



**THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF "POPULAR" FOODS: EXPLORING THE
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ORIGIN AND PRODUCT IN THE RIBERA DEL
GUADIANA DESIGNATION OF ORIGIN**

LA CONSTRUCCIÓN SOCIAL DE LOS ALIMENTOS "POPULARES":
EXPLORANDO LA RELACIÓN ENTRE ORIGEN Y PRODUCTO EN
LA DENOMINACIÓN DE ORIGEN RIBERA DEL GUADIANA

A CONSTRUÇÃO SOCIAL DOS ALIMENTOS "POPULARES":
EXPLORANDO A RELAÇÃO ENTRE ORIGEM E PRODUTO NA
DENOMINAÇÃO DE ORIGEM RIBERA DEL GUADIANA

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ABSTRACT

This research article explores the relationship between origin and product in the context of the economy of qualities, which emphasizes the constructed and negotiated nature of product characteristics in modern market economies. Focusing on the Ribera del Guadiana Designation of Origin (DO) in Extremadura, Spain, the study investigates how specific actions contribute to linking particular attributes to a geographical location and vice versa. The analysis reveals that the relationship between origin and product is not fixed and stable but constantly recreated through processes that combine standardization and contingency. The article highlights the performative

dimension of the “origin” category, showing how it associates the qualities defining the product's uniqueness and connects it to a specific place. The study draws on ethnographic research conducted at the Almendralejo Enological Station, which plays a crucial role in regulating the Ribera del Guadiana DO. Two specific processes of diversified standardization—ripeness control and harvest window adjustment, as well as organoleptic analysis and analytical sample control—are examined in detail. The findings demonstrate the construction of the DO Ribera del Guadiana object as a process and emphasize the role of coordination among various agents in stabilizing product properties. By tracing the journey of the object from the vineyard to the laboratory and through the analytical report, the article sheds light on the dynamic nature of standardization processes and their impact on the relationship between origin and product.

Keywords: Economy of qualities, designation of origin, popular food, food production.

RESUMEN

Este artículo explora la relación entre origen y producto en la denominada economía de las cualidades, que enfatiza la condición construida y negociada de las características de los productos en las modernas economías de Mercado. Centrándose en la Denominación de Origen (DO) Ribera del Guadiana en Extremadura, España, el estudio investiga cómo acciones específicas contribuyen a vincular atributos particulares a una localización geográfica y viceversa. El análisis revela que la relación entre origen y producto no es fija ni estable, sino que se recrea constantemente a través de procesos que combinan normalización y contingencia. El artículo destaca la dimensión performativa de la categoría "origen", mostrando cómo este asocia las cualidades que definen la singularidad del producto y lo vincula a un lugar determinado. El estudio se basa en una investigación etnográfica realizada en la Estación Enológica de Almendralejo, ubicación que desempeña un papel crucial en la regulación de la DO Ribera del Guadiana. Se examinan en detalle dos procesos específicos de normalización diversificada: el control de la madurez y el ajuste de la ventana de cosecha, por un lado; y el análisis organoléptico y el control analítico de muestras, por otro. Los resultados demuestran la construcción procesual del objeto DO Ribera del Guadiana y subrayan el papel de la coordinación que desempeñan los diversos agentes para estabilizar las propiedades del producto. Al seguir el objeto desde el viñedo hasta el laboratorio y a través del informe analítico, el artículo arroja luz sobre la naturaleza dinámica de los procesos de normalización y su impacto en la relación entre origen y producto.

Palabras clave: Economía de las cualidades, Denominación de Origen, comida popular, producción alimentaria.

1. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ORIGIN AND PRODUCT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ECONOMY OF QUALITIES

Production, distribution, and food consumption in modern market economies operate under an “economy of qualities” (Callon et al., 2011). This concept suggests that the characteristics of a good or service are not inherent but constructed and negotiated through social interaction. The value of a product depends on how agents perceive and assess its qualities, including tangible aspects (performance, efficiency, durability) and intangible factors like reputation, status, and symbolic value (Bourdieu, 1984). Callon et al. (2011) analyze the dynamics of attribution in relation to two mechanisms: the uniqueness of goods and their (dis)connection to consumers. On the one hand, goods should possess recognized and identifiable qualities for consumers, which requires standardization systems (such as size specifications, barcodes, and protocols) throughout the production chain (Cañedo and Loredo-Narciandi, 2016). These standardization criteria aim to eliminate variability and uncertainty. On the other hand, diversification is necessary to meet consumers’ changing preferences.

The principles governing the economy of qualities operate simultaneously: while the market standardizes products, it also allows for continuous differentiation to cater to diverse consumer demands (Cañedo & Loredo-Narciandi, 2016; Cañedo, 2016). This concept aligns with anthropologist Montserrat Cañedo’s category of “diversified standardization” (Cañedo, forthcoming). Diversified standardization involves a coordinated and multi-participatory process of standard production that defines and stabilizes objects as homogeneous sets with shared properties. Maintaining this process requires constant adjustments in the chains of practices involved in producing standards, given the various variables and conditions that impact the production, distribution, and consumption of goods. These contingencies are multiple and of varied nature, but to mention some relevant examples at the time of writing this article, they could include the impact of inflation on consumption patterns or the effects of prolonged drought on crop ripening.

In the food industry, the standardization and diversification of practices are governed by a wide range of certifications, such as Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographical Indication (PGI), and EU Organic Farming certification, to name a few. These certifications are officially recognized protocols that ensure the product possesses distinctive attributes and characteristics, such as being “local,” “organic,” or produced in a “traditional” manner. Thus, these certifications provide uniqueness and a

competitive advantage to the products compared to similar ones. In this sense, these certifications not only *confirm* but define the product's properties, aiding in its competitive differentiation and, in the case of PDO and PGI, establishing a connection with a specific geographical origin.

When discussing regulated food products certified by their origin, it is common for properties and places to intertwine: foods that *belong* to a location and locations *recognized* for producing certain foods. This interchangeability raises questions about how we can conceptualize the category of "origin" from an anthropological perspective, considering that in market economies, the "local" is inherently linked to large global networks of production, distribution, and consumption (Belasco and Horowitz, 2009). However, in this article I aim to explore this "origin" from a different perspective. I intend to investigate how the relationship between origin and the qualities of a product is constructed, that is, which specific actions contribute to linking particular attributes to a geographical location and vice versa, focusing on the practices that shape an object built around the notion of belonging to a place: the Designation of Origin Ribera del Guadiana—an institutional and commercial network based on diverse wines produced in the autonomous community of Extremadura.

My aim is to demonstrate that the relationship between origin and product is not fixed and stable, as commonly perceived in formalization processes and informant discourses. Instead, I will highlight how this relationship is recreated through processes combining standardization and contingency: processes that stabilize qualities by embracing variability and contingencies that are rationalized through standardization procedures (Callon et al., 2011; Cañedo and Loredó-Narciandi, 2016). In other words, I will show how the "origin" acquires a performative dimension, constantly associating the qualities that define the product's uniqueness and connecting it to a place (Cañedo, forthcoming).

From this perspective, the discourses that typically describe the qualities of protected products, such as "these wines are ours," "this land imparts its character," or "this is how it has always been done," do not merely represent the preservation of deeply rooted forms in tradition and history. Instead, they reveal themselves as an ongoing process of adjustment in which farmers, insects, algorithms, and distillation columns intertwine in ways that are not always predictable. These connections leave traces (a coordinate on a map, a hurried notation in a laboratory notebook, the bitter taste of someone tasting grapes before harvest) that, like clues, allow us to reconstruct the movements that link the "local" and the "traditional" to objects that, like Ribera del

Guadiana wine, are partially sustained by the life cycle of vines imported from America in response to phylloxera epidemic, internationally validated methods of chemical analysis, or the working conditions of temporary Romanian laborers who migrate to the region every year.

In this article, I present the preliminary findings of an ongoing ethnography that examines the practices of diversified standardization shaping the Ribera del Guadiana Designation of Origin (DO). Given the wide range of actors involved, I will focus exclusively on a specific empirical location, the Almendralejo Enological Station, which is responsible for wine quality analysis in Extremadura. Furthermore, I will explore two processes that illustrate specific practices of diversified standardization: maturation control and harvest window adjustment on the one hand and organoleptic analysis and analytical sample control on the other.

The text is structured as follows: the first section describes the main characteristics of the Ribera del Guadiana DO and the Almendralejo Enological Station. Next, I analyze the practices of diversified standardization in detail, highlighting specific forms that have emerged. Finally, I propose that the Ribera del Guadiana DO is a constantly evolving object where attributes can be stabilized by associating the qualities defining the “origin” and the “product” in a specific context.

2. RIBERA DEL GUADIANA DESIGNATION OF ORIGIN

The Ribera del Guadiana Designation of Origin (DO) is an institutional and commercial network that regulates the production, commercialization, protection, and promotion of wines made in six regions of Extremadura (Fig. 1). Established in 1999, the Ribera del Guadiana DO currently includes twenty-five wineries and 3,587 winegrowers.¹ It is the third largest DO in Spain based on registered surface area, ranking behind La Mancha DO and the Qualified Designation of Origin (QDOa) Rioja. However, its volume of qualified wine is limited, with approximately 43,000 hL produced in the 2020/2021 campaign, which is far less than major wine-producing regions like DOCa Rioja or DO Cava. The main varieties are red wine (88%) and white wine (12%). Most of the production is intended for domestic trade (90%), with China, Lithuania, Germany, and Latvia being the main foreign buyers.

¹ The production data of the DO Ribera del Guadiana presented in this section correspond to the year 2021 and were obtained from the annual reports of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Food of the Government of Spain, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/mwewxpnk>



Figure 1. Location of Extremadura in the Iberian Peninsula and details of the six subzones of the Ribera del Guadiana Designation of Origin. Source: riberadelguadiana.eu.

The Ribera del Guadiana DO is institutionally regulated through a Regulation² related to national and European protection frameworks. This Regulation establishes the role of a Regulatory Council, responsible for verifying compliance with the production methods and characteristics specified for wines bottled under the Designation of Origin, and acting as a certification body. The specification defines the geographical areas, analytical and organoleptic qualities of the product, permitted volumes and yields, grape varieties, and packaging and labeling systems.³

One key concept emphasized in the specification is the explicit link between the product qualities and the local history and distinctive natural environment. In the “Link with the geographical area” section, the regulation highlights historical events that demonstrate the longstanding wine presence, such as a 4th-century BC *kylix* used in a funerary ritual in the Medellín area, a 3rd-century mosaic with viticulture motifs found in present-day Mérida, and a reference to Extremadura in the 1520 *Libro y registro de la bodega del Monasterio de Guadalupe* [Book and Registry of the Guadalupe Monastery Winery], which is considered the oldest treatise on viticulture. The following section of the specification further explores the connection between “tradition in wine production” and the natural factors of the region, with two subsections: “Quality and characteristics of the product influenced primarily or exclusively

² Order 74/2018, of June 5th, approving the Regulations of the “Ribera del Guadiana” Designation of Origin, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/3wp72s7w>.

³ Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/55m575k2>

by the geographical environment” and “Causal link between the geographical area and the characteristics of the product.” This specification underscores the profound link between product qualities and the local history and unique natural surroundings. As Medina (2008) shows in his ethnography regarding the rise of wine tourism linked to the patrimonialization and touristification of food products, these types of practices exemplify how Denomination of Origin regulations intertwine with “identity processes,” symbolizing the historical and social significance of viticulture within a specific region.

The Almendralejo Enological Station, established in 1915 in Almendralejo, Badajoz, is responsible for regulating the Ribera del Guadiana Designation of Origin. It was created in response to the phylloxera epidemic that affected Europe in the mid-19th century.⁴ The station aimed to improve the competitiveness of wine producers in the region by addressing the impact of the epidemic. Phylloxera led to the replanting of native grapevines with American vines, which had a shorter life cycle. To adapt to these new vines, the station focused on selecting suitable varieties based on climate, soil, and grafting requirements. Initially, the Almendralejo City Council requested the establishment of an American vine nursery for experimentation, which later led to the creation of the Enological Station.

After overcoming the phylloxera epidemic and replanting vineyards with American rootstocks, the wine sector faced challenges due to the low quality of the wines. As stated in a document from 1905, “our wines in Almendralejo cannot last in the cellars for more than a year [...] With the methods we follow, there are as many types of wines as there are containers in the cellars” (Zarandieta, 2016, p. 518). This message reveals the absence of methods that could guarantee a certain level of uniformity in the qualities of the produced wines, which hindered their commercial possibilities. To address these shortcomings, the mayor of Almendralejo requested that the “development of the wine production in this city follows the scientific improvement of its elaboration” through the creation of an ampelographic and enological station where they could test and determine the grape varieties that are most adaptable to the environment.⁵ In 1915, two engineers from the Ministry of Development arrived in the town to train local producers and future technicians of the station in various phases of the production process, such as estimating the harvest window by determining acidity and sugar levels, temperature control, and analytical controls of the samples.

⁴ The historical chronology has been taken from Zarandieta (2016).

⁵ The ampelographic section did not materialize as planned due to a shortage of available fields for experimentation.

Today, the Enological Station still preserves traces of this transition in its facilities. The facility features early 20th-century agricultural machinery and botanical illustrations depicting vine parasites and pests. These artifacts accompany visitors to the two laboratories in the building, where the landscape transforms into white lab coats, distillation columns, and decantation funnels (Fig. 2). It is in these facilities that sample analysis takes place, following highly regulated and standardized procedures. All the procedures carried out there are validated by the National Accreditation Entity (ENAC), in accordance with criteria set out in the UNE-EN ISO/IEC 17065 standard.⁶ Furthermore, as we will see below, each analytical determination is also subject to highly routine protocols adhering to international standardization developed by international organizations.



Figure 2. Along the hallway leading to the laboratory, various devices showcase the history of the Enological Station.

⁶ <https://riberadelguadiana.eu/entidad-de-certificacion/>

Having introduced the location where our agents’ practices converge, we can now explore the traces that shape our object.

3. TRACKING THE SAMPLES

Beside the product characteristics and certification procedures are regulated by the Specification of Conditions and protocols, it’s worth considering the various variables that introduce heterogeneity and uncertainty in the wine production process. Factors like prolonged drought, changes in packaging requirements, updates to temperature control systems, or pest outbreaks can all impact the final product qualities. To produce a competitive wine that meets the defined characteristics it’s necessary to address these uncertainties and minimize variability through standardized procedures. Montserrat Cañedo (2017, forthcoming) highlights that standard production is not a given but a performative and multi-participatory process involving diverse agents. Diversified standardization, therefore, relies on the ability of agents to coordinate in time and space the different actions that stabilize the product properties, considering sources of uncertainty and changing market demands.

To illustrate this process, we will examine two dynamics of diversified standardization in the DO Ribera del Guadiana: ripeness control and harvest window adjustment, as well as organoleptic analysis and analytical sample control. Our methodological strategy involves tracing the journey of the DO Ribera del Guadiana object from the vineyard to the laboratory and through the analytical report, and observing the inscriptions generated along this movement (Latour, 2013, p. 86). This approach highlights the procedural construction of the object, demonstrating how protocols dynamically stabilize the attributes defined by regulations and market demand (Latour, 1993). It allows us to break away from rigid institutional frameworks and informant discourses and perceive the object as an ongoing assemblage (Latour, 2005). Due to length constraints, we haven’t included other significant adjustment practices that impact standardization processes, such as commercial diversification or innovative technical procedures for rationalization.

3.1. Ripeness control and adjustment of the harvest window

The harvest window determines the ideal time for grape harvesting, which varies across vineyards due to factors like soil diversity, climate conditions, vine arrangements, and cultivated varieties. The goal of adjusting the harvest window is to predict the best start date for harvesting in each vineyard, ensuring consistent attributes that align with regulations and market demands. This adjustment involves monitoring grape ripeness.

Ripeness control takes place from August to the first half of September in 35 selected plots within the six subzones of the Designation of Origin. The Enological Station's technicians use a Geographic Information System to identify the plots and mark the vines from which samples will be taken. To do this, the technicians of the Enological Station count the number of vine rows and divide it by three. Based on the length, they mark one vine every 10, 20, or 30 plants (although the most common number is ten plants per vine). After identifying the plants, the sampling process begins. On the one hand, a collection of grapes intended for physical-chemical analysis in the laboratory is performed. The number of berries collected depends on the size of the grape: one hundred for the larger grapes (pardina, cayetana, tempranillo, garnacha) and two hundred for smaller grapes (Cabernet Sauvignon or Merlot). These berries are selected to ensure a representative sample: ten berries are taken from each plant, from different clusters, at different parts of the cluster and from clusters located on both sides of the trellis. These berries are labeled, stored, and sent to the laboratory for further analysis. A second process is grape tasting, which is performed on a sample of 25 or 30 berries with pedicels. During the tasting, the technicians analyze, on-site or at the facilities of the Enological Station, the visual and tactile ripeness of the berry, the technological and aromatic ripeness of the pulp, the aromatic ripeness of the skin, and the ripeness of the seeds.

The results of the analysis and tasting are published in a weekly bulletin accessible on the Ribera del Guadiana Designation of Origin website.⁷ Grape growers and technicians receive the bulletins via email to adjust their harvests based on neighboring vineyards' ripeness levels. The objective is to allow them to adjust the harvest by considering the degree of ripeness observed in neighboring vineyards. Thus, the bulletins include diverse results. Firstly, they identify the locations of the samples, specifying the subzone, type of training system (bush or trellis), cultivation method (dry farming or irrigation),

⁷ Available at: <https://riberadelguadiana.eu/control-de-maduracion/>

municipality, and grape variety used. The second section displays the results of the physical-chemical analysis conducted in the laboratory, quantifying different parameters such as mass, sugar concentration, total acidity, pH, or total polyphenol index, among others. A third section evaluates the ripeness of the berry, pulp, skin, and seeds, expressing the expertise of the tasters as numerical values within a four-interval scale. Lastly, the bulletins synthesize these indicators in a section of conclusions and observations to facilitate results' interpretation among the stakeholders.

The ripeness control adjusts the optimal harvest date in each vineyard, taking into account the results obtained from the analysis of the samples. This personalized adjustment allows for the *standardization* of the final properties of the product, producing a wine with analytical and organoleptic characteristics that comply with regulations and meet market demands. Therefore, the ability to achieve and stabilize the qualities of Ribera del Guadiana wine relies on the coordination of various practices involved in the process. In this sense, far from being attributes “that arise from the land” or that “preserve the best of our tradition,” achieving the properties that certify the origin of the Ribera del Guadiana Designation of Origin involves the mediation of expert knowledge and continuous monitoring and control procedures. These protocols act on the representativeness of the samples and their proper handling. Calibrated measuring devices, following international standards, allow for the validation and replication of results. Thus, expert knowledge translates predictions into actions.

Throughout this sequence, from the selection of vineyards to the electronic notification of the ripening bulletin, the concept of “origin” takes on different objectified forms that we can trace. In this process, “origin” becomes a cartographic coordinate, a hundred berries that act as representatives of a whole, annotations that identify the containers holding the samples, a document certifying the receipt of the sample, the pulp extract on which the sugar concentration is calculated, etcetera, until the bulletin that predicts the optimal ripening point, which anticipates the “quality” of the object. Thus, the “origin” escapes from its particularity and circulates beyond the vineyard.

3.2. Organoleptic analysis and analytical control

Another aspect of diversified standardization is the organoleptic analysis and analytical control of the samples. Clients who want to certify their product's properties submit samples at the reception and registration area, along with a request specifying the desired analytical determinations.⁸ The samples are associated with a barcode and a numerical value upon arrival. The data from the request and the codes are recorded in a computer program, and then the samples are transferred to the laboratories (Fig. 3).



Figure 3. In the reception and registration area, a lab coat observes the transformation of samples into requests, codes, and computer entries before entering the laboratory.

⁸ Model of application for analytical determinations, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/vz9phdav>
Model of application for organoleptic analysis, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/bd3m9eew>

The first laboratory is the analytical control laboratory, accessible only to the technical staff. Only labeled samples are sent there to ensure “anonymity” and “impartiality” in the procedure. In the laboratory, the language changes compared to the reception area. There is no camaraderie between the workers and those requesting the analysis; instead, a technical language is used. The director systematically describes various analysis procedures and equipment characteristics. Each analytical determination follows standardized protocols specifying the apparatus, reagents, procedures, and units of measurement involved. For instance, to determine total acidity using volumetric analysis, one of the most common determinations, the OIV-MA-AS313-02 method is followed. This protocol, developed by the International Organization of Vine and Wine, outlines the laboratory material, provides a detailed procedure, calculation method, and units of measurement.⁹ Regular calibration of instruments is also emphasized. While a worker is preparing the analysis of a newly arrived sample, the director reiterates these steps: weighing, dividing the sample into flasks, recording measurements, verifying the assembly of the fractionation column, lighting the Bunsen burner, and recording the date in the notebook. Each stage results in an entry in a spreadsheet on a laptop computer.

The sensory analysis laboratory is situated on the building’s second floor. It comprises a sample and reference storage area, a tasting area, and an administrative office. The samples retain their labels from the registration area, although opaque black glasses are sometimes used during tastings to anonymize them again. The samples are stored in a refrigerator with regularly monitored temperature according to predetermined values. From there, they are moved to the tasting area, which is a room divided into ten separate stations by side walls. Each station includes a monitor, keyboard, mouse, overhead lighting, tasting glasses, a glass, a stopwatch, and evaluation sheets. Reference documents, “Taster’s Guidelines” and “Stopwatch Operation,” are posted on the wall of each station for consultation.

The tasting process consists of three phases, each evaluating different parameters: a visual one analyzing clarity, hue, intensity or depth, and color of the sample; an olfactory phase evaluating the aroma; and a gustatory phase assessing the flavor, aromatic persistence, body, taste, and gustatory persistence. The taster is the primary measurement instrument during the

⁹ Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/4m7uffks>

tasting, but various standardization devices are also employed to *transform* the technician's subjective perception into a universal code (Latour, 2017, p. 259). For example, in the visual phase, tasters assign the hue by comparing the glass with a set of color swatches. In the olfactory and gustatory phases there is a list of descriptors, groups, and differential characteristics defined according to standardized patterns that serve as references. These patterns are stored in temperature-controlled refrigerators, and tasters in the laboratory often undergo periodic training to remember these references (Fig. 4). The results of the tasting are recorded in a computer program and transferred to the administrative section for registration.



Figure 4. When faced with the patterns, the taster translates their specific perception into a universal code.

Both the organoleptic analysis and analytical control generate a results report that certifies and supports the measurements taken. This document is formalized in the laboratories and then returned to the reception and registration area, where it is added to the initial request, sealed, and delivered to the client. Other byproducts, such as sample residues, are collected and periodically removed.

Similar to the analysis of adjusting the harvest window, the organoleptic analysis and analytical control of the samples leave behind traces that allow us to track the transformations the object undergoes throughout the chain of actions. In this second stage, we are interested in examining what happens when we trace the process from the final product back to the initial stage, meaning from the results report to the sample delivery. For example, in the case of organoleptic control, the report plays a role in engaging the taster with the standardized pattern—from the universal number to the color of a specific sample, from the odor of the pattern stored at controlled temperature to the olfactory perception of the individual—then to the selection of a portion of the sample stored in refrigerators, to the labeled containers as a whole, to the signature on the analysis request, to the barcode attached to the container, to the blue signature on the request form, to the trace left by the electronic payment of the analytical fees, and so on. The list could go on indefinitely, limited only by the length of this text.

The central aspect of our approach is that it allows us to emphasize two qualities concerning how the origin and properties of the object are connected (*cf.* Latour, 2005, 2017). Firstly, the chain of associations we consider can extend as much as we desire. In this study, we have chosen two relatively stable forms—the vineyard and the laboratory report—as starting points to trace the transformations. However, it is evident that there are changes, continuities, and associations that precede and extend beyond them, such as the biotechnological experiments conducted by the wineries, or the actions leading to the invention of the distillation column. Secondly, this tracing is reversible: we can track the transformations of our object in both directions, *whether from the vineyard to the laboratory report or from the final report to the vineyard.*

The DO Ribera del Guadiana object is no longer just a bottle, a winery, or a set of specifications; it resembles a continuous formation (Latour, 1993, p. 134) in which we, as anthropologists, can ethnographically address the actions that introduce a certain (temporal) stability into the object and reconstruct the process by following the traces left by these transformations: reports, smells,

Pantone colors, lab coats, glasses, residues, dinners. Thinking about our objects this way raises several questions and leads to some conclusions.

4. CONCLUSIONS

When I began writing this article, I analyzed several DO Ribera del Guadiana promotional advertisements. One of them portrayed the product as a representation of “tradition rooted in time and craftsmanship that has dug deep into the earth with effort.”¹⁰ The ad emphasized wine, land, tradition, time, and effort—an enumeration that highlighted the connection between the land’s provision and the hands’ role in preserving what already existed. However, the omission of other common agents during the ethnography, such as computer systems or laboratory instruments, caught my attention. As a spectator, I followed the advertisement, witnessing the stages that took me from the dawn over the vineyard to the final toast. As an anthropologist, I sought to uncover the practices that were left out, contributing to a frozen perception of time and bringing us back, with a glass in hand, to the essence of the place.

In this study, I have explored how the relationship between “origin” and “origin-protected product” is constructed, aiming to move away from reductive frameworks often found in institutional discourses and informant narratives. I intended to analyze the specific practices that temporarily stabilize certain properties (in this case, those recognized by the standard) and how these standardization processes intersect with dynamics that introduce variability. By tracing the transformations undergone by the DO Ribera del Guadiana object—from the vineyard to the results report, and vice versa—we have followed the object along the chain of references that connect “origin” and “product,” shedding light on some of the resulting objectified forms. This has allowed us to observe how the “local” nature of the object, its “origin” as a link to a specific temporal and spatial context, becomes blurred along this chain: what may be “local” at one level of action (selecting one hundred berries during the sampling process) can become “universal” within a different spatiotemporal framework (by associating the color of the must with a standardized numerical code).

So, what does “the local” mean in this context? How can we understand the “origin” of these objects? Ultimately, what is the relationship between “origin” and “product”? In my opinion, the answer lies in viewing “origin” and

¹⁰ Available at: https://youtu.be/dwSomao_XU8

“product” as two ends of the same *continuum*—a complex object in which standardization practices aim to stabilize the qualities that define the uniqueness of the products. However, these qualities are established based on various sources of variability and commercial demands. In this sense, the attributes that define Ribera del Guadiana wine do not solely arise from its historical and natural context, as any set of specifications may suggest, but must be associated with each new harvest, considering changing requirements and unforeseen situations. “Origin” and “product,” seen in this manner, are inseparable—they are intertwined whether they are standardized, quantified, or reduced to pulp; whether they appear in diagrams, emails, or scientific articles.

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