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Research Synthesis

This research uses cheese as a lens, specifically the cases of Parmesan and Cheddar, to understand the global dispute over the right to use particular food names in commerce. On the one hand, Parmesan enjoys protected Geographical Indication (GI) status within the European Union (EU), which restricts use of the name to cheese-makers within a strictly-defined region of Italy. However, a number of countries both within the EU and abroad have contested the protection of Parmesan and requested an international standard for the name on the basis that it is the generic term for a type of cheese long produced in various territories. The use of the name is a highly controversial issue and the debate remains at a standstill. On the other hand, the name Cheddar has been uncritically assumed to have lost the link to its original location of origin, rendering it un-protectable and open for use by anyone anywhere to market a certain *type* of cheese. A name like Cheddar may be referred to as a Generic Geographical Indication (GGI). Generic terms can be used by anyone, anywhere, at any time, and may not be privately owned.

I explore the essentially contested nature of the struggle over the use of cheese terms and the role played by competing ‘gastro-panic’ discourses in framing the competition for

policy influence at the international level. Cheese presents a suitable product category through which to examine this phenomenon because their names are currently the most internationally contested. In today's world what a cheese is called is much more than what a cheese is called – it involves everything from how a product is perceived in consumers' minds to how names and products are intertwined with everything from identity, culture, and the social relations of production within a territory to business, industrialization, and trade. The debate over cheese reveals the inherently political nature of the ways in which genuineness and genericness are constructed in an increasingly competitive market-place.

The main objective of the research was to thoroughly explore the issue of GGIs between the EU and its 'New World' (NW) opponents, which has received little academic attention thus far. I examined how and why actors are competing over the status of cheese names and at the same time generated a better understanding of genericism within the context of global GI politics. I also sought an explanation for why such discourse has manifested surrounding Parmesan rather than Cheddar. The motives for this research were straightforward. First, genericism is an inherently contested concept despite the unprotectability of generic terms being enshrined in GI policy. Second, within the broader political-economy of GIs the generic use of geographical names is one of the most contentious issues. Third, the use of these names is of significant importance to producers, manufacturers, consumers, and policy-makers all over the world yet the rules and regulations governing their use remain vague and under-developed

This research is firmly anchored in the emerging field of food studies. Food studies is an interdisciplinary approach that places food at the center of analysis, using it as a lens through which to explore, analyze, and understand phenomena within society, both past and present. The thesis takes a qualitative approach to critically interpret and understand the nature of GIs and generics as socially constructed rather than relying upon more objectivist

approaches that attempt to rationalize, test, and explain. Additionally, it employs a comprehensive case analysis of the generic issue and focuses on the illustrative examples of Parmesan and Cheddar and draws on written policy material and other documents, websites, blogs, artifacts, observations, and semi-structured interviews and discussions. This allowed for a more detailed illustration and examination of the complex relationships between a diverse range of actors from various levels and enabled me to document the diverging perspectives and contested viewpoints and demonstrate the influence of key actors and interactions throughout the narrative.

I demonstrate how European and NW actors compete over cheese names through parallel processes of gastro-panic where they invoke a language of food system security as a means of providing a foundation for and justifying political action to deter perceived threats to the use of certain terms. Gastro-panic manifests itself in competing policy discourses, understood as discursive strategies employed to secure the exclusive or generic use of terms, and is key to understanding how different groups in this debate promote their interests. I demonstrate that the generic debate is essentially a competition over cultural representations and security. Competing European and NW actors make claims and counter-claims in an attempt to establish dominance over the other through discursively demarcating what constitutes proper and improper use. As signs, cheese names are given meaning by how they are represented as place-specific or generic. These meanings are not merely abstract notions but also have real practical effects, being developed and deployed in concrete struggles over the power to demarcate and influence the right to the use of certain terms. But actors also compete over security where the construction of territorial and cultural boundaries surrounding the use of terms as well as the preservation of use rights is fundamental to its pursuit. However, both strategies of demarcation are a source of conflict as there are

incompatible claims over the use of terms. This can be problematic because it creates strict divisions that may cause actors to lose sight of any cooperative potential within the dispute.

The pervasiveness of oppositional gastro-panic strategies in agri-food political discourse within the generic debate is powerful in that it is not only prevalent as a discursive strategy in the language of actors but also structures their practice. The issue is not only talked about in terms of the threatening effects of the others' efforts but partially structures much of the actions performed by actors in international negotiations where the right to use cheese terms still has the potential to be affected. Through the active demonization of a folk devil, claims-makers consider the other side to be adversaries and as the folk angels they defend their positions, enterprise to mobilize supporters against them, and employ legitimating values through organized proposals and the enforcement of new rules to influence policy and government action. Thus, the discourse pervading the gastro-panics serves a political-economic purpose where the deployment of a language of security is used to securitize a perceived threat and can be a useful means of persuading policy-makers that action must be taken to deter it. By framing the dispute within this type of setting, claims-makers on both sides are able to rally supporters and generate a consensus to legitimate actions to preserve a particular right to the use of cheese names.

The nature of the gastro-panic myth differs given the divergent geographical, historical, political, and institutional contexts in which it is being framed. Different forms of neoliberalism and ideas about the role that dairy plays in the economy and society underlie the competing sides and helps explain divergent European and NW approaches to the generic issue. In a discursive sense, the debate about the implications of generic use within the agricultural protectionist environment of the EU or the restriction of use in more market-oriented countries is similarly security-maximizing. Countering gastro-panic politics inform national and international debates on the future of food terms and are interwoven with

demands for agricultural liberalization, market access, and open competition in a proposed global free trade regime. The progressive globalization of the world economy has contributed to a growing sense of insecurity amongst many and significantly affected agricultural policy. At the international level, rules, regulations and norms are constantly being shaped and the international agri-food market has become a battleground for groups with conflicting interests attempting to influence policy and its construction.

Within this process difficult questions exist as to who has the right to use certain terms and what the place of culture and protection is in an increasingly borderless world. This is an issue about spheres of interest, market share, barriers to entry, but also perceived heritage and tradition is very strong. For example, should producers be able to recapture names? And are food cultures destined to become immovable and fixed entities forever rooted to the place of origin? This is reflective of the paradoxical effect of globalization which has over time expanded the material and symbolic reach of food cultures and at the same time triggered attempts to re-localize them. Paralleling this has been the dramatic rise of global dairy industries and the continued formation of intellectual property rights through GIs. Globalization and the expansion of world trade have also led to increased demands for international rules on generics as a means to protect and enhance market share in cheese.

An important lesson to learn from this research is that the protection or non-protection of food names emerges through a dynamic process of discursive construction. As signs the connotations attached to food names are rarely stabilized or unproblematic in practice. Because their meaning fluctuates within and between territories they are also inherently contested and change as competing actors seek to fix their otherwise shifting meaning. This is important because it emphasizes that meaning is the outcome of politics and the connotations attached to cheese names emerge as a socio-cultural construction that industry participants and other actors have to constantly negotiate and re-define. Additionally, rather than being a

stable and objectively-assessed state of being, genericism itself is a complex notion that has different and sometimes contradictory meanings. The production and maintenance of genericism relies upon the consensus of actors working within the negotiated and contested terrain of international politics, some of whom are more powerful and well-organized than others.

In short, this research demonstrates that genericism is not a given condition. Genericity, like genuineness, is not a quality of the name and product themselves but is something which is ascribed to them by someone with authority. Food names become territorialized or disembedded through the mobilization of values and meanings that construct them as either 'genuine' and 'specific' or 'ingenuine' and 'non-specific'. In the case of Parmesan, the localization process is about utilizing a *terroirist* discourse that roots the product in time and space and at the same time demonizes its outside use as counterfeiting. Exclusive rights to the name are legitimated through European claims-makers' discourses as they emphasize the essential link between its authenticity and 'realness' and the Reggio-Emilia territory, traditional production methods, and history. At the same time, the de-localization process that seems to have affected Cheddar is about utilizing a discursive strategy that releases the name in time and space and legitimizes its outside use. In the narratives of opposing NW actors the product name loses its cultural specificity through emphasis on its generality. Within this oppositional process actors are unable to find a compromise to reconcile the diverging interests of different stakeholders and their desire to secure the rights to use.

This thesis sought to investigate and bring into focus the current controversies surrounding the genericity of cheese terms and broaden the literature on GIs where the issue has been largely neglected. It can also be used to inform current international policy debates surrounding generic terms. The thesis makes an original contribution by widening the

understanding of and demythologizing the issue of genericism within GI politics, expanding the analysis beyond a transatlantic focus to encompass broader perspectives from NW actors, and by interrogating the issue through the lens of cheese – specifically the innovative comparison of the highly contested case of Parmesan and the uncontested case of Cheddar. This is important in contemporary global GI politics as the ownership of cheese names is an ongoing site of negotiation and contestation. As well, it is the request for an extension of stronger protection to foodstuffs and the claw-back of generic food terms that constitutes the most current area of contention within the GI debate.

This research also contributes by moving beyond the primarily legalistic focus on GGIs through providing an in-depth examination of the political and discursive processes that influence the use of terms. As was demonstrated throughout the thesis, the status of certain names is sometimes not the result of objective processes of definition and demarcation but rather the outcome of negotiations in which actors, driven by particular interests, compete over meanings and worldviews in order to secure the rights to their use. GIs and generics are social constructs and as signs their connotations differ from one region or territory to another. It is therefore important to problematize the taken-for-granted nature of opposing perspectives and analyze the processes of social and cultural construction within political negotiations because the decisions made have concrete effects on the use cheese terms around the world and also affect the development of international regulations and markets.

Furthermore, the gastro-panic framework discussed in the third course could potentially be applied to other empirical cases within the food system. Gastro-panic involves the perceived and expressed anxiety over a wide range of elements in the food system, how this concern is manifested in political and public discourse, and the concrete effects it has. As such, it might usefully be applied as a lens to better understand the issue of GMOs where public fear over potential risks has led to changes in policy, the rhetoric of the Slow Food

movement that seeks to protect food cultures from the existential threat of globalization, or the political debate over food security and safety in general.