

The Sociology of Wine: Globalization, Terroir, and the Social Construction of Taste in an Era of Status, Simulation, and Resistance

ABSTRACT

Motivation

Wine has long been more than just a drink. We can see the meanings that wine has acquired throughout human history. Whether it serves as a symbol, a cultural artifact, or a social performance, wine exists in states similar to the states of matter. This multi-structure of wine makes it play a role in constructing class, privilege and identity. As I read through the past thesis topics, I realized that research on the social side of wine was insufficient. Also, my observations in the sector made me feel that only the sensory qualities of wine are given importance. How people define, judge, evaluate and moralize taste is rarely discussed. As I began to observe trends in wine, I realized that wine created a space to examine broader sociological questions such as globalization, status, authenticity, resistance, and the simulation of tradition. I wanted to explain all these concepts based on a sociological perspective. If we could understand the reasons for the concepts I mentioned above, constructive decisions could be made for the future of wine. I want to be a part of the democratization of wine culture

Problem / Objective

This thesis closely examines natural wine, the role of women in winemaking, and how we consume wine and experience its taste. Utilizing sociological theory, it investigates how wine not only mirrors the world around us but also influences it. It illustrates how class, resistance, and certain tastes gain power through wine. The goal is to analyze postmodern representations of class divisions, gender politics, and authenticity through the lens of wine.

Methodology

This thesis uses a qualitative and interpretive approach based on sociological theory and cultural analysis. It looks at how wine intersects with things like globalization, class, gender, and taste. The goal isn't to collect numbers or data. It's to understand the cultural patterns, symbolic meanings, and shifts in ideology that come through how wine is made, consumed, and represented. To do so, it uses academic texts in sociology, cultural studies, and food studies.

Content

The thesis begins with a brief introduction to wine and sociology. It then transitions to globalization, which has shaped the foundations of the modern era. The rationale for starting with globalization is that it acts as the first spark in a chain reaction. Through globalization, societies became interconnected economically, culturally, politically, and socially, even if they didn't wish to be. These new connections paved the way for new ideas and movements to emerge. However, what globalization primarily facilitated was the spread of capitalism, making it faster and more effective on a global scale. As a result of this interaction, concepts like glocalization and hybridization have emerged. Even though they might appear to be reactions against globalization, the system has

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managed to absorb them and transform them into something consumable as well. At the same time, globalization has created opportunities for people to safeguard their local and cultural values. One reason for this rise in localism is the shift in lifestyle; as life migrated to urban areas, people began to long for rural living. However, as previously mentioned, consumption isn't restricted to physical goods; it exists in anything that can be transformed into a commodity. That's where wine reenters the discussion, particularly the concept of *terroir*, which signifies the local essence in the wine world. The thesis clarifies what *terroir* truly means and how it is currently utilized.

It also explores how globalization promotes standardization, providing an example from the wine industry. The emphasis on Parkerization is not incidental, as it connects to later sections that discuss feminism and women's roles in winemaking. Initially, the thesis analyzes taste from a biological perspective, and then it transitions to the social and cultural dimensions. Bourdieu's *Distinction* offers a fresh perspective, explaining how our history, environment, and social context shape our preferences, often without our conscious awareness. At this point, the reader may begin to feel uncertain, questioning their tastes and the origins of those tastes, which ultimately aligns with the core objective of sociology. The thesis then examines the chaos of modern consumption spurred by capitalism and globalization. It introduces Thorstein Veblen's concept of conspicuous consumption, illustrating how our choices are not entirely personal; they are influenced by imitation and a yearning to belong. We observe how the channels of consumption—what is trendy and what is admired—are determined by specific groups. Today's leisure class doesn't just purchase expensive wines to stand apart; they seek rare or unusual ones to signal their uniqueness. This leads into a richer discussion of taste. This is where the debate around natural wine truly begins. The rise of natural wine is explored alongside the social structures it encompasses. What we observe is a form of resistance against traditional ideas of taste. The thesis examines wine through the lens of feminism, one of the strongest movements of the modern era. It aims to demonstrate the inclusive potential of wine. The potential it has to accommodate different identities, voices, and values. Yet, even within this inclusivity, we return to a key issue. The problem of commodification and how meanings become diluted in the process. At this juncture, the reader begins to question everything. What can be trusted? What's real and what's merely a reproduction? That's when Baudrillard enters the scene. Through his concepts of simulacra and simulation, the thesis reveals the strange, matrix-like world we inhabit now. Where reality often feels like a performance.

Conclusion

Still, the meanings we attach to wine are constantly shifting. Old class signals haven't vanished; instead, they've become quieter and more polished. At the same time, new voices and methods of pushback are beginning to emerge. Taste isn't solely a matter of personal choice. It's shaped by the world around us, marketed to us, and sometimes even resisted. In a culture filled with images, status chasing, and recreated traditions, wine prompts us to consider what's real and what's merely a performance. Viewing wine this way provides us with a deeper understanding of how power, taste, and meaning are subtly changing right before our eyes.