uses, agricultural production, and physical milieu. For most European anthropologists, on the other hand, *terroir* is expressed through the product to which it confers its originality (in the sense of typical product).² It is undeniable that the discipline has engaged constructively with the issue of *terroir* as very often anthropologists have been called upon to provide their expertise

on questions of origin, tradition, historical change, or notions of quality. The work of Laurence Bérard and Philippe Marchenay in France exemplifies the nature of the expertise involved in the recognition of labels or ‘Geographical Indications’ at national and European levels. *Terroir* is thus referred to as a spatial and ecological concept that ‘links together the actors, their histories, their social organizations, their activities, and, most importantly, their agricultural practices’ (Bérard *et al.* 2005).

Discussions about *terroir* originated on the European continent, and it is only recently that the subject has attracted the attention of American anthropologists, who have examined the validity of *terroir* as a social construction. The publication by Amy Trubek of a book entitled *The taste of place: a cultural journey into terroir* (2008) offers the perfect illustration of this trend, and in addition it provides evidence of major shifts in the conceptualization of *terroir*, as she places greater emphasis on cultural processes. Her work also offers a definition that goes beyond the classical interpretation encapsulated by the geologist James Wilson in his seminal book *Terroir: the role of geology, climate, and culture in the making of French wines* (1998). In the ten years that elapsed between these two publications, the definition of *terroir* shifted significantly and anthropology positioned itself relative to a debate originally dominated by geologists. In 1998, James Wilson, taking Burgundy³ as his case study (Fig. 1), asked: Why are the great vineyards of France located where they are? And: Why does one site produce a superior wine, while an adjacent plot that looks the same yield a lesser one? Most of Wilson’s argument is founded upon a geological interpretation emphasizing the natural conditions of the soil, and as a result the role of the *vignerons* (wine-growers) in recognizing differences between them is generally marginalized. He argued that:



Figure 1. View over the *climats* from Pernand-Vergelesses. (Photo by the author.)

It was in Burgundy that the realization came to me that it was not the surface geology alone that decides the better vineyards, but the combination of the elements of the vineyard habitat. I quickly learned that the natural history of wine would be a complex study, but the key factor would be geology (Wilson 1998: 5).

Indeed the concept of *terroir* has been applied to a variety of situations, generating very different interpretations. In her pioneering article, Barham (2003) argues that the notion of *terroir* focuses discussion on how old is made new and to what extent history is used to contribute to this social process. According to Barham,

[T]he historical *terroir* concept viewed wine production as a complex dance with nature with the goal of interpreting or translating the local ecology, displaying its qualities to best advantage. A great deal of knowledge about the local terrain is needed for success as well as respect for natural conditions that can be expressed through the wine (2003: 131).

She states that, following Bérard and Marchenay's work (1995), *terroir* appears to be a more flexible tool including the valued past without becoming either rigid or exclusionary.

Yet very few studies have actually examined the changing nature of the concept of *terroir* especially in relation to its so-called 'French birthplace' and the industry which provided its foundations, the wine sector. Nor has there been much questioning of the globalization of *terroir* and its counter-effects on the society from which it originated. *Terroir*, as rural heritage, is often presented as harmonious, coherent, respectful, original, natural, threatened, a setting in which people, space, and time are organically connected (Filippucci 2004: 79). The discourse on *terroir* has over the years become omnipresent, but the politics of *terroir* refers also to a process in which a wide range of actors have become involved in the social construction of the present, which, in turn, provides a platform for self-identification. Very few studies have sought to explore the strategic deployments of *terroir* in a precise geographical location, through a specific historical period, and around a particular product, wine.

I will argue that Burgundy and its *terroir* offer a remarkable example of the paradoxical effects of globalization and the complex interplay of global and local forces and how individuals mediate globalization at local level. While most of the anthropological literature has focused on exacerbating the production of local differences (Appadurai 1996: 50; Warnier 1999: 97) or representing space as a place of break, rupture, and disjunction, there has been less emphasis put on the isomorphism of space, place, and culture (Gupta & Ferguson 2002: 3) or on the role of specific individuals in guaranteeing the permanence of the fit. The erosion of the 'natural' connection between place and culture has undeniably taken centre stage in most analyses, leading us to think of a globalized world as a culture without space. Yet the local and the global feed upon and reinforce each other rather than being mutually exclusive, and the production of locality relies on imagination mediated by local agency, but articulated differently by individuals depending on their social positioning at local and global levels.

If we take the example of Burgundy, it could be argued that the vineyard has altered little since the 1930s in its physical nature, with stable landownership patterns and a social structure characterized by divisions between a small number of large landowners and the rest. Over the years, Burgundian producers have pursued a dual strategy, highlighting both place (Burgundy) and specificities, either the village (Pommard, Meursault, or Volnay) or even individual plots or wine-growers. Yet what might appear

to be production on a micro scale has international implications because an established local wine-grower can become a global icon through his/her recognition in guides such as that of Robert Parker.

A sense of permanence and fixity characterizes Burgundy and is even showcased through local wine tourism and the cultural *mise en scène* by selling authenticity, history, and tradition in a nostalgic fashion. Very few changes are visible to the naked eye of the anthropologist returning for an annual field trip, and it could be argued that globalization has not visibly affected the local wine industry. The façade of an unchanging place, ‘a *terroir* blessed by God’, remains superficially convincing, and the issue of how individuals mediate globalization seems almost incongruous in this context (Fig. 2). However, like other sectors, the wine industry has been affected by the intervention of foreign corporations or individuals buying French vineyards and ‘setting up shop’ (Trubek 2008: 85). The global financial markets have until very recently provided vast quantities of cash ‘to splash out’ on commodities such as wines, and Burgundy in this context is particularly sought after. Somewhat paradoxically, globalization has added lustre to the distinctiveness of Burgundian wines, highlighting the *savoir faire* of the wine-grower or the uniqueness of the vineyard, while at the same time exerting great pressure for the standardization of wine production by promoting grapes such as pinot noir and chardonnay. The greater standardization of wine techniques and viticultural practices has led to the negation of *terroir*, and awareness of this broader context is essential to understanding the strategies deployed at local level. *Terroir* is about protection, but it is also a tool to engage constructively with a global market and its literary, economic, and legal manifestations.



Figure 2. A sacralized land! (The Romanée Conti.) (Photo by the author.)

Terroir in Burgundy

Starting from the case study of an anthropological investigation of the Burgundian *terroir*, conducted over a period of twenty years, this article considers some of the major issues attached to the territorial construction and organization of French viticulture around the concept of *terroir*. The first part of the article discusses the plurality of representations encountered in Burgundian viticulture since the birth of the AOC (Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée) in the 1930s, demonstrating the growing role of *terroir* as a discursive tool through the historical reorganization of the wine profession. *Terroir* is about asserting and justifying differences at local and even micro levels and ultimately about acquiring social, economic, and political benefits from such claims. As we shall see, there has been a paradigm shift in French national and local discourses, from an explanation of *terroir* based upon natural geography to a recognition of the key role of the wine-grower in the production of quality wines. This shift has blurred some of the issues contributing to the definition of *terroir* and has led to a romanticized and essentialist approach to wine culture, in part as a defence mechanism against the impact of globalization. Yet the different notions of *terroir* nevertheless share an appeal to notions of unchanging place and of enduringness which are used to justify claims of authenticity and to consolidate established reputations by emphasizing the local and even the micro level of production.

The second part of the article focuses on how Burgundy in the context of its recent application for world heritage status emphasizes the micro level by claiming the right to global recognition. Burgundy uses heritage as a new means to serve the definition of specific micro-identities to counter globalization (Appadurai 1996: 50; Crenn & Téchoueyres 2004: 1). This is also part of a wider process of global recognition affecting most wine regions (Champagne is Burgundy's principal competitor) in their claim for more singularity. Indeed for French wine-growing regions, *terroir* has been a powerful tool in the hands of local elites as they have sought to protect their social and economic position. Far from being an unchanging, timeless geographical space, *terroir* is not only a vibrant, constantly changing discursive strategy for advancing the claims of individual, regional, and even national interests, but also a means of negotiating change by anchoring Burgundy wine in a fixed and territorially defined conception of nature. In Burgundy, globalization provides an opportunity for key actors to reinforce their position in international markets using the timeless imagery of *terroir* and even new concepts such as *climats* which in reality disguise changes and standardization in the local wine industry.

Shifting discourses on *terroir* in Burgundy: from *terroir* to *climats*

AOC recognition and the legal foundations of terroir

The concept of *terroir* in France is traditionally associated with the birth of AOC wines, and the history of denomination of origin provides the key to understanding the French wine market (Garcia-Parpet 2009: 18) and its definition of concepts of differentiated and hierarchized quality. The law of 1935 establishing the AOC was promulgated in a period of social and economic crisis and it privileged landowners, an artisanal model of production, and a natural conception of wine delineated by a specific area of production (Jacquet 2009). The social structure of Burgundy at the time was marked by a division between *vignerons* (peasants) owning plots but selling the grapes to *négociants*⁴ and wealthy elites, who, through the commercialization of their wines and the construction of a small niche clientele, sought to empower themselves by

contributing to the recognition of a wine hierarchy based primarily on the commercial and historical reputations of specific plots. The 1935 legislation consolidated this social hierarchy opposing traditional families (lineages) of local wine-growers defined by their peasant roots to the emergent entrepreneurial wine elites who would exercise their leadership by setting local norms and standards of quality through the ideology of *terroir*. One of the most successful achievements of the period was the regulation of the wine market by the wealthiest wine-growers and landowners to the detriment of the previously dominant *négociants*. The AOC and *terroir* ideology constructed by the wine elites reflected the existing social hierarchy but it worked to the advantage of many ordinary peasants, although their exclusion from the AOC negotiations meant that those with plots in the wrong places risked marginalization.

Jacquet (2009) has examined the establishment of the AOC label in Burgundy and cites 109 documents that were presented as part of the legal process leading to official recognition in 1935. Several categories could be identified, but what is important is that they all related to imagined, idealized, and traditionalized aspects of local viticulture and to the use of what were described as 'honest commercial practices'. That definition was not accidental and reflected the deep-rooted problem of adulteration and frauds. The legal documents themselves stressed the historical character of viticultural practices (price lists shown, for instance), their scientific recognition by national scholars or scientists, or previous classifications which had already established the mapping of the territory. In most cases, archival evidence was interpreted as proof of an established claim of quality. This dominant conception of *terroir* was driven by local landowners who were able to define the parameters of the debate, and it is unclear whether or not the less fortunate wine-growers shared the same ideology of *terroir* as the wealthy class of landowners of fine wines.

If I have mentioned this crucial period of the AOC legal recognition, it is because representations of *terroir* cannot be understood without making reference to these important initial debates. This strict definition of the past through 'usages locaux, loyaux, et constants' led to a redefinition of the market which was favourable to the landowners of fine wines and to a redefinition of the product. By the same token, the AOC system helped to fix the mythical image of an ahistorical *terroir* producing a wine with a taste unchanged since time immemorial. This view dominated the French wine industry until very recently, and has also been a major factor in the creation of an image of the wine-grower as the embodiment of traditional agrarian values and as a guarantor of quality. The wine-grower as an artisan and as a mediator and/or conduit of nature or *terroir* provides the foundation for the expression of a wine imaginary which has become a commonplace in several professional discourses (Amiel 2004: 83). He remains associated in the consumers' mind with the guarantee of quality, while the figure of the *négociant* is almost totally absent from discourses on wine and from the promotion of the region or *terroir*.

What emerges from this historical analysis of the establishment of the legislation in Burgundy is that despite the strongly unified image of Burgundy viticulture, the wealthiest landowners (especially those owning a monopoly) dominated the reorganization of the market, defining notions of quality, taste, and geographical origin and making sure that existing hierarchies were consolidated. Landownership is the key in that process as well as the historical reputations of specific plots. By the middle years of the twentieth century, *terroir* and the AOC legislation that underpinned it had become

a powerful ideology supporting the economic and social hierarchy of Burgundian wines, leaving little space for contestation.

From terroir to terroirs: reconciling nature and culture

From the 1970s onwards, with the revival of regionalism and ecological concerns, the concept of *terroir* became the pillar of French wine production and national drinking culture (Demossier 2010). *Terroir* was reinforced by the re-emergence of oenology and also the influence of geologists, who provided the scientific foundations for many of the claims made on their behalf. Geological determinism became a trump card in the recognition of quality wines, successfully obscuring the socio-political construction that made their legal emergence possible a few decades earlier. More than 400 French wine-producing areas have gained the AOC label over the past six decades, and every year new ones are added to the list (INAO 2001). The AOC system not only imposed itself throughout the wine-growing regions, but also rapidly became an economic tool for regional development in areas where modernization threatened local agricultural or food products. Over the years, the rhetoric of *terroir* has gained in prominence, and it could be argued that in Burgundy today it is part of the dominant discourse, despite a complex social configuration and a variety of situations behind the AOC. A romantic discourse of the local, the traditional, and the authentic has become commonplace in regional viticulture, articulated around the wine-grower as the paragon of quality and the historicization of specific places (Demossier 2010).

Over the last twenty years, I have been engaged in a wide-ranging and ongoing process of fieldwork in Burgundy. My initial research in the 1990s in the context of my Ph.D. concentrated on wine techniques and culture, and broadened later into an analysis of French wine consumption. Most recently, it has involved participation as an adviser for the region's application for UNESCO world heritage status coupled with systematic fieldwork conducted each summer for the last ten years. The opportunity to take a long-term research perspective has allowed me to mark the changes in professional and public discourses on viticulture and wine culture. During the 1990s, for example, Burgundian wine production was dominated by a growing scientific and technical discourse and *terroir* was widely acknowledged and used to explain the individuality of different plots of land, even when they were located only a few metres apart. *Terroir* was systematically cited by wine-growers, landowners, and wine merchants as the result of the primary influence of geology, which explained the reputation, the location, and the price of fine wines. There was a general consensus which recognized the supremacy of nature in determining quality. Land prices corroborated this hierarchy, with the value of plots varying from just 30,000 euros per hectare to as much 2,760,000 euros per hectare for the best locations (Agreste Bourgogne 2008: 4). The social hierarchy reflected to a greater extent the economic hierarchy.

During the 1990s, specialists of *terroir* such as Claude Bourguignon (1999) argued in the regional wine magazine *Bourgogne Aujourd'hui* for the need to look after vines in order to maintain quality wines. It was in the same period that the wine sector decided to organize a series of conferences on the issue of soils and their management. Fieldwork conducted at the time confirmed that there was an emerging discourse in the wine profession emphasizing the need to use fewer pesticides and other chemicals and to return to more natural and ecologically friendly techniques. This emphasis upon traditional methods was presented as a flagship for some of the most renowned vineyards

in the Côte d'Or such as the Romanée-Conti. Yet the majority of wine-growers knew little about these innovations, and the discourse of *terroir* provided a façade for a heterogeneous and constantly evolving professional wine community which was relying on a modern technical culture dominated by intensive agricultural methods.

When conducting fieldwork in the 1990s with a group of wine-growers, all of whom were landowners of fine wines, I was struck by the fact that they never directly used the expression 'traditional', but they always claimed to have seen techniques or actions practised, referring to generational transmission or to inter-group knowledge. Most of their know-how was reproduced by imitation rather than by empirical observation or personal decision-making. Quality was, for them, principally the result of an established hierarchy derived from the soil, and traditional meant reproducing what had been done in the past. A young wine-grower from Premeaux-Prissey, who took over the vineyards of his wife after the death of her father, continued to plant some unauthorized vines amongst his pinots noirs following his father-in-law's advice. Other cultural practices were presented as collective, although not all the wine-growers followed them rigorously. A case in point is *dodinage* in Meursault, in which white wines are stirred by hand using an iron bar during their maturation in oak barrels which is presented as traditional in this area and as a factor of quality, enabling wine to be oxygenated while it matures in the cellar. Only a minority of wine-growers decided to take away the leaves of the vine (described technically as *épamprer*) to limit wine production and thus increase quality in terms of concentration. These personalized techniques designed to improve quality did not always produce consensus, and the issue of productivity, in terms of how many litres of wine can be produced in a luxury market, remained central to the debates on quality.

The absence of a specific discourse on taste was even more striking, and when I was invited to join my informers for a wine-tasting in the cellar, the majority of them did not comment on the wines tasted, even when asked about them; instead, their description related to the vintage or specific weather events. When asked during one of the tastings about the specificities of a particular wine, I was told that the year had been cold and that September was rainy which created problems when harvesting. The concept of a taste belonging to a specific plot was not expressed and the emphasis was placed on the natural and geological characteristics of the vineyard rather than on the qualities of the final product. Taste was not articulated in a sophisticated way at the time because there was no normative discourse on taste in the wine market. Taste and its definition was first and foremost the prerogative of the *négociants*. This was interesting considering that most of these producers were already selling their wines directly to a clientele who according to them were keen to acquire more information about their products. When I commented upon this to a well-known local *négociant*, Pierre Poupon, who was also a wine writer, he responded without hesitation: 'Yes it is true most of them have never tasted other wines than their own and it is only since I began organizing local wine tastings in the 1970s that they realized their wines were different from those of their neighbours.' Despite this apparently patronizing comment, most of the wine-growers were indeed separated from the commercial side of their activity and produced their wines in association with local *négociants*. Thus taste and its expression were absent from definitions of *terroir* and quality.

This social structure was, however, increasingly challenged by a widening access to higher education, the difficulties of ensuring the transmission of the *domaine* (wine estate) within the lineage, and finally the arrival of new kinds of investors, notably the

banks. The wine market also experienced a period of greater prosperity, which was linked to the emergence of an international clientele of discerning consumers. Cultural knowledge followed these economic trends, accompanied by the background of a new French wine-drinking culture orientated towards quality wines (Demossier 2010). This younger generation of wine-growers proved eager to contest the traditional ideology of *terroir* (through wine-making, for example) and were defining themselves against their elders by trying to gain more knowledge through their involvement with the Groupe des jeunes professionnels de la vigne (Young Wine Professionals Association) as well as education and travel.

They are all now in charge of recognized vineyards, and what distinguished them from others of the same generation was their identity crisis either as 'one of the possible successors amongst siblings' or as 'a female inheritor' or as 'a successor in a phase of transition and crisis'. At the time, they could not reproduce some of the skills and techniques valued in the local milieu as they were perceived as outsiders, and were not therefore able to locate themselves in a specific network. They represented a new generation of wine-growers more critical towards the past and of the methods used by their predecessors. It is therefore possible to argue that before the 1990s, taste and the whole gustatory discourse marked a point of division between the social elites and the ordinary *vignerons*, but it was a distinction that was already beginning to break down.

Burgundian culture in the late twentieth century was defined by a concept of *terroir* based on the AOC system and underpinned by a belief in the determining power of geology, which was itself confirmed by the price of land. This construction worked to the advantage of local elites and tended to be rather conservative as the soil was at the core of this ideology. However, following the growth of the wine market and under the impact of generational changes and the development of wine education, more wine-growers wanted to make their own wine, bottle, and sell it. As a result, they began to be open to the idea of taste, engaging more actively in the making of better-quality wine and contesting more openly the role of geology in the definition of quality. It led to a challenge to the classic definition of *terroir* based upon land, tradition, and soil with a new emphasis on the wine-grower, who emerged as the key to unleashing the potential of the vineyards. With the proliferation of international wine guides and a genuinely global market, successful wine-growers have established themselves as major actors in their own right.

Towards globalization: UNESCO and the climats

The recent project of applying for UNESCO recognition of the *climats* of Burgundy for world heritage status and the debate surrounding it offers an insight into the continuing strength of a traditional model of *terroir* amongst intellectual and cultural elites. The project was put together by the region of Burgundy, the department of Côte d'Or, the towns of Beaune and Dijon, the BIVB (Bureau Interprofessionnel des Vins de Bourgogne), and the Confrérie des Chevaliers du Tastevin. The owner of the Domaine de la Romanée Conti (widely known as DRC⁵) is the president of the association established to campaign for UNESCO recognition, and most of the meetings have taken place under his leadership. What is striking is the absence of any significant contribution from the wine-growers to the development of the Burgundian campaign, which defines itself as 'different from Champagne, which decided to play the *terroir* card'. Burgundian elites, especially the leading landowners associated with local politicians, have decided to construct a historical narrative around the notion of

climats,⁶ an ill-defined term but one that is embodied in imagined notions of an enduring and thus authenticated social configuration.

The project began in 2008 with a series of prestigious conferences organized in the Clos de Vougeot, which followed the creation of a UNESCO Chair in the 'Cultures and Traditions of Wine' attached to the University of Dijon and the Institut Jules Guyot. Following this international mapping of Burgundy, four workshops were organized to cover different disciplinary areas and experts were appointed to provide a report on geology (by a professor of geology), history (Olivier Jacquet, previously cited), economics (two academics from the Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique in Dijon), and finally, anthropology (a report that I was commissioned to write after that produced by the economists was not judged as 'sufficient' for the overall submission). These reports were asked to respond to the criteria set by UNESCO for sites of international recognition, and the experts had to use their expertise to build an argument in relation to the notion of *climats*, defined by the scientific committee of the association as the cornerstone of the application. For the cultural partners in charge of the overall project (GRAHAL, Paris: www.grahal.fr/accueil/index.php), a discussion of the universal, exceptional, and representative character of the Côte d'Or vineyards was the central preoccupation. The concept of resilience – defined as the ways that Burgundian communities have coped with the location of the vineyards and thus the difficult nature of growing wine at its climatic limits – was often cited as one of the points to be addressed by the experts.

During the meeting organized for the presentation of the socio-economic and anthropological reports, the president of the association, responding to some of the points I had raised during our discussions, defined *terroir* by referring to the work of wine-growers, which, he claimed, was inspired by a philosophy and a vision which he named the 'génie bourguignon' (Burgundian spirit), a term already widespread in the Burgundian folkloric literature of the 1930s:⁷ 'This is the *génie Bourguignon!* Generations of work in the vineyards by wine-growers who have accumulated a wealth of experience, which each generation has benefited from, but has also improved through constant refinements previously brought by empirical knowledge and today by science'. This romantic and nostalgic vision of *terroir*, which is still common in public discourse not only in Burgundy, but also on French vineyards more generally, neglects the socio-political realities of knowledge and of its transmission in the wine sector. I have shown elsewhere how this knowledge is dependent upon specific social networks which are themselves defined by the positioning of the individual in a specific community and by his/her social and cultural capital (Demossier 1999).

The anthropologist Robert C. Ulin (2002: 691) has argued that the relationship between artisanship and science is a point of conflict and tension in the self-definition of wine-growing culture, and thus a cultural view of work and self-identity that is differentiated acknowledges both the potential and the constraints of power. Indeed, different fields of social action establish both limits and possibilities for the growers, and *terroir* has to be analysed in relation to these constraints. An elitist discourse centred on *climats* constructed on a combination of geological and historical arguments confirms the supremacy of the vision of the elite landowners. When I asked the research officer in charge of the project to organize a focus group to discuss my hypothesis, insisting on having all the various social groups represented, only the president of the association and the prestigious established wine merchant, the Family D, attended with some local personalities, politicians, and representatives of the wine

industry. Wine-growers were absent from any of the discussions during the different stages of the process. When questioned about the elitist nature of the project, the president argued that ‘we need to use only one word, “wine-grower”; there are no small or big wine-growers, but only the accomplishment of a collective work transcending any sociological tensions’. Yet the history and ethnography of Burgundy demonstrate that social and cultural conflicts are endemic, and throughout the process I was reminded of the less than collective nature of the enterprise.

The three historical periods analysed provide us with an insight into some of the issues at stake when analysing *terroir*. Following Moran (1993), *terroir*, tradition, and authenticity are strategically employed to privilege certain actors and modes of development. The bid for UNESCO recognition is very revealing of how the concept of *terroir* in Burgundy continues to evolve and to signify the existence of social and cultural divisions. The elites see themselves as part of a happy united world of *vignerons* and the notion of *climat* seems to add a further coat of varnish to a rosy picture. Yet it does not in any meaningful way engage with wine-growers, or with those who are not in possession of the best plots. The process has, however, benefited the majority of wine producers, and the UNESCO campaign is another example of the shift of *terroir* to consolidate the economic positioning of the elites at a time of drastic European reforms and global changes. The majority of the wine-growers will only realize the impact of such initiatives in the longer term, and without really having embraced or contested what is underpinning the shift in the *terroir* ideology.

Against the background of globalization, which is for the majority of wine-growers a synonym for acute competition, business failures, and anxiety, local actors have developed strategies to use global forces to redefine in their own terms part of the local environment (Crenn & Téhoueyres 2004). Using a rhetoric emphasizing *terroir* not only as a natural and ecological concept, but also as a historicized and heritagized construction of place, the wine-growers create a suggestive and powerful image that can be passed on, narrated to, or consumed by a discerning group of consumers. This powerful construction is partly inspired by what is happening in other wine areas such as New Zealand or California. By the same token, the wine-growers reinvest this already emblemized place with another set of values and meanings which encompass past and present practices, local and global representations echoing other contemporary preoccupations. It is after all about place-making in an interconnected world where globalization remains translated and interpreted in local terms. This production of locality, however, does not benefit all members of the community in the same way.

Questioning the Burgundian model of *terroir*: the Côte d’Or

Given the nature of the historical evolution of the Burgundian vineyards and their hierarchical character, the categories I have decided to use for mapping the social configuration of the wine region have to be treated with caution as they are in many ways fluid and not rigidly defined. It is, however, possible to identify three main categories of social actors who dominate the imaginary construction of locality at global level: wine-growers, landowners, and oenologists. Discourses and representations of *terroir* can be presented as socially localized and defined, but they are also historically constructed and can be displayed to suit different interests. As part of the discourse on *terroir*, other discourses have contributed to maintain the representations emanating from elite culture since the first establishment of the AOC, and they are part

of the wider societal context in which *terroir* operates. The embeddedness of local and global issues provides a platform from which to question the circulation and flux of images and ideologies attached to wine culture.

Wine-growers

The dominant figure of the wine-grower as a cultural icon of the French *terroir* is an important element in the process of reinventing and reconstructing the French nation through the region (Demossier 2010). As we have seen, the wine-grower has recently been reborn as an icon of modernity, a national hero of our time, a symbol of a civilization threatened by globalization, but also as the figure synthesizing the ambiguous paradoxes of global and regional identities. Television programmes, newspapers, books, and exhibitions have, since the 1980s, devoted considerable attention to the *vigneron*, a character exemplified by Aimée Guibert in the internationally renowned 2004 documentary *Mondovino* or by the publication in 2002 of *Les nouveaux vignerons* by Rigaux and Bon. This cult of the wine-grower is distinguished by the voice given to them by writers or filmmakers in relation to specific issues, identifying them as unique characters. The emphasis is put on the authenticity of the wine-producer, his story, his family history, tradition, and artisanship. Very few, if any, women are chosen to illustrate the modern wine-grower. He is very often filmed or photographed in his rural setting wearing his working clothes or in front of his estate with his family, his wife and children next to him. His accent is nearly always edged with regional intonations and his strong personality emerges through the interview. He is presented as 'honest' and 'true', a solid citizen. The image of the peasant well theorized by the work of Susan Carol Rogers (1987) has therefore been replaced by that of the wine-grower who represents continuity and helps to mask the pain and loss of cultural change (Demossier 2010).

Although a discursive and essentialist element of the 'rural idyll' (Howland 2008), the wine-grower is not a recent invention. Gilles Laferté (2006), in his study of Burgundy and its wines during the inter-war period, has demonstrated that a regionalist folklore focusing on the wine-grower as the paragon of quality and authenticity was promoted by local elites as part of a strategy designed to integrate them into the national economy. For Laferté, the interaction between folklore and economy was more subtle as the image of the producers of quality wines was imposed alongside that of the region, this fusion being illustrated by the cellar which was the main focus of the Burgundian pavilion at the Universal Exhibition of 1937 and seen as the incarnation of various conflicting values between elite culture and folklore (2006: 200-5). At the regional level, the figure of the wine-grower was omnipresent in parallel with the formation of a local identity, integrating the transformation of the nation as a commodity.

Going beyond this national and regional construction by focusing on the vernacular representations of *terroir* adds a new dimension to the debate. In Burgundy, wine-growers generally defined themselves as the 'workers of the land', and even if this category has become fashionable in public discourse, wine-growers differentiate amongst themselves, identifying those who work the land from the rest. The emphasis is placed on direct contact with vines, the hard labour and the micro-knowledge wine-growers have acquired of their plots. The experience of many years of intensive fieldwork makes it clear that the majority of wine-growers are in agreement with this definition.

However, when it comes to landowners who own but do not work the plots, employing a workforce instead, they tend to emphasize the symbolic and moral value of ‘work’ as a way of belonging to the local professional community. On several occasions during the UNESCO meetings, the president reminded us of the importance of using the term *vigneron*. ‘I am a *vigneron*, and D.L [another very well-known producer from Meursault] is also a *vigneron*, is it not the case, D?’ Yet when tasting wine in his cellar, it became clear that he was not involved directly in the cultivation of his vines. The key issue in terms of social stratification and discourses produced here is that of landownership and economic positioning in an era of intense European and international debates on *terroir*. Following Robert C. Ulin (1996), in Burgundy as in Bordeaux, work and labour are fundamental values underpinning the self-identification of wine-growers in a world where both are becoming contested by ‘flying wine-makers’, capitalism, and the standardization of technologies.

Considering the historical transformations of the Burgundian wine region, it is easy to see why wine-growers emphasized work on their land as a central element of their self-identification (Fig. 3). Since the phylloxera⁸ crisis in Burgundy during the 1870s and 1880s, and especially the first half of the twentieth century, landownership has been a sign of their social emancipation. It is also crucial to point out that, for the majority of wine-growers, making and selling wine became central to their self-definition only very recently, for most since the Second World War. As previously noted, I met several wine-growers who were unable to produce a specific discourse on their wines when tasting them. *Terroir* was figuratively evoked, but there was no direct connection



Figure 3. The reinvention of an artisanal and natural tradition. (Photo by the author.)

between soil and tastes. The link was established later through the emergence of the wine experts and guides in the literary field, as the work of Jean-Luc Fernandez (2004) illustrates.

Most wine-growers started to taste wines amongst themselves and to present their products for competitions and fairs as recently as the 1990s. In terms of a specific discourse on *terroir*, wine-growers' representations were indeed very often mediated by other elite groups or individuals at regional or national level. As yet there are to my knowledge no examples of wine-growers who have acquired a literary reputation, but there are other wine professionals who have achieved this status, such as landowners, sommeliers, and local politicians. It is, therefore, striking that the dominant discourse on wine-growers and *terroir* is that of other social actors who have mediated the knowledge they have acquired through contact with the producers. In Burgundy, the examples of Jean-François Bazin⁹ or Jacky Rigaux, 'voice of the *terroir*', illustrate this growing visibility of wine specialists.

Most landowners play the local, traditional, and natural cards even when they are almost entirely detached from their social environments, do not cultivate their vines, or do not even make their wines themselves. This strategy echoes global images constructing quality wines elsewhere. In its publicity, a multinational wine producer such as Gallo uses the image of the granddaughter of the company's founder set against a vineyard, attempting to tie a global multinational to a place and to identify it with a wine imaginary of tradition. In this way it has benefited from the construction of the wine-grower as an emblem of quality and authenticity at global level. As I have argued elsewhere (Demossier 2010), the ethos of the wine-grower as a professional is constructed around the hegemonic assertion of authenticity, even when his wine-making and wine-growing techniques are very modern or leave, in some cases, little space for his/her intervention. For a wine-grower, working your plot defines you as a member of the community, as a peasant who still has a link with the *terroir* and some ties to the local community. However, this conception has been increasingly challenged by the consequences of economic and commercial success or by the integration of key players into global networks, which in turn has led to a questioning of the organization of the community.

The traditional image of the *vigneron* has prevailed for decades, and this despite the intense modernization of French agriculture and the pressures of globalization, which threatens the concept of *terroir*. Even if modernity has become the key element of the wine industry, the emphasis is nevertheless on the imagined, idealized, and seemingly enduring links with nature. The image of authenticity is widely shared by the various actors of the wine sector, and marketing practice refers to it as one of the main elements marking the specificity of French wines. In Burgundy, playing all of these cards while maintaining the fixity of the *terroir* and emphasizing, to the extreme, the definition of place at the micro level as a commodity linking visually a plot and a bottle guarantees future success for some of the key players in the international arena.

Landowners and négociants

When discussing discourses on *terroir*, it is clear that if the AOC legislation has benefited a whole range of producers from landowners to wine-growers, the discourse on *terroir* has remained largely the prerogative of a small group of elites at the heart of the political process. The situation described by Olivier Jacquet (2009) for the 1930s has not altered drastically, and his argument that the definition of excellence has relied upon

the use of history to claim the uniqueness of a specific geological place is compelling. In this process, landowners and *négociants* have reinforced their position especially in relation to the acquisition of the best plots. Today most *négociants* also own vineyards, and because of their commercial networks they are better connected and are able to promote and market their wines more efficiently. They also play a major role in terms of leadership and in defining excellence within the professional group, and landowners are very often identified as the best wine-growers and their vini/viticultural techniques are more or less well known.

Ingredients other than *terroir* are nevertheless necessary to produce excellence in a competitive international market. Rarity and efficient marketing (or not marketing at all as a strategy) are also the principal elements making the reputation of a product. The Domaine de la Romanée Conti, a quasi-monopoly, considered by some to produce the best wines in the world, argues strongly for the use of 'traditional techniques' as a means of preserving the quality of the soil. The Domaine's vineyards are managed using biodynamic principles and organic agriculture, with tractors recently being replaced by horses to reduce the compaction of soil. Yields are very low, at around 25 hl/hectare, and they harvest the grapes later than most vineyards in Burgundy. Minimum intervention in the winery allows an entirely 'natural' vinification. The Domaine in its publicity emphasizes that it has a private supply of oak from the Tronçais forests and 100 per cent new oak is used; maturation time depends on the quality of the vintage. There is no filtration, and if racking of the lees¹⁰ is required, this is done by gravity from cask to cask, never by pump. *Terroir* is here presented as a philosophy, the quintessence of quality, and for the owner of the DRC, co-manager of the estate:

This was all done by people. It was not a question of the *terroir* saying I am very good and you are going to make a great wine with me. No it was people for historical and all sorts of reasons who were led to make wine here, but they had in their heads the idea of making a great wine, and they learned to take the handicaps, the difficulties (because after all, this is the limit for pinot maturity) and transform them into an advantage.

This vision of *terroir* is shared by a handful of emblematic landowners, most of them the third or fourth generations of educated, well-travelled, and eloquent inheritors of the best plots in Burgundy who are keen to distinguish themselves further from other Burgundian wine-producers who have now acquired technical knowledge and commercial reputations. They have all been trained as oenologists or have graduated from the French *grandes écoles*. The example given by the website *École du Vin et des Terroirs* (School of Wine and Terroir) located in Puligny-Montrachet, another emblematic village espousing the virtues of *terroir*, summarizes the main ingredients incarnated by this vision. Experts in organic wines or in bio-dynamic production methods, they present their views on the soil and how to manage it most effectively. The esoteric dimension of the teaching is underlined, and most contributors are well known in the local milieu for their ecological positioning. It is also interesting to note that some of them, such as D.L., cited previously, are sitting on the scientific committee discussing the application to UNESCO for recognition of the *climats* of Burgundy. What they emphasize is the significance of nature or what they define as natural despite the fact that the vineyards of the Côte d'Or have been continuously remodelled by human intervention for at least 2,000 years.

The experience of years of fieldwork has convinced me that in terms of wine-making competence, knowledge, and skill, the situation is extremely heterogeneous and each

individual story is unique in its own right. Yet there is also clearly a common technical culture of looking after your vineyards and making wine. A wider process of negotiated social differentiation and distinction has occurred, although wine-growing is the field of action in which different viticultural practices define the wine-maker as artisan and the guarantor of the true expression of *terroir*. According to the president of the Association pour la Reconnaissance des Climats de Bourgogne (Association for the Application of Burgundy to World Heritage Status) and co-owner of the DRC: ‘There is a hierarchy of *climats* that is based more on the capacity of such and such *climats* to enable the wine-grower to create each year a quality wine, if he has worked well on his plot. This is the key for a *grand vin*’.

What is obvious is that some claims of excellence are more successful than others and that success is dependent upon how they have been integrated into wider local, national, and global discourses – tradition, authenticity, or the wine-grower as the paragon of quality – or how they have struck a chord with particular groups such as discerning international consumers. These examples demonstrate the strategic deployment of differently imagined and idealized notions of *terroir* from production to consumption in an array of different social and geographical contexts that are responsive to and contingent upon varying moral/economic, social, and political modalities over time. What is emphasized is minimum human and technological intervention and an appreciation of nature/*terroir* as mediated through the wine, which contrasts with the global and uniform technical perspective promoted by oenologists.

Oenologists

The development of oenology as a profession has contributed significantly to the transformation of wine and wine culture. First established in the nineteenth century, oenology was revived and popularized by Émile Peynaud, founder of the Station Oenologique de Bordeaux. Generations of Bordelais have been trained to taste wine, many of them working as professionals in the industry, and from the 1970s the same occurred in Burgundy, where Max Léglise was the initiator of a similar revolution. Through his best-selling book *Le goût du vin* (*The taste of wine*), published in 1980, Peynaud succeeded in imposing the oenologist as the key scientific expert in wine-tasting. Today, oenology is the scientific branch of the profession, and generations of oenologically trained and institutionally certified wine-growers and wine-makers have been formed in Bordeaux, Dijon, and elsewhere. It has also become one of the major cultural activities by which wine-lovers learn about the art of wine-tasting.

Perhaps surprisingly, wine-growers in Bordeaux and Burgundy were initially reluctant to embrace oenology (Ulin 2002: 700), and many refused to abandon their traditional methods and were suspicious of the outsiders who were held up to them as a source of modern scientific expertise. The generation of young wine-growers who have been trained at the local *lycée viticole* of Beaune incarnates this traditional group, which was still very wary of the rising power of the oenologist. When interviewed in the 1990s, most of my informers underlined that the oenologist was ‘the wine doctor’, who was called upon only in case of a specific problem or to check the final stages of vinification (fermentation during the wine-making process). For these wine-growers, maintaining control of the work process was crucial, especially in the context of their recent development of the commercial side of the *domaine*. However, amongst this same generation, it was becoming increasingly common to attend training courses at the local university in order to obtain the *Diplôme National d’Oenologie*, which was perceived as

the most valuable scientific diploma at national level. These wine-growers are to some extent the leaders in the field and they also occupy a central position in local viticulture. They are very well connected to different segments of the wine industry and are generally the most willing to experiment with wine-making, and they are, interestingly enough, firm believers in the concept of *terroir*, as well as being actively involved in local matters contributing to the regional dynamism of Burgundian viticulture, maintaining links to their university and travelling to different wine-producing countries, especially the USA, Australia, and New Zealand.

Robert C. Ulin has argued that tensions between wine-growing as an artisanal practice and wine-growing as a science are amongst the defining features of French viticulture (2002: 700). Ulin also argues that a generational schism, a trope which none the less embodies the relationship between knowledge and power, dominated the discourses of wine-growers (2002: 701). This goes further in Burgundian viticulture as the schism operates along class lines. Access to education and training in France is first and foremost an issue of social reproduction, and in Burgundy the acquisition of professional wine qualifications determines your positioning as a wine-grower in specific technical and social networks. These divisions were all inscribed in a rhetoric on *terroir* where quality, location, and the hard work of the wine-grower, encapsulated by the expression 'beautiful vines',¹¹ provided a platform for self-definition which suited most of the local producers. However, going beyond this collective discourse engrained in the AOC system, it became clear that diverse representations of *terroir* coexisted and that issues of generation, gender, social profile, connections, and education were at the core of these disparities.

For some, *terroir* provided a convenient veil behind which to hide the traditional and unquestioned inheritance of the *domaine* through the lineage, while for others it became a way of redefining questions of quality and of creating the opportunities to improve what was already provided by the AOC law of 1935. Yet *terroir* and its expression in the form of a unique taste in the case of Burgundy is a strategically deployed myth and cannot be grasped without understanding the historical social structure in place and the fields of knowledge which enable specific individuals to consolidate their dominant positions. Elites and wealthy landowners sought to empower themselves at different historical periods by taking into their hands the ideology of *terroir* and moving it forward in relation to their changing economic situation. The access to oenology was a key factor in the process of differentiation between the various groups as it enabled the elites to produce a discourse on taste which referred directly to *terroir*. While they still define the *terroir* ideology in conservative terms, they nevertheless offer an open space for contesting its definition.

Conclusion

Historically speaking, the concept of *terroir* is rooted in the social, political, and economic development of the French vineyards and their legal protection as a particular parcel of land with specific characteristics of soil that are revealed through the work of the producer defined as an artisan. Far from encapsulating a fixed and monolithic view of French vineyards, it has evolved into a broader category defining the distinctive character of French rural production with atomized landownership, a system promoting agrarian values and artisanship at a time of major agricultural change and rapid industrialization. The use of ideas about place to make arguments about quality became increasingly important in the twentieth century and it was adopted as part of

a sustained socio-political movement to protect French agricultural products from internal and external forces.

The Burgundian campaign for UNESCO recognition sheds light on the recent changes affecting the idea of *terroir* in the context of increasing competition for wine regions to be given world heritage status against the background of the globalization of the wine industry. It is undeniable that an idealized history plays an important strategic role in definitions or political quarrels about the nature of *terroir* and also quality by emphasizing the allegedly unique attributes of a specific site. By telling a story of a seemingly collective and well-organized community, which in reality was heterogeneous and fractious, the Burgundian elites have created a sense of belonging and have mobilized specific values to foster solidarity, rootedness, and cohesion while at the same time confirming their own individual economic and social status and selling their uniqueness at global level. Despite their turbulent history, and against the grain of individualism which characterized Burgundy, *terroir* has facilitated a process of consolidation between the various actors and has facilitated the emergence of a set of values in which different interests are protected in the international arena. Burgundy has deployed a wide range of internal and external strategies to ensure its economic prosperity. While *terroir* remains the trump card at local, national, and global levels, the campaign for UNESCO recognition by using the *climat* argument (historical depth of the place combined with a micro-identification and a wine-grower) introduces a new set of values and meanings which embrace international preoccupations and ensure that the heritage factor will add further value to the place and the product.

Terroir in French viticulture as incarnated by the law of 1935 and as a system of representations provides a fascinating example of how a concept rooted in authenticity, tradition, history, and the past can be employed as a dynamic differentiated economic tool. Used in this way, it facilitates the anchorage of specific skilled communities and encourages the quest for excellence by providing a multidimensional space in which individual producers can locate themselves to suit their own purposes. The fact that the current global context has facilitated its success and has encouraged the circulation and consolidation of specific regional discourses and the recognition of particular actors in wine culture is another trump card. *Terroir* thus provides a window into the mechanisms by which societies are able to use globalization and modernity to suit their own purpose, and the recent bids by Burgundy and Champagne for UNESCO world heritage status suggest that they will continue to do so.

Yet, as the example of Burgundian *climats* demonstrates, beneath the seemingly harmonious discourse of *terroir* lies a far more heterogeneous and imaginative society. Place can be a powerful marketing tool in the wine industry, and employing the sort of constructions of space that emphasize micro-local distinctivenesses and their resultant products is one powerful strategy to exploit monopoly rents of these unique places (Overton 2010: 759). If the UNESCO bid is successful, it will undoubtedly ensure that the 'natural' connection between place and culture remains at the core of what defines Burgundian wines in an international context. In Burgundy this has been pushed to the extreme as the notion of *climats* represents a further step in claiming distinctive quality. Yet it is likely that *terroir* management and discourse will mainly benefit the wealthy elites, which will in turn increase the monopoly value of their already enhanced plots. In the internationally renowned film *Mondovino*, an anxious wine-grower declares, 'Uniformity will mean the death of Burgundy'. History suggests that he has nothing to worry about!

NOTES

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¹ For a coverage of the literature on *terroir*, see the recent selected contributions: Barham, (2003); Gade (2004); Overton & Heitger (2008); Tregear (2003); Trubek (2008).

² Translated from Casabianca *et al.* (2005).

³ By Burgundy, Wilson means the emblematic Côte d'Or, a small part of the Burgundian vineyard which covers around twenty villages and sixty different AOCs. Both the Ph.D. and the recent UNESCO fieldwork concentrated on this portion of territory. Ethnographic fieldworks were conducted between 1990 and 1994 in the context of a Ph.D. in social anthropology and then subsequently in 1999 and 2003-4 during two periods of study leave awarded respectively by the University of Bath and the British Academy (Large Research Grant 35396) and more recently in 2008 when contributing to the UNESCO panel of experts.

⁴ The *négociants* are defined as the French for 'merchant' or 'dealer', used in the wine world to refer to a person or firm that sells and ships wine as a wholesaler. The extent of the role played by this intermediary has expanded historically. Traditionally, *négociants* bought, matured, sometimes blended, and then bottled and shipped wine. Over time, the role increased to include purchasing grapes and making wine.

⁵ Romanée Conti is generally classed amongst the world's greatest and most expensive wines.

⁶ The final UNESCO report underlines the notion of *climats* in Burgundy as a local translation of *terroir*, an academic and scientific term coined to identify the characteristics of a small portion of the territory and its uniqueness. In Burgundy, the *terroir* has been delineated and divided to the extreme and small areas have been named and hierarchized. More than 1,000 *climats* have been defined in Burgundy, especially in the Côte d'Or. For more information, consult the following website: www.climats-bourgogne.com.

⁷ See, for example, Gaston Roupnel and the idea of 'génie bourguignon' (Whalen 2001).

⁸ The phylloxera was a small insect that was responsible for the most devastating plague in wine history. A native of North America, it was imported to Europe and most of the vineyards were destroyed as a result. People called it 'the black disease'. Attempts to combat it with carbon disulphide made some headway, but it was the United States which, having sent France the disease, sent it the cure. The vine-stocks were replaced with naturally resistant American stocks and these were then grafted with scions of traditional French grape varieties.

⁹ Jean-François Bazin has written extensively on Burgundy and its wines. He has also contributed to the *Guide Hachette* and is one of the local figures in the world of Burgundy wines.

¹⁰ Racking is the process of siphoning the wine off the lees (dead yeast) into a clean barrel. Racking allows clarification and helps in stabilization. The racking process is repeated several times during the ageing of wine.

¹¹ For most of the producers, the notion of 'beautiful vines' lies not only in the aesthetic of the landscape, but above all in the amount of work invested in looking after the plot, tidying it up, pruning it and making visible the direct quantity of work done.

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Au-delà du *terroir* : construction territoriale, discours hégémoniques et viticulture en France

Résumé

À partir de l'étude anthropologique de la viticulture en Bourgogne, l'auteure examine les principales questions liées à la construction territoriale de l'industrie viticole française autour de la notion de *terroir*. Elle présente les différents déploiements stratégiques de cette notion rencontrés dans la viticulture bourguignonne depuis les années 1990, et avance l'idée d'un changement paradigmatique avec le passage de l'argument géologique à la reconnaissance du viticulteur comme médiateur de l'expression du *terroir*. On observe en outre une tendance à utiliser le *terroir* comme outil de gouvernance locale, aboutissant à une homogénéité et à un enracinement tout en donnant aux villageois locaux les moyens de répliquer à la mondialisation.

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