

Halloumi/Hellim: Global Markets, European Union Regulation, and Ethnicised Cultural Property

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Abstract

Halloumi/hellim is a cheese that does not belong to any one ethnic group or nation alone. Rather, its messy genealogy mirrors the complicated histories of the peoples of the Eastern Mediterranean. Historically, the multi ethnic and multi-religious population of Cyprus had many food traditions in common, and Peter Loizos in his work repeatedly referred to the importance of commensality and the shared culinary practices of Greek and Turkish Cypriots. Recently, however, Greek Cypriots are laying claim to halloumi cheese as an ethnicised national product. Since the EU accession of 2004, the Republic of Cyprus has become eligible to apply to the European Commission's programme for protective food labels to be awarded to so-called origin products. When a food item is declared an origin product, it is taken to represent the group's history and its distribution is mapped onto the group's territory. The conflicts that ensued with the Republic of Cyprus' halloumi application to the EU are evidence of this type of 'gastronationalism' (DeSoucey, 2010), but also show how the claim to exclusive cultural property is contested by local actors under conditions of globalising markets and supranational political regulation.

Keywords: European Union, Cyprus, dairy products, nationalism, heritage

In 2006, a German enterprise based in Stuttgart registered the trade mark 'hellim' for one of its dairy brands called 'Gazi' with the European Union. Hellim is the Turkish-language name of the cheese known among Greek Cypriots as halloumi. Taking the perspective of social anthropology, one has to contend that halloumi, or hellim, is a cheese that does not belong to any one ethnic group or nation alone. Historically, the multi-ethnic and multi-religious population of Cyprus held many food traditions in common, and Peter Loizos in his work repeatedly referred to the importance of commensality and culinary practices to both Greek and Turkish Cypriots (Loizos, 2008). In his 1998 paper, 'How might Turkish and Greek Cypriots See Each Other More Clearly?', he explores commonalities in daily life and social terminologies, many also mentioned by Papadakis (2005), asserting that 'bridges might be built by understandings in historical depth of more detailed and specific local similarities – and differences' (Loizos, 1998, p. 46).

However, immediately after the German registration of the trade mark for hellim, an association that represents the interests of Greek Cypriot dairy companies, the Organismos

Kypriakis Galaktokomikis Viomichanias, lodged a complaint with the EU's Office of Harmonisation in the Internal Market (OHIM). The Cypriot dairy producers' organisation had also been granted a trade mark by OHIM in 2000, albeit a slightly different one called a 'collective community word mark' which reserves the use of the product name halloumi. Legally, the complaint by the Greek Cypriot producers had to rely on the allegation that consumers could easily confuse products called 'halloumi' and 'hellim'.¹ In 2010, OHIM and on appeal, the General Court of the EU in 2012, both turned down the objection by the Greek Cypriots, arguing that there was no risk that consumers would mistake the German-produced 'Gazi hellim' for 'halloumi' produced on the island of Cyprus, because the words are phonetically and visually sufficiently distinct.² In this, trademarks differ from other property rights such as patents which protect a design or technology, and also from the so-called quality labels of the EU that designate and protect regional origin. A trademark grants an economic actor the exclusive right to use a name for a product, and to take action against any other producers calling their product by the same name. Nevertheless, the trademark, does not prohibit other producers from manufacturing the cheese, it allows for using the same recipe, provided that the resulting product is labelled so that it cannot be mistaken for the trademark-protected commodity. The General Court of the European Union finally ruled in June 2012 that the Germany-based company is permitted to call its cheese product 'hellim' when exporting it throughout the European Union.³ Not surprisingly, the Greek Cypriot dairy sector is displeased with the outcome of this legal altercation.⁴ That Greek Cypriot dairy corporations failed to prohibit the use of the term hellim by a German producer acquired particular salience against the backdrop of a Greek Cypriot application to secure a so-called geographical indication for halloumi cheese produced in the Republic of Cyprus. Within the various international frameworks of intellectual property regulation, geographical indications constitute a form of protection that markedly differs from such rights as a copyright, a patent, or – as in the example of 'Gazi hellim' – a trademark. While trademarks are conferred to entrepreneurs or companies, geographical indications are awarded to products whose provenance is territorially

1 For information on the definitions and regulations concerning trade marks within the European Union, see [<http://oami.europa.eu/ows/rw/pages/index.en.do>]. For an analysis of the role of patents, standards, and certifications in the globalised economy, see Busch (2011).

2 According to the press, the General Court of European Union announced late in 2012 that it will review its earlier decision, following an appeal by the organisation of dairy producers in the Republic of Cyprus. See also 'Hellim vs. halloumi debate will be heard in EU court', Cyprus Mail, 24 November 2012.

3 Judgement of the General Court of the European Union of 13 June 2012. Case T-534/10. Organismos Kypriakis Galaktokomikis Viomichanias vs. OHIM – Garmo (Hellim) [<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/>], retrieved on 4 August 2012. See also Official Journal of the European Union. C 217/20 of 21 July 2012.

4 A few weeks after the court ruling, an organisation representing the interests of Greek-Cypriot producers of cows' milk moved to beat the Germany-based 'hellim' producers with their own weapons. They founded a cheese production company, and lodged a whole series of applications for EU trade marks with OHIM, for a number of cheese products containing the word 'halloumis' in their name.

defined (see Credit, 2009). As a consequence, geographical indications cannot generally be reserved for one producer or company, but are shared by all producers in a given area. Once a product is protected under a geographical indication, it cannot be claimed for a trade mark by a single company. The German-based company marketing 'Gazi hellim' had apparently used the window of opportunity that halloumi cheese had not yet been awarded one of the geographical indications granted by the European Union. In what follows, I attempt to dissect some of the conflicts surrounding the attempts to claim halloumi as an origin product.

This article is based on research conducted in Greek Cypriot society between 2005 and 2011, after the Republic of Cyprus became a member of the European Union. Earlier, I had conducted a small-scale field study of the modernisation of halloumi production, in collaboration with Nicholas Andilios, a Greek Cypriot school teacher and food researcher born in Argaki, the community that had catalysed Peter Loizos' entry into ethnography and triggered his anthropological imagination throughout his life. It was at the 2001 conference at Intercollege Nicosia in honour of Peter Loizos and his lifetime achievement (see Papadakis, Peristianis and Welz, 2006) that Nicholas Andilios approached me to ask whether I would be willing to work with him on this topic. In 2002, we visited both small-scale halloumi producers and the huge industrial mass-production enterprises and eventually published a paper (Welz and Andilios, 2004) that ended up as part of the background documentation for the application for origin protection to the European Union that the Republic of Cyprus launched in 2009.⁵ This paper, which mentions the fact that both communities on the island traditionally produced the cheese under discussion, was also used by Turkish Cypriot cheese producers to halt these proceedings and make a claim, albeit in vain, for inclusion in the application to the European Union. For the follow-up work on the effects of transnational regulation on halloumi production and marketing that I have done independently since 2004 (see Welz, 2012; Welz, forthcoming), qualitative interviews and ethnographic observations were conducted during annual visits to the island. Among the experts included in this later study were entrepreneurs engaged in marketing regional specialties, administrators who implement the European quality label programmes – both in Nicosia and in Brussels – consultants who assist producers in complying with food hygiene guidelines, food scientists at research institutions, representatives of NGOs that safeguard consumer rights, public health officials, veterinary officers, 'slow food' activists as well as restaurant chefs and hotel owners.

Culinary Heritages and Invented Traditions

Historians Alexander Nützenadel and Frank Trentmann assert that 'food consumption plays a crucial role in the construction of local and national identities and in the changing self-

5 The paper also included oral history accounts of halloumi making that Nicholas Andilios had collected among female relatives who are refugees from Argaki. A manuscript version of the paper is available on the Argaki diaspora's website [www.argaki.org].

understanding of social groups', adding that 'foodstuffs [...] raise sensitive questions of authenticity. Of course, many of these claims to authenticity are products of what Hobsbawm and Ranger in a different context called "invented tradition" ' (Nützenadel and Trentmann, 2008, pp. 1 and 13). In the case of 'Gazi hellim', the suspected usurpation of halloumi cheese by Turkish economic interests raised Greek Cypriot concerns. The conflict that ensued is not just about economic stakes but about heritage claims, as well. Social anthropologists define heritage 'as a complex of objects and practices that embody the uniquely characterized and enduring presence of a collectivity, typically a nation or an ethnic group, at once founding and displaying its identity' (Filippucci, 2004, p. 72). More often than not, nation states have successfully deployed heritage preservation as an instrument of identity politics, creating a homogenised national culture (Hobsbawm, 1992). Heritage production indeed is a modern phenomenon, deeply rooted in both the political economy of capitalism and the emergence of the modern nation state (Hylland Eriksen, 2004).

Today, the culinary heritages of Europe are marketed globally, and traditional food constitutes a growing economic sector within Europe. As a consequence, competition between producers is fierce, and the need to protect the uniqueness of one's product becomes particularly important. Contrary to what many observers of this conflict in Cyprus suspected, however, the Stuttgart-based company producing 'Gazi hellim' has no connections with Turkish or Turkish Cypriot business interests. It was founded by a German of part-Spanish descent. For many years, he has been developing a number of brands with foreign-sounding but invented names, catering to various ethnic niche markets of immigrants from Southern Europe who had settled in Germany. Increasingly, Germans, interested in the food they had tasted while on holiday in Italy, Bulgaria, Greece or Turkey, as well as restaurants and convenience caterers, also became customers of this very successful company. 'Gazi' products, like the company's other brands, are produced exclusively in Germany, utilising milk from German dairies, and are distributed primarily within Germany even though broader European markets are also targeted. The brand name 'Gazi' is a fictitious creation for marketing purposes rather than the name of a product or brand originally produced in Turkey. Having said that, the name appears to convey authenticity to the Turkish immigrant clientele, even though not surprisingly, as one marketing promoter demonstrating how to grill hellim at promotion events in immigrant supermarkets throughout Germany told me, Turkish housewives living in Germany are largely ignorant of hellim cheese and have to be told how to prepare it. This is no surprise, as hellim only became widely available in Turkey some years ago. There, it is not explicitly marketed as a Cypriot product.⁶

6 Once they enter the Turkish market, Cypriot products tend to lose their association with Cyprus. I thank Kerem Öktem for sharing this insight with me. He suggests that increasingly, even among Turkish Cypriots, products originating in the north of the island are considered to be of inferior quality when compared to products from Turkey. This constitutes a reversal of earlier hierarchies of value and appears to reflect growing ambiguities and even 'insecurity in the North, regarding what it means to be "Turkish"-Cypriot' (personal communication, 2012).

Because of the dominance of distributed production networks and transnational value chains, commodities today often lack clear-cut or proven connections with specific places of origin or actually identifiable producers. Food producers as well as state and private regulatory bodies are increasingly making use of designations of origin to add value to individual products, hoping that the distinction will make them more competitive on globalised markets. Globalisation:

'on the one hand limits consumers' knowledge about the spatially distanced systems of provision through which food commodities come to us; but, on the other, and at the same time, also puts an increased emphasis on geographical knowledges about those widely sourced food commodities. These geographical knowledges – based in the cultural meanings of places and spaces – are then deployed in order to “re-enchant” (food) commodities and to differentiate them from the devalued functionality and homogeneity of standardized products, tastes and places’ (Cook and Crang, 1996, p. 132).

The case of a Cypriot cheese re-invented by a German entrepreneur to cater to German residents with a Turkish background is, then, a telling example of how associations with place and culture are employed by the food sector in order to ‘re-enchant’ food products and target specific consumer groups. In the case of ‘Gazi hellim’, the connection to a place of origin is visibly fabricated. The German enterprise employs the Turkish-sounding names as marketing ploys and does not even pretend that the product’s provenance is originally from the Eastern Mediterranean. With consumers in Germany, this poses no problem. Within the Cypriot context, the Stuttgart-based company’s claim is explosive, as it goes to the very heart of the cultural nationalisms that actors on both sides of the Cyprus conflict have known to wield as divisive instrument for many decades. In a sense, the Greek Cypriot response to the Stuttgart case, then, is an example of what Peter Loizos has called ‘invasive ethnicity’, indicating that these ‘ways of thinking and acting about nation, ethnic and personal identity’ (Loizos, 1998, p. 37), once they have taken hold in social life and people’s subjectivities, insidiously dominate any perception of self and other. Ultimately, social anthropologists contend that any claim to ethnic ownership of a food product or a recipe is always the outcome of social constructions, in this case resting on an ‘authentication regime’ (Nützenadel and Trentmann, 2008, p. 13) that privileges discursive and symbolic evidence of a groups’ social and territorial integrity through history.

Same or Different? Contested Origins

But is halloumi an exclusively Greek Cypriot product? Is the hellim produced by Turkish-Cypriots a mere copy of the authentic original, or do dairy producers in the north of Cyprus have a legitimate stake in this food tradition as well? Did halloumi originate on the island, and was the recipe later exported to other regions of the Near East where halloumi is known today, such as Lebanon and the Emirates? Or has the practice of making a cheese that is resistant to melting, an effect of the fresh curd being heated before the cheese is shaped, been imported to Cyprus from

other areas of the Eastern Mediterranean? All of these questions are rife with ethnicist assumptions and economic competition.

Etymologically, the term halloumi points to an Arabic root and cultural historians insist on Venetian sources that had encountered halloumi in the pre-Ottoman period (Patapiou, 2006). German folklorist Magda Ohnefalsch-Richter, whose 1913 monograph on Greek customs in Cyprus today enjoys a second life as source book for Greek Cypriot cultural nationalism, mentions halloumi as one element of a Greek Cypriot family's hospitality offered to passing travellers but does not insist on its Greekness (Ohnefalsch-Richter, 1913, p. 96). A recent study by sociolinguists at Eastern Mediterranean University relies on Ottoman sources and traces back the origins of halloumi to the Roman Empire and ancient Egypt (Osam and Kasapoglu, 2011), thereby attempting to prove that halloumi/hellim is definitely not the cultural property of Greek Cypriots. Their findings suggest that the recipe and the specific technology of cheese making predates the division between orthodox Greek-language Cypriots and Muslim Turkish-language inhabitants of the island, and indeed was known on the island before the formation of these ethnic communities.

Etymological origin of a term may point both to lexical borrowing and to technology transfer, migration, or trade. Clearly, the adoption of cultural innovations from other societies has made cultural change possible in societies throughout the world, for thousands of years. Contemporary anthropology is wary of explanations that cite evidence for the unequivocal provenance and historic continuity of any cultural artefact, knowledge, or practice. Anthropologists consider all tradition invented in so far as it is always an interpretation of the past guided by present-day interests and identities. While it is often cited as common knowledge that halloumi cheese production goes back many centuries, and was not exclusive to one group of the population,⁷ as both the Greek and the Turkish Cypriot rural population utilised sheep and goats milk in their food production, there is no evidence that in the village context, cheese production occurred in cross-ethnic contexts. Rather, it is safe to assume that this gendered subsistence activity where groups of women pooled the milk of their animals to produce cheese once a week (see also Loizos, 1981, p. 22) was known to and practiced by Orthodox and Muslim women in their respective neighbourhood groups separately. In her ethnography of Kozan village – known by Greek Cypriots as Larnakas tis Lapithou – where she conducted fieldwork between 2003 and 2006, Lisa Dikomitis encountered hellim making as a family-based gendered occupation (Dikomitis, 2012).

7 The fact that both main communities on the island produce and consume this type of cheese is not emphasised particularly in information resources presently made available by Greek Cypriot agencies. See the 'Virtual Museum of Cypriot Food and Nutrition'. University of Cyprus [<http://foodmuseum.csucy.ac.cy/web/guest/home>], or 'Halloumi. The Flagship of Cyprus Authentic'. Cyprus Chamber of Commerce. Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Republic of Cyprus [<http://www.cyprusfoodndrinks.com/>], accessed on 5 August 2012. In the work of ethnologist Ephrosini Rizopoulou-Egoumenidou, however, who curated the Virtual Museum, there is ample evidence of shared culinary cultural traditions between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. See for instance Rizopoulou-Egoumenidou (2002); Rizopoulou-Egoumenidou (2007).

Her observations of Turkish Cypriot families, many of whom were displaced from the Paphos district, mirror first-hand observations in Greek Cypriot society among small-scale domestic halloumi producers in the south (Welz and Andilios, 2004).

Halloumi/hellim is only one of a whole series of Greek and Turkish twin terms, such as loukoumi/lokuim and flaouna/pilavuna (Sycallides, 2004a, 2004b; Papadakis, 2004), denoting the same food item familiar to and consumed by both communities (Hatay, 2006). This phenomenon is not limited to Cyprus but can be found in other countries where Muslim and Christian populations coexisted during Ottoman rule as well. Since the 1974 Turkish invasion and the *de-facto* division of the island, references to food and eating, with their benign connotations of commensality, pleasure and sharing, have served to lend credibility to Greek Cypriots' insistence on the so-called good neighbourly coexistence prior to 1964 and especially during the colonial period. During the 1990s, bi-communal peace activism on both sides of the Green Line employed the shared food culture of Greek and Turkish Cypriots as a medium for reconciliation and rapprochement, citing it as evidence of an older unity broken by the colonial regime's politics of divide and rule. The findings of ethnologists and folklorists have been used to substantiate this view of socio-political relations between the communities under British rule (for a critique and a summary, see Azgin and Papadakis, 1998). Conversely, as Constantinou and Hatay argue, in Greek Cypriot society today, 'non-ethnic or cross-ethnic heritage [...] is underestimated, with the exception of peace activists concerned with the construction of a common Cypriot national identity' (Constantinou and Hatay, 2010, p. 1601). In the 2004 referendum shortly before EU accession, the majority of Greek Cypriots turned down the UN peace plan and shut the door to the EU in the face of Turkish Cypriots who continue to be locked into an internationally non-recognised polity,⁸ with very restricted access to European markets. With regards to agriculture and food production, the 2004 European Union accession of the Republic of Cyprus introduced many European Union regulations and funding opportunities to Greek Cypriot society. These also tend to stabilise differences and deepen disparities between Greek and Turkish Cypriots.

The Origin Foods System of the European Union

Halloumi/hellim and its messy genealogy mirror the complicated histories of the peoples of the Eastern Mediterranean. Ultimately, any cultural claim of collectivity towards ownership of this or

8 A recent book by Yael Navaro-Yashin (2012) addresses what it means to be citizens of a state that is considered non-existent and even illegal according to international law. She analytically dissects the discursive and material practices of contemporary statehood in northern Cyprus that aim to produce a semblance of legitimacy and sovereignty, and paints a grim picture of the situation of Turkish Cypriots, cut off from international mobility and the European economy. The focus of the study is on the period before 2003, when there was no mobility possible across the Green Line and the regime in northern Cyprus employed spatial confinement as a systematic method of social control.

that tradition or artefact is a construction that is guided by present-day feelings and narratives of belonging rather than being evidence of centuries of unbroken transmission and in-group purity. Yet, it is precisely such claims – to unbroken transmission and purity – that the European Union's instruments of regulation are inviting, facilitating and stabilising. It was in 1992 that the member states of the European Union first decided to establish a quality label system for the protection of geographically specific food products. The strengthening of the culinary diversity of Europe is often linked with attempts to ensure the EU's competitiveness in global markets. Since 1996, the European Union has given official recognition to regional culinary traditions by extending copyright protection to so-called origin foods. By reserving the use of the name of the product to a certified group of regional producers, and by monitoring that production continues to follow the traditional recipe, with ingredients sourced from the region, the relationship between the product and its area of origin is protected and competition from other areas excluded. Thus, the European Commission has created legal as well as administrative procedures to define the rightful owner of a traditional food product, its recipe and the knowledge of the proper production methods. These procedures are implemented by state bureaucracies in the member countries whose primary interest is to sell the products of their countries on the European market. For the European Commission, the goals of the programme are manifold. The creation and protection of niche markets will also serve the ends of sustainable regional development, creating employment in rural areas, while the preservation of the diversity of European food products makes Europe more competitive in global markets for high priced delicacies.

The European Union's PDO/PGI system, being valid only within the European Union, is one of a number of frameworks of geographical indications established worldwide. Systems of geographical indications that build on place-based product and do not permit producers outside of the defined area to use the place name in labelling or marketing have become more prevalent in recent years in many countries and in larger frameworks of transnational trade. This reflects the increased competition on global markets for agricultural products and foods. Transnational regulatory bodies such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the TRIPS agreement as well as the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) continue to be engaged in negotiations with the European Union and other actors over the status of the EU's system of 'origin foods' protection.⁹

The pertinent European Union regulation distinguishes between two categories of protected names: The protected designation of origin (PDO) and the protected geographical indication (PGI). The inclusion in the public register of protected product names is preceded by a publication in the Official Journal of the EU. When the label is awarded, the product is listed on

9 For an in-depth discussion of the contested status of the European Union system of geographical indications within the framework of the WTO, see Credit (2009) and Raustiala and Munzer (2007). For the relation between TRIPS and the WIPO regulation of cultural property, see Bendix *et al.* (2010).

the internet. To be eligible for the protected designation of origin (PDO), a product must meet the following conditions:

'The quality or characteristics of the product must be essentially or exclusively due to the particular geographical environment of the place of origin; the geographical environment is taken to include inherent natural and human factors, such as climate, soil quality, and local know-how; the production and processing of the raw materials, up to the stage of the finished product, must take place in the defined geographical area whose name the product bears' (Guide to Community Regulation, 2004, p. 6).

For the protected geographical indication (PGI), the requirements are less stringent. It is sufficient that one of the stages of production takes place in the defined area. In both cases, however, elaborate and very precise product specifications form the basis for the European Commission's decision to include the product in its list of 'origin products' and to give the applicants the right to print the certification seal on the product label. Specifications are required to give precise information on the authentic and unvarying production methods as well as any other properties which allow 'the objective differentiation of the product from other products of the same category through characteristics conferred on the product by its origin' (Guide to Community Regulation, 2004, p. 12). Among these, there are not only physical, chemical, microbiological or biological characteristics, but also the so-called organoleptic qualities of a product that make it unique to sensory perception, be it by its taste, smell, colour or texture.

The PDO/PGI system, then, does not protect the mere provenance of a food product, but engages origin as category constructed to signify the interdependence between the place of production, the producers and their knowledge, and the historical depth of a tradition, as French food ethnologists Laurence Bérard and Philippe Marchenay (2007) contend. Most important is proof of what is called the 'link', involving documentation – such as archival materials, historical accounts and old newspaper articles – of the historical connection between the product, its name, and the area. Here, also biochemical data and information on plant genetics may be engaged. It is not particularly difficult to recognise the similarity of these European regulations to the French concept of 'terroir'. 'Terroir' presupposes 'specific rural space possessing distinctive physical characteristics [...] seen as the product of the interaction between a human community and the place in which it lives' (Cégarra and Verdeaux, 2005, p. 22). Indeed, the European quality label system of PDO/PGI integrated and superseded the national legislation already in place in France and Italy. Economic geographers consider it an exemplary case of 'respatializing' (Feagan, 2007, p. 23) or 'relocalizing' food systems (Brunori, 2006, p. 121) as a reaction against the on-going trend towards large-scale, globally distributed production networks. PDO/PGI creates links between producers and consumers. The operation of 'fixing products to place through place labeling' (Feagan, 2007, p. 27) is instrumental for the valorisation of niche products and the creation of new markets for them.

Who Owns Culinary Traditions?

Many artisanal foods stuffs, produced in rural households and small family-run businesses, have become almost extinct because of the small-scale of production and markets. They are today at risk to disappear altogether when the older generation of producers abandons production and no successors take over. Other products – especially dairy and meat products such as cheese, sausages, and hams – may survive because they have made the transition to semi-industrial or even industrial food production. Thus, vernacular food in the sense of traditional local food systems had mostly ceased to exist decades ago. At best, 'one item in an older farming or culinary system [...] has been selected out by the market, [while] the rest of the local system is largely abandoned and un lamented' (Pratt, 2007, p. 298). Today, most artisanal products marketed in European countries have been 'generated out of sustained commercial activity, state regulatory systems, and international trade agreements' (*ibid.*).

For the larger part of the population, regional diversity in food consumption – compounded by differences between rural and urban populations – had remained in place throughout most of Europe well into the twentieth century. The year-round availability of industrially produced, packaged and branded food and the integration of European agricultural products into global markets contributed to severing the link between regional diet and regional farm products – a process that was far advanced by the end of the twentieth century. Still, food products did not become uniform and homogenised throughout Europe. Rather, increasingly specialised demand created the need for ever new and more diverse products, as consumption became a culturally expressive practice. The EU's quality label programme and its intention to strengthen the economic competitiveness of regional food producers as well as to sustain the diversity of the European food repertoire have to be interpreted against the backdrop of these developments (Welz, 2012).

In spite of the opening up of national markets within the framework of the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Communities, coupled with the ability of industrial food production to mass produce and widely distribute such local food products that were once limited to specific regions and dependent on artisanal production skills, small-scale rural production of traditional foods has greatly endangered and to a large degree diminished throughout Europe since the 1980s. Out-migration from rural areas to urban centres, especially in Southern Europe, had already hastened along the declining viability of agricultural production in many European regions. Working in conjunction with regional development measures to halt rural decline, the quality labels programme was instituted by the European Union in the early 1990s to counteract these trends. Perhaps more importantly, the origin foods programme emphasis on diversity and quality helped to create a market for high-end culinary specialties domestically and also to strengthen the EU's role *vis-à-vis* global food markets.

Nevertheless, internally within the EU, conflicts ensued between member states over the right of producers to use particular food product designations. Some of the most-publicised of those

concerned cheese products such as the Italian regional specialty 'parmeggiano' and the Greek 'feta' cheese (see DeSoucey, 2010). Conflicts less well known than these played out in the international arena, but more indicative of the effects of the EU's quality label programme on regional food producers, are conflicts over market shares and authenticity claims that have occurred within member states of the European Union and that have been studied by ethnologists and anthropologists. Studies conducted in Italy show that producers outside of the regions designated as the origin of a particular product have repeatedly tried to usurp the product name or attempted to influence the application process for a quality label in such a way as to leave the door open for producers other than those with whom the product originated (Grasseni, 2005). In many areas, small-scale producers increasingly have to compete with big companies. These produce protected food products in an industrial fashion more cheaply, eventually pushing the small-scale producers out of the market. In Italy, some of these conflicts have been solved with the aid of marketing initiatives and social movements such as Slow Food (Brunori, 2006). It is easy to see that while the procedure of application to the European Commission rests on an agreement, presumably of all producers in a defined region, it is rarely consensual and quite often very controversial. In many European regions, the link between the product and the area which gives its name is also difficult to document, so that disputes over property rights erupt easily.

The quality label system of the EU helps to preserve the kind of regional diversity in culinary traditions that has been historically generated in countries such as Italy or France where each community, municipality and even the tiniest region boasts unique products that for centuries have been produced in the same place. Here, the concept of 'terroir', once used to denote small-scale units of wine-growing regions, actually is reflected in a patchwork of place-specific products and production areas. Cyprus differs from these countries that were instrumental in serving both as a template for the programme and also had pertinent domestic legislation in place prior to the European quality label system. Government officials in the Republic of Cyprus contend that the main difference is the smallness of Cyprus, with its territory barely larger than individual regions or districts in some of the larger European states. However, Cyprus also differs from countries such as Italy or France in the ways in which agricultural production and the processing and distribution of agricultural food products was organised after Independence. In Cyprus, industrialised processing in the agri-food sector created a strong tendency to disarticulate regional differences in quality between agricultural products, with the possible exception of potatoes grown in the east of the island. Rather, grapes, olives, and milk from large numbers of farmers were pooled in order to manufacture standardised products of medium-range quality for the domestic market, be it olive oil, wine, wheat flour, yoghurt, or cheese. Only more recently, there have been efforts by individual producers as well as local associations to reinstall or even invent regional specificity. This has been most successful in the wine sector. (Jepson, 2004)

Conversely, biochemists and food scientists argue that to consider halloumi a cheese product that is uniform throughout the island disarticulates differences between regional variations of

halloumi. According to Papademas and Robinson (2001), these differ both in terms of the recipes and in terms of taste and organoleptic quality. Also, differences in vegetation that grazing animals feed on translates into differences in the final product. In the western part of the island, i.e. in the Paphos district, thyme and other macchia plants are prevalent. They are consumed especially by goats and give the cheese a characteristic taste. Traces of etheric oils of thyme and other macchia plants have been evidenced in halloumi cheese made from milk originating from this region (Papademas and Robinson, 2000).

The Quality Label Application that Failed

Up until the 1960s, the production of halloumi was a gendered activity that formed part of the subsistence economy of agrarian households. It was modernisation, growing prosperity and urbanisation since the 1970s that turned the traditional collective cheese making into a more professional and commercialised activity. Side by side with village-based small-scale production, halloumi developed into an important mass market commodity produced by large dairy companies who dominate the national market for cheese and other milk products. Their high-tech modern factories produce halloumi primarily for export. In recent years, small- and medium-scale cheese production has come under considerable pressure, among other things, also as a consequence of the financial burden of implementing the food hygiene measures required by the European Union. The dairy sector in Cyprus has been undergoing a process of concentration within recent years and has become dominated by a handful of companies. Halloumi exports have more than tripled in the past decade, with their annual value averaging around €0 million (see Gibbs *et al.*, 2004; Cyprus Exports of Halloumi Cheese, 2003–2007).

In 2009, the Greek Cypriot government submitted a proposal to the European Commission, in order to secure PDO status for halloumi cheese. There were many delays in the process. By 2011, even the first step of the process, the publication of the product specifications in the Official Journal of the European Union which invites international objections and qualifications and must precede the actual registration procedure, had not occurred. The application submitted in 2009 laid claim to halloumi as being uniquely and exclusively Greek Cypriot. This construction of nationalised heritage works to exclude all those groups that are considered external to the national project. In 2008, Turkish Cypriot dairy companies located in the Turkish-controlled north went to court in the Republic of Cyprus in an attempt to halt the process of the halloumi application submitted by Cyprus to the European Commission, demanding acknowledgement of the fact that this is not an exclusively Greek Cypriot product. They referred to the fact that historically, halloumi/hellim is an element of the habitual diet shared by both Turkish and Greek populations of the island. The complaint proved to be futile, and the Greek Cypriot application went ahead without acknowledging production in the north of the island.

But for all that, in the end, the European Commission did not award the PDO label that the government of the Republic applied for in 2009, because the application was retracted in 2012.

Why did this happen? For sure, in Brussels, doubts had been voiced as to whether it would be wise to certify a product so hotly contested. Members of the European Parliament had launched official inquiries at the European Commission, implying that a designation of halloumi as an exclusively Greek Cypriot product would unfairly discriminate against Turkish Cypriot producers of the same product, and, in more general vein, contradict the European spirit of integration and inclusiveness that the PDO/PGI programme should be infused with. Nonetheless, that the Agriculture Ministry of the Republic of Cyprus saw itself unable to go through with the application process ultimately has less to do with conflicts over ethnicised cultural property than one would assume. Because of its high export volume, halloumi cheese is a product of paramount economic importance for the Greek Cypriot dairy sector. Since its emergence as an industrial mass-produced cheese, it became the most important export good of the Republic of Cyprus. When the Republic applied to the European Commission for the status of 'protected designation of origin' for halloumi cheese produced in the government-controlled areas, intense struggles ensued over the ingredients that go into this cheese. Traditionally, it is a cheese produced from a mixture of goat and sheep milk. For the industrially produced halloumi cheese in Cyprus, however, especially the grade made for export, cow's milk is utilised due to its easy availability year round and the much lower price. National legislation passed in the 1980s allows for this practice. It specifies that a 'substantial amount of goat's and/or sheep's milk' needs to be included in a cheese called halloumi, but allows for up to half of the milk to be from cows. Dairy cows had only been introduced to Cyprus on a large scale in the 1960s, so the claim that a halloumi cheese that contains cow's milk may still be called traditional is hotly contested. In the years before the halloumi application was submitted to the EU, the industrial dairy companies applied considerable pressure on the government bodies preparing the application for PDO status for halloumi cheese, to ensure that they would be able continue using cow's milk, and still acquire the coveted designation for their cheese. Consequently, the application to the European Commission included up to 49% cow's milk in the list of ingredients for the product specification. However, in 2010, the owners of large goatherds and flocks of sheep had protested, mounting demonstrations in the island's capital and demanding assurances that goat and sheep milk would continue to be an important ingredient in the future production of the EU-certified cheese. They argued that due to lenient controls in the implementation of the 1985 law, industrial companies had for years habitually substituted the milk of goats and sheep with milk from cows to a much larger degree than provided for in the domestic halloumi law. In early 2012, fierce debates, political altercations, and street protests again erupted around the issue of halloumi ingredients. As it turned out, the powerful dairy companies who also dominate the Cyprus Cheese Makers Association were not satisfied with a product specification that gave them the right to use only 49% cow's milk in the certified product, and that would submit them to stricter controls than before. Indeed, the fact that the PDO application submitted by the Agricultural Ministry allowed for cow's milk in the first place had been an important concession to the larger dairies' interests. It would have been more in the spirit of the EU's origin

foods programme to put up a traditional product for certification, for example, a halloumi cheese made only from goat and sheep milk, possibly with a regional denomination such as Halloumi Pafitiko, i.e. halloumi from Paphos district. But, the industrial cheese makers had been against that proposition from the outset, as it had been their intent to have their entire output of halloumi valorised by a PDO label, and to consequently be able to sell it for a higher price. As the producers group responsible for the PDO application, they threatened the government with retracting the halloumi application. For a short time, after intense and lengthy negotiations, it appeared that some measure of compromise had been found. Yet, in April 2012 the applicant, the Cheese Makers organisation, quit from the process, leaving the Agricultural Ministry with no other choice but to retract the application and abort the process.

Conclusion

Regardless, in the Greek Cypriot media and political debates, the failure to acquire a PDO label for halloumi cheese is primarily viewed as making the cheese industry vulnerable to incursions and usurpations by competitors from other countries. Turkish Cypriot producers as well as dairy companies from Turkey and Bulgaria particularly, are feared in this context. But also, the case of hellim produced in the South of Germany acquired a particular salience, feeding into paranoid notions of halloumi being stolen by foreign agents. Yet, some more positive developments have also come out of this. Indeed, Dacian Ciolos, the member of the European Commission in charge of agricultural affairs, in his response to an inquiry by a member of the European Parliament,¹⁰ stated that he took the concerns of Turkish Cypriots seriously and urged all concerned 'to reach a mutually acceptable and sustainable solution' to end the on-going division of the island. The solution to the Cyprus problem would then also, so Ciolos implied, put an end to both sides trying to secure the cheese as their property. One would hope that he is correct in this view of what the future holds for halloumi/hellim. In a statement in August 2012, the agriculture minister of the Republic of Cyprus, Sophoclis Aletraris, did not rule out the possibility of re-applying for the PDO label, but this time launching a joint application including hellim. So far, no proceedings have been initiated. And whether this move would give producers in the north a fair share of the real and symbolic benefits of origin certification or whether it is an attempt to colonise Turkish Cypriot hellim and subsume it under a product legislated by the Republic of Cyprus, is hard to predict. Constantinou and Hatay, however, claim that 'in recent years, and especially with Greek Cypriot entry into the EU, Greek Cypriot identity has been progressively redefined as a national Cypriot one, in which the essential identity of the island is Greek, but in which the majority identity can also show tolerance for other cultures' (Constantinou and Hatay, 2010, p. 1614).

10 See Parliamentary question E-004686/2012 of 8 May 2012 'Subject: Registering Halloumi cheese as a Protected Designation of Origin Product' [<http://www.euoparl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef-//>], retrieved on 18 July 2012.

The certification of protected origin foods by the European Union transforms local food products into ‘commodity-heritage’ (Grasseni, 2005, p. 80). The term ‘commodity-heritage’ was introduced by Cristina Grasseni to denote a traditional artefact that is modified and standardised so that it can be sold on globalised markets. When food is discursively distinguished and politically regulated in order to become commodity-heritage, it is taken to represent a group’s history, and the distribution of that artefact is mapped onto the group’s territory. Claims for origin foods, then, may be based on notions of an ethnicised ownership of tradition or even of a ‘gastronomicalism’ (DeSoucey, 2010), as can be seen happening in the Republic of Cyprus. This is by no means inevitable. Examples from other member states of the European Union show that the origin foods programme can also be deployed politically to enhance both regional diversity and cultural heterogeneity within a country. Also, in some cases, European quality labels have even been awarded to ‘origin products’ that are produced across state boundaries, giving producers in two countries the right to carry the quality label on their products. In its failed attempt to apply for the origin foods programme, the Republic of Cyprus seems to have missed the opportunity to celebrate both its hybrid legacy as a country that links Europe and the Middle East and to supersede its ongoing division.

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