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Consuming Wine in France

The ‘wandering’ drinker and the ‘vin-anomie’

Marion Demossier

In two of the most important publications devoted to the anthropological approach towards the drinking of alcohol (Douglas 1987, De Garine and De Garine 2001), it has been argued that drinking has to be studied in a comparative context and that anthropologists have a distinctive perspective to offer on this social act. For Mary Douglas, the specificity of the anthropological perspective is to examine drinking as a 'constructive' activity, a way of life, one element of a given culture (Douglas 1987: 3), while, for De Garine, drinking endorses a negative as well as a positive activity (De Garine and De Garine 2001: 2). According to both authors, anthropologists have traditionally turned their attention to the issue of drinking as a 'social act performed in a recognised social context' (Douglas 1987: 4). Yet few studies have focused on drinking as a marker of national and regional identity and as a complex field for asserting and negotiating questions of competition, power, identity and social ordering, that is to say as a 'field for action' (Douglas 1984: 30). It is also true that most of the studies presented in these multi-authored volumes have employed traditional ethnographic methods which focus upon a specific fieldwork or locale. However, the complexity of the national or regional character of drinking or even the issue of changes affecting it have been largely ignored by anthropologists. The recent volume edited by Peter Scholliers (2001) addressed some of these issues from a historical perspective.

This essay aims to challenge some of the traditional ethnographic methods employed in these studies by exploring, through a multisided ethnography, the

complex position of wine in France, which is defined as a single national alcoholic drink (French wine) as ‘a national treasure’ (Ulin 1995: 524) and, at the same time, as a plural drink (French wines) expressing a whole range of social relations and referring to a complex and dynamic set of meanings and values. As Loubère has noted, ‘all the regional wine economies were strongly influenced by geographic, economic and cultural ties to the Nation (Ulin translating Loubère 1995: 523). By employing the technique of a multisited ethnography as defined by Douglas Holmes (2000), it is possible to analyse different cultural perspectives on drinking as a place for the production, performance, expression and reception of drinking cultures. The practice of wine drinking and the culture attached to it provides a space for the renegotiation of social ordering and defines the changing relationship between national and regional identities in France. In this context, ethnography offers a fruitful way to explore the dynamic and fragmented character of this complex social act embodying attributes of social organisation and general culture.

This chapter is based upon ten years of participant observation¹ of wine production in France and uses a fragmented and multisited ethnography encompassing wine festivals, wine fairs, wine clubs, wine expertise and extensive interviews with professionals in the wine trade. The main aim is to use ethnographic research in order to examine what Wilson (see introduction to this volume) has described as the wider cultural formations and expressions of power and identity related to wine drinking culture and their dynamics. The intention is to explore different aspects of the diversity of meanings, discourses and actions encountered in relation to the concept of ‘wine drinking culture’ as a cultural object as defined by Gusfield (1987: 75). This is understood as a ‘cultural production’ (in the sense underlined by Ulin 2002), as ‘a medium in which other levels of categorisation become manifest’ (Douglas 1984: 30),

as a national and regional emblem that is expressed through both the media of literature and scholarship and patterns of consumption. Using a series of detailed ethnographies of wine culture, including the composition of the *Guide Hachette*, the spring fair of *Caves Particulières*, the wine festival of the *Saint Vincent tournante* and a multisited ethnography of drinking places, this article will address the complex and dynamic nature of wine drinking in France by discussing the ambiguities raised by a declining wine drinking culture set against the background of the constant work of 'cultural production' led by specific national and regional social actors to construct drinking wine as 'an ideal world' (Douglas, 1987: 11). In consuming wine, there are a number of values and social representations which act as cultural markers indicating the main elements that define French national and regional identities. It could be argued that when consuming wine, the drinker imbibes tradition, time, space and authenticity trying to establish a core of common values which will enable them to define their common identity. What is at stake here is the balance of power between producers and consumers, experts, connoisseurs and what I shall define as wandering drinkers and last but not least, national and regional identities in the context of French society. French national identity which could be identified by the consumption of a single ordinary type of wine has seen its sphere of influence challenged by the increasing consumption of quality wines attached to specific wine growing regions. In this context, the concept of regional identity has come to the fore through this new type of consumption and could be seen as a new medium for social differentiation and identification. Drinking is central to our sense of individual identity, beliefs and collective representations. I would argue that through the consumption of wine and by choosing which wine to buy, when and how or with whom to drink it, individuals are actively engaged in a process of identity-building.

Wine drinking culture in France

Through its soil, its people, its history, its culture, customs, daily life, literature or songs, France is inextricably linked to the vine and to wine

(Durand 1994: 820; my translation)

Wine drinking and the culture associated with it, are for many an essential part of what it means to be French. According to no less an authority than Theodore Zeldin, ‘the part wine played in life [at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of 20th century] was indeed as considerable and as complex as that of political and social ideas’ (1977: 755). Roland Barthes (1973), has reached similar conclusions defining wine as a ‘totem drink’ underlining its seminal importance to French culture. Drinking wine remains a national technique with its associated sociability, self control and culture of moderation defining an important part of what it means to be French. For French people, wine or more precisely the love of good wines, characterises Frenchness in much the same way as being born in France, fighting for liberty or speaking French². The *cliché* of the French people as a nation of wine connoisseurs remains widespread within France and outside. This image of a strong national wine drinking culture still prevails in the national imagination despite the changes affecting wine production and consumption. Most of the French literature on wine has, until recently, been written by historians, social scientists, experts, connoisseurs and politicians who continue to repeat the traditional story³. Yet the seemingly impregnable position of the ‘civilisation’ of wine has started to come under attack, and it is time to ask if the existence of a distinctive French wine culture is a myth⁴ and

if it is not, does it still serve as a medium for the preservation and transmission of cultural and national memory. In Pierre Nora's feted *Les Lieux de Mémoires*, published in 1994, Georges Durand devoted a chapter to the three main types of memory associated with wine –personal, national and cultural- arguing that wine has become a place of memory. French wine drinking culture as it was traditionally constructed, or at least some elements defining it, has started to act as a repository of memories underlying major changes affecting French society such as the rural/urban divide, the growing fragmentation of French society or the changing nature of social classes. These social changes illustrate the transformation of wine as an element of French national identity and the reshaping of regional and local identities attached to its production and consumption in the context of a globalised society. As Nora pointed out (1994: 1011, my translation), the past no longer guarantees the future, memory which is continuity enables the reshaping of a fragmented national identity’.

In order to explore the changes affecting wine consumption and wine culture and their relationship to expressions of national, regional and local identities, it is important to recall that wine drinking has become increasingly detached from the act of eating, representing a unique act of consumption in its own right. By shifting from an integrated element of diet into an intrinsically hedonistic food, it has gained a highly complex set of meanings. Attached to these new representations, wine tasting has also become an ‘*affaire de goûts*’ or a place of social discernment, hierarchy and power. Wine drinking has become drinking wines. Bourdieu (1979) has argued that taste is socially constructed and that, traditionally, the hierarchy of wines became identified with the social hierarchy. The consumption of quality wine was a preserve of the bourgeoisie. It was also historically attached to the emergence of the bourgeoisie and restaurants which have transformed the act of eating and drinking

into a highly cultural and social occasion. As Bourdieu has pointed out, among the bourgeoisie, foods are also sources of pleasure, but with less emphasis on the physical character of food than on its commensal and taste-symbolising aspects. The symbolic dimension of wine-drinking has been the apanage of the bourgeoisie. With the democratisation of eating out and with the recent and growing importance of the middle-class, new strategies were needed to differentiate groups of individuals from each other and wine offered a means of expressing this differentiation : 'I love Bordeaux... I do not like Burgundy...I prefer vins de pays'. The varied patterns of consumption are illustrated by the many discourses embedded in the cultural object of wine and very often, the consumer finds him/herself lost in the profusion of expertises. The access to the oenological/scientific discourse is thus, in part, a question of power, as very often, people who are able to describe wine position themselves in relation to that knowledge, distinction and social domination. Consequently, there are various tensions between different types of consumers, the connoisseur and the wandering drinker, who are both increasingly defining their identities through wine drinking and through a complex set of consumption and cultural patterns. The connoisseur is defined as the classic example of the educated drinker for whom wine culture is much more than drinking wine, while the wandering drinker might be defined as the average wine drinker who knows little about it and is experimenting a 'vin-anomie'. There are also numerous examples of people making their careers out of the publication of this knowledge, and each wine-producing region can boast its own local culture and experts who seek to disseminate it. New wine cultures have emerged at both local and national level in response to the decline of a traditional and national wine drinking culture.

These developments have taken place against a background of changing French and European patterns of food and drink consumption which are heavily influenced by a growing concern for healthy eating. As eating and drinking and the pleasures of the table have always loomed large in the French perception of what constitutes the good life (Zeldin 1977: 725), the effects have been particularly dramatic. According to the French sociologist, Claude Fischler (1990), French dietary patterns have been transformed since the 1970s. He has argued that a new model of consumption has emerged combining traditional and modern practices, something he describes as 'gastro-anomie'. Put simply, this can be defined by the lack of norms and rules defining food consumption. For example, a growing number of French people will prefer a snack during lunchtime hours instead of a meal. However, recent studies⁵ have argued that the only element which has survived modernity is the emphasis placed on sharing a meal together, with commensality still structuring daily life.

The same social phenomenon or 'vin-anomie' has revised the position of wine in French culture and has altered its consumption patterns and it could be argued that commensality remains here too the principal element of wine consumption. Several anthropological studies have argued that 'drinking brings pleasure and could act as a social lubricant in many gatherings' (De Garine and De Garine 2001: 2). Yet it could also be used as a space for expressing tensions between individual and collective identities, between the emerging figure of the wandering drinker and the declining national figure of the connoisseur. If we look at the official statistics, alcohol consumption decreased by a remarkable 25% between 1970 and 1990⁶. While declining in popularity, wine is still the dominant beverage. Beer consumption remains stable and the consumption of spirits has increased slightly⁷. Since 1981, the percentage of regular drinkers of wine has decreased continually, while the proportion

of occasional drinkers continues to rise as a specific social and cultural phenomenon. The growing number of wine-clubs illustrates this recent trend. However, according to Badouin (1990: 41), the proportion of non-consumers appears to have stabilised following a period of increase (23.6% in 1980 to 38.2% in 1990). It is worth noting that in 1990, the number of people who declare that they never drink wine is as high as 50% which demonstrates a huge change in alcohol drinking culture. The norm has shifted from a collective alcohol drinking culture to a non alcohol drinking culture. If these statistics reveal profound changes in French society, they also suggest that drinking wine has become a strong social and cultural marker and therefore a sign of social differentiation. Drinking even more than eating provides a vehicle for a conferring or displaying status in which prohibitions and preferences operate (de Garine and de Garine 2001: 6). To question them enables us to understand to what extent drinking as a biological need and as a social act is intrinsically an element of social identity in action.

The principal change affecting wine consumption is related directly to the nature of wine itself, which a product once appreciated for its nutritional qualities has been transformed into a beverage loved for its taste. Wine is no longer the staple drink consumed during the family meal and it has been replaced by water. The consumption of alcoholic drinks, and especially wine is now closely related to the nature of the meal, whether or not it is a special social occasion. The phenomenon of eating out has also influenced the separation of ordinary family meals from more festive and occasional events, with a greater emphasis upon drinking for social occasions. As consumption has declined, wine has increasingly become a noble drink and a sign of 'distinction'. In the process, it has been transformed into a highly ritualised and 'cultural' object. Connoisseurship in the matter of wine is in itself a field for

competition and it has the power for identifying the person as well as the wine (Douglas 1987: 9). Taking possession of wines and 'all the manners' involved in their use, grants the person a certain status and a certain identity. Good wine and the culture attached to it has become a symbol of a middle class lifestyle and more than food, its consumption acts as a social marker or a sign of belonging to a dominant social class (Grignon and Grignon 1980: 533). According to Holt (1997: 113), those with high cultural resources construct what they perceive to be a unique style through the consumption of objects and through authenticity and connoisseurship. Today, however, with more individuals adopting modern lifestyles, the core of wine drinking culture as a cultural, symbolic and material object has come under attack.

As Mary Douglas has argued (1987: 12), the economic dimension of wine drinking culture plays a major role in the way the product is used as a commodity. Wine production has always been a protected economic sector, and France still ranks amongst the largest wine producing countries worldwide, which helps to safeguard the domestic market. However, since the 1950s, France has had to redefine its position, owing to its membership of the European Union and the resulting competition from major wine producing nations such as Italy and Portugal. More recently, the emergence of New World wines has offered further competition and it is likely to pose a serious challenge to French wines in the future⁸. One of the main consequences of this competition has been a significant improvement in the quality of wine produced in France and a concentration of the major companies in the wine sector which has increased the range of wines available to the consumer responding in part to the growing diversification of drinkers and their desires, and contributing in turn to changes in tastes. Another major factor of influence has been the role of the wine industry and the anglo-saxon experts in standardising tastes and advising

producers to create wines with oak flavours (which are perceived as more stable and reliable from one vintage to another). Accompanying these changes, a large number of local producers have progressively taken control of the commercial side of their activity and as a consequence, they have developed a direct contact with the consumer. As postmodernist theorists will say, we have no choice, but to choose. However, our choice is still constrained by socio-economic, cultural and technological factors. As a consequence, regional and national markers of identity have been renegotiated. French people consume less wines and are no longer as attached to their local or regional beverage, but are instead prepared to explore other French regions or even other countries through their wine consumption. The social dimension of wine drinking has become the main reason behind their consumption as society has become more individualistic and competitive.

Despite the impressive and wide ranging literature on wine and wine-drinking culture in the arts, humanities and social sciences, few authors have challenged the conception that wine culture and consumption have become fragmented. Two works have, however, adopted a more critical approach identifying some of the major issues for consideration by any study of wine consumption. In the first, *Drinking in French Culture* (1965), Roland Sadoun, Giorgio Lolli and Milton Silverman raised a number of important issues. First, drinking wine and eating, which are very closely associated in French culture, were defined as two related elements of the process of nutrition. Secondly, wine was not consumed by all their respondents but it was drunk more often than any other alcoholic beverage and in the largest volumes. They also concluded that most wine was consumed at home. Even if there were differences between social groups, the largest percentage of wine consumers was found amongst those with an 'average education'. Their survey also pointed out the pronounced

regional differences in wine consumption, with the lowest percentage of wine drinkers in France living in the Northwest (49% in Normandy and Brittany) and the North (56% Artois, Picardy), and the highest found in the South (or the Midi), where not surprisingly wine production was a major industry. Their findings clearly challenged the traditional stereotype of the French as knowledgeable and eclectic wine drinkers, but it is rarely cited by French scholars, who have continued to argue for a more united, coherent and national wine drinking culture. In the second work to offer a revisionist perspective, *Le buveur du XIXème siècle* (1990), the historian, Didier Nourrisson, argues that French drinking culture evolved over the course of the nineteenth century. According to his analysis, the French went from consumers of a single type of drink –wine- who varied between ages, social classes and regions to plural consumers, whose affluence offered more opportunity for choice at a time when the number and quality of beverages was increasing. In Nourrisson's analysis, the dynamic and geographic character of drinking culture, as a reflection of social, cultural and economic changes, is presented as an essential aspect of any serious study of patterns of alcohol consumption. With this historical context in mind, the contemporary situation can now be explored.

Wine culture, writings and power

In other words, the social group which has sufficient knowledge to control the quality of wine declines dangerously compared to the declared group of connoisseurs

(Guille-Escuret 1987: 93; my translation)

Episode 1: Ethnography of the 1990 and 1999 Guide Hachette classification in Burgundy. In January 1990, I participated in a workshop on wine-tasting organised by the BIVB (Interprofessional Office for Burgundian's wines), during which I was invited to join the wine tasting committee of the *Guide Hachette* which met some weeks later. Several roundtables of 'experts' were formed and we were given the task of tasting specific samples of wines and then discussing them. My panel was composed of a famous female oenologist from one of the big 'wine merchants' in Burgundy, three wine-growers from the local area, one courtier⁹ and a businessman. The results of our deliberations had to be written up and submitted to the organiser of the panel. Intense discussion followed each tasting and very often the judgement of the female oenologist, seen as an expert, dominated the debate.

Years later, in 14 January 1999, I was invited again, this time in my capacity as an anthropologist, to a wine-tasting organised by the *Guide Hachette* for the sixteenth edition of their wine guide. On this occasion, the editor of the Guide, Mme Montalbetti, was present to inaugurate the first wine tasting session. In her speech¹⁰, she announced that 'I would like to thank you for coming again this year, as it is our seventeenth year together and I would like to thank all the tasters who have worked with us over this period, tasters who come again and again for the pleasure of tasting and also for the rigour of the exercise'. The wine tasting was spread over a period of three months and a local expert (technician), Mr Bianchi, was appointed to organise this highly 'professional' and controlled event. In two of the wine tasting rooms of the new BIVB, forty-three people, including six women, gathered together to taste fifteen wines from the village of Gevrey-Chambertin. They included sellers, wine-merchants, wine-growers, wine-merchants, wine journalists, chefs and a small number of connoisseurs who had been recruited from all over Burgundy. According to Mme

Montalbetti, the quality of the guide derives from the high level of expertise of the professionals involved and in this context, she emphasised the lack of connoisseurs judged as not sufficiently competent to participate. Tasters are given a place with a separate desk, two INAO glasses and a technical slip which they have to fill in. In front of them, a sink and a tap enable them to drink water and to spit during the tasting. Each of the forty-three committee members will taste blindly (that is that the bottles will be presented with a black cover masking their origins) the samples given to them and will try to put into words their sensorial experience.

These two ethnographic episodes separated by a period of ten years, illustrate how professional wine culture has changed since the 1990s. While wine consumption has declined continuously, a new wine culture –at national and regional level- has proliferated in a variety of ways, from television programmes and specialised literature to wine experts and wine bars (J-P Albert 1989:117-124). Most libraries now have a specific shelf devoted to drinks as part of the cultural activities on offer from travel guides to cookery books. In 1994, a specialist wine library was launched by Hachette in collaboration with a Burgundian wine-merchant. Accompanying this trend, the wine expert has become one of the main actors in the commercial sphere and his expertise has been legitimised and recognised by these various publications which present him as an ‘objective taster’¹¹. The proliferation of guides and books devoted to wine are a good indication of this movement. The *Guide Hachette* sold 150,000 copies in 1999, while the guide produced by the American wine guru, Robert Parker, sold 60,000 copies in 1999 (Garcia Parpet 2000: 151). According to Mme Montalbetti¹², ‘They aim at different publics: Parker’s book is the work of a man with a school of thought and a very personal approach to wine. It is what we called an art book while the *Guide Hachette* does not have a esprit d’école (school of thought)’.

Another characteristic of the *Guide Hachette* is the diversity of consumers it wishes to embrace: ‘to prescribe a quest and a diversity of taste is how I see its main role’ insists Mme Montalbetti on several occasions during the interview. The great diversity of guides and wines covers nearly all of the editorial market and, it is in part, a response to the increasing fragmentation of consumers (Garcia Parpet 2000: 150). In the case of the *Guide Hachette*, the wide range of experts reflects the diversity of consumers. The success of both guides is also an indication of wider processes affecting drinking tastes in French society.

The world of both wine guides and connoisseurs in France is, however, constructed upon the foundations laid by the ideology of the AOC (Appellation d’Origine Contrôlée or Denomination of Origin) which was created after the First World War and has now spread to foodstuffs and other traditional products, both in France and elsewhere in Europe. If we take the example of the *Guide Hachette*, it is organised in line with the regions and denominations authorised by the AOC. During the tasting in Beaune in 1999, the wines from different AOC were tasted together. The whole exercise was controlled by professionals and the experts, who aimed to classify and rank the various producers within the same AOC, which underlines the fact that competition remains constructed at a local rather than at a national level. Their judgment, which is presented as being as ‘objective and professional’ as possible, is rarely unanimous. In France, the quality of wine could be defined as ‘an affair of specialists’ and recent studies have argued that quality is often a subjective issue (Morrot 1999, Casabianca and Saint-Marie 1999) and that the legitimacy of the process of decision-making in the wine-tasting committees relies upon a consensual and negotiated process more than on an objective evaluation of the product¹³. The interviews that I have conducted over the last ten years with various actors of the wine

industry confirm this analysis. They also show very clearly that different professions in the wine industry from wine waiters to oenologists use different languages to describe the same product. The growing wine literature underlines this lack of a unified and collective language as far as wine-tasting is concerned, it also confirms the fragmented nature of wine drinking culture. Through the use of a specific language, rituals and practices, specific groups of individuals seek to dominate others. As argued by Giddens (1981: 4), power is regarded as generated in and through the reproduction of structures of domination. Clearly, in an area where the French State was still very active, new groups have sought to empower themselves and to create a new order.

During the meeting held in 1999, the work of the wine-tasting committee, including the definition of the type of wine (red, rosé or white/dry, medium or sweet/still or sparkling)- was followed by the description of the sight/eye (foam/robe if coloured, with reflects, intensity, colour, legs), the smell/nose (intensity, aromas, bouquet, flaws) and finally the taste/mouth (first impressions, balanced, dominant tastes, body, flavours, intensity and flavours, length and flaws, balance). All of these parameters enabled the evaluation of the product based on whether or not it was already drinkable and which dish could best complement it. A special recommendation or 'coup de coeur', which is, according to Mme Montalbetti, seen as the most interesting element of the evaluation, and which corresponds to both concepts of fragmentation and quest was left to be marked in the right bottom hand corner. Finally, a mark was given out of five to complete the evaluation, zero being a wine with serious faults which was rejected and five being reserved for an exceptional wine. Each group of three tasters shared the same samples and from their judgment, the local organiser, Mr Bianci, had to produce 'a coherent and technical wine-tasting

note', a task that was extremely challenging when the three tasters did not agree on the wine's qualities.

Once the tastings were complete and the technical note had been agreed, a local 'expert' was asked to rewrite each of the notes in a poetic and anecdotal manner. In this case, the 'expert' was a journalist and local politician (a previous head of the regional council) who is the author of a series of best-selling books on the wine growing villages of Burgundy in which he adopts a literary stance, positioned between folklore and ethnology. It is worth noting that during the interview, Mme Montalbetti, briefly mentioned his contribution, praising the highly professional character of the guide¹⁴. Her comments emphasised the objective context of the wine-tasting which is clearly explained in the guide's introduction. The guide offers a vast panorama of each wine-producing region and through the editorial work conducted by the local 'expert' or mediator, its publication integrates changes at a micro socio-economic level, recognising good producers from one year to the next and shaping their reputations as a result. Its essential role is to transform through its writings the technical evaluation of a wine into a literary description, which in turn contributes to the reputation and revival of a gastronomic regional identity.

This literature is also part of a wider movement associated with a new form of gastronomic regionalism based upon economic regeneration and local identity (Blowen, Demossier and Picard, 2001) which contributes to the region's reputation beyond its own administrative boundaries. It could be argued following Robert Ulin's study of the Southwest wine producing regions (2002: 696) that a similar process of 'cultural production' and invention has taken place in the majority of French wine growing areas. The guide appears as a fundamental tool in constructing reputations, and, consequently, in consolidating economic positions. By 'democratising wine

consumption', as Mme Montalbetti has pointed out, the *Guide Hachette* provides a national framework for the expression of local and regional identities through a well-established national and regional politics of taste. This politics of taste is, according to the head of the *Guide Hachette*, a question of 'everyone expressing his or her difference. We live in a society which must be diverse. Each one has to tell his or her difference'. Wine has therefore become a commodity to express differences and 'distinction' and in this respect, the expert, who can decrypt their complexity and their language occupies a powerful position in the diffusion of culture. Its consumption however, relates back to social differentiation, questions of exclusion and, by the same token, questions of local and regional identity. It does confirm the hegemonic position of some wine-producers compared to others in this highly competitive sector.

Wine consumption and social differentiation

Wine is a food for hierarchy and consequently it contributes to the hierarchisation of society

(Guille-Escuret 1987: 63; my translation)

Episode 2: Ethnography of the spring wine fair of the Caves Particulières in 1997. On 11 April 1997, I was invited to interview Mr Jean Ezingard, the president of the spring wine fair of the *Caves Particulières* (the head office is situated in Orange, South of France) in Paris (where they had organised their spring fair). The spring wine fair of the *Caves Particulières* (private cellars) is a public event organised by wine producers from all of the main wine-producing regions of France, enabling visitors to buy wine directly from the producer. It is part of a wider economic change

by which producers have taken a direct control of the commercialisation of their products. The wine fair has attracted growing interest over recent years. In 1994, 25,000 visitors attended and by 1997, this figure had risen to 45,000. Most of the visitors are from cities and the majority of them from Paris. Twenty-two wine-growers participated in 1994, a figure that rose astronomically to 910 in 1997, attesting to the growing presence of individual wine-growers in the commercial sphere and to their need to sell directly to customers. The modern building, with its glass and aluminium structure, was in stark contrast to the internal decoration of the fair where artificial grapes, oak barrels, green and white displays, INAO glasses¹⁵ and a large red carpet dominated the scene.

At the reception, I asked for Mr Ezingard and I was sent to his stand¹⁶. A stocky vigneron welcomed me with a warm handshake and then proceeded to announce that he was 'the president of a place for authenticity and conviviality, and definitely not a fun fair'. The beginning of our discussion focused on the historical development of the wine fair and his discourse emphasised the importance of a collective organisation of Southern French producers, established in the 1970s, with the aim of taking over the commercialisation of their wines. Their influence still dominates the organisation of the fair and from the various individual displays, it is easy to guess where each producer comes from. Each region and each producer tries to impose their own image through such techniques as the displays of bottles and labels on the stand, their wine boxes or the presentation of the *Guide Hachette* conveniently opened to reveal their own personal entry. The sense of diversity and the informal nature of the fair which is organised in a very haphazard fashion (it was easy to get lost because of the lack of a clear organisation between the wine-growing regions) confirms the heterogeneous nature of both production and consumption.

In this open space, visitors wandered about in pursuit of their wine pleasure and passions. Some people already had a clear idea of what they sought, announcing that, for example ‘we want to buy 12 bottles of Château-Margaux’, while others were more curious and were searching for something new: ‘White or red? Which AOC?’ asked a producer. The publicity of the wine fair illustrated this tendency: ‘Behind each of the bottles that you will meet on your travels, you will see a face, hear a personal story, taste a specific and unique savoir-faire’. Most of the visitors were Parisian men, but during the weekend more wine-lovers arrived from all over France, especially for the occasion. The tribal and masculine nature of the crowd denoted that wine tasting remains a male collective activity, yet very often, groups of men and women or couples come together to buy the wine. What strikes the anthropologist is the sharp contrast between urban (consumers from the cities) and rural worlds (the wine-growers)¹⁷. The fair provides a social space for the urban dwellers in quest of their rural roots. However, any clear sense of social differentiation between the visitors becomes very difficult to read. The profile of the connoisseur of wine¹⁸ in particular dominated the various conversations I had with those present. The wine producers interviewed during the fair confirmed that the connoisseur was their favourite customer and that during this event, they had made some interesting and memorable contacts. The producers made the point that the connoisseur was the customer they were looking for, a man of discernment who knows about wine and is not obsessed with labels and ‘big names’. There was, however, a strong sense that wine tasting had to be controlled and limited. This distinctive pattern of moderation was encouraged by the organisers and throughout the exhibition there were posters displaying a single half-empty glass of wine¹⁹. Security guards were on the scene to

assure cohesion and social order in the event of anyone failing to heed this subliminal message.

The success of such events, which have multiplied over the last thirty years, illustrates only one aspect of the changes affecting wine consumption. This is part of a new attraction for popular tastes or 'vins de pays' which illustrates again this new type of consumption dominated by the occasional and urban drinkers. Recent surveys have confirmed the increase in the consumption of quality wine, which rose from around 4 million hectolitres in 1960 to 13 million in the 1990s (Badouin 1990: 38). In response to this demand for good wines, the INAO has seen the number of applications for the official status of AOC (denomination of origin) soar dramatically over the last ten years. A growing social differentiation has accompanied this trend. According to Boulet, Laporte, Aigrain and Mélanie (1991: 24), demographic differences associated with gender and age predominate today. Men and women drink differently: 10.9% of women consumed wine every day in 1990 as against 28.1% of men. To put these figures into perspective, it is interesting to note that the proportion of women drinking every day has declined by 54.8% since 1980, while the comparable figure for men is also a dramatic 32.3%. On the other hand, the proportion of non-consumers has grown from 34.5% in 1980 to 58.5% in 1990 (male non-consumers represented 26.5% in 1980 and 43% in 1990). The 'occasional' category remains stable amongst women, while it has increased slightly amongst men. In terms of age, the rise of non-consumers has affected all age groups and a similar pattern underlies the decline of regular wine consumers. A certain degree of social disordering is going on reshaping social positions and issues of power. In this new social context, the figure of the connoisseur as a regular consumer emerged as a powerful voice in contrast to the new

occasional drinker which seems to be used as a symbolic figure in the new wine marketing campaigns.

Young people are also targeted at by marketing campaigns of the wine industry. The study cited above reveals the importance of a generational effect and it is clear that during the 1980s, wine was no longer such an integral part of the culture and consumption patterns of young people. This shift has affected most of the Southern European cultures of the wine belt, especially France, Italy and Spain. These tendencies have been confirmed by the forthcoming report written by the Onivins-Inra²⁰. However, these statistical surveys tend to ignore regional variations and focus instead upon a typological approach to an increasingly differentiated and fragmented type of consumption. Drinking has become a marker for an increasing social differentiation and its analysis defies any strict and straightforward sociological explanation. It is why only a multisited ethnography can enable us to grasp drinking as a complex object of analysis. However, for governmental and professional bodies, the consumer's needs have to be anticipated in the context of the already declared crisis of French wines (Berthomeau 2001).

My ethnography of a wine club situated in the urban area of Chalon-sur-Saône offers an excellent illustration of the middle-class nature of the new wine culture. The majority of the members of the club are male professionals, many of whom are retired, including doctors, civil servants, teachers and businessmen, with a small minority of women accompanying their husbands or partners. From the various meetings organised by the group, it is clear that wine is perceived as a special, rather mysterious product and most of the members have joined the club to learn more about it. Their meeting provides the members with an introduction to different wine producing regions and the samples tasted are chosen in collaboration with the local

oenologist, following a trip to the chosen wine producing area. Each participant is given a card explaining the main characteristics of the wines tasted. The discourse of the organisers is devoted to exploring the variety of wines in France and to sharing this knowledge with the club members. In their discourse, they claimed that contrary to the traditional wine club, they were open to all and they cited the example of Jean, a black factory worker, who was a member. That they should feel the need to justify their social openness does, however, raise suspicions about its true extent.

If wine consumption has been democratised as has argued Gilbert Garrier (1994: 249), it has also been transformed into a form of quest for individual identity in the context of an increasingly fragmented and post-modern society. In this context, the study conducted by Boulet, Laporte, Aigrain and Mélani in 1991 is stimulating, as it argues for three distinctive types of behaviour related to wine consumption. Their analysis, which is based upon a socio-economic typology of consumers, confirms the fragmentation of social groups in relation to wine consumption and this pattern is illustrated in our wine-club. The authors have identified three specific groups of consumers. The regular consumer who drinks every day and who is represented by the categories of 'retired people', 'ouvriers sportifs' (active working class men) and 'farmers'²¹. The occasional consumer, on the other hand, tends to be drawn from the middle classes and seems to be the appropriate label for the majority of wine drinkers encountered during this study. And finally, the last group includes 53.2% of the non-consumers and is represented by young women, 'modestes complexés' and finally 'young couples living together'. Occasional wine consumption is, therefore, the increasingly typical behaviour of a specific type of individual, often young, with a comfortable economic position and possessing a cultural capital. The figure of the wandering drinker corresponds to this emerging pattern of 'vin-anomie' that is

illustrated by the two last categories. The regular consumer is to some extent the personification of certain types of connoisseurs. It could, however, be argued that the wide range of consumers reflects to some extent the social disorder and the increasing fragmentation of the drinkers.

Yet, the figure of the connoisseur, often cited, but rarely met, remains emblematic of French wine culture and consumption, but his pre-eminence disguises the lack of a national, oenological culture and the relative decline of regular wine consumers. A recent survey has underlined the lack of basic oenological knowledge amongst the French, whose wine culture is represented as heterogeneous and symbolic. However, is the connoisseur another mythical creature? The profile of the connoisseur which is prominent in the vast literature on wines, is seen as crucial to understanding the social processes and the values embedded in wine consumption and culture. Yet, defining the connoisseur is not an easy task, as social diversity and differentiation affect wine drinking culture and consumption. The recent upsurge of wine culture in France has, to some extent, contributed to the construction of the connoisseur as a repository of collective memory who shares his time between drinking wine and buying books, guides and maps of French wine producing regions in order to make sense of a complex world. The emergence of this curious creature is connected to a wine culture which has been democratised, professionalised and diffused through literature and the media. On the other hand, the figure of the average drinker provides us with a different image of wine drinking culture. For some drinkers, wine has become an object of social tensions and its consumption has been transformed into a search for identities and differentiation. It is worth noting that the cultural edifice attached to wine drinking in France has started to crumble as pointed out by the majority of our informers. From a private and domestic activity organised

around the family meal, it has been transformed into a social, public and ritualised act around which the individual is constructing an 'ideal world'.

The 'wandering' drinker

Today, drinking takes place at home. Before that (in the XIXth century), individual or collective drinking took place above all in a public sphere

(Nourrisson 1990: 9; my translation).

*Episode 3: Ethnography of the Saint Vincent tournante. January 1991, Puligny-Montrachet(Burgundy)*²². The *Saint-Vincent tournante*, the principal regional wine festival of Burgundy, takes place on the first week-end following Saint Vincent's day, the 22nd of January in the honour of the patron saint of winegrowers. The right to host the *Saint Vincent tournante* rotates amongst the wine-growing villages of Burgundy and returns every thirty years to its point of departure. The village chosen for the event by the *Confrérie des Chevaliers du Tastevin*²³ organises a procession attended by representatives of the seventy-five mutual aid societies in the region, followed by a church service held in parallel with a free wine tasting and, finally, three banquets of honour. Over the years, the festival has been transformed from a family and village gathering into a vast celebration which is open to the public for two days. In 1961, two Americans were invited by the local wine-merchant to follow the small procession going to the church. In 1991, more than 100,000 people turned up, including visitors from Switzerland and America. Thirty thousand bottles of wine were drunk, three banquets were organised and the village made a profit of around 4 million French francs. By buying a glass for 25 *francs*, visitors were able to taste the

wines for free. The festival is the occasion to drink, good wines which are normally confined to prestigious wine-tastings, without specific ritual and *mise en scène*. Three types of wine are consumed during the festival itself. The wine of the *cuvée* Saint Vincent, which is drunk in a public space, was served from the bottle to the glass and was offered directly to the consumer without the ritual accompaniment traditionally attached to this type of wine. This wine is intended for the thousands of visitors who can consume without limits a famous and normally not affordable wine. On the other hand, a hierarchy of bottles of good wines with labels is consumed in the more private and social space of the three banquets, organised by the *confrérie*, the local priests, and finally the wine-growers of the host village. The latter includes the wine-growers' clients and focuses on an emblematic and highly ritualised type of wine consumption, which accompanies the elaborate meal prepared by a distinguished Burgundian chef. The *Saint Vincent tournante* thus provides an excellent example of how different social situations produce markedly different types of wine consumption for different drinkers and how the festival offers a medium for the expression and reception of a wide range of social identities.

The historical development of the festival illustrates the emergence of a new type of wine consumption and culture. In 1961, wine consumption was privately organised and structured by each family around the Sunday meal. By 1991 it had become a festive, public, less institutionalised and more fragmented type of consumption, shedding light on a new social hierarchy of drinkers. This development could be explained by the wine-growers' increasing experience of the commercialisation of their wines and the need to attract more customers by promoting the village's name. It is worth noting that as wine consumption has become more public, festive and separated from eating (wine shops, wine bars have given a more

visible and social status to wine consumption in French society), differentiation has also become increasingly visible (as is revealed by the 1999 festival compared to 1961). The public and private dimensions of wine drinking have had to be renegotiated and in line with this change the more public it has become the less it has been controlled. In 1961, nobody in the village was seen to be drunk during the festival and most of the wine consumption was organised around the table, as part of a family meal. Yet, the organisers of the most recent festivals have complained about the increasing problem of excessive drinking. There were several cases of alcoholic comas in 1991²⁴, which is something the Burgundian wine-growers do not want to see associated with their product. This problem illustrates the difficult relationship of young French people with alcohol, ‘Wine is not as much a part of our culture; we are a different generation from our parents, a generation that consumes more than any other, but wine is not part of it’, as one visitor in his twenties from Dijon commented to me. Excessive consumption also underlines the extraordinary and festive character of the event. In this sense, festive also means occasional. Another important development within the festival of the *Saint Vincent tournante* has been the opening of the wine cellars. Instead of a family gathering, the tasting has become an opportunity to advertise the AOC and to publicise the name of the village and that of the region.

The organisation of the festival emphasises this aspect, giving the wine’s name to different wine cellars, from the Folatières to the Clavoillon. The menus of each of the three banquets held during the festival also highlight the various AOC belonging to the village and enhances the position of each wine in the local hierarchy of wines: ‘Lobsters go well with Bâtard-Montrachet (grand cru, white wine)’. For most diners, moderate consumption is encouraged by the combination of distinction with taste.

First and foremost, it becomes a stylish exercise of your tastes and a proof of your 'distinction'. Again by becoming public, wine consumption has become more ritualised and sophisticated under the increasingly powerful diktat of the connoisseurs (and not the wine-growers). It is worth noticing that in the process, the group represented by the wine-growers has declined, becoming marginal as wine-tasting is increasingly recognised as a professional art. In this respect, Mary Douglas (1987: 9) has argued, connoisseurship also has its own power for social domination.

The *Saint Vincent tournante* thus reveals a wider phenomenon. Visitors now come from all over France and many take the opportunity to visit the region and combine buying wine with tourism. The leisure culture, of which tourism is an important element, has recently been given a boost in France by the lowering of the retirement age and the new 35-hour week (Demossier and Milner 2000: 76). The emergence of a new wine tourism has accompanied this trend and almost every wine growing region has its own wine route, and has encouraged the publication of regional guides about gastronomy and wines. The wine tour has contributed to the modernisation of local infrastructures and tourist accommodation (Plichon 1996: 131). Numerous examples could be given to illustrate the general efforts of local governments and of the French state to promote French wines, both at home and abroad.

In this voyage of discovery of French wine producing regions, the wine-grower -and his wife- have emerged as the principal intermediaries. In contrast to the supermarkets or the chains of wine merchants such as Nicolas, the wine-grower offers an alternative type of consumption based upon to a more personalised and authentic approach. The client has to contact him to make an appointment and the meeting is always organised around the tasting of new wines in barrels followed by bottles of the

most recent vintages. Their relationship is based upon a regular and personal contact that each partner tries to maintain. The wine-growers are well aware of the ephemeral nature of their modern clientele. The temporary character of their client base reflects the conceptualisation of the 'wandering' drinker. It is worth noting that there are some major differences between established vineyards such as Bordeaux and Burgundy, which have been able to retain some of their traditional customers, and whose reputation is associated with a particular type of consumer, and it is here that most connoisseurs are to be found. The general craze for this type of approach illustrates some of the principal features attached to the concept of 'the wandering drinker': occasional in his/her consumption, looking for a new discovery, a 'coup de coeur', passionate in his/her quest and basing the quest on the consumption of others. This approach incarnated in the wine-grower, is a surviving emblem of a rapidly disappearing rural France. However, wine consumption is often more than a simple passion. For many individuals, wine-drinking has also become a means of defining their identity in an increasingly modern and fragmented world. As argued by Bocock (1993: 77-9), consumption pattern acts as ways of demonstrating an individual's position and expressing personality and individuality.

Tell me what you drink and I shall tell you who you are : I drink wine therefore I am French?

Without wine, France would probably not be France (Sadoun, Lolli and Silverman 1965: 48).

Episode 4: Consuming wine in different places. When working as an anthropologist with producers and wine-growers, it is very often the case that a collective wine consumption takes place and it is presented as compulsory for all the members of that group. In the context of a wine-club tasting such as that in Chalon-sur-Saône in 1999, on the other hand, consumption is an individual matter and is non prescriptive, in the sense that the anthropologist is very often left to observe rather than being obliged to participate. Specific features differentiate the very structured organisation of the professional wine-tasting from the less organised space of the wine club. In the first case, the tasting takes place in the cellar, in the morning or in the evening, each individual standing and walking from one barrel to the next, commenting briefly on the wine, but focusing more on the technical aspect of the wine-grower's work or on the climatic characteristics of the vintage. The wine club and its members, on the other hand, puts great emphasis on the social dimension of the tasting: the wine-tasting takes place in the evening, before dinner and each *dégustation* of the wines selected for the occasion is accompanied by a verbal and emotional description which focuses on sensations, feelings and tastes. Each member enjoys the sharing of their experience with the person next to him/her. The silent and quasi-religious atmosphere of the first setting contrasts vividly with the noisy and hedonistic ambiance of the wine club. While the consumption could be characterised in the first case as moderate, technical and hierarchically organised –from the youngest to the oldest vintage and from the lowest denomination to the more emblematic one. The second context is more accurately defined as a question of pleasure, freedom and a quest of identity which defines the second context 'I really like this wine, how would you describe it? It reminds me of...'. Members of the wine-club use the occasion as a means to maintain social relations or to establish new ones. Tasting the wine offers a way of

communicating with others and of recalling memories. Moreover, drinking wine is a social act which recreates a lost sociability in the context of our modern society, creating timeless moments which are perceived as separated from the ordinary.

Between producers and consumers, another group of actors plays an essential role which position them both literally and figuratively in fields of power which should be seen as socially mediated (Ulin 2002: 694). Wine culture in France is defined by the role of intermediaries whose ranks include oenologists, wine-waiters (*sommeliers*), wine-merchants, *cavistes* and chefs²⁵ who play a major role in the upsurge of a gastronomic regionalism. However, their field of power is rather fragmented, especially when wine is concerned. Interviews which I conducted in 1999 with these different professional groups soon revealed very different perceptions of wine. For oenologists, the technical nature of the product is central to their description and to their relationship to the wine they drink. Therefore, a specific and highly technical discourse often accompanies their judgment. Their comments refer to basic elements of nature and reveal that wine could be, according to them, objectively grasped. Many of the oenologists I interviewed were very critical of the role performed by the *sommeliers*, who were perceived as being at the other extreme of the spectrum, as ‘the eulogists of wine’. The *sommeliers*, on the other hand, refer to a symbolic and cultural approach to wine and very often, their approach focuses on its literary and poetic construction. Fischler argues in his book ‘Du vin’ (1999), that there are two distinct drinking cultures, illustrating the divisions underlined above: the ‘boire froid’, characterised by a technical approach which dissects, analyses and searches for defects, and the ‘boire chaud’ which dreams, imagines, fantasises, remembers, feels and eventually gets intoxicated with sensations. This dichotomy illustrates the range of discourses surrounding wine from a nature/culture perspective

and it must be argued that the consumer is much more aware of the cultural than of the technical dimension. Ulin has used this dichotomy between artisans and scientists when analysing the potential and constraints of power as a differentiated cultural production when looking at the concepts of work and self-identity amongst the South West wine growers (2002: 700). It could also be argued that both sides of this spectrum are embedded in the *Guide Hachette*, incarnated, on one hand by the jury of professionals and on the other hand, by the local expert. While the scientific and technical dimension of wine drinking dominates the social arena, most French people are interested by the cultural element. Surveys of French opinion frequently produce observations such as ‘Wine is and must be an authentic and symbolic product’ (Ipsos-Insight 1999).

Despite the increasingly fragmented wine drinking culture, there are a number of other specific values enhanced during the process of consumption which act as cultural markers, indicating the main elements that define individual identities. First, we could argue that the process of non consumption is still perceived in France as an exclusive act, as alcohol consumption is an integral part of the process of integrating into a group. By contrast, drinking wine in its multiple forms immediately classifies the drinker as part of a group, a community or the specific ideology of ‘bonne chère’ and passions. It relates, by the same token, to the process of integration, values of happiness, collectiveness and emotions. The humanist conception dominates drinking, despite the quest for hedonist values. In fact, throughout the fieldwork and interviews that I have conducted over the last decade, wine drinking has nearly always been described as a collective practice enabling individuals to test social cohesion through the control of drunkenness and the emotions attached to it. When the tourist travels around France, he or she is invited to visit a country where friendship, taste, wine and

local specialities dominate. His/her quest is about reviving memories of places, people and tastes, a feeling of belonging to an 'imagined community', of a common sociability, an original *communitas*, thus an identity (Demossier 2000: 150). The consumption of wine offers the prospect of an intimate relationship with the wine grower and with a culture that is now separate from his/her own experience as a modern urban dweller. It is also part of the new process of regenerating social bonds and recreating a sense of community between individuals at a local level.

Another value which underlines the concept of inclusiveness and the sense of belonging to wine drinking culture is the emphasis put upon authenticity and tradition. In a stimulating article, Philippe Chaudat (2001) shows how supermarket chains refer to concepts of authenticity, *terroir*, tradition and regional identity to promote local wines from the Jura. The *mise en scène* of these products makes sense for the consumer as they refer to their specific local and cultural context and Chaudat notes that the publicity materials used by the supermarkets rely extensively upon the sense of belonging to both a national French heritage and to a regional identity. The same comments could be applied to the spring fair of *Caves Particulières*, where regional identities coexist with each other to form part of a wider French identity that is, what it means 'to be French'. Authenticity and tradition are cultural markers which fix specific conceptions and imaginary values to the concept of present. 'Consuming authenticity will enable the consumption of the imaginary and of the past in order to produce the present, but will equally enable the creation of one's own identity, the appropriation of a geographical space, the interiorisation of the image of what he/she drinks and the ability of becoming this image in return' (Chaudat 2001: 722; my translation). Moreover, consuming authenticity and tradition when drinking wine refers to the concept of time, in the context of a constantly changing society. When

drinking wine, it could be argued that consumers reinvent time in a different manner as immortalised by the poetic expression of Lamartine ‘ô Temps, suspend ton vol, et vous, heures propices, suspendez votre cours’.

French consumers are very much attached to the idea of authenticity and to the notion that products have to be more natural and less industrialised and processed. In a survey on the oenological knowledge of French consumers, conducted by Ipsos-Insight Marketing (1999), it was pointed out that consumers are aware of the technical changes affecting wines, but that they are against any complete modernisation of the process of wine making: ‘The idea of blending wine seems suspicious to them...’. Another aspect discussed in the survey is the attachment of French people to the notion of *terroir*. The concept of *terroir* is almost untranslatable, but it refers to a traditional food or to the agricultural produce of a specific geographical, historic region. It has become a term charged with meaning for French urban dwellers in search of their roots. At the core of this process and the recent upsurge of *terroir* is wine as it provided an ideology acting as a support for the expression of social and economic divisions. For French consumers, *terroir* and AOC wines encapsulate two elements. First, they connote the qualities of the soil and the natural characteristics which made the wine and which classify it within the hierarchy of French wines. Secondly, it is also about social distinction and economic position, as wine prices depend partly on their ranking. Various factors contribute to the position of each wine within the vast range on offer. Consuming wine, therefore, remains an act of differentiation, in which individuals position themselves in relation to others. In this quest for identities, old and traditional values coexist and it is possible to say, that wine has never been so modern.

Conclusion

Through this multisited ethnography of French wine drinking culture, it has been possible to question a number of assumptions concerning the complex and contradictory position of wine culture and consumption in France. The chapter has aimed to treat drinking as a medium for constructing the actual world (Douglas 1987:9), but also to negotiate some of the changes affecting it. I have shown that a certain amount of social reordering has taken place challenging notions of French national and regional identities. For French people, despite the modernisation of their society, wine remains a 'cultural exception' (Ipsos-Insight 1999) and in this context, it is part of the French specificity. Wine as a culture and as an object of consumption has always been used in different ways and in French culture, its emblematic position remains the landmark of a cultural specificity as it still underlines Frenchness. However, it also defines a culture of exclusion. Today, consumption in France could be seen as a way of reshaping old ideologies and it is certain that contradictory values are embedded in French wine drinking culture. The national dimension of wine culture no longer relies on consumption, but has more to do with specific emblematic values which are today in danger of disappearing. Attempts are constantly being made to restore, recreate or invent communities (Warde: 183). The changing political, social and economic context has given rise to new expressions of local, regional and national identities based upon differentiation and competition in the social sphere which are negotiated between individuals, groups and society as a whole. In this process, wine offers, through sociability and exchange, a collective and cohesive way of defining declining collective identities in the context of a changing society. Following Warde's argument (: 184), the aspiration to culinary or drinking communion is exhibited in the

language of tradition, the appeal of regional cuisines or regional wines, the validation of home cooking and home drinking, nostalgia for high-quality locally produced ingredients and wines and endless reflection on the authenticity and coherence of national cuisines or wines.

It also provides a means of expressing differentiation in the context of a democratisation of wine-drinking culture and the emergence of a mass-consumption headed by the middle-class. As the middle-class started to enjoy drinking, new strategies of social distinction were needed to cultivate this 'distinction'. Individuals are now free to choose what they want to drink and in this regard, complex processes of differentiation take place. There is a real tension between 'the wandering drinker' who reflects the fragmented type of wine consumption and the 'connoisseur' who is seen as a dominant and perennial figure in wine culture and who likes a personal and loyal contact with the wine growers. The tensions between these two types of individuals illustrate the difficulty of grasping the concept of a national wine drinking culture as a homogeneous object. Through wine consumption, individuals compete and construct their identity. The source of identity is the life-style image that individuals purposively appropriate or construct and the shared normative orientations underlying their consumption. As regional identities have come to the fore and cease to rely on the consumption of local and regional wines, an intense process of regeneration has taken place at regional level supported by the State. At the same time, the values embedded in wine consumption illustrate the attachment of French people to space, time, rural society, commensality and sociability which are today challenged by globalisation, modernity and multiculturalism. These values could be read as the traces of a surviving agrarian ideology or they could be seen as an alternative type of consumption in an increasingly global society. I would like to

conclude on a positive note by citing the example of a Muslim Algerian in Montmartre (Paris) who some years ago opened a wine shop despite the unease of his own community. Interviewed this summer on the French radio, he explained that French wine had helped him to discover France, its regions, its diversity and its people and he concluded that it was what he wanted to transmit....

Notes

1. Since 1991, I have conducted extensive fieldwork in Burgundy on the wine-growing community and on wine culture. Much of this research consisted of four intensive years of participant observation and ethnography of different parts of the wine production process. Participant observation was my main line of enquiry and I locate my work in the French anthropological tradition. This has resulted in the publication of 'Hommes et vins: une anthropologie du vignoble bourguignon' (Demossier 1999). Since I have been engaged in a new research project on wine drinking culture and consumption, the results of which are presented in this chapter. This research project has combined ethnographic fieldwork and interviews of professionals in the wine sector (Paris and wine-growing regions) and it has been inspired by the work of British and American anthropologists and the structuralist and developmentalist sociology of food. I would like to thank the Department of European Studies of the University of Bath (Great-Britain) who granted me with study leave in 1999 and the British Academy which awarded me a larger research grant to complete this study in 2003-2004.
2. See the survey conducted and analysed by the historian, Jean-Pierre Rioux in *L'Histoire*, n°100, May 1987.
3. There is a large literature devoted to wine, its history, and culture in France. Much of this aims at preserving the mythical status of wine drinking culture. Amongst the better recent publications are 'Histoire sociale et culturelle du vin' published by the historian Gilbert Garrier or 'Du vin' edited by the sociologist Claude Fischler.
4. Most of the literature analysing the transformation of wine culture comes from national institutes, collective organisations of wine producers or the press in

general. However, some historical studies have also focused on wine consumption and culture (Nourrisson, 1990; Garrier, 1994), but they rarely discuss the decline of wine culture.

5. See the Conference proceedings of 'Food in the future 1993-1997', published by the Ministry of National Education, Research and Technology in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. Research Programme R 94125 by G. Masson and P. Moscovici.
6. <http://www.eurocare.org/profiles/franceeupolicy.htm>. For a more precise statistical account of the recent evolution of wine and alcohol consumption in France, see Badouin (1990), Boulet, Laporte, Aigrain, Mélani (1991, 1997) and the quinquennial reports produced by the ONIVINS-INRA research team.
7. <http://www.eurocare.org/profiles/franceeupolicy.htm>
8. For details about the economic situation of French wine, see Jacques Berthomeau's report published in 1999.
9. The courtier is the intermediary between the wine producer and the wine merchant. He usually negotiates the transaction between the two actors and is paid a percentage of the overall transaction. He also has to ensure that the deliveries will take place in accordance with the agreement between the wine merchant and the wine grower.
10. Mme Montalbetti, Interview conducted during the Guide Hachette wine tasting, 14 January 1999.
11. From the Guide Hachette to the Parker Guide, the idea of an objective expertise is always tacitly emphasised and despite their different styles, the guides tend to construct quality as a consensual and scientific category of perception and taste.
12. Mme Montalbetti, interview, 14 January 1999.
13. For more details, see Morrot (1999), Casabianca and Sainte Marie (1999). Our ethnography of the Guide Hachette confirms their conclusions.
14. Similar comments have been made by Marie-France Garcia Parpet about wine expertise in Touraine (2000).
15. These glasses are traditionally used by wine producers to taste their products.
16. The entrance fee includes the right to taste the wines for free. A glass with the logo of the wine fair was given to each visitor.

17. French society in the last census of 1999 is characterised by a growing urbanisation.
18. The connoisseur is recognisable by the way he holds his glass and by his extensive knowledge of wine culture as opposed to the snob who is obsessed with labels and prices. Many professionals working in restaurants and shops have confirmed this representation attached to the connoisseur. It is also worth noting that for the professionals the connoisseur is usually perceived as a man.
19. Several French public information campaigns have taken place since the 1980s recommending moderate consumption: from 'one glass is OK, but three is too much' to 'how do you look when you are drunk' targeting young people, the family, the elderly and companies. The social control over alcohol consumption has increased over the years, but in the debate on alcohol consumption, wine still occupies a specific position –as it is not perceived as any other alcohol beverages. The discussion around the Evin Law demonstrates the symbolic and political power of wine in French society and economy.
20. Personal communication with Christian Mélanie, ONIVINS, Paris. Personal communication with Christian Mélanie, ONIVINS, Paris.
21. Of these categories, 64.9% drink wine every day while they represented only 38.1% of the French population. The various categories underlined in their survey are part of the typology constructed by the authors of the report. For more details, see (Aigrain, Boulet, Lambert, Laporte, 1990).
22. For more details on the festival, see Demossier (1997).
23. The *Confrérie des Chevaliers du Tastevin* was created in Burgundy in 1934 by two local notables, Camille Rodier, the chairman of the tourist office, and Georges Faiveley, a wine-merchant in Nuits-Saint-Georges. It serves as an example all over France and similar *confréries* now promote the wines of regions such as the Loire or the Bordelais. Since the 1970s, the Confrérie has issued its own special commendation for Burgundian wines called *Tastevinage*. For a wine-grower to be accorded the *tastevinage* label is a source of professional prestige and potentially of advantage when it comes to the commercialisation of his vintage. The *Saint Vincent Tournante* was part of the commercial operation launched by the *Confrérie* in the 1930s to provide an

economic boost and cement social divisions between wine-growers and wine-merchants in the context of the crisis.

24. During the *Saint Vincent Tournante* of 1991, I counted 40 alcoholic comas in two days with most occurring by 10.00 o'clock in the morning. The wine producers were very anxious that we did not film this part of the festival.
25. It is interesting to note that the French language dominates the vocabulary attached to wine.

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