



Sarah Goler Solecki
Globalisation, the EU, and Multilateralism (GEM) PhD School
University of Warwick and LUISS Guido Carli

Abstract

The difference between Geographical Indication (GI) and generic food terms is an important and highly contentious issue in international negotiations. This distinction is significant to producers, manufacturers, consumers, and policy-makers all over the world because it means the difference between the restricted versus open use of certain popular terms in domestic and global markets. This thesis uses a food studies approach that employs cheese as a lens to understand the contested politics of Generic Geographical Indications (GGIs), which has been under-explored in the literature on GIs. Through case studies and an analysis of written policy material and other documents, websites, blogs, artefacts, observations, and semi-structured interviews and discussions, it investigates the complex processes through which European and New World (NW) actors compete over the status – protected or generic – of cheese names, why this struggle is manifested in the case of Parmesan but not of Cheddar, and how we can better understand genericism within the context of GI policy. The thesis argues that actors guided by differing agricultural paradigms compete to secure the use of terms through oppositional discursive strategies of ‘gastro-panic’, where they appeal to a language of security in order to persuade policy-makers to take action against the perceived threatening actions of their opponents. It finds that unlike the contested term Parmesan no such panic has emerged surrounding Cheddar because its widespread use has not been interpreted as a threat to the ‘original.’ As well, genericism emerges as both a dynamic and socially-constructed concept subject to ongoing negotiation and contestation and a strategic discursive device used to block the successful registration of proposed product names as GIs. 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.

Key words: Geographical Indications, generic, international negotiations, Parmesan, Cheddar, agricultural paradigms