

Qualifying tradition: Instituted practices in the making of the organic wine market in Languedoc-Roussillon, France

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Abstract

Within France, the Languedoc-Roussillon region (now part of Occitanie) is home to about one third of the nation's area of certified organic vineyards. Each year, the world's largest organic wine fair, Millésime Bio, takes place in the city of Montpellier. This trade fair is an important site where organic wine is not only sold but also given meaning in the market, and importantly, differentiated from but made commensurate with conventional wine. In this paper, we examine processes and practices of 'qualifying' organic wine, including by means of relational processes of association and dissociation. Drawing on collaborative event ethnography and other qualitative methods, we focus on individual and institutional actors engaged in creating forms of commodified meanings that circulate with organic wine. In Languedoc-Roussillon, these meanings reflect and reinforce a longer-term so-called shift to quality in wine production, yet also emphasize continuity over change, particularly through emphasis on ongoing role of artisanal, independent growers. We argue that qualification thereby works not only through association with independent growers but also by dissociation, specifically from Languedoc-Roussillon's agrarian tradition of generic wine production and from the central role played by wine cooperatives in the social reproduction of the region's small-holding grower class.

KEYWORDS

collaborative event ethnography, economy of qualities, invented tradition, Languedoc-Roussillon, Millésime Bio, organic wine

1 | INTRODUCTION

As with all products of organic agriculture (or at least those products sold explicitly and formally as such), organic wine must be identifiable in markets through specific signifiers of quality. These signifiers include formal certification and the use of labels. They also include less formal ways in which narratives of quality become attached to wine through processes of what Callon, Méadel, and Rabeharisoa (2002) define as *qualification* undertaken by individual and institutional actors. These narratives of quality may describe or verify ethical (i.e., social and/or environmental) standards to be applied to commodity production and circulation as forms of what Julie Guthman (2002) memorably referred to as 'commodified meanings' attached to 'meaningful commodities'. But more generally, what is involved is the signification of intrinsic material and aesthetic attributes in wine, including aspects such as age, acidity, viscosity, varietal or grape blend, body, dryness, terroir and social and/or geographical places of origin, among others.

This points to a somewhat contradictory problem for products of organic agriculture and, for that matter, of other alternative agronomic regimes. To put the problem simply, organic/alternative food products must on the one hand be distinguished from conventional analogues. They must occupy different market niches and must be both symbolically and (in some instances) physically segregated from conventional comparators. They must be marked and maintained as 'different' in ways that are symbolically and materially consequential. Organic foods and food products are thus defined in important measure by *quality infrastructures* of difference that link producers to consumers via formal and informal social contracts (Giovannucci & Ponte, 2005). On the other hand, organic foods (or, again, products of other alternative agronomic regimes) must be accepted as being commensurate with conventional analogues. Organic apples, for example, need to be organic, but they also need to be commercially accepted as apples. If they are seen as being too different (e.g., too blemished and misshapen), then this will undermine their value. The challenge of addressing this inherently contradictory problem takes on added complexity in the case of organic wine given that '... in the agri-food sector, [wine] has the most complex and sophisticated quality infrastructure' (Ponte, 2009, p. 238). Thus, the first of two central questions animating this paper concerns how important individual and institutional actors qualify organic wine for the market in ways that distinguish it from and yet make it commensurate with conventional wine.

A second question, related to the first, pertains to how qualification is informed by *situated* practices. How do we understand the role of context—institutional, geographical and historical—in the qualification of organic wine? Here, we draw from neo-Polanyian perspectives on markets and market-making, emphasizing how specific institutions constitute the formation of markets and market segments. More specifically, we explore ways in which regional trajectories of agrarian transformation in viti-viniculture inform qualification and, drawing on and echoing Ibert, Hess, Kleibert, Müller, and Power (2019), the ways in which spatial imaginaries inform processes of qualification through the relational interplay of association with and dissociation from various aspects of regional historical context.

In this paper, we focus on the qualification of organic wine as it is substantively grounded in the region of southern France formerly known as Languedoc-Roussillon, subsumed since September of 2017 within the new administrative region of Occitanie. Languedoc-Roussillon is important as a regional focus for three main reasons:

- (i) It is the largest wine-growing region in the world by volume of production;
- (ii) It has been and remains the most important regional hearth for the organic wine movement in France, in turn one of the leading national producers of organic wine; and

- (iii) For much of the 20th century, the region was known for producing large volumes of relatively generic, inexpensive table wine sold primarily to working class families in French cities. More recently, the Languedoc-Roussillon 'winescape' (Crowley, 1993) has been transformed through a geographically uneven process known as the 'shift to quality', with increasing emphasis placed on the production of higher-quality wines.

Our ongoing research emphasizes social and ecological aspects of the 'shift to quality' in Languedoc-Roussillon, including specifically the dynamic articulation of organic and cooperative wine-making in the region. In this paper, our focus concerns how the qualification of organic wine reflects, refracts and, in some respects, obscures institutional, regional and historical context, often in highly contradictory ways. We argue that qualifying organic wines from the region takes place by means of narratives that selectively reference regional historical processes of agrarian transformation. These narratives take on aspects reminiscent of what Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) termed 'invented traditions' specifically by *association with* an ostensibly continuous tradition of artisanal production by relatively small-scale independent growers and wine-makers as well as through *dissociation from* a productivist past in regional wine-making. The latter, we argue, takes place specifically through de-emphasis of the important historical and ongoing role of cooperative vinification in securing social reproduction for the region's small-scale growers. We make these arguments drawing primarily on observations of spatially and institutionally situated representational practices involved in qualifying wine at the Millésime Bio organic wine trade shows held in southern France in 2016 and 2017.

2 | CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

This paper contributes to existing scholarship chronicling the emergence of organic agriculture and the formation of markets for organic and other products of alternative agriculture (see, e.g., Gibbon, 2008; Guthman, 2004; Krzywoszynska, 2015; Luetchford & Pratt, 2011; Mutersbaugh, 2004). This includes scholarship concerning the development of formal and informal 'quality regimes' based on codified ethical standards (Friedberg, 2004; Ponte & Gibbon, 2005; Staricco & Ponte, 2015). However, we place emphasis on less formal dimensions of processes of *qualification*, not to downplay the significance of formal, codified certification regimes and the like but instead to explore how these are complemented by a diverse set of practices involved in attaching meaning to organic products.

We are specifically concerned to contribute to accounts of the uneven geography of organic production and organic supply chains by 'placing' or grounding the emergence of organic wine production within Languedoc-Roussillon. In wine, this unevenness is evident at the national scale given that Spain, Italy and France together account for 70% of the world's organic vineyard area (Mercier, 2016). It is also evident regionally, however, including within France where organic vineyards have emerged and remain highly concentrated in certain areas of the country, notably Languedoc-Roussillon. In general terms, spatial unevenness in organic agriculture may be seen in part as a manifestation of the influence of situated economic and institutional networks that articulate pre-existing actors—growers, producers, buyers, retailers, researchers and regulators among others—in new ways. These relationships are based on constructs of trust, transparency, accountability and the production, codification and commodification of standards and meanings that sustain durable conventions of quality across increasingly extensive networks of production and circulation (Codron, Sirix, & Reardon, 2006; Guthman, 2002, 2007; Ponte, 2009).

The influence of regional and institutional context on the emergence of organic agriculture and associated supply networks reinforces the basic insight that markets and market niches cannot be explained as the outcome of the aggregation of individual choices or preferences. We take the neo-Polanyian view that instead embraces holism. As Karl Polanyi (1957, p. 251) argued, '... if, in any given case, the societal effects of individual behaviour depend on the presence of definite institutional conditions, these conditions do not for that reason result from the personal behaviour in question'. A neo-Polanyian perspective calls for substantivism over abstraction, '... an iterative engagement with actually existing (or formerly existing) *real economies*, understood ... in a manner especially sensitive to socio-

institutional context' (Peck, 2013, pp. 1553–1554, emphasis in original). This implies not only attention to institutions per se but also an historicist perspective on the evolution of markets as empirical, path-dependent phenomena. It also points to the importance of geographical context, including regionally differentiated social relations and practices, and to the complex interplay of human and non-human actors and processes in constituting 'the economic' (Moore, 2015; Smith, 1984, 2008).

At the same time, emphasis on the 'real', situated character of economies requires attention to what Timothy Mitchell (2014, p. 484) calls the 'effect' of the economy '... as the product of an iterative process of reference'. Systemic forms of representation tied to material practices also constitute real economies and, as Mitchell suggests, help to bring economies into being through reference. To capture aspects of this insight, we also draw on the work of Callon et al. (2002) and their notion of the 'economy of qualities'. For Callon et al. (2002), the qualification of goods by various actors participating in markets is '... organized around two structuring mechanisms: the *singularization* of goods and the *attachment* of goods to (and detachment from) those who consume them' (p. 202, emphasis added). Speaking to the tension between difference and commensurability, they argue specifically that singularization '... is obtained against a background of similitude. The difference that enables a product to capture the consumer always involves the prior assertion of a resemblance which suggests an association between the consumer's former attachments and the new ones proposed' (Callon et al., 2002, p. 203).

We find this framework particularly helpful in two respects. First, Callon et al. recognize the importance of and differences between the intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics of commodities. This perspective is well suited to wine. Clearly, wines are differentiated by intrinsic material properties (e.g., colour, aroma, viscosity, acidity and sweetness). At the same time, the wine sector features an elaborate 'quality infrastructure' (Ponte, 2009), including a bewildering array of formal nomenclature such as geographically delimited appellations, along with less formally determined valorizations linked to socio-cultural distinction (Bourdieu, 1984). This makes it almost impossible to separate the extrinsic and the intrinsic when it comes to wine. Callon et al. offer an account of qualification as a co-production of material differences as they are actively signified through individual and institutional practices of representation.

Second, although Callon et al. argue for the need to situate any commodity within a broader space of commodities in order to understand dynamic and competitive processes of singularization, attachment and detachment, their approach seems particularly apt when considering distinctions made between closely related commodities or classes of commodities, such as in the formation of market segments. In their words, there is a '... difficult adjustment between a supply and a demand that is formed around a list of qualities—an adjustment that is temporary and constantly threatened because it operates against a background of *substitutability and comparability*. The good relates to a certain structuration of competition, which acts both as a constraint and a resource for the collective qualification-requalification of products' (Callon et al., 2002, p. 201, emphasis added). Although organic wine is no longer strictly speaking novel, it does occupy a dynamic and still maturing market niche, the characteristics of which are regionally uneven. This means organic wine must be qualified in ways that position it within and yet distinguish it from an existing, elaborate hierarchy of quality conventions (Krzywoszynska, 2015). And this must be done in ways that extend beyond the formal, codified quality regimes of organic certification as well as those of established wine appellations (which do not distinguish between conventional and organic wine).

Within this, as Ibert et al. (2019) have argued, there is a need to be attentive not only to positive associations involved in singularization but also to the ways in which singularization occurs through dissociation, a decoupling of undesirable symbolic meaning from a commodity or class of commodities. As they put it, '... *associating* denotes a set of practices [designed] to increase the salience of links that evoke or confirm all of those ideas about a brand's or product's qualities that the provider would like various constituencies to hold. *Dissociating*, in contrast, denotes practices of weakening or obscuring meaningful negative links between a brand/commodity and other entities' (Ibert et al., 2019, p. 49). We find this rubric helpful in capturing substantive processes of qualification in action that we observed, particularly when association and dissociation are understood to be conjoined, relational processes. Moreover, as with Ibert et al. (2019), we are interested in exploring association/dissociation as they originate in individual

and institutional practices that are situated within and informed by specific historical geographical contexts, including, in the case of wine, trajectories of agrarian political economic change.

A third conceptual pillar of our analysis is an adaptation of the notion of 'invented tradition'. We draw on the use of this term as it was originally proposed by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) to refer to systematic and power-laden narratives and practices emphasizing continuity during moments of social change. Invented traditions have the effect of normalizing and stabilizing emergent practices, power relations, institutions and social relations by suggesting an historical continuity. For Hobsbawm (1983, p. 1), "[i]nvented tradition" is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past'. Hobsbawm and Ranger (and their collaborators) emphasized the emergence of formal exercises and performances, often tied to state politics and projects (e.g., national holidays and parades), through which configurations of state power or forms of regulatory and political territorialization become legitimized by reference to tradition. We adapt the concept here to apply to the commercial qualification of organic wine. For us, the notion of invented tradition helps capture the individual and institutional practices of qualification we observed that invoked agrarian tradition in the Languedoc-Roussillon regional winescape in highly contradictory ways. We focus in particular on the symbolic resonance of the small-scale, artisanal household wine-maker, noting a complex mix of association with the historical continuity of this class of independent vigneron, on the one hand, and, on the other, dissociation from the region's productivist past. Dissociation from the past applied not only (as one would expect) to the region's history of producing low-quality wines based on intensive and specifically chemically dependent agronomic regimes but also, in a more contradictory fashion, from the historical and ongoing centrality of collective vinification in securing social reproduction for the small-scale grower.

3 | ORGANIC WINE PRODUCTION, LANGUEDOC-ROUSSILLON AND MILLÉSIME BIO

3.1 | Organic wine

The emergence of organic agriculture in France has a long and complex history (Bivar, 2018) but was punctuated by the introduction of formal state certification under the French 'AB' label in 1985 followed by the European standard in 1991 (Gibbon, 2008). The development of a modern organic wine movement in the country broadly follows this timing, emerging in the late 20th century and accelerating rapidly following the turn of the 21st century. Between 2007 and 2015, the total area of organic vineyards in France tripled, with over 71,000 ha of French vineyards (i.e., almost 10% of the nation's total vineyard area) either certified or in conversion as of 2018 (Agence Bio, 2018).

Disaggregating this growth reveals spatial unevenness, with the Mediterranean departments of Languedoc-Roussillon and Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur emerging early as leading regions. Already, by 2011, almost 10% of Languedoc-Roussillon vineyards were certified organic or were in conversion (Agence Bio, 2012). Figure 1, reflecting data from 2014, demonstrates that the organic wine movement was at this time concentrated in the south and southwest, but that expansion into other wine-producing regions was well underway.

The most recent data available indicate that the newly created region of Occitanie continues to lead France with over 22,600 ha of certified organic vineyards in 2018 (and an additional 12,000 ha in conversion). This represents 35% of France's total area of certified vineyards. Moreover, 90% of Occitanie's organic vineyards are located in the four main wine-producing departments of the former region of Languedoc-Roussillon—Garde, Hérault, Aude and Pyrénées-Orientales (Agence Bio, 2019).

Importantly, the French organic wine sector differs significantly from the conventional wine sector in ways that extend beyond agronomy. These differences include the following:

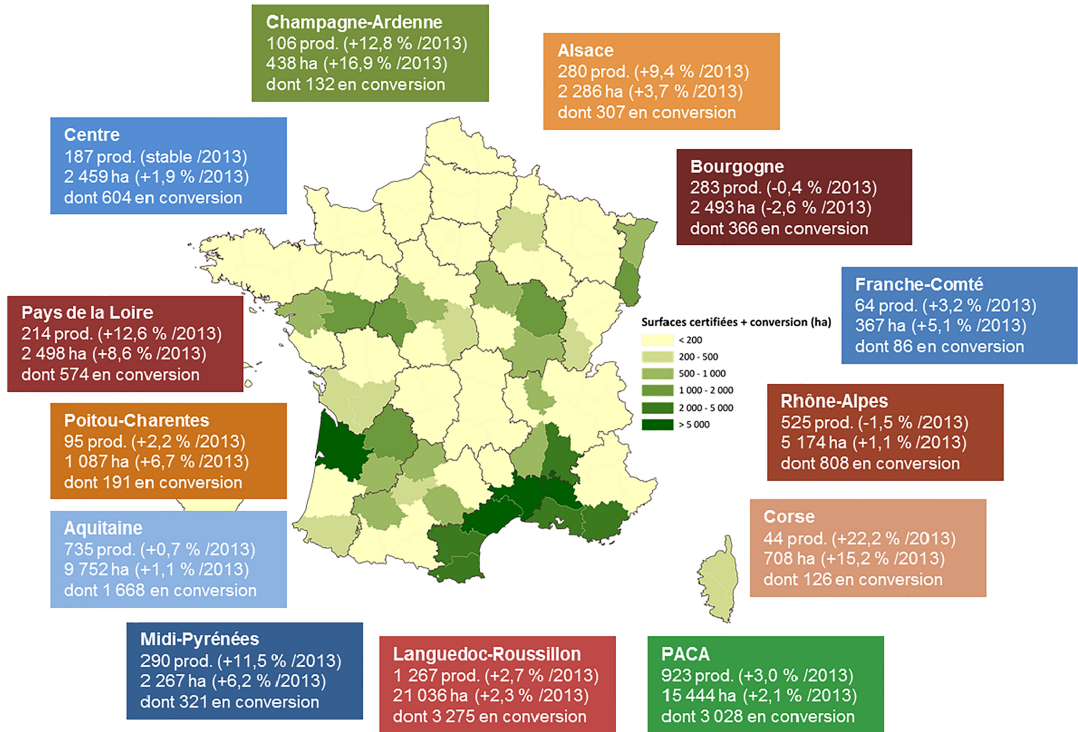


FIGURE 1 Organic viticulture by Region, France, 2014 (Mercier, 2016)

- A relative emphasis on export markets (47% of French organic wine sales and over half of Languedoc-Roussillon organic wine sales—see Mercier, 2016; Sudvinbio, 2018). These trends are generally consistent with the organic wine market more generally (see Ponte, 2009; Staricco & Ponte, 2015). In contrast, about two thirds of French wine production overall is sold domestically (US Department of Agriculture Global Agricultural Information Network, 2016), and an even higher share of conventional wine from the Languedoc-Roussillon is sold within France.
- A higher demand for labour inputs (waged and non-waged), driven in part by the prevalence of manual harvesting in the organic sector (Mercier, 2016).
- Dominance of independent growers and wine-makers, with two thirds of the volume of French organic wine produced by independent 'viticulteurs' or growers. In contrast, over half of French wine production and about 70% of Languedoc-Roussillon wine production by volume is accounted for by vinicultural cooperatives (Les Vignerons Coopérateurs de France, 2019; Touzard, 2011).
- The organic wine sector also shows a pronounced emphasis (over 90%) on the production of geographically delimited wines (Mercier, 2016). In contrast, less than half of French wine production is geographically delimited (US Department of Agriculture Global Agricultural Information Network, 2016).

3.2 | Languedoc-Roussillon

Whereas the Languedoc-Roussillon (Figure 2) is the largest single wine-producing region in the world by volume of production, it is also a region where wine accounts for about 50% of total agricultural production and where vineyards account for one third of farmed area (Filippi, 2012). Between the latter 19th and the middle 20th centuries,

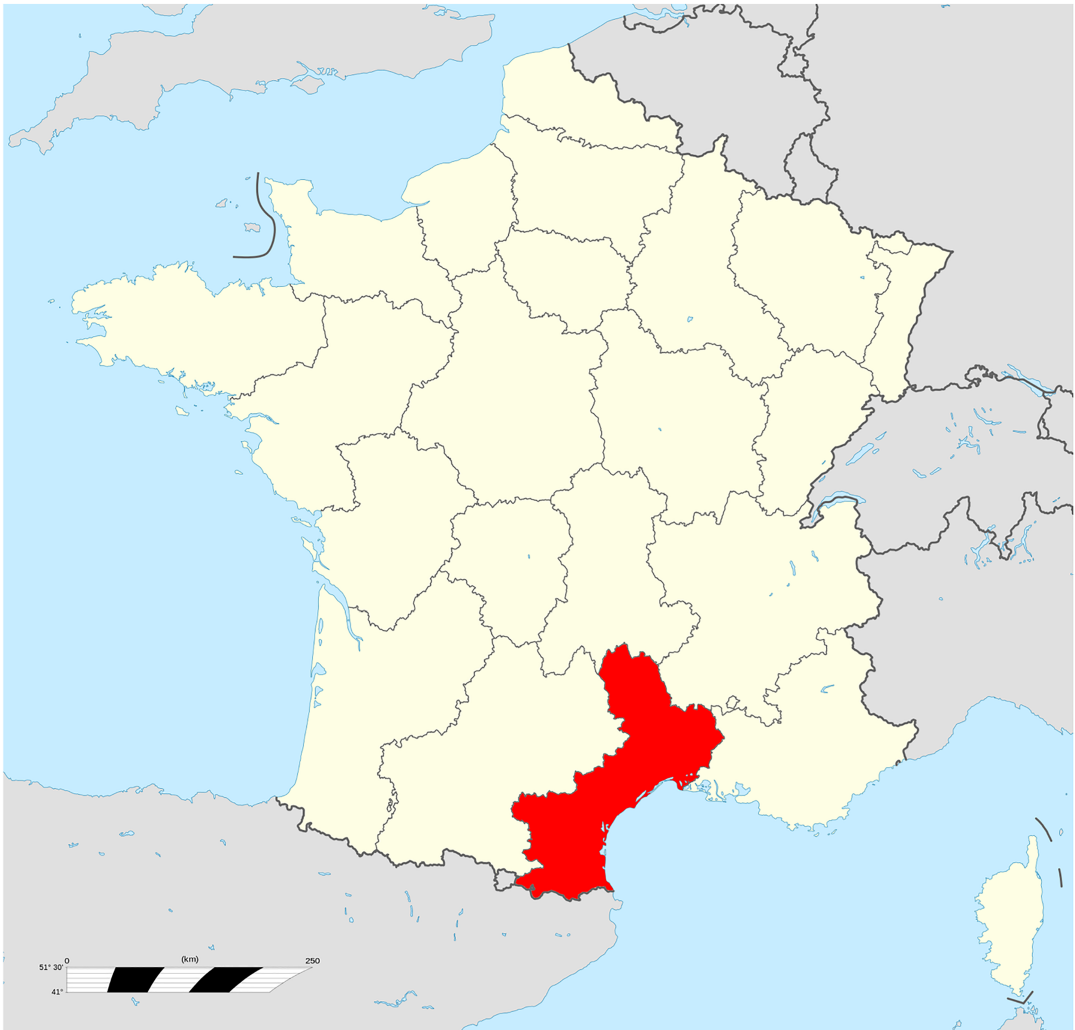


FIGURE 2 Languedoc-Roussillon (in red). Historically, this region included the provinces of the Lozère, the Gard, the Hérault, the Aude and the Pyrénées-Orientales (moving from north to south) (from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Languedoc-Roussillon_region_locator_map.svg)

the region was known for the mass production of generally lower cost, generic wine (particularly red table wine). Much of this wine came from grapes grown in intensive mono-cultural settings featuring irrigation (at least on the larger estates), extensive use of synthetic chemicals and, over time, increasing degrees of mechanized farming (including harvesting). Emphasis was placed on high yields, frequently over 100 hl of wine per ha. As a consequence, the region's wine became known for being thin, without character or complexity, and low in alcohol—in short, 'plonk' (Crowley, 1993; Jones, 1989; Loubère, 1990). A good portion of this wine was sold in bulk rather than in bottles, some of it directly, but much of it to intermediaries or *négociants* who would blend and bottle it for distribution under their own labels. Class structure among growers was polarized, featuring large capitalist estates located mainly in the flatter lowlands, and a preponderance of small-holding independent family growers (Lem, 1988, 1995).

More than any other region in Europe, Languedoc-Roussillon is also known for its viticultural cooperatives (Jones, 1989; Knox, 1998; Simpson, 2000; Touzard, 2011; Ulin, 1996). France's first such cooperative, *Les Vignerons libres*, was established in 1901 in the town of Maraussan, just outside Béziers. In subsequent decades, the



FIGURE 3 Wine Cooperative Building in Villeveyrac, in the Hérault Department, Occitanie (photo by one of the authors)

cooperative institutional form took hold throughout France, sustained by, *inter alia*: economies of scale in wine-making and marketing otherwise unavailable for small-scale and independent growers; the ability to store wine in large tanks and thus wait for favourable market conditions before selling; sharing of market risks among growers (Loubère, 1978); access to cheap credit under-written by the French state (Simpson, 2000; Ulin, 1996); and solidarity among cooperative members, particularly smaller-scale growers. Cooperatives also acted as important networks of formal and informal knowledge sharing and innovation, as they continue to do (Chiffolleau & Touzard, 2013).

Importantly, land ownership was not collectivized under the auspices of the cooperative model. Though practices and governance models vary, members typically harvest grapes from their vineyards independently (sometimes relying on reciprocal labour exchanges) and deliver them to the cooperative for vinification (Lem, 1999; Ulin, 1996). Generally, payment is by volume of grape variety delivered, though increasingly some cooperatives offer premiums for higher quality.

Cooperative viticulture remains prevalent in France, with half of all French wine produced by cooperatives, and half of French wine-growers members of wine cooperatives (Les Vignerons Coopérateurs de France, 2019). Yet the cooperative model became and remains most powerfully expressed in Languedoc-Roussillon. In small towns and villages in wine-producing areas of the region, distinctively modernist buildings (see Figure 3) used for collective vinification and wine storage dominate townscapes. Today, wine cooperatives still account for about 70% of total wine production in Languedoc-Roussillon, even as the number of individual cooperatives has fallen dramatically in recent years due to consolidation (Martin, 1996; Touzard, 2011).¹ Emphasis on high volume production of generic wine suited the cooperative model because growers could be paid uniform prices per weight of grapes delivered while grapes could be combined across different ownerships and varying qualities, facilitating efficient mass production. Many viticultural cooperatives in Languedoc-Roussillon were particularly enthusiastic practitioners of the region's productivist approach to wine-making.

¹More recent trends suggest that cooperatives are also embracing organic wine. Mercier (2016) reports that the number of cooperatives producing organic wine jumped from 70 to 203 between 2009 and 2014. However, more than half of this volume is sold to negociants or intermediaries.

However, since the 1960s, the wine sector in Languedoc-Roussillon has experienced significant restructuring (Crowley, 1993; Filippi, 2012). Known generally as a 'shift to quality', change has been encouraged and initiated in part by the French and EU governments coincident with the development of the common European market (Jones, 1989). Although complex and contested, the shift to quality has entailed a move away from productivism. Discrete aspects of the shift include decreased use of irrigation; emphasis on lower yields; reductions in vineyard area (including via highly controversial and contested 'arrachage' or wine pull programs²); replanting vineyards with varieties associated with higher-quality wine (e.g., grenache, syrah and mourvèdre); and an increased emphasis on production of geographically delimited appellation wines (Crowley, 1993). These processes have had significant implications for the cooperative movement in Languedoc-Roussillon and have in general terms been controversial within it. One reason for this is that many growers have opted to leave cooperatives in order to produce wine independently in order to take advantage of changing market and regulatory conditions. Other growers have instead sold their vineyards to newer producers (including those coming from outside the region), many of whom have in turn also stopped delivering their grapes to cooperatives in order to produce as independent vigneron.

Cooperatives have responded to the shift to quality in diverse ways, including via institutional innovations (Chiffolleau, Dreyfus, Stofer, & Touzard, 2007; Martin, 1996). Some have introduced premium prices for higher-quality grapes while also allocating those grapes to producing and bottling wines that meet higher standards of quality. But these practices can be and have been divisive within cooperatives, posing governance challenges. In some cooperatives, including some we have visited, considerable social friction has resulted, including between individual growers, but also between growers and cooperative staff.

It is this historical, regional and institutional context in which a powerful regional organic wine-growers movement emerged in Languedoc-Roussillon, a context that is reflected but, as we argue, also refracted in the qualification of organic wine through contradictory processes of association and dissociation. One site where these processes are readily observed are wine trade fairs, including most prominently among them, Millésime Bio.

3.3 | Millésime Bio

Billed as 'un mondial du vin biologique' (a world of organic wine), Millésime Bio is the world's largest trade show devoted exclusively to organic wine. It is widely viewed within the sector as *the* organic wine show. As such, we can think of MSB as what some management scholars refer to as a 'field-configuring' event (Lampel & Meyer, 2008), drawing together in a spatially integrated and concentrated venue and controlled commercial environment a set of significant institutional and individual actors who are otherwise dispersed in space (Bathelt, Golfetto, & Rinallo, 2014). MSB acts as a temporary arena where these significant actors are able to display, discuss, debate and promote the materiality and sensory experience of organic wine, facilitating mechanisms, techniques and practices of representation that work to construct 'the organic', again, in ways that extend beyond formal organic certification. MSB more specifically comprises a prescribed institutional, geographical and temporal context for contested meanings to be channelled into legitimate and coherent forms of qualification in part by enrolling disparate actors and institutions into a shared 'community' of meaning (Scott et al., 2000). Accordingly, Millésime Bio serves not only as a site of market-making in a thin sense of facilitating sales but also as a space of 'culture-making', of learning how to 'make sense'.

Though it is the world's largest organic wine trade show, MSB is also distinctly and consequentially French. In 2017, MSB featured 902 exhibitors (most of them wine producers), 78% of whom were based in France. Significant institutional actors supporting MSB include not only the EU but also the French state in the guise of AgriMer and

²The uprooting programmes have resulted in an aggregate loss of 50% of the Languedoc's vineyard area. Together with the integration of the European market bringing cheaper wines from Italy and Spain into direct competition with those from the Languedoc, they have been the most controversial and have elicited the strongest opposition. See, for example, 'L'arrachage des vignes, « crève-coeur » des viticulteurs' (http://www.la-croix.com/Actualite/France/L-arrachage-des-vignes-creve-coeur-des-viticulteurs_-_NG_-2008-09-13-676106).

Agence Bio. Even more specifically, however, MSB is tied to Languedoc-Roussillon. The show is held annually in Montpellier (with the notable exception of 2017, one of the years we visited), the largest and most important city in the region. Montpellier is the former administrative seat of Languedoc-Roussillon and remains an important administrative hub within the reconstituted Occitanie. Montpellier is also home to a number of institutional sites of agricultural and oenological research and innovation (including the University of Montpellier, Montpellier SupAgro and Le centre INRA Occitanie-Montpellier). Official regional support for MSB comes from the Occitan regional ministry of agriculture and the Occitan Regional Council. Yet Millésime Bio's regional institutional identity is most closely authored by Sudvinbio, a professional association of independent organic wine producers based in Languedoc-Roussillon and founded in 1991.

Continuously since 1993, Sudvinbio has organized and hosted MSB, helping to constitute the organic wine market, including, as we discuss, via the institutional qualification of organic wine. Sudvinbio acts as an intermediary between organic growers and wine-makers, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, French and EU government and multi-lateral institutions, including Agence Bio and the Institut National de l'Origine et de la Qualité (INAO). Sudvinbio also acts as an important institutional partner for individual growers by offering training in organic viticulture and assistance with the 3-year process of organic vineyard certification. Noting its vision of growing from the region out, Sudvinbio states, 'Millésime Bio has been a stakeholder in and a *growth engine* for the organic wine sector for the past 25 years. Sudvinbio is determined to continue its work to support the economic growth and the interests of the growers in *Occitanie, France and abroad*, who have placed their trust in it'³ (emphasis added). Though Sudvinbio has evolved over time, in 2017, fully 91% of its more than 300 members were based in the four largest wine-producing departments of Languedoc-Roussillon.⁴ With aspirations to shape the world of organic wine, Sudvinbio remains a distinctly regional organization.

4 | METHODOLOGY

The core of our research method is an adapted form of collaborative event ethnography (CEE). Specifically, we attended and made observations at the Millésime Bio trade show in 2016 (Montpellier) and in 2017 (Marseille). CEE is a method emphasizing intensive and qualitative primary observation by a team of researchers at important meetings or gatherings, including policy workshops, stakeholder meetings, annual business meetings or, as in our case, trade shows.

Brosius and Campbell (2010) explain that CEE was developed in advance of the Fourth World Conservation Congress in Barcelona in 2008, with the primary goal being to develop an approach allowing a team of researchers to make visible '... the roles of a broad suite of non-local actors in informing conservation policy and negotiating trade-offs ...' (p. 247). The method relies on the notion that social projects (be they policy regimes, or in our case, emerging markets) cannot be simply 'read-off' of the various interests of the institutional and individual actors involved but rather emerge from the social engagements and negotiations between those actors in real time (Corson, Campbell, & MacDonald, 2014; MacDonald, 2010). It also emphasizes less formal observation than is the case with structured or semi-structured interview techniques, allowing researchers to capture the sometimes messy, contradictory and open-ended aspects of signification (Campbell, Corson, Gray, MacDonald, & Brosius, 2014).

CEE is collaborative in the sense that researchers work together to plan, gather and analyse direct observations and insights. CEE is not unique as an ethnographic research method deployed at professional meetings, including those with a commercial orientation (see, e.g., Goldstein, 2018; Sunder Rajan, 2006; Tsing, 2004). CEE is, however, well adapted to dealing with the size and complexity of large meetings, particularly those featuring parallel sessions

³Press release, February 28, 2017, 'Millésime Bio, 2018 to take place from Monday January 29 to Wednesday January 31, 2018, at Montpellier Exhibition Centre', issued by Sudvinbio and Montpellier Events.

⁴This figure was calculated using postal codes listed for producer-members using data available from Sudvinbio (at <https://www.sudvinbio.com/en/about-us>).

or workshops. These logistical problems can be mitigated by multiple researchers conducting what is in some sense a multi-sited collaborative ethnography undertaken within the same event (Brosius & Campbell, 2010).

Attending Millésime Bio provided the opportunity to recognize a multiplicity of interests in 'the organic'. It allowed for compilation of these interests in part through observation of *encounters* (e.g., between wine-makers and buyers or agents, among wine-makers and between wine-makers and 'experts') as well as *actions* (e.g., gestures, modes of presentation and expressions of (dis)interest). By being present at the site, we were able to record processes of knowledge formation, negotiation and translation, observing how qualification gains traction in relation to particular interests through processes of both disagreement and agreement. We were also able to interrogate some of the foundations of representational claims. We witnessed meaning as it was being made, challenged, transformed, referenced and translated into relatively coherent and stabilized expressions of both 'the organic' and 'the market', including by means of contradictory references to invented traditions that associate, dissociate and situate contemporary organic wine and its disparate producers in relation to ongoing agrarian transitions in Languedoc-Roussillon.

Our approach to generating observations was broadly consistent at both shows, with some important adjustments from the first year to the second. At both shows, we moved throughout the exhibit spaces focusing primarily on conversations with producers. This approach was facilitated by the way the show is organized, with each exhibitor situated at a numbered table designated for their display (see Figure 4). We privileged producers based in Languedoc-Roussillon whenever possible. We specifically sought out the relatively few vinicultural cooperatives present at both shows to learn their perspectives. Some conversations were undertaken in tandem and some independently in order to balance consistency with a desire to speak to a higher number of contacts than either of us could accomplish alone.

Most of our conversations were 10 min or less in duration. Although not ideal, we felt obliged to respect that the producers were at the show to sell wine. We also aimed to speak with a relatively broad cross-section of exhibitors and other show participants. Core elements of our conversations with exhibitors included the following topics and issues:

- how long the producers had been certified as organic (an issue we were able to check against the database provided to all 2017 show registrants);



FIGURE 4 The Main Exhibit Hall at Millésime Bio 2017 in Marseille (photo from Sudvinbio, www.millesime-bio.com)

- what precipitated the decision to convert;
- type of enterprise (family business, independent, estate, etc., some historical trajectory);
- the role, if any, of formal education in oenology among those involved in the enterprise;
- main markets, including export markets;
- the importance of Millésime Bio to their business and their main reasons for attending;
- a general description of their land (how many parcels, where in relation to the town or village where they are based, type of grapes grown and their terroir); and
- forms of institutional linkages and support.

We spoke to approximately 100 producers and other individual actors over the two visits. We also attended several short, formal presentations by and spoke with representatives of relevant institutional actors, including Agence Bio, Sudvinbio and the INAO.

5 | INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES OF QUALIFICATION

5.1 | Exhibitor stands

Millésime Bio is organized in ways that reflect an articulation between the qualifying role of the event, the quality of the good itself (organic wine) and the distinction of the good within a space of goods (i.e., wine). These principles are expressed through specific institutional practices.

The spatial arrangement of presenters within the MSB exhibit hall(s), for instance, is not organized by nation, region, appellation, size of operation or type of business (i.e., cooperative, independent vigneron and négociant). This is in contrast with other wine trade shows, including for instance, the large Vinisud show, a trade fair for organic and conventional wines alike that promotes wines of the Mediterranean region and which we also attended in 2018 for comparative purposes.⁵ Whereas Vinisud is organized by region and appellation, at MSB, producers are distributed more or less at random, paired at small tables allowing for tasting and low-key, informal conversations (see Figure 5). The explicit purposes of this approach include facilitating serendipity in moving through the space of the show while disrupting any singular emphasis on wines of a certain type or region. However, one may also interpret the spatial arrangement of producers as a commitment to the idea that the show, though an expression of the regional wine-growers movement, is truly global. This is important given the aforementioned prominence of export markets for organic wine but also signifies common identity and cause uniting organic growers and wine producers from around the world.

The material and aesthetic style of display at MSB is also strictly prescribed by Sudvinbio. Each exhibitor is provided with an identical set of generic materials: a table and a white table cloth; two chairs; clean wine glasses; a spittoon; and a small sign of a standardized design specifying the name of the producer, the primary region of origin and the primary wine appellation produced.

Sudvinbio's prescriptions regarding producer exhibits comprise important forms of institutional qualification. On the one hand, the relative uniformity of display spaces is explicitly grounded in the notion that wine should speak for itself: 'Seul le vin fait la différence!' (<https://www.millesime-bio.com/home/presentation>). This, in turn, reflects the idea that terroir is foundational to wine quality and that terroir should be expressed clearly through wine, sentiments that recurred often in our conversations as we discuss subsequently. Embrace of this idea by Sudvinbio represents an explicit commitment to subjecting organic wine to the same standards of aesthetic adjudication as those applied to conventional wines and in this sense reflects a form of association aimed at commensurability. However, and as we discuss in more detail subsequently, emphasis on wine speaking for itself as a form of institutional qualification tends also to downplay social agency or the role of social practices in shaping the intrinsic qualities of organic wine.

⁵See <https://www.vinisud.com/fr/>.



FIGURE 5 Producer exhibits at Millésime Bio (photo from Sudvinbio, www.millesime-bio.com)

This has the effect of ‘naturalizing’ organic wine, deflecting attention to the myriad social forces that not only mediate the relation between terroir and wine consumers but that more specifically have helped to constitute the organic movement itself. In short, the notion that wine speaks for itself expresses a contradictory coupling of association and dissociation that has the effect of effacing one of the central institutional architects of organic wine’s qualification: Sudvinbio itself!

While explicitly downplaying the social mediation of wine quality, simple and uniform displays also put producers on a relatively equal footing with one another.⁶ Superficially, this may seem merely fair-minded in that it restricts larger producers from using their financial and staff resources to dominate smaller-scale competitors. This is a significant issue given, for example, that over 15% of the producers at the 2017 show reported ownerships of 10 ha of vineyard or less, whereas many others reported much larger holdings.⁷ The relative equivalence afforded to showroom footprints was a prominent feature of both shows that stood in marked contrast with Vinisud, for instance, where some display spaces occupied truly massive footprints on the show floor, dwarfing those of smaller independent wine-makers.

The privileging of small-scale producers at MSB takes on added significance, however, when one considers the powerful political and cultural tradition of small-holder identity and solidarity in Languedoc-Roussillon. This tradition helped give rise to Sudvinbio and the regional organic grower’s movement more generally. Reflecting on this context, Sudvinbio’s approach to prescribing exhibitor display spaces comprises a form of institutional qualification through association with a regional agrarian tradition that has been importantly defined by small-scale growers. At the same time, however, emphasis on high-quality wine is more consistent with recent shifts in the Languedoc-Roussillon wine sector, as is a pronounced emphasis on independent, artisanal vigneron. Atomized display spaces reinforce a sense of the autonomy of one producer from another and thus achieve a measure of dissociation with the agrarian past, notably in downplaying by omission any reference to a small-holders movement or collective identity, including as these are expressed through cooperative vinification in Languedoc-Roussillon or, for that matter, in France more generally.⁸

⁶Il s’agit de juger et de comparer les vins, et non pas toutes les techniques d’exposition des vins! (<https://www.millesime-bio.com/home/presentation>).

⁷This calculation is based on the 861 presenters who provided information on the size of their landholdings in the information made available to participants at the 2017 show.

⁸To be clear, there were vinicultural cooperatives represented at both shows we attended, albeit not in proportion to their importance in the region’s winescape.

5.2 | Challenge Millésime Bio

Also noteworthy as a form of institutional qualification is 'Challenge Millésime Bio', an annual international competition open only to organic wines whose producers are show participants. Hundreds of wines are tasted and evaluated by a panel of appointed judges. In 2017, the 10th annual edition, just over 1,400 wines were entered, with 125 awarded gold medals, 201 silver medals and 87 bronze. Winning wines are announced at the show, and their producers are permitted to display a Challenge Millésime Bio logo on their labels, packaging and other marketing materials. Medal-winning wines were also made available to sample at the show and to evaluate in an unstructured, self-guided space.

Clearly, a central purpose of a competition such as this is to market wines. Indeed, competitions are becoming increasingly important in the qualification of wine, particularly in the export market, in parallel with the adjudications of established wine experts such as James Suckling and Robert Parker. Scores from professional wine adjudicators and medals from reputable competitions comprise forms of qualification that can travel and translate more easily in international markets than is the case with sometimes arcane terms used to describe local growing conditions, locally or regionally specific grape varieties, local production norms and lesser known geographically delimited wine appellations. Indeed, scores and awards may be seen as forms of quality convention that supplement geographically delimited appellations by providing a basis for differentiating within them (Garcia-Parpet, 2007; Ponte, 2009). Numerous producers with whom we spoke affirmed the promotional significance of the Challenge Millésime Bio competition and others like it, emphasizing simply that 'winning medals sells wine'.

Thus, the mere fact that Millésime Bio features a competition designed to recognize and promote organic wines that achieve high standards of quality is unremarkable. What is notable, however, is the medal-winning success rate among wines entered into the competition, almost 30% in 2017. This strongly suggests that a goal of Challenge Millésime Bio is to associate organic wines *as a class* with high standards of aesthetic quality. Though Sudvinbio embraces the explicit premise that wine should speak for itself, MSB and the Challenge Millésime Bio competition more specifically suggest otherwise as institutional practices of singularization are deployed to actively mediate between producers and buyers, associating organic wines with high aesthetic standards rather than, for example, consistency and reliability, volume of production or low price. These practices also include active dissociation, challenging two prevailing views, on the one hand, that organic wine as a class is inferior to conventional comparators (see, e.g., CBI, 2013; Rojas-Méndez, le Nestour, & Rod, 2015) and, on the other hand, that Languedoc-Roussillon in particular is known for producing lower-quality wines.

Also significant is a near exclusive focus on estate wines⁹ sold in bottles, evident in the Challenge competition specifically, but also reflected (to a somewhat lesser degree) at the show more widely. This is a clear instance of dissociation by 'omission' (Ibert et al., 2019). In Languedoc-Roussillon, much wine continues to be sold in bulk, frequently to intermediaries or négociants. Moreover, much of the wine produced in Languedoc-Roussillon continues to come from viticultural cooperatives. In fact, the production of bulk wine sold to intermediaries remains most prevalent among cooperatives, with over 70% of the volume of cooperatively produced organic wine on a national level in France going to négociants compared with just 16% of the volume produced by independent viticulteurs (Agence Bio, 2018). While one of the functions of MSB is in fact to facilitate negotiation of sales contracts between individual producers (including independent vignerons and cooperatives) and négociants, selectively privileging estate and bottled wine over bulk wine reinforces the perception that organic wine is higher-quality wine as a class since estate production and distribution in wine in bottles (as opposed to in bulk) are accepted markers of higher quality in the sector. Dissociation from bulk sales and cooperative wine production, in the context of Languedoc-Roussillon, thus reflect and reinforce the shift to quality in the region's winescape.

⁹Estate wines are wines produced from grapes grown in vineyards that are owned by the wine-maker(s) and that are produced entirely within the winery of the wine-maker.

6 | INDIVIDUAL PRACTICES OF QUALIFICATION: THE PRODUCERS

Our conversations with growers and wine-makers generated a wide variety of representations. Three often repeated and conjoined themes stood out:

- (i) 'terroir talk';
- (ii) the importance of ethical commitments to environmental and land stewardship; and
- (iii) emphasis on the ongoing tradition of independent or artisanal production.

According to Barham (2003, p. 131), 'terroir refers to an area or terrain, usually rather small, whose soil and microclimate impart distinctive qualities to food products'. Terroir helps to underpin both the formal and informal qualification of food products by reference to place or region of origin. Within the EU and beyond, terroir also acts as a form of what has been called 'defensive localism' (MacDonald, 2014; Winter, 2003), restricting the spatial scope of competition in food markets by means of quality conventions that highlight locally and regionally unique food products and processes that are difficult or impossible (for technical, regulatory or cultural reasons) to replicate in other places. This includes formal geographically delimited appellations (e.g., the EU geographical indications and traditional specialities system) but also less formal mechanisms such as branding and marketing that invoke specific geographical imaginaries.

Though not unique to wine, terroir as a foundation for formal and informal quality conventions takes on a special meaning in the wine sector, particularly in France (Wilson, 1998). Environmental elements of terroir most commonly understood to influence the quality of wine are soil type, climate (i.e., temperature, precipitation, humidity and prevailing winds), aspect, elevation and topography. However, other influences frequently cited include hydrology (e.g., depth of groundwater and frequency of flooding), variation between daytime and nighttime temperatures and the composition of local plant communities.

Terroir is often used in reference to wine not only to invoke local environmental conditions but also to convey an ethical commitment to agronomic and wine-making practices that are faithful or 'true' means of expressing these local environmental conditions (Barham, 2003; Wilson, 1998). Teil and Barrey (2009) argue that aiming to closely align wine with terroir is a particularly important ethos among producers of organic wine in France. Our discussions with producers at Millésime Bio reinforced this observation. Expressions of the essential idea here are found on many websites belonging to organic independent vigneron, including those who have attended Millésime Bio in the recent past. Domaine des Pradels Quartironi located northwest of Béziers is an example:

We are now growing 16 hectares of vines, on schist slopes, with south south-east exposure. This stony arid terroir allows only low yieldings [sic] (20 to 40 hl/ha) and produces beautiful wines featuring concentration, elegance, freshness and silky tannins. Our Domaine is located at 300 metres above sea level, perched on a sunny hill and protected from any outside pollution. The northern wind often blows here, refreshing the grapes at night and protecting them from humidity and illnesses. Our vines are planted on schist soils surrounded by evergreen oaks, strawberry trees, pines, a few chestnuts, heather, cistus, cade, juniper, thyme and other wild aromatic plants. Our grapes and our wines enjoy all these perfect conditions to develop rich attractive bouquets. (<https://vins-quartironi.pluginwine.com/?lg=en>)

Another example comes from Domaine du Pech d'André located in the Minervois region:

According to *geomorphology*, vine varieties were chosen to search for *the best expression of the terroir*. Each plot, according to its character, delivers the force of this land. It gives us fruits that speak mostly of the air: Cers, the cold, dry and often so violent northwest wind that dominates, while Marin, the

Mediterranean wind, brings the humidity of shorelines that helps the Mourvèdre to mature so well
(<http://www.lepechdandre.com/wine-estate/vineyard-terroir.php>, emphasis added)

For many producers, organic grape cultivation was specifically linked to more faithful or genuine expression of terroir in wine-making. In this, however, we noted a contradictory ambiguity about the role of the growers and about the social character of and context for the organic wine producer's movement, an ambiguity that is arguably inherent to the concept of terroir more generally. Specifically, representing organic viticulture as a means of more faithfully expressing terroir tends towards *reifying* ostensibly 'natural' or ecological determinants of grape and wine quality, downplaying labour practices such as pruning, ploughing, weeding, irrigation and chemical applications. This emphasis in the qualification of wine tends towards rendering growers as mere ciphers whose role is to transmit rather than to actively mediate environmental influences on grape and wine quality. Yet clearly agronomic practices not only influence the quality of grapes and wine but also help to shape the terroir itself over time, for example, through longer-term changes in soils, hydrologic regimes and surrounding plant communities. In this respect, elements of 'terroir talk' tend to obscure the historicity of terroir itself.

In other respects, however, many vigneron placed themselves, their choices and their practices at the centre of their commitments to organic wine production through reference to the strength of their ethical commitments to the land and to minimizing negative environmental impacts from viticulture. Numerous people with whom we spoke made the claim that systemic synthetic chemical use in vineyards had compromised the quality of wine but also damaged soils, groundwater, and local plant and animal communities. These claims were sometimes linked to broader commitments to sustainability and green production, thereby qualifying organic wine by association with broader contemporaneous trends in environmental sensibilities and practices.

For other growers, embrace of organic agronomy was even more intimate, motivated by a desire to protect their health and the health of their families. This makes sense. Many growers and wine-makers live among their vines. Living and working in the fields means considerable direct contact with the vines and with the soil, making concerns about exposure to pesticides, herbicides and other chemicals more immediate. This was a particular point of emphasis for growers we spoke with who practice manual grape harvesting, an increasingly common though not formally required practice in the organic sector.¹⁰ Whereas manual harvesting is widely associated with higher-quality wine, it also clearly increases human contact with the grapes and the vines. Some growers became demonstrably emotional when addressing these topics, discussing negative health effects that they felt had been induced by working with commercial synthetic agricultural chemicals. One grower, for instance, noted with great emotion the toll that illness—including specifically cancer—had taken on multiple generations of his family. For him, sick land, sick people and poor wine quality were inter-linked consequences of a past, productivist and destructive agrarian regime. Organic cultivation for such growers represents turning a page on the past, a sentiment that is echoed at an institutional level by Sudvinbio.¹¹

These kinds of narrative contradict terroir talk by making the choices and practices of growers and wine-makers central influences on wine production. They also comprise forms of qualification by dissociation, decoupling organic wine with what is seen as a destructive era of wine production, sentiments that take on added meaning in the context of Languedoc-Roussillon where productivism in viticulture arguably reached its apogee.

Crucially, however, the decision to convert was consistently represented to us as a highly individual and personal one, attributed without reference to broader trends in the wine sector, or historical social or institutional influences. In this respect, terroir talk deflected attention away from the organic wine-growers movement, even as Sudvinbio as

¹⁰Very few growers with whom we spoke referenced reliance on wage labour, though clearly some of the larger producers at the show have full-time and part-time employees and some of these were in attendance at the shows helping to staff exhibit stands and to sell wine. However, by far the most common reference to wage labour was associated with hiring pickers during the compressed harvest season at the end of summer and into the early autumn.

¹¹See <https://www.sudvinbio.com/en/about-organic-wine>, 'Motivations for converting to organic viticulture'.

the host of MSB gives evidence of the significance of collective mobilization and institutional qualification in the organic wine sector.

In fact, twin narratives, of terroir and of environmental stewardship, were often fused together by means of reified reference to the figure of the independent artisanal wine-producing household at the centre of an invented agrarian tradition. Many independent vigneron with whom we spoke associated their commitments to faithful expression of terroir and the embrace of high ethical standards in environmental and land stewardship with an historical tradition in wine-making (including specifically in Languedoc-Roussillon), dissociating themselves and their wines from the productivism of the past yet claiming inclusion in a continuous history of independent and small-scale household growing and wine-making.

Recruitment of younger generations into the family winery was cited as critical in reproducing this legacy. For many independent vigneron, recruiting their children into the family wine business allows for retention of familial property by means of inheritance while providing a source of non-waged or partially waged labour, essentially a form of Chayanovian social reproduction. Frequently, we were told of the particular importance of new generations of wine-makers obtaining formal agronomic and oenological training in publicly supported French agricultural and technical institutions, then bringing this expertise 'home' to the family domain. While sending children of growers and wine-makers to school for formal training is hardly new (see Loubère, 1985), we were told often that it takes on added significance in the organic sector because vocational training can be critical to successfully navigating the conversion process and in the embrace of organic agronomy more generally.

Whereas forms of qualification emphasizing the tradition of independent growing and wine-making are common in the wine sector¹²—particularly in Languedoc-Roussillon with its ubiquitous smallholders—we noted with some surprise that numerous vigneron who are new to the sector and to the region referenced this theme as well. We heard several versions of 'back to the land' narratives bundling the acquisition of vineyards in Languedoc-Roussillon; organic viticulture; and making quality wine and bottling it under a family label with immersion into a long regional tradition of independent wine-making. In several instances, entry into the wine-making business was coupled with a move from professional careers in urban centres such as Paris, Lyon and Montpellier, but also London and New York. We spoke with former hoteliers, sports coaches, teachers, computer scientists, asset managers and engineers, all of whom echoed these themes in various ways. For these people, commitment to organic cultivation was expressed as part of a spiritual and deeply nostalgic pull to farming, to living on and drawing a livelihood from the land, to manual labour, to a simpler way of life and to a continuous tradition of a 'life of the vine' in Languedoc-Roussillon. These new arrivals, perhaps more than any other individual or institutional actors, made plain the invented character of the traditions they embraced by cloaking themselves in family traditions that had little or nothing to do with their own families.

Repeated associations of organic wine with the archetypal figure of the small-scale, independent grower comprised an invented tradition in another important sense, dissociation from vinicultural cooperatives. Many vigneron told us that intergenerational reproduction of the family domain had in recent years involved coupling a decision to convert to organic agronomy with a decision to take some or all of the family's vineyards out of the local cooperative in order to vinify and sell independently. We spoke to many vigneron at both MSB 2016 and 2017 who offered variations on this theme. One older grower owning about 12 ha outside Pézenas in the Hérault, for instance, described with great emotion leaving his local cooperative after decades of continuous membership. He began producing and selling his wine independently, in bulk, in 2015. When we followed up with him in 2018, he had established his own label and was preparing to bottle his first vintage. Significantly, the reasons he gave for converting to organic cultivation and for leaving the cooperative were conjoined: to embrace a different environmental ethic towards the land and to eschew synthetic chemicals; to more faithfully express his terroir; and to produce higher-quality wine. He

¹²The centrality of this association in qualifying wine in general terms is evidenced by the ubiquitous logo used by Les Vignerons Indépendants de France depicting an abstract vine worker carrying a barrel of wine with the words 'vigneron indépendant' underneath. See <https://www.vigneron-independant.com/>.

specifically expressed a frustration and sadness that he could not achieve these goals while remaining in the cooperative due to what he experienced as a lack of support from other members and from staff.

These and other themes we have discussed are well captured on the website of *Mas Oncle Ernest*, a mid-size independent family vigneron with 25 ha of vineyards. One section of the webpage explains the ethos behind the start of a family label of organic wine initiated by Alexandre Roux (the subject of the narrative), drawing on a four-decade tradition of family wine-making:

Mas Oncle Ernest was a dream. This dream became a reality in the fall of 2007. Since 2003, along with my father, I had been working on a winery located between the appellations of Côtes du Ventoux and Côtes du Rhône. The head office is located in Entrechoux, a small village of Haut-Vaucluse. Our work was culminated in a yearly contribution to the cave cooperative (cooperative cellar). Necessary as this process may have been, it left me frustrated and with a taste of lost opportunity that grew with the seasons. That is how, after a few years of improving my skills on the farm, I decided to cross the Rubicon and start producing our own product to conquer the vast wine market. (<http://www.mas-oncle-ernest.com/aventure.html>, translated from French by the authors)

As Alexandre makes clear, he found his local cooperative to be an impediment to renewing the family enterprise along the lines he envisioned, precipitating a decision to withdraw some of the family vineyards in order to vinify independently, under a family label.

This storyline points to a disarticulation between the organic movement and the cooperative movement in Languedoc-Roussillon. Often this is attributed to an overall indifference to innovation and to producing quality wines within the cooperative sector. Such characterizations are not surprising coming from independent vignerons seeking to sell wine at a wine trade show; they have an obviously self-serving character (which is categorically not to say the claims lack foundation). What is more surprising, perhaps, is that we have heard similar narratives echoed by cooperative members and staff as well as from wine experts with knowledge of the region. To be sure, these sentiments capture certain empirical realities. As noted earlier, independent vignerons account for a disproportionate share of organic wine production in France, and a higher proportion of organic wine than conventional wine is produced as geographically delimited wine and sold in export markets—both markers of quality (Agence Bio, 2018; Mercier, 2016).

It is also true that cooperatives confront unique challenges associated with producing organic wine.¹³ For example, any decision to convert to organic agronomy involving multiple independent growers is inherently more complex than a decision taken by a single grower, and yet a decision by a single member of a cooperative to convert to organic growing is unlikely to provide sufficient justification for the corresponding cooperative to produce organic wine. EU regulations require the strict partitioning of organic and conventional grapes and wine throughout the production process.¹⁴ Cooperatives wishing to produce wine that is certified as organic while continuing to produce conventional wine thus face either high organizational costs arising from vinifying conventional and organic grapes separately within a single facility or high capital costs associated with building or renovating old and large-scale buildings and equipment in order to maintain parallel facilities.¹⁵ One cooperative director also emphasized how difficult it is to convince small-holding members to embrace organic agronomy because many have off-farm jobs that leave little time to work in their fields. Hiring wage workers for these growers is not an option because they are too small to justify the cost. Instead, such growers tend to continue to prioritize high yields (generally associated with lower

¹³See Chiffolleau, Dreyfus, and Touzard (2008) on wine cooperatives in Languedoc and their response to fair trade and ethical sourcing regimes more generally.

¹⁴Where ... not all units of a holding are used for organic production, the operator shall keep the land, animals, and products used for, or produced by, the organic units separate from those used for, or produced by, the non-organic units and keep adequate records to show the separation' (Council Regulation [EC] No 834/2007, chapter 2, Article 11).

¹⁵Interview, vinicultural cooperative director, July 20, 2017.

wine quality) and the use of synthetic chemicals in order to reduce the risks of crop failure. In addition, cooperatives that do produce organic wines in parallel with conventional wine may trigger some of the same internal division among members that has greeted practices such as the use of price premiums for higher-quality grapes, divisions that may lead to governance crises.

The real and perceived articulation of cooperative and organic wine movements in Languedoc-Roussillon underpins a contradictory dynamic of association and dissociation in qualification of the region's organic wine. It is quite clear that the organic wine movement in the region has been animated, at least in part, not only by the broader organic agriculture and food movements but also by the shift to quality in Languedoc-Roussillon wine production. Organic growers from the region have typically embraced organic cultivation not as an isolated innovation but rather as one of a suite of changes, including ripping up old vines and replacing them with varieties associated with higher-quality wine; prioritizing export markets; lowering yields; producing bottled wine for direct sale (as opposed to selling in bulk to *négociants*); and producing more geographically delimited wines. And as we have indicated, many growers have also opted to couple conversion to organic viticulture with embrace of independent, artisanal wine-making. In doing so, they understandably seek to dissociate themselves from collective vinification's and its ties to productivism and low-quality wine production, as well as from institutions in which they, as members, in many instances encountered opposition to formal organic conversion. Securing this dissociation, however, often involves inserting themselves into the powerful tradition of independent family wine growing in the region, thereby referencing a highly reified and atomized subjectivity, stripped of the collective social relations involved historically in securing the reproduction of independent land-owning growers through cooperative vinification. The contradiction in this association lies in suggesting an historical continuity of a small-holding independent class of family growers, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, omitting from this reference the dominant institutional means by which that very social reproduction has been secured at the farm scale in Languedoc-Roussillon since the early 20th century. It also occludes the history of small-holding growers in Languedoc-Roussillon as a collective social and political movement that has helped to define the region itself (Lem, 1995; Loubère, 1990). Vinicultural cooperatives, integral to the social and agrarian history of small-scale independent growers in the region, are thereby subject what Ibert et al. (2019, p. 46) call strategies of '... omission, obfuscation, and hiding potentially "unholy grounds."'

7 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: 'QUALITY' AND THE POLITICS OF TRADITION

Our observations reveal the dynamic character of qualification in action as it is learned, performed and negotiated by iterative practices taking place within a highly singular, structured and concentrated space. Millésime Bio, the world's largest and most important organic wine trade show, is a unique forum where formative acts of qualification are undertaken by a high density of important individual and institutional actors, the latter including state and multi-lateral organizations promulgating regulations and classifications that promote and govern organic wine production and marketing, together with non-governmental organizations, notably the show's host and sponsor Sudvinbio. Concentrated interactions among these actors in a structured space and time facilitate the dynamic refinement and 'fixing' of organic wine's extrinsic qualities, supplementing formal quality regimes (notably the EU and French organic certification standards and formal wine classifications) and thus conferring on organic wine a set of 'commodified meanings' that position it within existing and highly elaborate quality infrastructures in the wine sector. We have emphasized in particular the ways in which institutional and individual practices of qualification singularize wine as a market segment yet make it commensurate with and legible as wine.

Within this, we have placed emphasis on the ways in which the regional context of Languedoc-Roussillon substantively informs processes of qualification at MSB. We argue more specifically that a dynamic interplay of association and dissociation reflects, reinforces and obscures regional agrarian traditions and transformations, resulting in the ascription of an invented, selective regional agrarian tradition to organic wine. Sudvinbio, as the institutional host

of Millésime Bio, authors this contradictory articulation in important and symbolically charged ways. No-frills producer displays prescribed and enforced at the show are institutional practices that echo a powerful solidarity that has long animated the wine-growers movement in Languedoc-Roussillon, particularly among the region's numerous smallholders (Frader, 1986, 1991; Lem, 1988; Loubère, 1978, 1990; Smith, 2016). We note that the institutional qualification of organic wine at Millésime Bio is in important respects steeped in and echoes this tradition in the form of subtle but discernable associations. At the same time, the institutional qualification of organic wine at MSB works through a dynamic interplay of association and dissociation which generally works to align it with the broader shift to quality in the region's wine sector, decoupling it from the productivism for which the Languedoc-Roussillon has been known in the wine sector as well as from the tradition of collective vinification.

Among individual actors, the figure of the artisanal family grower living on and from independently owned vineyards emerged as the central association, linking faith to terroir and high ethical standards in environmental and land use practices with continuation of an historical tradition of independent family growing and attachment to place and to land. Qualifying organic wine by means of association with a tradition of small-scale, independent, artisanal household growers provides a link between past and present. It thereby secures an apparent continuity in a sector in which time and tradition are powerful thematic references. This continuity, however, stands in tension with the obvious fact that organic agriculture, in general terms, is itself by definition a rupture, departing from many of the practices characteristic of productivist viticulture, including the use of synthetic chemicals. More specifically, the emergence of Languedoc-Roussillon as perhaps France's most important regional hearth for the organic wine movement reflects and reinforces change as much or more than it does continuity, in particular the region's multi-faceted shift to quality. The figure of the independent vigneron as a central referent in the qualification of organic wine at MSB, and particularly organic wine from Languedoc-Roussillon, involves the articulation of a form of invented tradition that serves to secure, as Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) suggested, the appearance of continuity amid change. We encountered repeated citations of tradition in the guise of the highly abstract, reified and atomized subject of the independent family wine grower, drawing on the political, economic and cultural lineage of small-scale family growers in a region in which this class segment has unquestionably been historically central. Yet at the same time, these associations tended to dissociate by omission the historical importance of collective social relations and solidarity among these very same growers and in particular the role of cooperative vinification in the social reproduction of regional smallholders. What emerged as invented tradition, then, was the abstract figure of an independent petty commodity producer stripped of social context, quite at odds with the complex social architecture of wine production and agrarian social reproduction over the longue durée in Languedoc-Roussillon. Our observations point to invented traditions of agrarian continuity actively secured through substantive processes of qualifying organic wine by individual and institutional actors that take the form of highly selective and contradictory references to this region's agrarian past.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the numerous individual growers, wine-makers, commercial agents and representatives of institutional actors attending the 2016 and 2017 Millésime Bio and the 2018 Vinisud trade shows for taking time to speak with us and to answer our questions. We also would like to thank the show organizers (Sudvinbio, Vinisud) for allowing us to participate. Thanks to Celal Cahit Agar, Steffen Böhm, Zoe Brent, Jun Borrás, Sophie Caillon, Liam Campling, Mike Ekers, Tomas Frederiksen, Winnie Lem, Deborah Leslie, David Mackenzie, Jonathan Pattenden, Louis-Antoine Saïssset, Gavin Smith, Andrew Stevenson, Jean-Marc Touzard, members of the PE2 research cooperative at the University of Toronto and the anonymous reviewers selected by the journal for comments pertaining to earlier drafts and the research programme more generally. Versions of this paper were presented at the ICAS-Etxalde Colloquium 2017 'The Future of Food and Challenges for Agriculture in the 21st Century' in Vitoria Gastiez, Basque Country in April of 2017; at the University of Exeter-Penryn Campus, Science and Engineering Research Support Facility (SERSF) in May of 2017; at the University of Manchester School of Environment, Education and Development Annual Lecture in May of 2017; and in revised form in the Colloquium of the Department of Geography at the

University of Manchester in February of 2018. Any errors, mischaracterizations or omissions remain solely our responsibility.

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How to cite this article: Prudham S, MacDonald KI. Qualifying tradition: Instituted practices in the making of the organic wine market in Languedoc-Roussillon, France. *J Agrar Change*. 2020;20:659–681. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joac.12371>