

Securing and optimising more-than-human value production in the 'mozzarella landscape' in Italy

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ABSTRACT

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A thesis submitted to Politecnico di Torino
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**Securing and subsuming more-than-human value
production in the ‘mozzarella landscape’ in Italy**

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This thesis investigates the securitization and subsumption of more-than-human value production in the ‘mozzarella landscape’ in Campania, Italy. Water buffaloes, essential in this landscape, have lived in the coastal marshlands of Campania for centuries, and buffalo milk has been used for the production of the famous mozzarella cheese. Currently, the Mozzarella di Bufala Campana PDO is an internationally acclaimed product. Nevertheless, buffalo farming and mozzarella production in the region has had to face various socio-ecological challenges in recent decades. My objective is to analyse how the processes of securitization and subsumption in the dairy farming sector contribute to more rigorous control over animal bodies, and interfere in their bodies and lives for more efficient value production. In exploring these issues, I have focused on three interrelated processes: the relationships between the subsumption of buffalo milk production and the market demand for mozzarella, the immunization of the mozzarella landscape by the means of biosecurity and traceability, and branding as the product of the landscape and the animal. My research has engaged with political ecology and political economy, animal geography and economic geography literature on value production, securitization, branding and the landscape.

This thesis is based on multi-sited field research carried out in Campania region in Italy mainly in 2018. One of the highlights of my fieldwork was a 7-week-long internship on a buffalo farm where I conducted participant and direct observation. My research has also included detailed textual analyses of newspapers, magazines and government and industry reports, in-depth and expert interviews, photography and videos. The empirical chapters of this thesis aim to investigate how the body of the buffalo has been subject to interventions for more efficient value production; how the animal body is controlled and secured as a response to socio-ecological struggles in the region; and how the buffalo body and the landscape are incorporated in the branding of the mozzarella. The complexity of the issue made it necessary for me to engage with several concepts, but my objective is to maintain the body of the buffalo as the central theme of my analysis. My research argues that the securitization of buffalo farming and mozzarella production has indirectly made the cyclic reproductive activities of buffaloes a critical element of the political debates that can limit or enhance the globalization of the 'White Gold of Campania'. The securitization and the subsumption of the 'mozzarella landscape' with its human and nonhuman value producers demonstrate how processes of securitization, value production and the 'improvement' of biological reproduction are interlinked.