

The transformation of ordinary wines: a new danger for vintage wines.

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Abstract:

A split has always characterized the French wines history. We can distinguish two types of wines: vintage wines and ordinary wines. Vintage wines delimited by restrictive conditions of production take a high social value, while ordinary wines, due to a wide production take a nutritional value. However, this split is currently questioned due to the transformation of ordinary wines into country wines. Indeed, these latter have headed towards wines with a better quality image. At first, the outcome from this transformation caused an increase of the French vine country wines. But, these wines have now new requirements in order to prevent their market shares. They lean more and more on the concept of terroir which was a specificity of vintage wines. In consequence, the AOC (Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée) wines are losing an important source of distinction and are gradually questioned.

Key words: ordinary wines, vintage wines, country wines, geographical indications.

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Introduction

A split has always characterized the French wines history. We can distinguish two types of wines: vintage wines and ordinary wines. The distinction is traditionally established on the production and the nature of their consumption. Vintage wines delimited by restrictive conditions of production and enjoy a high social value, while ordinary wines were due to a wide production and take nutritional value.

However, the trend of the international wine market and the transformation of the consumer behaviours have raised an issue about the French production. On the one hand, the Anglo-Saxon wine culture progressively increases within the production mode. It is represented by (Garcia-Parpet, 2001, 172):

*“A regular quality production based on simple evaluation criteria, an adapted supply to the novice consumers who can’t make their choice in front of a large range of complex commodities, an integration of the production and distribution conditions and the use of brands.”*¹ It fosters a single type of supply within the international market. On the other hand, the nutritional value disappears for the social value and the distinction between the two wine families is more and more difficult to detect.

In this context, the interest is to understand the current transformation of these old wine categories and their consequences on the French wine regulation mode.

Here, we focus on the evolution of ordinary wines and their impact on vintage wines. Indeed, these wines are the first ones to move toward an erosion of their concept of production. Some elements show that these risks still exist today. Therefore, we can wonder how the issues of ordinary wines act upon vintage wines. If these wines disappear, the framework of the French wine split will disappear too. In consequence, there will be an obvious impact on vintage wines. What will be the nature of this impact?

Our study arises in two sections.

The first section shows that vintage wines are already questioned. Indeed, in spite of their will of distinction, some AOC (Appellation d’origine contrôlée) wines move towards an erosion of the production system. This section will be illustrated by statistics coming from an important work of Bartoli and Boulet (1989) on the French wines.

¹ Our translation.

The second section shows that the transformation of ordinary wines into country wines involves new springs of erosion for vintage wine because of the country wines progressively rely on the notion of terroir, which questions the specificities of vintage wines. Here, a terroir means “*a geographical zone, limited, with its geological, agronomical and climatic characteristics, and the specific disciplines that the men had imposed themselves to use the best of this zone*”²(INAO, 2001).

1. The vintage wine: a concept of production already questioned.

During the nineteenth century, the French wines production strongly increased. It went from 28 000 hectolitres in 1808 to 83 836 hectolitres in 1875. Facing this trend, some winegrowers have adopted a strategy of differentiation, which then officialized by a political decision and created the category of vintage wines. But this construction does not prevent from problems within vintage wines and they encounter first signals of erosion.

1.1. The construction of vintage wines: from a choice by some winegrowers to an official political decision.

According to Boulet and Faillet even though there are several types of wines, the split between vintage and ordinary wines has appeared like a fundamental characteristic within the French wines (1973).

First of all, the distinction between the two families has a social origin. However, it has officially legitimated thanks to the AOCs regime.

1.1.1. The distinction between ordinary and vintage wines in France: a social origin.

The split in the French wines started in the antiquity. This distinction is explained by the difference between some cheap wines locally consumed and some expensive wines exported. However, this split is not natural but the result of social production and consumption systems.

² Our translation.

The real distinction between ordinary and high wines appeared during the middle age. From this time, wine had become a sign of prestige and social value. Therefore, the high social classes mainly consumed it. This link with high society meant that some winegrowers had established strategies of marketing within the great noble tables with the help of local nobles. Burgundy was a good example of the deal between some dukes and vineyards (Gadille, 1967).

At the same time, another type of wine grew with the urban development. It was defined by a wide consumption within the domestic and urban population. We can separate two kinds of wine productions:

- The first one was made by the ecclesiastics, noblemen and bourgeois, who wanted to increase their social value. It was concentrated around the exports. The aim of this production was also to create important profits.
- The second one was realised by some labourers, small urban owners, and few peasants who rear grape plants near the conventional fields. The poor local people were the main consumers.

These productions were often realised on the same soil and could not be differentiated by intrinsic features. Then, some winegrowers have developed specific techniques for high wines like the selection of so-called noble vine and new rear modes.

However, even though these differences existed, there was still a threat for high wines due to the development of ordinary wines on the same soil. In addition, high wines have grown up facing the rise of interest of the bourgeoisie. Therefore, various laws have been established in order to protect high wines with local and royal decisions. Beyond those decisions, the will of the high winemakers appeared. Thus, these rules enabled them to preserve a lucrative and prestigious viticulture thanks to their social position. The main purpose was to create a network of rules leading to the exclusion of the wines produced in quantity and the wine was defined like a specific and prestigious product. Consequently, the idea of a limited production appeared, obstacles for competition were legitimated and the scarcity became synonymous with quality within the French wines.

Finally, the split in wine production has been the result of a social willpower. The need to defend the goodwill of vintage wines has brought the first definition of the specificities of vintage wines. Indeed, without a real intrinsic distinction, these wines carried out a set of rules, which limited the quantity of vintage winegrowers, the amount of production and cohabitation with ordinary wines on the same soil.

However, with the collapse of the old regime, many of these rules have been wiped out. In consequence, vintage wines once more needed new rules to legitimate their specificities and the creation of the AOCs answered to this necessity.

1.1.2. The creation of the AOCs regime: an official recognition for vintage wines.

Facing the social and economic evolution, the network of rules, which was built during the middle ages, was withdrawn. However, the hard crisis of wine in the end of nineteenth century provided a new and stronger set of rules. Almost these ones, an important official framework arose as the cause of the split in French wines, by legitimating vintage wines: the AOCs regime.

The crisis of the turn of the nineteenth century brought several evolutions:

- A production crisis as a result of the phylloxera crisis. The production fell of 35,23% between the periods 1860-1870 and 1880-1890.
- A sharp increase of the competitors wines. The imports were multiplied by fifty between the periods 1860-1870 and 1880-1890.
- A decrease in the wines sales. It is emphasizes by the fall of 49,51% in the value of wine between the periods 1880-1890 and 1900-1910.

It concerned all of the vineyards but vintage wines adopted specific solutions.

During this period, the decrease in the vintage wines sales arose as a result of an increase in the competition from ordinary wines and from the industrial wines. Moreover, the wine merchants could use foreign grapes after the fall of local production following the phylloxera crisis. There was an important fraud about the origin of the wines because several merchants bought foreign wines and sold them like local wines³. Therefore, after several winegrowers' complaints, new laws were

³ The wines of Bordeaux were an example of these frauds with almost three millions hectoliters produced and about six millions sold at this time (Roudié, 1988, 208).

proposed, especially on the sixth of May 1919 and the twentieth of July 1927. The law of 1919 gave a juridical value to the geographical delimitation of the “origin’s names” and the law of 1927 restricted the supply through the notion of constant, loyal and local uses.

However, these laws were disappointing because of the poor application of 1927 and the inadequacy of the law of 1919 (Capus, 1947). Thus, when a vineyard with a geographical origin had succeeded, the supply increased at the same time, due to a rise of yields, to new rears and to foreign wines. This evolution has been bad for vintage wines since it was opposed to the link quality/scarcity⁴.

In this context, the AOCs regime, which has been applied with the decree of the 30th of July 1935, showed up like the necessary tool for vintage wines. The lawmakers explained:

*“The controlled appellations’ institution, (...), will stimulate progress due to the advantages linked with this qualification. The winegrowers will have to get disciplined, to rule out the big yields in opposition to the production of vintage wines. Ugly types of vine will have to be replaced for noble types of vine: for a search of quality instead of quantity. It is an issue of life and death for the great French wines.”*⁵

From this decree, the separation between ordinary and vintage wines has become logical. The opposition between quantity and quality, the use of specific vine and specific conditions of production arise like the explanation of the split.

Moreover, the AOCs regime allows the legalisation of great profits involved with the vintage wines thanks to the “appellation guaranteed income”.

Barham (2003, 135) notified that to award an AOC to a product, the natural factors and human factors are decisive. These factors constitute the framework of the notion of terroir and determine the “typicity” of the product (*ibid.*).

In the same sense, Laporte explains that the decree of the AOCs allows the guarantee of the typicity through the restrictive conditions of productions and that these conditions of production are synonymous with quality of wines (2000, 560). In consequence, the notion of Terroir appears as a signal of quality. Thanks to this signal, each vintage wine can improve their specificities linked to their terroir and

⁴ The production of vintage wines went from 6 % of the global wine production in 1920-1923 to 20% in 1932-1935.

⁵ Our translation.

finally creates a situation of monopole⁶. From this position, the producers of vintage wines have enjoyed a guaranteed income.

Today, the AOC wines are still regarded as the best wines of quality in comparison with the table wines. However, this specificity does not prevent the first difficulties within vintage wines.

1.2. The evolution of vintage wines: the first signals of erosion.

In spite of the great effort made by some winegrowers and the legitimisation of the AOC wines, vintage wines currently encounter difficulties to defend the logic of the guaranteed income. These wines are heading towards a distortion between their economic development and the concept of AOCs. This evolution is especially true for the generic AOCs which are the first wines questioned.

1.2.1. Toward a distortion between the economic development and the concept of the AOCs.

In the 1980's, Bartoli and Boulet showed an antagonism context within vintage wines. At first, some elements pointed out the success of vintage wines but other elements pointed out some risks of unsteadiness for these wines (1989, 840). But these authors supposed that the second observation was predominant.

Bartoli and Boulet showed three sources of erosion within the vintage wines (*ibid.*, 842).

The first one is the most important due to a distortion between the productive forces and the logic of guaranteed income. The evolution of the productive forces is the outcome of the logic of productivity which has been applied within the agriculture since the beginning of the nineteenth century. It is especially characterised by:

⁶ Many people accept this link between the terroir and the position of monopoly since the article of Schooler which emphasizes differences in the evaluations of similar products due to the use of the name of the country as label (1965, 396).

- An increasing mechanization of the crop techniques, and then, of the harvest.
- An increasing use of the plant-care product against the diseases and the pests of the grapes, or in order to increase the yields.
- A better control of the transformation and of the storage of the wine thanks to a development of specific tools.

This logic of productivity is dangerous for wines which defend their specificities through the link scarcity/quality. Bartoli and Boulet explain (*ibid.*, 868):

“The increase of the productive bases which is an intrinsic mechanisation peculiar to the capitalist mode of production (...), involves a gradual disappearance of the logic of guaranteed income or at least the protective institutional system and finally the specific regulation mode of vintage wines”⁷.

The second distortion arises within the relations between the production forms and the sale capacities of the suppliers. A clash appears between the collective and the brand valorisation of the wines.

Traditionally, there is a deal between the winegrowers and the wine merchants within vintage wines. Indeed, the AOCs regime is characterised by a common defence of the logic of guaranteed income even though individual interests are different.

This link is the result of the long historical process of the first AOCs (Champagne and Bordeaux) in order to avoid social conflicts between these two professions.

Today, the more frequent overproductions are going to wipe out the deal between winegrowers and wine merchants. These latter can choose the production sector in front of the high available supply involving an eviction of a part of winegrowers. In consequence, the institutional system could be disturbed with the disappearance of the traditional vertical solidarity between the professions of wine.

The third distortion appears with the increasing difficulty to sell the wines with a monopoly price to the national and international markets.

According to Bartoli and Boulet, within the international market, the demand for vintage wines will not have any problem in midterm but the development of the foreign productions with logic of guaranteed income could involve a standardisation

⁷ Our translation.

of the income coming from the French AOC wines. Besides, the national market could be in overproduction of vintage wines (*ibid.*, 847).

Finally, the French vintage wines are heading towards an erosion. However, the distortions do not concern all of the AOC wines.

It can realise a difference between the generic and prestigious AOCs. Nowadays, the generic AOCs do not have any official definition. In your study, we assume that a generic AOC is an AOC which does not correspond to the link quality/scarcity. Thus, it has an important yield; conditions of production least restrictive and it can arise as a fallback position to other AOCs when they do not respect their conditions of production⁸.

According to this definition, the biggest generic AOCs are AOCs “Bordeaux”, “Bourgogne” and “Côtes du Rhône”.⁹

Assuming that the prestigious AOCs have always followed the strict conditions of production, only the generic AOCs are mainly concerned by the risk of erosion. This observation truly arises in the French generic AOC wines which are the first AOC wines questioned.

1.2.2. The generic AOCs: the first wines questioned.

Today, the three distortions observed by Bartoli and Boulet at the end of the 1980's are a reality for the generic AOC wines. Indeed, their evolution shows all the difficulties involved by these elements.

The first distortion concerns the increase of the productive areas and the existence of a glut due to the distortion between the development of the productive forces and the logic of a guaranteed income.

For the production areas, we can observe the increase within the two biggest generic AOCs: “Bordeaux” and “Bourgogne”.

- In Bordeaux, the AOC area went from 113,7 thousands hectares in 1993 to 123 thousands hectares in 2003 (ONIVINS, 2004e).

⁸ In France, this possibility is called “repli”. See the definition in (CIVB, 1997, 17).

⁹ Other AOC are generic too but they are not signalled here in order to simplification.

- In Burgundy, it went from 26,2 to 29,7 thousands hectares in the same period. These increases involved increases in the production from 1993 to 2000, the following harvest being especially small (ONIVINS, 2003c).

In consequence, an imbalance between the supply and the demand has appeared. For the AOC "Bordeaux", the commercial potential was around 5,5 millions hectolitres in 2003 whereas the production was around 7 millions for a standard year (Némin-Autexier, 2004, 24).

This glut brought two consequences:

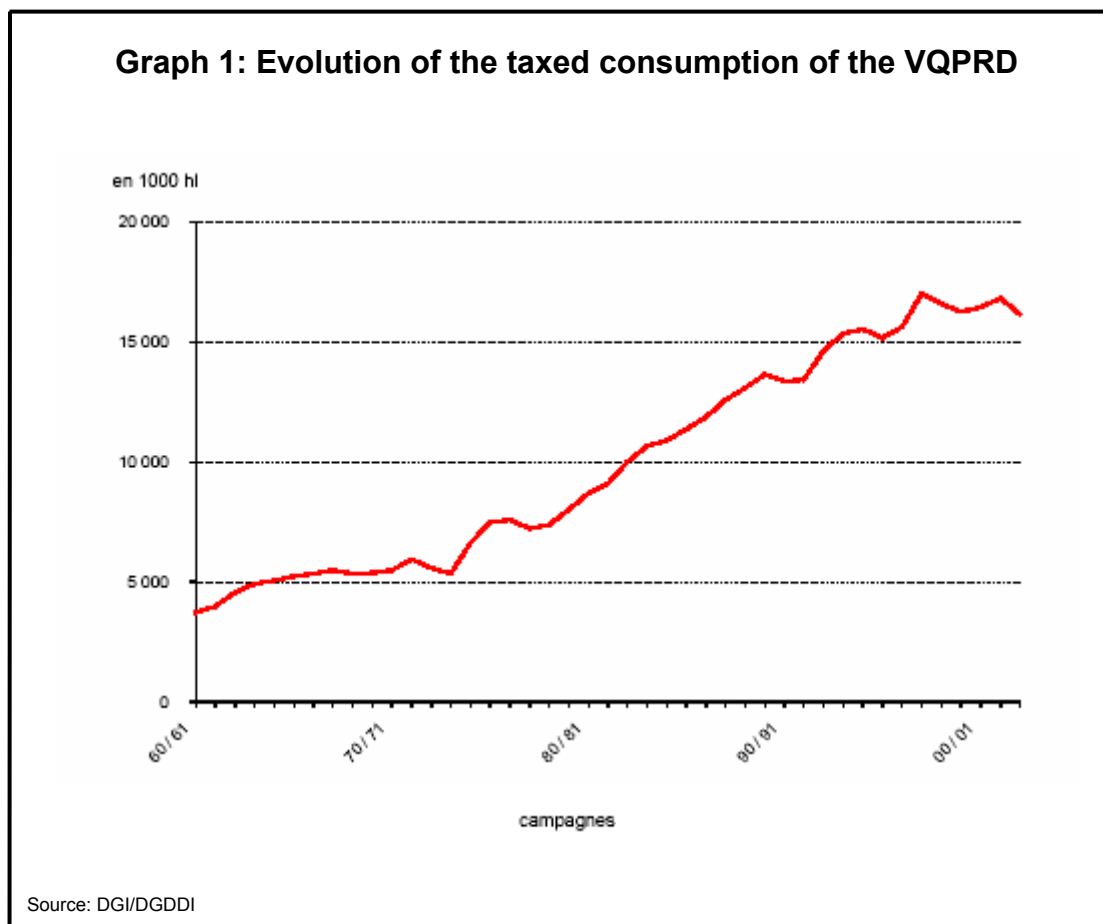
- A continuous increase in the stocks. For example, the storage of the red and rosé Bordeaux went from 1781 thousands hectolitres to 3202 thousands hectolitres between the periods 1994/1995 and 2003/2004 (ONIVINS, 2004f).
- A fall in the prices due to the increased quantity which does not allow to keep a monopoly price. The price of red Bordeaux AOC has decreased since 1998. (Rannou-Heim, 2004, 3). Moreover, the anticipated great production of 2004/2005 should make this trend worse.

The second distortion within the generic AOCs arises too. There is a split in the vertical solidarity between winegrowers and wine merchants. This situation occurs in Bordeaux with the claims of the winegrowers against the wine merchants. Indeed, the sales of the merchants decrease and in order to reduce their difficulties, they take advantage of the glut to reduce the price of the raw material. Consequently, the price of the AOC wine barrel is not sufficient to cover the production costs of the winegrowers (Béraud-Sudreau, 2004, 12).

Eventually, we can also emphasize the difficulty to sell the wines with a monopoly price to the national and international markets.

Concerning the international market, the demand for vintage wines increases, as observed Jesus Oliviera Coelho and Rastoin (2001, 18). However, the competition with the new producing countries is hence strong and involves a desertion of the French generic AOCs. In 2003, the exports of the red wine appellations have decreased by 10% in the European Union and 5% in the other countries. The appellation of Bourgogne is especially concerned with a fall of 14%. This decrease is 8% for the "Côtes du Rhône" and 6% for the "Bordeaux" (Agreste, 2004, 1).

Concerning the national market, the saturation of the demand is confirmed. Thus, the taxed consumption of the VQPRD¹⁰ has been in stagnation since 1998/99 (Graph. 1).



Finally, the situation of the AOCs is complex. Even though we are talk about first signals of erosion within the regulation mode of vintage wines, only the Generic AOCs are currently concerned. But this limited crisis is not over and new changes could increase the risks of erosion for the all of AOCs. Thus, the transformation of ordinary wines into country wines appears like a new cause of erosion for vintage wines.

¹⁰ VQPRD constituted by AOCs and AOVDQS (label guaranteeing quality and origin) but these latter are very few in France (431,7 thousands hectolitres for 23 971 thousands hectolitres of AOC in 2002).

2. The transformation of ordinary wines into country wines: a new cause of erosion for vintage wines.

Ordinary wines are the first French wines to encounter a deep erosion of their regulation mode. Nowadays, the social and political environments of the French wines lead to a transformation of ordinary wines. It is characterized by the development of country wines. But, this transformation has a deep impact on vintage wines, and country wines could become a new cause of erosion.

2.1. The social and political environments of the French wines: a transformation of ordinary wines.

The French social formation has deeply changed since the end of the 1950's, notably with a progressive decrease of the industrial jobs profit to the service jobs. Within these evolutions, ordinary wines are less and less adapted.

In order to adapt to the consumer assumptions, some European interventions have been appeared, which means a transformation of ordinary wines.

2.1.1. Ordinary wines: commodities less and less adapted to the French society.

Ordinary wines represent unidentified wines and they are also named table wines. They are produced in high quantity and their consumption is mainly national.

When Bartoli and Boulet were interested by the dichotomy within the French wines, they had defined the specificities of the consumption and the production of ordinary wines. They explained that these wines had faced a kind of steadiness until the 1970's. Then, they have been characterised by a degradation of their economic position following an important crisis. Today, this trend is confirmed and shows that the French ordinary wines must be revised.

For Bartoli and Boulet, the origins of the erosion can be observed in the demand area. Indeed, since the 1950's, the national consumption has decreased due to structural changes of the society. Indeed, these wines have been the most consumed during the urban expansion of the nineteenth century. The growing of the industrial centres and the high increase of the urban population brought an important outlet for

ordinary wines which were historically linked to the urban population. Besides, ordinary wines were considered as a tonic drink, a complement of the daily meal. Since then, this consumption has strongly decreased. There might be two explanations for this trend (ONIVINS, 2004b, 22).

- The first one is a disaffection of the wine consumers until 1990 in France. Between 1980 and 1990, the percentage of consumers of more than fourteen years old has decreased by three million people.
- The second one is that the nutritional value was gradually abandoned in all the countries to an occasional consumption of commodities with better quality reputation. Thus, the daily consumption strongly decreased going from 61% of the French consumers in 1980 to 37% in 2000 (*ibid.*).

These evolutions have had a deep impact on ordinary wines, which lost around 50% of their consumption between 1979 and 1999 (Rannou-Heim, 1999, 1). Moreover, they have created a glut of ordinary wines since the production was kept at a high level.

At the beginning, the supply of these wines was controlled with a limited use of the technological innovations, especially with the eviction of the industrial wine commodities. But since the 1950's, the yields have increased thanks to mechanization and to a rise of the productivity of labour. Moreover, the crop's techniques and the wine's transformation have improved. In consequence, the harvests have become more important and regular, involving several overproductions and then a deep crisis in the seventies.

This trend doesn't exist anymore today. Between 1993 and 2002, the production went from 22 431 to 19 345 hectolitres thanks to a reduction of the production areas (-20%) and to a stabilization of the yields from 2000 (ONIVINS, 2004b). However, this production remained too high. For example, in 1999 and 2000, the big harvest in Languedoc involved a fall of the ordinary wines prices (Agreste, 2003, 2).

This problem of glut is worsened by the wine evolution of the other producing countries.

Within the European Union, Italia and Spain appear like serious competitors for the winegrowers with a cheap raw material and a production being mainly constituted by

table wines (ONIVINS, 2004c). Today, this European competition could be rougher with the recent integration of Hungary and the next integration of Romania and Bulgaria. These countries are expected to increase their production by 9,3% (ONIVINS, 2004d, 3) because their ordinary wines are a wide share. For example, ordinary wines represent a third of the Hungarian wine production (Sidlovits, 2004, 144).

Another origin of the competition comes from the new producing countries. Since the Uruguay Round in 1995, the European wine market has been more sensible to the cheaper foreign wines (Rannou-Heim, 2004, 4).

These competitors involve two problems:

- They limit the exports of the French ordinary wines.
- They introduce new waves of raw material for the wine merchants who want to reduce their costs.

Thus, they increase the situation of glut which can be currently estimated at four millions hectolitres¹¹

Finally, the imbalance between supply and demand of ordinary wines becomes rapidly too high for keeping the production of table wines. Therefore, these wines head towards an increase of their quality image. Such transformation is the result of European interventions.

2.1.2. The European interventions: the origin of the transformation of ordinary wines.

It appears that since the crisis of the 1970's, the decisions have been less and less the result of the local actors. Thus, the EU, through governmental decisions, has taken a more and more important place within the production of ordinary wines. It involved a transformation of these wines into country wines.

The real intervention of the EU within the wine market appeared with the MCO (Common Market's Organization) in 1970.

¹¹ From Rannou-Heim (2004), and ONIVINS (2004b). For the French production and consumption only.

The main purpose was to ensure the steadiness of the market. Completed in 1979 and 1987, the measures mainly targeted ordinary wines. This European policy involved the creation of quality wines with a specific identity, removing ordinary wines. With that, the decrease of the vineyards and the development of specific wines were launched. This direction differed from the traditional logic of wide production without differentiation of the wines but the winegrowers progressively agreed to finally claim these transformations. Touzard noticed this evolution in the Languedoc-Roussillon (2000, 594):

“After a period of disagreement, the deals between the Government, the EEC and the local wines person in charge ended up creating measures targeting to reduce the regional supply (uprooting subsidies, obligatory distillation and replanting subsidies). As a result, there was a decrease of the production until 1993, an uprooting of more 100 000 hectares and a replanting of the third of the vineyard with aromatic vine.”¹²

These transformations have been confirmed by the last MCO, which notably target to (Ministère de l’agriculture et de la pêche, 2001, 4):

- Keep the transformation of the production toward the quality and to better integrate the consumers’ expectations with a new frame for the vineyards.
- Keep the steadiness between production and demand.

These European directions involve a deep transformation of ordinary wines into country wines.

Country wines are defined as table wines, which use a geographical indication as a differentiation (ONIVINS, 2004a). These wines have more restrictive conditions of production like: maximum yield, minimum alcohol degree, etc. They are divided into three types:

- Departmental indication.
- Zone indication.
- Regional indication.

Today, the majority of French table wines are country wines. Even if the table wines do not disappear, their share progressively decreases as shown below. Thus, the

¹² Our translation.

share of country wines went from 53% of ordinary wines to 72% between 1993 and 2002 (ONIVINS, 2004b, 11).

The consequence of the wine MCO in Europe is the transformation of ordinary wines into country wines. This phenomenon could have an impact on the evolution of vintage wines. Indeed, the development of country wines could arise like an aggravation of the risks of erosion for vintage wines.

2.2. The development of the country wines: a possible worsening of the risks of erosion for vintage wines.

The first idea of the country wines is to use the advantages of the AOC wines without compete with vintage wines. The use of a geographical indication within ordinary wines is just a reference to the concept of terroir. But, today, the country wines need to improve their quality image. These new requirements of the country wines could be a question of the specificities of vintage wines.

2.2.1. The use of a geographical indication within ordinary wines: a reference to the concept of terroir.

We saw that vintage wines used the concept of the terroir in order to get differentiation from other wines and legitimate a guaranteed income.

Today, this using keeps peculiar to vintage wines but the development of the country wines could question this privilege.

At the first plan, the geographical indications used within the country wines have no link with the concept of terroir because they come from administrative delimitations and not from a specific area. In addition, the conditions of production are less restrictive and many country wines still symbolise the wide production of table wines like in Languedoc. Consequently, their goodwill cannot really frame on their soil 's specificities.

However, some elements used can remind this concept. Thus, the wine zone must be "*an homogenous set of climatic and historical characteristics*"¹³ (ONIVINS, 2004a). Beyond, there are the physical characteristics owing to a particular

¹³ Our translation.

geographical area and the reference to human factors with the “*homogenous historical characteristics*”.

Until now, these allusions do not actually increase because the French country wines were specialized in single type of vine. Half of the country wines approved in 2002-2003 used a specific type of vine (Rannou-Heim, 2004, 4).

This orientation is explained by the foreign competition based on these distinctions. Aigrain and Brugière (2003, 24) explain:

“(...) The stores within the non producing countries are framed through the vine, even if the wines are gather by countries. Then the distributors realised codifications in the same vine, for example one to nine within the white wines to signal from drier to sweeter (...).”¹⁴

The country wines of « Oc » are the best example. These regional wines of Languedoc-Rousillon are a great example of reconverting. They represent the biggest area of production of country wines in France and they are specialised in the vine country wines. In 2002, 80% of the sales were realised by seven types of vine (Union Interprofessionnelle des Vins d’Oc, 2004):

- For the red wines: Cabernet-Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah.
- For the white wines: Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Viognier.

This specialisation allows the removal of the outlet of ordinary wines toward the international market. In 2003, 83% of the “Oc” country wines were exported to (Union Interprofessionnelle des Vins d’Oc, 2004):

- The United-States and Canada
- The United-Kingdom, Belgium, Germany and Scandinavian countries.
- Asia and especially Japon.

However, it also involves a bigger sensibility with the international competition which is stronger and stronger. Indeed, some new producing countries have established their wine strategy to the exports. For example, Anderson (2001, 117) explains that the boom of the Australian wines, which began in the late 1980’s is notably

¹⁴ Our translation.

characterised by an overwhelmingly export-oriented because the national consumption has been static over the 1990's.

Consequently, in order to keep the foreign expeditions, the French vine country wines must always be ready to improve their quality image. This obligation currently appears with the development of the geographical indications within the new producing countries but it could involve a question of the specificity of vintage wines.

2.2.2. The new requirements of the country wine: toward a question of the specificity of vintage wines.

In order to increase their market shares, the new producing countries have engaged in new quality strategies at the end of the 1980's. These strategies, notably based on geographical indications, could bring a disappearance of the split in the French wines. Indeed, facing foreign decisions, some French country wines search to improve their specificity through the geographical indications. It involves a strengthening of the using of the concept of terroir and consequently a question of the specificities of vintage wines.

The last strategies of the new producing countries are dangerous for the French country wines. Indeed, one force of these wines is to present several single grape wines linked to geographical indications. Now, this force is gradually questioned. Thus, Anderson explains that Australia progressively used the geographical indications to improve the quality image (2001, 117). It is true for the USA too. Even though the purchases still depend on the brands and the vine, some brands have used geographical indications to improve their quality image (Benjamin, 1999).

Such uses of geographical signals are legally delimited in these two countries.

In the USA, they refers to a country, county or AVA's (American Viticultural Areas) (Wine Institute Of California, 2001, 20). In Australia, they refer to a zone, region or sub-region (AWBC, 2004).

These geographical indications are less restrictive than the French country wines in terms of viticultural and winemaking practices. The only restriction is that wine which carries the regional name must consist of a minimum of 85% of fruit from that region. Besides, no obligations exist for the maximum yields, crop techniques and wine transformations. However, they are closer to the notion of terroir than the French country wines (Tab. 1). For example, an Australian geographical indication must

consider history (general, grape growing and wine production), geology, climate, harvest dates, drainage, water availability, elevation and traditional use of the area and the name (AWBC, 2004). These standards lead to extricate two aspects of the terroir: geographical characteristics and the human know-how.

Tab. 1: The uses of geographical indications: differentiations and rapprochements in relation to the notion of Terroir.

	Human characteristics	Nature characteristics	Area delimited
AOC	Specific disciplines that the Beings imposed themselves	Geological, agronomical and climatic characteristics	Specific Area
French Country Wines	Homogenous set of historical characteristics	Homogenous set of climatic characteristics	Administrative
Geographical indications	History (general, grape growing and wine production) and traditional use of the area and the name	Geology, climate, harvest dates, drainage, water availability, elevation	Administrative

Sources : From the official definitions of terroir, production zone of French country wines and Geographical Indications.

Facing these developments, some French country wines want to improve the use of their geographical indication with the valorisation of their expertise. It is the case of the “Oc” country wines with “the Grand d’Oc”. These latter bring their distinctive values from specific enological practices (Garcia-Parpet, 2001, 174).

The issue is that the developments of the human factor within the country wines reduce the distinction between vintage wines and others. It can involve two additionally phenomena:

- An aggravation of the generic AOC wines situation.
- A question to the AOCs regime.

The aggravation of the generic AOC wines arises from the loss of the benefit of the logic of guaranteed income.

Indeed, country and regional AOC wines are under competition. Both realise their dispatches on the same foreign markets. With the improvement of the quality image within the country wines, the distinction between these wines and vintage wines become hard. Such impact increases the risk of erosion within the AOC wines. These latter regularly pass the legal roof and increase the similarity with the country wines. For example, the decree of the red Bordeaux AOC limits the yield to 55 hectolitres per hectare but until 2000, the yields were around 63 hectolitres per hectare (CIVB, 2003, 2). In consequence, facing cheaper country wines, the monopoly price becomes indefensible for the generic AOC wines.

The question of the AOCs regime follows from the matters of the generic AOCs. Indeed, the similarities between country wines and these AOC wines supposed that a wine of terroir could come from any area. The link between the scarcity of wines and the scarcity of good terroir becomes wrong with the generalisation of this concept. Garcia-Parpet shows that there is an increase of the AOC vineyards and that it is opposed with the idea of scarcity (2001, 173).

Moreover, the agreement committees currently accept 98% of the AOC candidates although the administrative process seems hard (Barham, 2003, 133). It supposed that all the vineyards could become an AOC (Laurent, Chamourin, 2002, 16). Thus, excepted the AOC Champagne, more and more prestigious AOCs encounter the first difficulties (Sarrazin, 2004)

Finally, the transformation of ordinary wines to “high” country wines wipes out the dichotomy within the French wines. In consequence, the generic AOCs, which have already some difficulties to prove their differences, see one more the deterioration of their market position. But, moreover, these difficulties could involve a pernicious effect within the prestigious AOCs, which lean on the same rules currently questioned.

Conclusion.

We can say that the transformation of ordinary wines to country wines could be dangerous for vintage wines.

This bad impact can be explained by the current context of vintage wines. Indeed, the regulation mode of vintage wines already encounters a question.

Vintage wines have actually been built with the AOCs regime. It makes it possible to legitimate the specificities of vintage wines and to protect them from ordinary wines trend. However, in spite of this protection, vintage wines currently encounter first signals of erosion. The rise of the productive forces goes against the “logic of guaranteed income” with the question of the link between scarcity and quality of wines. This distortion is especially true for the generic AOCs.

In this situation, the passage of ordinary wines to country wines could be a new source of erosion for vintage wines. Facing a gradual maladjustment of ordinary wines to the market assumptions, the European MCO had meant a transformation of these wines to country wines. At first, even if these wines had used a geographical indication, they did not constitute a real menace for vintage wines because they were mainly specialized in vine country wines. But, the new requirements of the French country wines currently mean a question to vintage wines peculiarities. Facing the use of geographical indications by the new producing countries, some French country wines could develop “high” country wines, which improve the reference to the concept of terroir. It could involve a generalization of this concept and a disappearance of the specificity of vintage wines: specific expertise within a specific geographical zone. It leads an aggravation of the problems to the generic AOCs and more globally to the AOC wines.

Facing this transformation of ordinary wines, vintage wines must reaffirm their specificities. But, we can wonder if it is still possible. Indeed, the French wines are facing in profound change and several ways are proposed. Do the AOC wines have still reasons to exist? How well they could create new sources of distinction in relation to the other wines?

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