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Humanities

Crafting Alternatives through Wine: An Ethnography of Female Natural Winegrowers in Italy

by

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Abstract

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This thesis examines the production and consumption of natural wines through an ethnographic account of the work undertaken by female winegrowers in Italy. Drawing on ethnographic materials collected in two Italian regions (Piedmont and Sicily) between 2017 and 2018, this study investigates the multiple meanings and values attached to the production and consumption of these wines. Produced through a minimal interventionist approach which is based on the rejection of synthetic chemical substances in the vineyard and oenological additives in the cellar, natural wines are a debated product category which polarises opinion and lacks a legally recognised definition both at a national and European level due to their alternative sensorial aesthetics. At the interface between traditional claims to *terroir*, new environmental sensitivities, and consumers' desires for ecologically and socially embedded food products, natural wines represent a flourishing niche market supported by a transnational network of sales agents and cultural intermediaries. Analysing how female natural winegrowers interact with nature and craft their wines, I argue that these producers frame their work through a highly reflexive posture which informs the ways they critically engage with their locality, approach the organic certification, and challenge the existing normative frameworks of quality. By producing wines through a careful sensorial engagement which preserves the non-human elements inhabiting their vineyards and cellars, these women promote a relational understanding of *terroir* and taste which emphasises the unfolding materiality of production and consumption. As relatively new social actors in a field historically dominated by men, I argue that these women are powerful agents of change who have successfully carved out their own space within a world which has traditionally excluded them from leading positions and entrepreneurial roles. Through their wines, they craft alternative ways of being in the world which re-shape the relationships between tradition and techno-science, culture and nature, and local and global scales.

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Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

Print name: Clelia Viecelli

Title of thesis: Crafting Alternatives through Wine: An Ethnography of Female Natural Winegrowers in Italy

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. Parts of this work have been published as:
   Viecelli, C. (2021) 'Local bubbles: Natural wines between globalization and locavorism', *Ethnologie française*, 51(3), pp. 589-599.

Signature: ..... Date: 1st June 2021

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Natural wines in an ethnographic nutshell

Taking advantage of being in Irpinia (the hilly interior of Campania region) to visit my boyfriend's family last year, I made an appointment to visit a local winery dedicated to the production of natural wines. I had already come across those wines a few years earlier, during a natural wine fair I had attended in Veneto region. Since then, the colourful labels of their bottles had appeared from time to time at the tables of restaurants and wine bars I had been seated at, as well as in natural wine lovers' houses had been invited to. I remembered those wines were particularly renowned to be extremely radical for the way they were produced (long macerations, no added sulphites) and for the grape varieties they used, rigorously autochthonous, which could be recognised by expert palates only. The last bottle I had myself tasted a few months earlier had been a Fiano, a typical white variety which gives the name to the final wine. I could still remember the haziness in the glass, the explosion of wild and summery smells of Mediterranean scrub, citrus fruit and peach raising to the nose, and the refreshing acidity in the mouth. I was then happy and curious to visit the place where that particular wine was produced, which by coincidence resulted to be very close to my boyfriend's native village. Surprisingly enough, no one from my boyfriend's family knew either the winery or the wines despite the fact the cellar was distant less than 20 km from where they lived. When I briefly told the story of the winery to the family members, including its economic success within the natural wine world with prices rising to more than 40€ per bottle at the restaurant, out of curiosity and a discrete amount of suspicion my boyfriend's father decided to join us for the visit to the cellar. We were welcomed by one of the owners in front of a three-floor, white and blue house which I was told to be one of the buildings constructed after the terrible earthquake of 1980, which devasted vast areas of Irpinia and caused thousands of deaths. We followed the owner into her house and down to the cellar where she had previously set out the glasses for the wine-tasting. While flipping the pages of a photo album, she started telling us the story of the winery, which was founded by a group of six young friends who wanted to produce for fun ("*per gioco*") a wine similar to the one their own grandparents used to drink every day. To do so, they started touring the surrounding area to find those small plots of vineyards still worked in traditional ways by elder local farmers whose sons and daughters had emigrated to the north of the country and were not then interested in inheriting the family land. They paid particular attention to old vines of indigenous grape varieties, which were traditionally used to produce local wine in the past. According to them, those old plants were not only the source of high-quality wines but also represented a living repository of a whole range of

practices, knowledge and skills connected to the land, a valuable part of the cultural heritage of an area which was heavily damaged by the 1980 earthquake. While looking at the pictures the owner was showing to us, I identified the organiser of the first natural wine fair held in Italy back in 2002. It was she, the owner told me, who had first mentioned to them the existence of a group of Italian and French winegrowers producing with their same ethos. As the owner recalled, "she told us what we were producing were natural wines, we didn't know before then, for us it was just wine!". This encounter allowed them to acquire a new identity as natural winemakers, and get in contact with other Italian producers who were part of the emergent natural wine movement. Around the same years, they managed to have one bottle of their Aglianico (a local red wine) tasted by Luigi Veronelli, the most famous and influential wine journalist in Italy at that time. His ecstatic appreciation of their wine laid the ground for their following economic success. Nowadays, they export nearly 95% of their total production mainly to Japan, US, South Korea, and Northern Europe. Every year, small groups of international distributors, importers, and reviewers who promote their wines in their own countries come to visit the winery. Beside the wine-tasting session held in their cellar and a tour of their vineyards, these professionals are also taken around to discover the region as well as consume local food products at recommended farms and restaurants. The owner told us, with an ill-disguised expression of pride on her face, this kind of informal gastronomic tours had become so successful that now the most enthusiasts from Britain would take same day flights from London just to have lunch again at the local restaurants they had been to during those tours.

1.2 Overview of the study

I have chosen to introduce my thesis with the above ethnographic window as it captures the various intersecting themes at the core of this study well and reveals the motivations that prompted me to conduct ethnographic fieldwork amongst these wine producers. This research project aims at investigating the production and consumption of natural wines through an ethnographic account of the work undertaken by female winegrowers in two Italian regions, Piedmont and Sicily. As emerges from the opening ethnographic vignette, this thesis is also about the complex relationships between local and global scales, the revitalisation of traditional agricultural knowledge and practices, and the formation of new rural identities and sensitivities. The focus on female producers has provided me with an original entry point into the analysis of these interconnected themes, highlighting the tensions nested into this field. By giving voice to the experiences and ideas of these women who represent new powerful social actors and active agents of change, this thesis examines how they carve out their own singularities and negotiate the complexities of this wine world through a highly personal and original approach.

My engagement with the natural wine world started by chance a few years ago while I was working in a small restaurant in Milan, my hometown, after completing my Master degree in Social Anthropology. The owner and chef of the restaurant was passionate about natural wines and a friend of many producers whose wines were served at his restaurant. It was mostly through his late-night lectures once the restaurant was shut down, and the baffled reactions of customers tasting their first glass of natural wine that I became more and more interested in this fascinating world. He was the person who introduced me to an interconnected world of artisanal winegrowers producing radically different wines characterised by strange colours, peculiar smells, and strong flavours. My first encounters with natural wines were indeed marked by a sense of surprise and unexpectedness that made me pay particular attention to their unusual sensorial qualities and know more about the stories behind their production. I was immediately fascinated by the aura of contestation and innovation surrounding these wines and their producers, and it was this curiosity which led me first to enrol into a training course for wine-tasters and then investigate this world through an ethnographic lens. By living with my informants and following their everyday working activities, I have come to understand the meanings and values attached to the production and consumption of these wines and how, through the latter, these winegrowers express themselves, their worldviews, and their attachment to the place where they live. This thesis has developed around this ethnographic realisation.

1.3 Research context

Wine has become a global commodity embedded in an increasingly far-reaching and complex market, and European wines are amongst the most sought-after objects of consumption. Partaking in a long-standing history of symbolic and social prestige, wine plays a fundamental role in shaping global imaginaries and local identities (Phillips, 2006; Smith, 2007; Kopczyńska, 2013). Yet despite its global success, there have been concerns regarding wine-reproduction, homogenisation and, more recently, its sustainability and healthiness. Indeed, in a global scenario dominated by environmental discourses around climate change and its impact on viticulture, the production of so-called natural wines seems to represent a challenging response that a growing number of European winegrowers have adopted. However, the absence of an official definition of natural wines within the national and European legislation does not permit to capture this reality in quantitative terms (Servabo, 2013). Against this confusing scenario where natural wines do not exist as a legally recognised product category, the work of these producers becomes open to

contention.[1] In this context, the role of female winegrowers seems to acquire even more original connotations worth investigating, as they work within a historically male-dominated field of production which has traditionally assigned marginal roles to women and has unacknowledged their contributions (Bravo and Scaraffia, 1979; Martinotti, 1984; Pescarolo, 2001).

As a commodity, wine seems to have a social life of its own (Appadurai, 1986). Scholars have approached the study of wine by being well aware of its participation in specific systems of cultural representations (Ulin, 2002;2004). Consumers are attracted by what a wine bottle contains not only in terms of pleasure and enjoyment but also, and more significantly, distinction (Bourdieu, 1984). *Terroir* and vintage constitute respectively the geographical and temporal axes in the coordinate system of wine distinctiveness, shaping unique wines that reflect the strong association of a place with a taste (Trubek, 2008). The consumption of distinct wines thus seems to imply the rejection of the perceived anonymity attached to mass-produced commodities (Barham, 2003; Demossier, 2011). At the same time, legal systems of denominations such as the French *Appellation d'Origine Côntrolée* (AOC) contribute to the establishment of hierarchies of quality that reinforce the *terroir* ideology and political interests (Moran, 1993; Zhao, 2005; Fourcade, 2012; Teil, 2012). Nevertheless, globally defined market demands for standardised aromas and flavours, and modern technologies have been accused to jeopardize wine uniqueness and inimitability (Benjamin, 1986; Soldati, 2006; Demossier, 2013). The natural wine movement, developed in different European countries since the 1970s as a loose group of non-conformist producers who strongly criticise industrial agriculture, represents a distinctive way of addressing issues around quality, mass production, and sustainability. Despite the lack of a clear definition and the absence of a legal category, common ground is provided by emphasis on craftmanship, authenticity, and a general rejection of technology (Black, 2013). Often erroneously associated to certified organic wines, with which they share a similar approach to viticulture, natural wines retain specific processual, aesthetic, and cultural attributes that make them a category in itself. Indeed, their being natural, besides sparking harsh debates over the meaning of the term, refers to a series of practices and values that differentiate these wines from organic ones. Natural winegrowing is associated to small-scale, artisanal production. These wines are produced according to a low-intervention approach which combines the rejection of synthetic chemical pesticides and fertilizers in the vineyard, with the use of indigenous yeasts and minimum (or zero) technological manipulation in the cellar (Kaplonski, 2019). For these reasons, these wines are presented as being a step further than organic wines in terms of naturalness. Nowadays, natural

[1] To date, France is the only European country that has recently issued a natural wine certification. The *vin méthode nature* has indeed been officially recognised by the National Institute for Origins and Quality (INAO), the French Ministry for Agriculture and the French Fraud Control Office.

wines represent a flourishing niche product category within the larger organic wine sector both on national and international scale. Since I started being interested in this world a few years ago, the number of dedicated fairs, events, and seminars both in Italy and abroad has mushroomed. Reading an article on this topic published on the newspapers *La Repubblica* in January 2019, I could count more than forty annual events in Italy exclusively devoted to the promotion of this wine category (Ricci, 2019b).[2]

1.3.1 Women in the field

In a sector traditionally dominated by men, the presence of influential female producers within the natural wine panorama constitutes an original object of anthropological analysis. The historical trajectory of female occupation in the agricultural sector has undergone through different transitions, but a common feature has been women's subordinate role due to a widespread patriarchal culture within peasant families (Bravo and Scaraffia, 1979; Barberis and al., 2013; Bertolini, 2014). While the female presence in agriculture was already conspicuous before the Second World War (Tirabassi, 1993), during the economic boom (1950s – 1970s) the percentage of female rural workers increased due to the industrialization of the country and the consequent migrations of male workers from the countryside to the cities and from the south to the north of the peninsula (and abroad). Since the 1980s, women have started to assume managerial roles within small and medium Italian farms, especially in the south were men left the countryside in huge numbers (Bertolini, 2014). Nowadays, official statistics report a steady female presence in the sector. According to a recent survey conducted by Coldiretti (the leading agricultural trade union in Italy), in 2018, 28.6% of the Italian farms were conducted by women, a quarter of whom were young female entrepreneurs under 35 years of age (Coldiretti, 2019). In the same year, women were reported to manage 28% of the small-scale wineries in the country, a higher percentage compared to industrial wineries conducted by women which were only 12% of the total.[3] While in medium and larger conventional wineries women generally occupy working positions in accountancy, marketing, and communication, it is unusual to see them directly involved into the production process which is still perceived as a male occupation (Gilbert and Gilbert, 2019; Cinelli Colombini, 2021). Conversely, one of the most visible aspects of the Italian natural wine movement is the presence of female producers who manage the activities conducted both in the vineyard and in the cellar (Ricci, 2019a). The reasons behind this stark

[2] In this thesis "winegrowing" will be used as a term encompassing the processes leading to the production of wine. I will use "viticulture" to refer to the practices of grape growing, and "winemaking" to the various activities conducted in the cellar. Natural producers usually identify as *vignaioli* (similar to the French *vignerons*), which in this context can be translated as "small-scale winegrowers".

[3] The survey was published in an article on the Italian business newspaper *Il Sole 24 Ore* (Manuelli, 2019).

contrast are partly due to the reduced size of the natural wine world and the role of pioneers that a few women had for the development of the Italian natural wine movement.[4] Statistics about the number and roles of female natural winegrowers in Italy are practically non-existent due to the lack of a legal recognition for this wine category. Still, there are common traits which allow to draw an initial picture of the female presence in this world. They are generally highly educated, with a university degree in Viticulture and Oenology which enables them to conduct and manage their own wineries quite independently (Cinelli Colombini, 2021). They usually own the land where they produce their wines, either as the last generation of traditional families of small winegrowers or as newcomers who have invested in small-scale wine enterprises. This aspect of land tenure represents an element of novelty considering the Italian legislation and cultural norms on this matter, which has favoured an inheritance system from father to son.[5] Finally, these women craft their wines in distinctive and original ways, actively participate in debates around natural winegrowing expressing their personal views, are highly mobile and exposed to media attention.

To give an idea of the way these female producers are described by wine critics and journalists interested in their work and approach to winemaking, I report what a natural wine distributor told me in this regard: "What strikes about these female natural producers is that they are different from the women of the industrial wine, the ones you can see portrayed in the photos of wine magazines with high heels and painted nails, instead these female producers are farmers, they are the ones who manage the winery and make wine" (interview 29/10/17). This statement reflects the gendered organization of the conventional wine sector, where women tend to be assigned to roles of communication, administration and marketing and excluded from the site of production. At the same time, it shows how female natural winegrowers represent an outstanding exception as they not only play managerial roles within their wineries, but are also physically involved in every step of the production process. If in the past it was precisely physical strength that was used to frame and justify the superiority of male members within peasant families (Papa, 1985; Palazzi, 1990; Pescarolo, 2001), nowadays these female producers express themselves and their personal interpretation of *terroir* through their bodily engagement with the vines and wine without framing their actions through explicit gender categories.

[4] This explanation was also provided by the moderator of a wine-tasting event organized by the producer Corrado Dottori at his estate in July 2018. The wines tasted for that occasion were produced by women only and the moderator referred to the special role played by women within the Italian natural wine movement compared to the industrial wine sector.

[5] Italian women were legally excluded from inheritance until 1865 (when the Pisanelli Code established equality between male and female heirs), but women were still subject to their husbands' authority until 1975 when the new Italian family law abolished the role of the *paterfamilias*. However, women have kept being excluded from inheriting the land by a widespread custom which privileges male heirs (Palazzi, 1990).

For these reasons, I decided to investigate the natural wine world through an ethnographic analysis of the work undertaken by a group of female producers. By focusing on these women and their narratives, the thesis examines the ambiguities, tensions, and novelties of natural winegrowing through a privileged lens. As new and influential social actors who push the boundaries of past gendered configurations within a contested field of production such as natural winegrowing, my informants are at the forefront of a series of historical, political, and aesthetic transgressions investing this world of wine. Still, this thesis does not constitute an anthropological work on gender and does not apply a feminist perspective to the themes analysed. Instead, I frame the intersection between natural winegrowing and gender through a materialist approach that focuses on the changing roles and agency of these women. Drawing on the existing literature on women in agriculture and more specifically small family farms, I want to investigate how much my informants' case studies diverge from previous generations.[6] What can we argue about women working in traditional winegrowing families? What happens to those women who were not born into winegrowing families? How do these women act in a male-dominated sector? Instead of asking myself whether there was a special relation between women and nature or any supposedly 'female' features attached to natural wine production, I entered the field with these questions in mind. As Brandth and Haugen aptly observe, arguing that farm women's bodies are 'close to nature' "raises problems of defining both women and nature as essential categories, when in fact both of them are socially defined" (Brandth and Haugen, 2005: 91). I opted for this materialist perspective as I was mainly interested in my informants' disrupting roles within the wine field. During my fieldwork, these women explicitly told me that gender did not connotate their work, their identities as winegrowers, not even their wines. None of them were involved in any wine professional association promoting the role of women in the sector. As one of them told me, "I think that the producer's personal character prevails over gender; I don't define myself as a female winegrower, I'm just a winegrower" (interview 06/09/17). Through an inductive approach, I followed my informants' narratives as they emerged during my fieldwork and I let them guide my understanding of their engagement with natural wine production and consumption.

1.4 Rationale of the study and research questions

By focusing on the production and consumption of Italian natural wines through an ethnographic account of the work of female winegrowers, my research project will provide the current anthropological literature on wine with original insights. When I initially approached the study of

[6] I did not focus on large-scale wine corporations as natural wine production in Italy is usually undertaken by small-scale wineries.

this category of wines, I soon realised that it had not yet been the object of extensive anthropological investigations. A part from the chapter by anthropologist Rachel Black (2013) included in the volume she co-edited with her colleague Robert Ulin, natural wines have only recently attracted the attention of a group of researchers interested in non-conventional winegrowing, alternative agro-ecologies and the environmental shift occurring in the wine sector (Alonso González and Parga Dans, 2018; Heath, 2018; Pineau, 2019; Grandjean, 2021). This thesis aims at contributing to this emergent field of wine anthropological research. In particular, four main aspects connected to the production and consumption of these wines constitute the rationale of my ethnographic study and will be developed throughout the thesis: the mutual and complex relationships between nature and culture in natural winegrowing; the role of *terroir* in my informants' practices and discourses; and finally, the discussion on natural wines' alternative sensorial aesthetics. These aspects will be presented through the narratives of my female informants, whose role as agents of change constitutes the fourth theme that will run throughout my whole thesis.

The notion of "nature", something that is central to the (debated) definition of these wines and is presented as the main point of reference in the practices and discourses of those who craft them, has not been investigated through a fine-grained ethnographic analysis of the work conducted by these winegrowers both in vineyard and in the cellar. "Nature" and "culture" emerge more or less explicitly as key concepts in the representation of natural wines by producers and other actors involved in their promotion (wine critics, importers, distributors, retailers, etc.). The very process of winemaking is usually depicted as an iconic instance of the intertwining of nature and culture, and wine itself is conceived as a cultural artefact with a thousand-year history (Charters, 2006; Black and Ulin, 2013). The current debate over the meaning of nature applied to winegrowing has made this conceptual opposition re-emerge in new terms. On one hand, winegrowers stress the rejection of synthetic substances in the vineyard and chemical additives in the cellar, highlighting thus a more natural approach to wine production. On the other hand, their detractors claim that there is not such a thing as "natural wine". They argue that wine would naturally turn into vinegar without human intervention (Black, 2013). Natural wines then seem to pose interesting questions regarding the way we conceptualise nature, culture, and their mutual relationships at a time marked by growing environmental concerns (Inglis, 2019). Drawing on an ecological and new materialist perspective, this thesis aims at investigating the production of these wines and the meanings attached to them by going beyond the classic nature-culture divide. My work indeed sits within current debates contesting the opposition between nature and culture and its articulation as a binary distinction, which have historically characterised anthropological thinking

and in particular Lévi-Strauss' structuralist approach.[7] Nowadays, the debate around the Anthropocene and the impact of human activities on the environment has forced anthropologists to revise their theoretical frameworks and adopt new epistemological perspectives. Earlier works by Descola (2013) and other scholars such as Viveiros De Castro (1998;2004) and Holbraad (2009) on indigenous cosmologies have paved the way towards a thorough rejection of a Western anthropocentrism granting human beings a status superior to other non-human species inhabiting our planet. In the last decades, an increasing number of anthropologists have been focusing their attention on fungi, trees, animals, microbes and their complex entanglements with human life (Ingold, 2000; Haraway, 2008; Paxson, 2008; Kohn, 2013; Tsing, 2015). According to these scholars, human sociality and culture are not ontologically disconnected from the web of human – nonhuman relationships that make up biological life. These multispecies ethnographers are studying "contact zones where lines separating nature from culture have broken down, where encounters between *Homo Sapiens* and other beings generate mutual ecologies" (Kirksey and Helmreich, 2010: 546). My ethnographic account on natural winegrowing is situated within this literature as I framed the production of natural wine as the activity of different human – nonhuman agentive beings in which human contribution is just one element among others.

Besides being natural, these winegrowers consider their wines as authentic products of *terroir* and, as such, antithetical to conventional and industrial ones. *Terroir* represents a fundamental category of meaning which crucially shapes their lives, values and everyday actions. As an anthropologist working on wine, I have dealt with a vast literature focusing on *terroir* through various disciplinary angles: historical, philosophical, geographical and, of course, anthropological. The common approach of most of this scholarship, especially from the anthropological side, has been a deconstructive analysis of the French concept of *terroir.* The valuable works by anthropologists such as Demossier (2011;2018), Ulin (1996;2007;2013), and Trubek (2008) have highlighted the socially and historically constructed nature of this complex concept and have provided insightful analyses on its use by different social actors both at national and international scale. Power relations, logics of distinction, strategic appropriations, and mythical narrations are all issues that emerge within the literature on *terroir*, not only in the study of wine but also in food studies. Still, the way *terroir* is lived and interpreted as an ontologically relevant category by natural winegrowers forces the researcher to adopt new analytical perspectives (Teil, 2012). This is even more evident as natural wines do not conform to the normative standards of quality

[7] The French anthropologist defined nature and culture as "two mutually exclusive orders" (Lévi-Strauss, 1969: 8) within a theoretical paradigm constructed through chains of oppositions (e.g., raw – cooked; wild – domestic; female – male).

defined by national system of appellations such as the French AOC, which were founded precisely on the *terroir* ideology (Moran, 1993; Fourcade, 2012). As contested and contesting products of *terroir* which claim their authenticity and subvert existing hierarchies of values, natural wines invite to new reflections on the role and meaning of *terroir* in the work and lives of these winegrowers.

Finally, the alternative sensorial aesthetics of natural wines resulting from the practices, choices and ethos adopted by their producers both in the vineyard and the cellar, prompts a reconsideration on the processes through which taste and quality are constructed, assessed, and hierarchised. The sensorial engagement which characterises the way natural winegrowers craft their own products and shape alternative frameworks to judge their quality seems to escape established mechanisms of value attribution to wine. Going beyond a Bourdieusian reading of taste as a reflection of socially determined dispositions and drawing instead on a pragmatist approach, I argue that the analysis of natural wines' sensorial aesthetics sheds new light on the material ecologies of production and consumption as well as the formation of alternative normative frameworks which challenge existing regulatory regimes.

Female natural winegrowers act as relatively new social actors in a sector which has been (and still is) a male-dominated field of production. Considering these women's higher education, technical training, land ownership and international success, makes them an original research subject and constitutes a unique angle through which to investigate natural wine production. While these producers have attracted the attention of film directors and wine critics (Graglia, 2011; Nossiter, 2014; Gasnier, 2016) as they adopt a highly personal perspective on their production, they have not yet been the object of thorough ethnographic analyses. In fact, the existing anthropological literature on the gendering of wine has so far focused on female workers' conditions within a familial mode of production (Lem, 1999; 2013), but has neglected their role as agents of change. This thesis will contribute to filling this gap in the literature by choosing to give them voice as key informants in my research. As Weidman argues, voice is "a site where shared discourses and values, affect, and aesthetics are made manifest in and contested through embodied practice" (2014: 38). It is through an analysis of their embodied practices with wine that I will show how they break with conventional discourses and practices on *terroir* and nature, carve their own individualities and contest regulatory regimes of taste.

The questions that guided me throughout my research helped me frame my argument, and this thesis will address them by developing the key themes I raised above. I approached the study of natural wines as I was fascinated by their contested and contesting status, and the stories they were imbued with. These two aspects formed the basis for the questions I asked myself when I

embarked upon my ethnographic fieldwork: why are natural wines framed as radically alternative to conventional wines? How do natural winegrowers construct their relationship with nature through the production of their wines, and what is the role of *terroir* in the practices and narratives of these producers? In which terms female natural winegrowers represent new social actors in the field? And finally, what can the sensorial aesthetics of natural wines tell us about established politics of taste and hierarchies of wine values?

1.5 Structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of six main chapters and it is structured in the following way:

- Chapter 2 presents the methodology I used to conduct my study and a description of my research participants. Here I outline the steps undertaken to conduct my ethnographic fieldwork and the challenges which emerged during the time spent on the field. Ethnography has allowed me to investigate the motivations and practices of my informants as well as understand the meanings and values attached to their work and lives as natural winegrowers.
- Chapter 3 provides an overview of the wider socio-cultural context of my research and introduces natural wines as a contesting and contested product category. By looking at the recent trends in artisanal food production and consumption, and the role of *terroir* in promoting and adding value to local food products, I will show how natural wines intersect modern food anxieties and consumers' desires of ecologically and socially embedded food products.
- Chapter 4 is the first of the three main ethnographic chapters of the thesis. Here I analyse the relevance of *terroir* in the work of my various informants despite their different attachments to the place where they produce their wines. I also show their diversified engagements with the European organic certification and the global connections they have as a social network of producers. Through this multi-scalar perspective from the local to the global, I highlight the reflexive approach characterising the work of these producers at different levels.
- Chapter 5 deals with the work undertaken by my informants both in the vineyard and in the cellar. During my ethnographic fieldwork I followed the working activities of my research subjects during the harvesting and pruning seasons. Drawing on the materials collected, I explore how natural winegrowers engage with the living materialities of wine by attuning their practices to the agency of the vines, yeasts, and fermenting must. I also expand on the current role of female winegrowers within this field of practice through a diachronic perspective.

- Chapter 6 focuses on the multiple and alternatives values attached to the production and consumption of natural wines by looking at the ways my informants construct and promote an alternative normative framework of quality to assess their own wines. In parallel to a relational understanding of *terroir*, wine-tasting and consumption are framed as a reflexive and unfolding activity which is open to the emergent material qualities of wine and dismisses pre-set, analytical evaluation criteria.
- The concluding chapter summarises the main points raised throughout the thesis, highlights the original contribution of my work, and reconsiders the title of this thesis in light of what I have argued in the previous chapters.

Chapter 2 Methodology

"The task of the ethnographer is to contextualize insight of local values and practices within wider local significations, and to render them probable; to show how theirs is a *meaningful alternative as a way of life*"

(Howell, 2018: para. 3; emphasis mine)

2.1 Introduction

This thesis is an anthropological account of the production and consumption of natural wines in Italy through a focus on female winegrowers based in two regions (Piedmont and Sicily). As such, the main research method I drew on was ethnography. I conducted multi-sited fieldwork for short and repeated periods of time between 2017 and 2018. As the topic of my research deals with the production of wine, my fieldwork focused mainly on the two most important activities carried out in the year, namely harvest and pruning. Each of these moments represents an intensive period of work riddled with risks, physical hardship, concentration and foresight. I spent weeks with my informants, working with them both in the vineyard and in the cellar according to the period of the year. I stayed at their place at least a week each time, resulting in a series of different ethnographic observations that I will examine further in the next chapters.

In this chapter, I will illustrate my research methodology highlighting the main challenges I had to face while conducting my ethnographic fieldwork. I will first show how I entered the field, then I will introduce my field sites and my research participants and consider some methodological implications of my approach. In the second part of the chapter, I will focus on sensory ethnography and I will demonstrate its relevance to my research project by providing some examples from my fieldwork. Finally, I will conclude with some remarks on research ethics and data analysis.

2.2 A preliminary reflection on the current popularity of ethnography

Generally speaking, ethnography is considered as the methodological backbone of anthropology: without ethnography, anthropology's theoretical significance weakens and it becomes an epistemologically fragile discipline (Howell, 2018). Recently, Ingold (2014) has challenged this common perspective by criticizing the way the term "ethnography" has been overused by anthropologists and other social scientists alike. As a PhD student based within a Modern Languages department (then not Anthropology or Social Sciences), I have witnessed myself an

increasing popularity of ethnography as a research method applied to a wide range of different studies. Indeed, an increasing number of students and researchers working in Linguistics, Education, Medicine, and Biology (among others) mention “ethnography” and “fieldwork” among the methods deployed in their research projects. Most of the time ethnography is vaguely understood as part of a broader set labelled as “qualitative research methods”, where open-ended interviews, focus-groups and biographies seem to combine to form more human-oriented research practices (Howell, 2017; Shah, 2017). When asked about the length of their fieldwork (or more commonly defined “data collection”), students of my department generally answer that a few interviews, sometimes repeated over a short period of time is more than enough. When other PhD students at my department knew that I would conduct fieldwork ideally over a year, they were quite surprised. What they could not really understand was the methodological necessity of spending such a prolonged period of time in the field.

It is not my intention here to try to find an explanation to the current popularity of ethnography in academic disciplines other than anthropology (Van Maanen, 2011; Demossier, Bernasek and Armbruster, 2019). Rather, these examples forced me to re-think the strengths of ethnography and its peculiar characteristics as a research method, which differentiate it from other methodologies equally valid but based on different epistemological premises. I embarked upon fieldwork with these considerations in my head. In what follows, I will describe my experiences as an anthropologist conducting multi-sited fieldwork, highlighting the main methodological challenges I faced during the time spent with my research participants.

2.3 Multi-sited ethnography

My ethnographic account of the production and consumption of natural wines in Italy is articulated through multiple mappings covering different sites both in Italy, my own country, and abroad (London). To do so, I had to be mobile and conduct multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995). I mainly directed my ethnographic gaze on two distinct Italian regions where my informants work as winegrowers, namely the countryside of Piedmont and Sicily. I came to choose these two particular regions due to a combination of different factors, where serendipity played a major role. As I will explain more in depth below, during the initial stages of my research I tried to get in contact with female natural winegrowers with different backgrounds and biographies (women belonging to small-scale farming families; first-generation winegrowers; and newcomers). Instead of first selecting specific geographical locations and then possible producers to study, I gave priority to finding this diverse group of female informants. The first two producers I enrolled in my study were based in Piedmont, the most renown Italian region for wine production (together with Tuscany). Through one of them, I got in contact with three other

producers, one working in Piedmont and two in Sicily. One of these producers based in Sicily is also quite famous within the natural wine world and for this reason I had previously planned to include her in my research. By the end of this selection process, I made connections with four female winegrowers based in Piedmont and two in Sicily (see map below). In logistical terms, having to travel between these two regions during the harvesting and pruning seasons was feasible as the timescales for these activities did not completely overlap in the two locales due to their different climatic conditions. At the same time, having all my informants split into two areas was more manageable (and financially sustainable) than being forced to move around multiple locations across the country. For these reasons, I limited my geographical focus to these two regions.

Figure 1 Map of Italy (Mapswire, 2021) [modified by author]

Besides conducting multi-sited fieldwork in these two regions, I followed my research subjects to different wine fairs where they participated in promoting their wines. In fact, I did not only follow those people and their wines, but also their ideas as I discussed natural winegrowing with sommeliers, wine merchants, chefs, and other experts who know my informants, their wines and their approach to winemaking well.

2.3.1 Entering the field

In this section, I will explain how I built up my social network of producers and wine professionals at the very beginning of my research. As noted before, my initial relationship with the world of natural wines started off when I was still based in Milan, the most cosmopolitan and international city in Italy. The same natural wine world (especially if we look at the consumption side) is nested within these cosmopolitan urban hubs such as London, New York, Copenhagen, Tokyo, where middle-class consumers meet in fancy restaurants, fairs, hipster bars, as well as at cultural and promotional events dedicated to these wines (Smith Maguire, 2019). Even though Milan has not been historically the most important venue for the promotion of natural wines on a national scale, it was here where I first encountered these wines while working as a waitress in a local restaurant. The owner and chef of this small restaurant is a Sicilian man with a passion for natural wines. After decades of conventional wine consumption, which led him to a certificate as a professional wine-taster, he became critical of mainstream wine production and started looking for less interventionist approaches to winemaking. Now, his restaurant mainly serves natural wines coming from different countries (mostly Italy, France, and Spain) to a middle-class clientele, and it is one of the city's venues for events devoted to the promotion of these wines and the philosophy behind them. He is both the person in charge of the wine cellar and the one who maintains regular contact with natural wine distributors, sales representatives as well as the winegrowers. When I decided to conduct an anthropological study on natural wine, he was more than happy to be my gatekeeper.

Evoking now this preliminary stage of my research, especially in light of the fieldwork which ensued, makes me reflect even more about the open-ended nature of ethnographic research. Recalling the role of serendipity I mentioned above, I agree with anthropologist Ulf Hannerz when he argues that "it is important to cultivate a certain willingness to seize unforeseen opportunities, a general sensibility towards ways of making anthropology out of realities which might otherwise remain mere distractions" (Hannerz, 2006: 31-32). Although I had developed a few research questions supporting and articulating the rationale of my PhD project, I started my fieldwork with a vague idea of what I was going to find out once in the field. My two supervisors, in turn, corroborated this personal feeling by highlighting the serendipitous nature of fieldwork. I still remember when, during a supervisory meeting, they warned me about the crucial importance of those days when nothing seems really worth taking notes of, which instead prove to be somehow illuminating retrospectively. Howell clarifies that the same word "serendipity" includes an element of wisdom in its definition, meaning that the anthropologist must be ready and receptive all the time (Howell, 2017: 17). Luckily enough, my fieldwork was blessed by this magical power

that enabled me to re-direct my ethnographic gaze to unforeseen directions. In particular, as I will better explain later, part of the argument of my thesis dealing with the significance of my informants' worldviews, opened up when I inadvertently started focusing on the aesthetic values of these wines.

Through my gatekeeper and his acquaintances within the natural wine world, I started building my own network of natural winegrowers, distributors, critics, and amateurs. Through him, I was initially able to meet with two female winegrowers who were based not far away from Milan (one working in Piedmont who then became an informant of mine, one in Emilia-Romagna). At that preliminary stage, I had not yet decided to focus on female producers only but I suppose that being a woman myself somehow influenced my gatekeeper's choices. Through snowball sampling, the producer based in Emilia-Romagna put me in contact with a female producer and close friend of hers, who would then become one of my main informant (Livia). Through her, I managed to include three more producers to my group of informants (Claire, Margherita and Isabella). As a result, my network of natural winegrowers was constituted mostly by women. It was during this selection phase that I realised the possibility to frame my research on natural wine through a specific focus on the work undertaken by these women. As I argue below, if my positionality initially influenced this methodological trajectory, the rationale of my study was nevertheless justified as these women represent new social actors in the field, who have not been the subject of extensive research.

While expanding this fast-growing network of producers, and mostly thanks to it, I was also able to meet other professionals working in the natural wine sector as critics, sommeliers, writers, and wine fair organisers. At some point of my fieldwork, I came to realise that the majority of my informants were acquainted with each other in a more or less close way, resulting in a constellation of interrelated groups of people. The way my social network expanded quickly over a relatively short span of time (less than two years) already says something about the dimensions of, and the level of interconnectedness existing within, the Italian natural wine world.

2.3.2 My field sites

Piedmont and Sicily are the two sites where I spent most of my fieldwork. The production of wine is deeply rooted into the history of both regions and its cultural significance has recently found a further recognition through the inscriptions into the UNESCO World Heritage List. In 2014, Piedmont's vineyards of Langhe-Roero and Monferrato have been recognised as UNESCO "cultural landscapes" as they "provide outstanding living testimony to winegrowing and winemaking traditions that stem from a long history" (UNESCO, 2014). In the same year, the

traditional practice of cultivating the *vite ad alberello* (head-trained bush vines) of the Sicilian island of Pantelleria was declared UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.[2] These inscriptions reflect current processes of heritagization investing European rural localities (Ray, 1998; Gade, 2004), but also a long-standing tradition in wine production that, as I will show, my informants acknowledge and promote in ways which do not align with UNESCO processes and state practices of geographical designation (through the DOC/G system).

Piedmont is located in the far north-western corner of the country and encircled by the Western Alps to the north and west, creating a natural border with France. The Tyrrhenian Sea is accessible going southwards through Liguria region less than 50 km away. Together with Tuscany, Piedmont is internationally renowned for the production of high-quality wines. Wine is produced in many different areas throughout the region, with a prevalence of red over white wines. Barolo and Barbaresco, both produced from the Nebbiolo grape variety, are the two crown jewels of the region, highly appreciated for their extraordinary longevity and complexity. As shown in Figure 2 below, Piedmont is the Italian region with the highest number of DOCs and DOCGs (58 denominations in total, followed by Tuscany with 52).[3]

[2] *Alberello* is a traditional trellis system. The plant is not supported by any wires and it develops as a short bush.

[3] DOC and DOCG stand for *Denominazione di Origine Controllata* and *Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita*, respectively. They represent the national indications of geographical origin for wine.

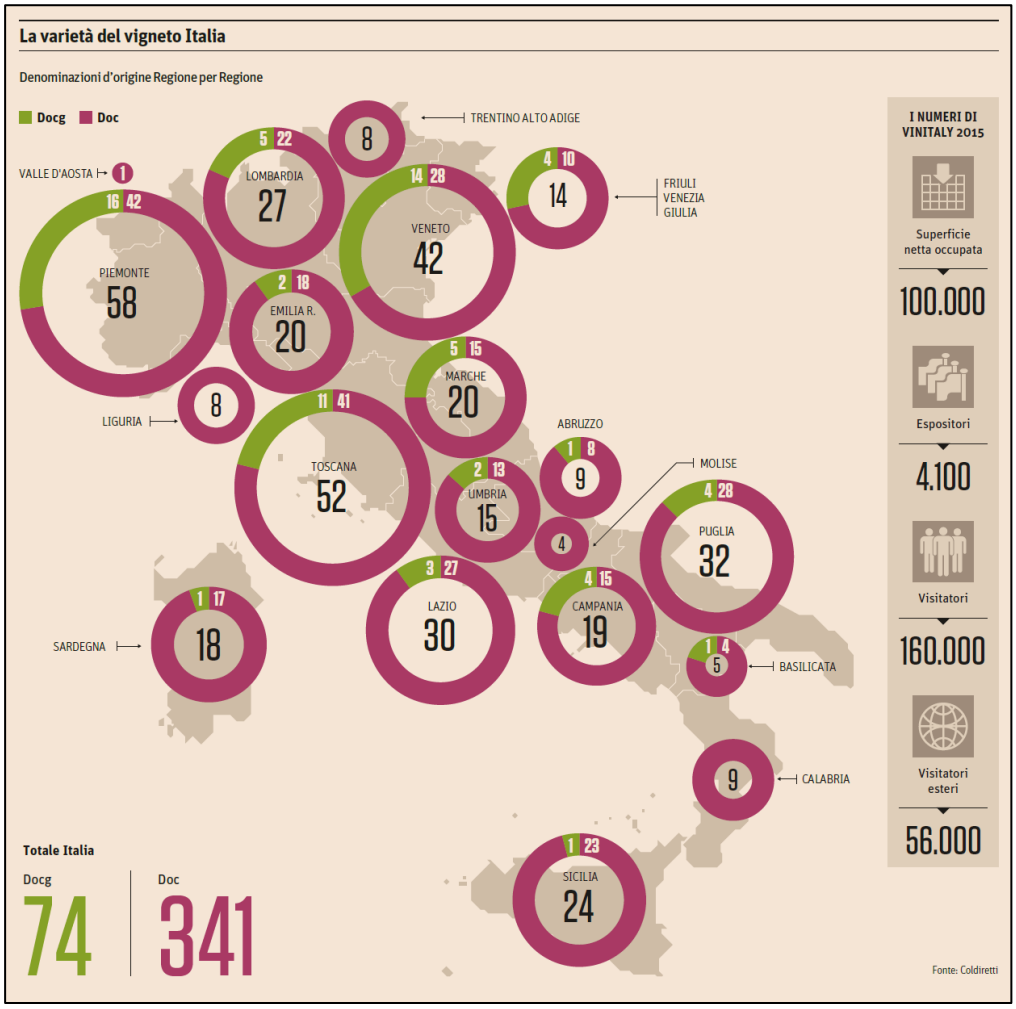


Figure 2 Italian Denominations of Origin region by region (Infodata, 2015)

As I will explain in chapter 4, this leading position reflects the historical and political prestige of a region which had strong political and cultural ties with France and possesses a long tradition of small-scale, family-run wineries. In fact, to give an idea of what viticulture looks like in Piedmont, wine experts and scholars often draw a comparison with Burgundy in France: the two regions are indeed characterised by a geography composed by a myriad of small plots owned by small winegrowers, and a long-standing tradition in artisanal, small-scale viticulture where the land is mostly inherited through generations (Matasar, 2006; Lyons, 2015). An orientation towards artisanal, natural winemaking has somehow always been present here, where the winegrowing areas are mostly divided into rather small land plots belonging to single small owners or families of winegrowers (Servabo, 2013). It is no coincidence that the first Italian association of natural winegrowers (ViniVeri) counts, amongst its founding members, a few small-scale producers based in Piedmont who were critical of mass production and modernist winemaking techniques.

In this regard, Sicily does not compare to Piedmont and its image of fine wine region is quite recent. Located at the extreme southern edge of the country, Sicily is one of the two major Italian

islands. Here the history of viticulture and winemaking is thousands of years old, when the region was still a Greek colony known as Magna Graecia, "Greater Greece" (Buttitta, 1977). Still characterised in some areas by traditional systems of training such as *alberello*, viticulture in Sicily is widespread across the whole region, from Mount Etna down to the island of Pantelleria. White and red wines, produced in similar quantities, are mainly obtained through indigenous grape varieties such as Grillo, Catarratto and Nero d'Avola. Compared to Piedmont, Sicily can claim just one DOCG (Cerasuolo di Vittoria, which was created in 2005) and 23 DOCs. This is indicative of the two regions' different historical trajectories and, more generally, a long-standing political and economic divide between the north and the south of the country. Until the 1980s, the bulk of Sicilian wine production would travel across the country to be assembled with wines produced in the north. Sicily was, together with Puglia region, the major supplier of national bulk wines due to their higher sugar concentrations, which translated into increased alcohol volumes. Land ownership in Sicily was historically the expression and, more importantly, source of income of few local notables and aristocrats. Viticulture and winemaking had been long rooted into this system of latifundism until the Second World War. Until very recently, the good reputation of Sicilian wines has been tightly associated to the names of few large owners and entrepreneurs who invested their wealth into the production of high-quality wines. Nowadays, the whole region is witnessing a major renaissance in the production and exportation of local fine wines thanks to a new generation of trained winegrowers and a renovated interest in the region's potential (Atkin, 2011b; Napjus, 2014).

2.3.3 The advantages of being mobile

Being able to move around different sites across these two regions gave me the possibility to acknowledge both similarities and differences in the way natural winegrowing was carried out by my research participants, as well as the impact it has at a local level. Multi-sited ethnography in this sense allows the researcher to apply a comparative lens to the anthropological analysis. During my fieldwork, my ethnographic gaze was mainly focused on these wine producers' lives, practices, and ideas, and being mobile allowed me to better follow these stories. I spent most of my time with my informants working at their wineries in these two regions, and I followed them in few occasions when they travelled to dedicated fairs and events both in Italy and the UK (London).[6] As I could not join them in all their numerous annual journeys abroad, I had to take advantage of the time I spent with them at their own wineries in the two key moments of harvesting and pruning. Moreover, I interviewed various professionals involved in the promotion,

[6] See Appendix C for more information.

communication, and trade of these wines. The materials collected added a more critical perspective to my understanding of the natural wine world.

Thanks to the multi-sited nature of my fieldwork, I came to acknowledge the mutual influence of local and global forces within the natural wine world as it emerged through the actions (and words) of my informants. In fact, I moved around different sites where these local and global levels were constantly intermingling as my informants worked in specific spatial locations, being at the same time embedded in wider networks of people, places and cosmologies. They travelled around the world with their wines, telling stories about their work and their products which were simultaneously followed by hundreds of people through the social media. In this sense, I can say that following my informants (both off-line and on-line) has proven to be an important way of learning. The multi-sited dimension of my fieldwork allowed me to collect short meaningful observations of my informants' lives, resulting in a series of ethnographic windows which are open to modernity and its complexity. This mobile character of my research, which in part reflects the global mobility of my informants and their wines, has enabled me to get a better picture of these producers and the social circuits they attended.

However, that does not mean this aspect of my fieldwork ruled out the significance of those ethnographic moments spent in more conventional bounded field sites. As I said in the introduction of this chapter, my understanding of natural winegrowing mainly emerged through observing and actively participating in a wide range of activities with my informants. In this sense, I found useful Candea's (2007) notion of "arbitrary location", which redeems the value of the traditional bounded site by redefining it as an explicitly partial and limited perspective into the complexity of our modernity. In my ethnography, the vineyards and cellars of these winemakers represent specific locations where modernity and its complexity can be detected, as the island of Corsica becomes for Candea a methodological tool to enquire into wider social configurations. It was during those moments spent with my informants that I managed to share as much as I could in terms of informal chats, practical activities, exchange of opinions, laughter and even silences. That included also some unwanted yet unavoidable intrusions into their intimate domestic lives, witnessing personal as well as familiar crises and joys altogether. I tried to record all these moments, what Malinowski (1922) defined "imponderabilia of actual life", as accurately as any other ethnographic data.

2.3.4 Conducting 'anthropology at home'

I conducted my ethnographic fieldwork in my own country, where I grew up and have spent so far most of my life. In anthropology that would represent an instance of what has been termed

'anthropology at home' (Jackson, 1987; Peirano, 1998). At the beginning of my research, I took into account this methodological caveat concerning my fieldwork and questioned how this would influence the development and the same content of my own ethnography. Soon enough though, I realised (with some relief) how many factors made me feel a proper outsider in the field. Considering my own position there, a young female researcher raised and educated in an urban context with no background in rural work, I had enough attributes to be perceived as an external presence by my informants. When I was involved in the practical operations undertaken both in the vineyard and in the cellar, I was treated as a novice who needed to be taught from the basics. This specific working environment, action-oriented but also knowledge-based, counterbalanced the methodological rule "making the familiar strange", which is supposed to inform the conduct of anthropologists working 'at home' (Van Maanen, 1995; Myers, 2011).

For these reasons I would consider my research an example of 'anthropology at home' only to the extent that I could conduct my fieldwork in my own language. That means I was able to share those common levels of discourse and cultural references that a language inevitably brings with it.[7] As for the rest, the object of my study and the mode of investigation lead to defining my research as an anthropological account focused on the complexities of modernity and its multiple scales. As the debate on the role of anthropology and its methodological trademarks within our contemporary world has shown, concepts such as "field site" and "home" need to take into account the discipline's implicit assumptions as well as multiple levels of practices, discourses and knowledge, including the researcher's self-reflexivity (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997; Peirano, 1998).

2.3.5 A further remark on my ethnographic fieldwork

Before introducing my research participants, I briefly want to take into consideration one of the key aspects of my ethnographic fieldwork, that is its temporal dimension. Compared to other research methods, ethnography traditionally finds its legitimacy and peculiarity in the long and uninterrupted engagement with the field and who live in it. Multi-sited ethnography as a method has opened up new, more flexible ways of conducting fieldwork which in turn reflect the increased mobility characterising our contemporary society (Wulff, 2002; Hannerz, 2003; O'Reilly, 2009). As a consequence, one-year or two-year fieldwork in a single locale is not the norm anymore. An increasing number of anthropological studies are indeed based in multiple locations which are investigated across repeated periods of time. Anthropologist Helena Wulff (2002) describes her multi-local engagement in the study of dance in Ireland using the expression "yo-yo fieldwork". According to the author, not being physically in the field over a continuous period of

[7] Even though I had to make sense of many expressions in local dialects related to the context of study.

time does not jeopardise the quality of the observations made by the ethnographer. In-between periods of fieldwork allow the researcher to sharp her theoretical questions, reflect on the materials already collected, and better prepare for the next field stint. During the time I spent away from my research sites, I was still mentally engaged with my fieldwork, I kept in contact with my informants through different means of communication (voice calls, text messages, emails, and Facebook), and I revised my research questions and literature in light of what I had already collected on the field. In advocating short-term ethnography, Pink and Morgan argue that "it is not simply an inferior way to do ethnographic research that is imposed by the time constraints […] It is rather a route to producing alternative ways of knowing about and with people and the environments of which they are part" (2013: 359). According to the authors, short-term ethnography is characterised by the intensity of the research encounter, a tight dialog between theory and ethnography and an on-going engagement with the audio-visual materials collected.

On a more personal note, as a PhD student I had to face stringent time constraints and limited financial resources. Nowadays, universities need to comply with stricter standards of academic productivity and bureaucratic pressures, which might result in a restriction of the timespan allowed to fieldwork activities as well as difficulties in obtaining solid funding. Translating all of that into the planning of my research project, it meant I could not conduct fieldwork over prolonged periods of time. Instead, as I said, I was able to make short and repeated visits in my main field sites where I collected a series of ethnographic observations. Nevertheless, I think the way I conducted my fieldwork did not hinder the quality of my observations and the analysis I could draw from them.

2.4 My research subjects

In this section, I will introduce the two distinct groups of people I worked with during my fieldwork and the selection criteria and research methods I adopted. The main group is comprised of female natural winegrowers working in Piedmont and Sicily, while the second one includes wine professionals only.

2.4.1 Female natural winegrowers

As viticulture and winemaking are historically a male-dominated field of production (Matasar, 2006; Bryant and Garnham, 2014), I decided to focus my attention in particular on female winegrowers who are relatively new social actors in this field. In doing so, I could investigate the production of natural wines through an ethnographic perspective on those producers who represent the most innovative side of the Italian natural wine field. Some of these women have

attracted the attention of the media and wine professionals as they are the most prominent figures in this small world and their notoriety openly clashes with a past characterised by a marginalised role in this sector. These charismatic women, who have strong personalities and a highly personal perspective on their work, are praised for the quality of their wines both in Italy and abroad. Blog posts, newspapers articles, special events, as well as documentaries have been recently devoted to these influential women (Graglia, 2011; Gasnier, 2016).

As I wanted to give voice to these producers and their heterogenous life trajectories and social roles, I decided to work with a diverse group of women who could represent this range of alternatives. A fundamental criterion was their belonging (or not) to traditional families of small farmers where a gendered division of labour historically determined the role of their female members (Bravo and Scaraffia, 1979; Pescarolo, 2001). As different scholars have variously argued with regard to gender roles in traditional winegrowing families (Martinotti, 1984; Pratt, 1994; Lem, 1999), women would assist men in nearly all the working activities in the vineyard such as hoeing, planting, applying antifungal treatments to the vines, and driving horses to plough. Still, a division of labour by gender would characterise pruning as a masculine task due to the strength required, while other activities deemed as lighter and dexterous were assigned to women (Papa, 1985). Within these families, each family member was variously enrolled as workforce to keep the farm in operation and thus guarantee the whole family's livelihood. Small farmers families were then not only a kin-based institution but also the basis of the unit of production, so family relations intermingled with work relations (Martinotti, 1984). The head of the family-enterprise tended to be the oldest male individual, the *paterfamilias*, who was the legal owner of the land and had the authority and power to dictate the direction of social life over the rest of the family members (Barbagli, 1984; Papa, 1985). As Lem (2013) argues, the *paterfamilias* had the power to subject his wife, sons and daughters to commit their energies and labour towards sustaining the family-based enterprise through a regime of "family hegemony" (2013: 225), whereby the values of familism and family farming got internalised by these kin categories appearing as natural and common-sensical. If until that moment the work in the vineyard was conducted evenly by both men and women despite a gendered division of labour, the process of capitalist modernisation that invested the agricultural sector led to a masculinisation of viticulture and removed women from many of the tasks performed in the fields (Pratt, 1994; Lem, 1999). A monocultural regime was introduced and vineyards became then specialised and absorbed all the family investments which were now oriented towards capital-intensive techniques of vine cultivation. The mechanisation of the sector accompanied this transformation of the rationality of rural life and changed the role of women, whose work was now felt redundant. Tractors, mechanical sprayers, and other machines substituted much of the hard work previously done by men, who remained

the main presence in the fields while women lost contact with the vineyard environment and became more and more associated to the domestic sphere only. As different scholars have argued, farming in general became constructed as a masculine field of production and tractors as symbols of masculine identity and power (Brandth, 1995; Saugeres, 2002). Importantly, men were also the ones who controlled not only these new technologies of production, but also the specialist knowledge required to transform grapes into a commodity to be sold in the market (Matasar, 2006). Indeed, as my informants confirmed to me, training programs and agrarian schools were attended by men and actively supported by state policies who addressed them as the rightful recipients of these initiatives (Lem, 1999).

This historical overview over the changing role of women in the viticultural sector has allowed me to better understand the novelty brought about by female natural winegrowers in the contemporary age. By working with both women who represented the last generation of Italian small-scale winegrower families (Livia, Margherita) and women who chose this profession freely (Isabella, Claire, Costanza, and Virginia), I could expand my comparative lens. Three additional selection criteria have contributed to diversify even more my sample: land ownership, technical background or professionalisation, and being newcomers. In the past, female farmers were usually excluded from land inheritance to the advantage of their brothers and husbands. Nowadays, women have increasingly more access to land tenure, which in turn leads to financial independence and greater decision-making power. Studying oenology and viticulture at university level represents another novelty associated to women in this sector, and an important credential for their recognition as professionals. I also wanted to include women who decided to quit their previous jobs to set up their own winery as their life trajectories, practices, and choices represent alternative approaches to natural winegrowing. The key to my ethnographic endeavour was to capture the tensions and ambiguities of the natural wine field by including different female profiles. I wanted them to guide me through their stories and relationship to wine production and consumption.

With this group of women, I decided to use participant-observation as my main research method. I systematically took field-notes of the informal conversations I had with these women, the everyday activities we carried out both in the vineyard and in the cellar, as well as other relevant events occurring while I was living with them. I also used an audio recorder for my interviews and my smartphone to take pictures and make small videos in order to capture the words, gestures and movements of my informants while working in their wineries. I focused on their manual work on the vines during the harvest and pruning activities, and their bodily interactions with the must once their work moved into the cellar. I used these audio and visual materials as research data to

complement my fieldnotes and enhance my analysis on the multi-sensory, material dimension of the work of my informants and their engagement with wine and place (Pink, 2009).

As Bloch puts it, participant-observation "makes us learn the procedures which these people have themselves learned and enables us to check up on whether we are learning properly by observing our improving ability to cope in the field with daily tasks, including social tasks, as fast as our informants" (1991: 194). This first-hand, bodily engagement involved in participant-observation allowed me to acknowledge some implicit aspects of my informants' skills and values that would otherwise have remained hidden in the ongoing flow of everyday life. As an example, cleaning the floor of the cellar and all the equipment used after crushing and destemming every afternoon during the harvest, made me realise how crucial it is for these producers to maintain high levels of hygiene. As these winemakers do not use any chemical additives but just low amounts of sulphites (which basically protect the must from bacterial attacks), it is fundamental to leave the cellar as clean as possible at the end of the day.

This group of research participants is constituted by six women aged 35-52, four of them working in Piedmont (Livia, Margherita, Costanza and Virginia) and two in Sicily (Isabella and Claire). [9] Due to the small size of the Italian natural wine world, all my informants know each other (and each other's wines) at least by name. Two of them are members of the same association of natural winegrowers (VinNatur) or participate to the same annual wine fairs; in some cases, their wines are sold by the same distributor. Moreover, some of these women are bound by a long-standing friendship (Livia and Margherita, Livia and Isabella). Livia and Isabella are my key informants as I managed to spend more time with them, and I had the opportunity to follow more closely them in their everyday activities. By living and working with these two women, I was able to gain a more informed understanding of the kind of engagement they have with their vines, the cellar environment, and the locality where they live. In what follows, I present all my informants by providing short biographies connected to their engagement with natural wine production.

2.4.1.1 Livia

Livia represents at least the fifth generation of a family of traditional small-scale winegrowers based on the rolling hills of Asti province in Piedmont (see map below). The area is particularly well-known for the production of sparkling wines from a local aromatic white variety called Moscato. Her family owns nearly fifteen hectares of vineyards and they annually produce approximately 70,000 bottles of wine (mostly being the internationally praised Moscato d'Asti).

[9] Their real names have been replaced by pseudonyms according to the ERGO ethical procedures. The same holds for the rest of my participants.

She is the youngest of four siblings, and with her older brother and father she manages the family wine estate. She grew up in a traditional patriarchal family, and after her graduate studies in Development and International Cooperation at the University of Turin and a short working experience abroad, she decided to come back to Piedmont to join the family winery. Livia combines a strong attachment to local traditions (of which she proudly claims the role of "*custode*"*)* and an innate desire to travel around the world. She claims that her work as a natural winegrower has enabled her to reconcile these two apparently contrasting aspects of her identity. During our first encounter, she told me that wine is a unique means to feel connected to her own place and, at the same time, meet with other like-minded producers around the world during wine fairs and sales trips. A few months before my arrival to her estate, Livia's mother (a leading figure within the family) had passed away and Livia's marriage relationship was coming to an end, too. In a patriarchal family such as hers, she had to replace her mother's role and become more involved into the domestic duties (shopping and cooking for the whole family twice a day; taking care of her father, son and daughter; coordinating the working activities of the housekeeper and another woman who helps Livia with her father, the vegetable garden, the vineyards and the cellar management). Though she is called *la padronna* (dialect expression for "mistress") by her father due to her managerial role in the household and the winery, Livia describes her identity as constantly being at the interface between a "traditional" world and a "modern" one, each characterised by specific timescales. She spends part of her life living and working within a traditional peasant family where there is a marked gendered division of labour which has assigned her a range of diverse responsibilities. At the same time, she identifies as a "modern" (and now a single) woman who is highly mobile, speaks two foreign languages and travels the world to trade their wines. This double identity is experienced by Livia through a sense of internal fragmentation, and represents a constant source of familiar tensions (especially before and during the time she spends away from home). While she has consciously chosen to take her role within a traditional peasant family and embrace the social values underlying the peasant culture, she is aware of the contradictions and tensions nested in her being both a "traditional" and "modern" woman.

I got in contact with Livia and her family before my fieldwork formally started off. I have focused on her as she embodies two contrasting aspects of the natural wine world: a strong attachment to tradition and locality as well as a marked transnational dimension. Also, recounting Livia's story means tracing the initial stages of the Italian natural wine movement. Indeed, she was one of the first Italian producers to be invited to the early *salons du vin nature* in France, as well as one of the promoters of the first natural wine fair in Italy.[10] Nowadays, she can count on a robust

[10] I will describe Livia's story more in depth in chapter 4.

network of contacts (producers, sales agents, distributors, etc.) and it is through her that I met Isabella, Margherita and Claire.

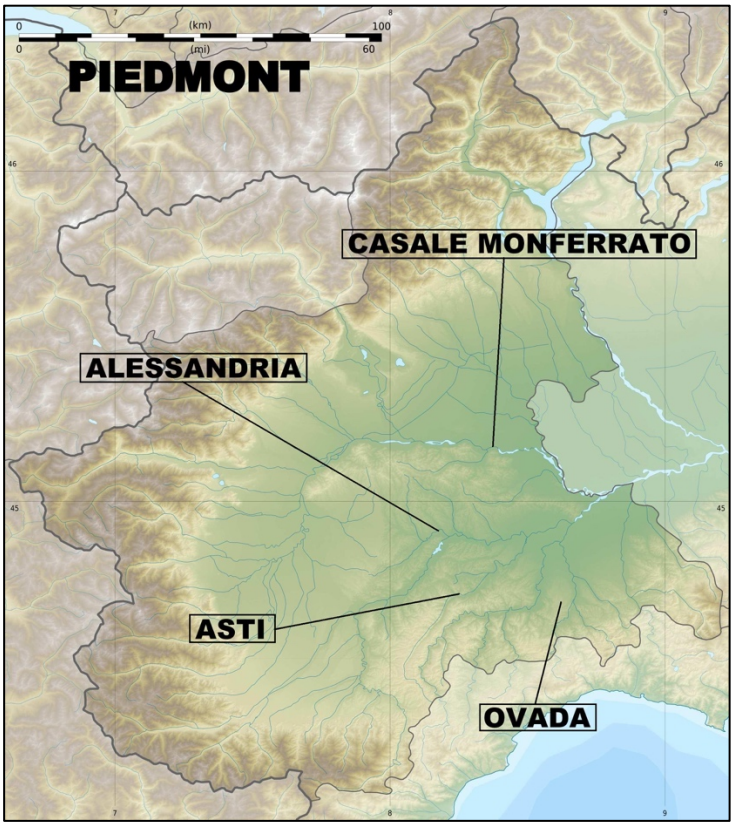


Figure 3 Map of Piedmont (modified from "File:Piemonte relief location map.jpg" by User:Bourrichon, licensed with CC BY-SA 3.0)

2.4.1.2 Isabella

Isabella is my second key informant, she is based in the historically renowned wine area of Vittoria, in the southeast corner of Sicily (see map below). Despite her young age (she is now in her thirties), she is highly regarded as a natural winegrower by wine critics, journalists, and other professionals working within both the natural and conventional wine sector. After a degree in Viticulture and Oenology at the University of Milan in the early 2000s, she decided to go back to her home region to produce natural wines from autochthonous grape varieties of her area: Nero d'Avola and Frappato (both red varieties), Moscato and Albanello (white varieties). Isabella is a young woman with a strong personality and a highly personal view on viticulture and winemaking. Now, she is the owner and manager of an estate which covers eighteen hectares of vineyards and produces distinctive wine of *terroir*. Nearly all her annual production (around 120,000 bottles) is exported to the US, Japan, and Scandinavia.

In a way, Isabella (like Livia) represents a very special kind of informant due to the mythical halo that surrounds her within this world. The fact that her winery attracts a large number of tourists,

wine critics, distributors, journalists, and young trainees is definitely connected to her high status and her volcanic personality. Isabella belongs to that first cohort of Italian natural winegrowers that gained a name on the international scene thanks to a few pioneering tours to the USA organised by an American distributor in the early 2000s, when she was still in her twenties. The first of these trips, in 2008, forged the beginning of close friendships with her travel companions that endure, such as the one with Livia.

In 2003, when she was moving her very first steps in the world of wine after her degree in Oenology, Isabella sent a letter to the highly respected Italian wine critic and journalist Veronelli.[11] The letter contained a harsh critique on the increasing industrialisation of the wine sector, and it received Veronelli's attention and praise. Her rigorous approach to winemaking, considered environmentally sound due to her resolute rejection of any chemical substances in the vineyard and in the cellar, was captured in the nickname "natural woman" which was coined by an American journalist after a reportage on her estate in 2012. Seen through the eyes of a foreign journalist, the case of Isabella combined in the perfect ingredients to write a success story. In fact, being a young woman in a traditionally male-dominated field of production, based in a region historically connected to the *mafia*, contributed to create the heroic aura surrounding her. The following year, she published a book, a sort of sentimental journey into her passion for Sicily, winemaking and agriculture. Since then, Isabella has been into the spotlight of the international wine world, she has appeared in documentaries and TV programs on wine, and she is widely recognised as one of the most successful Italian female winegrowers. For all these reasons, I wanted to include her in my research and I felt extremely lucky when I was invited to join her at her estate for the harvest season in 2017.

[11] The role of Veronelli in promoting Italian small-scale, artisanal wines will be described in chapter 3. Here it is important to say that Veronelli was also the editor of one of the very first Italian wine guides.

Figure 4 Map of Sicily (modified from "File:Relief map of Italy Sicily.png" by Nzeemin, licensed with CC BY-SA 3.0)

2.4.1.3 Margherita

Margherita belongs to a family of small-scale winegrowers where she represents the fourth generation (and the first female). The family estate is based in a less-known area of Piedmont which is comprised between the provinces of Alessandria and Asti. Her family possesses seven hectares of vineyards and produces nearly 25,000 bottles of wine from local grape varieties (mainly Barbera and Grignolino) each year. Like Livia, Margherita did not enrol immediately into the family enterprise and decided to do so on her own after her undergraduate studies in Graphic Arts, when she realised that wine represented her real passion. Before joining the family winery, she enrolled into a course in Wine Tourism and Marketing in Asti where she met Livia's brother. Since then, the two families have maintained a friendly relationship and Margherita feels indebted to Livia and her brother as they introduced her to their wide social network of producers and international importers.

Margherita has two sisters, both of whom never showed any interest in the work of their family, so that it came as a surprise (and a certain regret) for Margherita's parents when their daughter expressed the desire to work with them. Working the land was still attached to past experiences of hunger and toil at local level, and Margherita's parents actively supported a different working trajectory for all their daughters. The fact they were all women reinforced her parents' views as winemaking was still deemed a male occupation. Margherita initially dedicated to widening their

local clientele by choosing to bottle their wine, which had been sold in bulk or demijohns until then. Later, she moved her first steps into the cellar and here she had to negotiate her presence with her father, who was at that time the main person in control of each stage of the vinification process. Nowadays, Margherita is in her forties and has two daughters, who grew up following her mother in the family vineyards and the small cellar where she has introduced her own personal approach to winemaking and crafts wines with a great deal of experimentation. Though she thinks that working within the family estate has represented a limitation to her professional development as a winegrower, she has consciously embraced the values surrounding the peasant culture in which she was born (a strong attachment to her place, a sense of simplicity and frankness, which are all expressed into her wines). Even the dynamic within her family reflects this peasant substratum: her father represents the head of the family (he is the owner of their plots and he is the only one entitled to drive the tractor), but it is her mother the "real engine of the whole family", as Margherita stated the first time I met her. Margherita can count on her mother's support not only to mediate in the difficult relationship she has with her father, but also for some domestic duties like taking care of her two daughters. Margherita's parents-in-law are way less available in this respect and for this reason are described by Margherita as "modern grandparents". Divided between the work in the vineyards and the cellar, and the domestic activities at home, Margherita's mother impersonates the leading female figure within traditional peasant families (similarly to Livia's mother). Despite the reduced size of her family estate, Margherita has a strong reputation within the natural wine sector, and a large number of passionate clients from different countries who periodically come to visit her winery (among them, many Japanese natural wine lovers). Together with (and thanks to) Livia, she attended the first natural wine fairs organised in Italy in the early 2000s. She was also part of the small group of Italian natural winegrowers who toured the USA together with Livia and Isabella around the same years. It is through Livia that I got in contact with Margherita and her family, even though I already knew her wines and part of her story.

2.4.1.4 Costanza

Unlike Livia and Margherita, Costanza does not belong to a family of wine producers. As I could tell from her strong accent when we first met, Costanza grew up in Rome where she gained a degree in mathematics. As her desire to pursue a PhD in the same field was frustrated by some disagreements with her supervisor, Costanza decided to move to Milan to study finance and there she met her partner. After a career as financial consultants and due to a common passion for wine, in 2009 they decided to quit their jobs and urban lifestyle to set up a small winery on the hills of Ovada in southern Piedmont. Before embarking in their new life project, Costanza (who was in her forties) studied Viticulture and Oenology at the University of Milan. Together with her

partner, she now owns five hectares of vineyards and produces approximately 21,000 bottles of wine from different indigenous varieties. This hilly and mountainous area called Alto Monferrato (*alto* means "high") where viticulture has long been practiced, is generally considered a rural border land between the regions of Piedmont and Liguria. When choosing where to invest their money to start their business, Costanza and her partner were attracted to this remote corner of Piedmont (called "the other Piedmont" by her), which was historically famous for wine production and nowadays is more affordable compared to the prestigious Langhe. They converted an old *cascina* ("farmstead") into an upscale *agriturismo* where they currently live and host tourists visiting the area. Their brand-new three-floor cellar was designed by an architect and hosts a variety of different vats (wooden barrels, clay amphoras, concrete and stainless-steel tanks) which reflect Costanza's experimental approach to winemaking.

Since the beginning, their idea was to produce natural or, as they prefer to say, "radical" wines by using just organic grapes without any chemical additives. This approach to winegrowing (which Costanza defines a "philosophy") does not clash with the rigorous technical knowledge she applies to her work in the cellar, where she vinifies with minimal or zero additions of sulphites. Her scientific background and passion for mathematics resonates in her fascination for oenology and, more concretely, in her own lab where she can test the various wine component (sugar, pH and acidity) without recurring to external laboratories. On her Facebook profile, she defines herself a "militant producer, alternative oenologist, mathematician and dog lover". Considered a talented winegrower by various sommeliers despite being a newcomer to this world, Costanza is a member of the VinNatur association and actively engaged into the promotion of the place where she lives and produces her wines. I decided to focus on Costanza as I was interested in her story and role within her winery, which were different compared to the rest of my informants. Moreover, a wine professional I interviewed at an early stage of my research praised her talent and natural instinct as a winemaker and I became even more intrigued by her persona. I first met Costanza during a natural wine fair in London in March 2017, and I later discovered that she is a close family friend of one of my informants from my second group of research participants (the head sommelier based in Copenhagen).

2.4.1.5 Claire

Claire produces natural wines with her husband on the northern side of Mount Etna (Sicily). As a globe-trotter oenologist (she obtained her degree from the University of Adelaide), she worked in conventional large-scale wineries in France, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa for more than ten years. In 2001 she moved to a renowned wine estate in Tuscany and there she met her future husband, who introduced her to the world of natural wines. He is one of the co-founders of

a major UK-based importer and distributor of natural wines, which also works with some of my informants (Livia, Isabella, and obviously Claire). It was through him that Claire decided to change her approach to winegrowing and went to Burgundy first and Tuscany later to learn more about the biodynamic method applied to viticulture. In 2005, Claire first set foot on Mount Etna and here the unique volcanic soil and extreme landscape exerted great fascination over her. For three years, she worked as a winemaker for a local estate and then she decided to set up her own small winery with her husband. To vinify their wines, they restored a 250-year-old *palmento* (a rural building where wine was traditionally produced in squared open vats carved into the local stone), which appears in some of their labels designed by a French cartoonist who also collaborates with other French like-minded producers. Part of their wines are aged in buried clay amphoras following the traditional Georgian method. They now produce nearly 40,000 bottles of wine from five hectares of biodynamic vineyards (three of them are owned by Claire and her husband whereas the remaining two are rented). The vines, scattered through multiple small plots placed on spectacular terraces, are mostly sixty to one hundred-year-old plants of Nerello Mascalese (a local red grape variety). Claire and her husband have two children and the whole family is based in London. That makes Claire a highly mobile winegrower, who commute between the UK and Sicily on a monthly basis taking turns with her husband to stay with their sons in London. Her children attend school in the English capital, and generally prolong their holiday breaks to allow the family to spend longer periods of time on Mount Etna. For these reasons, Claire and her husband have hired three local young male workers (one full-time and two part-time) who supervise the activities in the cellar on a regular basis. Claire is not a member of any Italian natural wine associations, but her sales network is highly developed through her husband's job as distributor, importer and retailer. I first met Claire during a wine fair in London in April 2017 and I later got in contact with her through Livia, who is a friend of hers. I decided to include her among my informants as she represents, like Isabella, a type of independent, highly-trained female producer of natural wines who is not tied to a traditional familiar background.

2.4.1.6 Virginia

Virginia was the first producer I was put in contact with by my gatekeeper. She is a fifty-year-old natural and biodynamic wine producer working in Monferrato, a well-known wine area of Piedmont comprised between the two provinces of Asti and Alessandria. Like Costanza, who is a good friend of her, Virginia decided to become a winegrower at a later stage of her life. Virginia was born in Veneto, the north-eastern region of Italy internationally renowned for the local red wine Amarone, but she does not belong to a winegrower family. Following her university studies in Modern Languages, she moved to Milan and after a brief working experience as a professional dancer, she started working in the theatre sector as a manager and producer of international

dancing shows. In 2005 Virginia and her husband (who is a TV producer) decided to buy a *cascina* and the surrounding 60 hectares of land divided into large portions of wood, an orchard and what would become a small vineyard plot (three hectares), in Monferrato. In tracing her life trajectory, Virginia explicitly draws a geographical axis which points to the West and the mythical land of wine: "I come from Verona, I passed through Milan, I have arrived in Piedmont and, I like to say, I am probably going to France" (interview 17/07/17). She looks at her previous experiences as different threads revealing parts of her inner self and linked by a sustained and unconscious desire of being independent and physically close to nature. The project of producing wine in this "nearly archaic, rural" corner of Piedmont responds first of all to the realization of this personal trajectory, where her body represents the main point of reference. Recalling her past experience as a professional dancer, she told me that producing wine and interacting with her vines took the connotations of a dance.

Since the beginning, Virginia approached viticulture and winemaking with this intimate and existential posture. Agriculture is, for her, primarily a physical experience that involves her whole persona, and it functioned as a catalyst of her inner aspirations and desires. According to her, producing naturally is a fundamental starting point within her vision as a winegrower. She planted vine shoots of autochthonous red grape varieties (Barbera and Grignolino), applying the principles of biodynamic agriculture. Before planting the first vines, Virginia studied to become a professional sommelier at the most credited national association of wine-tasters, AIS (*Associazione Nazionale Sommelier*). At the same time, she attended specialised courses and seminars on the modern biodynamic method under the guide of the agronomist and consultant Leonello Anello, who introduced her to the application of Steiner's principles to agriculture.[12] Nowadays, her annual production is around 8,000 bottles of certified biodynamic red wine which she mainly exports abroad. Her explicit orientation towards biodynamic agriculture and her decision to become a winegrower at a later stage of her life made me decide to include her into my research project.

2.4.2 Wine professionals

My second group of informants is composed by four professionals involved in the Italian natural wine world. One manages a wine bar in Milan selling bottles of natural wines; one lives in Copenhagen and is the head sommelier of two restaurants which serve natural wines; one is a Turin-based natural wine distributor and organiser of a natural wine fair; the last one is a Milan-based professional sommelier and wine educator, who also owns an independent publishing

[12] I will discuss Steiner's philosophy in chapter 3.

house mainly specialised on French and Italian wine culture. They are key players in the marketing and promotion of these wines and the approach behind their production. In my thesis, I refer to this group of professionals as "cultural intermediaries", drawing on an expression coined by Bourdieu (1987). The French sociologist defined these actors as professional taste makers who rely on their knowledge and authority to construct repertoires of cultural legitimacy. My informants provided me with useful background information related to the positioning of these wines and their producers both in the national and global wine market. Moreover, they are actively engaged in the heated debate concerning the status and legitimacy of these wines and their definition as a product category. With this group of informants, I conducted four semi-structured interviews between 2017 and 2018. Through the materials collected during these encounters, I gained a better understanding of the natural wine world, the distribution of these wines across Italy and abroad, as well as the different meanings and values attached to their consumption.

Moreover, in order to map the historical development of the Italian natural wine movement and the emergence of a natural wine culture, I have relied on articles published on wine specialist magazines, blogs and newspapers; books written by sommeliers, wine critics and educators; documentaries dedicated to natural wine producers; informal chats with restaurateurs, wine-shop owners and natural wine lovers. All together, these materials are part of what sociologists Inglis and Almila define "wine field", which refers to "how people talk about, construe, debate, polemicize and imagine wine […] This is a field of competing and conflicting values and opinions. It mediates between the wine world and wine culture, as it shapes both what consumers consume and what producers produce" (2019: 8).

2.5 Methodological challenges

Navigating a field strongly characterised by specialist knowledge (namely, viticulture and oenology) and high levels of handcraft, has required some preliminary theoretical background as well as a multisensorial attentiveness. Winegrowing, and even more so natural winegrowing, is a complex field of practice characterised by manual work, observational skills, technical and scientific knowledge, as well as sensitivity and care. As I will better describe in the next chapters, this amount of physical fatigue, manual skills, ongoing tasting, and precise planning constellate the everyday lives of my informants and concerns both the vineyard and the cellar. Because of the artisanal character of this production, natural winegrowers generally manage and control each step of the process. In order to map and make sense of the myriad of actions leading to the final product, it was necessary for me to possess some basic notions of winemaking and wine-tasting.

I believe some field sites such as mine require a good level of specialist knowledge which enhances the ethnographer's capability of being engaged in, and discussing about, the flow of activities carried out by her informants. Otherwise, the risk would be that the researcher might not access that level of understanding in which practices become meaningful, discourses are assessed, and negotiation and interpretation take place. At that level of expertise, the ethnographer can comprehend what is going on while observing her informants, and what constitutes matter of discussion or disagreement amongst them. One of the fieldnotes I took during my fieldwork in Sicily is quite eloquent in this sense: "I am at the table with my informant and all her interns, ready for the next blind tasting. The covered bottle finally appears on the table, and everyone looks pretty excited to start a new tasting session. My informant's boyfriend pours the wine into the glasses and a lively debate immediately ensues. If I did not know anything about macerations, carbonic vinifications, reductions and volatile acidities I would definitely miss a great deal of this interaction" (Fieldnote 26/09/17).

I think some background knowledge is crucial to the ethnographer's apprenticeship, even more so within the current compression of time in academic research which results in increasing constraints in conducting long-term fieldwork. As far as I am concerned, my previous training in wine tasting proved to be a valuable tool in my context of study. Before starting my PhD, I undertook two courses on wine tasting at one of the leading organizations of wine tasters in Italy (ONAV), which provided me with solid background knowledge.[13] Moreover, given that the production of natural wine is a contested practice, the prior knowledge I gained was fundamental in order to understand what my informants were rejecting in terms of oenological practices, and how they were doing so. When approaching my informants for the first time, especially those I interviewed just once, they usually took for granted that I was knowledgeable enough to discuss about fermenting processes, indigenous yeasts, and other technical notions of winemaking.

Still, during my fieldwork, I embarked upon a proper apprenticeship. The gap between what I had studied in my handbook while preparing for my certificate as a wine taster, and what I learnt while working with my informants was immediately evident. As viticulture and winemaking are sensuous fields of practice, all my theoretical notions were temporarily put aside as soon as I moved around the rows of vines of my informants and I stepped into their cellars. Besides the technical and theoretical knowledge involved in this kind of production, a whole range of tacit actions, gestures, and movements constituted the core of my informants' work and my own apprenticeship. Ingold describes this process as a condition in which "the learner is placed […] in a

[13] I still had a critical approach to the training I received and I was aware about the political agenda of my organization within the national wine panorama.

practical situation and is told to pay attention to how 'this' feels, or how 'that' looks or sounds – to *notice* those subtleties of texture that are all important to good judgment and the successful practice of a craft" (Ingold, 2000: 416). Referring to the knowledge gained through a process of apprenticeship, and more in general as the result of doing fieldwork, Jenkins (1994) sheds light on the analytical complexities of grasping what he defines the "elusive quality" of everyday life. Following a line of enquiry initiated by Bourdieu (1977), Jenkins highlights the practical, mainly unuttered dimension of social knowledge, and the gradual acquisition of embodied skills and habits that serve as a basis to navigate the social world. Social encounters are shaped by degrees of social knowledge spread unevenly among different actors, previous personal experiences holding specific temporalities as well as the immanent possibility of mutual misunderstanding. In this regard, the ethnographer's apprenticeship in the field is the same as the one undertaken by anybody else: "Social life, indeed, is made up of these acts of mutual interpretation, and the anthropologist, like any other actor, needs to create protocols, through acquiring various habits, skills and savoir-faire that will allow him or her to participate in it" (Jenkins, 1994: 443).

2.5.1 The researcher's positionality

Connected to this dimension of apprenticeship, another methodological facet emerged while conducting my fieldwork: my own positionality. As Jenkins (1994) has pointed out, there is no such thing as "objective observer", as anyone in the field occupies a specific position determined by individual (and partial) knowledge of the world, desires and personal ambitions as well as power and gender relations. The ethnographer walks into the field bringing with her a personal baggage formed by her previous life experiences, personal attitudes, and sensitivity, which all influence the way the local social context is perceived and understood. That requires a critical understanding of the production of ethnographic knowledge at each stage of the research process (England, 1994; Aull Davies, 2007). Indeed, my specific role as a researcher in the field took with it a few methodological and epistemological implications. In line with an interpretivist approach, there is not a truly objective reality to look at, instead any actor (including the same ethnographer) possesses just a partial, socially determined, situated knowledge of the world. As a result, this specific positionality must be fully acknowledged once the researcher tries to make sense of what she has experienced and recorded in the field. My presence in the field needed to be made explicit at any step of the research process: from taking field notes to data analysis, up to the final writing stage. In other words, since the very beginning of the research, the ethnographer ought to be self-reflexive about the process of co-construction of social knowledge as well as its negotiated and situated nature (Geertz, 1988; Coffey, 1999).

Especially at the beginning of my fieldwork, I realized how my persona constituted an unusual and cumbersome presence among my informants. My objective then was to try to make my actions as little disruptive as possible. That is not an easy task when dealing with a working environment that is regulated by specific patterns of actions which involve the use of the body and a constant level of attention. For example, following my informants pruning their vines without distracting them too much while asking them a number of more or less banal questions, was in fact quite hard at the beginning. The same held in the cellar, when I tried to help them moving around pumps and buckets during those delicate moments in which a single wrong passage can lead to disastrous effects and cause tensions between the people involved.

Meanwhile though, my presence triggered in my informants a further sense of awareness about the actions they were carrying out. Even when my research participants got used to me wandering around the vineyard and the cellar holding my notebook, I could feel that my presence functioned as a sort of mirror to them. The fact that I was there to follow their daily activities and discuss about winemaking with them, prompted my informants to become more self-reflexive on what they were doing. Sometimes, this self-reflexivity took the shape of a renovated sense of belonging. For instance, Livia (my key informant who lives and works as a natural winegrower in Piedmont) told me that speaking about her engagement with the local winegrowing traditions made her realize how deeply she felt attached to the hills surrounding her house and winery. On another occasion, my manifested interest in pruning was the reason for her father (a man in his 80s) to go back to the vineyard with a pair of shears after a long time, an event which was received with great surprise by the rest of his family.

This dimension of self-reflexivity was a key aspect of my daily interactions with my informants throughout my whole fieldwork. As it will be clearer in the next chapters, natural winegrowing is a contesting and contested practice (especially for what concerns the procedures undertaken in the cellar). Natural winegrowers are confronted with wine critics and legal institutions (such as the national DOC system) which delegitimise their work by criticising their methodological choices and the alternative sensorial aesthetics of their wines. As a consequence, these producers are engaged at various degrees in an ongoing battle to promote and value their wines and the approach behind their production. Translating this into own my ethnographic experience, it meant dealing with people who were constantly reflecting on their own actions, choices, and ideas. Their way of speaking with me about spontaneous fermentations, yeast, and bacteria was, in a Comaroffian sense, ideologically loaded in so far as their worldview took the shape of a self-conscious system of beliefs that needed to be explicitly reaffirmed and reinforced (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991). As I will argue, this reflexive attitude is one of the crucial elements characterising my female informants and their approach to wine production and consumption.

2.6 Sensory ethnography

The subject of my study has naturally led me to focus my attention to the sensorial dimension of my fieldwork. Wine, together with all that surrounds it (namely, its materiality, production, consumption and corresponding practices), is placed into a sensuous dimension. Starting from the work undertaken in the vineyard up to the process of fermentation in the cellar, the production of wine constitutes a field of practice characterised by high levels of sensorial engagement. Drinking wine represents one of the most complex actions humans can undertake in terms of sensorial engagement. It is a multi-sensorial practice that involves the use of our senses: not only our nose and mouth are engaged in the process, but also our eyes and ears are at work while approaching a glass of wine. In particular, drinking natural wines constitutes an even more engaging experience due to their striking sensorial aesthetics. As I will argue, these wines present a wide range of smells and flavours, which are able to reconnect the drinker to past sensorial memories. Doing participant-observation in such a context of study meant drinking wine with my informants in different occasions and for different purposes, smelling the fermenting must in their cellars from early morning, moving around vines to prune in the middle of the winter. In the following chapters, I will describe in detail the multi-sensorial environment of the vineyard, cellar, and the numerous wine-tasting sessions I attended during my fieldwork. For now, I want to focus on what is defined as "sensory ethnography" and its tenets as a reliable research method (Pink, 2009;2010).

For Malinowski, the main scope of ethnography was constituted by grasping "the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise his vision of his world" (1978: 25). Indeed, the predominance of sight over the rest of our senses has characterized anthropology until quite recently. Considered as either a physical perception or a metaphor, sight has dominated many paradigms throughout the history of the discipline. As different scholars have argued, an eye-oriented approach applied to the study of culture and society reflects a specifically Western attitude towards reality (Haraway, 1988; Classen and Howes, 1996; Classen, 1997).

Based on a multidisciplinary approach to the study of everyday life and human experience and drawing on recent findings in neurology that suggest our senses are inter-connected, sensory ethnography stresses how learning and knowing are situated in embodied practice and movement (Ingold, 2000). The focus of this approach is on those dimensions of our being in the world that are pre- or non-linguistic, and on our body as the locus of multi-sensorial experience where memory, imagination, and sensations are all interwoven so as to produce signification. As a research method, sensory ethnography empowers the immersive nature of fieldwork highlighting the multi-sensorial aspects of participant-observation (including everything which is non-verbal

and unspoken), both in the research practice and in the way the latter is presented to the public (Pink, 2009). Regarding research impact, anthropologist Sarah Pink endorses the use of visual media and other art practices that go beyond the traditional written monograph and enable the audience to physically engage with the final work.

The ethnographic encounter is framed in a way that stresses the researcher's multisensory participation in actions and activities carried out in the field, such as walking with one's informants, eating, and playing with them (Pink, 2007). As emerged in my own fieldwork, drinking with my informants was a fundamental multi-sensorial practice that disclosed a whole range of meanings, values, memories, and emotions. As I said above, producing and tasting wine involve all human senses. In particular, the act of crafting natural wines requires a great deal of manual coordination, careful attentiveness to single details, and a sensitive disposition towards the living fermenting must and, later, wine.[14] Also, tasting wine both in the cellar and in other social contexts was characterised by specific performative features that stressed the multi-sensorial nature of this action: staring at the wine served, rotating rhythmically the glass (clockwise or anti-clockwise direction is itself matter of debate), smelling the liquid, and finally sipping through specific and repetitive movements. During my fieldwork, I was an apprentice who tried to learn through practice in a context that placed constant attention to these different sensorial stimuli. My movements in the vineyard and in the cellar were constantly driven by a careful attention to the surrounding smells and sounds as well as the tactile sensations provided by grape skins, soil, fermenting must, and wine.

2.6.1 The ethnographer as a research instrument

Within this methodological framework, the ethnographer's body plays a fundamental part. Since its first formulations as a research method, ethnography has given special attention to the role of the researcher in the field. Rather than considering it as a neutral presence, early anthropologists and fieldworkers conveyed the idea that the researcher's body is a scientific instrument through which social reality can be measured and interpreted.

In the early twentieth century's anthropology, this methodological tenet was firstly endorsed by the British anthropologist W. H. R. Rivers (Kuklick, 2011). During the Torres Strait expedition in 1898, Rivers tested the islanders' sense of smell, touch, hearing, and vision through experimental psychological tests and found evidence that, as humans, we share the same sensorial apparatus.

[14] This deep perceptual engagement with the living properties of wine is a key point of differentiation between natural and conventional winemaking (see chapter 5).

This finding made possible for the researcher to understand the subjects of her study by imitating their conduct, postures and gesture, thus becoming a sympathetic observer. Rivers and his psychological model, which entailed the use of the researcher's body as a measurable device in the field, influenced Malinowski and his ethnographic works. Although at that time it was framed within an evolutionary perspective, this methodological principle is still at the core of the ethnographic research practice (and, in particular, participant-observation).

Reflecting on the differences between ethnographic and scientific fieldwork, Candea (2013) defines the former as an "experimental device" insofar as the world of the people studied and their knowledge of it are measured by the ethnographer, who becomes an embodied instrument able to record people's aims and concerns through her persona. The fieldsite functions as a device that allows the researcher to experiment with time and space, and in particular to acknowledge how these two dimensions are lived by the people studied. This process implies a sort of tension between local configurations on one hand, and the ethnographer's own trajectories: "an ethnographic 'fieldsite' emerges at the intersection of the localizing processes of the people studied, and of the interests, decisions and commitments of the anthropologist" (Candea, 2013: 254).

As an anthropologist working on wine, this methodological aspect has been even more evident as I physically used my body as a device to interact with the object of my study. Indeed, wine was physically at the centre of most discussions and informal chats I had with my informants, who were keen to share their views about wine production and winemaking techniques in front of a glass of wine. During these situations, I relied on my tasting skills in order to appreciate, assess, and share comments on wines' colours, smells and tastes. During the pruning and harvest periods, I physically experienced the strain and fatigue characterising these two important annual activities. Sharing these tasks with my informants was fundamental for accessing their worldviews, and understanding the meanings attached to their work.

2.6.2 The use of interviews and its critique

According to an ethnographic approach that places greater importance on the senses, interviewing is considered as a multi-sensorial event. That means that the discursive content of the interview represents just one of the sources of data to be interpreted by the researcher. The interview setting represents a situated and meaningful context where knowledge is constantly co-produced and co-constructed by the interviewee and the researcher. As the interview is not suspended in a vacuum, attention should be paid to sounds, smells and dynamic interactions that surround the interview, as well as emotional reactions and moments of silence. For example, that

was the case during a blind wine-tasting session with Isabella and other people in a restaurant, where she got emotional and decided to pause for a moment (I describe this episode in chapter 6). In my fieldwork experience, I tried to put this methodological principle into practice by considering what was going on besides the interview itself. I noted down the emotional reactions of my interviewees and I took into consideration the instances in which other social actors interrupted our conversations. I also retrospectively analysed how much my questions had determined the trajectory of the whole interview in a self-reflexive fashion.

Drawing on critiques about the use of interviewing in qualitative research studies and the methodological risks of treating interview and narrative data as privileged ways to reveal "authenticity" (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997; Hammersley, 2003), I decided to limit my use of semi-structured interviews to my second group of research participants (sommeliers, wine experts, journalists, wine retailers, etc.), and rely mainly on participant-observation with my main informants (female winegrowers).

Considering the multi-sensorial nature of my fieldwork, I deemed participant-observation as the best methodological tool to use in my ethnographic study. Working with female winegrowers and taking part in their ordinary activities allowed me to acknowledge the multi-faceted and multi-sensorial aspects of their work, including the tacit dimensions of their practices. Informal chats with my main informants have been recorded and annotated without resorting to a more formal interview setting. I opted to conduct semi-structured interviews when time constraints did not allow me to engage in more informal conversations. That was mainly the case with my second group of research participants with whom I used semi-structured interviews to discuss issues surrounding the production, consumption, and distribution of natural wines. These interviews took place in different locations: at the wine bar run by the Milan-based manager; at a wine fair with the Turin-based distributor; online with the head-sommelier living in Copenhagen; at the private house of the Milan-based professional sommelier.

However, my methodological choice does not imply a supposed priority of participant-observation over interviewing, as these two "symmetric" methods hold different rationales and produce data of different forms (Atkinson and Coffey, 2002). Interviews allowed me to focus on the way my informants placed themselves within the debate on natural wine production, and the cultural resources they employed to build their own perspectives on this topic.

2.7 Research ethics and data analysis

My ethnographic fieldwork has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Southampton. I am also fully aware of the Ethical Guidelines for Good Research Practice published

by the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth.[15] The participant information sheet and consent form I used for my informants can be found in Appendix A and B, respectively. When I conducted my fieldwork, I carried with me the relevant participant information sheet and consent form as requested by the ERGO ethical procedures. While it was relatively easy to explain the reasons of my presence there and the main aims of my study by voice, the moment of signing the relevant forms made me aware of my own specific position in the field. The whole procedure of communicating details about the rights of my informants as research participants and the subsequent request of signature on the consent form became a matter of personal reflection over the power relations between the researcher and her participants. The same act of signing off an official document bearing the header of a foreign university was accepted with varying degrees of deference and pride. Research ethics and its practical application to my study through the use of these official documents, shed further light on the complex relationship between the researcher and her participants. Being a PhD student based at an English university added cultural capital and academic prestige to my persona and my role as a researcher while conducting fieldwork in Italy. That proved to be a useful means to establish an initial contact with, and gain the attention of, my second group of informants. Due to time constraints and the secondary role of this group of participants within my research design, I took advantage of this specific social position to facilitate my access to these informants. I acted in a different manner with my main informants, as I had more time to establish a closer relationship with them. As a result, the ethical procedures took place in a more informal fashion with this group of participants.

I first transcribed the interviews I had recorded during my fieldwork, and then I proceeded to code the transcriptions according to relevant themes that I had in part already identified while being in the field. I applied the same procedure to my fieldnotes, my informants' Facebook posts, other relevant online materials as well as brochures and wine fair guides I had collected during my fieldwork. Drawing on my analysis, I decided to construct my narrative through key thematic sections which correspond to Chapters 4 to 6 of the thesis. Within each section, I integrated the relevant theoretical analysis into my ethnographic data.

2.8 Conclusions

In this chapter, I critically presented my research methodology, described the sites where I conducted my ethnographic fieldwork, and introduced my research participants and their

[15] https://www.theasa.org/ethics/guidelines.shtml

biographies. I demonstrated how the methods I used in my research are relevant to this study by highlighting their analytical strength and methodological appropriateness. The combination of multi-sited ethnography, participant-observation, and semi-structured interviews coupled with a strong focus on the sensorial dimension of my fieldwork, provided me with a rich methodological toolkit. In the next chapter, I will locate natural wines within a wider analytical framework which takes into account contemporary food trends, the rise of food activism in Europe and global trends investing the wine sector.

Chapter 3 Locating natural wines between contemporary appetites, food activism, and global wine trends

"Wine. Topic for discussion among men. The best must be Bordeaux, since doctors prescribe it. The worse it tastes, the more unadulterated it is"

Gustave Flaubert, from "The dictionary of accepted ideas" (1911)

"The age of the Bordeaux drink snob is dead"

François Dumas, Tokyo-based importer of French natural wines (Crago, 2015)

3.1 Introduction

Natural wines represent a very small portion of the broader wine sector, accounting for about 2% of the global sales according to the wine specialist magazine Meininger's (Lohfert, 2019). At the same time, they constitute an elusive product category which polarises opinion and lacks a legal reference both at national and European Union level (Rose, 2012). Often erroneously associated to certified organic wines, with which they share the same approach to agriculture, natural wines retain specific processual, aesthetic, ethical and philosophical attributes that make them a category in itself. Indeed, their being "natural" refers to a series of practices and values that differentiate these wines from organic ones. Generally speaking, these wines are portrayed as being a step further than organic wines in terms of "naturalness", due to the way the grapes are cultivated in the vineyard and the wines are crafted in the cellar. In the recent volume "The globalization of wine", Inglis (2019) connects the emergence of natural concerns within the globalised world of wine to wider social issues relating to climate change and environmental crisis. As he notes, there is an increasing demand for wines which are produced according to more environmentally-driven principles and practices, following broader trends in food consumption occurring in the Western world.

Before delving into the intricacies of this debated category of wine in the second part of this chapter, I will situate this kind of production within a larger framework of analysis that takes into account some modern Western concerns over what counts for 'good', 'natural', and artisanal food. This will allow me to describe a specific set of modern European anxieties and appetites, including the attempts to overcome and satisfy them. As I will show, the production and

consumption of 'good' food is the result of wider socio-politic and economic dynamics rooted in the rise of industrial capitalist agriculture, globalisation and the formation of the EU. I argue that natural winegrowing intersects with these wider transformations in food production and at the same time responds to specific trends occurring in the wine world. In the last section of the chapter, I will trace the historical development of the European natural wine movement from its French origins to the present day, focusing in particular on the Italian strand and its principal social actors.

3.2 Food anonymity and the emergence of artisanal foods

The emergence of modern concerns over the food we eat on a daily basis is tightly linked to the current dominant globalised food market and its capitalist logic of production and consumption. The main features of this market are the result of a process of heavy industrialisation within the food sector that has occurred for the last 60 years. Traditional agricultural methods and timescales have been substantially reshaped by the introduction of highly specialised industrial machinery and the application of science-based technology coupled with a capitalist logic of production. As a result, today we are exposed to a massive amount of food, coming from every corner of the globe at a considerably lower price. The main consequences of this drastic change in the food sector involve the impact on the environment, the overall quality of food production and the loss of knowledge about the origin and the content of what we eat (Pratt and Luetchford, 2014).

This main transition within the global food system, and the corresponding dangerous effects on our health and the environment, have been the subject of popular publications in the growing field of critical food journalism since the 2000s. Books such as *Fast Food Nations* by Eric Schlosser (2001), *The Omnivore's Dilemma* by Michael Pollan (2006), *Tescopoly* by Andrew Simms (2007), and the more recent *Farmageddon* by Philip Lymbery (2014), have all contributed to raise awareness among the general public about the nature of the food we eat every day, and the industry that produces it. Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation* has been so influential that it has also been adapted into the homonymous documentary directed by Richard Linklater (2006), while the original book has been adopted as a course reading in classes of Anthropology of Food in many universities.

As consumers become increasingly reflexive about what lies behind food production as a response to food scares, they seek out the food products which appear to be more closely linked to their place of origin and context of production. Instead of mass-produced, standardised foodstuffs which are perceived as anonymous and placeless, a growing number of consumers are

directed towards goods that seem embedded in traceable natural and social connections and are thus deemed as more authentic and trustworthy. The anonymity of today's food perceived by consumers has been countered by this increasing demand for more 'authentic', 'traditional' foodstuffs that seem to reconnect producers and consumers, thus restoring those social relations taking place between growers and users which are nowadays jeopardised by the dominant economic system (Wilk, 2006). This consumer behaviour is framed by some sociological literature on alternative agri-food networks as the quality 'turn', and implies a transition from an 'industrial world' to a 'domestic' one "where quality conventions embedded in face-to-face interactions, trust, tradition and place support more differentiated, localized and 'ecological' products and forms of economic organization" (Goodman, 2004: 5).

3.2.1 Artisanal food values

The social and cultural contours of this transition, as well as the implications in a return to 'tradition' have also been analysed by some anthropological literature. Anthropologist Harry West (2016) highlights how the same definition of artisanal food constitutes a vague category which responds to a modern anxiety concerning the quality of food and the consequent need of 'authenticity' on the part of both producers and consumers. As he notes, artisanal foods represent a category that is constructed along specific temporalities whereby notions such as 'small-scale', 'traditional', and their opposite ('large-scale', 'modern', etc.) are subject to transforming contexts of production and the technologies supporting them: "the line between industrial and artisanal foods lies in the eye of the beholder. At the same time, comparison between these categories – either explicit or implicit – is essential to ever-changing definitions of artisanal, as the category makes sense only in relation to its constantly changing industrial other." (West, 2016: 409). The emergence and demand of artisanal foods has also been analysed as a modern response to rapidly changing circumstances connected to globalisation and the political unification of Europe, which entailed the problematic construction of a European identity. The ethnographic example given by Terrio (1996) of French *grand cru* chocolate illustrates this politics of cultural authenticity in advanced capitalism, that promotes the production, revitalisation, and reinvention of craft commodities to counter a perceived cultural homogeneity. The production of chocolate described by Terrio acquires value and distinction through the crafting skills of French artisanal chocolatiers that oppose their knowledge and traditional *savoir-faire* to anonymous, mass-produced chocolate candies made by foreign firms. The return to this renovated sense of authenticity, tradition, and locality against the backdrop of significant political changes that have invested rural development at European level, has been critically analysed through the lens of *terroir*. Historically this term, which found its first application to the French wine production, has

been deployed to define a usually circumscribed area whose soil and microclimate infuse distinctive qualities to food products (Barham, 2003: 131). Demossier (2012) demonstrates how the logic of *terroir* is key to understand the increasing demand of traditional products and foodstuffs from modern urban consumers, and at the same time how this French concept can shed light on some crystallised notions of culture and history that characterises the construction of a common European identity. As she argues, "the notion of *terroir* has come to encapsulate the European idea of a connection between 'locality' and 'quality' in an age that is often defined by a sense of globalization and the loss of local authenticity. Putting emphasis on 'tradition', 'authenticity', 'history', 'place', and 'identity', *terroir* has become a governance tool to promote specific values at the core of the so-called process of Europeanization" (Demossier, 2012: 124-125).

As ethnographies of artisanal foods have variously analysed (Paxson, 2012; West, 2013b), the need of reconnection underlying the production and consumption of these foods is articulated as a desire to reconnect with the natural ecologies where food is grown, the social and cultural ecologies which meaningfully produce it, as well as with people's own bodily self. In a more or less direct manner, both producers and consumers enjoy a renewed engagement with the natural and social environment where 'real', 'healthy', and 'traditional' foods are crafted. The same craft involved allows for the revitalisation of sensorial skills, learning processes based on hands-on attempts or transmission from experienced artisans, leading as a result to an intimate rediscovery of one's own self. Taste is then not only the evidence of a more genuine, transparent mode of production ('it tastes good'), but it also shapes the process of crafting food, especially those products such as cheese (and wine) which require the interplay of living substances such as yeasts and bacteria.

These 'craft foods', as part of a wider range of alternatives to the industrial food market produced by different alternative agri-food chains or movements, are based on a pre-set discourse of romantic tradition that opposes the local, artisanal, authentic, etc. to 'modernity' and its corresponding attributes such as progress, technology, mass-production, etc. Using 'locality' and 'authenticity' as lenses to examine how alternative food movements add value to speciality products, Pratt (2007) highlights that the romantic image of a rural past is key to sell foodstuffs that seem to bear the unique mark of local (and timeless) traditions. As a result, the value acquired by these products seems to escape at times the dominant exchange form, acquiring non-monetary connotations. This new engagement with food is based on constructed notions of 'nature', 'craftmanship', and 'authenticity' that come to compete, and sometimes combine with, scientific notions of health and naturalness.

As the ethnographic study conducted by Meneley (2007) shows, the construction of extra-virgin olive oil as a natural product is the result of a complex dynamic that comprises medico-scientific parameters, culinary-aesthetic values, and artisanal techniques of distinction. Against the anonymous mass-production of olive oil traded by multinationals, extra-virgin olive oil produced in the Mediterranean area is presented as the result of a long tradition of artisanal techne stretching back to Greek mythology. Moreover, the naturally occurring fats and antioxidants contained in olive oil are praised by researchers, health professionals, and cosmetic firms to construct the image of olive oil as a natural and healthy product, as well as a key ingredient of the "Mediterranean Diet". While the technological process tends to get obscured, the artisanal techne is emphasised to gain distinction and add value to the product. To determine the extra-virgin quality and obtain a DOP certification, aesthetic and sensory evaluations are made by trained olive tasters. As a result, extra-virgin olive oil comes to be appreciated as a (healthy) work of art that seems to be produced through a timeless tradition which bears cultural and aesthetic capital.

3.2.2 The European food scandals and the process of food regulation

In recent times, a series of crises related to the industrial production of food in Europe led to a process of reorganisation and regulation of the food sector, as well as the concomitant rise of transnational movements with food activism at the core of their agendas. Starting from the late 1980s, food scandals such as the spread of BSE (known also as 'mad cow disease'), *E. coli* and dioxin contamination in feed and poultry brought to the fore key issues connected to the industrial food supply and its functioning. As a result, consumers' confidence in the quality of the food purchased in supermarkets and other retailers dropped down, causing a major process of reorganisation of the food sector at both national and EU institutional level (Harvey, McMeekin and Warde, 2004). In a moment where concerns over the negative effects of fast food on obesity and the politics of GMOs were animating the public debate at a national and international level, these food crises triggered a whole series of dynamics which led to the emergence of new social and political actors both inside and outside of the institutional sphere.

As consumers became increasingly aware of the potential risks of food diseases, they lost their confidence in the industrial food supply chain and started to apply a critical scrutiny to what had been previously considered as safe food (Lien, 2004). The same consumers assumed indeed an important role as the main recipients of new policies on food safety. At an institutional level, both national and EU governments had to respond to what was publicly deemed as a policy failure over the safety of the final food product. At EU level, that entailed a whole process of revision and rationalisation of the existing body of food law, as well as the creation of standards of quality. The

aim was to reorganise the existing legislation covering the entire food supply chain, paying particular attention to the side of production, including animal feed and the processing and manufacturing of food. What happened was a major shift towards a 'farm to fork' policy, which was declined around the key notions of "safety" and "risk". As part of this institutional action, in 2003 the European Commission created the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), an independent food agency whose main objective was to identify risk and communicate with the public (Barling, 2004).

Seeking for a closer connection between consumption and production, food quality was thus fundamentally framed in terms of food safety, in particular on microbial food safety, for the consumer. That entailed the dominance of the scientific discourse as the only legitimate voice capable to give relevant advice on food safety issues (Heller, 2002). Due to this science-based approach, other qualitative measures of food, such as its cultural and environmental dimensions did not gain the same representation within the new regulation. At the same time, food provenance and authenticity became new indicators of food quality that would guarantee a better connection between the consumer and the producer. Local foodstuffs, that is food with a traceable origin or marked by a recognisable provenance came to acquire new added value within an increasingly liberal international market. At the same time though, the production of artisanal foodstuffs (such as cheese), which are made in working environments characterised by intense microbial activity, were hindered by the new EU food law. Centred on an overarching science-based notion of safety, the new European hygiene rules negatively impacted on a whole range of artisanal food practices connected to specific areas and cultural traditions.

3.3 The rise of food activism

In this European scenario, where the institutional reorganisation of the food sector took the form of a process of normative standardisation, new grassroots movements have given voice to wider public concerns over the negative effects of food industrialisation on the environment, and a perceived growing homogenisation and standardisation of food. Despite their different agendas, these transnational movements (farmers groups, animal rights activists, anti GMOs, environmentalists, etc.) are animated by the same fears and discontent about the production and consumption of industrial food. Seeking closer connections between producers and consumers, they have proposed alternative forms of economic and political action centred on food activism. By this term, Counihan and Siniscalchi (2014) refer to a broader range of discourses and practices undertaken at different scales by political activists, farmers, restaurateurs, producers, and consumers whose common goal is to change the way food is produced, distributed, and consumed. In their efforts to make the food system more democratic, sustainable, and better in

quality, some of these movements have framed their discourse and action around those cultural and social dimensions of food which had been overlooked by the EU legislation and the global industrial food system at large.

According to Murdoch and Miele (2004), modern consumers not only privilege products that retain the natural and social marks of their environments of production, but they also want to establish a connection between themselves and the object of consumption. They desire a new engagement with natural qualities lost in industrial production, as well as social and cultural qualities embedded in local artisanal traditions. Achieving that requires a new aesthetic relationship with food that replaces conventional market aesthetics, and highlights alternative conceptions of food quality. As Murdoch and Miele argue, "new social movements frequently play a key role in adjudicating over notions of quality. They attempt to broaden quality criteria in order to incorporate the environmental, social and cultural impacts of production and consumption." (2002: 163). Food movements such as Slow Food, organic farmers associations, and Fair Trade operate within this changing scenario, promoting a renovated sensibility towards food appreciation through an alternative aesthetic that is based on a sense of connectedness.

The examples of Slow Food and the French farmers movement led by José Bové in the 2000s, can be read as bottom-up responses to a variety of public concerns that tackle regulatory schemes and forms of capitalistic exploitation perceived as threatening the health and safety of consumers as well as existing local cultural practices and human-environmental relationships. Following different strategies, Slow Food and the Farmers Confederation led by Bové have framed their discourses around food highlighting a definition of quality that connects social and cultural values to locality. In their effort to do that, both movements have relied on *terroir* and its logic of giving value to the connection between single localities and their intrinsic qualities. For this reason, I have chosen to describe them more in depth, as they enable me to extend the discussion to the wine sector in the second part of this chapter. On one hand, the political claims advanced by Bové are inscribed within a specifically French cultural system, from which *terroir* emerged historically. According to Gade (2004), it is no coincidence that France represents the country "where the wisdom of the globalization trends overtaking the world has received its most persistent critique. This European land of artisan tradition, well-defined local specificity, and culinary refinement had led the world in the search for ways to ensure and develop authenticity of food production" (Gade, 2004: 848). On the other hand, Slow Food has adapted the French *terroir* model to the Italian landscape in order to promote the quality and uniqueness of Italian gastronomy. The fact that one of the first campaigns of Slow Food involved the Italian wine sector might be read as evidence of how the French model has been borrowed by discourse around local quality and authenticity.

3.3.1 The French debate on GMOs

The intensive application of science and technology to food production, notably in the development of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), was one of the main causes of public concern on food safety during the 1990s. In France the debate over the impacts of GMOs took the form of a huge protest led by the activist and farmer José Bové. As Heller (2002) shows, at the beginning the debate over the evaluation of GMOs was framed through what she has termed a 'risk' discourse: a set of argumentations dominated by scientific expertise which was considered as the only legitimate voice on the matter. National research institutions, regulatory bodies, as well as corporate development bodies, such as Monsanto-France, were in turn part of a wider European and international 'risk' network, which framed the discussion over the GMOs through the scientific notions of 'risk' and 'safety'. Different activist groups and NGOs organisations united against the use of GMOs, adopted the same scientific objective register to legitimate their claims within the national and international political arena. As a result, other socio-cultural frames, such as food quality, were automatically excluded due to their 'non-expert' status.

The second phase of the debate (1999-2001) was instead driven by the *Confédération Paysanne* (CP), a union of French self-identified peasant farmers that managed to shift the discourse around GMOs from scientific hegemony to *paysan* expertise. Highlighting cultural and social issues connected to food and stressing the negative impact of post-war industrialized agricultural policy, the confederation assumed a key role within the wider international anti-globalisation network constituted by different anti-GMOs activist groups, environmental, and indigenous NGOs and farmers movements such as *La Vía Campesina*. At the core of the CP's anti-GMOs campaign there was the struggle to defend the rights of farmers and workers against the use of biotechnology in agriculture, which translated into a larger political agenda opposing a symbolic pre-industrial peasantry to modern capitalist forms of power and exploitation. Instead of embracing a scientific register to tackle the issue of GMOs, the CP shifted the discourse on a notion of 'nature' as inherently interwoven into culture, contrarily to the implicit divide put forward by the previous 'risk' hegemony. Drawing on a French understanding of 'nature' as a cultural and social category, the CP managed to set the terms of a legitimate discourse based on *paysan* expertise, gaining public involvement. As Heller explains,

> for the CP, the *paysan* preserves nature by knowing and caring for *le paysage*: by working and transforming the earth into a productive and meaningful landscape. […] the CP points to the notion of *paysan* as producer and manager of the rural economy - as well as steward of nature whose cultural expertise preserves the land for future generations. (Heller, 2002: 19)

In doing so, Bové could rely on a shared cultural reference to *terroir* and the power it has in giving distinction to French regional food products. Roquefort cheese in this sense embodies all different components that constitute *terroir* in its most expanded definition, that is an integration of natural elements and human factors (Gade, 2004). In the production of Roquefort cheese what is celebrated is indeed a unique combination of specific microbiological, geographical, technical, and cultural elements. What gave a huge popularity to the political claims advanced by the CP was the protest against the construction of a McDonald's in the town of Millau in southwestern France in summer 1999. At the head of the protest was the leader of the CP, farmer and activist José Bové. Son of two scientists working in the USA, Bové was educated in Berkeley and later became a sheep farmer in Larzac, in the Dordogne region renowned for the production of Roquefort cheese. During the protest in summer 1999, Bové was followed by one hundred other sheep farmers who manifested their dissent about the extra tariff posed on French agricultural products such as Roquefort cheese by the US government.[1] José Bové was imprisoned by the French police and that event marked his rise as national hero against US food homologation, as well as anti-global activist worldwide.

As Bodnár (2003) argues, the opposition staged by Bové and his affiliates between Roquefort and the Big Mac is not merely an opposition between localism and globalisation, as the two products being commodities equally enmeshed into the global economy. At the core of the dispute lies instead what she calls a 'taste differential': the small-scale artisanal production of Roquefort cheese locates the product into a well-defined cultural and social space where taste takes on cultural and democratic connotations (Bodnár, 2003: 139). In France having a good taste means possessing cultural expertise to appreciate good food, or *la bouffe* in French. That is food which has been produced according to local or regional agricultural *savoir-faire*. The latter is entangled in specific localities and guarantees transparency and diversity, contrarily to the anonymity of standardised food whose processes of production remain mainly obscured to consumers. As a result, Bové claims, the production of Roquefort is more democratic compared to the Big Mac counterpart exactly because of the way it is made and what it affords, the right to food diversity. The Big Mac is instead a symbol of what he terms *malbouffe*, the negation of that combination of cultural pleasure and agricultural knowledge. It is in this taste differential and the right to have traceable food that the rhetoric of Bové manages to legitimate the higher price of Roquefort on the market, eluding that way the accusation of food elitism. As Bodnár aptly argues when describing the French cheese and the American burger, "the difference between the two kinds of

[1] This decision of the US government was interpreted as a retaliation for the EU's decision not to import US hormone-treated beef.

global connectedness lies in the niches Roquefort and Big Mac occupy in the political economy and in the symbolism of global production and consumption" (2003: 137). Roquefort cheese is a distillate of French local agricultural tradition and, at the same time, it becomes the symbol of *paysan* survival and resistance to food and cultural homologation at a larger scale.

Making good use of globalisation, Bové has emphasised common socio-economic issues affecting different areas across of the world controlled by the industrial food industry. Through a strong focus on locality, the CP's leader has given voices to multiple localities all connected to and affected by the same economic system. As it will also be clear when discussing Slow Food and its founder Carlo Petrini, Bové was successful as he managed to express anti-global stances while not rejecting the same global conditions that allow the trade of Roquefort, acknowledging instead the intricate global connections between local production and global consumption. Bové himself is a mixture of apparently clashing categories: an educated man and a sheep farmer by choice, a defender of the local production of cheese in Larzac although he is not originary from that region; a peasant and simultaneously a globe-trotter activist.

3.3.2 Slow Food

Crossing the border and coming to Italy, Slow Food is certainly another leading actor within this socio-political field of action. Slow Food is an international movement which currently counts hundreds of thousands of members in over 150 countries, grouped into local chapters and actively engaged in promoting Slow Food's philosophy.[2]

The movement finds its origins in Piedmont, one of most famous winegrowing regions of Italy. Founded in 1986 by Carlo Petrini (a sociologist by background, and food and wine expert), the movement had in fact a close connection to the world of wine from its beginning. During the 1980s the region was the scene of an unprecedented scandal of wine adulteration that caused the death of about twenty people and a major crisis in the Italian wine economy. This event is known as the "methanol wine scandal". Some producers from Piedmont and Emilia-Romagna regions added excessive amounts of methanol to increase the alcoholic level of their wines, which in turn resulted to be highly poisonous. Slow Food took a strong position against the adulteration of wine, and advocated for quality in wine production.

As both Leitch (2003) and Siniscalchi (2014) have observed, Slow Food has always had a two-fold agenda, being at the same time a political and economic actor. Petrini and the other founders of the movement belonged to those Italian left-wing circles who had experienced the turmoil of

[2] www.slowfood.com

the ’68 movement and had been actively involved in the Italian Communist Party and other extra-parliamentary political groups. The same Slow Food Manifesto first appeared on the pages of the Italian left-wing newspaper *Il Manifesto* in 1987. Using a snail as a logo, the founders of Slow Food harshly criticised industrial food, the growing standardisation of taste and the modern lifestyle epitomised by fast food. Against the restlessness of modern life, Petrini and his associates formulated a poetics of ‘slowness’ centred on the notion of pleasure. As it can be read in their original manifesto: “Our movement is in favour of sensual pleasure to be practised and enjoyed slowly. Through Slow Food, which is against homogenizing effects of fast foods, we are rediscovering the rich variety of tastes and smells of local cuisine. And it is here, in developing an appreciation of these tastes, that we will be able to rediscover the meaning of culture” (Slow Food Manifesto in Leitch, 2003).

The ‘right to pleasure’ advocated by Slow Food is intrinsically connected to conviviality, to an idea of shared and collective enjoyment which bears a political significance. Consumption of good food and wine entails a community of people who are sensually engaged in appreciating and valuing local tastes which hold cultural significance. In order to form this social base of conscious consumers, Slow Food has since the beginning engaged in different types of commercial initiatives that promote taste education. Slow Food Editore, the movement’s publishing house, was founded at the beginning of 1990 with the idea of disseminating the association’s core values through books on Italian food and wine, travel guides specialised on cultural tourism, and handbooks on tasting techniques. As part of this effort, Slow Food has involved primary schools into a series of food projects and created other taste education programmes, culminating with the recent creation of a university entirely devoted to the multi-disciplinary study of food.[3]

It was during the food scandals of the mid-1990s and early 2000s, that the movement stretched its horizons and became an international political actor engaged in the protection of so-called ‘endangered foods’. Drawing from the biblical story of Noah, Slow Food indeed created the Ark of Taste in 1996, a catalogue of agricultural products and food production systems threatened by industrialization, climate change, new consumption trends, and migration from rural areas.[4] Against a process of food standardisation dictated by the imperatives of safety and hygiene, Slow Food stood up as the defender of threatened artisanal food products by promoting their conservation, valorisation, and presence on the market. In so doing, it approached the sphere of production more consistently and, in particular, it initiated collaborations with those local and

[3] The University of Gastronomic Sciences was founded in 2004 and it is based in Pollenzo, a small village in Piedmont close to Slow Food’s headquarters located in Bra.
[4] https://www.fondazioneslowfood.com/en/what-we-do/the-ark-of-taste/

artisanal producers whose work came to represent the resistance to industrial food production and taste homogenisation.

The rediscovery of local tastes eloquently claimed in the Slow Food manifesto, involves in fact a politics of place that defends the diversity of regional landscapes and cultural heritage associated to artisanal practices rooted in specific localities. Food is linked to material cultures of production which date back to an ideal past untouched by the present dangers of capitalism. In so doing, Slow Food has borrowed the French model of *terroir* ("*territorio*" in Italian), adjusting and using it to the valorisation of Italian wines, cheeses, and other food products. As Pratt argues, "the Slow Food Movement recognized early on that the wine trade of Burgundy was better organized than that of Piedmont because of the French concept of *terroir* and its regulatory frames. Through it, they sold not just a wine but a whole world" (Pratt, 2007: 291-292). In order to taste 'good', food then must be produced taking into account existing local ecologies of production. In Slow Food's key triad, 'clean' indeed points to the respect of the environment which entails those local and artisanal techniques that preserve the typicity of food products and their unique taste, as well as environmental biodiversity. Together with 'fair', that relates to social justice for producers, these three interconnected principles delineate a moral economy that encompasses not only producers and consumers, but also the environment (Siniscalchi, 2014).

At the end of 1990s, Slow Food *praesidia* were introduced as a way to give economic viability to a series of small-scale, high-quality productions which were threatened by the EU food safety legislation and hygiene rules. As Siniscalchi (2013) argues, *praesidia* reflect the double nature of Slow Food as a movement which is active both in the political and economic arena. Besides being the result of a process of labelling, whereby a selected list of 'endangered food' are traded using a specific Slow Food label, *praesidia* represent the means through which alternative economic and political spaces can be considered.

On one hand, the limited production of these artisanal foods come to be sold on the market with an added value justified by their unicity. On the other hand, this increased price gives recognition to the efforts and knowledge behind this kind of artisanal production and shows that quality comes with a cost. Moreover, through *praesidia* Slow Food acts as a regulatory body which sometimes intersects the work done by the State and the EU over matters of food labelling. The movement provides small producers with strict protocols which regulate areas, times, and techniques of production, as well as quantity levels. As many of these *praesidia* are not already protected by designations of origin due to their small scale and reduced economic relevance, Slow Food results to be the only actor functioning as a ruling body. The situation is different when Slow Food applies its regulations on products already covered by larger EU food appellations: in these

cases, Slow Food norms represent an additional regulation that is actively sought after by small producers seeking distinction and a better market competitivity. Acting as a stricter regulatory body, Slow Food thus becomes an antagonist to the State which applies EU regulations (Siniscalchi, 2013).

The same two biannual fairs organised by Slow Food, *Salone del Gusto* and *Terra Madre*, combine economic and political elements. During those occasions, consumers can physically meet producers and buy a whole range of products from them, thus contributing financially to the association's revenues. At the same time, the two salons represent an important political platform through which the movement communicates its philosophy and achieves international visibility.

As noted by different scholars who have analysed critically Slow Food and its agenda (Chrzan, 2004; Laudan, 2004), the complex and varied nature of this movement exposes itself to some internal contradictions. Slow Food is an international movement promoting alternative economic and political spaces, while operating within a neo-liberal market that can transform *praesidia* products into gourmet delicacies that are not accessible to everyone. The movement's ideal political aspirations are somehow constrained by the concrete actions it takes as an association which needs to be economically viable and negotiate with other political powers. Despite the fact that Slow Food emerged as a movement extremely critical about the industrial food supply and its homologizing effects, it has nevertheless adapted some aspects of the global neo-liberal economy, within which the production and consumption of food are currently inscribed. Using Petrini's own expression, the 'virtuous globalisation' promoted by Slow Food takes advantage of the increased possibilities of global connectedness to grow awareness about sustainable systems of production, potentially leading to a better-informed market demand as well as closer relationships between small farmers and consumers (Leitch, 2009).

The way Petrini and his associates have successfully reconfigured the notions of food production, distribution and consumption through an emphasis on the social and cultural values of food, has allowed Slow Food to become a powerful international political actor able to catalyse media attention and dialogue with national and international organisms concerned with food regulation. In the current 'cultural economy' that has invested rural localities (Ray, 1998), Slow Food has undeniably contributed in reconfiguring new dynamics between local producers and global consumers, where food plays a crucial role. Food movements such as Slow Food have brought to the fore alternative articulations of quality that simultaneously respond to, and have an impact on, consumers' attitude towards food and the market more generally.

3.4 Wine: a parallel story

As we have seen so far, the rediscovery of artisanal food products is tightly linked to major shifts that have invested society, such as globalisation, the emergence of a European identity, and the consequent structuring of new legal and economic frameworks. In particular, the (negative) effects of the industrialisation of the food sector and a sense of cultural homogeneity resulted from the combined forces of globalisation and Europeanization, has led consumers to look for a sense of renovated rootedness and authenticity through their food choices (Demossier, 2000). In this process, the appeal to *terroir* was fundamental to the creation of GIs (Geographical Indications) at the European level in the 1990s. The EU regulations of 1992 (then updated in 2012) introduced a new legal framework to label food products specifying their geographical origin and process of production.[5] As a result, GIs were legally recognised as a form of intellectual collective property, creating major tensions within the World Trade Organization as it did not align with the American concept of trademark based as it is on individual ownership (Barham, 2003; Demossier, 2012).

3.4.1 T*erroir* and the development of the French AOC

This kind of regulation was modelled on the already existing French system of *Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée* (AOC), which was created in 1935 and where *terroir* had found its first legal application. The AOC system of denomination was historically the result of the political battles fought by French winegrowers and property landowners against wine merchants (*négociants)*, who had dominated the French wine market until then. In particular, a series of frauds and adulteration scandals during the economic crisis of the early 20th century were attributed to these wine merchants, who were accused of using the names of famous wine regions such as Champagne and Burgundy to name wines obtained by cheaper extraterritorial grapes (Carter, 2017: 487; Demossier, 2011).

The AOC hierarchical classification of wines used *terroir* as the main organizing principle around which building a rigid association between circumscribed geographical areas and the taste (and quality) of the wines produced there (Moran, 1993). During the same year, in 1935, it was also created a semi-governmental institution called INAO (Institut National des Appellations d'Origine). Its main function was to give legitimacy to the protocols of production issued by winegrowers and

[5] The Regulation (EU) No 1151/2012 on quality schemes for agricultural products and foodstuffs replaced the previous EU regulations on the subject and introduced two new designations and logos: Protected Denomination of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographical Indication (PGI), respectively.

landowners and institutionalise a definition of quality which was shaped around the idea that historically dominant producers created superior wines. In this way, specific land plots were attributed a higher status and their allegedly superior quality was legitimised (Trubek, Guy and Bowen, 2010; Fourcade, 2012).As Fourcade (2012: 533) argues, "by embedding the *terroir* system into law through immutable classifications, the social status that certain land tracts had acquired through socially exclusive patterns of ownership and expensive modes of cultivation […] became literally 'naturalized', as if their claims to distinction came, first, from the blessing of nature". Nowadays, INAO still plays an intermediary role between the local wine unions applying for the AOC designation and the French Ministry of Agriculture which finally legitimises the successful dossiers. As Barham (2003: 133-134) aptly describes, the whole procedure is a multi-level process of negotiations from the local level to the state which involves different social actors and various professional expertise. The AOC model became the main jurisdictional tool to regulate wine production and, at the same time, secure the inimitability and economic success of French wines and, by large, French landscape. Despite its rigid constitution, the AOC system has gradually included new winegrowing areas and nowadays more than 400 wines have gained the prestigious AOC status. Besides wine, other French agricultural products are now protected by an AOC designation of origin. In these cases, the AOC recognition exalts not only the natural features of food products but also their cultural, collective and historical ties to locality, in line with recent processes of patrimonialization that have invested primarily rural France, but also other European countries (Gade, 2004).

3.4.2 The French debate on the AOC system

Despite the growing success of discourses and practices of heritagization centred on *terroir* and the corresponding legal devices of geographical authentication across Europe, the French AOC system has recently been questioned by groups of French winegrowers committed to the production of *terroir* wines. Teil (2014;2017) describes how in the early 2000s a number of French vintners challenged the AOC's ability to properly identify and protect the *terroir* quality of their wines. According to these producers, the French system of appellations and in particular the tasting commissions in charge to judge and interpret the authenticity of their wines proved incompetent and unreliable. Their wines were indeed excluded from appellations as they were not considered typical enough. At the centre of this debate, Teil (2014) argues, lies the problematic double nature of the AOC system as a regulatory regime that both protects intellectual creativity without any specific reference to quality (that is the wines annually crafted by winegrowers working in designated areas), and at the same time should specify and guarantee the quality of these products on the market. In particular the notion of typicity has always been

problematic as it is not something that can be objectively measured and it instead rests on collective judgments made by a panel of experts.[6] When the AOC regulations were created in 1935, compulsory specifications for viticultural and winemaking practices (such as pruning methods, choice of grape varieties, maximum yield per hectare, etc.) were designed to protect the quality of the wines produced under an appellation. A stringent control over the practices adopted in the vineyard and in the cellar were deemed sufficient to produce quality wines, as their favourable geographical location was already acting as the main guarantee of their superior quality. A specific sensorial assessment of their typicity through a complimentary tasting was introduced in the 1970s, when the international success of the AOC system raised doubts about its capacity to provide consumers with real guarantees of quality which could justify the significant price difference between ordinary wines and AOC protected wines. Since then, the attention over quality shifted from the viticultural practices and winemaking techniques adopted by winegrowers to the final wine, whose taste became the main object of judgments formulated by panels of experts (Teil, 2017). The recent dispute on the AOC system's ability to assess the expression of *terroir* in wine has developed from the consequences of that shift. The latter indeed caused a lack of interest in the practices conducted in the vineyard, which instead have been recently put forward by those producers challenging the reliability of the AOC norms. In a changing scenario that has seen the increasing application of new chemical substances in the vineyard and oenological innovations in the cellar leading to a generalised standardisation of tastes, the concerns raised by these producers have put under scrutiny the sensorial criteria to assess the quality of wine through its taste. The debate presents two opposed factions of winegrowers who endorse two different interpretations of *terroir* and two distinct notions of heritage attached to the AOC. On one side there are producers who interpret *terroir* as an asset and an *a priori* guarantee of quality, so the link between a specific place and the superior taste of its products does not need further legitimation. As Moran (1993) argues in this regard, AOCs are founded upon notions of environmental determinism whereby "(i)n all wine regions, the physical environmental attributes of the defined territory of the appellation have been literally and uncritically transferred to the wine made there" (1993: 701). According to this perspective, the AOC should just signal to consumers the particular geographical determination which functions as a sufficient guarantee of the quality of the wine produced in that specific appellation. *Terroir* is then a natural condition which simply needs to be reproduced by the winegrower every year by simply adhering to the specifications set for each denomination. On the other side there is a group of producers who challenge this conceptualisation of *terroir* and the corresponding

[6] These panels are generally composed by oenologists or trained tasters with a technical background in the wine or food sector, and are included on regional lists officially recognised by the Ministry of Agriculture.

function of the AOC as a quality indicator. For them, the expression of *terroir* can only be judged *a posteriori*, and typicity is framed as the result of a creative process of production which engages both the vineyard and the winegrower in any coming vintage. The vintner is seen as an interpreter or a translator who needs to decipher the *terroir*'s message and does so by attuning her working practices and sensitivity to the specificities of the vineyard and the vintage. As Teil (2012) argues, *terroir* is a multifaceted notion that eschews a pre-formulated definition due to its alternative mode of existence. For these reasons, it should be better conceived as a "product-object", that is an object which is inseparable from its process of production and whose existence is distributed across a multiplicity of different winegrowers working in the same circumscribed area. According to this group of producers then, the AOC should recognise and protect the unpredictability and creativity connected to their work and at the same time constantly monitor the practices and ethos adopted by winegrowers (including the rejection of pesticides in the vineyard and chemical adjuvants in the cellar) to make sure a real commitment to *terroir* is pursued. This accreditation to winegrowers and their practices should be complemented by a judgment on the taste of the wines examined which include a broader range of experienced tasters interested in *terroir* (producers, critics, journalists, restaurateurs, etc.). Just as *terroir* is the result of a collective and distributed process of production, so the judgment of its taste is a collective and distributed process which remains open to discussion amongst those involved. While typicity remains difficult to define in positive and objective terms even at this stage, for these producers a partial solution could be to train the tasters' palate to approach what were once considered as wine faults (such as volatile acidity and oxidation), as the result of the non-interventionist practices adopted by the winegrower in the vineyard and in the cellar. Being recognised as "relative" faults should provide tasters with a more contextualised understanding of the work of producers and their ethos.

3.4.3 The globalisation of wine

While the *terroir* model has been translated into new regulatory frameworks and applied successfully to rural development policies across different European countries as a way to protect the quality of agricultural products (West, 2013a), its hegemony within the wine sector has eroded since the 1970s. The famous blind tasting organised by the British wine merchant Steven Spurrier in 1976, also known as the "Judgement of Paris", has come to represent the key historical event that marked the end of France's absolute supremacy in the production of high-end wines. The blind tasting featured French and Californian wines and the panel was comprised of renowned French wine experts. Some Californian wines surprisingly scored higher than well-renown French wines in both the white and red wine categories. The so-called Old World, that refers to traditional European wine-producing countries (in particular France and Italy), had until

then relied on the symbolic and cultural capital accumulated through centuries of fine wine production and trade. The AOC model and its hierarchical structure had been the unique point of reference for the classification of fine wines and its main organizing principle, *terroir*, had guaranteed exclusivity and competitive advantage. The rest of the world's wine regions (the so-called New World), could not rely on that long and prestigious history of distinction and then set their own wine market by emphasising the role of technology applied to wine production, as well as introducing the varietal labelling and more democratic judgment devices (Fourcade, 2012; Howland, 2013; Smith Maguire, 2018). A major figure in this process of democratisation of wine has been the famous US wine critic Robert Parker and his 100-point classification system. A former lawyer from Maryland, Parker has built his fame by approaching wine tasting in an extremely subjective fashion. Deeming the French system of classification as elitist and anti-democratic and rejecting the naturalistic and auto-referential logic of *terroir,* Parker has introduced a more liberal (and American) way of conferring distinction to fine wines: his own individual taste. Until then, tasting wines to make judgements about their quality had not represented as a profession external to the context of production and distribution, instead it had been practised by committees of growers, brokers and wine merchants. Rather than challenging established hierarchies of taste based on the *terroir* logic, the main objective would be in fact to re-affirm them in ritualistic ways (Fourcade, 2012: 538).

Within a changing global scenario that sees the emergence of new producing countries with a relatively recent history in viticulture and transformations in consumption patterns investing traditional wine-producing areas, the process of social distinction characterising the Old World of wine has changed too. On one hand, the New World has tried to translate the French concept of *terroir* folding it within an enlarged notion of provenance that includes emphasis on regionality, small-scale production and the personality of the winemaker (Smith Maguire, 2018: 8-9). That has been possible due to the flexible and ambiguous nature of the *terroir* concept that can accommodate opposing categories within it: *terroir* is thought to be both natural and cultural, physical and human at the same time. It is about magnifying the particular nature of a place through the work of humans (Daynes, 2013), but at the same time "it glosses over the highly problematic nature of what is 'real', 'true', 'natural'. The role of human agents and technology are sequestered, ignoring the inevitably changing nature of knowledges and technologies over time, recognition of which jeopardises claims about an unchanging physical, social and technical order." (Inglis, 2015: para. 20)

On the other hand, traditional producing countries such as France and Italy have witnessed a constant decrease in regular wine consumption, which is accompanied by transformations in the way wine is consumed. In the context of an increasingly individualistic society where wine

consumption is more and more defined as an occasional practice characterised by fragmentation and growing social differentiation, drinking wine can be framed as a quest for identities (Demossier, 2010). If in France the "wandering" drinker has signalled the emergence of this new and eclectic wine culture (Demossier, 2005), in the New World the figure of the 'new consumer' has been purposely constructed by a coalition of business professionals and academics supported by powerful wine companies and national governments. The 'new consumer' is portrayed as a middle-class person, oriented towards easy-to-drink bottles of wines, whose grape varietal and aromas are clearly stated on the label. This type of drinker does not need the sophisticated knowledge and cultural capital that allow the Old World wine connoisseur to decipher cryptic labels and understand complex wines. This broad marketing operation which was mainly prompted by the US, Australia and South Africa, was disseminated by a range of different actors through international conferences, specialist journals, and commercial campaigns, with the aim of forging a New World imaginary around drinking wine. For their part, plant scientists and biochemists supported the idea of an interventionist approach to winemaking, which would guarantee stable and consistent wines through the use of selected yeasts and technological processes such as filtration. The reliability of the brand replaced the idea of provenance and *terroir* as the main criteria to appreciate wine.

This major shift in the production and consumption of wine affected the EU policies on the matter in 2006, leading to an 'industrial' model of winemaking to the detriment of small-scale, artisanal wineries (Inglis, 2019: 35-36). In terms of taste, the industrial wine produced through the support of technological innovations and oenological practices led to a standardisation of styles and aromas across the different wine-producing countries. Relying on oenological additives and technological manipulations in the cellar, wine producers could escape the unpredictability of nature and offer consumers a consistent product year by year. As it is provocatively presented in the documentary *Mondovino* by Jonathan Nossiter (2004), the increasing industrialisation of the modern wine sector has transformed wine into a characterless, standardised commodity. Within this now global sector, an influential role is played by the so-called "flying winemakers", leading wine experts and oenologists traveling around the world to offer consultancy and disseminate the technical knowledge acquired in world leading research centres such as Stellenbosch in South Africa and the University of California, Davis. This transnational community of experts, often supported by a rich social capital that enables them to connect easily to investors, wine critics, and organisers of major wine fairs, contribute to the standardisation of styles and the promotion of an internationally accepted wine aesthetic. World-renown, globe-trotter oenologists such as the French Michel Rolland, create what Lagendijk (2004) terms the "inter-connected locales" of the globalised wine world. A world that is comprised of different local realities that get connected

through transnational networks of key actors disseminating the same technical knowledge, ideas, and practices.

Within this scenario, a global hierarchy of wine values has come to dominate the cultural circuits of the sector and, at the same time, affect the practices of local wine producers. The cultural authority displayed by global tasters, wine critics and oenologists, who possess a common knowledge and means of communication to mediate and reproduce the sensory experience of tasting wine, dictates the way the latter is valued in the global arena. As in the ethnographic case described by Jung (2014), Bulgarian winemakers strive to give their wines international recognition through the promotion of their unique (and unknown) *terroir* and autochthonous grape varieties. To do so, they try to align with a notion of quality that has less to do with the intrinsic characteristics of their wines, and more to do with "the recognition of a discernible difference [that] is the basis for a hegemonic taste knowledge of place-based foods" (Jung, 2014: 26). Similarly to the example of the Italian extra-virgin olive oil described by Meneley (2007), the global promotion and recognition of Bulgarian wines passes through the evaluations of panels of experts who, through their hegemonic taste knowledge, reproduce a global hierarchy of value (Herzfeld, 2004).

It is in this complex globalised scenario that the natural wine movement has gradually emerged as a response to the industrialisation of the wine sector, the increasing standardisation of its practices, and homologation of taste. Groups of European small-scale, artisanal producers have rejected the industrial model initially proposed by the New World and later adopted at the EU level. Before delving into the historical development of this loose movement, I will first describe the category of natural wines in broader terms.

3.5 Natural wines

According to the International Wine and Spirits Record (IWSR), the most widely used source for alcohol-drinking trends in the world, in a global scenario where wine consumption growth rates remain mainly flat, organic wine represents the subcategory which is expected to increase the most between 2017 and 2022. With 78% of the global market share, Europe is leading the sales of organic wines, followed by the US (IWSR, 2019). Nowadays, natural wines represent a flourishing niche product category within the larger organic wine sector both on a national and international scale.

Generally speaking, natural winemaking is associated to small-scale, artisanal production (Goode and Harrop, 2011). These wines are produced according to a low-intervention approach which combines the rejection of synthetic chemical pesticides and fertilizers in the vineyard with the use

of indigenous yeasts and zero technological manipulation in the cellar. The grapes, which are organically grown, are hand-harvested so as to reduce the use of tractors and other agricultural machines in the vineyard that could overly compress the soil, compromising land fertility and polluting the surrounding environment. Harvesting manually also allows for a preliminary selection of the grapes, which sometimes continues in the cellar prior the destemming and crushing operations.

Due to the use of indigenous yeasts which grow naturally in the vineyard (specifically on the grape skins), the fermentation process occurs spontaneously. This is a key aspect in the production of natural wines, as it is said that wild yeasts confer the specific characteristics of the soil to the wine, acting as a sort of marker of provenance. Moreover, as the fermentation process is not begun artificially by selected yeasts, it takes usually more time allowing for the creation of chemical compounds which are normally avoided in conventional winemaking (Rothbaum, 2006). This can lead to higher levels of volatile acidity and a whole range of complex aromas which are generally defined as the "weird" or "funk" characteristics of these wines (Martineau, 2015; Cushing and Ross, 2017; Graf, 2017).

Chemical and artificial substances commonly deployed for oenological purposes, such as enzymes, acids, vitamins, and powdered tannins are banned. The same holds for a whole range of technological manipulations such as inverse osmosis and cryoextraction, which are said to heavily alter the microbiological texture of wine. Clarification and filtration, which usually imply the use of additives (such as isinglass, caseine and albumin) and invasive mechanic processes (such as tangential and micro-filtration), are replaced by physical gravity and additional racking operations. Finally, the amounts of sulphites (used for antioxidant and anti-bacterial purposes) are considerably lower compared to conventional winemaking. Some natural producers choose to not add them at all, or in small quantities just before bottling.

As a result, natural wines are often cloudy or with some sediment at the bottom of the bottle, they vary greatly from vintage to vintage, sometimes even from bottle to bottle of the same batch, and they are more exposed to the risk of spoilage due to minimum amounts of sulphites. Natural wine advocates affirm that these wines are the true expression of the place where the grapes are grown. Indeed, a greater emphasis is paid to what happens in the vineyard, as it is said that at the core of natural winemaking is the fruit itself, the grape, which must be clean, healthy, and properly ripened. As nothing else is added in the cellar, these producers rely mainly on the good quality of the yield as their necessary point of departure. For this reason, one of the recurrent mottos of these winemakers is "*il vino si fa in vigna, non in cantina*" ("wine is made in the vineyard, not in the cellar"). The wine obtained is said to be "alive" or "pure", because it has

not been subject to artificial modifications that can alter the original substance and reduce its microbiological component, namely naturally occurring yeasts, enzymes, and bacteria (Legeron, 2017b). Technological interventions and oenological products such as artificial aromas, oak chips and Arabic gum that are used in conventional winemaking to create specific varietal notes and adjust levels of acidity, sugar, and tannins are strongly banned. According to natural winemakers, these oenological techniques "mask" the real nature of wine and as a result lead to consistent flavours each vintage.

3.5.1 A debated category without legal recognition

When it comes to tasting natural wines, there is no middle ground: people either adore them or find them disgusting. Within the larger wine world, and in particular among wine critics, natural wines have been framed as a trendy phenomenon capable of attracting polarised opinions (Asimov, 2010; Atkin, 2011a). Headed by the worldwide acclaimed wine critic Robert Parker, who has defined natural wines as a "scam…that will be exposed as a fraud" (Parker, 2014), an army of wine critics, writers, sommeliers, and oenologists has harshly criticized natural winemaking and in particular its sensorial aesthetics. Degraded from the status of "wine" and equated to "flawed cider or rotten sherry" (Palling, 2014;2017), their smell and taste have been compared to "the whacking smell of a pigsty before it's been cleaned down, an acrid, grim burst of acid that makes you want to cry" (Rayner, 2012). These detractors argue that natural wines are generally cloudy and, mostly, prone to a series of what conventionally are considered serious wine faults: chemical instability, oxidation, volatility, and high presence of Brettanomyces yeast.[7] Faults that are said to be the direct result of the low-intervention approach adopted in the cellar, which translates into minimum dosages of sulphites, zero addiction of selected commercial yeasts, and chemical additives controlling the fermentation.

Paradoxically, the only common element in these disputes over natural wines seems to lie in the difficulty of defining them. The term natural is itself problematic as there is no agreed definition among the professionals of the wine sector over what could be defined as a natural wine (Servabo, 2013). This is how Master of Wine Isabelle Legeron, the most influential champion of natural wines in the world, approaches this issue:[8]

[7] Brettanomyces are a type of yeast family, defined as spoilage yeasts by conventional winemaking. It is characterised by barnyard, mousy and pungent aromas that add complexity and unpleasant profiles to wine according to their quantity.

[8] The title of Master of Wine is considered the most prestigious accreditation as a professional sommelier in the larger world of wine.

> Natural wine is a continuum, like ripples on a pond. At the epicentre of these ripples are growers who produce wines absolutely naturally – nothing added and nothing removed. As you move away from this centre, the additions and manipulations begin, making the wine less and less natural the further out you go. Eventually, the ripples disappear entirely, blending into the waters of the rest of the pond. At this point the term "natural wine" no longer applies. You have moved into the realm of the conventional. (Legeron, 2017a: 108)

A strong philosophical orientation pervades Legeron's discussion over the definition of natural wine. As I will describe through my ethnographic materials, many producers align with this sort of definition and tend to eschew any fixed rules or criteria which, according to them, could lead to the risk for natural winegrowing to be tantamount to just a method. Natural wine associations, as I will show below, provide their members with charters of quality which translate into attempts to define their philosophical orientation, together with more or less clear quantitative indications for the amounts of sulphites allowed.

Even in broader legal terms, natural wines do not constitute a legally recognised product category both in Europe and overseas, making any attempt to capture reliable statistics on this niche market problematic (Woolf, 2016). "Natural wines" as a legal product category does not exist at the European Community level, despite the fact that "organic wines" have been included in EU regulations as part of a larger set of rules on organic products since 2007. Indeed, "organic wines" and "natural wines" are two categories not entirely overlapping.

The latest set of rules issued by the European Community, Regulation (EU) No 203/2012, represents the main legal reference only on the matter of organic wines. If we trace back the history of the development of EU rules for wine, it can be seen how the process has been heavily affected by conflicting political and economic interests among the state members. When EU rules on organic food were issued in 1991, organic wine could only be sold as "wine from organic grapes". In 2007 the EU regulation No 847/2007 on organic production and labelling of organic products replaced the previous definition and introduced the category "organic wine", without any specific implementation though. While the European organic sector was steadily expanding and the competition from non-EU producers was growing, the Commission and member states could not easily find a common ground over the regulation of organic wine-making, The main reason of disagreement was about the amount of sulphites allowed, as they are deployed in different measures across the various wine-making areas in Europe, due to geographical and climatic reasons (IFOAM, 2013). The solution adopted in the final EU regulation No 203/2012 was

harshly criticised by the majority of natural wine producers, as they consider their limited use of sulphites as one of the major divides between natural and conventional winemaking.

Despite EU regulation's objective to abolish substances that might alter "the true nature of the organic wine" (European Commission, 2012), the use of the word "natural" to refer to a typology of wine is still forbidden by law. As Italian wine critic Bietti (2013) points out, what was at stake here was not merely a definition, rather the protection of specific commercial interests within the wine sector. According to him, the outcome of these regulations was the result of negotiations between wine lobby groups and the national governments, at an EU level. For instance, the steps undertaken to indicate a maximum level of sulphites reflected a real concern (the negative effects of sulphur dioxide on human organism, and consumers becoming more aware about this risk) and the solution to the problem aimed at defending the wine industry interests. By setting a (rather high) limit to the amounts of sulphites contained into organic wines, the law seems to stigmatise their use but at the same time does not provide consumers with a reasonable understanding of the real level of sulphites that can negatively impact on the human body. That way, a great number of wines labelled as "organic" contains amounts of sulphites considerably higher compared to their natural counterparts (see Figure 5 below for a comparison between conventional, organic, biodynamic and natural wines). Although EU and national regulations allow wine producers to declare the actual proportion of sulphites on their labels, there is not a corresponding intention of making consumers aware of the differences between conventional and natural winemaking in the use of sulphites. The official criteria set by law do not translate into selective standards; rather, they implicitly favour the industrial wine production and the broader commercial interests at stake in the sector.

Figure 5 “Wine: fermented grape juice” (Author: Cédric Mendoza, 2013 for www.vinsnaturels.fr)

Finally, the issue of defining (and promoting) natural wines is problematic since the same producers do not agree on a common definition. However, the problem seems not to merely rely on language. As it will be shown, it discloses a whole reality made out of different positions, each claiming its own perspective on wine production. As some wine critics have observed though, this confusing scenario does not allow natural producers to effectively promote their wines in a market where their conventional counterparts are more protected in terms of national and European policies (Servabo, 2013).

3.5.2 The natural wine market

According to the specialist magazine Meininger’s Wine Business International (Lohfert, 2019), the total production of natural wines could account for about only 2 % of global sales. Nevertheless, it is a niche production which is growing in numbers year by year and becoming what has been labelled as a ‘global phenomenon’ that attracts wine critics, sommeliers, chefs, and amateurs (Woolf, 2016; Halligan, 2019). In this regard, The Guardian affirms that “in hotspots such as New York, Copenhagen, London and Paris – where a small, fast-growing network of militant bars sell nothing but natural- it is very much a thing” (Naylor, 2017).

In Europe the Danish market can claim the lead of natural wines consumption thanks to the emergence of a new cuisine focused on sustainable, seasonal, food with a strong emphasis on the

place of origin, making a perfect combination with the philosophy of natural wines. In this regard, Copenhagen-based Michelin-starred restaurant Noma has been the most influential example of this kind of eno-gastronomic match (Holland, 2017; Steffensen, 2017; Whitbread, 2019). I will delve more into the connections between the so-called New Nordic culinary movements and natural wines, for the moment though I want to explore more in general the spread of natural wines within the European and international market.

In the UK, where the organic food sector has steadily increased over the years, registering record levels in 2018 (Smithers, 2018), natural wines represent a blooming niche market with London as one of the major venues in terms of wine shops, restaurants, bars and events dedicated to these wines. The artisanal wine fair RAW, founded by the first French female Master of Wine Isabelle Legeron in London in 2012, is gradually expanding in other key cities such as New York, Berlin, Los Angeles and recently Montréal (Cushing, 2017).

In Germany, despite the fact that it is a country with a long-standing organic awareness, natural wines still lack a defined position within the larger and well-developed organic wine sector. The US market instead is quite dynamic, due to the pioneering work done by few wine critics and distributors back in the 1990s-2000s, as it is described in the next part of the chapter. The large number of bars and restaurants devoted to these wines which have been opened recently in cities such as New York and Los Angeles is eloquent in this sense. The US is the second biggest importer of natural wines; some of them can even be found on the shelves of the supermarket chain Whole Foods Market (Woolf, 2016).

In absolute terms, Japan is the overseas country where natural wines were first commercialised and continue to be highly appreciated. This Asiatic country is the first importer for many European producers and its connections with the natural wine movement dates back to the early 1990s, in a time when France was just about to lay the groundwork for the emergence of a natural wine market (Crago, 2015). The first book ever published by a wine critic exclusively on natural wine was written by the Japanese Master of Wine Kenichi Ohashi in 2004, nearly a decade before Isabelle Legeron organised the first edition of RAW in a converted brewery in the gentrified area of Shoreditch, London. The success of these wines among Japanese palates is explained as the combination of different factors, according to various voices collected by wine critic Simon Woolf. On one hand, the total lack of a winemaking tradition in Japan has meant an open-mind approach to wine tasting that is key to appreciate these products per se, as a distinct category of drinks. On the other hand, after the nuclear disaster of Fukushima in 2011 and a more general high-speed process of industrialisation, Japanese consumers started to feel the need to reconnect to nature,

environmental issues and rediscover a sense of rural life that had been lost especially in the hyper-urban context of cities such as Tokyo (Demossier, 2018: Chapter 6; Woolf, 2019).

If we look at the profiles of natural wines consumers, it is immediately clear that the key words are: young (or more specifically Millennials), urban, and educated. The natural wine movement find its accolades in big cities hubs such as London, New York, and Tokyo where the major natural wine fairs are organised, and wine bars and restaurants are run. Posts and photos on Facebook and Twitter taken at these and other similar events and venues mostly portray crowds of young people holding a wine of glass in unpretentious ways. The age factor is key in the appreciation of these wines as young palates are not already shaped by conventional wine-tasting aesthetics and norms. In fact, new generations of natural wine professionals have emerged in the last decade, occupying managerial roles and chief positions in the trendiest wine bars and restaurants in Europe and (mainly) abroad. According to a survey conducted by the Italian wine e-commerce Tannico over the period 2015-2018, in a scenario where natural wine have nearly doubled in terms of their market share (from 8% to 15%), it results that young consumers display an appreciation for these wines. It seems Millennials have a more developed awareness towards sustainable viticulture and winemaking methods used by producers, as well as a sensitivity towards the latest trends in the wine world (WineNews, 2019).

3.6 The natural wine movement

Drawing a history of the emergence of natural wine producing as it is known and practised nowadays is not an easy task for many reasons. First of all, the category “natural wines” lacks a clear legal definition (and as a consequence a proper labelling), and the same natural winemakers work with a considerable degree of freedom resulting in different personalised working methods (Pineau, 2019). What is presented here as the natural wine movement does not offer clear-cut criteria of inclusion and it is generally used to refer to groups of producers sharing the same ideas and practices on viticulture and winemaking (Black, 2013). What I will present here then is an attempt to map the different strands of a loose movement which finds its roots in France in the 1970s and subsequently spread in Italy and other European wine-producing countries and finally overseas. As it will be shown, the emergence, promotion, and current success of this kind of winemaking approach is tightly linked to a few influential social actors.

3.6.1 The French roots of the movement

The idea of not deploying synthetic chemicals to treat the plants and, at the same time, trying to vinify without using sulphur was initially put into practice by few French winemakers scattered in

different regions, mainly in central France, who are regarded nowadays as the pioneers of the natural wine movement. Going against the logic of post-war modern agriculture which assured higher profits by maximising the yield per hectare and minimising the risks of diseases and fermentation issues thanks to the novel synthetic chemistry, these *vignerons* decided to produce wine by returning to traditional methods. Instead of using pesticides and chemical fertilisers in the vineyard, combined with sulphites and other chemical additives in the cellar, these winemakers relied on naturally occurring indigenous yeasts and low-to-zero additions of sulphites. They were the first ones to associate the word "nature" to their bottles (*vins nature*), implying that wines obtained through modern viticulture and oenology were artificial and lacked a veritable connection to their place of origin (Pineau 2019: 12-13). *Vignerons* such as Marcel Lapierre (Beaujolais), Pierre Overnoy (Jura) and the siblings Hacquet (Loire) are considered to be the first representatives of what later would become a movement of small-scale French winemakers who chose to not use chemical substances both in the vineyard and in the cellar (St Etienne, 2012; Celce, 2016; Haskell, 2016). Still in the 1970s, they were few in number, without any connections with each other, representing isolated cases of resistance to the progressist ideology of the new-born industrial agriculture in post-war France. In the early 1980s, these producers from central France started to become more visible to restricted circles of people interested in this type of wines and their underlying philosophy, and the first crates of their wines began to be shipped to and consumed in wine bars and restaurants in Paris (Woodward, 2017).

3.6.1.1 Jules Chauvet and his legacy

The Beaujolais region was particularly key to the emergence of a natural awareness in viticulture and winemaking due to the research and experiments conducted by the French biochemist and winemaker Jules Chauvet. Born into a family of small *négociants* and winegrowers in Beaujolais in 1907, Jules Chauvet trained as a biochemist at the Université de Lyon. Better known in France than elsewhere (in particular within the natural wine world), he was also regarded as an excellent wine taster, and his approach is said to have had a profound influence on modern wine-tasting (Goode and Harrop, 2011). Applying a robust scientific approach to the study of fermentation and the microbiological components of wine, Chauvet dedicated his life to experimenting with techniques for producing wines without recurring to chemical additives (sulphur dioxide in particular) and other oenological processes which were commonly used at the time, such as chaptalization. [9] His commitment to using indigenous yeasts to activate the fermentation process and

[9] Chaptalization is an oenological practice which consists of adding sugar to the must in order to rise the percentage of alcohol in the wine. It is named after Jean-Antoine Chaptal who invented it in 1801. In Italy it is a forbidden practice.

limiting the amount of sulphur dioxide in cellar operations have become the trademark of the low-intervention approach in winemaking that was for the first time labelled as natural by him. In particular, combining his expertise as a wine scientist and his skills as a gifted wine taster, he undertook several experiments to test the role of different types of yeasts during the fermentation process, arriving at the conclusion that indigenous yeasts were responsible for better flavours (Goode and Harrop, 2011). According to a clear-cut nature/culture divide, producing natural wine meant to reduce human intervention to a minimum, so that nature could express its whole potential. Chauvet framed "nature" and its relationship with human intervention in ways that are still at the core of the production philosophy embraced by natural winemakers nowadays. Cohen (2013) points at the paradoxes engendered by Chauvet's conceptualisation of nature and its opposition to humankind: his rejection of human intervention and praise of natural expression in winemaking find their basis in Chauvet's solid scientific background as a chemist and oenologist; the non-intervention approach he advocated implies, in fact, an intensive working regime where the winemaker needs to spend more time, attention, and work both in vineyard and in the cellar; the same notion of nature Chauvet had in his mind (and his eyes) was a microscopic one, populated by indigenous yeasts and made possible through the use of technological means.

For the purpose of this chapter, it is enough to point out the seminal influence of this French biochemist for the development of a first, small cohort of vintners who started producing natural wines following his oenological lessons. Jules Chauvet died in 1989, after having left few works based on his studies and experiments conducted throughout his life, which became textbooks for younger generations of natural winemakers. But also, he had become the mentor of a group of winegrowers and close friends based in Beaujolais who adopted his natural method, regarding him as their spiritual father. Marcel Lapierre, Guy Breton, Jean-Paul Thevenet, Jean Foillard and Joseph Chamonard, all together knowns as "The Gang of Five", reportedly got in contact with Chauvet in 1978 through their consultant winemaker Jacques Neauport. After what was recalled as a mystical encounter, Lapierre and his friends started working with old vines, harvesting full-ripened grapes, fermenting with no sulphur dioxide and indigenous yeasts only, and bottling without fining or filtrations (Atkin, 2007). That is why the Beaujolais region is considered one of the cradles of the natural wine movement, together with the Loire where biodynamic winemaker and consultant Nicolas Joly pioneered the application of Steiner's agricultural lesson to viticulture and winemaking back in the 1970s (Gordon, 2016).

3.6.1.2 Rudolph Steiner and the biodynamic method

French anthropologist Christelle Pineau considers Steiner and Chauvet the two spiritual fathers of the natural wine movement, being the former the point of reference for biodynamic winegrowers and the latter the initiator of natural winemaking (Pineau, 2019). Along the same line, according to Isabelle Legeron, Rudolph Steiner was amongst the earliest visionaries of a more sustainable viticulture and winemaking, together with Jules Chauvet (Decanter Staff, 2011). The point of contact between Steiner, the Austrian founder of anthroposophy, and viticulture is represented by the Organic Agriculture Course he gave in Koberwitz (Poland) in 1924, one year before his death. By that time, Steiner was already known as the father of that complex system of beliefs centred on the spiritual dimension called by him anthroposophy. Born in Kraljevec (which was at that time in Hungary) in 1861, Steiner first studied at the Technical University of Vienna where he received a scientific formation. Animated by philosophical questions about the human spirit, he later devoted his intellectual energies to the study of philosophy, in particular Kant and Goethe's works. The latter in particular became the main point of reference for Steiner's articulation of a science of the spirit (anthroposophy). According to the Austrian philosopher, the reality is comprised by four different levels (physical, ethereal, astral and ego forces), where spiritual and physical elements are intermingled to form a unique matrix, according to a holistic view of the universe. In 1924, Steiner gave eight lectures on agriculture to a public formed mainly by farmers coming from Germany and Poland (Paull, 2011). What was later labelled as "biodynamic agriculture" was initially a farming practice informed by the theoretical tenets of anthroposophy: the farm as an agricultural unity was considered as a living entity subject to the same four-level forces controlling the whole reality, and the farmer as the one who has to establish a personal relation to this natural system. As Vogt (2007) states, biodynamic agriculture was introduced by these anthroposophical farmers who did not apply the theoretical indications contained in Steiner's 1924 Agriculture Course systematically. Rudolf Steiner played an important role in the emergence of a movement of winemakers (and farmers) in a European rural context characterised by the affirmation of industrial agriculture, the gradual abandonment of traditional farming methods and the acknowledgement of the first negative effects caused by the massive use of synthetical chemicals in agriculture.

Biodynamic philosophy found its earliest application to viticulture in the pioneering work done by winegrower Nicolas Joly at his estate Clos de la Coulée de Serrant (Loire) in the 1980s. Before becoming a biodynamic producer, Joly graduated from Columbia University and later worked as an investment banker for J.P. Morgan in New York City and London. Nowadays regarded as the guru and leader of the biodynamic wine movement, in recent years Joly has become a globe-

trotter wine consultant and author of three books on biodynamic winemaking.[10] In 2001 he also founded Les Reinassance des Appellations (translated in English as "Return to Terroir"), the first association of biodynamic *vignerons* who are committed to employ sustainable, biodynamic and low-intervention techniques both in the vineyard and in the cellar.[11] In the introduction to the quality charter of the association Steiner's anthroposophical legacy merges clearly from the way wine is presented: "the taste of wine can only attain its singularity and become inimitable when it has received the mark of its terroir and microclimate. Everywhere on earth the 4 components - heath, light, water and soil/subsoil- combine differently in a unique way" (Return to Terroir, 2010). In order to be recognised as part of the association as a member, the producer must respect a charter of quality which is presented as a three-level rating system which builds on biodynamic philosophy. The group now counts more than 200 producers from 17 countries (Mullen, 2017).

3.6.2 The development of the Italian natural wine movement

In Italy, the rise of a natural wine movement happened slightly later and benefitted from what had already been tried out in France by winegrowers such as Lapierre in Beaujolais and, especially, Joly in the Loire region. To reconstruct the history of this loose movement I relied mainly on articles from blogs, magazines, newspapers and websites dedicated to Italian wine and food culture, as well as personal communications I had with my informants and other personalities of the Italian natural wine world during my ethnographic fieldwork.

Two producers from North-Eastern Italy, Josko Gravner and Angiolino Maule, are considered to be among the first few winemakers to dedicate special attention to sustainable techniques and low-intervention operations both in the vineyards and in the cellar.[12] In this initial phase of the movement, an important role was played by solidarity and mutual exchange of experiences between the winegrowers involved. Considering the Italian case, it was mainly through personal contacts with Nicolas Joly and other French winegrowers that Italian producers became aware of the potential of biodynamic techniques and organic farming (Montes, 2014). As it happened in France, the Italian winegrowers who first started working naturally did not represent a coherent

[10] Here the titles of his books which have been translated in different languages: "What is biodynamic wine?" and "Biodynamic wine, demystified" addressed to a public of wine lovers, and "Wine from sky to Earth" written mainly for winemakers.
[11] https://return-to-terroir.com/
[12] In an interview, Angiolino Maule claims that Josko Gravner represented a guide for him. It was in fact through Gravner that he approached natural winemaking for the first time in the 1980s Montes, M. (2012) 'Una chiacchierata con Angiolino Maule tra assaggi di vini con e senza solforosa', *cronachedigusto.it*, 23 February. Available at: http://www.cronachedigusto.it/archiviodal-05042011/331-lincontro/7639-maule.html (Accessed: 03 June 2019)..

movement of wine producers but rather quite isolated cases. In the 1970s and 1980s, the role of French advisors such as Joly's was determinant in growing awareness around natural wines and their production. And the same exchange of experiences and solidarity allowed more conscious collective actions over time. To this day, these solidary practices continue to be shared by Italian natural winegrowers, as they are valued as an extremely useful source of practical knowledge and expertise as well as part of what is shared in terms of tight social relationships. A strong sense of conviviality and enjoyment in drinking wine together indeed characterise this group of natural winegrowers.

The first consistent attempt at defining natural wines and their main characteristics dates back to 2001 when Luca Gargano, an Italian wine distributor since 1983, wrote the *Manifesto dei vini Triple A* ("Triple A wines manifesto"). The three As stand for "Agriculturist", "Artisans" and "Artists" respectively. After years spent tasting and importing conventional wines from the so-called New World, Gargano realised that a process of homogenization and industrialization in the sector was undermining the more natural, genuine aspect of wine drinking. [13] In particular, he felt the need to rediscover viticulture as the fundamental step in wine production. Agriculture and indigenous yeasts are the key words within his ten-points manifesto, which covers all the various activities undertaken both in the vineyards and in the cellar (Gargano, 2001). In 2003, Gargano got in touch with Joly, and the latter invited him to France to attend a wine fair with his group of Italian natural producers. The following year, Gargano organised the first edition of the natural wine fair ViniVeri ("real wines") at Villa Favorita, a Palladian frescoed villa in Monticello di Fara (close to Verona), one of the first venues in Italy where natural winegrowers could promote their products to professionals and the general public altogether (Pulliero, 2008).

3.6.3 The associations of ViniVeri, VinNatur and Vi.Te

ViniVeri is also the name of the first association of Italian natural winegrowers which was founded, upon Joly's advice, by four leading natural wine producers (Giampiero Bea, Angiolino Maule, Fabrizio Niccolaini and Stanko Radikon). Similarly to Joly's association, ViniVeri drafted a charter of quality for its members highlighting the key steps in the process leading to the production of natural wines, divided into two main areas: the vineyard and the cellar (despite the fact that biodynamic practices are not explicitly encouraged). The original leadership of the association lasted less than two years as Angiolino Maule dropped out to fund a new association

[13] This expression is used in the world of wine to refer to those countries which are not part of the traditional European wine-areas. New-World countries are: the USA, Canada, Argentina, Chile, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa.

called VinNatur in 2006. The reasons of this divide were various, but concerned mainly the lack of an explicit protocol on production. Today his association is the largest of its kind in Italy, with more than 170 members spanning over 9 countries.[14] VinNatur is committed to specific high quality standards, and this is reflected in its strict charter of quality and assessment criteria: each producer's wines are evaluated by a neutral panel of tasters and later analysed in a lab to check the possible presence of pesticides and levels of sulphur dioxide.[15] Every year in April around the same days of Vinitaly (the most important wine fair in Italy, taking place in Verona), VinNatur holds a three-day wine fair at Villa Favorita.[16] The wine fair is a unique occasion for all members to gather together, develop networking with wine agents, importers, distributors and critics who are drawn to Verona for Vinitaly during that week, meet the general public (who steadily increases year by year), and attend themed seminars and workshops focused on natural viticulture and winemaking.

Another major split within the Italian natural wine movement occurred in 2012 when a group of producers and other members from Reinassance Italia decided to create the association Vi.Te – Vignaioli e Territori (translated "winegrowers and territories") and organise their own wine fair within the institutional frame of Vinitaly. Before then, the Italian natural wine movement rejected unanimously any connection with the annual fair held in Verona, which was regarded as the symbol of that conventional industrial winemaking strongly criticised by the movement. Instead, the idea of this group of winemakers was to make their alternative voice heard right from within the capital of mainstream wine production, distribution, and consumption. In 2012 they were allocated one of the numerous pavilions inside Vinitaly to share with other organic producers. The first edition was a real success both for producers and public, considering that natural wines as a product category separated by organic wines were not already on everyone's lips (Cossater, 2012). Today the association counts more than 130 members, mainly Italian, who still hold their annual wine fair within the premises of Vinitaly.

3.6.4 The role played by Christine Cogez Marzani and Luigi Veronelli

Two years before ViniVeri was founded, that is in 2002, the first edition of natural wine fair Vini di Vignaioli (translated "winegrowers' wines") took place thanks to the idea and organisation of

[14] https://www.vinnatur.org/
[15] https://www.vinnatur.org/perche/diventare-socio-produttore-di-vinnatur/
[16] The last edition of VinNatur wine fair was held in a different location, due to some restoration works to the villa. The new location, the Margraf Showroom in Gambellara, has offered more space for the producers' stands. This last edition has also seen another important novelty, the launch of VinNatur Magazine, the association's brand-new half-yearly magazine.

Paris-based restaurant owner and natural wine lover Christine Cogez Marzani in Fornovo di Taro, a small town in the Italian province of Parma. Married with an Italian chef running an Italian restaurant in Paris, Cogez Marzani was the pioneer of Italian natural wines importation to France. Familiar with this kind of production, as Paris was already home of wine bars, shops and restaurants devoted to the promotion of French natural wines (Holthausen, 2016), Cogez Marzani started searching for Italian small-scale, artisanal winegrowers working without using selected yeasts, pesticides and excessive amounts of sulphites (Novati, 2015). By doing so, she ended up being a key figure in the development of a natural wine culture in Italy, and introduced among Italian producers the very idea of natural winemaking as an economically viable production with a French market (and culture) ready for it. As a result, many Italian producers realised thanks to her that their wines could be defined and sold as natural wines, as it was the case with the winemakers described in the ethnographic vignette at the beginning of this thesis. Since 2002, Cogez Marzani's fair *Vini di Vignaioli*, which can claim the title of first natural wine fair in Italy, has offered the possibility to get to know numerous winemakers (mainly Italian and French), and taste their wines in an informal environment which reminds the atmosphere of the French *salons du vin nature*. Since 2015, a Milan-based edition of *Vini di Vignaioli* (called "Live Wine") reflects the positive trend of a flourishing wine market niche which finds in big cities such as Milan its main target and economic success.

Another significant series of encounters added to the emergence of the Italian natural wine movement and more generally to the development of a political consciousness among Italian small-scale farmers and winegrowers reacting to the effects of neo-liberal policies in agriculture (maximising profits at the expense of a sustainable agriculture, overloading bureaucracy for small producers, standardisation of taste, etc.).

At the beginning of the 2000s a series of political events and social experiences led to the creation of "t/Terra e liberta'/Critical Wine", a social movement focused on ethical issues surrounding wine and its commodification. The movement was the result of the encounter between Luigi Veronelli, the internationally renowned Italian gastronome and wine critic, and young leftist activists from different community centres of Northern Italy. Veronelli was an intellectual and philosopher by background, interested in the history and culture of Italian food and wine, as well as an active defender of a peasant culture which was gradually being lost in the face of a growing agricultural industrialisation. Editor and author of numerous books and articles on the Italian cuisine, he invented the first gastronomic guides specialised in Italian wines and restaurants. As an influential journalist and expert of Italian gastronomy, he was actively engaged in raising awareness about the effects of industrialisation and food corporations on the economic and social conditions of small-scale, artisanal food, and wine production. At the beginning of the 2000s, a

few years before his death, he started collaborating with other intellectuals and young leftist activists in discussions on globalisation, the industrial food system, homologation of taste, changing consumption patterns, and agriculture (Tibaldi, 2009). Veronelli and his movement launched a campaign demanding self-certification for artisanal food products and what he called "*79rezzo sorgente*" (wine source pricing): any food product should bear an indication of all raw materials' origins, their typology and processing methods on the packaging, as well as its original price (Veronelli *et al.*, 2004). In doing so, he anticipated the request for a "transparent label" promoted by some Italian natural wine producers during ViniVeri wine fair in 2013.[17] Since 2007, the Milan-based eno-gastronomic fair *La Terra Trema* (translated "shaking land"), taking place in the historical self-managed community centre of Leoncavallo, has collected the legacy of Veronelli's political activism and his project of giving recognition to the cultural and artisanal work of small producers, farmers and winemakers through an ongoing debate within urban contexts. *La Terra Trema* remains the annual gathering of more than one hundred small-scale producers and farmers from all over Italy who can find here a dynamic and politically active environment to discuss current topics concerning state agricultural policies, engage in wider sociological debates and, last but not least, meet their local consumers.[18]

3.6.5 The recent success of the natural wine movement

In the 1990s, the natural wine movement expanded both in France and Italy, attracting other winemakers who were working in the same way in Europe, especially in Austria, Germany, and Spain. At the same time, the number of fairs and events dedicated to these wines slowly increased, most of the time thanks to the work of few wine *cognoscenti* who had honed their palates to the sensorial aesthetics of natural wines. This circumscribed crew of wine critics, sommeliers, distributors and importers have represented key figures for the recognition of an alternative way of tasting wine, which strongly opposed to the dominant criteria set by orthodox sommeliers and wine critics such as Robert Parker.

Since the mid-2000s (with some earlier isolated cases in the late 1990s), French and Italian natural wines have found their way into the US market thanks to the pioneering work of few wine professionals such as New York-based wine distributor Joe Dressner and his wife Denyse Louis (Louis/Dressner Selections), New York-based wine merchant Neal Rosenthal (Rosenthal Wine Merchant), who is also author of a book titled "Reflections of a wine merchant: On a lifetime in

[17] https://www.viniveri.net/notizie/verso-unetichetta-trasparente/

[18] https://www.laterratrema.org

the vineyards and cellars of France and Italy" and who was featured in Nossiter's 2004 film *Mondovino*, and New York-based wine blogger Alice Feiring (author of a successful blog called "The Feiring Line", as well as several books on natural wines). Nossiter also contributed to make the Italian strand of the movement famous in Italy and abroad through the documentary *Resistenza Naturale* (Nossiter, 2014). The film describes a group of Italian producers dedicated to natural winemaking, highlighting the political stance of their battles to promote an alternative to conventional wine industry.

Since the 2010s small groups of winemakers working in Australia and New Zealand, inspired by what was happening in Europe and the US, started producing natural wines in different regions of the two countries. The movement around natural winemaking in this part of the so-called New World retains the same characteristics as its European counterparts: a loose movement comprised of different voices and orientations that stand together against the use of synthetic chemicals both in the vineyard and in the cellar and excessive oenological manipulation during the vinification process (Asimov, 2019). The same is happening in small areas of Argentina and Chile, where some old autochthonous grape varieties such as the Chilean *país* are undergoing a process of revitalisation and renewed appreciation (Feiring, 2019).

3.7 Conclusions

In this chapter I have provided the reader with an introductory overview over natural wines, by placing them within a wider framework of analysis that takes into account the emergence of a new approach to food connected to modern European desires. In front of recent food scares and wider social transformations triggered by globalisation and the formation of the EU, Western consumers demand closer connections to the food they eat. Artisanal and natural food products appear then to be the responses to consumers' modern anxieties as they imply a reconnection with nature and in particular to locality, together with what the latter entails: a sense of lost traditions, authenticity, and rootedness. Transnational food movements such as Slow Food have intercepted these needs and proposed a new relational food aesthetic. At the core of this new engagement with food lies the problematic concept of *terroir,* which found its first application in French wine production. The multi-dimensional nature of this French concept has allowed its use within legal frameworks that bind specific localities to specific food products, guaranteeing thus their quality. Within the wine world, the concept of *terroir* has historically been the means to reproduce social hierarchies and promote a model of high-quality production that has become the point of reference for the rest of the wine world. Within a changing global scenario that sees the emergence of new producing countries with a relatively recent history in viticulture, the appeal to *terroir* has been subsumed within a larger set of values where science and technology play a key

role. Although *terroir* remains a key element for marketing purposes, the mass-production of wine relies more on new techno-scientific notions which are disseminated through transnational networks of experts and oenologists. The same networks, together with acclaimed wine critics and sommeliers, dictate the aesthetic and evaluative standards for taste, reproducing a global hierarchy of wine values. It is against this increasing standardisation of practices and homologation of taste, that groups of winemakers across Europe have started to craft their wines in unconventional ways. Natural winemaking can be approached then as a geographically fragmented response to this changing scenario and at the same time as a niche market that finds increasing popularity and accolades in international urban centres such as Paris and Tokyo. Nevertheless, as a debated product category, natural wines raise different issues regarding the way they are produced and their legal status within both national and European legal frameworks. In the next chapters, I will delve into these problematic aspects in light of the ethnographic materials I collected during my own fieldwork.

Chapter 4 Natural wines from locality to global scale

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to unpack the vagueness surrounding the image of natural wines (Monroe, 2019), and transform it into a more ethnographically complex reality. I will demonstrate that what is at stake is not simply a linguistic *querelle*, but instead a more complex, critical engagement with notions of *terroir*, authenticity and nature on the part of these producers. Drawing from my own ethnographic fieldwork, I will analyse how crafting wines which are said to be closer to nature and *terroir* by those who produce them, implies a reflexive posture and a strategic, sometimes contradictory, engagement with the place where production occurs.

I will show how producers who embrace a natural approach to viticulture and winemaking negotiate the meaning of their work while being well-aware of their positioning within a global market where environmental and ethical concerns translate into products with added value. Within the contemporary globalised world of wine, where values such as authenticity, ecological engagement and provenance are at the centre of new debates around 'quality' (Demossier, 2018: 157; Teil, 2012; Inglis, 2019), natural wine producers strategically carve out their own space at both local and global levels. While their wines are not legally recognised, and often contested by the hegemonic taste-knowledge of global experts (Yung, 2004), still these producers know how to strategically rely on their own network to place their wines in key market niches as well as create closer connections with consumers who want to differentiate from their more traditional counterpart. I will argue that the lack of an organic label and a regulatory framework is not always perceived as a limitation by these producers, but instead it is strategically deployed to mark a difference from the rest of the wines on the market.

Through the ethnographic analysis of my case studies, I will show how my participants make sense of their actions and beliefs according to their different life trajectories and engagement with natural winegrowing. The result will be an heterogenous picture which reflects the multiplicity of voices, practices and postures of these female natural winegrowers. The open-minded, reflexive approach to wine characterising these producers, who are generally highly educated and with a degree in oenology, will be analysed through the multiple strategies they undertake to claim their relationship with *terroir*, engage with the regulatory framework of organic certification, and build up a globally ramified network. The chapter is divided into three main sections, each of them addressing a different scale of analysis. I will start by looking at the way natural wine producers construct their relationship with locality (and *terroir*). Then I will

move my attention to the larger European scenario to discuss the involvement of natural winegrowers in the organic farming movement and their positions regarding the current EU legislation on organic wines. Finally, I will trace the global ties that shape the network of my interlocutors. In my analysis, I will critically approach locality not as a physical, bounded locale but as the place where different scales meet and contestations arise (DuPuis and Goodman, 2005).

4.2 Reflexive *terroir*

> Vi.Te is synonymous with artisanal wine,
> that expresses the flavor of the land it comes from
> and is born from diversity, knowledge and presence.
>
> The winemaker – through the everyday acts of farming – creates his or her own personal relationship with the land and the wine.
>
> We are pleased to celebrate this relationship, and at the same time contribute to the development and promotion of the culture of natural and artisanal wine, and organic and biodynamic agriculture.
>
> Vi.Te unites producers from all over the world who strive to express themselves through transparency, authenticity, and individuality.
> Our wines are produced with a respect for all living beings and aspire to be the authentic expression of the places where they are made.
>
> (Vi.Te-Vignaioli e Territori, 2019)

Natural wines are presented and communicated both by their producers and those who promote and sell them, as the result of a skilful process of interpretation aimed at expressing the local *terroir*. The above quotation is taken from the webpage of *Vi.Te – Vignaioli e Territori* ("winegrowers and territories"), one of the three main associations of natural wine producers based in Italy. Through a rather evocative and not prescriptive language, it delineates the foundational principles of natural winemaking highlighting the importance of an intimate relationship between the winemaker and her land. At first sight, natural wine producers seem to align with more traditional winemakers in their quest for fine wines, where quality is framed as the tight association between a specific place and its unique taste. What differentiates natural wine producers though, is their highly reflexive posture which leads them to treat *terroir* not as a given or a priori category, but as the result of a constant process of human-plant interaction. The concrete manifestation of this entanglement, namely wine, varies from year to year, from plot to plot, and as such is unpredictable. This open-minded approach, coupled with a strong ecological

sensitivity, is something I found among all my informants during my fieldwork in Italy and defines their own identity as natural wine producers, despite their formal membership to different natural wine associations operating at national and transnational level. At a practical level, their approach to winegrowing is informed by a solid technical knowledge, as most of them have a university degree in viticulture and oenology or have attended training courses and seminars which allow them to engage in wine production with a great deal of awareness regarding each single stage of the process. At a more ideological level, this reflexive engagement with *terroir* is founded on a criticism of the increasing homogenisation of taste and the industrialisation process that has invested the wine sector since the 1970s. In their quest for wines which bear the mark of the place where they originated, natural producers contrast globalisation and its standardising effects by emphasising values such as transparency and authenticity, while contesting existing notions of 'typicity' as framed by the regulatory framework of the national system of denominations (Barrey and Teil, 2011). As I will show through two ethnographic case studies, their attachment to *terroir* is strategically mobilised to make a distinction between their wines and the conventional ones. According to their personal backgrounds and life-trajectories, various strategies are undertaken.

Before delving into the significance of the *terroir* for natural wine producers, and in particular my Italian informants, I will first go back to the globalised wine scenario. I do so to argue that the emergence of natural wines as a distinct category has partly intersected the process of democratization investing the production and consumption of fine wines. Since the 1970s, Old World hierarchies of taste (especially French), which were based on the tight association between *terroir* and high quality, have started eroding. As a result, the same *terroir* concept has gradually been included into broader notions of provenance (Smith Maguire, 2018). Deemed as elitist and auto-referential, the French notion of *terroir* had, in fact, secured competitive advantages and monopoly rents for the Old World wine producers and excluded from this logic the New World counterpart (Harvey, 2002; Fourcade, 2012). The latter could not count on the same symbolic and cultural capital accumulated through centuries of history and materialised in structured quality assurance systems such as the French AOC. Nevertheless, with the appearance of new actors in a market increasingly globalised (hence more competitive), the hegemony of the *terroir* concept has been challenged by a more democratic approach to wine consumption. According to Howland (2013), a series of interrelated factors have caused the erosion of the *terroir* supremacy, producing what he calls "distinction by proxy": the middle-class performance of appreciation of fine wines through more democratic means that have allowed readily accessible economic capital to transform into cultural capital. As I have already said in the previous chapter, the indication of the varietal on the label has been one of the key factors in providing ready-to-understand

information to consumers. The introduction of points ranking systems such as the one developed by Robert Parker, and other forms of quality assurance mechanisms (wine awards, critic reviews, etc.) represent another way of communicating the quality of the wines purchased more easily. Amongst the other strategies noted by Howland (2013) which have led to a process of democratisation, there is a greater social access to winegrowers through public events, such as wine tasting tours and fairs, but also (and more indirectly) through biographies and interviews reported on wine websites and lifestyle magazines. As I will demonstrate later, these factors have also permeated the more restricted world of natural wine and its social actors. As Howland (2013: 326) aptly argues, the democratisation of fine wines has not removed the mechanisms and hierarchies of elite distinction, as wine remains a field of connoisseurship where differential status is constantly reproduced.

This holds true not only in the sphere of consumption, but also at the production and distribution level. As Harvey (2002) explains, the distinctive logic of *terroir*, which has historically secured monopoly rents to French wine producers to the detriment of those who do not own plots of land equally 'unique', has now been challenged by other modes of distinction. Indeed, quality claims based on the relationship between wine and its geographical origin have adapted to incorporate competing notions of authenticity, originality and uniqueness. In this way, the game of distinction remains unaltered. As Harvey concludes, "the generality of a globalised market produces […] a powerful force seeking to guarantee not only the continuing monopoly privileges of private property but the monopoly rents that derive from depicting commodities as incomparable" (2002: 100). *Terroir* has in fact been developed within a broader notion of provenance, which reflects contemporary desires of authenticity and transparency in line with what I argued in my discussion on food in the previous chapter. In particular, according to Smith Maguire (2018) the notion of provenance can be analysed as the combination of four different frames: transparency, genuineness, heritage and external validation. Following the author, the first three frames relate to authenticity while the last one pertains to legitimation devices such as the systems of denomination and awards. Authenticity relates to the particularities of production, which in the case of wine translates into detailed information about the place of origin, the way wine is produced and crafted and by whom, and its connections to local traditions and histories of winemaking. This broadening of the concept of provenance modifies the self-evident character of the original *terroir* logic to include quality claims based on the *minutia* of production, which reflect a democratization of *terroir*. At the same time, this 'taste for the particular' (Smith Maguire, 2018), that is an appreciation of the particularities of provenance which include the product, the producer and context of production, maintains a logic of distinction as it operates as a device of discernment that still reproduces status divisions between Old World and New World

wine regions. Within the Old World of wine, where the *terroir* concept keeps maintaining its hegemony, we instead assist at a process of hyper specification of provenance. A good example is Burgundy, where the campaign for UNESCO recognition has placed emphasis on its unique *climats*, and the individually named small plots of land forming the Burgundian *vignoble*. As Demossier (2011) notes, through this micro-local specification the allegedly natural association between place and quality has been pushed to the extreme, to claim superior distinctiveness and value in an increasingly competitive international scenario. If the divide between the Old and the New World has narrowed thanks to a process of democratization, wine nevertheless remains a field where the game of distinction keeps being played. With that in mind, I will now approach more closely the context of Italian natural winegrowing, and in particular the significance of *terroir* and 'locality' for this kind of production.

4.2.1 Born with *terroir*: Livia

> Before dinner I have a chat with Livia's brother about some recent reflections on *terroir* I made throughout the summer, which were prompted by some interesting discussions emerging during the last EASA conference.[1] I am interested in knowing how a winegrower thinks about *terroir*, while being well aware that much of my anthropological curiosity does not always make sense to my informants. I address the question to him in a pretty provocative way, as we have become familiar to each other this should not be a big deal (I hope). I am pretty surprised by his reply though. He frankly admits that *terroir* is first of all a "narration". It cannot be reduced to its soil components only, whose contribution to the creation of high-quality wines is not scientifically proven, either. He adds that the concept is difficult to grasp as it encompasses climate, soil, vines, and history. On top of that, he says, the time spent over the vines through generations is fundamental in creating a long, sustained human-plant interaction. It seems that Livia's brother embraces some criticism about the myth of *terroir*, but at the same time he defends it as a meaningful expression of his work as a wine producer. He tells me that not all his colleagues agree with him, instead some of them strongly believe in the alleged uniqueness of their own *terroir*. He acknowledges that some winegrowing areas are historically famous for their high-quality wines thanks to the *terroir* narration, while other regions cannot afford the same prestige. (Fieldnote 05/09/18)

[1] The European Association of Social Anthropologists.

Livia and her family live in the hills above Canelli, a small municipality in the Piedmont province of Asti which is historically renowned for the production of classic method sparkling wines.[2] Canelli in particular boasts a glorious past for the production of a sparkling white wine obtained through the local aromatic white grape variety Moscato, which is legally protected by the homonymous denomination of origin Moscato d'Asti Canelli DOCG. A few local historical wineries founded in the second half of the XIX century claim the credit for the production of the first Italian classic method sparkling wines, and their subterranean wine cellars have been recently inscribed into the UNESCO World Heritage List due to their historical and cultural value (see picture below).[3]

Figure 6 A road sign indicating the historical cellars of Canelli (photo by author)

Livia and her brother represent at least the fifth generation of a small-scale winemaker family that is deeply rooted to this corner of Piedmont. Their father, after some years working in Turin and

[2] Classic method sparkling wines, like French champagnes, are obtained through a process of second fermentation occurring in the bottle which is induced by the addition of yeast and sugar to the base wine.
[3] In 2014, the area around Canelli and Asti was officially granted the UNESCO World Heritage Site status together with the vineyards of Langhe-Roero and Monferrato (https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1390/).

Canelli as an insurance agent, decided to go back to the paternal home and manage the family winery when his own father became ill in the 1970s. At that time, wine used to be sold in bulk (*vino sfuso*) to private clients, who would then bottle it manually in the basements of their houses. When Livia's father took over the family business, he made some investments and introduced the bottling plant *in situ*, a technological rarity among local small-scale producers at that time.

When I first met Livia in Canelli in 2015, one of the first things she proudly told me was that the only real, traditional Moscato d'Asti is the one produced by her family on those hills. This is something that she repeated to me during the different visits I made to her place over the years, and the story was also confirmed by other natural wine producers I met in Piedmont. The very first day I spent at her place, after a delicious dinner with the rest of her family[4], Livia's father explicitly told me that their wine had always been natural because they had "the proper *terroir* to do it" (sic). More specifically, he said that their wine did not need further specifications to be defined, it was just "wine". He went on to say that this was especially true for their Moscato, which was a typical product, "born" (*nato*) uniquely in that land, a marker of authenticity *par excellence*. It was the rest of the wine produced in the area, he added, that was artificial and industrial. Giulio was referring in particular to the large-scale production of sparkling wines which represent a high percentage of the wines made locally. When the following day I was in one of their plots surrounding their property, walking with Livia through rows of vines ready to be harvested, she explained me that Moscato is the most expensive grape variety cultivated locally due to its high sugar content. Taking advantage of its high market price, many local wine growers prefer to sell their Moscato grapes to the wine industries of the area instead of producing their own wine, as it was done in the past. In that way, according to her, local wine growers have been devaluating a historical artisanal production that is barely surviving thanks to very few winemakers working in the same way as her family.[5]

It seems then that for Livia and her family producing a wine of *terroir* is necessarily bound to a practice, an artisanal *savoir faire* that allows the raw fruit to become a unique local product. It is for this reason that for Livia the term *terroir* can be pertinently applied to natural wine production only, which is carried out by small-scale artisanal winegrowers controlling each stage of the whole

[4] Livia lives with her father, brother, daughter and son in their family home, which is composed by the original compound and an annexed restored haystack where she lives with her sons. Livia has also two sisters who live in Turin and the nearby Canelli.

[5] In 2001, a small group of local producers created the *Associazione Produttori Moscato Canelli*, an association which promotes the local Moscato wine and aims at obtaining a new denomination of origin detached from the existing DOCG Moscato d'Asti Canelli. Livia does not belong to this association as she does not align with the quality standards promoted by its members.

process. If Livia's father takes for granted the association between their place and the unique quality of their wines, Livia became aware of producing natural wines of *terroir* only in 1998, after the visit of a group of French *vignerons* from Beaujolais to Canelli. During a tour around Le Langhe (the famous land of Barolo and Barbaresco wines, close to Asti province), this group of French natural winegrowers was received by Livia through a common acquaintance. At the end of the 1990s natural wines were already offered in Parisian *bars à vin*, and the Beaujolais region was already renown as the cradle of natural winemaking thanks to influential producers such as Marcel Lapierre (a close friend of one of the *vignerons* visiting Livia that year). Livia's personal trajectory of Livia tells a story that is similar to other Italian natural wine producers, who gained awareness of being part of an emergent movement of winegrowers through contact with other prominent colleagues working according to the same principles. In what follows, I will focus on the French influence regarding the role of *terroir* in the practices and discourses of my informants.

4.2.2 A French heritage

While Livia and her brother argue that only natural winemaking as an artisanal practice can lead to the expression of *terroir*, they also acknowledge the recent proliferation of the French term for marketing purposes in the Italian wine landscape. Indeed, since the 1970s groups of young innovative producers started to travel around France to learn and import cultivation and wine growing techniques to Italy (Giuliani, Lorenzoni and Visentin, 2015). Together with new knowledge, they also brought back the French idea of *terroir* on which those techniques were based. When in 1986 the methanol scandal threatened the Italian wine industry, in particular in the Piedmont region where most of the wineries involved in the scandal were based, the appeal to quality connected to *terroir* became the solution to resurrect an entire economy (Barbera and Audifredi, 2012). To this end, in 1992 the existing legal system of denomination initially divided into 'Table Wine' and 'Quality Wine Produced in a Specific Region' (that is DOC and DOCG wines) was modified by a new law which prohibited the application of labels of origin to table wines and introduced an intermediary level of quality, the *Indicazione Geografica Tipica* (IGT), on the model of the French category *vins de pays*. The aim was to strengthen a closer link between certified quality and *terroir* through an explicit hierarchy of denominations and a stricter regulation for DOCG wines (which are at the top of the quality pyramid, as it is shown in the picture below).

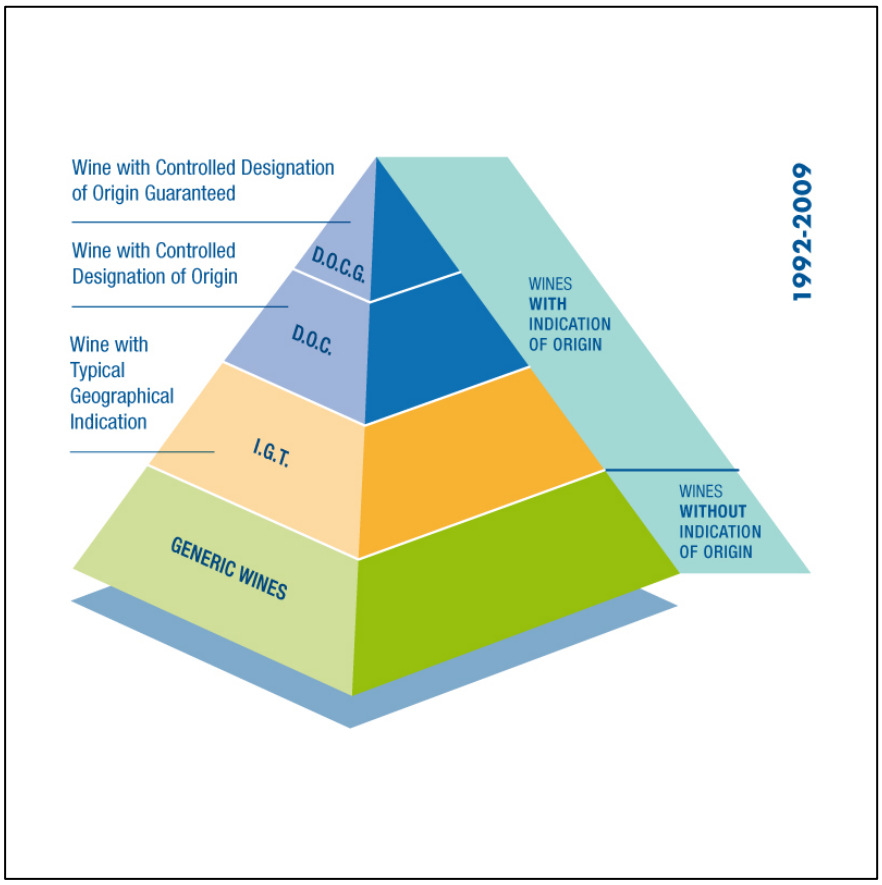


Figure 7 The Italian system of wine appellations (Federdoc, 2021)

The result was that a considerable number of small and medium producers were pushed to elevate their wines to the standards set by the *disciplinare di produzione* (the product specification, or French *cahier des charges*). Since then, the overall quality of the Italian wine production has increased and the export rates have been constantly growing. Piedmont nowadays represents the Italian region with the highest number of DOCs and DOCGs denominations of origin.

Currently, Italy and France represent the two world's largest wine producers and together they account for around 35% of the global wine production. What is interesting to note though, is that there is still a remarkable difference between the French and the Italian wine markets: while the value of French wines protected by the AOC appellation accounts for 82% of the national market value, the percentage for Italian DOC/DOCG wines is only 47%. The same discrepancy occurs if we look at the sales volume and sales value of the two countries at European level: France contributes 35% of the total European PDO[6] wine production against 20% of Italy, and French wines capture 54% of the European sales values compared to only 4% of Italian wines. The same

[6] Protected Designation of Origin, as it was established at EU level in 2012 and modelled on the French AOC system.

pattern is found at the consumption end, where French consumers generally rely on the AOC label as a quality indicator, while Italian consumers trust more wine guides, influential winemakers and previous tasting experiences (Corrado and Odorici, 2009; Carter, 2017: 484-485). The reasons of this difference between France and Italy and the failure of the Italian system of denominations to create a strong link between quality and *terroir* can be historically explained by the lack of a strong belief in *terroir* amongst Italian wine producers. According to Carter (2017), the *terroir* ideology successfully supported the emergence of a shared identity as *vigneron* amongst French winegrowers. Through local unions (*syndicats*) and their belief in *terroir*, these producers managed to work together to defend the superiority of their products. In this process the role of the state, which institutionalised the *terroir* concept through the creation of the AOC system of appellations, functioned as a quality regulator to the advantage of the winegrowers who still draft themselves the quality standards (Barham, 2003; Trubek, Guy and Bowen, 2010).

In Italy a strong identity amongst winegrowers never emerged as farmers used to work in a polycultural system where grapes were only one amongst the crops cultivated (olives, grains, fruits, etc.). Within an economy of subsistence, wine was not considered as a premium product meant for the market and the focus was on quantity instead of quality. Moreover, farmers did not get the right to vote until just before the First World War and that hindered the political formation of pressure groups able to confront the state policies on wine matters. As a result, the decisional power has remained in the hands of large wine merchants and distributors. In 1963, the DOC system of denominations was mainly created to increase the market value of Italian wine, whose quality was still to be built though. Instead of representing a shared belief as in the French case, the concept of *terroir* was then only indirectly adopted through the establishment of a legal framework constructed on the model of the French AOC. The attempt by the Italian government of increasing price and quality through the creation of a regulatory regime which only formally resembled the French model, proved unsuccessful due to the political nature of the DOC accreditation process which was used to gain support from local politicians through a clientelistic attitude (Carter, 2017: 491-492). This Italian appropriation of *terroir*, which Livia was pointing to, can then be interpreted as a marketing strategy that the Italian government introduced to increase the sales volumes of DOC and DOCG wine in the 1960s, and especially after the methanol scandal in the 1990s.

The use of *terroir* as a marketing device has nevertheless been framed as one of the interlocking dimensions through which the French concept can be analysed. This commercial dimension competes with what Charters defines as the ‘physical’ and ‘mystical’ aspects of place, together expressing *terroir* as a marker of distinction (Charters, 2006: 107-108). While the physical dimension strictly relates to the natural environment of the vineyard (soil, plant, altitude,

exposition, etc.), the mystical sphere includes the human factor and a socially cultivated taste of place which fosters a sense of identity for those believing in *terroir*, as it is best epitomised by French *vignerons.* The concept of typicity, intended as a quality tightly connected to a specific locality, derives its meaning from this sustained relationship between humans and nature. As Vadour argues,

> typicality characterises a collective taste memory, which has matured over a long time, through several generations of people, and refers to geographically referenced products. It is the shared perception of how generations from a given place expect the wine should taste, when made from grapes grown in that place and when the wine has been made in that place. (2002: 121)

While this idea of consensus over the meaning of typicity and authenticity applied to wine production has recently been challenged by groups of winegrowers in France (Barrey and Teil, 2011), it is this sedimented sense of *terroir* that Livia seems to evoke in relation to her wines and her approach to winemaking. It is no coincidence that she has developed an awareness as a natural wine producer thanks to the contact with French *vignerons*, for whom *terroir* represents a culturally engrained category of meaning. But there is also a broader historical reason that connects Piedmont with the French world of wine, as Livia's brother pointed out during a conversation I had with him about viticulture in Piedmont.

When Umberto was the King of Italy, Asti sparkling wines used to enjoy international prestige. At that time (1878-1900), these 'Italian *champagnes*' (as they were defined) used to appear on the royal table and during diplomatic events such as the launch of the royal ship Umberto I, which was celebrated with the christening of a bottle of Asti Spumante at the presence of the Italian king and the German emperor William II in 1888 (Georges, 1892). The fame of Asti wines, and in general of some wines produced in Piedmont was indeed the result of multiple political connections between France and Italy throughout the XVIII and XIX centuries. At the end of the XVIII century, Italy was not yet a unified kingdom and Piedmont was under the control of the Savoy family, and later became part of the French empire of Napoleon I (1800-1814) before returning to the Italian royal family. It was in this period of intense contact that thanks to the pioneering work of diplomats, statesmen and generals such as Filippo Antonio Asinari and Camillo Benso Count of Cavour, French innovative vinification techniques and viticultural practices were introduced in Piedmont. Filippo Asinari was an Italian nobleman who worked as a diplomat and general for the French empire of Napoleon I during the end of the XVIII and the beginning of the XIX century. Due to his interest in viticulture, he studied the French wine production and imported the grape variety Chardonnay to Piedmont, introduced new pruning techniques,

methods of implant and a rationalisation of the vineyard system (Di Ricaldone, 1973). Camillo Benso Count of Cavour was one of the earlier promoters of modern Barolo wine thanks to the commercial relationship he used to have with the French oenologist Louis Oudart, who worked as a wine consultant for noblemen in Piedmont in the middle of the XIX century. Oudart managed to produce a dry wine from local Nebbiolo grapes thanks to innovative vinification techniques and oenological instruments he imported from France (Stara, 2013). The success of Barolo wine, since then called "*il vino dei re, il re dei vini*" (the kings' wine, the wines' king), was accompanied by the early foundation of the 'Consortium for the Protection of Quality for Local Wines Barolo and Barbaresco' in 1934. The aim of the nascent *consorzio* was to define the geographical areas most dedicated to the production of the 'royal' wine and defend it from frauds and adulteration.[7] The Langhe area where Barolo is still produced, and more generally Piedmont represent then a successful application of the French *terroir* logic that is justified by a history of sustained collaborations between professionals working between the two countries.

4.2.3 Embodying *terroir*

The reference to *terroir* is indeed something common not only in the way Livia consciously promotes her wines, but also in reference to other aspects of her everyday life. The "collective taste memory" that Vadour (2002) refers to, applies to other spheres of Livia's life not strictly connected to the world of wine. One of them is definitely food: Livia cooks for the whole family at least two meals a day when she is not abroad for her sales trips. Cooking proves to be a meaningful, time-consuming activity that sees Livia engaged in selecting seasonal fresh ingredients to prepare mainly traditional regional dishes. During my fieldwork I have repeatedly been impressed by the combination of dexterity, *savoir faire* and technical skill that she daily puts in this operation of cultural reproduction (Sutton, 2014). Once the meal is ready, the same collective consumption is an occasion to reinstate their sense of attachment to their regional traditions. What is on the table is usually commented on and judged in terms of taste, referenced to past traditions, and at times consciously reinterpreted by Livia. I will explore this aesthetic of taste in the next chapters, but I want to highlight here how the human dimension of *terroir* becomes an ontological category which assumes material contours, and transforms into lifestyle, eating choices and existential decisions. Embracing *terroir* hence becomes a way to position oneself within a tradition, to state one's identity.

As in the controversy between modernist and traditionalist winemakers from Langhe described by Negro et al. (2007), *terroir* provides a frame of collective identity amongst wine producers who

[7] www.langhevini.it

did not want to switch to the use of *barrique* to produce Barolo. In fact, in the 1970s a group of winemakers from Langhe decided to adopt the Burgundian *barrique* to create a wine with softer tannins and fruity notes that better fitted the modern American palates.[8] Barolo wine, which was used to be aged in large Slavonian barrels after long macerations and uncontrolled fermentation, had acquired its distinctiveness due to this traditional technology which was said to reveal the potential of Nebbiolo variety and its *terroir*. Those winemakers who refused to introduce the *barrique* rallied against what they perceived as a homogenisation of taste and a loss of regional identity. For them, being winemakers was anchored to the expression of a traditional taste, which in turn was the result of traditional practices connected to the idea of *terroir.* At the beginning of the 2000s, some of these traditional wine producers joined the group *ViniVeri* ("real wines") with the aim of resisting the industrialization of viticulture and winemaking and defending the authenticity of their wines.[9] To do so, they outlined some basic rules such as the use of indigenous yeasts, the rejection of controlled temperature during fermentation and, more generally, a non-interventionist approach in the cellar. This group, together with *VinNatur* and *Vi.Te*, still represents an important voice in the fragmented Italian natural wine movement.

4.2.4 Born without *terroir*: Costanza's case study

Terroir is a fundamental category for those producing natural wines, especially in a region with a strong French influence such as Piedmont. For Livia and her family, this rootedness to their place of origin has been inherited through generations and is displayed as such through multiple means: the way they consciously define themselves as bearers of local traditional knowledge in winemaking; the gastronomic competence they possess in evaluating the traditional food they eat and the wine they drink; their everyday use of local ways to speak about the weather or activities to do in the vineyard (which are now disappearing among the young population); the pride they take in finding linguistic connections between their dialect and French; not least, the value they attach to their wines as authentic products of *terroir*. However, this cultural and symbolic capital they can count on is not readily available to all natural wine producers working in Piedmont, as in the case of Costanza and her partner.

Since the beginning their idea was to produce natural wines, using just organic grapes without any chemical additives in the cellar. Now, they own nearly seven hectares of vineyard which surround

[8] This group of innovative winemakers and the story of their battles against traditional winemaking are the subject of the Italian documentary *Barolo Boys: storia di una rivoluzione Barolo Boys: storia di una rivoluzione* (2014) Directed by Casalis, P. and Gaia, T. Stuffilm Creativeye..
[9] *ViniVeri* is one of the three main associations of natural wine producers in Italy that I described in the previous chapter.

their property. They chose those plots because the plants there are all old vines planted between the 1955 and the 1985, and inscribed to the regional DOCG register which includes those vineyards that can potentially produce DOCG wines due to their prolonged association to the local area. One of their plots has a further legal mention as *vigna storica* ("historical vineyard"), as the vines were planted there before the 1960s. They preferred to work with local grape varieties in order to better express the full potential of that territory. The age of their vines represented a further incentive to their choice, as they believe that old plants are more adapted to the soil and the climate of the area and so produce distinct quality wines. As Costanza told me referring to her *vigna storica*, "I really do care about this vineyard, as it makes a wine which is anyway different. We basically have three vineyards…and even though we are microscopic, we care of vinifying them separately, as for both the Dolcetto and the Barbera (two local red grape varieties), so the Barbera (wine) which comes from this vineyard is made only with Barbera from this vineyard…effectively the wines then are different". (interview 04/09/17)

The home page of their appealing website hosts the main message concerning their production: "highly suitable terroir, old vineyards, Piedmont-native grapes". The appeal to *terroir* is an explicit asset of their work as winegrowers. Their approach to vinification is coherent with their alignment to the *terroir* logic. In fact, they have a diversified production that takes into account the differences between plots and, in some cases, even within the same plot they vinify single parcels separately (to produce what is called *cru* in the French world of wine). The result of this operation are different variations of Dolcetto and Barbera, two red wines which are made with the two homonymous grape varieties. Besides them, Costanza also produces a white wine obtained through the local variety Cortese, and two other types of red wines from Albarossa and Nebbiolo (all of them are local grape varieties). Each of her wines are named after words or expressions of the local dialect dating from the second half of the 19th century, which have been recovered by Costanza and her partner as part of their research efforts in rediscovering the rural history of the area connected to farming and winemaking. In their historical investigation they have found out the etymology of the toponym and a description of the local *terroir* dating back to the middle of the 19th century when Piedmont was part of the Savoy Kingdom. On their website they use these archival references to emphasise the favourable geographical conditions of the area and its glorious past as a renown viticultural region.[10] It is interesting to note how for Costanza, a newcomer to the world of wine, a historical reference to the specificities of the local *terroir* represents something that adds value to her work as a natural wine producer. Other evidence of

[10] The main author quoted is Goffredo Casalis, a clergyman and historian who wrote a twenty-eight-volume collection of geographical and political accounts about all districts under the Savoy Kingdom.

this can be found in the way she is actively engaged in a collective project that reunites the small producers of the area to restore the prestige of the Dolcetto d'Ovada DOCG, a red wine produced in this area. In 2013, Costanza was one of the co-founders of the new *consorzio* of Dolcetto d'Ovada DOCG, which aims at promoting the potential of this local red wine and the entire area of production[11]. With a misleading name (*dolcetto* indeed means "a bit sweet") that does not convey the nature of this grape variety, Dolcetto is being promoted as a structured and tannic wine that can age well. Since 2013, the consortium has been working to collect local memories of traditional winemaking methods, emphasising the artisanal type of production and fostering a sense of supportive collaboration amongst its members.[12] This commitment to the institutional recognition of Dolcetto is for Costanza a way to feel included in a local network of young wine producers who share her vision about the promotion of their wines and the place where they work. As I will argue more in detail in chapter 6, it is also a strategic attempt to be actively involved into the local processes of decision-making concerning the quality specifications of the local appellation of origin.

Livia and her family represent themselves as a "living tradition", an expression she used to define her family's daily engagement with the local traditional culture, food, dialect and winegrowing practices. As I showed, they do not feel the need to be directly involved in the local *consorzio* or association of wine producers to ensure legitimacy of their work and identity as natural winegrowers. Costanza instead expresses her connection to *terroir* through her reflexive work as a highly educated winegrower and engagement with the local community of second-generation, young wine producers who share her same vision.

4.3 Navigating the organic certification landscape

The kind of reflexive and strategic engagement that my informants exhibit in their attachment to *terroir* and locality is also found in the way they critically approach organic certification as a means to confer meaning to their work. As a practice, natural winegrowing embraces different perspectives about producing wine without the recourse to chemical additives. As I argued in the previous chapter, the lack of agreement about a shared definition for this category of wine can be indeed explained by the multitude of approaches which characterises this method. Besides the

[11] The denominazione di origine controllata (DOC) for Dolcetto d'Ovada dates back to 1972, and represents the first DOC for Dolcetto wines in the whole Piedmont. In 2008 the Dolcetto d'Ovada obtained also the *denominazione di origine controllata e garantita* (DOCG). In 2019, the Piedmont region officially proclaimed Dolcetto as the wine of year, evidence of the successful work of promotion done by the Consortium of Dolcetto d'Ovada DOCG at regional level.
[12] www.ovada.eu/2019

expression of *terroir*, there is common agreement that the grapes should come from organic (or biodynamic) agriculture. As the raw fruit is the core element in this non-interventionist winemaking approach, a lot of attention is paid to the way grapes are cultivated. If we have a look at the diverse quality charters of the main European associations of natural wine producers, one of the basic requirements are indeed healthy grapes from organic agriculture. The key rules to be considered an organic vine-grower pertain to the rejection of any pesticides and herbicides in the vineyard and the use of organic manure as a fertiliser. The use of sulphur- and copper-based fungicides is allowed to prevent the plants from getting the two most common diseases, that is *Oidium* and downy mildew. Most natural wine producers decide to pay an institutional certification body to guarantee they work under an organic agricultural regime. Still, they do not identify themselves as organic wine producers and the organic logo does not usually appear on their labels. In what follows, I try to explain this apparently contradictory attitude by looking at organic farming as a social movement intersecting rural histories, EU policies and individual trajectories.

4.3.1 Organic farming as a social movement

Before looking at the specific legislation on organic wine and the way it is (critically) embraced by my informants, I will briefly trace the historical development of European organic farming in order to have a better understanding of its original significance as a social movement opposed to conventional agriculture. I do so because my informants identify as organic farmers due to the importance they pay to agriculture and viticulture in their work as natural wine producers. As small-scale producers contesting intensive conventional agriculture and its underlying exploitative logic, they share the same issues and, in some cases, the same responses as those organic farmers belonging to alternative food movements. Part of the criticism surrounding the legal certification of organic foodstuffs at EU level and its consequences on the market is also found among natural wine producers in relation to the European legislation on organic wine.

It has been argued that the European organic sector has been more politically and ideologically loaded compared to its US counterpart (Michelsen, 2001; Barham, 2002), and that is somehow reflected in the way academic research on alternative agri-food networks has developed in the two continents (Goodman, 2003). European organic movements indeed emerged as a reaction against conventional agriculture in a historical context (the years between the two World Wars) which had witnessed an unprecedented situation of soil degradation, low food quality and changing attitudes towards rural life (Vogt, 2007). Developed first in German-speaking countries (Germany, Austria and Switzerland), the first pioneering attempts carried out by few farmers in the 1920s and 1930s were informed by a science-based theory and food reform movements that

acknowledged the decrease of soil fertility and at the same time the deterioration of rural traditional knowledge. Around the same period of time, biodynamic agriculture made its appearance within Steiner's esoteric circle. In 1924, the Austrian founder of anthroposophy gave eight lectures on agriculture to a public formed mainly by farmers coming from Germany and Poland (Paull, 2011). Demeter, the first certification system of its kind to be founded, was introduced in 1928 and it is still used as a worldwide trademark by biodynamic farmers to certify their own products. Its private standards were initially general guidelines prohibiting the use of synthetic fertilisers and pesticides, which had to be replaced by biodynamically treated manure. Over time, these quality standards have become more detailed. Nowadays, they cover six different areas including production, processing, labelling, winemaking, apiculture and cosmetics.[13]

The perception and significance of organic farming itself did not remain the same over time. As Schmid (2007) observes, organic agriculture was first intended as a natural form of farming that discarded chemicals and pesticides, and whose application was extended on a limited area of European land by a small number of farmers, mainly in Germany, Austria, Switzerland and England. It was not until the 1970s that organic farming significantly spread across Europe and overseas as a recognised and effective alternative to industrial agriculture. As Lockeretz (2007) points out, the reasons of that rapid growth are diverse and a definitive explanation is still not possible. This was partly due to the countercultural movements of the late 1960s with their emphasis on coming back to the land, and the wider social and political activism during the Vietnam War that reacted against the massive use of chemicals weapons. Moreover, European consumers became more aware of environmental issues and food safety, especially regarding the use of pesticides and chemical additives and their disastrous effects both on the environment and on farmers' own health. What Michelsen (2001: 3-4) notes about this diffused criticism over mainstream agriculture is that organic farming since the beginning has successfully managed to define itself in opposition to conventional agriculture and, more in general, to a static agricultural model which has become a subsidised sector separated from other parts of society. The transformative potential of organic agriculture needs then to be found in the way it has changed the interrelationships between agriculture and society. As a social movement, organic farming indeed developed from a broad social basis (farmers, consumers, scientists, traders and ordinary citizens) not connected to conventional agriculture, which instead is characterised by closed networks, fragmentation and lack of societal involvement in relation to policy development.

[13] www.demeter.net

As organic farming movements and private certification systems multiplied over time, the need to coordinate the different activities undertaken by private certifiers and farmer associations became an urgent issue at national and international levels. Since the 1980s, the market expanded becoming more globalised and competition amongst private standard-setting organisations arose, making consumers confused about the meaning of organic farming. As a result, the need to find common denominators among the numerous existing standards emerged as a necessity, as well as a way to be more cohesive against each state authority. To that end, in 1972 a mixed group of European organic farmers, consumers and scientists funded IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements) with the aim to control and regulate organic farming standards at European level, and provide consumers with reliable information about organic food production.[14] Since the 1980s, IFOAM started an EU-focused lobbying activity to promote organic farming internationally. The international federation was able to take part in the discussion around the meaning of organic farming at EU legislative level. The first EU regulation on organic food production (Regulation (EEC) No 2092/91) was in fact the result of this lobbying action IFOAM carried forward during the drafting process (Geier, 2007). It is no coincidence then that certified organic viticulture took its first steps in Germany and Austria, where the organic consciousness had made its first appearance. Indeed, these two European countries were the first to develop coherent guidelines and quality standards for organic wine producers.[15]

4.3.2 Organic farming in Italy

If we move to the Mediterranean countries and Italy in particular, where there is a long history of peasantry and share-cropping systems, the emergence of organic farming movements takes on specific characteristics (Pratt, 2009). According to a recent statistical survey published by Eurostat, after Spain and France, Italy represents the country with the largest total organic area, accounting for nearly 2 million hectares.[16] At EU level, Spain (16.7%), France (15.1%), Italy (14.6%) and Germany (9.1%) together make up 55.5% of the total organic area of the Union. According to SINAB (the National Information System on Organic Agriculture), Italy is the first European country for organic olive trees, fruit and vegetables as well as the second in the world in terms of

[14] The not-for-profit federation still works as the main coordinating body on an international scale, and it counts nowadays more than 300 affiliated organisations including consumers, farmers, research, education, certification bodies and commercial organic companies, that work to promote organic agriculture and environmental sustainability (www.ifoam.bio).
[15] Ecovin, the German Organic Winemaking Association, was founded in 1985.
[16] https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Organic_farming_statistics

land allocated to organic vineyards (over 105,000 hectares which account for 15.8% of the national vineyard surface).[17]

In analysing the trajectory of alternative food movements such as organic farming in Italy, Pratt (2009) argues that we need to consider its specific agrarian history and how that has shaped the relationships between capitalist and non-capitalist forms of production. In a country whose agricultural sector is still characterised by a large number of small farmers, it is important to take into account both the long-term variations in the national agrarian organization and the specific rationality that shapes small-scale and household-based production. The latter refers to the values, choices and types of knowledge that are meaningful for those living and working within this sector. Capitalist notions of labour, land, money and time and their mutual relationships have been applied to a small-scale, household-based system of production across different timescales and trajectories that result in a complex and varied picture (Pratt, 1994). Moreover, the mechanization and industrialisation of agriculture, together with the introduction of new chemical fertilisers and pesticides, transformed the whole agricultural economy at a national level. I will expand on these major changes in the next chapter, when I will deal with the division of labour and household composition of those small-scale wine businesses which are part of the specific context of my study. For now, I want to point out the fact that organic farming in Italy historically represents one of the outcomes of wider changes in the agricultural sector investing the country after the end of the Second World War and the following decades. Starting as an alternative movement proposing a more sustainable agriculture which points towards biodiversity, a more efficient energy use, and a gradual independence from industrial inputs (in particular chemical fertilisers), organic farming has gradually taken up normative connotations since legal certification bodies have started to operate.

Against this scenario, organic farmers have embraced different strategies. As Pratt and Luetchford (2014) argue, drawing from ethnographic case studies of small-scale producers in Europe, the approaches and motivations expressed by organic producers to adhere or not to certification are various and contrasting, thus reflecting the complexity of choices, practices and orientations within this scenario. On one hand the organic certification seems to protect and guarantee the quality of food products against frauds and other competitors, and adds monetary value through premium prices. On the other hand, the bureaucracy involved to obtain an organic label translates into an expensive and time-consuming process. As these systems of traceability and certification

[17] Assobio (2019) *Global organic production: Italy among top leaders*. Available at: http://www.sinab.it/node/22428 (Accessed: 10th March 2020).

are regulated by the European Union, it means that these local products enter simultaneously wider political and commercial arenas where the cultural and social values attached to this type of production become assimilated into the capitalist market. The outcome of this process of appropriation tends to favour more retailers and large-scale producers than small growers, who have to sustain disproportionate costs to get their own products certified. In order to meet the demands of the international trade (and, more subtly, the interests of industrial and commercial lobbies that have invested in organic production), the EU certification applies uniform sets of regulations that deprive organic agriculture from its original values of environmental sustainability and social responsibility. The result is then a mere list of substances legally permitted, which is applied profitably by large-scale producers and small farmers alike. Amongst the latter, there are differences in the way certified agriculture is being perceived and applied. The most critical ones disregard the official set of regulations, as promoting larger commercial interests only. Others take advantage of it in terms of its higher financial return. Therefore, the alternatives seem multiple and different, making "organic" a source of debate and contestation amongst small farmers, including natural wine producers (Pratt, 2007).

4.3.3 The EU legislation on organic wine

In legal terms, the development of a specific European legislation regulating the production of organic wine has been a long and debated process. In 1991, the EU commission issued a set of rules (EEC No 209 2/91) to regulate organic food production, including grapes. However, wine as the processed product of grapes, was not subject to any specific legislation. As a result, it was possible to report on the label "wine from organic grapes" only. Until 2012, organic wine did not in fact represent a legally recognised product category in the EU, whereas other non-European countries such as the USA, Chile and Australia were already equipped with standards for organic wines.[18] Meanwhile, the larger organic food sector saw increasing expansion, reflecting the effects of the scandals that hit the European food supply chain in the early 2000s (as described in the previous chapter). It became then an economic priority to regulate the production of organic wine as well, whose sales volume was witnessing a steady growth both in Europe and abroad. Wine producers pushed to have a common legal reference framework which would harmonise the private quality standards that were already being adopted by individual organic farmer associations (IFOAM, 2013). After a long-debated process of negotiation amongst European institutions, certification bodies and wine lobby groups, the European Commission presented a

[18] https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_12_113

regulation in 2012 (No 203/2012), containing detailed rules for organic winemaking and introducing the new EU organic wine logo.

However, the new legislation was harshly criticised by the majority of private associations of organic and natural winegrowers. They found that the rules were too lax, particularly in relation to the vinification process and the addition of oenological additives in the cellar. According to the existing regulation indeed, more than thirty oenological substances can be added to artificially adjust the wine. The associations of organic and natural growers were particularly unhappy with the amount of sulphites allowed for each category of wine, which largely exceeded the level they had set in their own quality charters (Mercer, 2012; Bietti, 2013). Natural wine producers were also disappointed by the lack of a clear position concerning the use of indigenous yeasts, the pillar of the natural winemaking approach. According to the EU regulation, naturally occurring yeasts are not considered compulsory for wine fermentation.[19]

When I discussed organic wines with my informants, I understood that for them wine production is not framed as a regulatory matter but is strongly determined by their underlying individual choices, values and beliefs. Our discussions about organic certification and the criticism raised by some of them, enabled me to better grasp the meaning of natural winemaking as it is practised by my informants. These winegrowers have divergent attitudes towards organic certification per se and its application to their products. To some of them, the organic wine certification does not represent a proper means to guarantee the quality of their wines. Even more, for these winegrowers associating their products with the organic category can have a negative impact on their sales, as consumers' perception of organic wines is still not uniform and is not always positively connoted (Stolz and Schmid, 2008; Delmas and Lessem, 2017; Schäufele and Hamm, 2017).

As described above, these winegrowers are not satisfied by the existing EU legislation that permits the use of various additives in the cellar and processes involving high-tech gadgetry during winemaking. Nonetheless, they believe in the foundational principles of organic farming, being active supporters themselves of the ideas and practices implied by the original standards of organic agriculture. For this reason, they decide to be certified just as organic farmers with respect to their vineyards, without adhering to the organic wine protocol. Others admit the imperfect nature of the existing EU legal certification, still they prefer to make explicit their adherence to the organic protocol. These producers strategically use the certification as a sort of

[19] The only explicit reference to yeasts is found in the final annex of the regulation, where the specification to their use is just "if available, derived from organic raw material" (European Commission, 2012: L 71/47).

calling card, which needs to be complemented by a stricter quality protocol more attuned to their views. One of them is Virginia, a certified organic and biodynamic wine producer who works in the Monferrato hills, in Piedmont.

4.3.4 Virginia

As Virginia explains to me, "the beginning of my experience with the vines and biodynamic went hand in hand, they represented one single thing. I found the biodynamic method early on, I hadn't planted the vines yet but I had decided to plant them, and I had obviously thought it would be an organic choice, that I would seek an organic certification…but I soon realised what 'organic' could mean, and I didn't like what I was realising, especially this 'organic' which was conveyed by a trade association, it was something really grim, totally pointless and unreliable, it was not clear the difference compared to a conventional approach. Instead, I well understood the difference when I came across biodynamic". Indeed, one of the most common critiques directed at organic wine certification is that the whole act of producing wine is reduced to a mere "method", to a list of allowable substances that simply work to ensure the green logo on the label. This reductionist approach to organic agriculture, "where practice is defined by reference to material lists of allowed inputs, is consistent with the choice of production and market enhancement as the warranted terrain of discourse and regulation", Goodman argues in relation to the recent scaling up of the US organic food production (Goodman, 2000: 216). In a global market where organic foodstuffs command a premium price, agri-businesses and conventional agriculture are increasingly capturing the alternative values underlying organic production, absorbing them into the corporate capitalist economy (Goodman, 2000; Guthman, 2004; Pratt, 2009). If an emphasis on the moment of production has been one of the key aspects of organic agriculture and other alternative food movements to show transparency and raise awareness amongst consumers, the risk is that once this discourse transforms into a regulatory practice it can be absorbed by the techno-scientific discourse dominating food safety at institutional level. According to Allen and Kovach (2000), the problem lies in the fact that the philosophical foundations of organic agriculture, that is a commitment to holism and ecological sensitivity, are not easily translated into a systematic set of standards. The result, according to the two scholars, is that organic agriculture has been dissected into component parts and reduced to a list of allowable inputs. When the original values, which historically emerged within the counter-cultural movements of the 1970s and are still shared by other alternative food networks, are transformed into a set of regulations to meet criteria of economic efficiency and face market competition, the substantial difference between organic and conventional agriculture gets erased. Against this scenario, wine producers such as Virginia are highly critical about the way organic farming has been reduced to

an "input-substitution" approach (Rosset and Altieri, 1997) that does not convey their own ethos as natural winegrowers. For them, the organic wine certification is then not enough to communicate the meaning of their work to consumers and that is why they have sought more encompassing systems of beliefs such as biodynamic that can better express their approach to agriculture and winemaking.

According to Virginia, the modern biodynamic method relies on more coherent, strict, accessible and clear agronomic principles compared to organic certification. The main difference regards the total lack of direct intervention on the winemaking process, which contrasts with the legally permitted addition of oenological additives and adjuvants (crucially yeasts) that can be used in the cellar. She is also critical about Demeter certification as she thinks that it has imposed a single, univocal vision of biodynamic, which reduces the latter to a simple branding logo. Instead, the modern biodynamic method adapts the foundational principles outlined by Steiner in 1924 to the modern structuring of biodynamic farms and meets practical needs of contemporary winegrowers, for example obtaining the main biodynamic preparations used to spray the vines through international suppliers.[20] Virginia's wines are then certified using the trademark logo designed by Leonello Anello, *I vini biodinamici*, which indicates the producer's adherence to the criteria of the modern biodynamic method.

Still, Virginia also pays a certification body to label her wines as organic. According to her, the organic certification represents the ground zero to communicate the characteristics of her wines and the type of work she undertakes in the vineyard to consumers. Compared to private certifications, such as Demeter and the same *I vini biodinamici*, the legal recognition that organic farming holds at EU level constitutes for her a further guarantee in differentiating her wines from conventional ones. Along the same line, she agrees with the use of natural to classify her wines, considering this definition as an initial, easy attempt to signal the difference from conventional wines. Speaking about the EU legislation on organic certification, she is also in favour of a more detailed label which should clearly list all the ingredients used to produce wine. Wine represents indeed an outstanding exception amongst the food products regulated by the existing EU and national legislations. Even though wine is legally considered as a 'processed food product', there is no obligation of reporting all the ingredients used to produce it. On a wine label, it is compulsory to state the alcohol content and allergens only. That is why natural wine associations such as *ViniVeri* have been pushing the national authorities to obtain what they call a

[20] http://www.viticolturabiodinamica.it/manifesto.php. Biodynamic preparations are divided into two main types: spray preparations and compost preparations. The former include Horn Manure and Horn Silica (also called preparations 500 and 501), and are obtained by burying in the ground cow horns filled up with cow manure and quartz meal, respectively.

"transparent label" (*etichetta trasparente*), which should contain all the information regarding the ingredients used and the processes behind wine production.[21] It is interesting to note that producers such as Virginia, who cannot initially rely on a family name as they are newcomers to the sector, are willing to find in organic and private certifications (and the exhibition of logos on their labels) a valid surrogate of their initial lack of social capital within the wine circuits.

4.3.5 Livia

From a different standpoint, there are wine producers such as Livia who certify their vineyards as organic but there is no trace of it on their labels. In Livia's words, "we believe that our work is way more rigid and stricter compared to what is required. The (organic) certification has loose inclusion criteria that, according to us, do not represent us, do not add anything more, instead they belittle our work. We certify our wines just to be within the law so that as you speak about natural, organic agriculture, you can prove that you effectively do that, even if, I repeat, organic certification has more enlarged bands because it allows a lot of other substances. Yet, there are a few clients abroad that even if it is not on the label they request the certification, but for us it is a starting point, a basic thing but actually our work is completely different, way more radical than what is required by law" (interview 23/01/17). The organic certification of their vineyards functions as a requested legal device when they export their wines to foreign countries such as Norway, Denmark and Japan where organic products (and among them, wines) are highly in demand due to their green status but are subject to stricter regulations.

Producers such as Livia and her family, share the values of organic agriculture but they are highly critical of the criteria regulating the wine production process. A small but nevertheless telling evidence of this approach is offered by the message written on the property sign which welcomes the visitor to their estate: *Vini e vigne in cultura biologica* (wines and vines in organic culture), where the intended wordplay between *coltura* (crop) and *cultura* (culture) discloses their critical stance on the meaning of organic. For them, being organic farmers relates to the way they intend their relationship with nature, which in turn is informed by what Livia refers to as their culture and *savoir faire* as artisanal winegrowers. Producing naturally does not equate to ticking a list of allowable ingredients but is instead the result of a more encompassing engagement with a specific place, of which Livia considers herself (and her family) as an entitled interpreter.

[21] The 2015 edition of the annual wine fair organised by *ViniVeri* was entirely dedicated to the promotion of a transparent label: https://www.viniveri.net/en/notizie/verso-unetichetta-trasparente/

I would add that, compared to Virginia, Livia possesses enough social capital to sell her wines as natural without a legal recognition of their type of production, and without disclosing their status of certified organic winegrowers. Being one of the first Italian natural wine producers to join the alternative French wine circuits (as I will describe below), she now can count on a vast network of sales contacts spanning three continents. Even the way she defines (or better, does not define) natural wine reflects this self-confidence as a producer: "over the past few years the consumer has got used to a certain standardised type of wine, which ultimately is not wine as I don't call 'wine' a conventional wine, so you have to explain to the consumer what is a real wine, which is made through natural practices, respecting nature, respecting the grape, etc. so it is really a gap what it was created in the last twenty, thirty years. So (understanding what a natural wine is) shouldn't be something so mental (…) if your wine is healthy, genuine, good, and done in a certain way, you don't need to justify or always say what you do *not* do, actually it is the others who have a deviant oenological practice, not us. Ours is wine, full stop." (interview 23/01/17)

In contexts characterised by a strong, renown history in winemaking such as Piedmont, and specifically in small-scale realities which bear a long family tradition in the sector such as Livia's, certification devices run parallel to other quality indicators. Pratt (2014) analyses the effects of the recent exposure to market forces of a family-farming system in the Tuscan countryside and the transformations of the values attached to this mode of production. He focuses on the differences in the way local foodstuffs are appreciated by tourists and local customers, in a global scenario where 'authenticity' and 'locality' represent a counterpoint to modernity and food industrialisation, and translate into products fetching premium prices on the market. In describing the wine consumption pattern by tourists on one hand, and local customers on the other, Pratt argues that for the latter "the lack of a label (especially if the wine is from a famous district like Brunello) is evidence of the quality of a person's social network, as well as an implicit critique of certification and those who rely on it." (Pratt, 2014: 88-89). In the case of a niche market such as that of natural wines, I argue that this notion of network is paramount to the commercial viability of a small-scale, artisanal production which currently does not bear any recognised legal status (as opposed to the organic counterpart). I will now examine this key aspect of natural wine distribution, which goes back to the historical constitution of the natural wine movement and highlights further dimensions of this kind of production.

4.4 The natural wine network

4.4.1 The roots of the network and its main actors

Before being widely addressed as a "global phenomenon" by wine critics, journalists and other cultural intermediaries working in the sector, natural wines emerged as a loose network of producers sharing the same approach to viticulture and winemaking. As I outlined in the previous chapter, the European movement of natural winegrowers was constituted by scattered groups of producers from different wine-growing regions who reacted against the industrialisation of agriculture, the standardisation of taste and homologation to criteria set by institutional legal frameworks such as the national systems of denominations. These initial informal networks of producers proved to be essential to the creation of subsequent, more structured associations that have multiplied in the last decades across Europe. Within these former groups, charismatic figures such as the French biodynamic wine producer Nicolas Joly managed to attract numerous producers to more sustainable practices and promote a positive image around alternative winemaking practices.[22] Indeed, it was Joly who invited few Italian natural winemakers to join his association *Renaissance des Appellations* in 2001, and fostered the creation of the first association of its kind in Italy in 2004, *ViniVeri*.[23] In tracing the development of French biodynamic viticulture, Garcia-Parpet (2014) observes how much important networks have been to the creation of a market share for biodynamic wines in France. The private associations of winegrowers, particularly those which counted many well-known wine estates among their members, became successful over time and attracted both winemakers and consumers. That was definitively the case of Joly's *Renaissance des Appellations*, whose effective promotional events and solid communication skills provided its members with commercial success and market opportunities (2014: 106). Professional fairs and tasting events in various parts of the world have become the main means to promote the approach applied by these associations, which also have created private quality charters to guarantee the respect of strict production standards. In a moment where the hegemony of French fine wines was seriously threatened by the rising success of New World countries, biodynamic and natural wines could count on increasing demands from abroad, especially Japan.[24]

[22] The role of Nicolas Joly in the creation of the French and Italian natural wine movement has been described in the previous chapter.
[23] https://www.viniveri.net/notizie/lettera-di-giovanna-morganti/
[24] Japan still represents one of main importers of natural and biodynamic wines not only from France but also from Italy.

Another fundamental factor in the initial (and current) acceptance of this kind of wines has been the press, whose promotional force has managed to advertise small producers otherwise left under the radar, and praise the high-quality of their wines. The same is argued by Smith Maguire (2019), who analyses the emergence and globalisation of natural wines in sociological terms using the Bourdieu's concept of cultural field: a network of sites, texts, producers and consumers that generates practices, meanings, and values of particular cultural objects and activities (2019: 176). The author focuses on the important role played by cadres of producers and intermediaries, and the spaces of production and consumption dedicated to these wines. Renowned producers, wine critics, bloggers and sommeliers have had an influential role in legitimizing and promoting these wines within international and global circuits. The same holds for dedicated wine fairs such as the annual RAW fair organised by the most vocal natural wine's champion, the French Master of Wine Isabelle Legeron.[25]

Figure 8 The entrance to the RAW natural-wine fair in Central London (photo by author)

Prestigious restaurants and high-profile wine bars, such as the Michelin-starred *Noma* in Copenhagen and the Parisian *La Muse Vin*, confer prestige to the legion of natural producers whose wines appear on their lists.

[25] https://www.rawwine.com

Looking at the Italian case and in particular my informants' accounts, I have found the same dynamic. All winegrowers I got in contact with are active members of one of the three main Italian associations of natural wine producers, or promote their wines at the major national and international fairs dedicated to this niche market.[26] The role of network, be that formally structured as an association or more informally as groups of friends or acquaintances, has been fundamental in the trajectories of my informants. During one of my visits to Livia, I asked her to map her own network of contacts linked to her work as a natural wine producer. At first, I had thought that Livia's case could be just an example of what happens within the Italian natural wine's network at large. But as I had to add more and more sheets to my paper map to draw the web of arrows and lines she was orally tracing, I soon realised that Livia's network was in a way paradigmatic. Mapping her contacts was tantamount to tracing the historical developments of most part of the Italian natural wine movement (see Appendix D).

As Livia told me, until the early 2000s this kind of wines were simply referred to as *vins des vignerons* (winegrowers' wines) within the early French circuits. According to her, the debated expression "natural wines" came at a later stage of the diffusion of these wines. The first French fair Livia attended as a producer in 2001, called *Vin Passion* and organised in the area of Lyon, still today does not bear any natural connotations whatsoever. On their promotional website, we can just read their project is about "spreading a culture of social wine (…) To organize a real meeting and not yet another fair. Our indicator of success for these meeting is mainly the pleasure that we share, helped by a whole network of friends, to prepare and live these two days with the winemakers and the visitors". [27] In fact, it is in these terms that Livia and my other informants describe the excitement of attending these fairs. It is first of all about meeting friends and colleagues who live in different regions and work on their vines and in their cellars. These wine fairs are also the occasion to try the wines made by other producers and in this way to train one's own taste, as one of my informants told me. While during most of the year a producer is concentrated on tasting and adjusting her own wine through the different phases from must fermentation up to bottling, in special events such as fairs and organised wine tastings there is the possibility to wander around the different stands and sip the wines made by other producers. Some of these fairs, especially the ones which have been on the longest, are described by my informants as a proper *festa* (party).

[26] These associations are: *ViniVeri*, *VinNatur* and *Vi.Te*. I introduced them in the previous chapter.
[27] https://www.rencontresvinpassion.com/a-propos-de-nous

4.4.2 Natural wine fairs

Vini di Vignaioli (winegrowers' wines), organised every first weekend of November in Fornovo di Taro (in Parma province), is the Italian natural wine fair which counts the highest number of editions at national level. In the local exhibition centre of this small Italian commune, for two days an increasing number of natural and biodynamic producers mainly from Italy and France gather together for the pleasure of meeting each other and sharing the passion for their work. The fair, which was created following the example of the earlier French wine *salons* (as it is clear also from its name), represents the most awaited annual event for these producers. I personally had the chance to attend three different editions of this fair (in 2015, 2017, and 2018). I could observe how the number of attendees visibly increased from year to year, along with the number of producers involved. Amongst the fairs I managed to take part in, *Vini di Vignaioli* indeed differentiates itself for the high content of sociability that flows from stand to stand over the two days of the event. It is common to find groups of winegrowers amicably discussing and drinking together at one colleague's stand, without much concern of leaving their own posts unattended. The organisers do not allocate producers' stands according to their region of provenance, so that the public can roam around the numerous stalls without a specific order. The festive atmosphere is quite infectious, there are greetings yelled from one corner to the other, hands shaken, hugs exchanged and bursts of laughter echoing all around. But mostly, there is wine which is constantly poured and sipped from the glasses given to each visitor at the entrance, which are included in the ticket price. If they survive the day, these glasses then become souvenirs that crowd the domestic cupboards of visitors and producers alike, forming large collections as I have seen in my informants' houses. Towards the end of the day, the level of conviviality and alcohol consumed reach the peak and the fair transforms into a proper celebration. Glasses are raised, toasts multiply and any clear distinction between producers and visitors vanishes as everyone move freely around the fair to meet each other.

Figure 9 The frescoed interiors of Villa Favorita which hosted VinNatur wine fair in April 2017 (photo by author)

Besides producers and the general public, the fair welcomes distributors, agents, wine critics, journalists, and importers that taste and annotate on their diaries the latest wines produced and other bottles from earlier vintages. A small section of the fair is occupied by editors of books and specialised magazines dedicated to natural wines and other subjects connected to sustainable agriculture, environmentalism and wine culture. These publications contribute to the establishment and institutionalisation of natural wines as a cultural field and enable the circulation of its discourse. Some of these cultural intermediaries also organise themed conferences during the two days of the fair, which are open to everyone. Generally, these conferences cover debated topics related to the practice of natural winemaking, such as the use of copper in the vineyard or the role of the yeasts during fermentation. Indeed, one of the main functions of these fairs resides in sharing the state-of-the-art of natural winemaking as an agricultural and oenological practice. More informally, that takes the shape of a mutual exchange of information and expertise matured on the field. During these fairs, producers indeed discuss together about the problems they faced in the vineyard and in the cellar during the last vintage, reciprocally looking for advises and new ideas to solve their own issues. Part of this exchange is facilitated through wine, which is tasted and evaluated together as the tangible result of the work and multiple decisions made throughout the year. In this sense, through their networks, producers can share a great deal of knowledge, skills, and tricks to cope with the difficulties encountered both in the vineyard and in the cellar.

4.4.3 The role of producers and distributors within the network

Going back to Livia's network of contacts, it is clear that producers indeed represent the focal points of this network. While mapping her web of contacts, I gradually realised that single producers (or small groups of them) constitute the main nodes of the whole network. Some of these key producers are indeed the ones who organised the first natural wine fairs or dedicated wine tastings in *bars à vin* in France in the late 1990s and early 2000s, which gathered wine producers from different wine-growing regions. In some cases, these gatherings took the form of informal parties where producers, clients and importers were all invited as guests. One example was given to me by Livia, when she recalled the annual three-day party organised by the famous Beaujolais wine producer Marcel Lapierre at his place in Villié-Morgon around the 14th of July (National day in France), until his death in 2010. The party used to be an occasion to meet with other producers in a convivial atmosphere marked by the sharing of large volumes of wine each producer invited used to bring and offer. For more than a decade, Livia has been invited to join Lapierre's family and friends in an event characterised by the generosity and spirit of sharing of its hosts. She recalled during the interview the sense of community created during those three days where all guests would help out in the preparation of abundant meals, accompanied by bottles of wine and late-night dances.

Producers not only create temporary communities, but also initiate fruitful commercial relations for those winemaker friends not already known in the natural wine circuit. Livia' story, is illuminating in this regard. After meeting one of the first American importers interested in French natural wines at a fair in the Loire region in 2002, the year after she organised for him a visit to her winery where she also invited a small group of Italian like-minded producers. The visit, which included an extended tasting of all the wines brought by the other guests, launched the beginning of the exportation of Italian natural wines to the USA.[28] According to Livia, producers are in fact "the engines for the creation of new connections" (from recorded interview on 17/09/18), while importers and distributors remain the hubs of this network. The latter in fact reunite many producers from different countries in their respective lists, which are the result of working relationships sustained over time. England-based *Les Caves de Pyrene*, one of the major natural wine distributors, offers to its clients a wide selection of wines not only from France and Italy but also from South Africa, Georgia and Argentina, evidence of the global ramifications of its thriving business.[29] Looking at *Les Caves de Pyrene*'s wine list is then like taking a snapshot of the current

[28] For the majority of my informants, the US export sales represent their most profitable market share.
[29] http://lescaves.co.uk/lescaves-home#home

natural wine production scene around the world. Around each distributor and importer, especially the most renown, there is a web of producers who engage with them to sell their own wines. The wine lists of these selling companies somehow tend to reflect the personal taste and trajectories of their owners. That is an interesting aspect that leads into the type of approach used to taste and sell these wines, which is not based on points ranking systems used for conventional wines.

Going back to the difference in the role played by producers on one hand and importers or distributors on the other, the former seem to remain the main propellers of the whole natural wine network. This reflects the origins of the natural wine movement as it developed first in France and later in the rest of Europe. As I argued, there were only scattered groups of wine producers across different regions who would learn from each other how to make high quality wine without using pesticides and other chemical additives. Still today, natural winegrowers rely on the support provided by their network of like-minded producers. That is why annual fairs which reunite them in the same venue for a few days are much-awaited social and professional occasions.

4.4.4 Wine estates as centres of attraction: Isabella's case study

Besides these events, the same wine estates function as centres of knowledge exchange and formation for newcomers. The winery of Isabella, a Sicilian natural wine producer based in the south-eastern province of Ragusa, is an example of a lively 'community of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Isabella is one of the most famous Italian natural wine producers, with her annual production getting all sold out soon after each harvest. Praised by both mainstream and natural wine critics at national and international level, Isabella has become a point of reference for young winegrowers as well as professionals who dream about working in the natural wine world. Her modern winery where she tirelessly spends most of her time crafting her sought-after wines, is constantly visited by both itinerant groups of tourists with a passion for wine, and producers and professionals of the sector.

During the harvest season in particular, which is the busiest period of the year for any winegrower, Isabella's winery transforms into a small community of people living and working together seven days a week for at least a fortnight. The first day I joined her during harvest in September 2017, I was introduced to a team of ten people who had already been working in Isabella's cellar. A part from her permanent assistants (a group of local workers living nearby), the rest of the team was an heterogenous group of people coming from different places and for different reasons. There were two Italian Oenology undergraduate students who were doing their internship, a young Spanish winegrower coming from a family of winegrowers and wanting to

learn more about natural winemaking, an Italian sales agent working for one of the leading national distributors of natural wines (the same who sells Isabella's wine in Italy), and finally a couple from Los Angeles working in the catering business. Each of them was there to get a practical insight into wine production, learning from Isabella the different steps for making a natural wine. While that took the shape of a proper apprenticeship for the interns and the young winegrower, for the others it represented a unique chance to understand better the process behind the bottles they were to sell or serve as part of their job. As Lave and Wenger (1991) posit, a community of practice is based on the main tenet that learning is always situated in a social context and is enacted by practice and doing. The newcomers learn by observing, listening to the experts and engaging initially in what the two authors have termed 'peripheral' tasks. In the learning environment of a cellar during the harvest season, these tasks comprise a series of activities connected to the continuous arrival of crates full of harvested grapes from the vineyard: this includes the manual selection of the single bunches before sending them to the destemmer, pumping over the must from the bottom to the top of each tank, washing the empty crates and pile them up to be used again, and keeping all the surfaces of the cellar thoroughly cleaned after each operation. These tasks were performed daily by all of us, under the accurate supervision of Isabella who would impart instructions and comment on what she was doing herself. In particular, in this context the learning process acquires a specific sensorial connotation due to the very nature of the activities undertaken. The cellar was in fact surrounded by the strong vinous smell of the grapes already fermenting. The cellar was also invaded by the noise produced by the destemmer, the pumping system that moved the grape mass into the tanks, and other machines used to clean the floor such as pressure washers and water hoses. Besides sipping the must still fermenting in the tanks to test the sugar levels, Isabella would draw us to pay attention also to the temperature of the tank itself, as the fermentation process releases heat that can be detected by posing a hand on the surface of the container. While I will describe in depth this multi-sensorial apprenticeship in the following chapter, it is important to highlight at this stage that observing Isabella's wine making involved a highly sensory learning process. The novice or apprentice is not only immediately immersed into a field of practice, but also engages with a complex reality where all senses are at work. In this community of practice, the varying degree of expertise of each person translated into differentiated tasks, involving peripheral and more central roles and responsibilities. The two interns were immediately allowed to test with the densimeter the residual level of sugar in the must every day, while others started to do so until after a period of close observation. The same applied to the manual selection of the grapes, as it is essential to assess the different types of rot before selecting or discarding each single cluster passing on the conveyor belt.

The social relationships created in this context of practice where learning takes place, usually develop over time even after the harvest season and become part of the existing natural wine network. They often transform in friendships and working relationships where wine remains the binding force, the object of a common passion. For instance, one Oenology undergraduate student who undertook his internship at Isabella's estate a few years ago, works now as a *maître de salle* in a Michelin-starred restaurant in the nearby Ragusa where he introduced Isabella's wines to the list. The same kind of promotion occurred with the couple from Los Angeles, who have recently hosted Isabella at their place during one of her sales trips to the US West Coast. Together they run a successful restaurant in Los Angeles where they serve only natural wines, and one of them is also a successful sommelier, wine educator, restaurant manager and founder of a wine subscription service and retail shop that selects natural wines from small producers worldwide. The natural wine world is indeed characterised by these (sometimes long-distance) friendly relationships that are nurtured through annual meetings such as fairs, wine tasting events, and sales trips. It can be said that this connecting, global element represents the counterpart of a reality that is highly rooted in a specific locality, from which wine production ultimately draws its value. As in the case of Isabella, it is the local winery itself that becomes a hub for further connections. It is the place where a community of practice is created during the harvest season each year, but it also draws professionals working in the natural wine world throughout the whole year.

During my fieldwork at her winery, I could observe how her place has become an attracting pole for everyone working in the sector. In a single (and not ordinary) day, she received a Norwegian Master of Wine who came with a troupe to interview her for a TV program dedicated to wine; a Sicilian female chef who conducted a cooking show for the occasion; an acclaimed American globe-trotter chef who owns one of the most awarded restaurants in Asia; finally, a group of young Italian wine producers from Veneto region who informally came to make her taste their wines. Isabella's estate attracts all those different professional figures (sommeliers, critics, restaurateurs, young winemakers) that are fundamental for the legitimation and global circulation of natural wines.

4.4.5 Living in a (local) bubble

Her estate, which paradoxically remains a hidden universe at local level, represents one of the main crossroads on the international natural wine map. Isabella's extraordinary exposure to the media is counterbalanced by her down-to-earth commitment to agriculture and winemaking. This translates into a rigid daily routine which starts at 6 am in the morning and lasts until late afternoon, depending on the time of the year. I will describe the practicalities of her work in the

vineyard and in the cellar in the following chapter. For now, I want to underline how the local and global dynamic of this reality acquires specific and somehow paradoxical connotations. Isabella's *terroir* wines are praised by the international press as they are the result of a virtuous system of sustainable agriculture and winemaking. Still, her winery represents a sort of happy island in an area where a generalised lack of care for the environment is object of continuous complaints by local farmers like Isabella. Without delving here into a socio-political analysis of the state's profound inefficiencies in the south of the country (the waste management crisis being one of the most visible outcomes), it is worth highlighting the discrepancy between Isabella's agricultural practices and what happens in close proximity to her winery. Isabella herself has to deal with the lack of an efficient local administration on an everyday basis. It happens frequently that she has to report to the local authority fires of garbage abandoned along the local provincial route, which passes by her estate and (tellingly) gives the name to two of her wines. While I was at her place, one day a German blogger came to visit her winery and her vineyards. When we passed by piles of garbage disseminated on the road to her vineyards, Isabella ironically stated that what we were seeing was an integral part of the local *terroir.* By saying that, Isabella expressed all her disappointment towards a cultural substratum that characterised the local approach to public good, but also agriculture and land use. In a region marked by a long history of landlordism and migration, where still today the vast majority of the young population leave to find better opportunities in the north of the country or abroad, Isabella's choice represents indeed an outstanding exception. Since her graduation in Oenology, she has been living and working in Sicily, defending and promoting the local winemaking traditions that made the area one of the most thriving (and yet today neglected) wine economies of the region. During these tours, Isabella is proud to claim that the provincial road which passes by her estate is one of the oldest wine routes in the whole country dating back to the Greek colonisation, evidence of the glorious past of this area. Two of the wines she produces (her base white and red wines) are named after the current acronym for this road, which has thus regained its place on the international wine map thanks to Isabella's success. She told me that the choice was also dictated by her wish to communicate the idea of producing *vini di territorio* (*terroir* wines), which are anchored to that specific corner of Sicily. She physically lives in what was a traditional *palmento*, the local typical structure used in the past by the community to produce wine. As part of the tour in her estate, Isabella invites her visitors inside her house to have a look at what remains of the communicating open tanks made with local stone which were used to crash and ferment grapes.

Still, her international notoriety does not find an equal parallel at local level. It is easier to find her wines in Milan, Copenhagen or New York than in the municipality where she is based in and which is nationally renowned for the production of the local red wine Cerasuolo (the only case of Sicilian

DOCG wine). On one hand, this somehow highlights the success these wines enjoy in cosmopolitan, vibrant urban centres, as argued by Smith Maguire (2019). On the other, it tells the story of a deep fracture between rural and urban areas that has been a recurrent theme in the post-war history of the country. Looking at the wine sector in particular, the industrialisation of agriculture and the changing rationality applied to wine production has deeply transformed the farmers relationship with nature and the consumers perception of what wine is (Pratt 1994). I will analyse these transformations at the production end in the following chapter, here I just want to highlight the existing discrepancy between specific sites of production like Isabella's, and the surrounding local culture of consumption.

This specific disconnection with the immediate local reality is something I noticed not only there, but also in Piedmont where I conducted the rest of my fieldwork. In the case of Livia for instance, her wines are mostly unknown in Canelli, which is instead promoted by the local and regional touristic offices and the UNESCO as a municipality whose history is closely connected to the wine sector. Livia's Moscato, which is so praised in France and in other parts of the world as the best expression of Moscato from the area around Asti, hardly reach the palate of those who live nearby her winery. The same is true for other informants (Margherita, Claire, Virginia), whose wines are barely known in the area where these producers are based. The emergence and global success of natural wines present this contradiction: they are produced according to an approach which (reflexively) combines traditional elements and the cultural promotion of the local rural heritage (of which *terroir* is the most important feature), but they belong to a niche market and a wine culture which is based in urban centres and it is not widely spread at local level. Their consumption indeed reflects contemporary urban desires for authentic and traditional products. As DuPuis and Goodman (2005: 368) argue, these desires are the expression of an "unreflexive localism", which treats the "local" as a purified category. Here I showed how my informants engage with their localities reflexively. As Sonnino (2007: para. 3) argues, the local "involves a dynamic process of attribution of meanings through which social actors construct and defend the connection between a product and a place". The tension between upper-middle class consumers based in thriving cities and producers located in marginal regions where the traditional wine production is decaying or disappearing, has also been observed by Alonso Gonzales and Parga Dans (2018) in their study on the Spanish *terroirist* wine movement. As I will argue in the following chapters, this tension also concerns the radical transformation of the agricultural sector, the changing rationality of rural life and the dominance of an interventionist oenology in the wine sector over the last forty years, which has pervasively shaped our perspective and approach to wine.

4.5 Conclusion

"Natural wine, its critics notwithstanding, appears to most of us as politically progressive, environmentally friendly, and seemingly more authentic than mass-produced, industrial brands. Among its great advantages is its alleged proximity to terroir" (Goldberg, 2013). With these words, Goldberg describes the allure of natural wines in a contemporary global scenario which has seen major changes in the way wine is produced and consumed. The producers who embrace this kind of approach to winemaking criticise the increasing industrialisation of the sector and oppose to that a rigorous quest for *terroir*. This commitment to reveal the natural and cultural endowments of the place where they grow their vines is enacted through the use of autochthonous grape varieties, the appeal to local traditional knowledge connected to wine production, and a self-reflexive, critical stance on the meaning of their work. In a globalised wine world where *terroir* as a distinctive asset has been subject to a gradual erosion and challenged by an enlarged notion of provenance, it seems that natural wine producers still cling on Old World quality criteria meant to confer prestige and distinction to fine wines. Looking at my own context of study, and in particular at those producers who are based in Piedmont where a strong French influence has shaped the local approach to winemaking, it would be reasonable to assume that is indeed the case. At the same time though, the global success of natural wines reveals other, complementary aspects of these wines that hinge on new forms of prestige and legitimacy based on a renovated desire for authenticity and local embeddedness. Within the world of wine, that has translated into a process of democratisation both at the production and consumption end. Authenticity and quality claims are now framed through an embracing notion of provenance that values the biography and personality of the winemaker, her philosophy behind wine production, the specific context of production, without relying uniquely on the auto-referential character of *terroir* (Demossier, 2010). These particularities of provenance are all found in the way natural wines are made and presented: small-scale producers, committed to a production approach that is framed through the idea of genuineness and 'honesty' (Black, 2013: 288), and able to meet contemporary public concerns about environmental problems. These producers are socially accessible through fairs and visits to their estates, and sustained by a wide network of professionals globally promoting and offering their wines to cosmopolitan urban consumers. Following Smith Maguire (2019), it can be said that natural wines present material anchors to be aligned with both the world of fine wines and a new global aesthetic regime that is based on authenticity and a "taste for the particular". As I started to show through the ethnographic accounts I presented, the personal trajectories of producers embracing this approach reveal a complex picture where this double positioning of natural wines materialise in distinction claims, market strategies, and active participation within a vibrant global network.

Chapter 5 Going beyond nature and culture: natural winegrowing as a relational practice

5.1 Introduction

Among the scholars who have analysed the emergence of natural wines and its main differences compared to conventional wines, there is common agreement that a shift of emphasis has occurred in the way wine quality is framed. The winegrower and her skills, interpretation of her work and even her personality have come to the fore at the expense of a more classic argument that focuses solely on the natural, geological features of the place. In describing how the term 'natural' is negotiated between the actors involved in this restricted world of wine, anthropologist Rachel Black (2013) argues that production occupies an important place in the narrative of these wines. In particular, the discourses focus on those production methods that are able to express the uniqueness of the place where the grapes come from. This shift can be understood as a consequence of greater differentiation in the new globalised wine world, where locality acquires new values not necessarily tied to a classic definition of *terroir.* Demossier (2013: 196-197) refers to that while describing the Burgundian contemporary wine scenario where the so-called *vins à très forte personnalité* (wines with strong personality), among which she lists natural wines, have been promoted by a group of ecologically-minded producers. This signals a transformation in the construction of quality and a parallel contestation of the hegemony of the AOC system. These wines respond to ecological and environmental concerns raised by new consumers who want to distinguish themselves from their more traditional counterpart, but at the same time are treated with suspicion by mainstream sommeliers and experts who are sceptical about their sensorial profile and alleged lack of *terroir* expression. Teil (2012) notes a similar criticism when she depicts the contraposition between traditional producers of *terroir* wine and the so-called "naturalist", sulphite-free vintners. While both groups reject an invasive approach to winemaking which manipulates the taste of wine and erases the mark of *terroir*, "naturalist" vintners are accused of producing wines with pronounced oxidation and excessive versatility which mask the true expression of *terroir*. When taken to the extremes indeed, and despite their claimed proximity to *terroir,* natural wines paradoxically tend to taste the same, failing to convey to consumers the allegedly unique taste of place (Black, 2013: 287). This risk of an emerging standardisation of taste is acknowledged not only by the critics' faction, but also some natural producers (like Livia's brother).

According to these critiques, it seems that at the core of natural winemaking lies an implicit tension: on one hand, these wines are presented as the true, unfiltered transposition of nature in the glass thanks to a non-interventionist approach in the cellar; on the other, the role of the winemaker and her choices throughout the process represent a key aspect in the way these wines are crafted and communicated. When the natural dimension takes too much control on the human one, the result is said to be a wine which lacks the expression of *terroir*. The aim of this chapter is to investigate how this tension is negotiated by wine producers engaged in a natural approach to viticulture and winemaking. To do so, I will start by looking at the recent definition of *terroir* issued by the International Organization of Vine and Wine (OIV) in 2010 to identify what are the natural components constituting *terroir*. In particular, I will focus my attention onto those natural elements of *terroir* that are meaningful to my informants and inform their work both in the vineyard and in the cellar. By doing so, I will start to show how my informants engage with them through a relational dynamic that does not frame them as external factors, but as living elements crucially involved in the production of their wines. I will then expand on this relational dimension by having a closer ethnographic look at the work of my informants first in the vineyard and then in their cellars. By the end of the chapter, it will be clear how the production of natural wine is based upon an attentive perceptual engagement with the lively materialities of wine, where the role of the winegrower is to preserve these living properties while at the same time express her own individuality through her taste and choices. The last section of the chapter is devoted to those elements of the work and lives of my informants which were more connected with their gender and shaped their ideas and practices as natural winegrowers. I will show how belonging (or not) to traditional farmer families affected the way they perceived their work and identities as natural wine producers.

5.2 Dissecting *terroir*

In the previous chapter, I started to discuss the concept of *terroir* and its relevance for natural wine producers. In this section I will approach more closely those natural components of *terroir* that are meaningful to my informants.

5.2.1 Soil

According to the recent definition formulated by the International Organization of Vine and Wine,

> Vitivinicultural *terroir* is a concept which refers to an area in which collective knowledge of the interactions between the identifiable physical and biological environment and applied vitivinicultural practices develops, providing distinctive characteristics for the

> products originating from this area. *Terroir* includes specific soil, topography, climate, landscape characteristics and biodiversity features.
>
> (Organisation Internationale de la Vigne et du Vin, resolution OIV-VITI 333-2010)[1]

As it is clear by this formulation, *terroir* is constituted by a combination of both natural and human factors. While in the past the natural, geological dimension was given prominence thanks to influential publications written by geographers and experts such as Wilson (1998), nowadays the sociocultural side of *terroir* has gained increased recognition (Moran, 2001). Nevertheless, soil is still mentioned as one of the key natural elements in the production of fine wines of *terroir*. Detailed accounts of the multiple layers of soil making up a vineyard are presented by producers and sommeliers during wine tours and tastings as fundamental coordinates to assess the quality of a wine. When I was trained to become a wine taster myself, an entire class of my course was devoted to the distinction between different geological soils (clay, sand, or limestone) and their corresponding influences in the final wine.

Natural wine producers are not exceptions in this regard. During my fieldwork, I was told by my informants how the specific features of the soil in their vineyards imparted recognisable and unique notes and aromas to their wines. In some cases, the physical evidence of *terroir* was literally consigned into my hands. While harvesting Moscato grapes with Livia and the rest of the team in a rather hot afternoon, she stopped picking and guided me to a nearby empty plot of land that had been recently excavated. From the ground, she collected what looked like a marine fossil, a shell-shaped piece of crumbly soil made of compressed sand. While I was holding it, she explained to me that all the surrounding area had originally been under the sea level and those kinds of fossils were a proof of that. In terms of taste, Livia told me that specific soil contributed to the 'freshness' and 'salinity' of their Moscato, which resulted in a wine exhibiting deep but also elegant features. I will develop more in depth the sensorial aesthetics of these wines in the following chapter, for now I want to highlight how physical *terroir* gets defined and interpreted by my informants. In other instances, the link between soil and wine was not affirmed by recurring to a geological explanation but instead was explained through less scientific means. After a long day of harvest, Livia and I were watering the garden in front of her house. As a person who has grown up in a city where contact with nature had been limited, I took advantage of that situation to soak up a short practical lesson on the identification of flowers, plants and native herbs. While sniffing the glorious scent of wild mint and lemon balm that popped up here and there in the garden and between the rows of Livia's vines, I dared to connect those vegetal smells to the balsamic notes I

[1] https://www.oiv.int/public/medias/379/viti-2010-1-en.pdf

found in her Moscato. Livia was not surprised by my association, instead she agreed with me and exclaimed, chuckling: “That’s *terroir*, too!” She added that her US distributor had claimed the same after a walk in her vineyard of Moscato during a visit to her winery. In this case, evidence of physical *terroir* is the result of a collective perception which finds legitimation precisely because it is shared by a group of experts (Hennion, 2007). As a general rule, and as I was told numerous times by my interlocutors, a good soil must be “alive”. This is obtained through careful work in the vineyard and the rejection of any chemical substances (fertilisers, synthetic products, etc.) altering the microbiological components of the soil and its ecological relations.

This physical dimension of *terroir*, with its specific features, constitutes the guarantee of a distinctive wine. Still, “having the right *terroir*”, as Livia’s father told me the first day I met him, does not mean that this set of favourable features are automatically transferred in the wine produced. Rather, *terroir* represents in a way the most important external limitation in the work of these producers, as Daynes (2013) argues when describing the social understanding of *terroir* among Bordeaux winemakers. The natural endowments of *terroir* define both possibilities and adaptations on the part of the winemaker, who applies her intimate knowledge, sensual skills and sensorial experience to express them. This process takes the shape of a quest that is constantly re-enacted with every coming vintage, resulting then in a unique product which bears the specificity of a place in time. When tasting a wine, my informants usually said that in the glass they searched for *terroir*, grape variety and vintage. These elements formed the axes of their reference system, used to navigate their evaluations and appreciation of a wine’s quality. For natural wines, which are not subject to heavy manipulation in the cellar, the variability from vintage to vintage is even greater and it is praised as a sign of good practices both in the vineyard and in the cellar. This valorisation of difference and variability was actively cultivated by the same producers as a “taste for uncertainty” (Krzywoszynska, 2015), as I will argue in the following chapter where I will focus on the sensorial aesthetics of these wines and the judgment of their taste.

5.2.2 Vines

Another important external element of the natural components of *terroir* is the vine itself. It represents the most direct point of contact to nature, but also the repository of knowledge matured by generations of winegrowers. The way vines are cultivated, shaped, cared and managed is the result of constant human intervention. Throughout their annual life cycle, which culminates in autumn with the ripening of the grapes, these plants are subject to different sets of operations that are aimed at maintaining their health and self-sufficiency. Natural wine producers in particular place particular importance on the work done in the vineyard. According to them, the

necessary starting point to craft a good wine is healthy and perfectly ripened grapes, which in turn are the result of the work done in the vineyard over the whole year. The way of saying "*il vino si fa in vigna*" ("wine is made in the vineyard"), shared among my informants, captures the special emphasis they give to viticulture, conceived as an essential agricultural practice leading to the production of healthy grapes. As I said in the previous chapter, natural producers prefer to work with autochthonous grape varieties, which are considered more adapted to the local soil and climate, hence more prone to express the local *terroir*. Compared to the so-called international varieties such as Chardonnay, Sauvignon and Cabernet Sauvignon, which were implanted in many areas of the country a few decades ago to accommodate the taste of new international consumers who were not accustomed to local indigenous varieties, nowadays the latter are praised to be the true interpreters of the local *terroir*, not only by natural producers. In parallel to a process of quality improvement investing the national wine sector at large (Overton, Murray and Banks, 2012), this shared recognition of the value of the Italian viticultural heritage seems to reflect that specific 'taste for the particular' described by Smith Maguire (2018), and at the same time an increased awareness towards biodiversity and its protection (Mannini, 2004).

The use of autochthonous grape varieties on the part of natural wine producers goes together with the revitalization of traditional viticultural practices which were gradually abandoned during the industrial conversion of agriculture. Ian d'Agata, wine writer and author of the award-winning book "Native Wine Grapes of Italy" (2014), observes that Italian native grapes bear not only ecological significance but also cultural relevance due to the strong bond that ties indigenous grape varieties with the people who have tended to them over the centuries. Native varieties condense around them local knowledge, collective memories and a sense of regional identity (which historically characterises Italy as a nation-state with a relatively recent history). The conservation of these varieties implies then the conservation of this cultural heritage.

When Isabella decided to produce her wine in Vittoria, she chose as a training system for her vines the traditional *alberello*: the plant is not supported by any wires (as it is the case with the majority of trellis systems) and it develops as a short bush with a radial arrangement. This technique is traditionally used in Sicily, where hot temperatures and strong winds represent a stress for the plants. The reduced height of the vines obtained through the techniques of *alberello* allows for protection against the heat, and the creation of a microclimate that is beneficial for the plant. Isabella also told me that the resulting circular development of the vines enabled her to look at each plant from every possible angle. For a kind of viticulture which entails an intimate interaction between the plant and the winegrower, this aspect acquires particular importance for winegrowers such as Isabella. She also re-introduced the practice of bud grafting *in loco* which was mostly abandoned with the advent of the modern nurseries providing winegrowers with

grafted vine shoots ready to be implanted in the vineyard.[2] According to Isabella, grafting *in loco* (traditionally practised by a team of skilled male pruners over the summer) leads to better results as each rootstock can be carefully assessed before being grafted onto the bud. Also, this practice allows the propagation of the best vine specimens in the vineyard (what is called mass selection as I explain below). This is a time-consuming activity that requires high levels of skill and experience. On the Facebook profile of Isabella, photos taken during this operation were commented by people who appreciated the cultural value implied in the revitalisation of this practice. A few users also shared memories of elder relatives who had the same skill, while others were simply curious and wanted to know more about it.

When looking for new parcels to rent or buy, Isabella and the other informants who did not inherit the land from the previous generation, prefer to choose *vigne vecchie* (old vines) due to their historical value and quality of their grapes. In Sicily, *vigne vecchie* are usually found in *contrade storiche* (historical districts), delimited areas which were historically recognised for the production of distinct wines. Finding a parcel in these *contrade storiche* was for Isabella the best way to reconnect to the glorious past of the area's wine production, giving continuity to the expression of the local *terroir.* Old vines were treated by my informants as a sort of historical living shrines to which they paid reverence and particular care. Their twisted, winding trunks were captured in photographs that were posted on their Facebook profiles, or showed to the public attending wine fairs and tastings.

[2] After the advent of phylloxera (an aphid which damages vine's roots and ultimately causes its death) in Europe in mid-nineteenth century, the only way to grow vines is by grafting the plant with phylloxera-resistant American rootstocks. Bud grafting is the practice of grafting a dormant bud onto an American rootstock, generally instead of the bud it is used a dormant scion.

Figure 10 Old vine of Nerello Mascalese in Claire's vineyard on Mount Etna (photo by author)

They also represent an invaluable source of biodiversity, as their genetic heritage is the result of the mass selection that was traditionally practiced before clonal selection became the norm in Italian viticulture in the 1970s. Mass selection is based on a careful selection of the best plants in a vineyard aimed at reproducing a variability of genotypes that as a whole can better cope with different climate conditions and the emergence of diseases. Compared to clonal selection, whereby a unique genotype is selected and reproduced throughout the vineyard according to a logic of maximum profitability, mass selection operates through the idea of spreading the risks. In years particularly hot, the plants with a better capacity to cope with water stress will compensate for others more vulnerable to the heat. Conversely, rainy vintages will see a better performance from those more adapted to cope with abundant water. Practising mass selection implies that the winegrower possesses an intimate knowledge of each single plant of her vineyard. It is the result of a sustained interaction with the vines throughout the seasons, over the years. This relationship with the plants sometimes acquires anthropomorphic connotations: for my informants they were

bambine (little girls) and *figlie* (daughters) to take care of and nurture through a constant distillation of attention, observation, and physical contact.[3]

This kind of relational approach to the plants, founded on the centrality of embedded skills matured through practice and apprenticeship, characterised the pre-industrial, traditional vineyards cultivated by generations of small farmers before the industrialisation of the agricultural sector (Pratt, 1994). Anthropologist Mauro Van Aken (2014) argues that the traditional vineyard can be analysed as a complex *campo di senso* ("field of meaning") where economic, social, moral and aesthetic values intermingled. The work conducted in the vineyard was not exclusively finalised to the production of wine, instead it entailed the care of the whole ecosystem through activities pointed at the reproduction of its resources, the sustainability of the soil, and the transmission of the technical skills. When agriculture was not yet subject to a capitalist rationality oriented towards maximising profits at the expense of a more holistic approach to the ecosystem, the interaction with nature was founded upon a dialectical dynamic where "the vine is an active subject in relation to the surrounding environment in which the winegrower is included. Conversely, in the modern vineyard the vine gets objectified and reduced to 'stuff' in the everyday intensive practices, where each vine is just like the others, there is no more space or time for recognition" (Van Aken, 2014: 178). I will come back to this point later in the chapter, for now I want to highlight how natural wine producers have consciously reintroduced in the vineyard a more relational perspective that characterised traditional rural communities before the modernisation of the agricultural sector.

5.2.3 Indigenous yeasts

As I said in the previous chapter, the use of indigenous yeasts to trigger alcoholic fermentation constitutes the pillar of natural winemaking and the main difference from conventional wines.[4] As I was told numerous times by my informants, a common mistake is to equate natural wines to sulphite-free wines. While the amounts of sulphur dioxide are considerably lower in these wines compared to conventional ones, this simplistic definition does not reveal the real essence of their winemaking approach. According to these producers, it is the use of indigenous yeasts (and the rejection of any sterilising practices, such as filtration) that allow wine to retain its living attributes and the marks of the original *terroir*, leading to a substance which is different from year to year and tied to a specific place.

[3] In Italian the words "vine" and "plant" are both feminine nouns.
[4] Organic-labelled wines are not necessarily produced with the use of indigenous yeasts, as the current EU legislation is not prescriptive about it.

Indigenous yeasts are naturally found in the vineyard and in particular on the grape skins. They are part of the wider ecosystem of the vineyard and as such they are said to bear the mark of the local *terroir.* Once the harvested grapes reach the cellar to be transformed into wine, the yeasts travel with them and start to colonise the surfaces of vats, barrels, tools and walls. Scientifically speaking, yeasts are classified into families, or strains, which present different features and are still object of numerous studies aimed at understanding their functioning throughout the different phases of the fermentation process (Giudici, Solieri and De Vero, 2010). In conventional winemaking, the idea is to select in the lab those strains that better cope with the selective evolutive pressures induced by the fermentation environment and inoculate them into the must. Using selected yeasts helps reduce unwanted compounds (such as volatile acidity), emphasising varietal aromatic characteristics, and more generally it ensures a controlled and efficient performance without major risks. For natural winemakers, that means reducing the aromatic complexity of wine brought about by the variability and number of yeasts naturally present on the grape skins each year. In their opinion, by inoculating just one selected strain of yeasts, wines become organoleptically impoverished and characterised by standardised aromatic profiles and a lack of *terroir* expression.

In order to stimulate the genotypic variability of indigenous yeasts, the chemical composition of the grapes (sugars, nitrogen and mineral compounds, etc.) plays a fundamental role, and that is determined by soil, grape variety, vintage and cultivation techniques adopted in the vineyard. That explains why for these producers it is fundamental the work conducted in the vineyard and harvesting perfectly healthy grapes, as indigenous yeasts live and reproduce on the skins of undamaged clusters. As it is argued in the proceedings of a seminar on spontaneous fermentations organised by the Italian natural wine association VinNatur in 2010, the prerequisites to successfully conduct a fermentation without using selected yeasts is a solid knowledge and a high level of understanding of the process on the part of the winemaker.[5] If apparently nature seems to take control in spontaneous fermentation, in fact the winemaker directly concours through her practices to the realisation of a wine bearing the specific qualities of *terroir*, grape variety and vintage. This mindful, sensitive engagement with the organic components of wine is based on the idea that the fermenting must (and later, wine) is literally a living substance that needs to express its natural potential but at the same time it is exposed to a series of risks. This double aspect of liveliness and risk was well described by Costanza the very first day I stepped into her brand-new cellar during a rather hot harvest season.

[5] https://www.vinnatur.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/fermentinaturali-sintesi.pdf

As a member of VinNatur, Costanza represented well the type of winemaker who possesses a strong knowledge of the chemical and physical elements involved in each stage of the vinification process. A mathematician by background and with a degree in Viticulture and Oenology, she approached natural winemaking with a strong rational attitude. Her crystal-clear explanation of the role of the yeasts during the fermentation easily took the shape of a well-taught lecture in oenology. After explaining to me the pros and cons of industrial selected yeasts in conventional winemaking, such as their speed of action as starters and throughout the fermentation but also their reduced variability and their lack of connection with a specific place, she turned to the properties of indigenous yeasts:

> First: they don't start off the following day, it depends on the vintage as it is really variable, they can start off after three days, or five days, or even after a week. Second: alcoholic fermentation is way longer, it means that in quick vintages it can take fifteen days (2014 was a record vintage), last year my Cortese which is a white wine stopped fermenting on 18th of April and my Dolcetto Riserva (a red wine) was drawn off in December. This slowness of fermentation is undoubtedly a problem from the point of view of the work to be done, but qualitatively it is beautiful as you have a slow fermentation, a long skin contact, something that is actively pursued. What we don't like (..) is that the fermentation starts three, four, five days later. What happens is that when tomorrow we will fill up this tank, we cannot saturate it as it produces CO2 and it would explode, so we will fill it up to its 70% (…) if the alcoholic fermentation doesn't start, you have a tank not completely full (of must) but filled up with oxygen, and as a general rule, the majority of yeasts and bacteria that are dangerous to the must, they need oxygen, *in primis* acetic bacteria to make an example. So, if for five days the tank remains still, for me it is not good (…) you put yourself at risk. (interview 04/09/17)

Engaging with this risky, living substance is at the core of the work undertaken in the cellar, especially at the first stages of the fermentation. As I will describe in depth later, a series of strategies are conducted by the winemaker in order to cope with the arduous task of "letting nature express itself" without manipulating the wine with oenological procedures that can mask the mark of *terroir* and deprive the organic variability of the must. Here I want to emphasise how the choice of using indigenous yeasts is framed within a relational perspective where the organic component of the must is treated by the wine producer as a living subject that needs to be understood, and carefully handled as it is exposed to a range of risks that can hinder its future development into wine. The non-interventionist approach adopted by natural winemakers entails a conscious evaluation of the possible risks arising during the process, mainly related to the exposition of the must to oxygen and the consequent production of unwanted chemical

compounds. The fermentation process in natural winemaking assumes the shape of a dynamic field where the agency of the yeasts meets with the agency of the winemaker, and both contribute to the transformation of the must into wine. The rejection of any practice of sterilisation represents a corollary to the use of indigenous yeasts to maintain the living properties of the grapes, and the second main difference between this approach and conventional winemaking. It was again Costanza who provided me with a clear explanation of the importance of adopting a non-interventionist approach in the cellar:

> In a natural wine, you basically don't add additives, don't do any kind of stabilisation, and then you don't do another important thing, you don't do any filtration. So filtration, like sulfiting, is a form of sterilisation. You have a filter that blocks all microbiological life, so to conclude, a big difference between a natural wine and a wine which has been heavily added with sulphites and filtered, is that a natural wine from a microbiological perspective is alive, this is not rhetoric. If you don't filter, don't add sulphites, all the components (that is) yeasts, bacteria and enzymes go into the bottle. (interview 04/09/17)

In this section I have shown how natural wine producers frame their relationship with the natural elements of *terroir*, highlighting how a constant process of interpretation and adaptation is at the core of their work, both in the vineyard and in the cellar. Soil, vines, and indigenous yeasts (together with climate) represent an external physical limitation to the work of the producer and at the same time living elements that actively interact with the practices of the wine producer. Within this relational dynamic, nature is not an object to be acted upon, rather a subject that needs to be understood, listened to and taken care of. For these producers, who aim at transferring the marks of *terroir* into their wines, the living attributes of nature remain a constant point of reference in the work conducted both in the vineyard and in the cellar.

5.3 Encountering agency in the vineyard

5.3.1 Pruning

As part of my ethnographic fieldwork, I attended the pruning activities which are usually conducted in the vineyard during the winter season, at Livia and Margherita's estates. Dry pruning represents one of the crucial moments in the cycle of activities that absorb winegrowers' time

and cause fatigue throughout the year.[6] In winter, vines enter into a dormant state that lasts until the vegetative cycle of the plant starts again, with the opening of the first buds in spring. It is during this period of the year that pruners operate a series of cuts to the vine that will determine the future development of the plant both in terms of its vegetative growth and fruit production. As I will show, dry pruning is in fact the operation that reveals the underlying intentionality of the winegrower, or in other words, her ongoing "project" with respect to the maintenance of the vineyard and the production of wine. Pruning is also an activity traditionally loaded with social and cultural values as it is a complex and fundamental viticultural practice that takes time to become an embedded skill, requires a specific apprenticeship and it is generally connected to a high social status in the vineyard. In the traditional division of labour of small-scale family-run wine estates, pruning was indeed exclusively carried out by the elder and most experienced men who in turn would transmit their practical skills and knowledge to their sons (Guaschino, 1984; Van Aken, 2014). Among natural wine growers, especially those who still belong to traditional peasant families, this division of labour (and the social and cultural elements attached to it) is somehow still present but, as I will argue, includes novel social and aesthetic configurations. By analysing this specific working activity conducted by my informants in their vineyards, I will shed light on the way they engage with their vines, on their conception of time applied to their plants, as well as the artisanal and cultural values implied in this kind of production.

5.3.2 On the field

It is a cold and bright January morning, I am having breakfast with Livia in her kitchen. Yesterday, I expressed my desire to follow the pruning activity that has been carried out in the family vineyards. Giulio, Livia's father, offered to personally show me the details of the work from scratch. That came as a surprise, as Giulio is no longer in charge of this kind of work which is now done exclusively by his son. Since this year, the latter has been helped out by Ernesto, a young man living nearby who wants to learn how to naturally manage the vineyard. In front of our cup of tea, Livia tells me that dry pruning is traditionally considered a masculine activity. In the past, while men would prune the plants, women would later collect the remaining cut-off branches (the idiomatic expression in Italian is *tirare giù*, literally "pull down") and tie the new fruit-bearing canes to the wires a month later. These two activities were deemed as feminine because they were less tiring, compared to pruning which needed strong hands to deal with the hard vine branches (called *il secco* in Italian, "the dried"). While describing these activities, Livia recites a

[6] Dry pruning (*potatura secca* in Italian) is different from green pruning (*potatura verde*). While the former is done in winter, the latter starts in spring and as the name suggests, it deals with the removal of the excess shoots of the vine.

local way of saying which was used, together with others, by the peasant community as a reminder of the activities conducted in the vineyard, according to each month of the year. If the adage prescribes to prune in March and tie in April, nowadays everything is anticipated by at least a month due to the warmer climate. They in fact start pruning in January or February (according to the weather conditions), as in April the new buds are already vigorous and that means the vegetative cycle of the plant is in full swing. Pruning indeed needs to start when the plant is dormant, in particular pruners have to wait for the leaves to fall down completely, an indication that the plant's sap has returned to ground to rest during the winter months. Livia describes their approach in terms of "respect of the lifecycle of the plants". That means they avoid any possible distress for the plants caused by premature or belated cuts whose negative effect is visible in the so-called weeping of the vine (*pianto della vite*), the leakage of lymph from the pruned branches which resembles a teardrop. Livia opposes their *modus operandi* to the one adopted by their neighbours, who start pruning right after the harvest when the leaves are still on the plants. According to her, this decision is motivated by different yet connected reasons: on one hand, it is a way to keep busy their employees during a period of the year where the workload is less intensive (according to a perspective focused towards maximisation of work); on the other hand the fact that they do not respect the natural cycle of the plant is somehow overridden as they work with young vines only, which are exploited for fifteen-twenty years and then replaced by new ones. Instead, her family's management of the vineyards is focused toward the preservation and care of the existing plants, which are considered as their family heritage.[7]

With this preliminary information in mind, I went with Giulio to one of their plots of Guyot-trained Moscato vines surrounding their house to learn the practicalities of pruning. Equipped with a pair of electric shears, Giulio started showing me the basic notions each pruner has to know before embarking upon this complex viticultural operation. As Giulio made immediately clear, pruning is tightly connected to the future development of the plant and, ultimately, to the production of high-quality wine. In front of a vine ready to be pruned, a winegrower is presented with a series of actions that impact the past, present and future growth of the plant. Practically, this translates into three main steps: after an overall look at the single vine to assess its current development, the pruner eliminates the fruit head which carried the grapes in the previous vintage; she chooses which branch is going to be the fruit head of the current vintage; and she selects the spur which will be the fruit-bearing cane of the following year. These three types of cuts on the vine have been given names that take into account this temporal distinction: *il taglio del passato* (literally

[7] Livia hires external workers during the harvest season only. For the rest of the year, the workforce at the winery is constituted by her brother, her father, a Macedonian woman (who is also in charge of some domestic work), and herself.

"the cut of the past"), *il taglio del presente* ("the cut of the present") and *il taglio del futuro* ("the cut of the future"). Pruning is a complex operation that entails a multi-temporal dimension and affects the same viability of the winery, that is the preservation of the vineyard and the production of wine. While showing me how to proceed, Giulio described his actions in terms of rules ("what you should do") and prohibitions ("what you should avoid") which, taken together, constituted a set of moral prescriptions or what Van Aken (2014) calls a shared moral code. According to the author, being able to prune was a working activity traditionally embedded into a local field of meaning and as such it was tied to a series of norms which were in fact shared and transmitted within the farmer community. For instance, this code of conduct prohibited pruning during the new moon as it was believed that this lunar phase stimulates the circulation of the lymph and triggers the reproduction of specific insects that attack the branches of the vines. As Van Aken argues, and in line with what Livia told me about the different approaches to viticulture in her locality, nowadays this common moral code has become fragmented and diversified as new logics of production dictating the working rhythm in the vineyard have emerged. In some medium and large wineries, pruning is anticipated to keep workers active right after the harvest season, and moon phases do not mark any more the timeline of the activities conducted in the vineyard. As a result, the latter no longer represents a collective and coherent field of practice and meaning, instead it reflects the tensions and conflicts between different logics of production. I will come back to this important point later in this chapter, once I have expanded more on the way my informants interact with their vines, making clear the differences between this mode of production and the one adopted by conventional wineries.

Going back to that morning in the vineyard with Giulio, I realised the complexity entailed in pruning only when I was asked to do it myself. Before that moment, I had been visually following the movements of Giulio around each plant, connecting them with what he was telling me in order to gain a sense of the whole process. Only when Giulio decided to pass his secateurs on to me to prune the next plant, I immediately embraced a new perspective of the vine. In particular, the first thing that I realised were the intricacies of the dried branches and the difficulty in deciphering which one of them was to cut off and which one to spare. Giulio asked me to check out with him my guesses before proceeding, in order to be sure that I would make the right move. While trying to apply what I had theoretically learned a few moments before, I perceived the vine as an almost inaccessible and silent presence in front of me. I felt hesitant without any point of reference that could help me navigate the otherness represented by the plant. To make my estrangement greater, I realised how much each plant differed from the previous one, forcing me to pause in front of each new vine to mentally go over the sequence of instructions given by Giulio and subsequently formulate my assumptions out loud. Through this personal experience,

and especially the mistakes made, I could appreciate the amount of knowledge and skill needed to be a competent pruner. More than that, I could feel how each plant 'imposed' itself in a way that forced me (and Giulio at a lesser degree) to constantly adjust my movements according to each plant's specificity.

5.3.3 Viticulture in historical perspective

While I was struggling to make sense of my own movements and choices, I recalled what Giulio's son had told me in another occasion while I was interviewing him in their cellar. Speaking about pruning, and in particular how it was done until the 1970s before the industrialisation of the viticultural sector, he told me that winegrowers had a personal relationship with their own vines. Their work in the vineyards was aimed at the care and longevity of their plants. According to this perspective, a balance between production and preservation of the plant's health was actively sought throughout the whole annual cycle of activities conducted in the vineyard. Experienced pruners were particularly competent as they had a thorough, intimate knowledge of all their vines, one by one. That was possible due to the limited extension of the vineyards owned by the local small farmers (generally not more than three or four hectares). This exclusively individual management of their plots guaranteed a deep familiarity with their own vines, and it was based exclusively on hands-on experience on the field matured over time without any scientific background of any sort. According to Giulio's son, this kind of individual management of the vineyard still represents a best practice precisely because the singularity of each plant needs to be acknowledged in itself and throughout its development over the years. As he told me with regret, this intimate and sustained relationship with the vines is something that has been gradually lost once a new paradigm of production focused on yield-maximization emerged in the 1970s. A consequence of this change of approach is evidenced by the current lack of skilled pruners at local level, and the concomitant loss of the traditional knowledge and practices applied to pruning and viticulture at large.

What Giulio's son described about the tight relationship winegrowers had with their vines, applied to other areas of rural Piedmont and more generally all Italian wine-growing regions. As Guaschino (1984) argues while describing the work and lives of peasant families in the southeast corner of Piedmont in the late 19th – early 20th century, this intense engagement with the vines can be explained through economic and viticultural reasons. The small size of the farmers properties was indeed connected to the necessity of cultivating specific crops, vine in particular,

whose products were more profitable as more limited was the cultivated area.[8] In turn, the specific nature of the vine imposed hard work as well as specific and intensive care to each individual plant throughout the whole productive cycle. In particular, grapes were a crop which needed a great amount of manual skill, as many operations such as dry and green pruning, the binding of shoots and harvesting could be conducted exclusively by hands and without any other tools. As a result, winegrowers and vines were tied into a close relationship of physical proximity shaped by the movements and practices of farmers' expert hands. The skill and knowledge embodied by these winegrowers were not only applied to the care of the plants, but also the ongoing assessment of the interaction between the plants and the surrounding environment. They indeed possessed a deep knowledge of the best climatic conditions to undertake specific tasks in the vineyard (not only according to the season but also the moon phases), a detailed understanding of the effects of humidity, heat and sun exposure on the plants, and a careful appreciation of the interplay between the composition of the soil and the development of the vines (Guaschino, 1984: 20). Being attuned to the sensitive character of the vines and their ecological interactions was paramount to the production of wine, on which depended the whole peasant family's livelihood. For this reason, as Giulio's son told me, the work in the vineyard was conducted through a long-term perspective which aimed at the preservation and longevity of the vines.

5.3.4 Vines as relational plants

Coming back to the present, I argue that natural winegrowers have retained many of the practices that characterised the way small farmers approached their work in the vineyard. The manual dimension is indeed one key aspect that differentiates natural winegrowing from its industrial counterpart. The deployment of agricultural machinery is generally limited to tractors and mechanical ploughs that provide necessary support for the management of the soil and the weeds between the rows, as well as for carrying and moving weights. For those who are members of natural wine associations, it is explicitly prohibited to use any machinery during the harvest.[9] That means the relationship these winegrowers have with their plants is still shaped by a tight, ongoing interaction. In order to understand what is at stake in this kind of approach to viticulture I

[8] Guaschino (1984) also provides the reader with a historical excursus on the progressive fragmentation of land ownership in Piedmont, the gradual emergence of the small rural property and its connection with the hillside environment (where viticulture was the dominant farming method).
[9] In their charter of quality, these associations enlist which practices are banned both in the vineyard and in the cellar. Here the example of ViniVeri association: https://www.viniveri.net/en/soci-del-consorzio/la-regola/.

will adopt an analytical framework that takes into account not only human intentionality, but also the lively materialities of grapes as a crop.

Plants exhibit physiological and behavioural characteristics that make evident the biological distance between us and them. Compared to animals, which are more easily attributed an independent agency and the status of autonomous individual organisms, plants seem to possess a rather different way of affecting humans and more-than-human collective life (Brice, 2014). Their innate predisposition to become entangled into complex ecological relations with other beings and processes has led to consider plants as opportunistic, promiscuous as well as highly adaptive. Recent research on the neurobiology of plants have shed light on the multiple and sophisticated strategies they enact to enrol human and non-human elements to sustain their growth and guarantee their reproduction (Mancuso and Viola, 2015). At the same time, plants are highly sensitive to the external environment, and their rootedness and capacity to be affected by various environmental others have long been explained in terms of passivity and lack of agency. A vitalist approach to the study of crops such as grapes allows me to bypass this analytical impasse which frames plants either as unruled and subversive, or inferior and dependent beings. Attending to the vital materialities of plants means assigning agency to these living beings without falling into an anthropocentric perspective (Goodman, 1999). According to this approach, plants (as any other living beings) possess a vital spirit which is at the same time an inherent quality and an emergent property which unfolds in a relational dynamism with the environment and the other lively materialities (Bennett, 2010; Greenhough, 2010; Richardson-Ngwenya, 2010). If we look at vines, they indeed exhibit a constant entanglement in multiple networks constituted by other non-human elements such as pests, yeasts, soils, and climates (Krzywoszynska, 2016). This relational account of plants' agency is fundamental to understand the kind of engagements vines have not only with non-human entities but also with winegrowers, such as my informants. For the latter, knowing the vine and its agency is indeed paramount to the care they take for them. During my fieldwork, I was often told by my informants that "vines cannot be left on their own". Their innate predisposition to become enmeshed and easily proliferate through new networks of branches and leaves, indeed require a close, ongoing observation of the plants' development and a whole series of practices whose aim is to tame their thriving vigour.[10] Still, that does not translate into a total subjugation at the plant's expense. Instead, being able to channel this vital

[10] Vines' innate capacity to cling to other plants was efficiently exploited in ancient times, when vineyards were not already specialised and wood or metal poles were yet to be introduced into vine-training systems. Trees were used as supports to allow vines to grow and expand. Few exemplars of these *viti maritate* ("married vines") are still found in the centre and south of Italy.

energy into the production of the right density of leaves, number of branches and grape quantity (and quality), while caring for the plant's health, characterises the work of a skilled winegrower.

5.3.4.1 Affordances

This kind of mutual accomplishment between the agency of the vine and the need of the winegrower punctuates every activity conducted in the vineyard throughout the year. During the pruning season, this negotiation is less visible to the eyes of those who (like myself) does not possess a deep understanding of this engagement, which in turn derives from a long-term interaction with the plants. In front of a new vine to prune, I was not able to rely on the plant's affordances that could have guided my actions to the right cuts. This concept of "affordances", coined by the ecological psychologist Henri Gibson and adopted by various scholars interested in human – nonhuman interactions, allows me to pinpoint the relational dimension of pruning. Environmental geographer Jamie Lorimer (2007) defines affordances as "the inherent, ecological characteristics of a nonhuman in relation to the phenomenological apparatus of the body (human or nonhuman) that encounters and perceives them" (2007: 914). As such, affordance is a relational quality that allows (or disallows) the performance of a series of actions on specific lively materialities. In the case of pruning, it was clear to me that Giulio could easily navigate the vines' otherness through the sensorial recognition of their affordances. The specific material vitality of each vine indeed affected how Giulio interacted with them, allowing for certain actions to be undertaken and others to be dismissed or adjusted according to the characteristics of the individual plant. That was often the case when choosing the right renewal spur which would become the future fruit-bearing cane. If the vine did not afford Giulio a potential spur located into a favourable position on the head of the trunk (that is where the vertical trunk splits into two horizontal wood branches), the search for a spur was directed towards shoots grown on old wood at the base of the trunk.

5.3.4.2 Following the flow

The difference between an apprentice and a skilled pruner is based upon the intimate knowledge of the key material properties of the vine. It means becoming attuned to the way vines develop and are affected by other non-human elements such as the weather, soil, and diseases. In formulating an "ecology of materials" which draws on a phenomenological understanding of the world, Ingold (2012) describes materials as matter constantly unfolding through processes of flow and transformation. According to the author, the skilled practitioner is the one who is able to follow the flow of materials and bring forth their vital potentials: "In the act of production, the artisan couples his own movements and gestures – indeed his very life – with the becoming of his materials, joining with and following the forces and flows that bring his work to fruition" (Ingold,

2012: 435). This is especially evident during winter pruning, when each cut is done by taking into account the future potentialities of the plant.

Figure 11 A pruned vine (longer fruit-bearing cane on the left; short spur on the right) (photo by author)

The skilled pruner must indeed be attuned to the unfolding vital energy of the plant, in particular its sap, which supply nutrients to the whole structure. Knowing a vine and its past, present and future development, means being able to trace the path of the plant's sap flow. This is the main tenet of the vine pruning method created by a team of two Italian viticulturists, Marco Simonit and Pierpaolo Sirch, which have become a point of reference for numerous leading wineries around the globe.[11] Their method of pruning is now globally acclaimed, with workshops and training courses conducted in the most famous wine-growing regions, such as Bordeaux and Bourgogne. I will discuss more in depth how this new method has been adopted by my informants

[11] https://simonitesirch.com/

later in this chapter, here I want to emphasise how important a sensorial engagement with the vine is for the expert pruner. The knowledge required to master the pruning technique is gained on the field, in the very practice of working with the lively materialities of the plant. “Touch the vine and follow the flow” is one of the mottos of Marco Simonit, the co-founder of the Italian School of Vine Pruners, and is used as a hashtag on his Instagram profile to accompany the photos taken in the vineyards where he and his team work together, as master pruners and consultants.[12]

5.3.5 Temporality and uncertainty

Attuning to the vital properties of the vine also entails a recognition of the specific temporality embedded into the plants. When speaking about their vineyards and how they interacted with them, my informants used to tell me that it was a matter of fact that their plants would outlive them. As they worked mainly with old vines, which were already at least fifty or sixty years old, they were well aware that their own human lifespan was not comparable to the one of their plants. This recognition modulates the work of care my informants undertake on their plants, which in turn engenders a specific temporality arising from the reiterated encounters between the vital force of the plant and the human presence. As geographer Anna Krzywoszynska (2016: 295) states in relation to care in farming, temporality is a key element to take into account when dealing with plants, besides relationality. The vital materialities of the vine indeed possess their own specific temporality and so becoming attuned to plants means acknowledging this temporal dimension. Like other plant crops, grapes still retain the ability to temporally pattern the work conducted in the vineyard by winegrowers. The different activities, from pruning to harvesting, that mark the annual calendar of winegrowers indeed reflect the coordination between the plants’ agency and the viticulturists’ needs. As Richardson-Ngwenya (2012) argues in the case of sugar-cane breeding in Barbados and Franklin (2006) with gum trees in Australia, it is important to attend to the multiple temporalities arising from the interaction between different entities as it allows to understand how plants’ agency affect the human counterpart. I argue that what characterises the work of natural winegrowers is a specific attentiveness to the vine’s materialities, to their active participation into the production of healthy grapes and ultimately quality wines. When Livia criticised the way her neighbours managed their own vineyards without taking into account the plants’ natural cycle, she was indirectly pointing to a temporal disjuncture between the viticultural practices enacted by conventional winegrowers and the plants’ agency. Anticipating the pruning season to a time when the vines are not already into a dormant state

[12] https://www.instagram.com/p/B0yZZ6piPxo/?hl=it

entails adopting a kind of temporality that is aligned with the internal demands of the winery management and clashes with the plants' specific tempo.

Temporality in human – nonhuman interaction is tightly connected to another important dimension characterising agricultural work in general (and viticulture in particular): uncertainty. For viticulturists, recognising the plants' agency and ability to become affected by other human and non-human entities (which in turn possess their own specific temporalities), means dealing with uncertainty is a key dimension of their own work (Brice, 2014). Skilled viticulturists are well aware of the constantly unfolding nature of their vines and the complex ecological relations they create with other environmental elements such as weather, fungi, and weeds. Uncertainty, especially about cause-effect relationships, does not come as a surprise, instead it is a fundamental factor imbricated into the daily working experience of my informants. If we look at pruning, the lack of determinacy about the effective consequences of the cuts practised on the plants appears even more evident. While Giulio was showing me how to prune the knotty branches of the vines, he was also drawing up with his hands in the air the future silhouette of the vine in a way that could not trigger my own imagination. Indeed, this kind of imaginative "skilled vision" (Grasseni, 2004) was embedded in the working experience of Giulio as the result of his long-term engagement with his vines.[13] Still, despite his capacity to skilfully imagine the future development of his vines, he acknowledged the uncertainty entailed in what he was doing. His actions on the flesh of the vine were not corresponded by an immediate reaction from the plant, which was on the contrary lying in its winter rest. While moving his hands around the branches, he orally described his actions to me through the use of conditionals: "this fruiting cane should be strong enough to resist winter", "I might find a second spur in case the one I chose will not grow properly". Giulio would assess the concrete result of his pruning cuttings a few months after only, when the plants would come out of their dormant state and start their vegetative cycle again.

For this reason, a skilled pruner needs to constantly project her present actions into both the vine's past and future, without being totally sure of the final outcome. By touching and looking at the twisted lines of the trunk and the scars of previous pruning cuttings on the vine head, pruners retrace the previous history of the plant and assess its current unfolding to find clues (or affordances) for the new cuts to do. This multi-sensorial mapping does not only take into account the single plant, but also the existing relationships between them, and with the surrounding environment. Vines indeed are shaped not only by human hands but also the changing conditions of the climate and the attack of different species of fungi and bacteria that might alter their

[13] Ingold defines imagination in ecological terms as "the activity of a being whose puzzle-solving is carried on within the context of involvement in a real world of persons, objects and relations" (2000: 419).

natural development. Each of these elements brings with it its specific degree of uncertainty. Expert viticulturists such as Giulio balance this uncertainty by recalling past experiences which can guide their actions, but these will not transform their work into thorough mastery. Their knowledge of the vines is experiential and situated and, as such, grows together with them through time (Krzywoszynska, 2016). That is why for Giulio's son the management of the vineyard should be assigned to the same person who has followed the evolution of the single vines from the very beginning. As my informants would keep repeating to me, "in this kind of work, you never stop learning". Knowledge in viticulture is processual, open-ended and never gained once and for all.

5.3.6 Apprenticeship in the vineyard

Having analysed through an ecological approach the elements that characterise the situated and attentive engagement my informants have with their vines, it becomes evident that apprenticeship represents the main path to become a skilled winegrower. If, as Ingold puts it, "human knowledgeability is not founded in some combination of innate capacities and acquired competence, but in skill" (2001: 135), which in turn is based on a direct perceptual involvement with the surrounding environment, then becoming a skilled winegrower lies in a process of situated learning. The novice gradually tries to attune with the movements and gestures of the experts through a so-called "education of attention" (Gibson, 1979), by being instructed to see and perceive the critical properties of the surrounding environment in meaningful ways until the novice is able to pick them up on her own. I have stated in the previous chapter how the wineries of my informants represent important centres of apprenticeship for new generations of natural winemakers, creating communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) where social, aesthetic and cultural aspects of the natural wine world are actively shared and promoted. Here, I want to focus in particular on the process of visual apprenticeship, which is key to the practice of pruning and allows me to explain the difference between theoretical and experiential knowledge.

The same day I was being trained by Giulio to prune their vines, Ernesto (the young man who was undertaking his apprenticeship there) was trying to do the same in another plot. Although it was not his very first experience in pruning, Ernesto had been instructed by Giulio a few days before on the local way of pruning the family's vines, in particular with regard to the *taglio del presente* (the cutting on the cane which will bear fruit in the coming vintage). Giulio had showed Ernesto that the aim was to leave a fruit-bearing cane consisting of eight buds in total. This way of pruning is also referred to as *potatura corta* (short-pruning), and it was considered by Giulio (and his predecessors) as the most effective to manage the future vegetative growth. The number of buds left after pruning gives an indication of the desirable length of the branch, which should be long

enough to be tied to the training wire in a second moment but at the same time not too long so as not to let the plant proliferate with too many shoots in spring. Ernesto listened to Giulio's instructions and tried to put into practice what he had learnt, with the result that his scrupulous adherence to the directions received did not obtain the desired outcome on all vines. Indeed, by focussing his attention solely to the number of buds, he did not take into account if the pruned cane resulted long enough to be tied to the wire; or conversely, if it was too long so as to entangle with the next plant. As Livia told me a few days later, "he was overzealous and so he literally counted the number of buds! You need to have an eye (*avere occhio*), a bit of sensitivity" (interview, 29/01/18). Ernesto partly failed his task because he was not attuned enough to the differing materialities of the vines. Compared to Giulio, who could count on a greater sensitivity to the affordances offered by the plants, Ernesto proceeded mechanically treating each plant in the same way. He still lacked the kind of flexible, situated knowledge about vines that made Giulio a competent pruner. Indeed, the instructions given to Ernesto were interpreted by Giulio as a rule of thumb and as such they were not meant to deliver certainty about the final result, instead they functioned as signals that would orient him to find his way through what Ingold has defined a "taskscape" (Ingold, 1993: 158), a field of related practices. As Ingold posits, "rules of thumb may furnish practitioners with a way of talking about what they have done, or about what they mean to do next, but once launched into action itself they must necessarily fall back on abilities of a quite different kind – namely on developmentally embodied and environmentally attuned capacities of movement and perception" (Ingold, 2000). Giulio could rely on his refined perceptual repertoire to navigate through the taskscape of pruning within the unfolding yet structured environment represented by the vineyard. Something that Ernesto would still need to improve in order to gain "the kind of rhythmic adjustment of perception and action that lies at the heart of fluent performance" (Ingold, 2001: 141).

5.3.6.1 Learning to look skilfully

This multi-sensorial, situated process of apprenticeship sometimes clashes with the type of theoretical information received through institutionalised regimes of knowledge such as university degrees. My Sicilian informant Isabella, who obtained her own degree in Viticulture and Oenology before embarking upon the production of natural wines, recalled her initial disorientation in confronting the lively materialities of her vines when she started to manage her vineyard at the beginning of her working experience as a winegrower. Full of theoretical notions about the physiology of the plants, their common pathologies and so on, she felt puzzled and unable to put into practice what she had learned at university. It was fundamental for her to ask for practical advice from local old winegrowers, who trained her to look at, and interact with the vines in a different way. That entailed an immersive apprenticeship into the environment of the

vineyard that allowed her to understand vines from a more situated perspective. This apprenticeship was based on training her vision to detect those properties of the vines that were relevant for her work, and physically engaging with them. If at the beginning, as she told me, she was not really able to "see" what was going on in the vineyard, after a while she started to have an eye (*avere l'occhio*). According to Grasseni (2007), skilled vision is "embedded in multi-sensory practices, where look is coordinated with skilled movement, with rapidly changing points of view, or with other senses, such as touch" (2007: 4). Viticulture (and winemaking) are indeed complex practices that require a sophisticated orchestration of all human senses to interact with the non-human elements living in the vineyard (and in the cellar). When I met Isabella during my fieldwork, she was already a skilled and well-respected wine producer. During the numerous walks through her vineyards when we had to monitor the overall conditions of her vines after the pruning season, I observed how she was able to quickly assess the wellbeing (or possible distress) of her plants and their environment by touching the plants' branches and checking the volume of the weeds planted between the rows (see picture below).[14]

[14] It is interesting to note the same physical act of walking through the vineyard was informed by her skilled vision. In fact, when we had to move across rows where new rooted cuttings had just been planted as replacements, I could not easily spot them while Isabella moved fluently between them.

Figure 12 Isabella's vineyard in spring (photo by author)

She had developed a thorough sensory relationship with her vineyard that allowed her to 'communicate' with it. As Grasseni (2004b) aptly argues, skilled visions are situated, embodied, largely tacit and socially acquired through a process of apprenticeship that enables the novice to gradually take part into a community of practice. Being able to look in a certain way does not only permit to successfully complete a task, but also engenders specific aesthetic and moral sensibilities. Sharing a practice indeed means sharing a similar orientation, or worldview, which fosters a specific aesthetic and moral order.

5.3.6.2 Changing standards of vine beauty

During my fieldwork, I could realise that the work conducted in the vineyard was described not only in terms of care but also as an aesthetic experience. Grasseni defines the latter as "the way an activity of perception is organised and informed to tacit but shared standards for recognising beauty. Coming to these standards may give some insight into some important aspects of identity-construction" (2004b: 18). The vines of my informants were objects of aesthetic

judgements, which ranged from spontaneous appreciations to more elaborate commentaries to photos published on their Facebook profiles. My informants praised the beauty of their fruits, the magnificence of particularly old plants, and the vigour and colour of the foliage. In one of her posts on Facebook, Isabella described her oldest plants of Frappato as “incredible sculptures” which were source of personal amazement (see picture below). As we can see, in this case the vineyard is still a field of practice that is imbued with aesthetic values (Van Aken, 2014).

Figure 13 A picture on Isabella’s FB profile where she describes her vines as “incredible sculptures”

As a culturally situated and socially acquired ability, skilled vision does not sit in a vacuum, instead it has its own history. This means that the standards of beauty shared by a community of practice are not abstract ideals but do evolve over time. As Grasseni (2004a, 2004b) shows in her ethnographic study of cow breeders in the Italian Alps, the aesthetic appreciation of a cow’s shape has changed throughout history. In the same way, the beauty of the vines is not judged

according to immutable criteria. This is something that I realised during the pruning season when I moved from Livia's place to the hills where Margherita and her family live and produce wine. During my stay, her family was busy pruning their vines and I followed them in their activity through the rows of their vineyards. Margherita and Livia's fathers belong to the same generation of winegrowers, when notions of pruning used to be taught at local technical schools but mainly learned on the field from elderly pruners. As I observed, both pruned by practising cuts which were flush against the trunk of the plant, with the result that vines looked quite mutilated afterwards. They also would scratch the external layers of dried bark from the trunk with their hands. As both of them told me in different occasions, a vine was considered beautiful when it appeared "clean" and "neat". During those winter days I spent with Margherita's family, I also came to know that she was applying a different method of pruning. Equipped with Simonit's "Handbook of Vine Pruning", Margherita (and her mother) proceeded by doing cuts which were not tangential to the body of the plant, instead they were made at a distance from the trunk.[15]

Figure 14 The handbook by Simonit in Margherita's car (photo by author)

[15] In the last section of this chapter, I will focus more on this tension between Margherita and her father as it is indicative of the changing roles of female winegrowers within traditional peasant families.

According to the pioneers of this method, it is important to keep the sap flowing from the roots up to the branches as it provides the plant with nourishment. In order not to block its flow within the plant, it is crucial to avoid internal areas of dried dead wood which originate from large cuts made flush against the trunk. This revolutionary method, which was the result of close observations and careful research into the functioning of the vine's sap, has changed the aesthetic appreciation of these plants. Pruning cuttings made according to this method are in fact fewer and less invasive, satisfying vines' inherent capacity for branching. As a result, the singular characteristics of each vine are emphasised, and vineyards pruned in this way appear less homogenous and ordered compared to what has been the norm so far. A geometric sense of beauty has been replaced by an alternative aesthetics that praises diversity and heterogeneity.[16]

5.3.6.3 Vineyards as emotional landscapes

These aesthetic enjoyments were not limited to their vines, instead they extended to the surrounding environment including the physical elements of the landscape such as soil, rocks, woods, animals and even the weather, so creating a deep sense of belonging. Vineyards are "powerful centres of human dwelling" (Skinner, 2016: 180). The intimate, bodily engagement my informants had with the lively materialities of their vineyards engendered a deep emotional attachment to their place and fostered a sense of belonging. According to anthropologist William Skinner (2016), who conducted his ethnographic fieldwork among small winegrowers of McLaren Vale (Australia), this kind of emotional depth is strongly connected to the artisanal, small-scale dimension of his informants' work. It is indeed through their sensuous, physical involvement with their material world throughout all phases of production that vines and wines are imbued with meaning and emotions. During my own fieldwork, I could observe how sentiments of joy and pleasure accompanied the everyday lives of my informants. Often, these emotions were connected to their being immersed into the natural environment of the vineyards. Isabella described viticulture (and agriculture more in general) as a "joyful work", a "passion", which makes her happy especially because it entails an ongoing, close interaction with nature throughout the year. The work in the vineyard is also connotated as "relaxing", even "meditative" especially during the dried and green pruning, which are activities conducted in solitude, at a slow pace and in a silent ambience. This kind of solipsistic mood is generally opposed to the hectic, chaotic and collective atmosphere of harvesting.

[16] Through the success of their method, Simonit and Sirch have also re-evaluated pruning as a craft, restoring a sense of pride and identity in those who do this job. Here an interview to Marco Simonit: http://simonitesirch.com/wp-content/uploads//2016/06/WFW51-Robin-Lee-Marco-Simonit.pdf

5.4 Moving into the cellar

In this last section, I will show how those elements characterising the work of my informants in their vineyards also accompany their practices and decisions when engaged in winemaking. The attentiveness, care and relationality exhibited with vines and their environment also apply to the work conducted in the cellar. By focussing on the activities performed there, I will also shed light on the role that science and technology play in this kind of approach to winemaking. Finally, looking at what happens in the cellar allows me to dwell on the presence of female winegrowers within a field of production which was historically male-dominated.

5.4.1 Cellars as multi-sensorial places

It has been another full day at Isabella's winery. My alarm woke me up at 6.30 am and after a quick breakfast with the other trainees and guests in Isabella's kitchen, we moved into the cellar for the first daily round of pumping over. The intense smell of fermenting grapes invaded not only the interior rooms of the cellar, but also the external courtyard where the red crates used to carry the grapes from the vineyard had been left from the day before. It is the end of September, and in this eastern corner of Sicily the harvest has nearly finished. Inside Isabella's brand-new and spacious cellar, half of us took our positions on top of the huge square concrete tanks that occupy the main vinification room. Once lifted the lid of my tank, a poignant breath of red must wrapped me with its characteristic (and now familiar) vinous smell. At the bottom of the tank, my team-mate turned on the tank's big tap and a roar of purple and frothy liquid poured into a plastic vat put underneath. Kneeled over the hollow of the tank and with one edge of the pump held firmly in my hands, I yelled at my team-mate that I was ready to receive the bubbling must through the tube. He turned on the electric pump and as soon as the liquid reached my end, I carefully started to pour it evenly on the cap of grape skins covering the vinous mass.[17] This operation of pumping over is conducted several times a day in the very first stage of the fermentation process. As Isabella does not rely on the use of selected yeasts to trigger alcoholic fermentation but solely on those naturally present on the grape skins (and the ones already inhabiting the surfaces of her cellar), the early stages of the fermentation process are quite delicate. If the yeasts stop converting sugar into alcohol and carbon dioxide, wine gets easily spoiled by oxidation and bacteria. To avoid any unwanted stuck fermentation, it is fundamental to distribute the yeasts throughout the must and properly oxygenate the grape mass through the two manual operations

[17] During alcoholic fermentation, grape sugar is gradually consumed by the metabolic action of the yeasts and as a result alcohol and carbon dioxide are produced. The latter naturally pushes the grape skins contained in the must to the surface.

of pumping over and punching down. The latter is generally practiced by Isabella and her assistant; it consists of breaking the cap of grape skins through the help of a wooden paddle. As I observed, it is a labour-intensive operation especially at the beginning when the cap is still quite solid, dried and thick. (Fieldnote 27/09/17)

Cellars are places that starkly differ from the vineyard environment, especially during the hectic period of harvesting when the crates full of collected grapes are carried from different plots into the cellar, and their content is quickly moved onto the selection line before being crashed and destemmed. I had the chance to be more involved in the daily activities of my informants compared to the winter periods of my fieldwork, when pruning was the main task but it required a longer apprenticeship. Instead, harvesting and post-harvest operations allowed me to fully take part in many activities that punctuated the work of my informants in a crucial moment of the year, when all the fatigue and care diluted throughout the previous months found their concrete realisation. If it is true for natural winegrowers that most of their work is done in the vineyard as the latter is conceived as the main locus where a quality wine can originate. Nevertheless, the work in the cellar remains a key step into the production of a natural wine. It is here where a series of decisions, intuitions and tastes lead to the final product, expressing the sensitivity and personality of the producer. As I will argue, natural wines retain a specific connection with the ones who craft them, not only with the physical place where they come from.

I will start by highlighting the multi-sensorial dimension of the work conducted in the cellar, as it has been depicted in the ethnographic fieldnote at the beginning of this section. Winemaking is a complex practice that requires all human senses at work throughout the different stages of the process, especially during the early steps of alcoholic fermentation. This sensorial engagement with the lively materialities of the must is fundamental to properly guide the dynamic transformation of the grapes into wine. The relational work of care that is conducted in the vineyard carries on in the cellar, with its characteristic amount of uncertainty and risk. During my apprenticeship as a cellar worker, I realised how all my senses were simultaneously stimulated during the different activities I took part in. Vision is fundamental to assess the quality of the harvested grapes before they get crushed and destemmed, or immediately put into the fermentation vessels.[18] The fruit indeed must be healthy, rightly ripened and without any sign of fungal attack (expect for noble rot) which can affect the microbiological component of the must. The physical conditions of the grapes and their level of integrity are particularly relevant for

[18] Some of my informants used the winemaking technique of whole-bunch fermentation to vinify part of their harvested grapes. That entails the use of non-destemmed grape bunches which are placed into the fermentation vat together with a portion of crashed berries.

natural winemakers who do not rely on the addition of selected yeasts and other oenological adjuvants during the fermentation process (such as enzymes, acids, etc.). An important role is also played by hearing, as it enables the winegrower to assess if the fermentation, with its characteristic bubbling, is properly activated into the tank. By paying attention to the sounds arising from the tanks, my informants could also recognise the difference between the very first phase of alcoholic fermentation (called tumultuous fermentation), when the metabolic action of the yeasts is quite intense and the production of carbon dioxide makes the grape must "boil", and the later stage which is calmer (slow fermentation). Not only wine is the object of constant listening, as cellar workers need to listen to each other to perform tasks that require a careful coordination between individuals occupying different positions, where visual clues are not always available (as in the case describe above). More generally, during this time of the year cellars are noisy places where a multitude of different sounds, both human and non-human, intermingle and overlap. Conversely, I could appreciate the silent, peaceful atmosphere of my informants' cellars during winter, when they become an intimate space where wines are tasted mostly in solitude.

Manual skill is a distinctive feature of this approach to winegrowing; the tactile dimension is ever-present and engenders emotional responses (Skinner, 2016). It permeates all activities undertaken in the cellar, starting from the manual selection of the bunches once they arrive at the entrance of the cellar, up to the manual operations of pumping over and punching down.[19] The heat generated as a result of alcoholic fermentation is constantly monitored by touching the tanks, as it gives an indication of the intensity of fermentation. Often, assessing if the heat is evenly distributed throughout the whole grape mass is done directly by hands, without any tools. Bent over their vats or barrels, my informants would sink their bare arms and hands deep into the living substance of the must to regularly break the cap of skins and oxygenate the must. As they told me, it was important for them to have a physical contact with the lively materialities of the must, to "feel" the heat and texture of it. While pumping over and punching down the cap of Grignolino skins in her cellar (as shown in the picture below), Virginia described her actions on the must as a physical encounter with another subject, which triggered an emotional reaction on her part: she told me to feel "the pleasure of putting my own hands and arms into it, doing the pumping over, having my arms purple until mid-October and beyond".[20]

[19] The coordination needed between hands and eyes to spot spoiled berries and quickly remove them while they grapes were moving onto the selection line was initially a difficult task for me to perform. My informants' skilled vision allowed them to be quick and systematic in these actions.

[20] During my apprenticeship as a cellar worker, I could observe how the purple-stained hands of my informants (and mine) became an identity marker, and a source of pride at the same time. Coloured hands were indeed seen as the tangible sign of the hard work done in the cellar.

Figure 15 Virginia pumping Grignolino must over the skin cap (photo by author)

Finally, smell and taste obviously represent crucial senses for those who produce wine. During my fieldwork, I was repeatedly amazed by my informants' acute capacity of recognising specific smells and aromas not only in a glass of wine but also while doing other sensorial activities (like cooking, eating, walking in the nature). In the cellar, a natural winemaker is exposed to a range of risks deriving from not using selected yeasts to trigger the fermentation and other chemical substances that could adjust the original microbiological composition of the must. Unwanted chemical compounds (like ethyl acetate) and microbial organisms (like brettanomyces yeasts) need to be promptly detected in order not to spoil the must. To do so, it is fundamental to have a sensitive nose that can identify potentially undesirable odours at an early stage. Even though laboratory analyses can trace the presence of spoilage bacteria and other chemical compounds, my informants used to rely on their olfactory sensations.

The same holds for taste, which allows them to choose how to craft their wines and at the same time detect any major flaws during fermentation and maturation. Each winegrower cultivated their own individual taste, which was reflected in the wines they made and appreciated (in this case, not only theirs). My informants exhibited a high level of confidence in their own taste, sometimes framing this trust in terms of "instinct". When having to choose the right time to harvest their grapes, my informants indeed relied on their own subjective sensorial evaluations. That was the case for Claire, a winegrower producing natural wines in the northern side of Etna

volcano (Sicily). In her vineyard of almost centenary plants of Nerello Mascalese[21], she showed me how she assessed the level of ripeness of the grapes, which she did not want it to be excessive as she preferred to retain some of their acidity. She firstly checked the colour of the bunches, paying attention if all the berries had turned to their characteristic dark blue. She also checked if the colour of the stalk had become brown or was still green. Then she picked up some berries, squeezed them between her fingers to evaluate the firmness of their skin. Finally, she crunched one berry to taste its levels of sugar, acidity and the texture of its grape seeds.[22] She told me that they sometimes would send samples of their berries to the lab just to test the sugar levels, but for the rest (acidity, pH, and tannins) she and her partner were "relaxed" (sic) and relied on their own subjective judgments. During her daily walk-arounds in her vineyards right before harvest, Claire could easily identify through her multiple tastings those small variations in the flavour composition of her grapes occurring day by day.

5.4.2 Winemaking as a flexible and intuitive practice

Claire's case gives me the chance to introduce another fundamental aspect in the approach to winemaking of my informants. During one of the days in which we were harvesting her vines of Nerello Mascalese grown on an old layer of red volcanic stone, she explained to me how her process of crafting wine was always flexible, open-ended and highly dependent on the vintage:

> Every year it is an experience, every year you learn more things and you have to think more, for me that is the fundamental thing. It is easier, when you realise there is something wrong in the vineyard or the cellar, (knowing that) there is always a product that can help solve the problem, but when you work like us, we don't add anything, just the grapes, we have to do more stuff, we have to think more about the soil, how we might change the vinification, like less time on the skins, or more air, or.. So this is an experience that you do with the vine, in my opinion. (video recording 30/09/17)

Natural winemaking is a practice that requires flexibility and acceptance of uncertainty as it is dependent on what happens in the vineyard and is not supported by an interventionist oenology. As I will explain later, that does not mean that my informants were not knowledgeable oenologists themselves or did not employ any scientific instruments in their work. Yet, they rejected any application of that oenological knowledge that conceives wine as an object to be

[21] Nerello Mascalese is an autochthonous red grape variety typically found in the southern Italian regions of Calabria and Sicily.
[22] Grape seeds contribute to the feeling of astringency found in a wine as they contain tannins. As their colour turns from green to brown, the corresponding level of astringency gradually diminishes.

controlled and shaped according to certain sensorial standards. The deep perceptual engagement my informants had with their vines in the vineyard, and their wine in the cellar, was based upon a sense of relationality which framed wine as a living entity to interact with. According to this perspective, control over the materiality of the world of action is not an aim, instead it is replaced by flexible adaptation while intuition, improvisation and experimentation are praised as necessary and fundamental skills.

Especially during the hectic period of harvesting and early fermentation, when differing human and non-human agencies (grapes, yeasts, weather) are at work in a rather condensed span of time, it is key to be flexible to embrace this multiplicity of various elements and their different temporalities (Brice, 2014). The tensions generated by these conflicting enactments of time did not rule out a great amount of stress, which in fact characterised this period of the year. Uncertainty was acknowledged as an essential and unavoidable aspect of their work and was tackled by flexible adaptation. Being attuned to the living materialities of wine also means to be sensitive to its needs and react accordingly. In this ongoing work of care, constant attention is paid to the dynamic unfolding of the must first, and wine afterwards. When a problem arises, solutions need to be found promptly and by respecting the living material properties of wine. During an extremely hot harvesting season, one of my informants decided to cool down the fermenting must which was excessively warm by pouring cold water on the stainless-steel vats for a few hours per day.[23] During another particularly hot vintage, another informant was forced to destem her grapes before vinifying them (generally she used to do a whole-bunch fermentation) as the harvested bunches were meagre due to the water stress that had affected her plants. Not destemming would have led to the risk of developing too much astringency as the ratio between fruit and green components (stalk and seeds) was not balanced.

Decisions on how to vinify the grapes according to their levels of sugar and acidity (and their overall quality) were not unidirectional, nor did they result from the mindless application of an abstract rule. Instead, they were contingent, situated and based on intuition. As Ingold argues, the latter "rests in perceptual skills that emerge, for each and every being, through a process of development in a historically specific environment" (2011: 25). As such intuition is at the foundation of "technique", intended by Ingold as the skilled making of the craftsman who becomes knowledgeable through a direct contact with materials. My informants' sensorial knowledge developed *with* wine over time, and in the process of decision-making they relied on their past experiences to choose how to proceed in each vintage. As West (2013b) states in

[23] Many natural winegrowers do not systematically control the temperature of their tanks through automated systems as they believe it is an artificial means to adjust wine.

relation to artisanal cheesemaking, "the knowledge of cheese making resides in the interactive interstices between cheese makers and their broader ecologies – in terroirs comprising them and other components of an assemblage, including soil, rain, grass, animals, milk, vats, […] These components may not themselves *think* […] but the cheese maker must think *with* them (2013: 335, italics in the original).

5.4.3 The role of experimentation in natural winemaking

The artisanal value of this approach to winemaking does not rely only on this attentive engagement with wine and its components, but also on a sense of experimentation which was actively cultivated by my informants. By looking at this aspect, I will focus more on the human dimension of natural winemaking, highlighting the role of human intentionality in crafting these wines. "Experimenting" was exactly the expression Margherita used to describe her personal approach to the production of her wines, especially at the beginning of her experience as winemaker. Born to a family of traditional small winegrowers, she did not have a scientific background in oenology but the desire to live on the hills where she had grown up and her passion for wine led her to join her family's business when she was in her twenties. Although her family had been producing wine without the use of oenological substances in the cellar, they used to add sulphites during the fermentation process. When Margherita started to take control of the cellar gradually displacing her father from this role, she immediately decided to vinify part of their grapes without the use of sulphites. While recalling the reasons which led her to this type of vinification, she said it was the friendly relationship she had with other Italian natural winegrowers which influenced her choice. She was indeed very fond of the wines produced by these winegrowers who worked with very old plants, without using sulphites in the cellar. Her appreciation for the taste of these wines was then a major factor in her work as a winemaker.

According to Margherita, the *conditio sine qua non* to experiment without sulphites lies in a careful work conducted in the vineyard which allows the winegrower to obtain good quality grapes. This includes a soil with a good level microbiological life ("alive" in Margherita's words) and plants with well-developed roots. If these elements are not present, the work in the cellar becomes "complicated" and the wine produced "immediately falls down". Being experimental in the cellar was then tightly connected to the living qualities of the grapes, and the level of experimentation varied according to each grape variety and vintage: "hot vintages probably need more sulphur dioxide as wines are too basic and tend to die more easily…Barbera is a variety that can be done even without sulphites, it has a very low pH and it is more complete, Ruché instead is so basic.. it is the variety that I have understood less as it is a semi-aromatic (variety), it is easier with Barbera and Grignolino" (interview 25/01/17). Experimentation passed through the

knowledge that Margherita variously possessed of the characteristics of each variety cultivated in her vineyard. Experimenting for Margherita was associated to having fun, expressing herself and her creativity while at the same time being exposed to the risk of spoiling the wine. Something that had recently happened to her, as she had lost an entire tank of Ruché (which had been vinified without sulphites) because it had turned to vinegar. While recalling that disgraceful event, she mentioned what a renowned natural winegrower from Jura once said: that skilled winemakers once in their life make a mistake and turn their wine into vinegar. The experimental approach in natural winemaking then takes into account radical failures, which are registered and remembered becoming part of winegrowers' experiential knowledge.

My informants' experimentation often stood in a dialectical tension with the expression of *terroir*, as I introduced at the beginning of this chapter. In Margherita's case, radical experimentation characterised her earlier work as a natural winemaker, and she associated that with her young age. At the beginning she wanted to produce wines that could reflect more her hand, at the expenses of *terroir* (*territorio*) and vintage. That translated into the deliberate choice of not adding sulphites, while adopting oenological practices that led to the production of more structured and concentrated wines. By the time I met her, she told me she had changed her approach. If in the past she tended to have an *a priori* idea of her wine without taking into account what she would actually get from the vineyard in a specific vintage, now she preferred to

> comply a bit more with the grapes that arrive in the cellar, from certain grapes you definitely cannot obtain a wine different from what you have harvested, instead in the past I had quite a different idea […] It's useless to insist. Then about the *territorio* itself, I hope that by working in this way it will come out, if you don't sterilise, the *territorio* should always come out. Well, if you take it to extremes and pick up over-ripened grapes or a bit crunchier grapes way before their maturation or you do post-fermentation macerations with pomace,[24] then you will lose the *territorio* for sure. (interview 25/01/17)

5.4.4 Not a style but an individual taste

At the same time though, Margherita and my other informants were well aware of the inherent risk of an emerging standardisation of smells and taste in natural winemaking due to the practices adopted in the cellar. High levels of volatile acidity, oxidations and predominance of funky,

[24] Pomace are the solid components of grapes (skins, stems and seeds) which remain after the wine has been drained from the fermentation tank.

barnyard notes are indeed said to characterise many natural wines, with the paradoxical result that it is not possible to recognise any more the original grape variety (Black, 2013; Teil, 2012). According to my informants, an extreme approach in the cellar tended to obliterate the natural marks of *terroir* and vintage. To give me a practical example of what they meant by that, both Margherita and Livia referred to the current diffusion of so-called "glou-glou" wines which were becoming a craze among young natural winegrowers, especially in southern France.[25] The production of these wines entails bottling the juice obtained by crashed grapes before the fermentation process has finished, resulting in a light-bodied, fresh and easy-drinking fizzy wine. While these wines are enjoying quite a commercial success among natural wine lovers and in the trendy Parisian *bars à vins*, producers such as Livia and Margherita criticised their uniformity in terms of taste. [26] Based on a simple and reproducible method, these wines did not retain any connection with the place where they came from, becoming paradoxically similar to the much-reproached conventional wines. For my informants, the real difference between this approach and theirs lies in the artisanal value of their own work, which is at the same time individual, social and cultural. As Livia told me,

> for me the *vigneron*'s work has the priority. It is the main thing (…) Agriculture is first of all a social act of resistance, what we do is not to comply with the standards of a more conventional, exploitative agriculture, and (instead) comply with nature, respect it, be in harmony with it, so all this work that you do in the vineyard you have to find it in the bottle. So, you can do that by producing a wine that in turn speaks of you, your work and your land. (interview 25/01/17)

According to Livia, the individuality of each winegrower was a fundamental aspect as it significantly contributed to the uniqueness of the wine produced. Each individual winegrower brings into her work not only her sensitivity, but also her culture, local traditions and *savoir faire*. For Livia this was something impossible to gain overnight, instead it was founded on the intimate knowledge each natural winegrower had of their own work in terms of its interaction with the living materialities of a specific *territorio*. Crafting natural wine is an individual activity rooted into a specific place and loaded with social and cultural values, and as such it is unique and not replicable. For my informants, there was not such a thing as a "natural style", or a "natural taste"

[25] In France these wines are called *Pét-Nat*, which stands for *Pétillant Naturel* ("naturally sparkling"). They are generally produced without sulphites and through carbonic fermentation.
[26] In her article Teil (2012) draws a difference between "naturalist" winegrowers who do not use sulphites and traditional winegrowers who produce wines of *terroir* with lower amounts of sulphites which are supposed to express the local typicity (and whose protection under existing systems of denomination has become problematic in France). My understanding is that my informants are aligned with this second group.

which instead seemed to define the current hype for glou-glou wines. Debating about this issue, Isabella used these words during an interview she made for a podcast on natural wine:

> The natural method can be re-produced (…) what cannot be re-produced is the winegrower, the place, the sensations she has, her life choices, the craftsman cannot be reproduced (…) the person cannot be replaced, is unique, this is the main difference compared to a conventional wine.

These natural wine producers placed the value of their work into the craft dimension and I argue that is what allowed them not to feel alienated by their own labour (Ulin, 2002), while at the same time a sense of identity emerged precisely from their attentive work in the vineyard and in the cellar (Grasseni, 2004). As a result, the wines they produce embody not only their labour but also their social and cultural values. I will develop this theme more in depth in the last chapter, when I will look at natural wine as a product of sensuous consumption bearing specific characteristics. Here I wanted to focus on the role of craftsmanship in this kind of production and the meanings attached to it. Highlighting this artisanal dimension also enables me to justify the theoretical framework I adopted to analyse the work of my informants. The ecological approach I used to make sense of the human – nonhuman relationships characterising natural winegrowing has been criticised for reducing the scope of human intentionality and labour, not taking into account material results and the structuring effect of political economy (McCall Howard, 2018). The author focuses in particular on Ingold's work and argues that his treatment of the human engagement with materials is limiting as it does not allow to shed light on the alienating effects of capitalist value relations, the market pressures dominating the experience of work for most people, as well as capitalism's disastrous effects on our environment. I argue that in the context of my study, alienation did not mark the work of my informants precisely because as small-scale artisan producers, they controlled each stage of the production process. Also, as producers of wines considered sustainable and 'natural', they were placed in a favourable position within the global political economic order.[27]

5.4.5 Science and technology in the cellar

As I mentioned earlier, the work of my informants rejected any application of oenological science that frames wine as an object to be made according to specific aesthetic standards and eventually adjusted through the use of chemical additives (Pineau, 2019). Conventional winemaking is

[27] I will develop in the next chapter the kinds of market pressures my informants faced as producers of wines characterised by an alternative sensorial aesthetics.

harshly criticised by my informants because the unpredictable living elements of wine are not actively embraced, instead represent a possible threat to the realisation of an *a priori* idea of wine. Despite this convinced position against the underlying assumptions of oenology as an interventionist science and its corresponding appeal to chemical substances (both in the vineyard and in the cellar), it would be erroneous to argue that my informants rejected science and technology altogether. First of all, my informants had a university degree in Viticulture and Oenology (Isabella, Costanza, Claire) or had attended seminars, workshops and professional courses on the various technical aspects of their work in the vineyard and in the cellar (Virginia, Margherita). Some of the associations of which they were members periodically promoted in-depth seminars and classes on specific themes (for example, the role of indigenous yeasts in alcoholic fermentation). Margherita, who did not possess a solid scientific background, lamented the lack of it in her work as she believed it was a valuable means to "do interesting things" both in terms of agricultural choices in the vineyard and during winemaking. Costanza, who graduated in Viticulture and Oenology before becoming a winegrower, told me that her scientific background was a preliminary necessary step in her work. Knowing the chemical and microbiological wine components enabled her to vinify by using solely indigenous yeasts. Scientific knowledge was framed as a precious means to engage more consciously with the lively properties of wine. For Isabella, studying viticulture and oenology made her understand what *not* to do once she would become a winegrower herself. The applied side of oenological knowledge was then mainly rejected.

Technology in the cellar was reduced to the use of various tanks, vessels and barrels, which in many cases were not equipped with temperature controlling systems (as I said earlier, for many producers controlling the temperature was seen as an invasive practice); electric pumps and winepresses, crusher-destemmers, as well as bottling lines were also present; instruments to test the levels of sugar and acidity of the grapes, and implements such paddles and rakes were all deployed throughout the various stages. Still, retaining a manual interaction with the living properties of wine was considered a fundamental aspect of their work, and the main difference compared to conventional winemaking. Indeed, the latter was defined as a practice which was heavily dependent on invasive technological processes (like reverse osmosis, tangential filtration, etc.) that deprive wine from its living components and strongly reduce a direct sensorial engagement which is key for natural winemakers.

5.5 Female winegrowers as new social actors in the field

So far, I have analysed the work of my informants without focussing in particular on the gender dimension. In this section I will tease out those elements of their work and lives which were more

connected with their being female and shaped their ideas and practices as natural winegrowers. As I explained in the Methodology, my winegrower informants belonged to different backgrounds as some of them were newcomers to the wine sector (Costanza, Claire, Virginia and Isabella) while others represented the last generation of small farmer families (Livia and Margherita). With respect to the themes that have emerged in this chapter, I argue that this different positioning affected the way they approached their work in terms of choices, social expectations and individual desires. During my fieldwork, I noticed the gender dimension acquired different connotations depending on the social context in which my informants were imbricated. I realised that some differences persisted between those informants who belonged to traditional rural families and those who instead did not have any previous connection with the wine sector.

5.5.1 Livia and Margherita case studies

Both Livia and Margherita were born to families of small farmers dedicated to winegrowing for generations. Their fathers belonged to that transitional generation that saw the first systematic applications of pesticides and fertilisers to vines and the introduction of tractors and other mechanical machines into the vineyard. Still, their fathers consciously decided to maintain a more natural approach to the management of the vineyard compared to the majority of their farmer neighbours who were attracted by the modernist promises of higher yields through the use of chemical additives.[28] In both families, the eldest man was recognised as the *paterfamilias* and as such was respected as the head of the family enterprise. In Livia's case, it was no coincidence that her older brother had enrolled into a school of oenology so as to acquire the technical skills needed to conduct the family enterprise. It was indeed her brother the one in charge of the work in the cellar and the main manager of the vineyard (as Giulio was now too old to work consistently with him in the field). As a woman, Livia had the chance to choose what to study at university as working in the family winery was not imposed as an obligation to fulfil (and that was the same for her two sisters who left the household and moved to nearby cities). Once she decided to return to her family place of her own accord, she was a married woman with a university degree in Political Science and some working experience in international diplomacy. She carved out her own space in the family business by managing the sales and promoting their wines abroad (especially in France) while actively participating in the choices made by her brother at the cellar stage. Now Livia was an integral part of the family enterprise, but that also involved becoming embedded into the family-based logic which assigned her a specific gender role into the

[28] Margherita's father applied some herbicides to their vineyards for few years around the 1970s, but the negative impact it had on soil led him to abandon their use.

family. Indeed, especially after her mother passed away, she was also in charge of the domestic work of care for the whole family (cooking, shopping, looking after her children, etc.). Livia was aware of this double role within her family, which was source of internal tensions and sometimes open conflict with her father. For example, the fact that she had to leave for her annual sales trips abroad (something she particularly enjoyed due to her innate passion for travelling) was usually accompanied by some friction between her and the rest of the family. For Livia, being mobile and away from home had to be continuously negotiated.

Margherita's case was similar, as she did not enrol immediately into the family enterprise and decided to do so in her mid-twenties. After some years dedicated to the marketing and promotion of the family wines, Margherita decided to move her first steps into the cellar. It was here that she had to negotiate her presence with her father, who was at that time the only person in control of each stage of the vinification process. Margherita described her initiation into the cellar in these (gendered) terms:

> Fifteen years ago when I started to work with my parents, my father got sick he had a heart-attack, and for me it was because I started to work with him, as my father has always taken his work as something really personal, like HIS work, I don't know maybe who works at small-scale but also larger businesses, anyway anyone who is so committed to their own work, put much of themselves in what they do, without the vineyard my father is literally a dead man, every day he has to go there one or two hours, also to get a break from the female world that surrounds him here (…) it was not easy to introduce a daughter who could not basically do nothing, as I hadn't done anything before, so for me that was unsettling for him.. it was instead positive for my mum in many ways, as my mum used to be like his "shoulder", it was always my father who would prune, or for other decisions in the cellar it was more my mum who would help my father, instead at that stage when I could do nothing anyway, my mum took charge of the situation and there she realised what she was able to do. (interview 26/01/17)

Recalling her gradual transition into the space of the cellar, Margherita said it was difficult to be accepted by her father as he was reluctant to teach her the skills needed to make wine, while her mother was more supportive.[29] Her choice of not using sulphites was not accepted at the beginning (despite her father would add just small amounts before the fermentation), so for a

[29] Traditionally, decision-making in the cellar was considered a male activity and even later, when oenology started to be taught in technical schools and universities the vast majority of students were men.

while she had to trick him and lied about her experimentations. The rigid attitude of her father also applied in the vineyard as I showed above about pruning. Margherita and her mother were open to learning Simonit and Sirch's new pruning method whereas her father was rather sceptical about it.[30] When I met Margherita, her winery was already an established name in the Italian natural wine panorama, and her wines exported to Japan and the US (as I will describe in the next chapter). Still, she told me that her relationship with her father was still characterised by some tensions and a lack of recognition of her work on his part. While now they worked all together both in the vineyard and in the cellar, specific tasks were still gender-related. The tractor and other rural machineries were exclusively used by Margherita's father, while manual labelling was considered by him a feminine activity (a belief which Margherita explicitly defined as a "sexist" judgement).[31]

5.5.2 New alternative gender roles

The ethnographic case-studies of my other winegrower informants told instead a different story in terms of gender roles, and I argue that it was due to their different social and material positioning within the sector. In particular I highlight three main elements that contributed to the different shaping of their work experience as natural winegrowers: land ownership, technical background or professionalisation, and being newcomers.

Isabella, Virginia, Costanza and Claire were all the owners of their own estates. Three of them shared their land property with their own partners (Costanza, Virginia and Claire), whereas Isabella was the only legal owner and had been partly funded by a European Union agricultural scheme addressed to young farmers. That meant they all were disengaged by the family-based logic operating within traditional farmer families which would assign specific gender roles to the work conducted in the vineyard and in the cellar. By the time they decided to invest their own capital to produce natural wines, they had worked in different sectors where their being female was not negatively connotated. That was the case for Virginia and Costanza, who grew up in urban contexts (Milan and Rome respectively) and worked in the cultural and financial sector. Moreover, both of them received a politically progressive family education that actively supported female empowerment. Claire had previously worked into the conventional wine sector and as a globe-trotter professional oenologist she confronted with various working environments where her gender identity had not been an issue. Finally, Isabella was my youngest informant and

[30] Costanza used this pruning method for her vines. All my informants were in charge of pruning, except for Livia.
[31] Also in Livia's case, her father was the only one entitled to drive the tractor.

her work as a natural winegrower was her first professional experience after her university degree in Viticulture and Oenology. In their estates, they had a managerial role in each stage of production. They indeed controlled and were actively engaged in the activities conducted in the vineyard, as well as the procedures in the cellar up to bottling and shipping their wines. Besides themselves (and in some cases their partners), they could count on few full-time male wageworkers who helped them throughout the year and hired extra seasonal workers for the harvesting period. All of them (except Virginia who relied on an external consultant for the work in the vineyard) had a relevant university degree that allowed them to have the technical expertise needed to operate in the two main areas (viticulture and winemaking) without resorting to external professionals. As such, a gendered division of labour did not characterise their working experience as they performed all the roles that were traditionally assigned to men only, such as pruning and all the stages of vinification. In Isabella's case, even driving tractors and other machineries was not a male prerogative as she was able to conduct all the operations requiring their use.

As the patriarchal family did not represent for them the main point of reference of their working identities, they had more agency in expressing themselves and their personality through their work. These "detraditional" identities (Bryant, 1999; Brandth, 2002) reflected a new construction of masculinity and femininity away from the traditional family farm structure. Instead of being identified as 'farmer's wives', these informants embodied alternative femininities as they challenged traditional gender roles and embraced skills associated to men such as farm management and commercialisation (Annes, Wright and Larkins, 2021). In line with that, when I asked direct questions related to their gender identities, all tended to avoid any explicit reference to being female as affecting in any way their work, both in positive and negative terms.[32]

5.6 Conclusions

In this chapter, I ethnographically analysed the work conducted by my informants both in the vineyard and in the cellar in order to understand what is at stake in this approach to wine production, and how the latter differs from its conventional counterpart. To do so, I first introduced the natural components of *terroir* which are meaningful for my informants, and which inform their ideas about what natural wine is. I showed how soil, vines and indigenous yeasts are indeed key elements in the production of a wine that can be said to reflect its *terroir* of origin. By doing that, it started to emerge that the natural features of *terroir* are not only limiting external

[32] Evidence of this shared approach is the fact that to date there are no any association of natural winegrowers exclusively dedicated to the female representatives of the sector.

factors but also (and more importantly) lively agents that actively concur to the production of a wine that is said to be “alive”. The recognition of this relational activity entails an attentive and ongoing work of care that starts in the vineyard and carries on in the cellar. This kind of perceptual engagement with the living materialities of *terroir* takes on social, cultural, moral and aesthetics contours that also characterised the traditional vineyard as a complex field of practices and meanings (Van Aken, 2014). As I argued, the skilled work conducted by my informants is based on a sense of relationality that was at the centre of the practices enacted by traditional small farmers before the industrialisation and mechanisation of the agricultural sector. Being a skilled winegrower implied participating in a community of practice which shared a common worldview, aesthetic values, and engendered a sense of identity. While the contemporary wine-growing landscape appears more fragmented and the object of contrasting logics of production, natural winegrowers have maintained many aspects that characterised the work of these traditional small winegrowers, in particular the manual dimension. Yet, that does not translate into a mindless revival of traditional practices and ideas, instead I showed how the work of my informants is the result of a selective, self-reflexive and science-informed approach. Evidence of that is found in the way they have consciously adopted new pruning techniques, possess a thorough understanding of the fermentation process and place value on their own individual taste. I argued that it is exactly in this emphasis on their own individuality as artisans that lies the main distinction between a natural and a conventional wine. In this chapter I also analysed how different gender roles shaped the working experience of my female informants, highlighting the tensions perceived by those who belonged to traditional farmers families. Conversely, those who were newcomers to the natural wine sector enacted alternative farmer identities which seemed to challenge the traditional farming family’s division of labour.

Chapter 6 The alternative values and sensorial aesthetics of natural wines

6.1 Introduction

After having analysed the work conducted by my informants both in the vineyard and in the cellar and highlighted their deep perceptual engagement with the living materialities of wine, I now turn my focus on the products of their craft. Natural wines present peculiar characteristics tightly connected to the way they are produced, which differentiate them from their conventional counterpart. As artisanal products crafted through a relational and reflexive approach involving a multiplicity of living agents, natural wines are said to maintain a specific liveliness. As products of *terroir* which nonetheless bear the prints of the winegrowers crafting them, natural wines are also said to reflect both the natural features of their place of origin and the human interpretation given to those by the single producer. In this chapter, I will look at the ways in which these natural and human qualities are valued, assessed and negotiated by producers and professionals involved in their trade and promotion. In the first section of the chapter, I will ethnographically analyse the relationship existing between these wines and their producers, showing how the former come to represent a (liquid) extension of the latter. Natural wines indeed seem to share the human attributes of those who crafted them, reflecting the various stages of their development as winegrowers and individuals. Imbued with social and cultural meanings, these wines offer a faithful image of the ethos, sentiments and values embraced by their creators which remain impressed on them even when they leave the producer's cellar and enter the market. For these reasons and drawing on Paxson's (2012) ethnographic work on artisanal cheesemaking in the US, I argue that natural wines are "unfinished commodities", that is products whose values are not definitely sanctioned instead remain unstable and connected to the conditions of their own production and consumption. I will expand on this point by looking at the various ways in which their "unfinished" status is tightly associated to their crafting process and in particular to the notion of taste. The latter indeed represents the main point of departure to differentiate natural wines from more conventional wines as well as the main terrain where an alternative normative framework is constructed and shared. I will argue that natural winegrowers play the role of tastemakers and as such they are at the forefront in the promotion and communication of what counts as "good taste". In the second section of the chapter, I will focus my attention on the contesting and contested sensorial aesthetics of natural wines and how values such as inconsistency and uncertainty are positively assessed and actively cultivated by my informants. By

comparing the conventional wine-tasting technique (and its underlying assumptions about wine quality) and the alternative sensorial approach adopted by my informants and other professionals gravitating around the natural wine world, I will show how taste is framed as a relational and reflexive activity. Instead of relying on pre-set aesthetic standards, which respond to modern oenological notions of quality, natural wines allow for a sensorial encounter marked by a sense of discovery and surprise. I argue that this relational approach to taste, which also characterises the contemporary consumption of artisanal and ecologically embedded food, meet the locavore desires of urban middle-class consumers and make natural wines the perfect pairing of gastronomic movements centred on notions of authenticity, *terroir* and innovation.[1] In this regard, I will present the case of the New Nordic Cuisine as it provides a good example of the role played by natural wines in this kind of cuisine. Finally, in the last section of the chapter I will enlarge my analytical perspective to include legal frameworks of quality such the Italian DOC system of appellation and their prescriptive role in defining and assessing wine typicity. Due to their alternative sensorial aesthetics, natural wines do not align to the standards set by these regulatory regimes and as a result they struggle to obtain the DOC certification. I will show how my informants deal with this lack of recognition by diversifying their marketing strategies and, in some cases, by being actively involved into the local wine syndicates as a way to bring about change over existing interpretations of *terroir* typicity.

6.2 Natural wines as "unfinished commodities" with multiple values

As products retaining elements of those who crafted them, natural wines maintain specific values when they enter the global market. As I said in the previous chapter, these wines are the result of a process of sensorial engagement between the winegrower and the living materialities of wine. As artisanal products, they are said to bear the marks of the winegrower who crafted them, as if they were an extension of her persona. During my fieldwork, this concept was explained to me in multiple terms by different informants (both winegrowers and wine professionals) all converging around the idea that the wines obtained through this approach were not just commodities detached by the individuals (and places) producing them. Before analysing in detail the implications of this human character and in order to have a better sense of what I am arguing, I will start from an ethnographic vignette drawn from my own fieldwork in Sicily.

> I arrived on this side of Etna to follow the harvesting season at Claire's estate a few days ago. Today we didn't work in the vineyard and I took advantage of it to have lunch with

[1] Locavorism is defined as a consumer ideology promoting the consumption of locally sourced food, deemed as qualitatively and morally superior to industrial foodstuffs (Reich, Beck and Price, 2018).

> Isabella and the rest of her crew who had come to Etna. Harvest at Isabella's was over and she decided to take her team to visit the vineyards on this side of the volcano, to show them the place and meet with other natural winegrowers. A sort of school trip. We had lunch in the restaurant where all winegrowers from the surrounding area usually come to meet each other, share their experiences and exchange advice, and of course drink wine together (the restaurant has a well-stocked cellar). As usual, once at the table, Isabella and the guys decided to pair the coming dishes with a blind wine-tasting. The rule was simple: in turns, each of them visited the restaurant's cellar and picked up a bottle, which was then placed into a black sleeve and put on the table. The wine was then poured into the glasses and after a moment of silence in which everyone had the chance to smell it and have a first sip, a series of guesses started to pop up from any corner of the table. Generally, the first questions were aimed at guessing the macro-area of origin, gradually reducing the geographical scale up to a single region. Then participants formulated deductions about the grape variety used, the vinification style adopted, and finally the vintage (eventually even the producer). After a few bottles opened, tasted and in some cases properly identified, one of the guys selected a red wine produced by Isabella five years earlier. Another round of questions was asked, and guesses pronounced until a common verdict took shape: a red wine from the Mediterranean area, not excessively aged, grape variety and producer still missing. The guy who chose the bottle decided to reveal the label at last, and everyone (including myself) instinctively turned their eyes towards Isabella. She paused for a brief moment, stuck her nose again in her glass as if she hadn't recognised a good friend at first sight and was feeling bad about that, while her eyes started to become teary. The atmosphere suddenly changed, and after a moment of silence Isabella took the floor. She told us she got emotional as she suddenly reconnected to a period of her life as a winegrower where she had been approaching her work through a different state of mind, characterised by less pressures and more energy. That vintage also marked the beginning of her relationship with her current boyfriend who had come to her winery that year as a winemaker apprentice. Her wine made her remember a specific period of her life and work as a winegrower, and the fact she couldn't recognise it made her realise the transformations that had occurred throughout her career and life (which for Isabella are the same thing as she always says). (Fieldnote 01/10/17)

Witnessing that event proved to be important to my understanding of the deep engagement informants such as Isabella had with their own wines. The latter indeed embodied intimate elements of the lives of these winegrowers, including their memories, choices, crises, taste, and

personality. As a faithful reflection of their own creators, these wines were said to mark different phases in the life-trajectories of these producers. Margherita for example used these words to connotate her wines: “I like to define the wines we are currently producing as moody, I like this term ‘moody’, as I sometimes realise that they retrace not only our state of mind but also our moments of crisis, our enthusiasm, they retrace what we are at a smaller scale” (interview). According to Isabella, her wines changed over time as a reflection of the transformation she undertook as an individual and producer, and that was mainly due to her shifting sensorial engagement with wine. This evolution in the working experience of these producers generally presented a similar trajectory pointing towards a closer interpretation of *terroir*. As I showed in the previous chapter, that was the case for Margherita. Isabella told me a similar story when she described to me her latest project involving micro-vinifications of Frappato grapes from different parcels of her vineyard. If in the past she was more oriented towards the expression of the “naturalness” of her practices (by rejecting oenological additives and invasive technology), now her efforts were dedicated to emphasise the sensorial differences characterising plots of her vineyards located on different soils. As she told me, this new project was the result of a prolonged experience as a winegrower working in the same *territorio* and with a specific grape variety (Frappato), which she felt particularly connected with. During my last stay at her place, she was working on the labels to put on these new wines which would be released in the following months. Isabella decided to use different labels, each identifying the single vineyard chosen to produce the corresponding wine.

As commodities imbued with human elements, natural wines are also said to reflect the winegrower’s personality. That was explained to me not only by my winegrower informants but also other professionals involved in the promotion and sales of these wines. Elisa, a Turin-based natural wine distributor, explicitly told me that “their wine resembles them in an incredible way, but not all the wines as they might produce five or six different labels, but the wine which they feel mostly connected to (…) their top-level wine reflects their character” (interview). This close association between a wine and its producer sometimes implied that the dynamics affecting a winegrower’s social relations also had a corresponding impact on the way her wines were tasted and judged. That was the case for Livia, as she told me that she stopped drinking wines made by winegrowers with whom she had an argument with. Her personal relationship with other producers extended to include their wines, the two things running side by side. By the same token, I was often said by my informants that the wines produced by winegrowers who were close friends of them were very rarely disliked. Again, the two things running in parallel.

As human artefacts, these wines also take on cultural and social attributes connecting the single producer to a larger community of practice both on a synchronic and diachronic level. My

informants indeed shared a similar ethos in relation to their work as natural winegrowers, and opposed that to industrial winemaking and its underlying logic of production and techno-scientific domination of nature. As I argued in the previous chapter, participating to a community of practice entailed sharing a similar worldview which actively shaped the way a practice was interpreted by the members of that community (Grasseni, 2004a). As one producer stated in relation to his work as natural winegrower, "you cannot see wine through a narrow-minded perspective, as it were something completely detached from your life. I think that is a huge mistake. We work in a certain way because we are in a certain way and we think in a certain way. The opposite doesn't work".[2] This shared cosmology differentiates these wines from more anonymous commodities available on the market, and at the same time does not allow a clear distinction between "work" and "life" categories. As Isabella specified to me numerous times, being a winegrower was not considered as a job but a way of conducting her life, where wine represented a living object of love and the true expression of her persona.

On a diachronic level, reconnecting to a community of practice entails a dialogue with tradition. If for a moment we look at the larger wine sector and the way wine is communicated, it can be seen that the appeal to tradition is commonly used to emphasise the connection with the place of origin and so enhance the value of the product. Compared to other food products, wine is more easily associated to supposedly timeless traditions rooted in specific locales. It is indeed no coincidence that *terroir* first emerged as a concept related to winegrowing, and later adopted by other sectors of food production. While my informants were well aware of their privileged position as wine producers compared to farmers cultivating other crops, they identified the value of their work (and craft) in their physical engagement with the living materialities with wine. While the modern wine industry has gradually detached producers from the end product through mechanisation and a pervasive use of technologies in each stage of the productive process, natural winegrowers stress the fundamental role of manual labour and bodily engagement as core values of their work. By making invisible the site of production and the producers' bodies, the wine industry has erased altogether those social, cultural and aesthetic elements embedded into local practices and knowledge (Van Aken, 2014). What survives of these local repositories of knowledge are romantic images of antiquated tools and rural farmhouses appearing on wine labels and brochures aimed at vehiculating nostalgic memories of a supposed rural idyll, which are themselves commodified through a kind of commercial folklore sold to consumers (Laferté, 2011). As Domingos (2014) argues in relation to the representation of Alentejo region in wine-marketing

[2] This is an extract from an interview taken as part of a public online event organised by the Italian natural wine association *ViniVeri* in 2020.

strategies, “the countryside becomes a living and disciplined museum” (2014: 28), where the past is naturalised and the lived experiences of local farmers reduced to a crystallised image of rural life. Conversely, for natural winegrowers working the vineyard and following wine in the cellar are not just operations aimed at producing a commodity, but it is the very context where knowledge is socially-reproduced and certain aesthetic values cultivated. Tradition was for them a meaningful resource to (selectively) draw on, not just a well-crafted marketing strategy. It was this lived and embodied experience of the place that was vehiculated through their stories when selling their wines.

When my informants referred to local winemaking traditions, they pointed towards a shared set of practices and ideas transmitted through generations that still proved effective and meaningful in relation with what they were doing. What I want to emphasise here is that these traditions were not mindlessly replicated, instead they were the result of a reflexive selection operated by these producers. Demossier (2011) and Teil (2014) observe a similar attitude in the contemporary French wine world, where the “mechanical” reproduction of the viticultural and winemaking techniques codified by the AOC system (an approach critically defined as the “AOC recipe”) has been increasingly criticised by groups of vintners seeking *terroir* authenticity. I will expand more on the problematic relationship between natural wines and regulatory frameworks later in this chapter, at this point I want to shed light on the way my informants approached tradition through their everyday practices. An indication of this reflexive attitude towards tradition lies in the way my informants generally rejected any identification as winegrowers “looking backwards”, or “turning to the past”. Their approach to winemaking indeed left space for individual creativity and innovation, without that being considered antithetical to tradition but instead a vital element of it. As Abbots (2018) observes when describing the work of craft cider-makers in Britain, “they consistently celebrate historical continuities in practice, materials and environment and are aware of the legacy on which they draw. Such continuities are not rendered static, however, but allow for a conception of tradition that is fluid and subject to change, in contrast to more reified frameworks” (2018: 134-135). I argue that the same holds for natural winegrowers, even those who were born into traditional small farmer families who might be expected to retain a stronger attachment to local tradition.

As I have demonstrated so far, natural wines are not only “alive” but imbued with the essence of their producers and their reinterpretation of place. They traced the life-trajectories of those who crafted them, and reflected their personality, their worldview and the relationship they had with local tradition. For these reason, natural wines can be framed as “unfinished commodities”, an expression I borrow from Paxson’s (2012) ethnographic work on artisanal cheesemaking in America. According to the author, compared to a finished commodity whose value results from

the economic equivalence between its use value and exchange value, unfinished commodities are unstable and open to heterogenous forms of value. If, in Marxist terms, a finished commodity leads to labour alienation and fetishism due to the erasure of the social conditions of its production, unfinished commodities such as artisanal cheese keep the experiences, sentiments and interests of those who produced them as part of the equation. As Paxson clarifies, "(i)n calling attention to their own labor, as well as to the productive contributions of farm animals, bacteria, and fungi, cheesemakers seek to provide a demystified life for artisanal cheese, one distinct from conventional commodity cheese" (2012: 14). In the case of wine, the same difference can be found by comparing conventional winemaking with its natural counterpart as I argued above. In similar terms Terrio (1996) argues that unlike mass-produced commodities, handcrafted chocolates in France are "incarnated signs" (1996: 71) unveiling particular forms of production and their attendant social relations, and for this reason they "are the bearers of the social identities of their makers" (ibid.).

Connected to the "unfinished" status of natural wines, is the ambiguous social position of these producers as artisans in the contemporary society where the vast majority of people have an alienated experience of work and for whom the latter does not easily equate with "life" and "pleasure". As Paxson (2012) notes in relation to American artisanal cheesemakers, these producers are neither capitalists exploiting systematically the labour of others, nor wage-workers with no deep connection with the commodities they produce. Through the comments expressed by external people not directly involved in this field (such as friends of mine), I could realise the ambivalent social position of my participants. When describing the topic of my research, it was common for me to hear comments like "wow, it must be amazing, living with them in the countryside in their beautiful farmhouses surrounded by vineyards, drinking wine all day long" or, in a more sceptical tone, "they surely are virtuous winegrowers and respectful to the environment, but have a look at the prices of their wines!". These reactions partly contrasted with my own fieldwork experience and the reality I witnessed while living and working with my informants. At the same time though, those comments revealed the ambiguity and tensions nested in the social and economic positioning of these producers within the larger society and the market. I propose to unravel this complexity by looking at the way these wines are presented and communicated both by my informants and other wine professionals working in this sector. This will allow me to enlarge my focus from the production site to include wider arenas where the values of these wines are negotiated through broader qualitative frameworks such as the national system of appellations.

6.2.1 The narrative and evocative dimension of natural wines

As other types of commodities produced in a place and then traded and consumed in different localities, natural wines have a "social life" (Appadurai, 1986) and a "cultural biography" (Kopytoff, 1986) attached to them. Still, due to the way they are crafted, and the values embedded in their production, these wines present a particularly evocative quality which differentiates them from other commodities in general, and other wines in particular. The idea that they possess this evocative quality was largely shared among those involved in their production and trade, as I could realise during my fieldwork and even previously as a consumer and wine waiter in a restaurant in my hometown.[3] Recalling my very first encounters with these wines and the way I was then trained to serve them to clients, the first reactions I had were marked by a certain surprise connected to their unusual sensorial aesthetics, and curiosity about the particular stories attached to them. I will start by focusing on the narrative dimension of natural wines in this section and then I will move to the question of taste in the next part of the chapter. When I was trained by the owner of the restaurant where I first approached these wines, along with the sensorial characteristics of each wine, I was introduced to the biographies of each single producer. With the opening of each bottle, I started to imagine a small world with its specific geographical features, the people living in it, their life-stories and even their personality. During my apprenticeship, each wine-tasting was inevitably paired with a story, as if the bottle was a book ready to be leafed through. When serving myself the wines from the list to clients who were not familiar with them, I could perceive the same interest and curiosity. I am not implying that reactions were always positive and enthusiastic, indeed I happened to find bottles nearly untouched on the tables by the end of the service or sometimes I was kindly asked to replace the wine I had chosen with another one that was less "unusual". However, it was common for those who were positively impressed to come again to the restaurant with the explicit request to drink a bottle made by the same producer (or produced through the same approach). When I attended natural wine fairs as part of my fieldwork, I observed how this story-telling activity routinely accompanied the practice of wine-tasting.

Usually, if the visitor approaching the stand did not know anything about the winery or the area of production, the winegrower would start describing the region of provenance and the grape varieties cultivated locally. As a way to visually present their *terroir*, producers would also show photos of their plants (the oldest vines were usually given greater exposure) and the surrounding

[3] The restaurant serves fresh, seasonal food which is cooked following traditional Italian recipes with a certain degree of experimentation. The clientele is mainly composed by middle-class consumers, international tourists and local aficionados.

landscape, including the fauna inhabiting their vineyards (as a way to stress the importance of biodiversity and the liveliness of the soil). Compared to the sophisticated brochures and eye-catching marketing materials offered by medium and larger conventional wineries, natural producers generally relied on nonprofessional pictures taken with their own cameras and collected into informal photo albums. Some of them would bring some local stones, pieces of rocks, samples of sand and fossils found in their vineyard as physical evidence of the soil characterising the area where they produced their wines (see picture below).

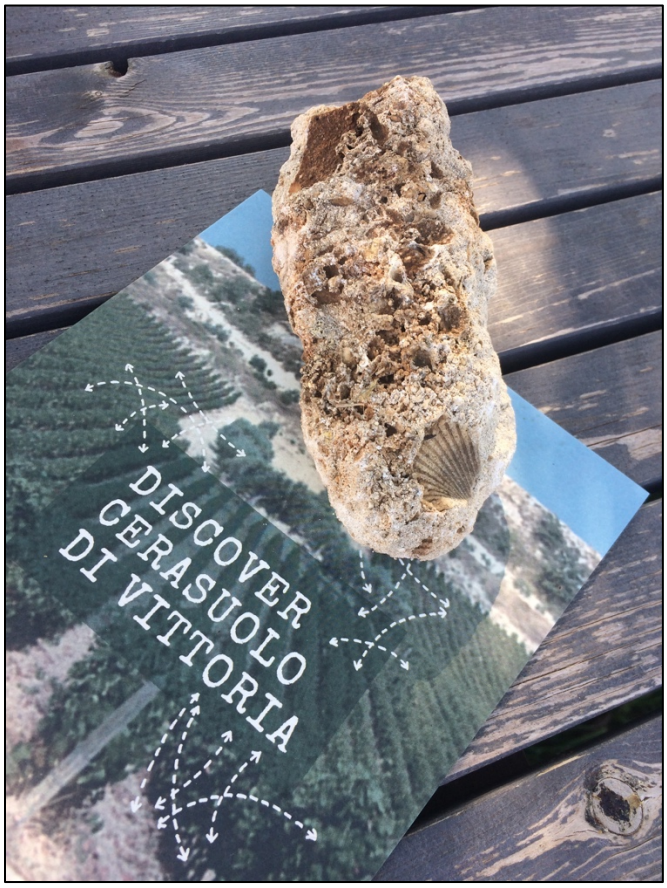


Figure 16 A piece of local rock with a marine fossil used by Isabella to describe her area (photo by author)

Others would complement the wine-tasting with other foodstuffs produced in their farming estates. Margherita for example would usually offer the organic hazelnuts cultivated by her family on their hills. While describing their own wines, these winegrowers also spoke of their projects, the decisions they had to make during each vintage, as well as their own aspirations and convictions as farmers and individuals. Often, wine offered the opportunity to start a discussion about agriculture, the national and European policies regulating the wine and food sector, as well as the difficulties in struggling with a burdensome bureaucracy. For example, during a wine fair I attended in 2017, a producer told me he disagreed with the current EU legal definition of "rural entrepreneur" (*imprenditore agricolo*) applied to farmers like him, as it entailed a capitalist logic

of production which did not value his work as a custodian of the local traditional knowledge and natural heritage. These public events enabled a political and cultural commentary around themes connected to taste, practices of conscious consumption, and sustainable production (see chapter 4). Also in this sense, natural wines can be framed as unfinished commodities due to their potential to activate multiple discourses around their production and consumption. Through their wines and the values attached to their production, natural winegrowers reflexively placed themselves within the contemporary political economic order.

6.2.2 Corporeal taste as a sign of quality

While the narrative dimension played an important role in the communication and promotion of these wines, it was mainly through taste that the relevance of the work of my informants and the values attached to their wines became mostly evident. Natural wines indeed present a strikingly alternative sensorial aesthetics compared to more conventional wines. If on one hand that is the material result of a series of practices conducted both in the vineyard and in the cellar, on the other hand this sensorial specificity gets assessed through external quality standards set by normative frameworks and consumption trends. I argue that taste comes to represent the main terrain on which the values of these wines are expressed and contested at the same time. The notion of taste I draw on is based on the works by Hennion (2007) and Hennion and Teil (2004) on amateurs and their engagement with the objects they love. The authors embrace a pragmatist perspective on taste and criticise the dominant sociological framework of analysis which frames taste as the passive individual reflection of socially determined dispositions. Instead, the French sociologists define taste as a situated and reflexive activity

> involving *amateurs* turned towards their object in a *perplexed* mode. By 'perplexed' we mean them being on the lookout for what it does to them, attentive to traces of what it does to others; a sharing out among the direct sensations to be experienced (or whose experience is being sought), and the indirect relays that permit one to change one's own judgement a bit, while relying in part on the advice of others (Hennion, 2007: 104).[4]

I follow this perspective on taste as it sheds light on the corporeal encounter between the taster and the thing tasted without reducing the latter to a passive object, instead considering it "an infinite reservoir of differences" (Hennion, 2007: 101). In this sense, I will analyse how tasting for my informants is a sensorial and reflexive activity and at the same time a collective technique

[4] While the authors develop their ideas by focussing on *amateurs* (as opposed to non-professionals) only, I argue that in my research context what they claim applies not only to consumers with an interest in natural wines, but also the same producers and wine professionals.

involving a group of tasters sharing judgements over the quality of the thing tasted. I will start from discussing the sensory experience of tasting wine which was at the centre of the work conducted by my informants in the cellar once grapes transformed into must and then wine. As I showed in the previous chapter, taste is indeed a sense particularly stimulated throughout the various stages of production. Even before entering the cellar, grapes are object of scrupulous samplings aimed at assessing their level of sugar and acidity during the crucial weeks anticipating the harvesting period. After the fermentation, producers get involved into a series of systematic tastings to assess the quality of the evolving wine which in turn will guide them in deciding the future steps to take. Here I present an extract from a fieldnote where I describe in detail this sensorial process.

Compared to last year, when Isabella's winery was quite packed with people working with her during the hectic days of harvesting, this year the number of cellar workers is smaller and I have the opportunity to follow Isabella more closely in her daily operations in the cellar without putting much pressure on her. Indeed, I am now familiar with this working environment so I am more aware of the specific rationality structuring the space of the cellar. I have learned how each body must occupy a specific place according to the task and how important it is not to be in the way. This year I have also got the chance to participate in the creation of the wine assemblages, an operation which in Italian is called *fare il taglio*, literally "doing the cut". It is indeed that moment of the year when Isabella has to blend wines from different tanks, which together will make up her entry-level red wine, an assemblage of Nero d'Avola and Frappato wines. I am training my palate to perceive the differences occurring from tank to tank and from day to day, repeating Isabella's gestures and listening to her evaluations. Wines are tasted directly from the vat various times per day, generally at fixed hours of the day starting from early in the morning. It is important to find those moments when the palate is more reactive to external stimuli, and for Isabella tasting in the morning proves quite effective. By tasting the same wines in the same order over various days in a row systematically, I have started to gain a sort of sensorial continuity or habituation that allows me to understand better what it means for my informants to have an intimate relationship with the sensuous materiality of wine. I find some tanks are more easily recognisable than others; for example, tank number 6 is easy to identify due to a peculiar smell of eucalyptus I perceived during my first tasting. With this initial sensation in my head, I have been trying to feel how it is changing and evolving throughout the days. Isabella uses different tanks to keep grapes from different plots divided even after the fermentation and until she has to blend them together. That allows her to reproduce a sort of detailed sensorial map of her vineyards into the cellar. While she actively encourages her assistants to establish an attentive and tactile relationship with wine, she is the only one in charge of making the various assemblages. This

process is the result of a series of samplings repeated many times a day, where she first tastes the wine from each single tank individually and then start combining small amounts of wine from different vats into the same glass. During the act of tasting, she looks absorbed in a sort of meditative silence where she browses through her sensorial memories trying to attune her palate to the wines she made the previous vintages. While tasting the current wine, she also has to take into account how it will evolve, in particular how the different components (acidity and sugar) will adjust to each other over time. Not relying on external substances to modify the wine, she can just "play" (*giocare* in Italian) with the different vessels at her disposal (wooden barrels, concrete and stainless-steel tanks) and move wine from one tank to the other to "play" a bit with oxygen. In order to blend the various wines, she does not follow a fixed recipe but instead she seems to proceed more instinctively, trusting her own senses step by step. In these days where I am following her in her tastings, she is actively including me in the process by asking me my own impressions on the wines tasted. Trying to overcome my initial embarrassment, I share my perceptions glass by glass by using expressions that best capture what I feel: "a bit salty", "dry", "short", etc. She listens to me with an open-minded attitude, and by sharing our perceptions we reach a sort of common judgment. When Isabella is satisfied with an assemblage, she takes a note of the numbered tanks she wants to blend on her cellar diary. (fieldnote 04/10/18)

The sensorial aesthetics of natural wines is then crafted by these producers through a process that simultaneously takes into account the living properties of wine and the winegrower's sensitivity and capacity to become affected by them. The cellar represents a key site where taste (in terms of judgment) is shaped by an ongoing sensorial engagement with wine (the tasting experience). As Abbots (2018) argues in relation to British craft cider makers, it is through the taste of the product that the artisanship entailed in the productive process is made visible. By shedding light on their perceptual involvement in the unfolding materialities of wine, natural winegrowers in fact place their own bodies at the centre of their work and at the same time they oppose their corporeal practices to conventional and industrial winemaking. Following Abbots' argument, these producers play the role of tastemakers within their restricted universe and in doing so they set the agenda of what counts as "quality" and "good taste". Quoting Abbots, "(c)orporeal taste, as the manifestation of a maker's value system, provides a paradigm through which social tastes can be defined, assessed, and hierarchised" (2018: 127). Although my informants did not conform to conventional quality standards (as I will show later in this chapter), they actively constructed an alternative normative framework through which they judged the quality of their and other producers' natural wines.

As I said above, the cellars of my informants were one of the main venues where this corporeal taste was actively cultivated and promoted. That was particularly evident in those cases where

wineries became attractive hubs drawing young apprentices, wine professionals and other cultural intermediaries interested in natural winegrowing. During my fieldwork, I observed how the estates of some of my informants were thriving centres where practices and ideas connected to “good taste” and “quality” were shaped and spread. In chapter 4, I described Isabella’s estate as a sought-after destination not only for wine tourists but also leading personalities of the international food and wine scene. Masters of Wine, Michelin-starred chefs, wine journalists and distributors periodically walked through the gates of Isabella’s winery to gain a better sense of her work. In those occasions, Isabella’s guests were invited for a tour in her vineyards, followed by a visit in the cellar where she showed the concrete tanks occupying the main fermentation room as well as the wooden barrels aligned into the aging room (a dimly lit space located underground and carved in the local bare rock). If the visit took place right after the harvesting period when the grape masses were still fermenting, Isabella would invite her guests to share the sensorial experience of breaking the cap of grape skins in one of the open vessels placed in the middle of the cellar. When getting in contact with the living materialities of the must, I could see the amazement and excitement in the eyes of the visitors (something I had experienced myself).

The tour then would continue with a wine-tasting taking place in Isabella’s own house, where visitors could pair her wines with her olive oil and other food produced locally. During these encounters, Isabella would provide her visitors with detailed descriptions of the geographical locale (in terms of soil, climate, vines, grape varieties used), the weather conditions of specific vintages, and the technical aspects of the production process. Through this narration, it emerged not only Isabella’s choices and decisions made throughout each step of the process, but also the meanings and values attached to her work (her respect for the vines, the attention paid to the living elements of wine, her vision on agriculture more generally, etc.). Looking in particular at the wine-tasting moment, all the attendants freely shared their own impressions with no one exercising authority over the other tasters. Isabella was open to the comments arising from her guests, and interested in knowing their perceptions as if her wines were not defined once for all, but instead able to engender different judgments. The language used in those occasions did not resemble the sophisticated lexicon of sommeliers and wine connoisseurs, and it was less focused on visual parameters and a detailed description of the bouquet and more on the tactile components of wine (in particular acidity and tannins). Overall, wine was treated as a living entity unfolding and evolving in the glass and for this reason time was an important dimension in the process of tasting. I will expand more on these specific aspects of the wine-tasting practice later in this chapter, for the moment I want to highlight how tasting natural wines was a corporeal and situated activity that required reflexivity and attentiveness, and at the same time it provided the

social context where definitions of “good taste” and “quality” were shaped and shared among those involved in this practice.

6.2.3 Natural winegrowing as a lifestyle

Along with the reproduction of this alternative normative framework, these occasions allowed producers to disclose their own worldviews not only through their discourses but also in more practical terms. That was particularly evident to me while I was spending my time with Claire and her family harvesting in their estate on Etna. During that period of the year, Claire’s place became a lively hub for various groups of people who came to visit her estate, taste her wines and share with them the festive atmosphere characterising the harvesting season. Since my very first day with Claire, I could feel a sort of relaxed and informal environment surrounding the daily activities undertaken in the vineyard and in the cellar. Claire and her partner (who also worked as a natural wine importer and distributor) had been hosting her parents and brother who had come to help them collect the grapes and take care of their two children. A young Tasmanian head sommelier of a restaurant and organiser of a natural wine fair, had been invited at their place to visit the area and have a closer understanding of the work behind Claire’s wines (which featured in his restaurant’s list). Moreover, everyday day other visitors informally joined our team, helping with carrying the crates from the vineyard to the cellar or emptying them into the old *palmento*, the local traditional open stone vat Claire used to ferment the grapes (see picture below).

Figure 17 Claire's *palmento* with one of the vats filled with harvested grapes (photo by author)

There was a couple of local fledgling winemakers hanging around Claire's winery to seek advice from her, who had been allowed to use one of her clay amphoras to vinify their own grapes. In this sense, Claire's winery was a sort of laboratory for local apprentice winemakers and amateurs who wanted to experiment with small plots of vineyards owned in that area. There were also international wine professionals working as distributors, importers or head sommeliers in restaurants serving natural wines (including Claire's). They were all there to get a direct sense of the work done by Claire so as to better describe the story behind the bottles they would serve back in their countries. This heterogenous group of people gravitated around Claire's place while I was conducting my fieldwork at her winery. Their curiosity and genuine interest in the working activities conducted in the vineyard and in the cellar contributed to create a vibrant and joyful environment. The lunch breaks in particular were marked by a convivial atmosphere, with all of us gathering in Claire's courtyard where meals were consumed with a beautiful vista on the vineyards and the volcano and with some music in the background. Locally sourced food prepared by Claire and her family was combined with other dishes offered by local neighbours, and numerous bottles of wine circulated around the table. Many of them were unlabelled magnum bottles from different vintages coming directly from Claire's cellar, but there were also wines made by other fellow natural producers. In this context, tasting wine was an integral part of Claire's lifestyle, not something detached by it or just a means to earn a livelihood. By sharing her

wines with her guests, Claire was also sharing the values and meanings attached to her work and life as a natural wine producer. In her words, “we are not trendy people, we don’t care, well if we go out we wear something like a clean pair of jeans but I do not use make-up every day or we don’t get crazy for cars.. our house, you saw it, it’s like that, instead (we spend) our money to eat and drink and spend time with friends and travelling, these are the important things for me and my partner”. When I asked her how she chose the range of prices to apply to her wines, the reply she gave me pointed towards the same direction: “we want people to drink our wines, not to collect them, we want wines which are affordable not only for the rich, but that you can drink on an everyday basis, at lunch, at dinner, without having to spend a fortune. And then there are other wines whose cost of the work in the vineyard is much higher, so in order to earn a living out of it we are forced to apply a little higher price” (interview 02/10/17). Producing and consuming wine for Claire were then two activities tightly connected, with one enabling the other. Her approach to winegrowing and, at large, life was at one with the way she welcomed her guests, built relationships with local people and shared with them her knowledge and passion for wine.

6.2.4 The social reproduction of a natural taste

Another important context where my informants actively played the role of tastemakers, were the annual wine fairs organised by the natural wine associations of which they were members, and more exclusive wine-tastings arranged by their distributors and importers. As part of my fieldwork, I attended many of these events which allowed the community of producers to gather in one location for a couple of days and present their wines to the public. As I argued in chapter 4, natural wine fairs were occasions of intense sociality both for the community of producers and the general public, with wine acting as a major catalyst. Here I want to highlight how these events were crucial for the reproduction and promotion of an alternative normative framework where producers acted as tastemakers. These events were indeed important occasions for producers to mutually communicate their knowledge and experiences, taste together their wines reinforcing that way their shared sensorial parameters of taste. As my informants told me numerous times, tasting with other fellow producers was a fundamental learning experience as they could train their own palates (especially in the presence of more experienced winegrowers). During the various wine-tastings offered to the public attending these events, producers had the possibility to explain their philosophy of production, describe the geographical features characterising their wines and define the criteria to assess the quality of their products. The visitors were indeed actively invited by the producer to identify what in other contexts would have been considered as flaws and re-shape those sensorial perceptions in a positive fashion. For instance, my informants would positively assess the cloudiness marking their wine or the volatile acidity pervading the

taster's palate and explain the reasons behind that alternative aesthetic. Obviously, the level of complexity of these conversations depended on the kind of interlocutor who was standing in front of them, and my informants told me that they could discern between an experienced taster and a neophyte since the very first question posed by the person approaching their stand. The most engaging and economically determinant exchanges were the ones with the professionals of the sector (wine journalists, importers and distributors), which in fact might end up in new profitable networks potentially opening up new sales channels. In the case of my informants, the working relationships forged with their agents (especially the very first ones who invested on them and traded their wines) had transformed into long-standing friendships. Having an influential distributor or importer capable of promoting the values endorsed by the community of natural producers was indeed crucial for the financial viability of my informants' enterprises. As Isabella told me once when discussing about these relationships, it was important for her to find professionals willing to engage and empathise with her (and other fellow producers') perspective on natural winegrowing as they were considered key actors in the promotion of a natural wine culture.

Natural wine fairs were not only venues where the public could taste craft products that were difficult to find in supermarket and other major retailers, but also an arena where an alternative wine knowledge was produced and transmitted through social interactions, and a series of thematic seminars and workshops running parallel to the main event which were usually organised by cultural agents such as wine educators, journalists and experts. For example, during the wine fair *Vini di Vignaioli* in November 2018, Lydia and Claude Bourguignon (two renown French microbiologists and soil experts) were invited to present their latest book on sustainable agriculture at a roundtable organised by the independent editor Possibilia Editore.[6] Besides the producers' stands, there was usually a section devoted to books, magazines and other cultural products traded by independent publishers who contributed to frame a public discourse (and a language) around natural winegrowing, the wine-tasting practice and other related themes (sustainable food production, organic agriculture, wine-tasting expertise, etc.). During my fieldwork, I found many of these publications in the houses of my informants who read them with interest to get updated about the state-of-the-art of the natural wine world, the emergence of new production sites and wineries, and the most recent dynamics affecting the wine and food sector at large (see picture below).[7]

[6] Their book has been translated in Italian by Possibilia Editore Bourguignon, L. and Bourguignon, C. (2018) *Manifesto per un'agricoltura sostenibile*. Translated by Cogliati, S. Milano: Possibilia Editore..
[7] The stories of some of my informants (and their wines) featured in these magazines. I personally used these materials to gain a better understanding of the values attached to these wines.

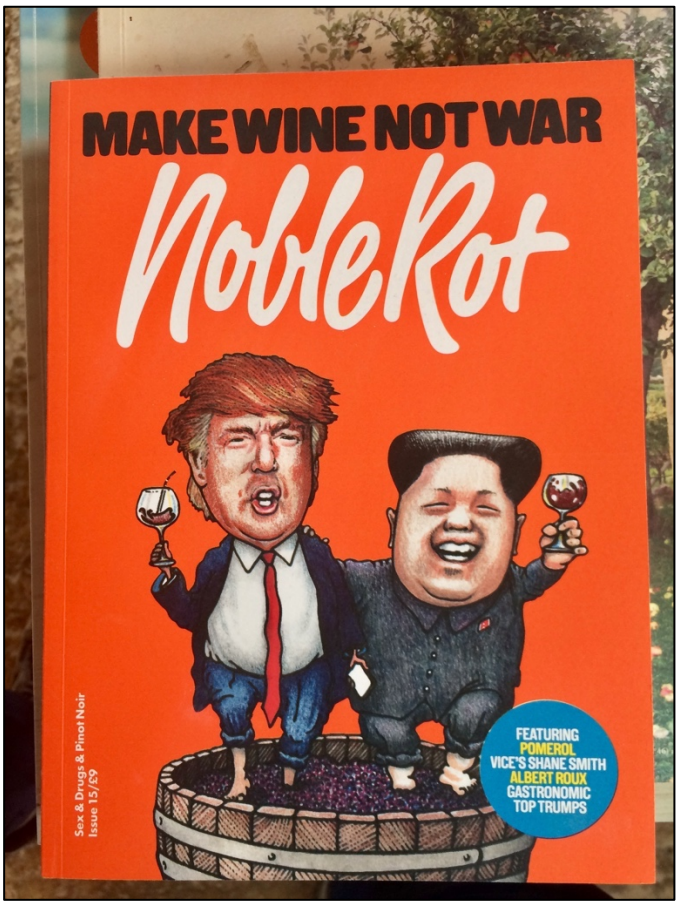


Figure 18 A magazine dedicated to natural wines in Isabella's house (photo by author)

The literary works produced by the pioneers of the communication and promotion of this small wine world, for example the volumes published by Porthos Edizioni since the early 2000s, represented for my informants a valuable tool for their own cultural (and identity) formation as natural winegrowers at the beginning of, and throughout, their own working experience.

What characterised this social production of knowledge, I argue, was a pronounced reflexive attitude towards the way their parameters of taste were shaped, assessed and defined. As they were aware of their contested position within the larger wine sector, these producers approached their work with a particular sensitivity to their own practices, attributing positive values to the craft involved in their engagement with wine. As a result of this approach to wine production, taste was for them a key category of meaning as it imparted the main differentiation from the more conventional industrial wines. This reflexivity characterising their identities as natural winegrowers was a common trait of their persona, as I could realise during the time spent with them on the field.

6.3 The relational aesthetics of natural wines

After having explained the peculiar status of these wines as "unfinished commodities" and the modalities through which these products are communicated and assessed, I now expand more on their alternative sensorial aesthetics in order to understand better the place occupied by these products within the larger wine (and food) sector. Natural wines represent an outstanding deviation from standard oenological practices and that has an impact on their recognition within official normative frameworks such as the Italian system of appellations. I will start with an ethnographic vignette which finds myself tasting a glass of Livia's wine at her place during a winter evening, where she discussed how she dealt with the unpredictability of her wines.

After dinner, we decided to open a bottle of a limited-edition white wine produced by Livia's family, which was the result of a unique combination of oversight and luck. Indeed, in 2000 her brother had left an entire tank of Moscato must unattended and had forgotten it in the cellar for over fifteen years. Thanks to the spontaneous creation of a thick superficial layer of yeast (technically called *flor*) the wine did not spoil, instead underwent a long process of evolution which is usually undertaken to produce the Spanish dry sherries and the French *vins jaunes*. When they finally recovered the abandoned tank, they got surprised as the final wine had maintained its integrity throughout all those years.[8] When Livia told me that story, I could not imagine what to really expect from that wine other than a certain sense of surprise. She opened the bottle, poured some wine in our glasses and left it there for a while to give it some oxygen. It had a nice amber colour and when I stuck my nose into the glass, I was hit by a wide range of unusual smells ranging from rosemary, walnuts, and thyme to candied orange and dried apricots. While I was mentally trying to connect those smells to past sensorial memories, Livia seemed engaged in the same process as if she were tasting her wine for the first time too. We shared our own different impressions out loud, trying to build a comprehensive portray made up of sensations, sensorial memories, and free associations. When I finally tasted it, I was struck by its vibrant acidity and freshness which were accompanied by mineral notes and a feeling of salinity which persisted in my mouth for a while. In that occasion, Livia told me that one of the main characteristics that differentiated natural wines from their conventional counterpart was their innate tendency to be unpredictable, even for the same producer who had crafted them. Due to their liveliness, they were highly sensitive to the weather conditions, temperature and even moon phases and as a result they constantly evolved in the bottle and changed from day to day even once opened. Producers such as Livia were then engaged in a sort of never-ending process of discovery of the

[8] These serendipitous events are not unusual amongst natural producers, and they reveal the value attributed by these winegrowers to unpredictability and uncertainty.

multiple sensorial possibilities offered by their wines. As Livia pointed out, that did not mean that the sensations found in her wines were always pleasant on every occasion, instead they could also sometimes result quite disappointing. That was part of the process. From the way she described this unfolding sense of surprise, I realised that unpredictability was perceived as a positive value and evidence of their own approach to winegrowing.

6.3.1 Valuing inconsistency and uncertainty

Compared to conventional wines, which are praised by their consumers for being consistent and predictable over the years, natural wines present an alternative sensorial aesthetics. In order to appreciate their distinctive character, it is fundamental to take into account the core values that shaped their production. The starting point of these producers was represented by an attentive and engaged relationship with the non-human multiple entities inhabiting the vineyard environment. Treating vines as having their own agency was indeed the main assumption guiding the viticultural practices undertaken by my informants in their vineyards. Once in the cellar, their work proceeded by maintaining the same ethos and in fact they accompanied the living materialities of wine without interfering through invasive practices and the addition of external substances such as enzymes, commercial yeast and other oenological products that would alter wine's original microbiological components. This perceptual engagement with wine, based on a work of care and as such open to intuition, experimentation and uncertainty, was also applied to the repeated acts of tasting and consumption. In what follows I will show what it really meant for my informants to taste a wine which was said to be alive and unfolding not only in the bottle and the glass, but also in the taster's own body. To frame my argumentation, I will draw on the vitalist approach I adopted to analyse the human – nonhuman interactions taking place both in the vineyard and in the cellar. Recalling the example of the apple illustrated by Mol (2008), in the encounter between the tasting subject and the object tasted these supposedly clear-cut boundaries are blurred into the creation of a network of multiple relations where no one has full control of the situation.[9] If applied to my context of study, it seems correct to argue that the taster's body and the wine tasted could be said to be entangled with each other, with human agency not fully governing the whole process. In the specific case of wine, a temporary obfuscation of human rationality is in a way something easy to imagine considering the intoxicating power of wine on human body. But my aim here is to frame wine as acting with its

[9] In Mol's words: "*I eat an apple.* Is the agency in the *I* or in the *apple*? I eat, for sure, but without apples before long there would be no "I" left. And it is even more complicated. For how to separate us out to begin with, the apple and me? One moment this may be possible: here is the apple, there am I. But a little later (bite, chew, swallow) I have become (made out of) apple; while the apple is (a part of) me" (Mol, 2008: 30).

own agency regardless its capacity to alter the human mind when consumed in larger amounts. With its multiplicity of living entities each possessing their own agency, natural wine is better thought of a sort of Deleuzian and Guattarian *assemblage*. Bennett (2010) draws explicitly on these two authors to give a definition of assemblage:

> Assemblages are ad hoc grouping of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of sorts. Assemblages are living, throbbing confederations that are able to function despite the persistent presence of energies that confound them from within […] The effects generated by an assemblage are […] emergent, emergent in that their ability to make something happen […] is distinct from the sum of the vital force of each materiality considered alone. Each member and proto-member of the assemblage has a certain vital force, but there is also an effectivity proper to the grouping as such: an agency of the assemblage. And precisely because each member-actant maintains an energetic pulse slightly "off" from that of the assemblage, an assemblage is never a stolid block but an open-ended collective, a "non-totalizable sum". An assemblage thus not only has a distinctive history of formation but a finite life span. (2010: 23-24)

Framing natural wine as an assemblage implies considering the winegrower and her actions as an integral part of it or, in Benett's words, one of the vital forces adding to the agency of the assemblage as such. When my informants talked about the liveliness of their wines and the manner they behaved once tasted and consumed, affecting their own bodies and memories in unpredictable ways, they were pointed towards this complex agency and its open-ended character. This inherent uncertainty, which exposed these producers to a certain degree of risk, was positively assessed but at the same time had to be carefully handled. Margherita, for instance, made it really clear this point while discussing about her "moody wines": "I experimented a little too much without sulphur dioxide over these last few years and now I have to take a step back for the sake of my own emotional stability [we both chuckle].. It's nice to experiment but it's also nice to keep my feet on the ground" (interview 25/01/17). It was crucial for my informants, especially those who tended to have a radical approach to experimentation, to reach a sort of delicate balance between their desire of innovation and experimentation on one hand, and the necessity to craft a product which was marketable enough on the other. As I have shown so far, they were all well aware of the existence of a niche market where their wines could be profitably placed, and in fact they had developed reliable networks of sales agents spanning different countries and securing a stable demand. Still, their wines needed to reach a minimum level of stability in order to be traded, even more so when they had to travel a long distance from the site of production to the final destination (like, for example, Japan). During my fieldwork, some of my interlocutors recalled (with some embarrassment) stories about batches of faulty

wine they had to withdraw from the market. Those negative events became part of their learning experiences as winegrowers constantly dealing with a great amount of risk.

At the same time, the uncertainty and unpredictability characterising these wines were deemed as a tangible sign of craft, and as such to be preferred to conventional products which in this respect were criticised for being easily recognisable and deprived of any personality. In term of taste, these peculiar features translated into wines that were difficult to assess through the standard approach to wine-tasting. This deviation from the norm was not endured by my informants, instead they actively criticised the recourse to aesthetic parameters (both visual and taste-olfactory) which did not fit their own products. Speaking about the smells and aromas found in natural wines, Livia described the difference between natural and conventional wines in these terms:

> There are completely different sensations when you taste natural wines, even in terms of smells, they are way more complex compared to a conventional wine, which is anyway limited to a fruit fragrance, so they (natural wines) allow room for plenty of interpretations and it is difficult as our nose is not much used to recognise all these smells so it is nice to do it together with another taster as the person in front of you will always track down other aromas and smells that you might not find in that moment as it becomes really subjective anyway.. so for me this is the difference, you don't have such fixed characters like the usual banana fragrance that are always the same, (instead) you have an incredible range of complex aromas and smells that you really need to train to recognise them and that leads to a lot of different emotions so this exchange is really stimulating as it connects you to your memories, to different situations and emotions, food that you could have eaten in the past and so yes, it's like a discovery, a re-discovery of things. (interview 24/01/17)

The wider range of smells and aromas found in natural wines were not negatively sanctioned, instead triggered a process of sensorial discovery which gained the best results when done collectively, so leading to a multiplicity of possible interpretations. As my informants told me many times during the numerous tasting sessions I attended, there was no such thing as a incorrect perception when drinking a natural wine. According to them, taste remained a radically subjective and relational activity and as such could not be definitely sanctioned as inappropriate according to pre-set normative standards. In this sense, the prescriptive nature characterising the mainstream approach to wine-tasting was rejected, and with that also the unbalanced power relations emerging between the expert and the novice (Silverstein, 2006).

6.3.2 Conventional wine-tasting and haptic taste: two opposite perspectives

Before expanding more on this critical difference between the open-ended character of natural wine-tasting and the more rigid attitude of conventional wine critique, it is useful to give a brief overview of the mechanisms structuring the latter. To do so, I will start from my own personal experience of apprenticeship as a wine taster undertaken before embarking upon my ethnographic fieldwork. In 2015, I enrolled into a wine-tasting course organised in my hometown by ONAV, the oldest Italian association of wine sommeliers. Having already been exposed to natural wines (and their contested position within the sector) by the time my course started, I approached my apprenticeship through a certain critical distance. I was indeed aware that what I was going to learn from my weekly course would problematically be applied to the wines I used to serve at the restaurant where I had been working. Still, the course provided me with a solid theoretical background on the foundations of the wine-tasting technique and more generally the winemaking process. As part of each lesson, participants were guided by the instructor to the tasting and assessment of a set of wines through a proper evaluation sheet (see Appendix E). The latter was divided into three distinct sections, each assessing and describing a specific sensorial dimension of wine: its visual appearance, smell, and flavour and texture. Each of these main sections was in turn divided into a number of sub-sections aimed at the evaluation of specific features such as colour or flavour intensity, through a numerical scale. The purpose of this sensorial exercise was to dissect wine into its main components in order to arrive at a final rating score. As my course progressed, I was becoming more and more able to recognise specific aromas and flavours, and transform my own sensorial perceptions into analytical judgments and scores. At the same time though, I realised that my training was about reproducing an underlying normativity that structured the whole tasting process. Once learned the rules, it became easier to fulfil the requirements of the tasting exercise and align to the aesthetic parameters set by the association. That became even more evident during one session when we were presented with a set of natural wines. The didactic purpose of our instructor was indeed to highlight how that typology of wines was difficult to assess through the criteria learnt during the course. If judged through standard analytical categories, those wines constituted the quintessential example of a flawed product: cloudy colours, strong animal and funky smells, high levels of volatile acidity and excessive oxidative notes. That was why before the actual tasting, the instructor warned us about their contested status and the heated debates surrounding them. It seemed clear that there was

no space for natural wines to be judged by resorting to the classic evaluation sheet, making clear the radical difference posed by these wines.[10]

This impossibility of assessing natural wines through the standard score system also entailed the inapplicability of the terminology used to describe more conventional wines. I am not stating that the cognitive process by which I was trained to translate sensorial cues into linguistic expressions was easier with conventional wines. To the contrary, much research on wine has been produced on the intersection between language and the sensorial (Gawel, 1997; Gluck, 2003; Caballero, 2007; Suárez-Toste, 2007), highlighting the complexity of making communicable a sensorial stimulus through words. What I am arguing is that the whole body of knowledge (including language) mobilised to assess conventional wines was actually modelled around an oenological understanding of winemaking, which mostly diverged from the one adopted by my informants. That indeed explained why natural wines did not easily adjust to standardised evaluation criteria, instead they actually escaped them. When I discussed this critical point with Giovanni, a wine journalist and director of an independent publisher, he explained to me the reasons were to be found in historically inter-connected moments which saw the emergence of oenology as a science and its close association to the wine (and food) industry:

> the problem is not wine *per se* but (…) the fact that in the last forty, fifty years it has been structured, also on the basis of how wines were stylistically made (…) a theory of taste that is largely useless. Partly because it has become clear along the way that things from a physiological point of view do not function the way they taught us, and partly because the theory of taste has been (…) very often promoted to give credit to the structures of power which needed it, so due to commercial reasons, and not due to formative, educational reasons addressed to the taster (…) For example the majority of the visual criteria, of the visual examination of wine, which are quite clearly the result of an oenological perspective in its worst possible sense, that is the fact we are taught wine should be transparent, brilliant and crystal-clear, is the overlapping of different cultural moments. On one hand, (and) the good thing about it, it is the result of the fact we learned (…) that a brilliant wine, before the arrival of oenological technologies, generally stands for a flawless wine (…) on the other hand the need of transparency is the result of the fact that oenologists showed up and their products, techniques and technologies allowed wines to be totally transparent and crystal-clear, that became an aesthetic

[10] Over the last years, the association has given more space to natural wines through thematic sessions and wine-tastings where natural producers have been invited to present their own wines. A sign that this category of wines has acquired a certain visibility within the larger sector.

> standard of quality (…) all this theoretical apparatus has been basically built in parallel, even in chronological terms, to the standardisation of taste which in turn is the result of an agro-industrial model of production, so the development of the intensive and extensive agriculture, the systematic application of all processes of refinement, treatment of raw materials to preserve them, making them lower-priced, more consistent and more homologated (…) who was born and raised at least in the past half century belongs to this culture whereby the diversity and unpredictability of taste is not acceptable any more. (interview 20/04/17)

The Italian philosopher Nicola Perullo (2016;2018) similarly argues that the analytical language of oenologists and sommeliers found its origins in the Department of Viticulture and Oenology of the University of California, Davis around the 1940s. The knowledge developed was instrumental to the industrialisation of the wine sector which involved an increasing standardisation of quality control. The practice of wine-tasting emerged as a method to assess wine through analytical categories based on sight, smell and taste. The purpose of wine-tasting was the formulation of a supposedly objective judgment which had to be as neutral as possible. To do that, wine was dissected into its main constituents so that they could be analysed and measured in both qualitative and quantitative terms. Against this objectification of the perceptual processes involved in wine tasting, Perullo (2016) proposes a radically different approach based on what he defines as "haptic taste".[11] Drawing on an ecological and phenomenological perspective, the philosopher considers taste perception as an unfolding relational activity that is always situated and where the properties of the things tasted are better understood as affordances. In his words,

> haptic perception is immersed consciously in the experiences of life, flowing on the surfaces and paths we walk along, moving through the world we inhabit. In my proposal, hapticality is not focused on objects and their qualities; instead, it is diffused across the processes themselves felt as evolving substances […] hapticality has more to do with exposition and unpredictability than with systematization, persistence, and control. (Perullo, 2018: 266)

As a consequence, wine is not a passive object of aesthetic appreciation, but a living substance engaged in an ongoing process of correspondence with those who taste it. The experience of tasting wine is configured as an encounter, a deep perceptual engagement which embraces all parts of the body, and does not enable only the recognition of specific smells and aromas but also the emergence of emotions, memories, pleasure (or rejection) and stories that constitute the

[11] The adjective "haptic" derives from the Ancient Greek *haptesthai*, which means "to touch".

contours of the experience itself.[12] As such, tasting wine entails a sense of discovery, imagination and creativity that is not limited to ticking the right box according to *a priori* standards (as I perceived myself during my training as a wine taster), instead it opens up new paths of knowledge. This process of ongoing attunement to, and correspondence with, wine and everything else we encounter through our senses is cultivated through care, attentiveness and an education of attention to the surrounding environment and its multiple ecological relations. Natural wines, which are crafted through this ecological awareness, seem to offer a perfect example of how this pragmatics of taste actually unfolds. Indeed, as Livia told me on several occasions, these wines offer the possibility to engage with a multiplicity of smells and flavours, enabling a process of discovery which discloses unpredictable emotional reactions and fosters various associations to past sensorial experiences. The relationship my informants established with their wines was framed as an encounter with a living substance which was subject to ongoing change and transformation, whereby the same wine could lead to different sensations depending on the context and moment of tasting. Even in more formal situations, such as wine fairs, the aim was not to formulate definitive judgments, instead the act of tasting offered the possibility to engage with the work of the producer, the place where wine was crafted, and the sensations engendered from that specific sensorial encounter. Due to its relational nature, tasting wine was in fact perceived as a situated and social activity, where the narrative dimension was not (only) a sales strategy but a constitutive aspect of the same tasting experience. Similarly to what Hennion and Teil argue (2004; 2007), tasting is a relational and collective activity that fosters reflexivity and is constructed (and modified) by sharing our own individual experiences with others.

Not only natural wines facilitated this relational approach to tasting, they also actively contributed to the cultivation of this ecological and relational awareness, what Perullo (2018) calls “gustatory wisdom” as opposed to technical expertise. According to Giovanni, the wine journalist I interviewed, natural wines indeed hold an important educational value insofar as they provide us with the possibility of tasting flavours and aromas that are not the standardised products of the agri-food industry:

> What is interesting in the natural wine movement is that the good natural wine (…) is for me, or better, for everyone who is approaching it, an extraordinary opportunity to proceed with a re-education of taste (…) it has a very strong cultural significance (…) you could do that with conventional wine as well but if you do that with conventional wine

[12]In this regard, Perullo notes how the standard practice of sipping small amounts of wine and spitting them out reflects this objectifying attitude towards wine, which does not take into account its naturally intoxicating power.

> you get bored after three times, (something that doesn't happen) with natural wine, precisely because it is way more diverse, way more unpredictable and intriguing, way less easily prone to being pigeon-holed. (interview 20/04/17)

6.3.3 The cultivation of a "taste for uncertainty"

In this regard, geographer Anna Krzywoszynska (2015) notes how the marketisation of ecologically embedded edibles, that is food products crafted through artisanal, traditional and quality practices that do not rely on industrial processes, reveals the possibility to engage with taste in alternative ways. Whereas other foodstuffs undergo processes of qualification (certification schemes, technologies, and legislative frameworks) centred on certainty to be successfully traded, ecologically embedded edibles are constructed through a different conceptualisation of quality. The author focuses her analysis on ecologically embedded wines and argues that the qualities mobilised by their producers are based on notions such as "inconsistency", "variability" and "uncertainty". Similarly to what Paxson (2008) argues about artisanal cheesemaking in the US, natural winemaking is framed as a mode of production which emphasises the ecological and environmental elements constituting wine, and places value on uncertainty and variability. While an inherent component of risk can affect the commercialisation of these wines especially on those markets where quality is strictly regulated by a set of conventional aesthetic standards, the cultivation of an alternative taste is fundamental to the establishment of more profitable market niches.[13] Natural winegrowers are indeed engaged in training the palate of their consumers to an unusual range of sensorial perceptions, which are associated to specific ecologies and processes of production. As a result, the taste of these wines is not set against *a priori* normative standards of quality but is framed as an emergent activity that foster reflexivity and connect the consumer to the social and ecological conditions of their production. According to Krzywoszynska (2015),

> a taste for uncertainty is a roaming taste that thrives on diversity. It is a taste that supports products which are not standardized, but are changeable and surprising. It is not prescriptive as to the objects of taste, but challenges consumers to exercise reflexivity in their tasting, to assess and value their taste experiences, and experiment

[13] The prices of natural wines are generally higher compared to the industrial wines found in supermarkets and large retailers. As artisanal products with added value, consumers accept to pay more to drink them. In the documentary *Resistenza Naturale* by Nossiter, the group of natural winegrowers at some point discuss about the ethics applied to the prices of their wines. Some of them have decided to sell their entry-level wine at a lower price.

> with their own ways of making foods and drinks edible so as to support artisan production with their taste buds. (Krzywoszynska, 2015: 500)

As argued, my informants (and their intermediaries) were at the forefront of this process of taste education. Annual fairs, wine-tasting sessions and visits to their own estates were all important occasions to negotiate the multiple values of their wines through a specific focus on taste. As Paxson (2012) notes in relation to artisanal cheesemaking in the US, "the successful commercial practice of a craft includes educating a consuming public to discern and appreciate the variation (within reason) produced by a workmanship of risk" (2012: 155). In the same way, for my informants training the palates of their consumers proved fundamental to the commercial success of their wineries.

6.3.4 Natural wine consumption as an elitist practice? The New Nordic Cuisine case-study

The emergence of artisanal and traditional products through alternative food networks and more structured movements such as Slow Food has responded to the necessity of establishing closer connections between producers and consumers. To this end, a new relational food aesthetics and taste education have been crucial to address and satisfy consumers' desires of a renovated sensorial engagement with the natural, social and cultural qualities of the food consumed (Murdoch and Miele, 2004; Hayes-Conroy and Martin, 2010; West, 2016). In this sense, natural wine consumption can be inscribed into this contemporary trend characterised by a greater reflexivity towards food (and wine) and a new relational approach to taste. At the same time, natural wines are also exposed to a similar criticism about the elitism characterising these consumption practices; Slow Food provides an eloquent example in this regard (see Laudan (2004) and Chrzan (2004). I will tackle this specific aspect by looking at the way natural wines represent the perfect pairing of the so-called New Nordic Cuisine, a recent gastronomic movement founded by a group of influential Scandinavian chefs. This will allow me to analyse the place occupied by natural wines in the international food and wine scene and reflect over the values these wines share with a gastronomic movement that promotes a strong connection to a supposedly Nordic *terroir* and a taste for the unknown.

Looking at the natural wine market, Denmark (and its capital in particular) can claim to be the leading European centre of natural wine consumption with its wide range of bars, shops, restaurants and retailers offering good selections of natural wines. For my informants, Denmark and the other Scandinavian countries represented a flourishing market where to trade their wines, and Copenhagen was one of the destinations of their annual sales trips. The current success of natural wines in the Danish capital is said to be connected to the emergence of a

Nordic cuisine focused on sustainable, seasonal and organic food, and a restaurant in particular whose chef is considered the most vocal champion of this gastronomic movement. The Michelin-starred restaurant Noma and its creative Danish-Macedonian chef René Redzepi were indeed the first to offer a list of natural wines to pair their dishes in the early 2000s.[14] Since then, an increasing number of restaurants and wine bars have opened their doors to this category of wines.

The so-called New Nordic Cuisine (NNC) was officially launched through a ten-point culinary manifesto in 2004 and it was presented as a gastronomic movement aimed at the rediscovery and promotion of an allegedly lost Scandinavian food identity through the appeal to a unique Nordic *terroir*.[15] The manifesto, which was signed by a group of Scandinavian chefs (including the Noma head-chef Redzepi), combined notions of sustainability, ethical consumption and well-being with a specific reference to a supposedly Nordic identity. The "purity", "freshness" and "simplicity" characterising the Nordic region are emphasised as the unique geographical attributes of a taste which reflects seasonality, has a strong ethical attitude towards land use and animal welfare, and is open to innovation. While some of the principles expressed in the manifesto were actually borrowed from the French *Nouvelle Cuisine*, the idea of rediscovering the "traditional Nordic food products" through gastronomic innovation was revolutionary (Jönsson, 2013). This quest for a truly Nordic taste has been supported by a multi-disciplinary team of researchers and scientists studying local ingredients, traditional processes and modern techniques with the purpose of challenging the conventional relationship between edibility and pleasure (Evans, 2012). The ingredients used to prepare the dishes are presented specifying their origin and processes of production. When I interviewed Lorenzo, the Italian head-sommelier and co-owner of a restaurant in Copenhagen whose philosophy has been influenced by the NNC, he stressed the importance of communicating to his clients the provenance of all food and wines served: "as you enter (…) there is a map of Denmark, where we put all our suppliers, from the one who brings us wheat to make bread to the one who brings us chickens, all of them are put there so that you know for each thing who our suppliers are and their origin (…) the provenance of everything is explained" (interview 28/02/18). As part of this culinary project, a new sensorial engagement with food is promoted and communicated not only during the meal itself but also more widely through illustrated cookbooks and dedicated TV shows. Chefs play a fundamental role into this process of sensorial discovery, which also entails the practice of foraging in the wild Nordic landscape to

[14] https://noma.dk/
[15] https://www.norden.org/en/information/new-nordic-food-manifesto

source new raw ingredients (Pico Larsen and Österlund-Pötzsch, 2013).[16] The *terroir* discourse is strategically used here to associate the Nordic nature to a specific taste and a cultural identity. In the globalised contemporary scenario, characterised by cultural homologation and food anonymity, the NNC has been interpreted as a sort of post-national movement that "reproduces a Nordic imagined community based on the (re)creation of a Nordic cuisine that takes its meaning from the production of locality, in the form of the Nordic *terroir*" (Tholstrup Hermansen, 2012). Similarly to other food movements emerged as a reaction to the industrialisation and standardisation of food production, the NNC fosters a closer connection between small-scale producers and consumers through a renovated attention to taste. In the case of NNC, tradition is framed as a fluid category that accommodates innovation, experimentation and influences from abroad while highlighting the natural qualities of the Nordic *terroir*.

Having presented the main features of this highly orchestrated gastronomic operation, I now want to shed light on the role played by natural wines in this cuisine. As I previously argued, natural winegrowers invite consumers to embrace a reflexive attitude to taste, which does not rest on pre-set evaluative standards, but it is framed as an emergent activity that values uncertainty and unpredictability. Similarly, the NNC points at surprising the palate of their clients through an array of unusual tastes where the conventional boundary between edible and not-edible is thoroughly reshaped and eating becomes a multi-sensorial and fun experience (Pico Larsen, 2010). Speaking about dining at Noma, Lorenzo told me that "when you get out of Noma, it is an experience so intense that it takes a while to answer to yourself to the question 'did I like it? Didn't I like it?' as you basically get slapped by the dishes, the flavours, the wines, everything" (interview). In this respect then, the unconventional sensorial aesthetics of natural wines finds a perfect correspondence in the food served by the NNC. While describing in particular his own approach to his clients, Lorenzo told me that his aim was "not to make anyone stupid, as in my opinion you don't need to be an expert to enjoy wine (…) I don't want to make it feel like school, or speak about stuff which is not interesting, I tell you why I've chosen that wine and why it is an enjoyable exercise for me (choosing it) and why it matches that dish, full stop" (interview). A taste for uncertainty seems then to challenge the authority associated to wine connoisseurship and expertise and frames the act of drinking wine as a pleasurable activity deprived of an excessive snobbery.

From a gastronomic perspective, Lorenzo added that the pronounced acidity characterising many natural wines finds a good pairing in the food served at Noma and other like-minded restaurants

[16]Redzepi is also the author of various cookbooks where he describes his journeys to the Nordic countries to find out local food varieties and traditional cooking techniques.

in Copenhagen, which is prepared by applying preserving and fermenting techniques to the raw ingredients sourced in the Nordic countryside.[17] As he explained me, these techniques were traditionally used to preserve food in places where the climate is mainly rigid, summers are short and as a consequence fresh vegetables are not easily sourced throughout the year. Acidity is also the object of *ad hoc* studies conducted by a team of scientists working closely with Redzepi's restaurant. Evans (2012), a researcher of the Noma's Nordic Food Lab explains that "one project we return to continually is our search for new types of acidity. While citrus fruits are the staples of sourness in warmer climates, they don't grow as well here in the north, so we have turned to fermentation to provide us with these necessary sour flavours." According to Lorenzo, both the NNC and the natural wine movement have not only been ground-breaking with respect to the norms dictating what is "good taste" but also because both of them have promoted geographical areas that were previously considered peripheral on the international food and wine map. Wine-regions such as the French Jura and Beaujolais where the natural wine movement took its first steps, were not indeed comparable in terms of prestige with Burgundy and Champagne. The same has happened with the Scandinavian countries, which have been recently rediscovered as a pristine land whose genuine and healthy food products have acquired culinary legitimacy through the success of the NNC and its creative chefs such as Redzepi.

Looking at the consumers of these food and wines, we can observe they mainly belong to an urban, young and well-educated middle-class (Smith Maguire, 2019). Natural wine consumption has indeed often been described as a craze, a hipster phenomenon thriving in cosmopolitan urban centres where an appetite for local products characterises middle-class food (and wine) consumption. If drinking natural wine in Copenhagen is usually framed as a laidback pleasurable experience, a certain taste, curiosity and spending capacity are nevertheless necessary conditions to gain access to this category of wine.[18] Shifting the focus to the NNC, if this gastronomic operation can be associated to alternative food movements for its emphasis on authenticity, *terroir* and the revitalisation of traditional practices, still "these 'alternative' spaces are adjusted to middle-class ideals" (Leer, 2016: 3). As it is argued in a study on the perception of the NNC and its application to everyday food consumption (Müller and Leer, 2018), the NNC has not transformed the eating habits of Danish people and its success has mainly been a cultural and culinary phenomenon connected to fine dining and the media. In this regard then, the NNC and natural wines seem to share a certain exclusivity as far as their consumption is concerned (Krzywoszynska, 2015). If on one hand a taste for uncertainty offers an alternative, more reflexive

[17] Natural wines are often praised for their gastronomic value as they are said to pair well with food due to their peculiar organoleptic characteristics and versatility (see for example Bietti, 2013).
[18] https://www.heremagazine.com/articles/copenhagen-natural-wine

approach to the consumption of food and wine and, particularly in the case of natural wine, challenges existing hierarchies based on connoisseurship and expertise, on the other hand price and access barriers limit the application of this experimental approach to taste to everyday eating and drinking practices. As I will argue in the last section of this chapter, existing legislative frameworks such as the Protected Geographical Indications (PGIs) and national systems of wine appellations contribute to this limitation by reinforcing standards of quality which are aligned to reified, normative notions of taste which stand in stark opposition to a view of taste as a relational and contextual activity.

Finally, looking at the ways in which locality is produced and reinvented in the NNC, there is an additional point of contact with natural wines and their complex relationship with the place where they are crafted. The kind of engagement my informants had with the localities where they lived and worked was marked by a sense of disconnection and lack of recognition. The estates of my informants indeed represented some sort of happy islands without a real connection with the local rural community. Despite being praised by international experts and critics as virtuous models for the production of wines expressing the local *terroir* through a reflexive use of traditional practices, natural winegrowers did not enjoy the same recognition at local level. Their wines were indeed mostly consumed by an urban middle-class displaying a reflexive palate as well as a taste for the uncertainty. The values and cultural legitimacy of natural winegrowing relied on a transnational network of influential cultural intermediaries such as distributors, importers, critics and sommeliers which secured the placement of these wines on profitable market niches (Alonso González and Parga Dans, 2018). The same kind of complexities seems to mark the relationship between the NNC and a rediscovered Nordic locality from which this gastronomic movement has drawn its value by strategically playing the *terroir* card.[19] Copenhagen indeed remains the epicentre of a locavore food scene which nevertheless does not include large sectors of its own population and the rest of the country. As a sort of urban bubble disconnected from the Nordic countryside on which has built its own gastronomic success, the Danish capital relies on influential cultural intermediaries and inspirational personalities such as Redzepi who have positioned the city on the gastronomic world map.

[19]As it has been aptly observed by Pico Larsen and Österlund-Pötzsch Pico Larsen, H. and Österlund-Pötzsch, S. (2013) 'Foraging for Nordic Wild Food', in Lysaght, P. (ed.) *The return of traditional food*. Lund: Lund University Studies, pp. 68-78., the notion of Nordic *terroir* promoted by the NNC rests on the traditional image of a pristine, uncontaminated nature. As such, it does not include human intervention as it is instead the case when used in wine production.

6.4 Natural wines as contested and contesting products of *terroir*

If natural wines represent the perfect pairing of a cuisine founded on notions of authenticity, naturalness, and sustainability and their consumption thrives among a well-educated urban middle class with a taste for local products, their legitimacy as *terroir* wines is still contested within normative frameworks of quality such as the French AOC and the Italian DOC systems of appellations. Due to their alternative sensorial aesthetics, natural wines are indeed at the centre of heated debates concerning the standards to judge their quality and in particular their association to the place where they are produced. Here, I will focus specifically on what is at stake for natural winegrowers producing what they consider *terroir* wines, when they have to deal with normative frameworks that are set on conventional quality standards.

6.4.1 Italian natural wines and their contested typicity: different strategies

As West (2013a) argues in relation to Appellation and Indications of Origin (AIOs) in general, the idea of a close association between a product and its place of origin has always been shaped by cultural, political and economic interests which often lead to social contestation. As legal instruments that define and guarantee the "authenticity" of the products under a protected geographical name, they defend the interests of some producers and exclude others from profiting from the added value attached to these products. In the case of natural winegrowers framing *terroir* as an emergent quality to be judged *a posteriori*, it is evident how the pre-set definition of typicity issued by legal frameworks such as the French AOC represents an object of contestation. The Italian DOC system of appellation rests on similar premises for what concerns the definition and protection of authenticity and the procedures undertaken to grant a wine the denomination of origin. Producers who intend to certify their wines under a legally recognised appellation, have to submit samples of their wines to the local DOC commission which judges their conformity to the specifications set for that denomination. To obtain a DOC/DOCG label, each wine has to pass through two different stages: a bio-chemical testing and a sensorial assessment. While the first test is based upon objective criteria as it measures the chemical and physical wine components (including alcohol volume, pH and acidity), the organoleptic analysis is conducted by a panel of accredited tasters who evaluate the conformity of wine to those aromas and flavours considered typical from that area. The winegrower is then informed about the outcome through a written report that eventually contains recommended adjustments to be made for the wine to be granted a DOC/G label. When I discussed this testing procedure with my informants, all of them expressed similar concerns and an overt criticism to the whole certification process. In particular, they resented the fact their wines usually struggled to obtain the DOC/G label due to their supposed "flaws" or "lack of typicity".

6.4.1.1 Livia's case-study

As Livia experienced it, the issues around the DOC certification reflected a situation of mutual misrecognition involving both the local DOC commissions and the natural winegrowers like herself:

> Our work, so it means our wines, is often frowned upon and ill-considered by the DOC tasting commissions, which use parameters set for conventional wines, so wines that have to be absolutely sterile under any respects starting from the colour (…) these commissions are not really familiar with traditional wines, so for example our Moscato d'Asti, which is always a full-bodied, intense, mature, rich wine with intense aromas and a dark, golden colour as the real Moscato should be, it is considered a wine which doesn't stick to the parameters, as the adopted parameters are the ones set by the technology used to make modern Moscato wines, that is wines which are white, nearly odourless, slightly scented and which eventually are really banal, not so interesting wines (…) so what happens is that they don't recognise your wine but you do not absolutely feel recognised by these parameters (…) it becomes a serious damage in economic terms if you are used to sell a Barbera d'Asti and they don't approve your wine because it is atypical, but the fact that it is atypical should not be a flaw, and "atypical" as compared to what? (interview 23/01/17)

Although the DOC qualification trial was said to rest on a highly debated view of typicity and serve the commercial interests of larger industrial wineries, Livia and other like-minded natural producers still wanted to certify some of their wines due to the value attached to the DOC/G label. While all my informants shared the same criticism towards the national system of appellations, the reasons behind the choice of certifying part of their wines were multiple and diverse. In Livia's case, it was a matter of pride and recognition of her family's work to connect their own Moscato to the specific area where they produced it, especially as they considered themselves the last custodians of this local wine tradition (see chapter 4). Without the DOC certification indeed, they would not have even been able to put the name "Moscato" on the label and declare the grape variety used and its provenance.[21] At the same time though, Livia could count on her family's long-standing reputation within the French natural wine market niche where their wines had been highly appreciated and consumed since the late 1990s (as I described

[21] Piedmont region indeed represents a quite exceptional case in this sense, as wines can either be classified as DOC/G wines or directly downgraded to the lowest category which includes all wines without a designation of origin. According to the latest European classification introduced with the Council Regulation (EC) No 479/2008, these wines are now termed "Generic wines".

in chapter 4). Evidence of the appreciation enjoyed by their Moscato in France was the fact that their family name was used to denote the whole typology of Moscato wines. Despite the difficulties in obtaining the certification and the criticised role of the local DOC commissions, Livia's robust network of sales agents and intermediaries allowed her wines to circulate in France and abroad where they were tasted and valued as authentic products of *terroir*. As I argued in chapter 4 in relation to the complex engagement my informants had with their own locality, here again it can be seen the contradictions nested into this kind of approach to wine production which draws its value from the close association to a place and nevertheless does not find its legitimation at local level. Livia's case shows how the legal transposition of *terroir* into a set of fixed regulations failed to recognise the work conducted by her family, and their attachment to a tradition which they felt as something alive and shaping their lives on an everyday basis. As West aptly states in relation to the creation of geographical indication regimes, "(d)epending upon who ultimately controls the application for a geographical indication, it may in fact do less to protect 'tradition' […] than to legitimate and facilitate transformation in tradition's name" (West 2013: 341). According to Livia and the rest of my informants, the criteria used by the local DOC commissions not only proved unsuccessful in recognising authentic wines of *terroir* but promoted a distorted notion of typicity which did not place value on the agricultural practices and production methods adopted by those winegrowers. The official definition of typicity mainly rested on modern oenological notions and techniques that had led to a general standardisation of tastes. Instead of valuing the creative process of production based on a deep perceptual engagement with the living properties of wine (and their ecological relations), the DOC commissions approached wine as detached from its own specific context of production and through aesthetic and oenological standards founded on consistency and predictability. Failing to value innovation and inconsistency as markers of quality and craft, the DOC system of appellation operated as a standardising device (Krzywoszynska, 2015: 497) aimed at establishing similarity among the wines produced in each specific geographical area. As Bowen and de Master (2011) argue in relation to the contradictions inherent to institutional processes of food heritagization, "regulatory mechanisms fix production techniques in time and space. In doing so, these schemes and labels have the potential to *reduce*, rather than enhance, the diversity that characterizes many local products" (2011: 77). While both the work of my informants and the DOC regulations revolved around the key notion of *terroir*, it was nevertheless evident that two conflicting interpretations were at stake there. The way my informants framed *terroir* did not align to the static, reified notions of tradition and typicity upheld by the DOC regulatory scheme.

6.4.1.2 Costanza's case-study

Costanza's case instead revealed other motivations behind the choice of qualifying part of her wines as DOCG products. Costanza and her partner were newcomers with a previous working experience in finance. Compared to Livia, they did not inherit the land where they produced their wines and could not rely on a solid network of sales agents when they started their own wine business. Initially, Costanza had tried to have all her red and white wines protected under the local DOCG denominations.[22] The legal certification was indeed considered an important guarantor of quality, especially for a small winery like hers which was not already known on the market. After some unsuccessful attempts where her wines were rejected by the local DOC commission, she matured a different position in relation to her initial marketing strategy. She told me she totally disagreed with the motivations expressed by the commission which considered her wines as flawed and lacking typicity due to the way they were crafted:

> Besides the waste of time due to bureaucratic reasons, they (the DOC commission) also annoy me because, for example, now we got the qualification of our Dolcetto from old vines and as usual due to the fact there are no sulphites or very few, then they write "we recommend to protect the wine really carefully"…our Barbera for example, and that was the last straw so after that we decided to withdraw it (from the qualification trial), they wrote "de-acidification is recommended", which is a recommendation that you should not give for a variety like Barbera, it is exactly the variety's typicity and you recommend me de-acidification?? That makes me quite hopeless, at the same time it should also be said that on a commercial level the DOCs unfortunately are so devalued nowadays, as you find some DOCs thoroughly deprived of any quality, on a commercial level having the DOCG does not mean anything nowadays. (interview 05/09/17)

Despite her disappointment, Costanza decided to maintain the DOCG certification for her Dolcetto and two of her Barbera wines and she intentionally downgraded the rest of her production. When I asked her the reasons of her diversified commercial strategy, she told me that was mainly due to her engagement within the local collective project aimed at the protection of the Dolcetto d'Ovada DOCG denomination. As I described in chapter 4, Costanza was one of the founders of the Ovada's wine syndicate (*consorzio di tutela*) together with a small group of second-generation and newcomer winegrowers who wanted to restore the prestige of this specific wine tradition and promote the corresponding local area of production. Her personal

[22] The DOCG certification represents the top level of the Italian wine classification, and is characterised by stricter specifications of production.

engagement with the DOC framework was then meaningful for her to the extent that it served the purposes of the newly founded local *consorzio*. At that point, it seemed reasonable for her to qualify two of her Barbera as DOCG wines too, otherwise having only her Dolcetto labelled as such would have negatively affected the consumer's perception about the remaining wines. Costanza's case shows how these producers experienced a tension between their resistance to the DOC qualification trials and the commercial opportunities offered by having a DOC/G label when placing their wines on certification-focused wine markets. At the same time though, Costanza's involvement into the Dolcetto d'Ovada DOCG syndicate introduces an element of active participation into the politics of protection and promotion of the local wine heritage. Through her engagement within the *consorzio*, Costanza tried to vehiculate a renovated image of Dolcetto wine and a different interpretation of the local *terroir*. Sometimes these collective efforts from within the local syndicates obtained concrete results concerning the same specifications of production for the wines under a denomination. That was the case with the Sicilian Cerasuolo di Vittoria DOCG appellation whose regulations on the production of the homonymous red wine were amended under the impulse given by the local *consorzio* where Isabella was one of the leading members. She indeed firmly believed that by being involved into the local syndicate she could gain some scope for action towards the transformation of the criteria set to define and assess her wines. If it was still difficult to change the rather blurred organoleptic parameters defining the wine's sensorial profile, there was nevertheless room to act on those standards regulating the bio-chemical composition of wine. The *consorzio* indeed managed to reduce the parameter about the minimum alcohol volume and abolish the addition of concentrated grape must, allowing producers such as Isabella who wanted to promote a different interpretation of the local wine to obtain the DOCG certification.

The ethnographic case-studies described here show how these natural winegrowers were able to strategically place their wines in different kinds of markets despite the general lack of recognition of their work at the DOC/G certification level. Moreover, some of them were also actively engaged into a process of negotiation of the quality criteria set by that regulatory regime, showing their capacity of being influent social actors at local political level despite the small-scale size of their production. Their engagement was even more remarkable in terms of female representation within these wine syndicates, where the number of women involved is still considerably inferior compared to its male counterpart. Indeed, the percentage of female winegrowers within the administrative boards of the Italian *consorzi di tutela* is currently limited to approximately 10%, while the percentage accounting for the number of female producers

serving as presidents of these boards is even inferior.[23] In this regard, Margherita told me that being a woman affected her role as a producer within the local DOC commission. The other male members were particularly harsh on her and downplayed her work as a winemaker. Because of that, she decided to withdraw from the commission and downgrade all her wines.

6.4.2 Wines without DOC/G labels

A part from the wines traded with a DOC/G label, nearly all my informants decided to downgrade the rest of their production to "generic wines" as a way to express their criticism towards the national regulation scheme and its functioning.[24] As I argued in this chapter, they preferred to count on the direct engagement with their consumers and, more importantly, their sales agents and distributors to vehiculate the values attached to their production. By actively cultivating an alternative taste more aligned to their worldview, my informants managed to place their wines in profitable market niches where their products could be appreciated and positively assessed despite the lack of legally recognised quality labels. That was mainly possible through the development of ramified networks constituted by international cultural intermediaries such as wine critics and journalists, importers, chefs, distributors. Within these networks, alternative knowledge paradigms through which to identify markers of quality and typicity were socially re-produced by both natural winegrowers and experts through repeated collective tastings. These paradigms were not only reproduced and shared among those involved in assessing natural wine quality, but also codified in more structured bodies of knowledge which could serve as point of reference for consumers as well. That was the case with the "geo-sensorial" approach promoted by Jackie Rigaux, a French wine critic and researcher at the University of Bourgogne who is highly regarded within the natural wine world. As opposed to the sensorial analysis used by oenologists and sommeliers to assess the organoleptic qualities of wine, the "geo-sensorial" approach to wine-tasting is specifically focused on the gustatory profile of wine and the correspondence between a wine's flavours and its *terroir* of provenance. According to Rigaux (2017), the expression of *terroir* in wine can in fact be detected mainly through the palate rather than the nose (as it is instead the case for sensorial analysis), and it is identified through a series of mineral flavours. As for other relevant publications on these themes, I found copies of the Italian translation of Rigaux's book in the houses and cellars of my informants, and I had the chance to discuss the merits of this approach with them during our numerous wine-tasting sessions.[25]

[23] https://www.federdoc.com/la-federdoc/
[24] The same strategy is adopted by groups of French natural winegrowers, too.
[25]The Italian translation of Rigaux's book "*La dégustation géo-sensorielle*" (2012) was curated by Porthos Edizioni.

The criticism to the DOC system accompanying the decision to downgrade part of the wines produced each year, sometimes found a visual dimension in the labels designed by these producers. Drawing on a vocabulary which ironically stressed the outlawed status of these wines, some natural winegrowers opted for colourful labels featuring bandits and pirates or containing wordplays which referred to the name of the appellation they had been excluded from (see pictures below as an example).

Figure 19 A bottle of natural wine labelled as “denominated bandit” (Author: Ermanno Granelli on Pinterest)

Figure 20 A bottle of Ivag (which is the reverse of "Gavi", a DOCG of Piedmont) (Botrytis Enoteca, 2021)

6.5 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have focused my attention to natural wines and the alternative and multiple values attached to their production and consumption. As the result of a process of production that aims at preserving the agency of its human and non-human components, natural wines represent a peculiar kind of commodities. They indeed express the natural and living elements of the place where they originate and reflect the individual choices and interpretation of the producers crafting them. As I showed through my ethnographic materials, natural wines are particularly evocative of the ecological, social and cultural conditions of their production and as a result they bear multiple and heterogeneous values which make them "unfinished commodities" (Paxson, 2012). They are indeed imbued with the sentiments, beliefs and ethos of their producers, who in turn express through their wines their own identities and worldviews. It is in particular through taste that the alternative values of these wines are expressed, and their quality assessed. Connecting the taste of these wines to the corporeal engagement and manual labour entailed in their production, natural winegrowers are the principal actors in the constitution and

dissemination of an alternative normative framework of quality. The relational and reflexive approach to *terroir* characterising the artisanal work of these producers finds a correspondence in the way these wines are tasted and assessed. As the contingency and materiality of *terroir* is not repressed but actively embraced through a perceptual engagement with its living properties, similarly taste is framed as a reflexive and relational activity that is open to unpredictability and uncertainty. While natural producers invite consumers to cultivate this "taste for uncertainty" (Krzywoszynska, 2015), conventional winemaking and wine-tasting techniques as well as national systems of denominations are based on pre-set quality standards that reject the living and unstable multiplicity of natural wine and impose a crystallised notion of typicity. Against such technical oenological knowledge and regimes of authentication, natural producers and their networks of sales agents and cultural intermediaries promote and disseminate an "alternative gastro-normativity" (Pavoni, 2020) that preserves the non-human materialities of wine and positively values the radical contingency of its consumption. I also showed how my informants strategically dealt with the DOC system of appellation to fulfil their own commercial interests and, in some cases, bring about transformations from within the same institution. As agents of change actively engaged in promoting alternative interpretations of *terroir*, these women managed to express their own views and be influential even in contexts still largely dominated by men.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

The goal of this study was to investigate the production and consumption of natural wines through an ethnographic analysis of the work undertaken by female natural winegrowers in Italy. In doing so, I argued that natural winegrowing represents a contested field of practice within the larger wine sector and I showed how the ideas and practices of my informants reflect the tensions nested in this world of wine. As new influential social actors, who reject or transform traditional gendered roles which still characterise the conventional wine sector, these women indeed push boundaries and propose new ways of engaging not only with wine but also with nature, the place where they live, and national regulatory frameworks. While navigating the Italian natural wine movement by playing an influential role (especially Livia and Isabella) and relying on well-developed transnational ties to trade their wines, my informants carve out their singular stories in highly individual terms which would have been impossible just a few decades ago. Their wines reflect their personalities, but also an attentive engagement with the lively materialities inhabiting their vineyards and cellars. By approaching their work with a great deal of experimentation and self-reflexivity, they shape novel material and aesthetic relationships with wine which break with industrial winemaking and conventional wine consumption. At the same time, they selectively use and promote local traditional knowledge and practices in ways which do not align with official heritage narratives (like the UNESCO) and clash with existing systems of authentication (i.e., the DOC/G appellations). Their engagement with locality is nevertheless ambiguous as their estates often represent local bubbles disconnected from the surrounding rural community. In their stories, all these different tensions cohabit without being necessarily reconciled and characterise these women as disruptive actors within the larger wine field.

By living and working with these producers over repeated periods of time between 2017 and 2018, during which I could step into their world and observe the commitment and passion they put in crafting their wines, I have come to a better understanding of these tensions and the multiple meanings and values attached to these wines. Ethnographic fieldwork has been fundamental to my understanding of the kind of engagement my informants had with wine and the place where they lived and worked as natural winegrowers. Moving between multiple sites represented a challenge but also enriched my overall perspective on this approach to wine production and made me acknowledge the differences and similarities between my research subjects in terms of life-trajectories, motivations, social roles, and ideas. In this concluding chapter, I summarise the main research outcomes of this study, highlight the original contribution of my study to the existing literature on wine, and make a final reflection on natural wines.

7.1 Main research outcomes and contributions

Before engaging in the ethnographic analysis of the production and consumption of natural wines in Italy, I investigated wider socio-cultural and political trends investing both the current European food scenario and the larger world of wine. I argued that natural wines indeed sit at the crossroads between traditional claims to *terroir*, new environmental sensitivities and the increasing demand for artisanal and authentic food products. In a current scenario characterised by food anxieties and raising environmental concerns, Western consumers express their criticism over the perceived anonymity attached to industrial food production and look for more socially and ecologically embedded food products. Alternative food movements such as farmers associations and Slow Food have emerged as a response to these renovated desires of sensorial engagement with the social, cultural, and natural contexts of production. In an attempt to locate natural winegrowing within this larger scenario, I built on the anthropological and sociological literature on artisanal food, food activism and alternative food movements. By focusing on the key concept of *terroir* and its role in the creation of Geographical Indications at European level, I turned my attention to the wine sector where the French concept first emerged. Drawing on the existing literature on *terroir* and wine globalisation, I argued that natural wines partly respond to current global trends that have seen the gradual erosion of *terroir* in the Old World of wine and, at the same time, a process of democratisation which has introduced a broader notion of provenance that values the winegrower's biography, ethos, and context of production. Promoted as authentic wines of *terroir* with an emphasis on sustainability, natural wines seem to tap both into traditional claims to *terroir* and new emergent desires for authenticity and local embeddedness.

Nature and *terroir* are two key dimensions at the core of natural winegrowing, and their unfiltered expression in the final wine is source of heated debates within the larger world of wine. What does it really mean to produce wine by letting nature express itself? How is *terroir* interpreted by natural wine producers? To respond to these questions, I adopted both a diachronic and synchronic perspective that allowed me to understand the meanings and choices attached to the current production of these wines. *Terroir* proves to be a guiding principle that informs the practices and choices of my informants, especially in a region like Piedmont where a strong French influence has historically shaped the way winegrowers engage in wine production. Still, I argued that what characterises the work of my informants is a reflexive and strategic posture which is applied to different levels and scales, from their complex relationship with the locality where they work and live to their critical engagement with organic certification. Looking in particular at the production of these wines, reflexivity and relationality are at the core of an approach to viticulture and winemaking which preserves the complex intertwining between

human and non-human agencies both in the vineyard and in the cellar. Adopting a phenomenological and new materialist approach to analyse the work of my informants, I showed how, through care and attentiveness to the unfolding materialities which make wine a living "assemblage" (Bennett, 2010; West, 2013), these producers establish an intimate, sensorial relationship with it and, at large, the place where it originates. The various degrees of experimentation and innovation through which they express the natural qualities of their wines are considered as an integral and essential part of the process, the personal mark of craftmanship involved in this kind of production which differentiates these wines from their conventional counterpart.

Drawing on my ethnographic materials, I highlighted the different and multiple engagements of these women within a field of production which has historically been dominated by men. By choosing a group of female producers with different backgrounds and biographies, I have been able to draw a diversified picture which reflects similarities and differences amongst these women. Young, mobile, and well-educated, these women have embraced their work as natural winegrowers through a highly personal approach which is reflected in the wines they craft. Highly regarded for the quality of their products, which enjoy increasing appreciation especially abroad, my informants have been able to carve out their own space within a world which has traditionally excluded them from leading positions and entrepreneurial roles. Even those who grew up in traditional families of winegrowers have managed to assume a recognised role in the family business and a certain degree of independence. As new and influential social actors who push the boundaries of past gendered configurations within a contested field of production such as natural winegrowing, my informants have provided me with a unique perspective to investigate this world of wine. They indeed represent the most innovative side of the Italian natural wine movement.

Finally, in chapter 6 I argued that the multiple alternatives values attached to natural wine production and consumption are tightly connected to the way these wines are crafted and imbued with individual, social, and cultural elements. As artisanal products made by winegrowers who reflexively engage with the non-human agencies inhabiting wine (starting from the vines and their multiple ecological relations with the rest of the living environment), natural wines present a radically different sensorial aesthetics which challenges existing normative frameworks of quality. Drawing on Paxson's (2012) notion of "unfinished commodities", I argued that these wines remain associated to the material context of their production and reflect the personality of their producers. Values such as inconsistency, unpredictability, and uncertainty are actively praised as tangible signs of craft by the same winegrowers, who act as tastemakers and construct alternative frameworks to assess the quality of their wines. The same kind of relational and reflexive

approach to production is cultivated at the consumption end, where my informants and other professionals invite the consumer to embrace an open-minded attitude towards taste. As contesting and contested products of *terroir*, natural wines propose an "alternative gastro-normativity" (Pavoni, 2020) which sheds light on the unfolding materialities of production and consumption without being trapped into fossilised regulatory frameworks.

By providing an ethnographic analysis of the work conducted by female natural winegrowers in Italy, this thesis contributes to the emergent anthropological literature on natural wines. At a time of increasing concerns about the negative impact of human activities on the environment, more sustainable methods are being sought after by both small and larger wineries worldwide. On their part, anthropologists, sociologists, and geographers interested in the world of wine have started to focus their attention on these themes and I believe natural wines will be more and more at the centre of their future research. I hope my work will constitute a valuable piece in the formation of this new field of anthropological study. My analysis of natural winegrowing as a contested field where the nature-culture divide is thoroughly reshaped by my informants sheds new light on scholarly discussions about the current ecological shift and our role in it. By approaching winemaking with a great deal of experimentation and sensitivity to the multiple materialities inhabiting wine, my informants push the boundaries of conventional understanding of nature and culture. By focusing my attention on the complex entanglements between human and non-human agents involved in the production of natural wines, my ethnographic account provides an original contribution to the emergent scholarship in the field of multispecies anthropology. Moreover, in choosing female winegrowers as my main research participants, I have given voice to a group of social actors who has rarely been the object of anthropological studies dedicated to wine. My thesis sheds light on changing social configurations which see female winegrowers play leading roles in a predominantly male world of wine. Equipped with a solid technical background and at the head of their wineries where they are in charge of each step of the production process, these women express through wine themselves and their interpretation of *terroir* in highly individual ways.

7.2 Crafting alternatives through wine

In light of what I argued throughout the previous chapters, I want to conclude this thesis by going back for a moment to its title. The work and lives of natural winegrowers, as they emerge from my anthropological analysis, seem to point towards the realisation of a different cosmology, an

alternative being-in-the-world which is expressed and enacted through wine. Corrado Dottori, a natural wine producer based in Marche region (central Italy), writes in his latest book that

> natural wine is not a *kind of wine*. It is a countercultural movement. Natural wine is not *a method*. It is an ethical and aesthetical attitude […] The real and powerful insurrection led by natural winegrowers is about the thorough reconsideration of the relationship between agriculture and industry, city and the countryside, culture and nature, techno-science and organic life […] The utopia of natural wine consists of human return *to* nature (Dottori, 2019: 160; my translation)

By crafting their wines through care and attention towards the multiple agencies inhabiting their vineyards and cellars, natural winegrowers simultaneously make evident the human-nonhuman relations that permeate our world and, through consumption, our bodies. Jonathan Nossiter (2019), director of two films on the world of wine (*Mondovino*, 2004; *Resistenza Naturale*, 2014), argues that the main contribution of the natural wine movement lies in shedding new light on agriculture and its cultural significance in a historical moment where rural-urban relationships need to be reinvented to secure the survival of our species. In this sense, natural winegrowing expresses the potential for changing existing socio-economical structures, systems of production, and normative frameworks of quality.

The utopian dimension entailed in wine production and consumption, the complex entanglement between the material and the ideal which has shaped winemaking since its very beginning, has already been investigated by scholars working on wine (Douglas, 2003; Daynes, 2013; Dutton and Howland, 2019). I argue that natural wines are no exception in this regard, as they are contemporary material instances of ideal aspirations which point, as Dottori suggests, at our conscious reconnection with the non-human surrounding and shaping us. Throughout my thesis I showed how my female informants embrace the utopian radicality of natural winegrowing and act as powerful and influential agents of change both a local and global scale. Through their work, knowledge and spirit of innovation, they originally sit at the interface of nature and culture, tradition and techno-science, local and global scales. Livia and Margherita try to reconnect the past, present, and future of their family traditions by actively reconfiguring their gendered role within a patriarchal family environment, and crafting wines which reflect their own personalities. Isabella combines her sophisticated technical knowledge with a highly personal interpretation of her *territorio*, which has led her to become one of the youngest acclaimed wine producers at an international level. Her estate represents a vibrant hub where the relationship between the countryside and the city has taken novel connotations, and new generations of like-minded winegrowers are formed. Claire, Costanza, and Virginia decided to become natural winegrowers

in less-known places where they have re-discovered local knowledge and practices while being at the same time highly reflexive in their engagement with wine. Their critical and distinctive perspective, supported by their self-confidence and solid background, make them the representatives of a new way of integrating different knowledge and experiences within a larger cosmology where wine, life, and work are all entangled. The success of these women, despite their different stories and life-trajectories, seem to suggest that the alternatives they craft through their wines are a valid point of reference to engage with the complexities of our time.

Appendix A Participant information sheet

UNIVERSITY OF Southampton

Participant Information Sheet (Face to Face)

Study Title: Gendered subjectivities in the global hierarchy of values: the ethnography of "natural" wines in Northern and Southern Italy.

Researcher: Clelia Viecelli **Ethics number**: 24964

Please read this information carefully before deciding to take part in this research. If you are happy to participate you will be asked to sign a consent form.

What is the research about?
My name is Clelia Viecelli. I am a PhD student in Modern Languages at the University of Southampton (UK). As part of my PhD project, I am conducting an ethnographic research on the production and consumption of "natural" wines in Italy, in particular on female "natural" winegrowers. My study revolves around different research questions, which are divided into three main sections here:

- How do women represent themselves as "natural" winegrowers? How much does their labour contribute to the construction of their self-identities?
- What is the relationship these female wine producers have with nature? What is the role played by technology and tradition?
- How do natural wine producers and consumers deploy social media and the Internet to differentiate their wines from the conventional ones? And how is their language used to describe their wines, and contest the national and European legislation on wine matter?

My research project is funded and sponsored by my University.

Why have I been chosen?
[There are two distinct groups of participants. Group A: Italian "natural" winegrowers and wine producers; group B: professional wine tasters, bloggers, critics, distributors, consultants, wine fair organisers.]
Group A: you have been chosen to participate to my research project because you work as a "natural" winegrower and wine producer in Italy.
Group B: you have been chosen to participate to my research because you work within the wine sector.

How can I take part in the research project?
You have to sign the consent form attached to this information sheet.

What will happen to me if I take part?
Group A: you will be asked to discuss together about the production, distribution and consumption of "natural" wines in Italy. You will be asked to be interviewed by the researcher. It will be used an audio and/or video recorder when it will be possible to do so. I will ask you to become friends on Facebook if you are a Facebook user, and to access your Instagram profile if you have one. Your involvement will last a more or less extended period of time depending on your availability, from a couple of hours to several weeks. Within that period of time, I will stay in close contact with you, observe and share your everyday working and social activities (if possible). A shorter follow-up can occur after a few months over another period of the year characterised by different working activities, both in the vineyard and in the cellar.
Group B: you will be asked to discuss together about the production, distribution and consumption of "natural" wines in Italy. You will be asked to be interviewed by the

PIS version: 1.0
05/01/2017

researcher. It will be used an audio and/or video recorder when it will be possible to do so. I will ask you to become friends on Facebook if you are a Facebook user, and to access your Instagram profile if you have one. Your involvement will last the time of your interview. All data gathered will be used for academic/research purposes only.

Are there any benefits in my taking part?
There are no material benefits to you, but your participation will contribute to enrich my research and to add to the existing body of knowledge.

Are there any risks involved?
There are no specific risks involved in this project, besides the ones that may occur in everyday life. Keeping confidentiality is addressed in the next section.

Will my participation be confidential?
All data gathered will be used for academic/research purposes only. Personal data will remain confidential at all times, and may also be disclosed if the participant provides prior explicit consent. Confidentiality and anonymisation will be assured through different procedures: names and any problematic identifying information will be replaced by pseudonyms, vaguer descriptors and replacement terms; the researcher will dispose carefully of individual confidentiality statements and information that can reveal participants' identity; systems of coding will be used when transcribing audio files; data with any identifying information will be stored in a password protected computer to which only the researcher has access. The researcher will follow the University of Southampton Data Protection Policy and Guidelines. The collection and storage of data gathered by the researcher will comply with the Data Protection Act 1998.

What happens if I change my mind?
If you change your mind about taking part in this research project at any time during the process, you have the right to withdraw without giving a reason and without penalty. You can also ask me to delete completely your data.

What happens if something goes wrong?
In the unlikely case of concern or complaint, you can contact the Chair of the Faculty Ethics Committee Prof. Denis McManus (email: D.Mcmanus@soton.ac.uk, telephone: +44 23 8059 3984).

Where can I get more information?
You can either call me on my mobile phone number (+44 7425 986538) or send me an email to cv1e16@soton.ac.uk at any time.

Thank you.

PIS version: 1.0
05/01/2017

Appendix B Consent form

UNIVERSITY OF Southampton

CONSENT FORM *(Version: 1.0)*

Study title: Gendered subjectivities in the global hierarchy of values: the ethnography of "natural" wines in Northern and Southern Italy.

Researcher name: Clelia Viecelli
Staff/Student number: 28083113
ERGO reference number: 24964

Please initial the box(es) if you agree with the statement(s):

I have read and understood the participant information sheet (PIS Version: 1.0 05/01/2017) and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study. ☐

I agree to take part in this research project and agree for my data to be used for the purpose of this study. ☐

I understand my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without my legal rights being affected. ☐

I finally understand that if I have any questions about my rights as a participant in this research, or if I feel that I have been placed at risk, I may contact Prof. Denis McManus, the Chair of the Ethics Committee, Faculty of Humanities, University of Southampton, SO17 1BJ, UK. Email: D.Mcmanus@soton.acuk. ☐

Data Protection
I understand that information collected about me during my participation in this study will be stored on a password protected computer and that this information will be used for academic/research purposes only. All files containing any personal data will be made anonymous.

I certify that I am 18 years or older. I have read the above consent form and I give consent to participate in the research described in the participant information sheet.

Name of participant (print name)……

Signature of participant……

Date……

Appendix C Further information about my fieldwork

Time periods of my fieldwork in Piedmont and Sicily (2017-2018):

Pruning season, January 2017: Livia (Piedmont)

Harvesting season, September 2017: Livia, Costanza, Virginia (Piedmont)

Harvesting season, October 2017: Isabella, Claire (Sicily)

Pruning season, January 2018: Livia, Margherita (Piedmont)

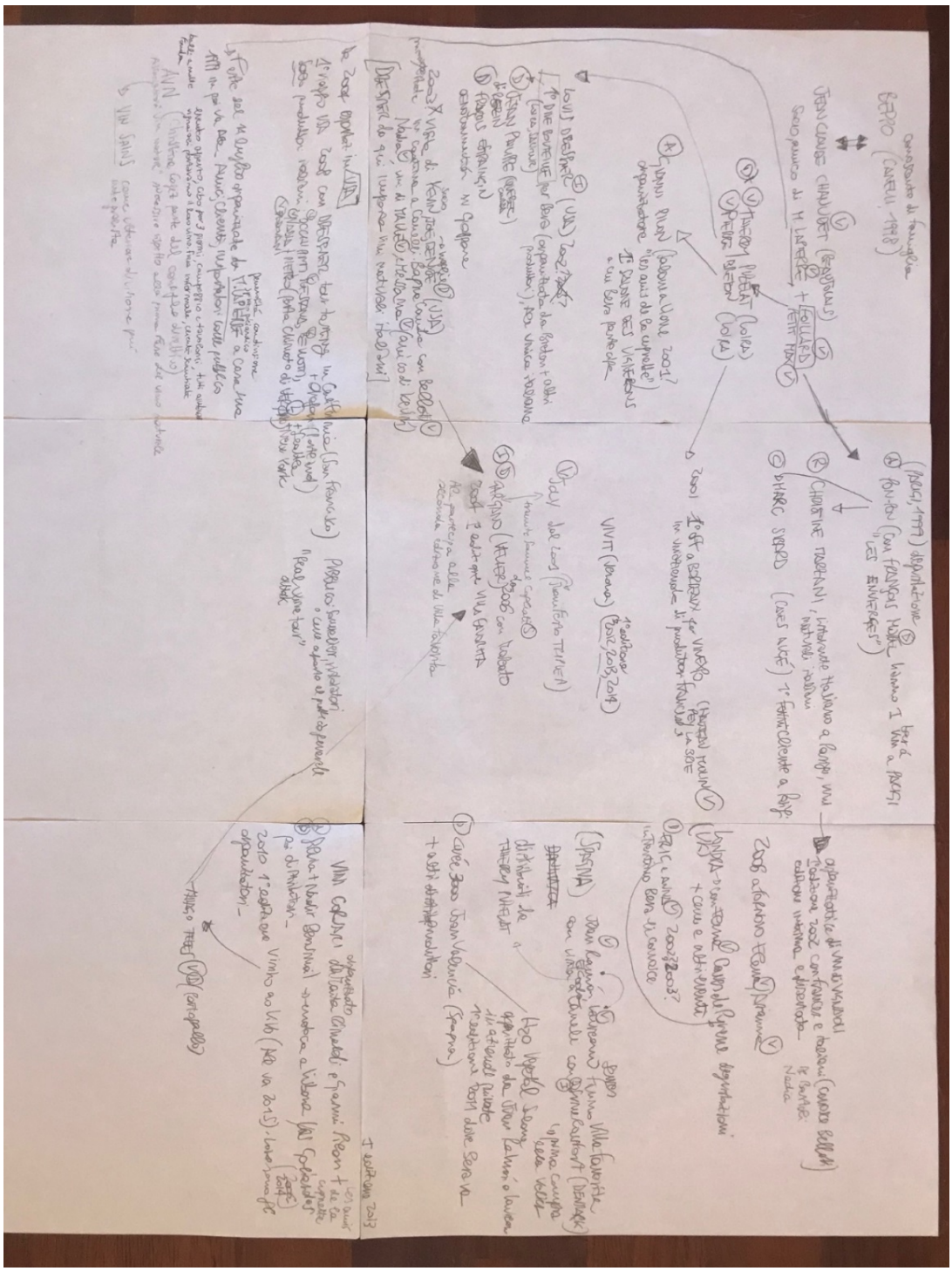
Post-pruning season, March 2018: Isabella (Sicily)

Harvesting season, September-October 2018: Livia (Piedmont), Isabella (Sicily)

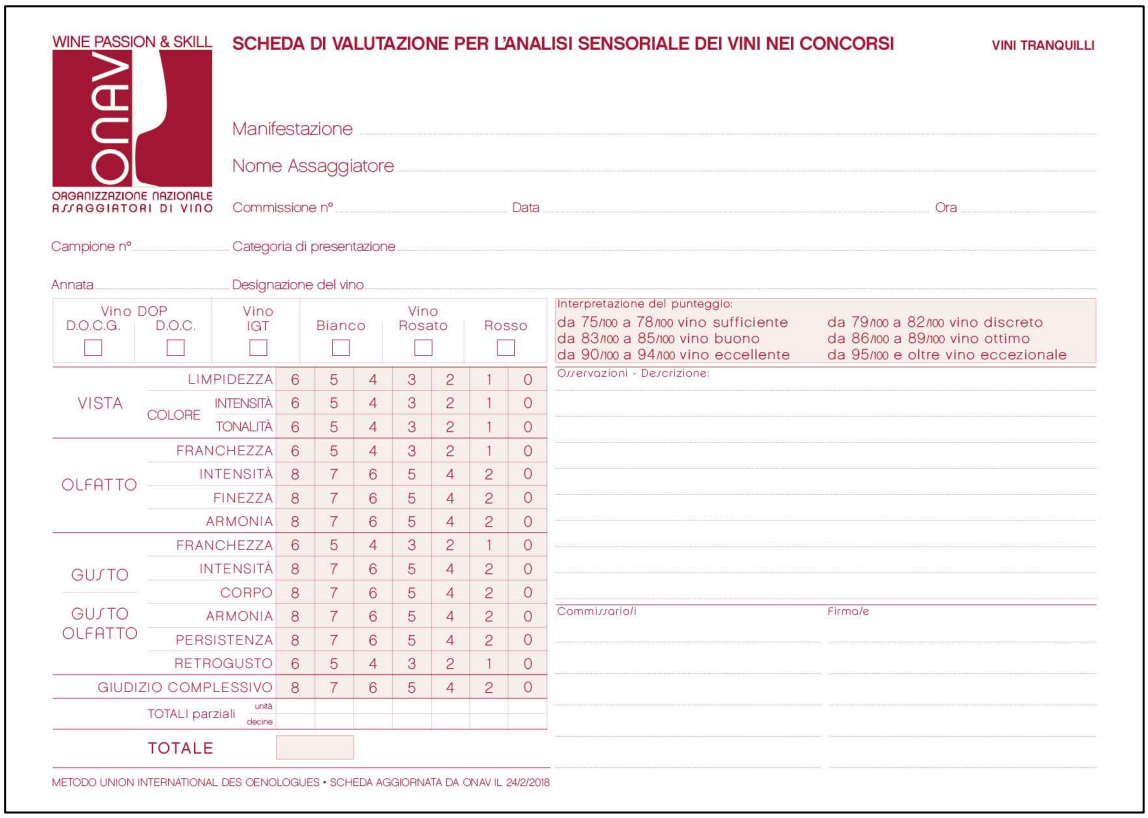
List of natural wine fairs and events attended during my ethnographic fieldwork (2017-2018):

- *RAW* fair in London (March 2017)
- *The Natural Wine* fair in London (April 2017)
- *VinNatur* fair in Verona province (April 2017)
- *ViniVeri* fair in Verona province (April 2017)
- *Torino Beve Bene* fair in Turin (October 2017)
- Vini di Vignaioli fair in Parma province (November 2017, 2018)
- *La Terra Trema* fair in Milan (November 2017)
- *Vini Corsari* in Barolo (December 2017)
- *VelierLive* event in Parma (February 2018)
- *Festival Musica Distesa* in Ancona province (July 2018)

Appendix D Map of Livia's network



Appendix E Evaluation sheet for wine tasting - ONAV (Italian Organisation of Wine Tasters)



WINE PASSION & SKILL

ONAV

ORGANIZZAZIONE NAZIONALE ASSAGGIATORI DI VINO

SCHEDA DI VALUTAZIONE PER L'ANALISI SENSORIALE DEI VINI NEI CONCORSI

VINI TRANQUILLI

Manifestazione .....

Nome Assaggiatore .....

Commissione n° ..... Data ..... Ora .....

Campione n° ..... Categoria di presentazione .....

Annata ..... Designazione del vino .....

Vino DOP D.O.C.G. ☐	Vino DOP D.O.C. ☐	Vino IGT ☐	Vino Bianco ☐	Vino Rosato ☐	Vino Rosso ☐

Interpretazione del punteggio:

da 75/100 a 78/100 vino sufficiente	da 79/100 a 82/100 vino discreto
da 83/100 a 85/100 vino buono	da 86/100 a 89/100 vino ottimo
da 90/100 a 94/100 vino eccellente	da 95/100 e oltre vino eccezionale

Osservazioni - Descrizione:

VISTA	LIMPIDEZZA	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
	COLORE INTENSITÀ	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
	COLORE TONALITÀ	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
OLFATTO	FRANCHEZZA	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
	INTENSITÀ	8	7	6	5	4	2	0
	FINEZZA	8	7	6	5	4	2	0
	ARMONIA	8	7	6	5	4	2	0
GUSTO	FRANCHEZZA	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
	INTENSITÀ	8	7	6	5	4	2	0
	CORPO	8	7	6	5	4	2	0
GUSTO OLFATTO	ARMONIA	8	7	6	5	4	2	0
	PERSISTENZA	8	7	6	5	4	2	0
	RETROGUSTO	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
GIUDIZIO COMPLESSIVO		8	7	6	5	4	2	0
TOTALI parziali	unità							
	decine							

TOTALE

Commissario/i ..... Firma/e .....

METODO UNION INTERNATIONAL DES OENOLOGUES • SCHEDA AGGIORNATA DA ONAV IL 24/2/2018

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