

THE PROPERTY OF FOOD

Geographical Indication, Slow Food, Genuino Clandestino and the Politics of Property

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This paper explores the political struggles behind the definition of geographical indication (GI), and the different uses for these food labels. It examines both the geopolitical and local conflicts around the definition of what GIs are, and the implications of GIs for the conceptualization of property. The article argues that the international geopolitics embodied in GIs is not simply creating class stratifications; it is dispossessing rural, local and underprivileged populations of a crucial resource: their tastes. Ultimately, the article argues for the utility of property as a theoretical and political concept, and suggests that we see it as a site of conflict.¹

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The Chianti is one of the most renowned of Italian wines. It is produced in various parts of Tuscany. It is made from Sangiovese grapes (75–100%) to which can be added Canaiolo Nero (maximum 10%), Trebbiano Toscano and/or Malvasia del Chianti (maximum 10%) and other red grapes recommended and/or authorized by the local administration of every zone of production with an alcohol percentage of 11.5% minimum for Chianti. The Sangiovese grape reflects the characteristics of the soil in which it is grown and is sensitive to the environment. This is the reason why the grape brings out the flavor of the sandstone which gives it its floral bouquet. The calcareous soils add to the scent of wild berries, while the tufa or the volcanic soil offers an aromatic odor of tobacco. (Villapandolfini 2012)

Property, when speaking of food, is generally considered synonymous with its characteristics, such as

taste, and color. Yet if one thinks about the current development of brands, it seems fairly obvious that food not only has properties, but can become one. The above quotation describes the qualities of Chianti, a well-known Italian wine from Tuscany. What is striking about this text is the evident connection that is made between a geographical area – a kind of soil, the wine's recipe – and its physical characteristics. In other words, not only the legal use of the label Chianti, but also its specific phenomenological character is deemed to derive from its geographical location and its mode of production. Today, this bundle of properties is defined worldwide as a geographical indication (GI), and it is generally protected by a specific legal status – one that oscillates between trademarks and cultural heritage. GIs embody an ambiguous connection between the *properties of food* and *food as property*: the politics of this pair of concepts constitute the subject of this paper.

Chianti is particularly enlightening here, because it has been a GI at least since 1716, when the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Cosimo III de' Medici, defined by law a portion of Tuscany as the only soil that could produce Chianti. Later in the eighteenth century Bettino Ricasoli fixed Chianti's recipe: 70% Sangiovese, 15% Canaiolo, and 10% Malvasia grapes. The proportion of the different kinds of grapes became law in the Italian state in 1967, though the law was altered in the 1990s and 2000s as to allow producers more flexibility. The natural history of Chianti's property(s) stops at this chronology, eliding the fight between the Italian state and a group of producers, determined to re-evaluate Chianti as a high-end product. It is because of this conflict that Chianti's recipe was altered – and its tradition and pedigree were invented.

Drawing from the Chianti conflict, this paper explores the political struggles behind the definition of GIs, and the different uses for them. The article rests upon an analysis of primary and secondary sources, extracted from official and “unofficial” documents, and is also informed by conversations I had with Italian small producers, farmers and activists. These conversations were part of a secondary project I have been developing in the past two years, concerning food sovereignty movements and their relation to property; while I am not a “food scholar” I am drawn to think about food as part of the broader discussion about the new forms of appropriation of the commons – that is, neoliberal strategies for rent exploitations. This issue has become very urgent to me also because of my own family connection with some small Italian growers, which gives me (partial) insight into the hardship of “alternative” farming.

The first part of the article explores two contrasting definitions of GIs: the EU defines GIs as linked to the *terroir* – that is to both a mode of living and a geographical space, while the US define it as a trademark, linked to a copyrighted brand. The concept of *terroir* originated in France between the 1860s and the 1930s. At that time, the French wine industry was suffering from years of bad harvests and the devastation of the wars. In order to enhance productivity, and save a sector crucial for the country's economy,

French farmers crossed local grape varieties with coarse American root stocks. But if the roots were American, what made French wine so special? Viti-culturists argued that it was the *terroir*, the soil, that allowed grapes to acquire a particular and unique taste. With time the concept widened to include not only the physical characteristics of the soil, but also the socio-cultural environment in which wine was produced. Later on the concept spread from wine to different products, and eventually led to the formulation of the first attempt to protect locally produced foods (the so-called *appellations d'origine controllee*) (Laudan 2004): *terroir* became a legal and rhetorical mechanism to link cultural traditions, locality, and sensible characteristics of a given product.

After a brief overview of the two main different conceptions and legal formulations of GIs, I will discuss in detail how the EU protects GIs. Apart from an obvious emotional and personal interest in researching topics “close to home,” I do so in order to critically evaluate the commonsensical notion that the EU devotes particular attention to cultural heritage. I specifically take into account the role of Slow Food, an organization that fosters the use of GIs, because of its conception of taste as a political issue. While Slow Food works not only within the EU certification, but also proposes its own labels, I use it as an example of the “best of the worst”: the most radical of the mainstream (i.e. based on the neoliberal market) advocates for GIs. Analyzing the dynamics of Slow Food certification is a way to assess the whole GIs legal system in its most “positive” manifestation: whose cultural heritage is protected, and whose interests are advanced by these legal tools of propertizing food?

While my discussion of Slow Food compels me to argue that GIs are used to draw and reinforce class boundaries, I complicate this conclusion in the following section, taking the example of Genuino Clandestino. This movement tries to popularize a “non-label” of quality, wherein consumers are co-certifiers of producers' quality. Faced with this very political, critical, and grassroots use of GIs, I conclude that GIs are potentially a focus of contentious politics. Propertizing food can, by extension, both

open and foreclose political possibilities. Thus, the issue is not to define a “logic inherent in property,” but instead to consider the actual relations of power that shape property’s conception and workings in a concrete situation.

This paper refers to the concept of “property” as a bundle of relations between people mediated by things (Verdery 2003). In the course of the paper, I emphasize the role of property as an explicit category of analysis. Property comes in handy to summarize the multiple levels at which social relations are structured. As the literature review should make clear, talking about food as property links together the role of food in shaping morality, group boundaries, geopolitical relations of domination and phenomenological experiences of taste. Using property as the overarching concepts for these different phenomena shows their interconnectedness: because of the phenomenological experience of food, geopolitical ties of dominations are established (and vice versa) through moralized class boundaries. Talking about property also shows the connection between actually existing human actors: because property is a relation between people, it heavily depends on who those people are, and how they use it. This means that relations of property can be used differently – although never independently from wider contexts. I suggest that property cannot be dispensed of as a theoretical concept: its capacity to bring together different aspects of social life makes it a useful tool to study the contradiction of the neoliberal capitalist system and people’s reactions to or involvement in it in their everyday lives. This is less of a theoretical position than of a political one: in my paper I privilege the processes happening on the ground as opposed to researching a sound and all-encompassing conceptualization of property.

Food and Property

The case of Chianti shows the centrality of food for the social life, and in turn for property relations. Food has often been recognized as a central symbol through which social categories are drawn, and especially as a locus whereby social inclusion or exclusion is affirmed, negotiated, or contested

(Douglas 2003). While Mary Douglas is much more concerned with how food is used to delineate purity, rather than ownership, this aspect can also be covered by property. Property has been used as a tool to morally define what the true and normative human condition should look like in an array of scholarly work: from John Locke’s famous treatises (Locke [1689]1964), to the role of property in defining or contesting stages of civilization (Gluckman 1968; Morgan 1985), property has often been equated with propriety, albeit in different ways. The overlap between the moral aspect of property and food is evident also in other classical anthropological studies.

Michael Herzfeld (1985), in his seminal ethnography of shepherds in a Cretan village, affirms that food preparation as well as consumption constitutes an act of meaning creation whereby the local space of the community is inscribed in the imaginary nation state. For Herzfeld, when a shepherd offers policemen the meat of the very sheep whose theft prompted the unannounced visit/inquiry we are witnessing an act not unlike a linguistic pun. Eating this specific kind of meat both legitimizes and ridicules the morality of the state, embedded in the policeman, by creating a bond of impossible complicity: the shepherd makes sure to let the policeman know that this might be the stolen property, and yet uses the local traditions of hospitality to oblige the policeman to consume the food. By coercing the harbinger of a state’s morality to consume immoral food, local norms and values carve a niche for their existence within the overarching structural imagination of the state. In both conceptualizations, food is moral because it lends itself to tracing boundaries – and that quality is what makes it so coextensive with property.

Other authors have traced the complicated marriage of food and property in more structural ways, attempting to frame social and group boundary-making within a geopolitical field of forces. Sidney Mintz (1986), in his masterpiece *Sweetness and Power*, re-narrates the emergence of the British empire through the colonial exchange with West Indian’s sugar plantations. Sugar, in Mintz’s analysis, is not only a commodity desired by English elites: it is the

means and reason of enslavement and oppression of entire populations, both in Africa and in England. In fact the mass production of sugar quickly becomes a way to lower the reproduction cost of England's proletarian classes – by generalizing a caloric means able to “free” more laborers from the “needs of life” in order to, well, simply work. At the same time, sugar becomes the leitmotif behind a massive enslavement of African natives who eventually will be traded in new world colonies; there their exploitation in back-crushing plantation work will be made possible by, again, sugar calories. Sugar in this case is a commodity that mediates two regimes of ownership and production: it produces (black) slaves in order to reproduce (English) workers.

Building on Mintz's political economy of taste, Elizabeth Dunn (2012) has more recently combined the phenomenological relations to and with food to the geopolitical relations that frame people's ability to reside in and identify with spaces and places. Dunn describes the refusal by Georgian war refugees to eat “bare” food – that is, the macaroni provided by international humanitarian aid agencies. Instead, some of them take extremely dangerous trips into land controlled by the Russians in order to recover jars and jams, which will be exchanged, circulated, and most importantly, eaten on festival occasions. With the recuperation of “traditional” food, Georgian refugees aspire to reconstruct a normal social life: if macaroni, a non-food coming from the non-place of international aid, came to symbolize their displacement from their land, and their eviction from social relations and life, “traditional” food embodied exactly the opposite. By organizing traditional weddings, festivities, and especially moments of convivial and communal eating, Georgian refugees used food to try to recompose a pattern of property. Food, but not *any* food, became the way to reconnect the broken link between individuals, community, and land.

While this literature review is not exhaustive, it shows that food can be entangled with discussions of property from multiple angles. As a moral element of social life, as a tool for the production of inequalities, as a phenomenological experience of

tradition or change food can be a window into the complex articulations of different regimes of property (Verdery 2003). While the authors mentioned here did not necessarily cast their analysis in terms of “the property of food,” I suggest that reading their work through this optic can be productive to think further about the relation of food and property in the contemporary world. Today, we are witnessing a privatization of common property of such scale and magnitude that some authors have named it the “second” enclosure of the commons: DNA information (Fortun 2008), body parts (Scheper-Hughes 2001), traditional knowledge (especially herbs and drugs, see Hayden 2007), software (Chan 2004), intellectual products (Strathern 2004), even future profits (Jeremy Rayner personal communication) – any product can be turned into a source of profit through “propertizing” technologies.

Clearly, not all forms of property that are proliferating at this moment are of the same kind. The landscape of the property form is widening, and becoming increasingly complicated: if on the one hand the intent is to fence off “common” spaces with increasing restrictions, such as the implementation of trademarks, property forms are also used by progressive movements reclaiming indigenous rights, or implementing “open sources” forms of copyright (such as the GNU General Public License). Among these property forms, many concern different aspects of an object or an idea: patents protect the *functional expression* of an idea – that is its potential application for productive processes. Copyrights concern the *creative expression* of an idea, and are linked to the specific form in which said idea is expressed. Trademarks *certify* the source of origin or source of an idea or object, although they are usually held not by the material and practical creator of the idea or object, but by an abstract entity (often a corporation). Certifications, logos, labels and brands move between these legal categories – sometimes used as synonyms for either trademark, patent or copyright, but often simply as the semantic expression thereof.

Within this aggressive phase of the expansion of capitalist relations, brands, labels and certifications occupy a very interesting space. In fact, if one of the

prevalent mechanisms that allow neoliberal capitalism to accumulate profit is not production, but rent (Harvey 2012), then brands, labels and certification (hereafter BLC) are a crucial legal and ideological mechanism to enforce and legitimize rent extraction. At their core, BLC can be described as semiotic and legal tools to maintain consumer choice by recognizing and distinguishing “quality.” They suggest that because of its name, one good is qualitatively better than the other: it follows that the consumer can freely decide if to invest more money in purchasing the certified brand, as opposed to a generic good. From an economic perspective, BLCs are generally thought of as instruments for “value addition,” that is instruments through which the monetary value of a product can be increased. So, if, on the one hand, BLCs are consumer-based technologies of information or ideology, on the other hand they foster a process of legal appropriation of not only symbols (the names themselves) or actual things, but also of production processes and of ways of doing things.

What is usually overlooked in these economic renderings of BLCs are the multiple regimes of value in which products, and especially food, are inscribed: “value addition” means not just the creation of value, but the re-signification of a product’s value – from the domain of social life to that of monetary value. In fact, a good or process that is BLC-ed is usually subtracted from general and common use to be placed under exclusive ownership of the title holder, independently from its previous meanings, practice and tradition. This implies that the social relations that previously made an object’s production possible are restructured by the BLC-ization process: communities that used to support each other by mutually exchanging goods, such as seeds, are now told that their form of social reproduction is illegal (Aistara 2011). As we will see, this extrication and re-tooling of the social relations of food can transform products into completely different objects: not only because the symbolic value of BLC-ed food is different, but also because BLCs affect the conceptions of sociality and personhood that are being mediated by objects (Strathern 2005).

Shifting the property relations that regiment

food ownership impacts the relation of individuals to food, and of individual to individual, and ultimately transforms the very ontological status of the object itself. Strathern (2005) demonstrates that the relation between persons and things is problematic: What is a “person”? What is a “thing”? The idea that “things” and “persons” are bounded entities, of which one can own the other, is maybe more of an ideological construct than anything else. In the case of food the co-constituency of “persons” and “things” is all the more obvious: food becomes a physical part of persons – and of course different kinds of food “make” different kinds of social persons and communities. It is this entanglement between food as an object and food as a constitutive element of both personhood and social relations that ultimately leads to deep conflicts about the property of food.

Geographical Indications: Definition and Controversy

Geographical indications delineate the specificity of a product on the base of its place of production, packaging and/or the methods of work enlisted to produce it. Usually this label is reserved for food, and is more extensively used to protect alcohols, but there are cases of other products (including knives) recognized as GIs. While this idea seems relatively simple and uncontroversial, there is no single and accepted legal definition for it. GIs have been recognized variously since the Paris Convention of 1883, the Madrid Agreement of 1891, the Stresa Convention of 1951 and the Lisbon Agreement of 1958, and the current TRIPS agreement (Giovannucci et al. 2009). The first convention that actually allowed for a clearer definition of GI and promoted the creation of a unified registry of all the GIs was the Lisbon Convention for the Protection of the Appellations of Origins and their International Registration of 1958. This agreement allows for the recognition of GIs in countries other than the country of origin through one single registration procedure. The inclusion of “human factors” within this convention is particularly important as it seems not only to recognize the value of products for commerce, but to leave space

for their evaluation in terms of cultural and societal import. Today, the GI register associated with the Lisbon treaty is administered by the World Intellectual Property Organization, a special agency that has been part of the UN since 1974; yet its effectiveness in regulating GI is limited by the low number of adhering countries: only 26 at present (Josling 2006).

While GIs have been mentioned in the TRIPS agreement since the 1990s, it was specifically since the 2001 negotiations in Doha that they stirred major debates and controversies. During this round of negotiations a bloc of countries, led by the EU aimed at extending the protection of GIs, while another group of countries, led by the US, were trying to block these. At the moment, TRIPS grants a strong protection to alcohol and drinks as part of GIs, but offers minimal protection for other kinds of food. The EU, meanwhile, has elaborated its own complex system of GIs, and is aiming at creating a unified register where both food and wines can be identified and thus protected across all the signatory countries. But why does the US oppose this process? The difference between the EU and the US lies in a fundamentally different understanding of the property relations expressed by GI: for the EU these indicators are collective labels that can be applied to any producer who meets determined criteria (typically producing in a certain area, with certain standards or techniques). There is not a single owner of the label: instead the indication identifies a relation between a geographical area and a product's quality. For this reason a GI granted by the EU cannot consist of an invented name: the name needs to be "traditional," that is "documented" independently from the producers' activity. For the US, GIs are essentially trademarks: they can be sold, leased or licensed. Trademarks protect the owners' inventiveness, and not the quality of a geographical area: as such they can be invented, and decoupled from the location of origin – that is, bought and sold. Further, there is no collectivity beyond a trademark, and generally the government is not involved in controlling or establishing its "standards": trademarks are independent from specific qualities of the objects they brand. Overall, while the EU considers GIs as partially en-

closing properties – open to a certain public use in order to preserve and foster economic and cultural traditions – the US conceive of GIs as tools for appropriation of property.

Deciphering the *Terroir*: The Neocolonial EU Food System?

How different are the EU and the US system in practice? While legal scholars and political scientists try to justify the disagreement between the EU and the US as alternative evaluations of philosophical principles, the reality seems to be much more complex. It is not simply that "Europeans are from Mars and Americans are from Venus," as Kaplan suggested to explain the EU refusal to invade Iraq in 2003. EU regulations, official documents and analyses do make explicit that "GIs are market tools" (Giovannucci et al. 2009). The crux of the matter is that in the EU France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Germany have registered the majority of foods and spirits, some of which are the most counterfeit in the world. While Parmigiano Reggiano cheese, for example, comes from a very specific region between the cities of Parma and Reggio Emilia, under the current TRIPS agreement the name "parmesan" can be used outside of the EU to sell any cheese – because it is considered a generic indicator. Thus the EU, and within the EU a specific bloc of countries, want to ensure their own dominant position within the global market of food products: GIs are optimal, as they allow for a group of producers to monopolize a sector of the market.

One could object that, while there is indeed a very clear commercial agenda, GIs could still work as a market-based tool for protecting local traditions. Indeed, this "human" agenda is clearly present and put forward in many EU documents, where it is often associated with a more broad interest of the EU in protecting "cultural heritage". The acknowledgment of food's cultural value has recently led to a differentiation of GIs labels. At the moment there are three EU-based indicators: Protected Designations of Origins (PDO), Protected Geographical Indications (PGI) and Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG). PDOs are products that are "produced,

processed and prepared in a defined geographical area using a recognized know-how,” PGIs are products that are “closely linked to a geographical area, where they are produced and/or processed and/or prepared.” In other words, PGI can make use of parts, inputs or processes of production that come from or are executed elsewhere. TSGs are not necessarily linked to a specific place, but denote “a product’s traditional composition or traditional mode of production” (European Commission 2010). Of these three labels, TSG is the newest and the one with the lowest “value addition” capacity; TSGs are generally less recognized and do not always have a place in the legal structure of EU member states, while PDOs and PGIs are overall better integrated with the existing legal systems, and are more recognizable by consumers.

However, as EU data show (European Commission 2010), GI labels map peculiarly onto the different European countries. First, most of the registered products are found in Western Europe: Italy has over 200 products certified, and France about 175, while Ukraine is the first Eastern European country, with about 25 products registered. Second, one can note that the most prestigious label – PDOs – is not common in Eastern Europe (with only about 50 registered PDOs). Does this mean that Eastern Europeans do not produce anything special? This lends itself to speculation: are the labels from the EU equally accessible to everyone? Or are they in fact privileging certain cultures and heritages over others, based perhaps on the country’s economic and political power within the EU?

A number of critical scholars have recently started questioning the role of the EU in fostering peace and cooperation. Despite the organization’s 2012 Nobel Prize for Peace, critics Böröcz József, Mahua Sarkar and others have argued that the EU is actively creating a neocolonial set of relations between a core (Germany, France, Italy and the United Kingdom) and a periphery (especially Eastern countries) (Böröcz & Sarkar 2005). Even a superficial study of the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) shows that this is clearly the case with respect to the allocation of agricultural subsidies: Despite the fact that

the agricultural sector employs only 5% of the labor in the EU 27 and contributes only 2% to the EU 27 GDP, the CAP took up to 34% of the EU budget in the period 2007–2013. 60% of the current CAP allocation is redistributed among five countries: Italy, France, Spain, Germany and the UK – which does not correspond to the role of these countries’ agricultural sector in the common market, but to historical relations of power (Boccaletti, Boccafogli & Varini 2011).

Some recent work on the political economy of food unveils similar processes: taking the case of toxic paprika in Hungary, Zsuzsa Gille (2009) argues that EU regulations on food safety are weakening Eastern European countries’ domestic control over food quality and toxicity. EU regulations work to open national markets to other countries’ exports, especially from core countries within the EU zone. As a whole the EU works as a neoliberal mechanism, but the blame for the negative consequence on individuals’ health is apportioned to Eastern countries. Specific EU policies to protect food “culture” as a form of cultural “heritage” thus contribute to stress the power inequality between a European core and an (Eastern and Southern) European periphery. Maybe this should not be surprising given what we know about politics of heritage: heritage has been shown to operate as a form of governmentality, whereby individual actions are redirected to support increasing subordination (Kuutma 2009). As made clear in the case of the Unesco conventions, local “terroirs” are sanctified and yet delocalized (Bortolotto 2009, 2010) so that localities become the center of a politics of heritage that at the same time undermines the viability of small, local producers and the independence of traditions in the periphery.

The kinds of inequalities being fostered within the EU are particularly evident in the current directions taken by the CAP to encourage “quality,” a policy that frames and supports the development of GI. Currently, the EU is developing and revising a “quality package,” promoting new methods to encourage sustainable agriculture and the development of tools for certifying locally produced foods (Boccaletti, Boccafogli & Varini 2011) – which include both or-

ganic production and GIs. The CAP is beginning to promote quality through a system of subsidies, disbursed by the EU institution to the member states' agencies, whose role it is to reroute them to different regions. Subsidies are today decoupled from production, and they constitute direct payments which directly complement farmers' income. Together with those payments, the EU has devised a Rural Development plan, aiming at fostering competition – which is understood as farmers' ability to market their products and access the technology and flexibility to be more demand and market friendly (European Commission Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development 2008). But not all farmers can access the subsidies, and not all products are equally certifiable. Available data show that 79% of subsidies go to farms owning more than 50 ha (ARSIA 2006). Despite the rhetorical claim that organic products and labels and GIs constitute a sustainable way to protect smaller peasants from low-income countries, data from testimonies available online and the informal conversations² I was able to collect portray a very different landscape: because of their small output and monetary sales, small producers (with less than 5 ha) are often denied contributions or do not even apply for subventions. As we will see, this lack of subventions was one of the reasons for small farmers to mobilize in grassroots organizations such as *Genuino Clandestino*.

CAP policies not only create quasi-colonial relations between different EU countries, but they also foster an internal proletarianization of small producers by effectively channeling funds into market-efficient large-scale agribusiness. The concern for quality and food safety embedded into the organic and geographical certifications seems to provide the ideological support for the sharpening of class divisions. For the small farmers that talked to me, EU incentives are sinking the possibility of small-scale organic agriculture. To paraphrase Jung's (forthcoming) insightful formulation, the GI system reproduces international, national and local hierarchies through the epistemological practice of branding. While the lack of a complete data set regarding the GI sector makes analysis of these new hierarchies in the

case of GIs provisional, it is probable that GIs will produce a situation akin to that for organic certification in and beyond the EU, the significant distinction being that in the case of GIs, mass production is not necessarily the goal. Yet the overall structure of EU subsidies, safety regulation and market orientation might push GI producers to congregate in larger agribusiness in order to brand themselves and capture funds much more effectively.

Beyond the *Terroir*: Slow Food and the CLASSification of Food

Slow Food is an international movement born after the turbulent period of contestation and terrorism that dominated Italian leftist politics during the late 1970s and the 1980s. Carlo Petrini, founder of the Slow Food movement, was an active member of a far left communist organization (*Partito di Unità Proletaria per il Comunismo*). His party was partially opposed to the "autonomist" option brought forward by the 1977 left movements and sided with the Italian Communist Party (*Partito Comunista Italiano*) against the independent new far left – both in its student and armed components, which included organizations such as *Proletarian Fight* (*Lotta Proletaria*) or the *Red Brigades* (*Brigate Rosse*). Leader of the left cultural circle *ARCI Gusto* and director of a supplement of the left newspaper *Il Manifesto* called "*Il Gambero Rosso*," Petrini was pushing for the recognition of food as a political category (Slowfood 2012a). His manifestation against the creation of the first McDonald's in Rome in 1986 signaled the emergence of a movement, built on the refusal of standardization of life and work, the aesthetic pleasure of food, and the maintenance of food culture and tradition. Formalized as an international movement in Paris in 1989, Slow Food has thrived also thanks to the ability to create an internationally recognized brand. Today, Slow Food is present in over 150 countries and represents a powerful organization that advocates worldwide for the promotion and conservation of quality food, and the traditions connected to it. Branding is a prominent activity for Slow Food, one that the movement has taken to a whole new dimension: while Slow Food

does not brand products, it certifies cities. The label “Slow Cities” is awarded to those urban centers that implement sustainable economic practices and foster the development and conservation of local food varieties. But mostly Slow Food has been renowned for having created a network of “presidia.” Presidia are essentially franchises – any individual can start one, provided that he or she can identify techniques and products in a specific area that are “slow” (i.e. traditional, tasty and in need to be protected). Note that, while Slow Food is particularly attentive to the way in which its own *trademarked* label (a snail) gets deployed, it encourages presidia to constitute “a producers association with its own name and brand... [for] telling consumers all over the world that these are extraordinary products and that discovering, buying and tasting them means learning history and traditions of a territory and safeguarding its cultural heritage” (Slowfood 2012b). In other words, while Slow Food itself does not develop its own brand of products, and clearly limits the possibility for producers to display the logo (Slowfood 2007), it does indeed encourage a fragmented regime of branding by local actors wholly consistent with ideas of GIs. This coexists in Slow Food philosophy with the attempt to go beyond traditional certification, whose limitations the movement recognizes (Slowfood 2012c). But what happens to food that is branded through Slow Food GIs?

Recent studies of Slow Food (Pietrykowsky 2004) have shown that in the great majority of cases the movement introduces class divisions in local territories despite its aspiration to invoke the sensuality of taste to defend localities against the effects of globalization: homogeneity, uniformity, loss of flavor. In the case of Slow Food, Geographical Indications constitute a system of what Michael Kearney (2004) has called CLASSification. That is, GIs create borders that epistemically divide objects and bodies into different legal categories, and through that into differently valuable and exploitable categories of objects and subjects. Kearney discusses inter-state borders and migration to explain how migrants become CLASSified as aliens, and thus thrown into a dispossessed category of exploitable workers. GIs proceed

in a very similar way: just like “illegal aliens,” products that are not recognized by GIs or Slow Food labels are likely to lose much of their value because of their failure to conform to a new epistemic and legal rendering of property. Using GIs distinguishes between “valuable” and “disposable” kinds of food, thus devaluing non-branded food.

On the other hand, the CLASSification system also impacts those whose products *do* get recognized as GIs: the increase in price of “quality” food effectively dispossesses local populations from their own delicacies, now transformed into expensive food that cannot be accessed through the same ties of reciprocities, but must be purchased through formal monetary markets. This has been famously described by Leitch (2004) for the case of the “Lardo di Colonnata,” a kind of pork fat that has been recently branded by Slow Food as a delicacy of Italian cuisine: before a working class aliment, it is now the propriety of some small producers who registered the relevant trademark (after having gone through the hassle of certifying “hygiene” standards). In this case Slow Food’s profits are not redistributed along the production chain: the creation of GI contributes to marginalize those at the margin of the newly branded foodscape. This has been widely documented in the case of other GIs, which often sanctify exploitative practices as “traditional”: in the case of Darjeeling tea, post-colonial and labor intensive plantations are now recognized as a form of “terroir” – whose added value will not benefit workers, but the owners of the plantation and of the label (Besky 2013).

Another contradiction in the social and political goals of Slow Food is shared with other forms of certification, such as organic and fair trade labels. Commercializing food as “quality” food on formal markets requires a number of transformation: first, food needs to be made “safe” – that is, producers need to comply with state and EU regulations. That is antithetical to not only most of the “traditional” ways of producing food – as our standards in the twentieth century did not apply say in the past – but also burdens small producers with financial and bureaucratic responsibilities (Leitch 2004). For a small producer, obtaining official certification means not

only paying the required controls, but also to lose time and energy in accessing knowledge and skills to navigate the complex bureaucratic apparatus; as stressed in many informal conversations, EU standards require farmers to become skilled at keeping records of activities for possible controls, learning how to apply for funding, and devise strategies to keep updated with new regulations and norms (May this issue).

The CLASSification effect of GIs does not only demarcate epistemic boundaries: it also contributes to the stratification of food consumption on the bases of income. A number of authors (Renard 2005; Guthman 2008a; Mutersbaugh 2005; Higgins, Diben & Cocklin 2008; Coombe 2011) have suggested that precisely this contradiction, including the extended burden posed on farmers, constitute proper-tization of food as a technique of disciplining that does not preserve cultural practices and local her-itage, nor favors rural development. Aistara's (2011) work on seed patenting and exchange in Lithuania and Costa Rica offers a very powerful example of how the introduction of property rights can radically alter circuits of reciprocity and social mediations. While in Costa Rica, seed exchange structures social relations, and mediates kinship, in Lithuania the ap-plication of EU-related property rights disempow-ers farmers' ability to create social networks. The EU legislation requires that organic growers utilize seeds that are either grown on the site or purchased through proprietary networks – a need justified to ensure quality, safety and local specificity. However, this means the end of the traditional practices of seed exchange, as informal seed exchange is bureau-cratically illegible and untraceable. Similarly, if the three-tiered organization of EU GIs come to deter-mine a product's market value, one can imagine that only GI products will become economically viable – thus limiting the informal procedures of exchange (of seed, techniques, knowledge, products), even if those techniques have facilitated the emergence of that very product.

Finally, a last critique has been addressed to Slow Food and GIs in general: by demanding that “tradi-tion” be documented in order to certify the product,

certification systems re-inscribe gender (and pos-sibly also ethnic or racial) discrimination. As Para-secoli (2010) has shown, the work of women – often the material and practical individual who maintains food practices alive through generations – is NOT re-corded in historical documents to the same extent as male's activities are. Thus really “traditional” ways of producing food might not be accepted because they have historically been practiced by the “wrong” subjects – invisible to official accounts – and could then lead different entrepreneurs to invent profitable traditions that capitalize on and reinforce women's exclusion from documented history.

In light of these critiques, what remains useful in the idea of the *terroir* as cultural heritage? Are GIs really restoring the connection between humans and their environment, in which local cultures are nur-tured? It seems clear that the cultural heritage and *terroir* that are protected by EU certification schemes are very particular ones. The food landscape project-ed by the European GI structure is essentially West-ern European, consumed by high-middle classes, produced by either large-scale agribusiness, or “doc-umentable” male subjects, and ultimately leads to the further impoverishment of the small peasantry in the periphery.

Living Politically with the *Terroir*

Genuino Clandestino is one of many attempts to react to the current wave of privatization and neo-liberalization in Italy, in Europe and worldwide. It participates in a network of movements, born in the “red regions” of Italy – Tuscany and Emilia Ro-magna – and then diffused nationally. The Associa-tion of Rural Seeds (Associazione Semi Rurali³), for instance, tries to fight against the limitations on the sale of seeds imposed by European and Italian intel-lectual property laws; the Campaign for the Access to Land (Campagna per l'Accesso alla Terra) tries to limit the sale of public land or, alternately, to find systems to collectively buy land in order to grant young farmers the possibility to make a living in agriculture. In both cases, notably, the associations have developed property-linked alternatives in or-der to maintain forms of “commons.” Rural Seeds is

pushing to recognize local varieties as “endangered” species, thus allowing their exchange. The Campaign for the Access to Land is, on the contrary, using an almost “shareholder”-based structure to purchase land in common. In the case of seeds, the increase of property rights is a problem, while in the case of the sale of public land, the problem is the shrinking of property. The extension or reduction of property rights alone do not tell us who is gaining and who is losing them: in fact both cases demonstrate the process through which private subjects acquire monopolistic rights over objects or resources previously held in common (even if this common had variable definitions).

These associations are mostly networks built by and through small farm peasants: both Emilia Romagna and Tuscany have seen a growth in terms of highly educated and younger farmers in the last ten years, and it is often these young farmers of the middle classes that constitute the core of these movements. Among these initiatives, *Genuino Clandestino* is one of the most promising. The movement proposes a “non-label” to counter the increasingly complicated and problematic process of certifying organic production or registering products as GIs. The idea of *Genuino Clandestino* is simple: today small producers who want to produce quality food have a really hard time surviving. Large distribution requires standardized volumes and qualities that small producers cannot even think of producing – especially if they want to keep agriculture as a meaningful way of life and not only a form of accumulation of capital. Not only are there costs to be sustained to certify the products, but these inspections constitute real forms of disciplining whereby “objective” consultants impose their authority on peasants, who are construed as stupid and backward (see Fisher 2012). Further, as many critical studies have put it, organic certification ends up enhancing and reproducing the neoliberal market economy, by creating the possibility of commodification in previously “virgin” and “alternative” spaces of production (Guthman 2007, 2008a, 2008b; Mutersbaugh 2005; Higgins, Dibden & Cocklin 2008; Coombe 2011; Jönsson 2005). As one peasant member of the

movement put it: “I can’t put the future of my farm in the hands of somebody who comes, looks around for five minutes and goes away” (Angrisano 2011). For this man certification is a personal process that cannot be effectively assessed by “impartial” agencies: in fact inspectors usually limit themselves at checking the reports or documents provided by the farmer, supplementing them by a quick inspection. For him this is not enough to fairly assess the whole process of production, and it is not possible to translate in bureaucratic labels the passion he puts into his work as an organic grower.

The problem is even more acute if one considers those farms that do not only cultivate, but also transform parts of the organic produces – processing it into jams, cheeses, and cured meats. In order to meet the requirements imposed by some certifications – as well as the legal standard for hygiene – they have to abide by procedures that destroy the “traditional” or “natural” way of processing food, and invest sums they do not possess in order to do so. *Genuino Clandestino* thus proposes to address both the “autonomy” issue and the “profitability issue”: it consists of a short-chain network of producers who sell directly in non-traditional marketplaces to individual consumers or to groups of buyers who place collective orders. Similar to what in the US is known as Community Supported Agriculture, the creation of “Groups of United Purchasing” (*Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale*) allows producers to cut out distribution costs and to maintain an affordable and yet profitable organic, traditionally-made product. However, these products are not certified organic, nor do they constitute GIs: on the contrary, they are certified as un-certified. Similarly, *Genuino Clandestino*, as an association of producers, awards this non-label to producers that they know, meet and whose producing technique they learn over time. The idea is to create a participant certification process whereby consumers and other producers can be involved in knowing the product and its production chain (Luetchford & Pratt 2008). This allows for peasants to keep their farms profitable enough to support them, though it limits the possibility for their expansion, as it is linked to a process of col-

lective knowledge generated locally. Farmers stress clearly that this system allows them to make enough money to survive, thus exchanging the possibility of surplus for personal autonomy from the market.

However, even surviving would not be possible without such collective organization in the current neoliberal moment: Genuino Clandestino thus proposes a way to link some forms of organic certification, geographical indication, markets and autonomy – a node that many critics have considered as being the major problems of property regimes in agriculture. By linking certification with local knowledge, they overcome the ethical and practical issues constituted by a generalized exchange (Renard 2005). Of course, operating in Bologna's open air markets, the farmers must create a practical network of buyers, and devise specific strategies to formulate and share knowledge in a way that does not impede productive activities. The challenge will be to maintain the initiative's sustainability over time. Yet, independently from the future successes of Genuino Clandestino, it is obvious that the creation of a non-label deploys a property-based mechanism of "branding" to undermine the logic of accumulation of capital and public resources for private interests. In this sense, Genuino Clandestino takes the idea of GIs and pushes it further, eliminating the bureaucratic obstacles (such as certifying agencies, legal documents, hygiene standards) as well as the aspiration of dispensing with social relations in the production of local foods. Considering that a real GI cannot disregard popular participation in both consumption *and* production, Genuino Clandestino opens up a space for political action. These food activists engage the battle of property by trying to reshape social relations in a way that is very different to the one proposed by agribusiness, or even by Slow Food. They mobilize property to shape nurturing boundaries of political engagement.

Conclusion: Beyond la Terreur du Terroir

GIs show the intersection of food production with property in multiple ways. As demonstrated in the case of Slow Food, the phenomenological experience of "quality" food and taste can become a way

to increase the monetary value of products, and to moralize class divisions. The geopolitical axis of GIs is a fantastic tool to dispossess rural communities of their local products, transforming those products into high-end global commodities and, in some cases, into very different kinds of food altogether. If any cultural heritage is protected through GIs, it is not the one that gave birth to these foods: it is instead the Western, male, and middle class sanitized idea of European tradition that is invented and imposed by the branding process.

However, the boundary-making property of food, or the propertized food, can also open up spaces for the development of multiple political movements and imaginaries. The case of Chianti shows an historical fight, between corporate interests and the Italian state, ultimately converging in a state-sanctioned, and invented, tradition. Today Chianti is branded as a culinary heritage, with a pedigree going back to the fourteenth century; yet its legally defined receipt has been changing over time, and is today defined by negotiations between state authorities and different semi-private consortia. It is these organizations that are now empowered by Chianti's legal status as GI, and who can shape its phenomenological property. While in all the official discourses it is said that it is Chianti's sensual features that lead to its specific status as a protected culinary heritage, in reality it is exactly the opposite: not its physical but its legal property (and its political implications) defines Chianti's specific taste.

Similarly, Slow Food joined forces with the state in order to promote and market Italian specialties for increased profits. In so doing it has shaped tastes and communities through mechanisms of propertization of food. This shows that the creation of GIs is an active political field, where also non-state actors take part in significant ways. Some of these groups and movements that try to use GIs outside the state-sanctioned ways are often not recognized as legitimate political actors. Activist movements proposing participatory or collective certification propose to use "non-labels" to demarcate boundaries where GIs promote real connection between consumers and food production. For them food becomes a virtu-

ous way to mediate relations between persons, a way to live politically, to construct communities and to re-imagine personhoods. Similarly, raw milk production and exchange, while not directly marked by the use of GI in Lithuania (Mincyte forthcoming), does take advantage of the political space created by boundaries of locality. The epistemic boundaries that are promoted by the “new economy” can be manipulated by different actors for different purposes, as stressed by Jönsson for the case of milk (and cows) in the Öresund region (Jönsson 2005), and by Kuutma for the ownership of heritage songs in Estonia (Kuutma 2009).

Given these complex uses of GIs, can we describe the “property of food” as a uniform analytical category, or as a monolithic political process? Can we think the boundaries promoted by GIs as eminently negative? Shouldn’t we open up the theoretical discussion of food and property so to incorporate a variable geography of political spaces – some of which transform productively property as an emancipatory tool (Tschofen 2008)?

If property is not a thing, nor a border, but a relation between people mediated by things, then it is possible for structural forces to control them only partially. I suggest that the problem is less about the borders created by the logic of property, and more about *who* they include and *who* they exclude – that is, how the CLASSification value of property is enacted, used and conflicted. As anthropological approaches have already shown, food can be the epicenter of a number of different identities, as well as conflicts (Salomonsson 2002; Sutton 2001). Borders, and by extension enclosures, can be put to very different uses: they can be used to foster class division but also to nurture alternative visions of the world. In the case of GIs the international geopolitics of taste is not simply creating borders, it is dispossessing rural, local and underprivileged populations of some of the last resources they had available – their tastes. Yet those classes and actors can re-appropriate (even commercially) the same foods and borders without necessarily falling in the same conundrums or problems. In order to make sense of the very important and serious conflicts happening around

food, I claim we cannot depict GIs as uniform labels – nor can we ascribe immutable characteristics to property. Theoretically, my analysis suggests that understanding the field of forces and the actual actors on the ground is necessary to make any sense of the meaning of property relation in relation to food.

Notes

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- 2 The interviews were conducted with friends, peasants, and family members who successfully applied for EU subsidies for organic farming, and have since been involved in monitoring and contesting the process.
- 3 Note the pun in the name. “Semi” in Italian means “seeds.” But it can also be a colloquial and dialectical form for “Scemi,” literally meaning dumb. “Semi Rurali” is thus both “rural seeds” but also “rural dumb people.” Needless to say, most of those peasants/activists have university degrees.
- 4 GAP was also the acronym of the partisan groups during World War II (Gruppi di azione Partigiana). It is unclear to me if the movement is aware of this similarity, but given that GAP were extremely active in the red regions, I would be inclined to suspect a connection.

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