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Wiart, L., Özçağlar-Toulouse, N. and Shaw, D. (2022) Maintaining market legitimacy: A discursive-hegemonic perspective on meat. *Journal of Business Research*, 144, pp. 391-402.

(doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.02.024](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.02.024))

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Maintaining Market Legitimacy: A Discursive-Hegemonic Perspective on Meat

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Abstract: The current and ongoing planetary crisis is further challenging previously legitimized markets, yet in consumer research insight into maintaining legitimacy in markets subject to multiple forms of contestation has been overlooked. While existing research focuses on one type of contestation in isolation, we focus on multiple forms of market challenge, differentiating between practical and symbolic forms of contestation. In doing so, we contribute to consumer research literature through an examination of the differing logics at play in the process of market legitimacy maintenance. Drawing on a discursive-hegemonic perspective, we theorize two different hegemonic logics that contribute to sustaining market legitimacy. As research traditionally focuses on meaning reconstruction and negotiation in the face of contestation (often theorized as co-optation), in this research we also point out the existence of another logic of meaning, namely, naturalization.

Keywords: Market System Dynamics, Legitimacy, Market Maintenance, Hegemony, Discourse, Meat

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Introduction

The current and ongoing global crisis of covid-19 and the climate emergency are further challenging the nature of established markets and associated practices, such as, meat consumption and air travel (Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2020). Despite raising environmental concerns, the legitimacy of such markets remains prevalent.

In consumer research, authors have started to study markets as co-constructed social systems in constant development (Giesler & Fischer, 2017). Attention has been focused on the active use of legitimacy to shape a new market or to disrupt a contested one (Ben Slimane et al., 2019) and the role of consumers in market evolution (Branstad & Solem, 2020; Dolbec & Fischer, 2015; Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013). Markets, however, are not static and, in addition to disruption and creation, market maintenance also requires continuous effort. Baker et al. (2018) and Debenedetti et al. (2021), highlight the need to understand how a “mature” market subject to ongoing critique is maintained. This is an important question as a market “needs to undergo continuous development and innovation to ‘maintain’; but to what degree?” (Baker et al., 2018, p. 319). Little attention has been given to understanding how markets are maintained where their legitimacy is challenged. Such insights are important to understanding the nature of market maintenance in practice.

Legitimacy can be challenged by, for example, structural instability (Giesler, 2008), sociocultural and belief-system changes (Baker et al., 2018) or the impact of consumer movements and their political work (King & Pearce, 2010; Weijo et al., 2018). Such struggle can drive market change and/or disappearance, impacting product offerings and associated meaning and practice. For example, using the context of a botox cosmetic brand, Giesler (2012) illustrates an ongoing process of legitimacy contestation, resulting in meaning reconstruction to preserve legitimacy. Drawing on actor-network theory, he examines how the botox product is constructed along a nature/technology contradiction, and how innovators and other

stakeholders promote two opposing brand images. The constant recreation of a new brand image is used to resolve and combat the contradiction of competing brand positions.

Research to date has been essential in revealing how market legitimacy maintenance occurs through the negotiation and integration of contestations, in a process of meaning reconstruction and alignment (Giesler & Fischer, 2017). Indeed, contestation fuels the efforts to preserve legitimacy that result in market transformation (Dinnin Huff et al., 2021). Research, however, has been restricted to one specific type of contestation in isolation, relating to one specific aspect of market legitimacy. For example, Giesler (2008) focuses on the cultural contradictions between utilitarian and possessive ideals and their impacts on the music market, materialized by a counterculture of downloaders. Following Holt (2002), who examined the parasitic mechanisms of markets that constantly feed on counterculture creativity, Giesler (2008) considers the process of market legitimacy maintenance as a never-ending dialogue between an industry and a counter-culture in relation to a specific area of contestation. This research, however, does not provide insights into other - and multiple - forms of contestations that may exist across different actors with competing interests in a given market context.

The current binary approach to market legitimacy maintenance is limiting, as challenges to market legitimacy can take multiple forms across different actors with varying beliefs, values and logics. For example, beyond countercultural movements, actors may contest different aspects of a specific market, such as, the ideological (e.g., killing an animal for meat) or material effects (e.g., environmental impacts of the market for meat). Literature has yet to consider the differing logics at play in the process of meaning transformation that have been developed to combat multiple forms of market critique. To understand the various ways in which markets could respond to and be shaped by distinct forms of challenges to their legitimacy, there is a need to examine the logics at play, the forms of contestation that disrupt legitimacy, and their impact on meaning maintenance and reconstruction of the market.

Previous investigations in consumer research have traditionally adopted an institutional perspective to study market evolution and have, therefore, focused on the evolution of cognitive, regulative and normative institutional pillars of legitimacy (Johnson et al., 2017). This approach, however, overlooks the evolving role of ideas and meanings in legitimacy that are important to understanding differing and shifting forms of legitimation (Schmidt, 2008). In contrast, this paper employs a discursive-hegemonic theory to understand the logics that facilitate market maintenance in the face of discrete forms of contestation. In particular, Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) perspective of hegemony facilitates our understanding of markets as discursive-hegemonic formations that constantly shape social reality. This perspective enriches our theorization of markets as it highlights the different mechanisms that a market may use to constantly reconstruct meaning associated with both objects and subjects, to overcome contestation and maintain legitimacy. Indeed, some literature in organization theory goes beyond an institutional understanding of legitimacy and defines it as a construct that is the object of discursive struggles (Erkama & Vaara, 2010; Vaara et al., 2006). Discourses attempt to either resist, reproduce or reinforce legitimacy (Vaara et al., 2006). Therefore, a market is constituted and reconfigured through these discursive struggles. A discursive approach is valuable because it enables the exploration of market legitimation as a contingent and fluid process of constant meaning transformation, integrating both objects and subjects into the analysis.

By merging the discursive-hegemonic perspective of Laclau and Mouffe (1985) with research focused on markets as dynamic systems (Giesler & Fischer, 2017), we make two contributions to consumer research. First, we theorize two forms of contestations that can destabilize and disrupt market legitimacy. Research to date has focused on contestation of a market object's material capacities (Dinnin Huff et al., 2021), whereas we highlight that a market can be challenged in terms of either its material or symbolic consequences, thereby, revealing the

different logics that underpin market meaning transformation. By distinguishing between *practical* and *symbolic* forms of contestation, we show how market meanings can be challenged differently. Practical forms of contestation destabilize a market by challenging its material effects (e.g., on the environment, consumer health or animal welfare), whereas symbolic forms of contestation directly challenge market values and underlying belief systems. Second, we theorize two distinct hegemonic logics that sustain market legitimacy, extending prior research on contested market evolution. As research traditionally focuses on the dialogic process of meaning transformation and negotiation in the face of a specific contestation (often theorized as *co-optation*), here we point out the existence of another logic of meaning, namely, *naturalization*. Instead of incorporating contestation, as commonly studied, this second logic aims to naturalize the market and, as a result, discredit the contestation.

The context of our study is the market for meat, which has a long history of contestation in relation to animal ethics (Spencer, 1993), planetary welfare (Springmann et al., 2018) and human health (Potter & Jackson, 2020), all of which are ongoing. In this paper, we examine how the market for meat has been challenged over a significant period of time by different types of events and actors, has responded to varying forms of contestation and managed to maintain its legitimacy. This provides an excellent context in which to examine logics of market meaning transformation that underpin market legitimacy maintenance.

In this paper, we first review the literature on market legitimacy and discursive-hegemonic perspectives in consumer research. We then detail the context, data and methods used to address our research question: *when exposed to different types of contestation, how are market object and subject meanings transformed to support the maintenance of market legitimacy?* Through a historical discursive analysis, we present our findings on how legitimacy for meat consumption has been maintained, illuminating differing forms of contestation and resultant

hegemonic logics. We conclude by discussing the implications of our findings for understanding market legitimacy maintenance.

1. Literature review

1.1 Market legitimacy maintenance

Market nature as a social system is increasingly recognized and explored in marketing (Kjellberg & Olson, 2017; Vargo et al., 2017). For Vargo et al. (2017), a systemic understanding of markets is valuable as it allows the study of “how new markets emerge, as well as how existing markets change or are, in some cases, replaced by better solutions to address new problems” (p. 265). These recent perspectives align with sociological approaches, which consider markets as political systems (Bourdieu, 2005; Fligstein, 1996).

Consumer research follows this perspective through the “market system dynamics” approach (Giesler & Fischer, 2017). Here, researchers are primarily interested in market transformation or creation as determined by the individual activities of multiple actors (Finch et al., 2016; see also, for example, Ertimur & Coskuner-Balli, 2015; Humphreys, 2010a, 2010b; Giesler, 2008, 2012; Holt, 2002). Within this understanding of market dynamics, legitimacy, from an institutional perspective, has been widely used to understand market evolution. As a central concept in institutional organization theory (Deephouse et al., 2017; Deephouse & Suchman, 2008; Scott, 1995; Suchman, 1995; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005), legitimacy and convergence of its four dimensions (regulative, normative, cultural-cognitive and pragmatic) has been progressively applied to assess market alignment with systems of rules and law, cognitive schemas and social norms (Humphreys, 2010b). By developing a historical approach, Humphreys (2010b), whose research is often taken as a starting point, explores how a change in market meaning, as determined by multiple actors’ activities, can help legitimize the market.

From these systemic and mainly neo-institutionalist perspectives, market legitimacy is considered a process that is co-constructed from a tangle of “institutional work” by different actors (see Dolbec & Fischer, 2015; Giesler & Fischer, 2017; Giesler, 2012; Humphreys, 2010b; Humphreys & Thompson, 2014). The agency of actors, such as, media (Humphreys, 2010b) and the state (Galluzzo & Gorge, 2020), but mainly consumers (Kates, 2004; Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013) are highlighted. Objects themselves may also carry this legitimacy as they convey certain meanings through expressive capacities (Dinnin Huff et al., 2021). Market actors might vie for power to reshape these objects. For example, Dinnin Huff et al. (2021) explored how recreational cannabis as a material object has expressive capacities (sensory and discursive) that facilitate the legitimacy of its market through alignment or distancing with products from existing and legitimate markets.

Legitimation is, thus, defined as a complex process of “struggles” between contradictory interests (Glozer et al., 2018), through which meanings assigned to a specific market and attached practices and objects are contested, reproduced or changed (Dinnin Huff et al., 2021). More specifically, the role of consumers in changing markets has been acknowledged through consumer movements and protests (Weijo et al., 2018) or countercultures (Giesler, 2008). These political contestations are mitigated through market reconfiguration. Market and object meanings are reshaped to align with and integrate these contestations (Dinnin Huff et al., 2021; Giesler, 2008, 2012).

Despite these insights, the market legitimacy literature has not yet built a robust theorization regarding how existing meanings are challenged, transformed, and stabilized, and how this contributes to the legitimacy of markets. The exception is through the theory of co-optation (Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007) and limited research on market system dynamics (Dinnin Huff et al., 2021; Giesler, 2012, 2008; Holt, 2002). In order to address contestation, market meanings are transformed and realigned through a subsequent incorporation of the critique that

has sought to challenge them. Such research, however, tends to focus on one type of contestation and its ongoing dialogic integration, thereby, limiting our understanding of multiple forms of contestation, resultant response logics and market meaning transformations. As a result, other mechanisms beyond co-optation, which can reestablish market legitimacy, have not been explored. This raises particular questions. First, are there forms of contestation that differ in how they challenge of market legitimacy? Second, beyond the logic of co-optation, are there other types of contestation that result in differing forms of legitimacy maintenance logics? Our research addresses these questions by theorizing the various mechanisms through which market meanings are transformed to stabilize legitimacy in markets facing different forms of contestation.

1.2 A discursive-hegemonic perspective on market legitimacy maintenance

A discursive-hegemonic perspective affords a theorization of market evolution as a political process of constant struggles and meaning transformation. Theories of hegemony highlight the centrality of meaning and its stabilization and naturalization within markets. Indeed, in cultural studies, hegemony has been described as a “process of making, maintaining and reproducing an authoritative set of meanings, ideologies and practices” (Barker & Jane, 2016, p. 407).

More specifically, Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) discursive perspective on hegemony highlights the perpetual existence of antagonism and struggles over meaning and, therefore, the impossibility of fixed meaning. This discursive perspective, as opposed to a Gramscian conceptualization (Gramsci, 1971), presupposes that hegemony is neither a static position nor something that is maintained from the top-down (Ferns & Amaeshi, 2019). It is, however, an ongoing discursive process through which meanings are constantly rearranged cohesively and temporarily to provide an illusion of stability. This approach permits a theorization of market as a discursive-hegemonic formation, in constant renewal, which can maintain its position

through accumulative processes of meaning re(creation) and/or stabilization in the face of multiple discursive struggles that continually resist, alter and challenge market meanings.

Laclau and Mouffe (1985) demonstrate that hegemonization involves the continuous (re)articulation of a ‘signifying chain’, that is, an assemblage of signifiers (units of meaning), connected in a coherent way (Ferns & Amaeshi, 2019). A partial fixing of meaning, which provides legitimacy, is formed around nodal points. Nodal points are the “privileged signs around which the other signifiers are ordered; the other signifiers acquire their meaning from their relationship to the nodal point” (Jorgensens & Phillips, 2002, p. 26). They create a sense of unity and stability, where the articulation of different discursive elements is formed into a common hegemonic project (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000). To take an example used by Howarth & Stavrakakis (2000), the nodal point “communism” offers other signifiers, such as, “democracy”, “state” or “freedom”, which create new meanings when incorporated into the signifying chain. A nodal point also enables the linking together of disparate signifiers: the nodal point “eco-gastronomy” seeks to combine disparate signifiers, such as, taste and social justice, to create stability; “eco-gastronomy” facilitates the constitution of ethical and ecological meanings for quality and the crafting of a common identification between actors (van Bommel & Spicer, 2011). Articulation, therefore, involves the adoption and creation of new signifiers, and the formation of nodal points for discursive stability when faced with discursive struggles between actors (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985).

1.3 Conceptualizing the market as a discursive formation

The concept of discourse is central to our investigation on markets. Stemming from a discursive-hegemonic perspective, discourse is regarded as productive; it not only reflects a pre-existing social reality, but continuously constructs it (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985), thereby, actively establishing object and subject positions. A market can be conceptualized as a *discursive formation* that provides object and subject positions for individuals (Phillips &

Hardy, 1997; Fairclough, 1992). Consequently, the market is an assemblage of discourse, comprising discourses enunciated by different actors (e.g., industries, media, state, lobbyists or consumers) that support a shared and stabilized articulation of the market's 'object/subject position' system.

First, a market constructs a system of meanings that form the identities of objects. For instance, meat exists not only as a specific material object, but also as a concept that is culturally and historically situated (Phillips & Hardy, 1997), where meaning is constructed and evolves, resulting in a discourse with agentic capacity. Our perception of meat products will be altered by the way discursive formations might construct their specificity as objects in terms of, for example, meat as the 'result of animal murder' or as 'nutritious' and 'delicious'. These constructions might be contested or reproduced through discursive struggles. Therefore, the market for meat as a discursive formation is an ontological practice, creating and modifying the meaning of meat as a means to stabilize its legitimacy (Howarth, 2000).

Second, a market also creates (non-)consumer identities, a discursive construction that is best described through the concept of subject position (Phillips & Hardy, 1997). Subject positions are discursive and temporary points of identification that individuals perform to situate themselves and others in a social space (Hall, 2000). For example, the subject position of the 'refugee' is constructed differently by various organizations, resulting in differing rights (Hardy & Phillips, 1999). This production of 'refugees' is continuous and the result of power relations regarding the construction of identities (Phillips & Hardy, 1997). The construction of identities by the market may also contribute to its legitimacy, something that has not yet been examined. Market object and subject positions that may appear maintained, in reality "contain hidden conflicts and suppressed voices, such that change and resistance to current institutional arrangements is always possible" (Larsson, 2018, p. 327). Market legitimacy, therefore,

involves struggles over object and subject positions and locations of power, the (re)construction of which needs to be examined.

In summary, in this paper we extend systemic thinking about markets by foregrounding the different logics at play in market legitimacy maintenance, which involve the transformation of systems of object/subject positions. We achieve this through examining the discursive (re)construction of market meanings. As we focus on diverse forms of contestation and their interrelations, this lens enables a discursive-oriented account of a complex and accumulative legitimation process of both incorporating and evading critique. The key concepts used in this research are defined in the Table A.1.

Insert Table A.1 here

2. Methodology

2.1 Context: the market for meat as a site of political contestations

To understand the role of the object/subject meanings in legitimization, we focus on the market for meat, a context subject to different types of contestations. Meat consumption and production have been linked to multiple crises and critiques over many years concerning public health and food security (e.g., Potter & Jackson, 2020; Mathew et al., 2004; Oliver et al., 2011), environment (e.g., Springmann et al., 2018) and ethical concerns (e.g., Cheah et al., 2020). The latter has been debated for thousands of years, as ethical vegetarianism and the philosophy behind abstention from meat date back to 600 B.C. (Spencer, 1993). Meat, therefore, seems to be the most symbolically potent food source and our representation of non-human animals plays a central role in its acceptance (Fischler, 1990). Historical-cultural factors influence humans' orientation regarding non-human animals, making some of them acceptable for consumption (Willard, 2003). The western philosophically constructed human dominance over non-human animals structures socio-cultural practices around meat consumption and subjectivities rely on this dominance (Derrida, 1991). Thus, the systems of meaning around meat and the consumption of meat appear to play an important role in market legitimization.

While subject to long-standing political contestation, the market for meat has maintained an overall position of legitimacy. It is unclear how and why the meat industry is more capable of incorporating and/or evading criticism than, for instance, tobacco, which also has health and environmental concerns and a strong industry position (Ferns & Amaeshi, 2019). The market for meat has been, and continues to be, subject to 'discursive struggles', yet it has evolved to maintain the normalcy of meat consumption. The existence of historic, diverse and strong political contestations makes this a rich context in which to examine different logics at play in maintaining market legitimacy.

2.2 Data collection and analysis

This study adopts discourse analysis to examine the relationship between systems of object/subject position meanings and market dynamics. Naturally occurring data is preferred in discourse analysis as it has not been subject to researcher interaction (Potter, 2002; Silverman, 2001). Therefore, the current research takes a historical approach that provides such data and the opportunity to investigate market legitimization logics of meaning transformation. With some exceptions (Baker et al., 2018; Ertimur & Coskuner-Balli, 2015; Giesler, 2008), the use of historical perspectives is rare in research on market dynamics, yet it provides rich accounts of market change and maintenance processes (Baker et al., 2018). Mills et al. (2014) highlight the need for theoretically situated historical research, advancing the need to conceptualize the past. Similarly, Karababa (2012) highlights the necessity of developing more comprehensive and theorized historical research. Consequently, this research draws on a “discourse-historical approach” (Wodak, 2001; Reisigl, 2018; Reisigl & Wodak, 2016) that emphasizes historical anchoring and the ways in which discourses are subject to diachronic change. As such, the present is “subject to a discursive process that influences how events are read” (Weatherbee et al., 2012, p. 194). That is, current discourses are necessarily influenced by preceding discourses, making historical insights pertinent to such analysis.

2.2.1 Data collection

We collected historical data based on two stages of data collection during two time periods. First, we gathered data from two French newspapers for the period 1944–2020, to identify the main themes of contestation in relation to the market for meat. Second, we collected data for the period 2015–2020 from a larger range of French newspapers, as we observed an intensification of contestation and, therefore, sought to integrate a broader spectrum of political positions.

Stage 1: time period 1944–2020

Stage 1 of the data collection gathered articles on meat consumption from two major French newspapers, *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro*, to identify key discursive events and major themes linked to meat consumption. These newspapers were chosen for their historical relevance (*Le Figaro* was founded in 1826; *Le Monde* in 1944), accessibility and mainstream position in French national media. The two newspapers were also selected for their conflicting ideological positioning: *Le Monde* is traditionally viewed as left-wing and *Le Figaro* as right-wing. Such media play a critical role in constructing and voicing views of legitimacy and illegitimacy (Vaara et al., 2006; Humphreys & Latour, 2013), making it a primary site for discursive struggles (Joutsenvirta & Vaara, 2015). This first historical timeline includes a period of industrialization and democratization of meat consumption and significant crisis, including, mad cow disease (BSE¹) and the climate crisis, resulting in the development of discursive struggles.

Le Monde online archives were searched for the period 1944–2020 using the following keywords: “meat”; “vegetarian”; “vegetarianism”; and “vegan”. The initial search resulted in more than 10,000 articles, which were screened for relevance in terms of their content positioning a positive or negative critique of meat consumption. We selected articles that either justified or criticized meat consumption, leaving aside, for example, articles with recipes or local events regarding livestock production. This resulted in 303 articles. The archives of *Le Figaro* from 1944–2008 were accessed at a city library in France. Since the analysis of a daily newspaper’s archives is extremely time-consuming, we restricted our search to key dates and discursive events revealed from the thematic analysis of the *Le Monde* archive (see below). Twenty-eight articles were uncovered by means of this process. The search covering the period 2009–2020 was completed on the *Le Figaro* website, from which point articles were made

¹ Known as mad cow disease, bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) is a neurodegenerative disease of cattle due to an infection after being fed meat and bone meal. The spread to humans is believed to result in Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD) from eating contaminated food.

available online, using the same keywords as conducted for Le Monde. This online collection resulted in 133 articles. A total of 436 articles from both sources were analyzed.

Stage 2: time period 2015–2020

Following the first stage of data collection and identification of key discursive events, we specifically chose to focus on the period 2015–2020. The first stage of data analysis (see below), revealed an intensification of discursive struggles from 2015 due to an increased interest in veganism, climate, biodiversity and health issues. To gain a deeper understanding of logics, as well as, the diversity of discourses within discursive formations, and to capture the impacts of these discursive struggles, we extended data collection to other publications, encompassing local publications and newspapers using the Europresse online platform. Local newspapers, including, La Voix du Nord and Ouest-France, were integrated as well as other major national publications with different political positioning, including Libération, L'Humanité, and Valeurs actuelles. This resulted in 530 articles.

2.2.2 Data analysis

A historical discourse approach (Reisigl & Wodak, 2015; Reisigl, 2018; Wodak, 2001; Wodak & Meyer, 2016) facilitates the exploration of how discourses evolve and are articulated to fix legitimacy. Specific to this approach is the constant iterative process between theory and discourse (Wodak & Meyer, 2016; Wodak, 2001). In keeping with this perspective, specific concepts and theory developed by Laclau and Mouffe (1985) were used to guide the analysis in a circular fashion.

The analysis and coding process was undertaken by the first author, consistent with the epistemological underpinnings of discourse analysis. This was further supported by active personal engagement in the process, which is considered a positive contribution (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). To ensure the credibility of the research, however, solo coding was discussed

and validated throughout the process by means of intensive group discussion between authors. These discussions enabled clarification of ideas and development of new insights about the data (Saldaña, 2009).

Our analysis consisted of three key steps. First, we began with a thematic analysis and open coding (Vaara et al., 2006; Wodak, 2001) on data collected during stage 1, to identify the main contestations related to the critique of meat consumption. A thematic analysis is argued to be the first step of a discourse analysis (Wodak, 2001) as to it identifies main themes in a body of data, and their historical evolution. By looking at the textual data, the task is to identify a limited number of themes and controversies evolving around a specific topic (Luyckx & Janssens, 2016). This exposed three central themes: (1) economics; (2) morality regarding animal representations, and (3) health and environment (climate and biodiversity loss). Further, it revealed an event timeline establishing four key discursive events, which are “events that influence the future development of discourse” (Jäger & Maier, 2016), related to discursive struggles, namely: (1) hormone-treated veal crisis in 1980; (2) peak of the mad cow disease (BSE) crisis in 1996; (3) 2006 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations report, highlighting the negative externalities of livestock and meat on biodiversity and climate; and (4) during 2015, the publication of a study by the International Agency for Research on Cancer, an agency of the World Health Organization, classifying red meat as “probably carcinogenic to humans”; the shock video filmed in the Alès’s slaughterhouse by the nonprofit organization L214²; and the mainstream appearance of meat-alternative products, including, the Carrefour Veggie range.

Having distinguished different themes, controversies and discursive events, we performed a specific analysis of the nomination and predication strategies, that is, of how social actors and

² L214 is a “French nonprofit animal defense organization that focuses its action on animals used for food consumption because they account for 99% of the animals exploited by humans”. See <https://www.l214.com/L214-french-vegan-animal-protection-NGO>

objects are constructed and qualified (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016). We used NVivo to classify how different object and subject positions were constructed by analyzing specific signifiers in open coding. These signifiers as codes were grouped into categories, or nodal points, which as main signifiers through which other signifiers are ordered and given a signification, were found to be dominant during key discursive events. The majority of discourses evolved around these categories of meanings, which structured discussions around meat, thus, giving it its meaning, and forming the characteristics of nodal points. This second stage of analysis sought to explore how object and subject positions (identities) are named and what characteristics and features are attributed to them. Therefore, we coded all material that could describe and define object and subject positions, as well as, changes in significations. We looked at what aspects of their discursive constructions change over time and the reasons for this change. For example, associated to the object of meat were categories, such as, “strength”, “masculinity” or “naturalness”.

Third, to understand how the market for meat consistently appeared to avoid illegitimacy, we iteratively went back to the literature on market system dynamics and to the concept of hegemony. We concentrated on argumentation strategies and discursive changes in relation to critiques, mitigation and intensification approaches, exploring how object and subject positions and meanings are transformed, fixed, reproduced, intensified and/or resisted. We found two logics through which market meanings are resisted and challenged and two logics through which market meanings were either transformed or fixed.

In the next section, drawing on Laclau and Mouffe (1985), we examine the ability of a market, as a discursive formation, to sustain legitimacy in the face of multiple forms of contestation through a constant reconfiguration of the object/subject position system of meanings. We conceptualize this historical, contingent and accumulative process of legitimation as a process of hegemonization consisting of different logics. We then examine how market meanings were

(re)articulated, resisted or fixed to argue for or against meat consumption, to study the different logics in the process of hegemonization specifically.

3. Results and discussion

To study the various logics of meaning transformation in market legitimacy maintenance, we first analyzed the different forms of contestation faced by the market. We found that market meanings can be challenged through two different forms of contestation: (1) practical, which only questions the material consequences of the market, and (2) symbolic, which directly challenges market meanings and their contingency. This finding is important since previous research has focused only one type of contestation, therefore, considering market legitimacy maintenance as a dialogical process of endless meaning transformation. By differentiating between these two forms of contestation, we find how market legitimacy maintenance can differ depending on the type of critique the market faces.

When market meanings are challenged through *practical* forms of contestation, this questions the material effects of a discursive formation. These types of market contestation do not intend to replace the market and its meanings, but rather to limit its negative effects. This is evidenced in key themes of contestation with regard to the market for meat, such as, environmental demands, where only material effects of the market on the environment are contested and not meat consumption per se. Rather, sought is a better integration of these concerns in meat production, and an association of its meanings to environment-related signifiers. In our first section, we examine and discuss the market discursive-hegemonic logic of response to this form of contestation, which is mainly based on meaning *co-optation* and incorporation, through the adoption of new nodal points that are characterized by their ‘emptiness’ and the recreation of object and subject position meanings. In doing so we extend previous research on market transformation and legitimation.

Market meanings can be also challenged through *symbolic* forms of contestation that are introduced by a counter-hegemonic discourse (here, the vegan discourse). Unlike practical forms, a symbolic form of contestation destabilizes a market by advancing demands which “cannot be domesticated, symbolized or integrated within the discourse in question” (Torfing, 1999, p. 301). Thus, we observed limits in terms of co-optation logic due to the incommensurability between such demands and how the market for meat is structured. In this, we find another logic at work. Rather than proposing a unifying solution, as observed in hegemonization to date and in market legitimacy literature (e.g., through market meaning transformation via co-optation, meaning alignment and consensus building), we observe a *naturalization* logic that responds to contestation by fixing object and subject position meanings through mythical narratives that seek to normalize consumption and associated identity. This logic is discussed in our second section.

3.1 Co-opting logic to integrate practical forms of contestation

The first logic of market legitimacy maintenance in the face of practical forms of contestation involves co-optation. Here, alternative and challenging discourses are incorporated to fuel market transformation to maintain market legitimacy. In this section, we detail the discursive functioning of such a logic. We show how practical contestations, such as, environmental or ethical critiques are incorporated by the market for meat through the construction of new nodal points. We examine these mechanisms through the construction and adoption of two nodal points: (1) ‘animal welfare’ and (2) ‘flexitarianism’ that both led to a transformation of the market for meat object and subject position meanings. These nodal points created stability and facilitated the constitution of ethical and ecological signifiers for meat consumption, thereby, maintaining its legitimacy.

3.1.1 Constructing animal welfare: the recreation of meat as “happy meat”

Our historical analysis revealed how ethical critiques regarding animals were integrated by the market for meat through the construction and adoption of a new nodal point: “animal welfare”. This led to the reconstruction of both meat market objects and subjects through an articulation of positive signifiers, such as, happiness and morality.

From 1944 to 1980, rather than a contestation of meat, we observed a construction of both meat and animals as industrial products. In this, the animal is “*transformed*” into meat; farm animals are just merchandise, either “*alive*” or “*in the form of meat*” (Fauchon, 1951). This economic nodal point dominates meat market discourses and meat consumption is articulated as vital to support economic development. Meat production “*is one of our country’s indisputable economic vocations*” and “*the government must therefore encourage domestic consumption*” (Locardel, 1960). Zootechnical³ scientific discourse, intertwined with state and industry discourse, is prevalent as it enables this construction of meat and animals as industrial objects. Along with this economic imperative of increasing meat consumption to align with high levels of production, we observed the development of a consumer responsabilization and the construction of a meat citizen-consumer subject position (Coskuner-Balli, 2020). For example, the state, and industry, supported the “Follow the beef” campaign in 1960 aimed at educating the consumer to buy more meat.

From 1980, however, two key discursive events, namely, hormonal veal (1980) and mad cow disease (BSE) (1996), prompted contestation. These events challenged existing meanings of farm animals as objectified and industrialized, and the material impacts on their existence. This is reflected by a journalist, who seeks to raise awareness of the living conditions of calves during the hormonal veal crisis:

³ Zootechnics is a scientific and technical field that studies the role of breeding, selection, and reproduction of animals and genetics to obtain products for humans.

“We no longer say "raising animals", but "making meat", and it is an industry. Here is how it is done with the calf: eight days after birth, it is kept upright in the dark, sometimes blinded, for three months; it can no longer move or lie down; it is pumped full of antibiotics and hormones; then its throat is slit. The animal is no longer considered as a living being capable of suffering, a calf, but as a thing, a material, a product” (Colomer & Pujol, 1980)

The articulation of ‘animal’ with an economic nodal point is made visible and contested, posing a threat to the legitimacy of the market, as meat becomes associated with animal suffering.

As a result, in discourses around the market for meat, we observed the farm animal move from “object” to “object capable of suffering” thanks to the creation and adoption of a new nodal point, namely “animal welfare”, that facilitated the incorporation of these critiques. This development is reflected in the burgeoning scientific literature on this new topic (see, for example, Dawkins, 1980; Duncan, 1981) and its adaptation in discursive formation within state, industry and lobbyist discourse. Through the adoption of this nodal point, we observe the creation of a new discourse of “happy meat” (Cole, 2011), which seeks to counter the discursive threats of animal suffering, while maintaining the position of meat as a food source.

The term ‘animal welfare’ is, however, an *empty nodal point* (van Bommel & Spicer, 2011); its meaning remains unclear, with differing conceptualizations reflective of suffering or psychological wellbeing, as the following veterinarian explains:

“The subject is sensitive, in these times when the question of animal welfare is constantly being raised. (...) Nevertheless, the question of animal welfare is rather vague and general. ‘The more we know about the animal, the more complex the issue is, the more difficult it is to define.’ The veterinarian Jérémy Boutant prefers to put forward batteries of objective criteria.” (Violette, 2019)

Interpretations of this nodal point can, therefore, vary and facilitate legitimacy maintenance through goal unification.

The legitimacy of the meat object through the “happiness” signifier is further articulated alongside other positive signifiers of “animal as meat”, such as, *quality*, *taste* and *naturality*, as these butchers explain:

“And if a beast is well raised, I can see it right away. If it has eaten grass, quality hay or cracked corn. When it arrives at the slaughterhouse, it must be killed quickly and without stress. To relax her, I even ask for classical music to be played. Just by touching a meat, I know whether the animal has been mistreated or not.” (Kerchouche, 2011)

“It cannot be good for the consumer to eat an animal that has been abused: there is something remaining from this pain in its flesh.” (Kremer, 1996)

These signifiers are mutually reinforcing and support the maintenance of meat legitimacy through a “win-win strategy” (Ferns & Amaeshi, 2019). Accordingly, the subject position of “compassionate carnivore” is created, providing a humane identity for consumers of meat.

3.1.2 Climate crisis and the rise of the “flexitarian”

The mainstreaming of discourse around the climate crisis also led to a practical form of contestation that positions over-consumption of meat as unsustainable and unhealthy.

From this we observe the creation of “flexitarian” as a new moral subject position, enabling the construction of a responsible identity built against the common enemy of industrial farming. As Interbev (French meat lobby) defines it in one of their campaigns:

“Flexi – what? Flexitarian! Which seeks to define and promote this way of life in its own way: ‘The flexitarian is the omnivore of the 21st century, an enlightened consumer who eats both animal and vegetable foods... He is a fan of vegetables and legumes, but also

a meat-lover, in just the right quantities. He has chosen a lifestyle that respects his body, but also the planet. By eating better, in a more reasoned way, he can favor quality meat from responsible and sustainable production.” (Marsolier-Kergoat & Treich, 2019)

This new articulation with the nodal point of flexibility also reflects the creation of what is arguably an *empty* nodal point; the term is articulated around positive yet ambiguous signifiers of “enlightenment”, “freedom”, “pleasure”, “health”, “fairness” and “responsibility”. Similar to the nodal point “eco-gastronomy” (van Bommel & Spicer, 2011), “flexitarianism” seeks to link disparate signifiers, strengthen their relationship, and create a common identity. Indeed, ‘flexitarian’ is a position that many could identify with, thereby, embracing an ethical positioning toward meat. The previous nodal point of ‘animal welfare’ is, in this configuration, incorporated into a flexitarian position, as flexitarianism would also facilitate the diminution of animal suffering.

Through this widening scope of identification, being a flexitarian is, therefore, the new ethical position, eligible for various readings. It is not too extreme and represents a rational and comfortable positioning for consumers. As such, through the construction of industrial farming as a common enemy, local meat is constructed as both “happy” and “sustainable”. This pragmatic solutioning of various urgent issues (climate crisis, health and animal suffering) leads to the construction of an attractive subject position. Our study, thus, reveals the centrality of creating a common identity to build consensus within discursive struggles and entice consumers to identify with market projects in logics of co-optation.

This co-optation mechanism, characterized by the construction of new and empty nodal points is outlined in Table A.2.

Insert Table A.2 here

3.2 Naturalizing logic to discredit symbolic forms of contestation

While logics of co-optation served to integrate practical forms of contestation, we also observed the development of another logic of market legitimacy maintenance which responds to the development of symbolic forms of contestation. While the market for meat is subject to critique due to its ethical and environmental material impacts, the consumption of meat per se and what it symbolically implies for animals is additionally contested as a result of the rise of a vegan discourse. The vegan discourse is, indeed, constructed not around an end to animal “suffering”, but rather towards an end to animal “exploitation”, which rejects the very existence of meat.

Through this counter-hegemonic discourse, market meanings are challenged, deconstructed, and replaced; for example, meat is articulated with signifiers of “criminality”. Here, ‘animal welfare’ as a concept is deconstructed, as French animal philosopher Florence Burgat outlines:

“Dizzy... A soft word for skull cracking and destruction of part of the brain, violent asphyxiation, or electric shocks. Dizzy? Because they are still needed alive at the time of bleeding, hear the slitting of the throat, so that the animals can quickly drain their blood thanks to their still beating heart. Still others are not stunned, but slaughtered in full consciousness for religious reasons, while the fish agonize for a long time in nets or on the deck of boats. Whatever the method, the animals are killed against their will, often in great suffering, conscious of their imminent death, terrified by what is happening to them.” (Message et al., 2016)

The “non-human animal” becomes a subject, thereby, constructing meat as murder. In this discourse, meat itself as a concept cannot be legitimate.

This form of contestation is symbolic as it cannot be integrated into the market. This results in another form of market legitimacy maintenance that does not result in meaning alignment and reconstruction, as developed in previous literature, but rather leads to object and subject

positions meaning naturalization. Our findings show that this naturalization logic involves (1) counter-hegemonic *discourse decredibilization* and (2) *mythical stabilization*, as outlined below.

3.2.1 *Decredibilization: symbolic contestation as irrational*

The naturalizing logic through which legitimacy is maintained when faced with symbolic contestation, involves the decredibilization of the counter-hegemonic discourse. This is consistent with Luyckx and Janssens (2016), who theorize “discursive antagonism” – which is based on discrediting criticism and its advocates – as a form of legitimation. Our results suggest that this process only applies to symbolic forms of contestation.

Although the vegan discourse also (re)articulates its argument around the significant challenges of the climate crisis and health in order to offer a less ‘emotional’ reading, its post-humanistic position is considered too extreme for the mainstream:

“PETA in the United States or L214 in France practice a method that has been used for centuries by all preachers: using reasonable arguments – environmental and health protection, better use of resources, defense of animal welfare, more respectful breeding and slaughter conditions – to convince in the end of a belief that is a matter of faith. In this case, that the beast is the equal of man, that killing it is a crime and that its breeding, exploitation, and eating should be prohibited. Despite the favorable echoes in magazines, the fact that this discourse has little traction does not eliminate the problem of over-consumption of meat and the conditions of its production.” (Géné, 2016)

Above, we see rational and ‘reasonable’ contestations (therefore, *practical*) constructed as superior to those that are ‘ideological’ in nature (namely, *symbolic*). This approach reveals the limits of objectivity, with animal welfare, climate change and/or health issues taken as objective and rational threats for which the newly created flexitarianism is a pragmatic response:

“Thinking of banning it is fanaticism. It is, however, possible to put forward a different approach, which can be summed up as follows: eat less meat and better-quality meat.”
(Géné, 2016)

Here, antagonism is made clear and exorcized; humanism remains inside the limits of objectivity, through the construction of post-humanism as anti-natural and a threat to humanity:

“Those who stand up for a way of life, a culture or a civilization are accused by the vegan of defending irrational traditions and customs that should be legitimately dismissed. Yet this is where vegan hypnosis must be fought. It is normal that man is the measure of the world. There is in veganism an abstract relationship to the animal, which cuts it off from its place in human history and tears it away from the long history of civilization. It is in the name of civilization that we must oppose it and of the fruitful relationship between man and animals, infinitely richer than that proposed by those who use the animal cause to curse humanity.” (Bock-Côté, 2019)

Through this mechanism, the vegan activist subject position is constructed as irrational and emotive. Its credibility is, thus, undermined, and its ability to delegitimize the market for meat questioned. This logic of naturalization is further supported by a mythical stabilization of meaning in relation to the market for meat.

3.2.2 Stabilizing meat through mythical narratives

The naturalization logic that emerges for maintaining meat legitimacy also involves meaning stabilization through the adoption of mythical narratives. In the context of the market for meat, we observed that where legitimacy is symbolically contested, this is sustained through a mythical and humanist reassessment of the natural necessity of eating meat. Through this, meat is rearticulated as natural and the subordination of farm animals as necessary to constitute a normal and “human” subject position. As an outcome, we observe the construction of a dominant and superior “carnivore” position:

“Faced with these cases of abuse in slaughterhouses, is there no other choice than vegetarianism or veganism? Isn’t it natural to eat meat? Doesn’t a lion in the savannah cause greater suffering to its prey? And doesn’t one deprive farmers of precious support by ceasing to be carnivorous?” (Mouterde, 2016)

“The carnivores hunt by instinct and eat their meat with pleasure. Homo sapiens are no exception to the rule. (...) Meat is therefore part of our deep nature and brings us essential nutrients.” (Mainsant, 2015)

Meat, therefore, aims to reconnect with our true human nature through the acceptance of death as developed by philosophers, such as, Alain Finkielkraut, who responds to a journalist in the following abstract:

“In ‘L’Humanité carnivore’, Florence Burgat [a French animal-ethics philosopher] advocates replacing animal meat with cultivated meat⁴. What do you think of this vertiginous option?

Personally, this option frightens me. It’s the scenario of a humanity that would only live surrounded by its own products. The philosopher Roger Scruton wrote a very beautiful text entitled ‘Eating our friends’. It is possible to raise animals under certain favorable conditions and, therefore, to eat them differently. I understand that this idea is intolerable to some people. But the prospect of a humanity that would never get out of itself terrifies me.” (Lacroix & Rosencher, 2018)

We observe in discourses this assimilation of human to carnivorous predator, a lexical device used to naturalize meat consumption. Humanist discourse is littered with such “natural” discursive strategies; meat-eating is one key trait by which we have characterized ourselves as

⁴ Also known as ‘cultured meat’, cultivated meat, as a form of cellular agriculture, is an animal meat that is produced by cultivating animal cells directly.

humans, and to stop eating meat would mean to cease being superior as human beings. Meat has enabled humans to rise and constitute themselves into a position of domination, as expressed by a meat consumer: *“It just makes me happy to be there, holding the fork, enthroned at the top of the food chain. I am ready to dominate the animal, at least mentally”* (Mouterde, 2016); or as explained by a philosopher: *“It is the regular addition of meat to an essentially vegan diet that has catalyzed the hominization of primates and thus allowed Homo sapiens to dominate the planet.”* (Tounian, 2017). Our results suggest that through this process of naturalization, market meanings are placed outside the sphere of public debate (Humphreys & Thompson, 2014), thereby, neutralizing symbolic contestation.

This stabilization mechanism, characterized by the decredibilization of symbolic contestation and mythical narratives is outlined in Table A.3.

Insert Table A.3 here

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, we offer core contributions regarding politics of markets and consumer subjectivities in processes of market legitimacy. We then consider policy implications and suggest avenues for future research.

The post-politics of markets

Our findings extend literature on market legitimation as a political activity, where practices and meanings are continuously contested (Dinnin Huff et al., 2021). Previous work has examined the role of consumer movements and protests in changing markets (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004; Weijo et al., 2018). Dinnin Huff et al. (2021) focus on the way objects and their materiality can reconfigure markets when contested. Here, we go further to show how both

object and subject position meanings are intertwined, placing emphasis on how meanings and their interplay perform a crucial role in resolving market opposition.

More specifically, our research reveals the existence of two logics of either incorporating or neutralizing critique through meaning transformation or naturalization. In doing so, this study explicates how market meanings are (re)articulated and (re)created over time and examines the role of contestation as a vehicle for both change and preservation through naturalization. The co-optation logic is characterized by its emptiness and consensus-building, whereas the naturalization logic is distinguished by the neutralization and instrumentalization of the contestation. These two different logics of market legitimacy maintenance are summarized in Table A.4.

Insert Table A.4 here

First, regarding the co-optation logic, we showed how practical contestations are incorporated through the adoption of alternative discourse signifiers and the creation of new nodal points. We identified and developed the importance of the *emptiness* of created nodal points as contestations mount. Indeed, the emptiness of newly adopted signifiers and nodal points is crucial as contestation mounts. Our findings suggest that, for example, emptiness reinforces the “win-win strategy” (Ferns & Amaeshi, 2019). This aspect of co-optation logic, where meanings must be diluted, has not been examined in previous literature on market transformation. For example, when Giesler (2012) examined botox meaning recreation, he considered this process as permanent without questioning the consistency of recreated meanings and their role in maintaining market legitimacy. Thus, continuously changing meanings involve the development of emptiness and ambiguity to support consensus. We warn, however, that such extensions of consensus through the creation of ambiguous nodal points may increase the risk of critique, by diluting existing concepts and their meanings. Legitimacy maintenance through

co-optation, in attempting to remove all conflict and integrate a set of plural demands, demonstrates this potential shortcoming.

Second, while Dinnin Huff et al. (2021) show how the market only stabilizes around *changing* meanings, our research reveals that stabilizing can also involve meaning naturalization through contestation neutralization and the use of mythical narratives. This naturalization logic, rather than incorporate contestations, instead accentuates them, accepts them, and takes advantage of their existence to reinforce its own legitimacy through normalization. This reveals the ability of a market to shape social reality and political struggles around societal issues. More specifically, our findings offer a better understanding of the use of a mythical narrative for legitimation. As Giesler & Veresiu (2014) argue, “marketplace mythologies serve to naturalize culturally constituted systems of consumption within particular social settings and time periods” (p. 853). We observed how marketplace mythologies serve the naturalization of market meanings in the particular setting of symbolic contestation. Also, our findings suggest that actors differ in the way they are positioned in the development of two logics of market legitimacy maintenance. In the naturalization logic, philosophers are central and facilitate the diffusion of myths, giving them the status of rationality. Whereas in the co-optation logic, pragmatic and consensual reasoning are central, with scientific discourse omnipotent. This observation points to the evolving normative power of certain discourses in the process of hegemony.

Research suggests that market transformation is a political process – a space of contestation and power relations between actors that struggle to stabilize a specific hegemonic project (Dinnin Huff et al., 2021). Our research, on the other hand, expands and enriches current perspectives by suggesting that the market may also be a critical post-political space (Mouffe, 2005). It is a space where political contestation is repressed and transformed by rationality to develop a pragmatic and universal consensus. Here, the market uses both co-optation and naturalization

as a way to eliminate conflict, reject ideological division, and render its meanings more consensual. Counter-hegemonic discourses are elevated to the ‘ultra-political’, associated with the idea of extremism, whereas, practical demands are incorporated to further maintain a semblance of unity within the discursive formation. Social changes are resolved and fulfilled without antagonistic struggles, but rather through pragmatic, market-based solutions (Dey et al., 2016).

Market legitimacy and logics of governmentality

This study also provides some insights into the question of how identities can be a leverage for market legitimization. Previous research has focused on market product construction and meaning transformation in legitimization (Dinnin Huff et al., 2021; Giesler, 2012), whereas we highlight the need to focus on both object and subject positions in the construction and maintenance of legitimacy. Taking Giesler’s (2012) botox product as an example, the market would, from this perspective, not only construct the brand image of the botox product but also the botox users’ subject position, with both being essential to market legitimacy maintenance. Moreover, literature in consumer research on market system dynamics has merged market dynamics with consumer identity projects (Arnould & Thompson, 2005), privileging a postmodernist understanding of identity and its role in market transformation. By employing a discursive-hegemonic view of the market as a discursive formation constituted by several actors and discourses, that supports the articulation of a common object/subject position, we were able to theorize linkages in which subject position articulations are supportive of market legitimacy. In doing so, we develop a conceptualization of market legitimization that responds to calls for a post-structuralist and discursive study of market dynamics and identities (Karababa & Ger, 2011; Veresiu & Giesler, 2019).

From our work, we can see that market products and object meanings are not the only agents to play a significant role in legitimation. Their constant recreation and stabilization also involve the construction of subjectivities. For example, the emptiness extension – characteristic of a co-optation logic – is also revealed through subject positioning. This research exposes the centrality of creating a common identity to build consensus within discursive struggles and entice consumers to identify with market projects in logics of co-optation.

Subject interpellation is crucial in mitigating contestation, and consumer subjectivities should be included in research on market evolution. Although the role of objects (Dinnin Huff et al., 2021) and their conceptualization (through branding, for example; see Giesler, 2012) in contestation mitigation has been studied, market reconfiguration also plays a role in terms of subjectivity.

This study argues that governmentality is, therefore, a powerful tool in market evolution. This extends previous work on governmentality processes and the formation of consumer subjectivities (Giesler & Veresiu, 2014; Veresiu & Giesler, 2019) by providing a longitudinal account of the governmentality processes by which a market constructs both its consumer and adversary identities. A key concept of governmentality is the dispositive (Foucault, 1980), which establishes and normalizes models of ideal subjectivity. Our findings, however, suggest that the construction of these models, which are subject positions, differs according to the two logics of market maintenance.

We suggest that the construction of subjectivity through the naturalization logic rests on a dualist and antagonistic process of “we” versus “them”, whereas the construction of subjectivity through the co-optation logic rests on a process of constructing a consensual and common identity. For example, the position of the vegan activists, which is part of the contestation of market legitimacy, is clearly identified as a common enemy and becomes central in the construction of the meat-consumer identity as being “anti-vegan”. This decredibilization

process, rather than relying on creating an attractive subject position, therefore, involves a process of dualistic identity construction: the vegan position is backgrounded and instrumentalized as a way to put the meat consumer in the spotlight (as rational, masculine and strong). This suggests the importance of stigma construction in naturalization logic. Research has pointed to how markets can be a place of (de)stigmatization (Mirabito et al., 2016). Our findings, however, highlight the importance of stigma in logics of market legitimation and the differentiating effects of stigma depending on which of the two market legitimacy maintenance logics are active.

The mobilization of mythical narratives is also crucial to the formation of an attractive, universal and naturalized subject position. Myths are, therefore, not simply resources for consumer identity projects (Thompson, 2004), but rather a powerful discursive instrument of interpellation. This mythical presence creates a normative presumption of common sense, thereby, reinforcing the affective potential of the hegemonic project and forming a new objectivity (Dey et al., 2016). This potential helps to explain why the market for meat maintains its position despite documented environmental impacts (Ferns & Amaeshi, 2019).

Public policy implications

The legitimacy of meat has been of ongoing significance in public discourse. Our theorization of meat legitimacy maintenance unpacks for practitioners the nuances and interactions of the legitimation process. This research has strong public policy implications in providing an improved understanding as to why meat consumption and the market for meat remains legitimate even in the face of significant criticism, including, climate change. To grasp the mechanisms of the hegemonic maintenance of meat enables practitioners to better construct discourses for more plant-based diets. Insights are important in underpinning policy decisions, such as, taxation on meat, where our findings reveal this would construct meat consumption as

essential for the construction of a “normal” subjectivity. Rather, such a policy would first require the development of a negative reconstruction of meat and meat-eaters representations.

As such, it will be important to observe how markets for “plant-based meat” and “cultivated meat” position themselves in relation to this contested arena. If they situate their offerings within a logic of co-optation, as in the continuation of an existent market for meat, their legitimacy might be at risk of being ambivalent.

Future research

Additional research could examine these logics in different contexts, which might further illuminate the role of the two identified logics in market legitimacy maintenance. Are there contexts where contestation succeeds in delegitimation even though such logics have been developed? Or where the strategies developed by counter-hegemonic movements succeeded? As developed above, what demands were able to participate in the market delegitimation and counter logics of market legitimacy maintenance? Future research may, therefore, draw on this discursive and hegemonic perspective to explore more fully these logics through comparative cases.

Furthermore, one domain that has been underexplored in our work is the evolving role of each stakeholder in the hegemonic discourse. Through different forms of contestation, this research highlights a strong interaction between discrete types of discourse in the process of hegemonization. Even if our results suggest that discourses that are part of the discursive formation have evolutive normative power (e.g., scientific, philosophic), different contexts could further illuminate these evolutions. This is important as, for example, scientific discourses become more contested and their role as legitimizer could be depreciated (McCormick, 2007). On the contrary, philosophical discourses seem to play a key role in the development of mythical narratives for legitimacy purposes. There is potential in reconciling the definition of a market to the definition of a dispositive as: “A thoroughly heterogenous ensemble consisting

of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral, and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid. (...) The dispositive itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements” (Foucault, 1980, p. 194). Future research could examine the evolution of this interplay in the process of legitimacy maintenance.

We suggest that work examining politics and post-politics of the market would benefit from our discursive-hegemonic definition of the market, encompassing the actions of a diverse set of actors, thereby, potentially leading to a redefinition of existing concepts and their interrelations, such as, meta-markets (Dinnin Huff et al., 2021) or organizational fields (Hoffman, 1999).

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Key Concepts	Definitions
Articulation	Discourse as a practice of creation, adoption, and linkage between signifiers and nodal points.
Discourse	A practice of social reality construction.
Discursive Formation	An assemblage of discourses enunciated by different actors that supports a common articulation of the system object/subject positions (e.g., a market, an organizational field or a social movement).
Nodal Point	Key signs through which signifiers are linked in a coherent way and with apparent stability.
Signifier	Units of meaning (literal terms, actions, concepts).
Signifying Chain	An assemblage of signifiers and nodal points giving an object or subject position its meaning.
Subject-Position	Discursive construction of identity with points of individual identifications.

Table A.1. Key concepts and their definitions (adapted from Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000)



Nodal point	Principal actors in the discursive formation/ reproduction	Concepts		Dominant consumer subject position
		Animal	Meat	
Economic	State, Zootechnics, Media	Industrial Object	Industrial Product	Citizen-Consumer
 Contestation: “Practical” – Contesting Over-Industrialization				
Animal Welfare (Empty)	Lobbies, Industry, Media, State	Object capable of suffering	Happy Meat	Compassionate Carnivore
 Contestation: “Practical” – Contesting Environmental & Health Impacts				
Flexitarianism (Empty)	Lobbies, Industry, Media, State	Object capable of suffering	Pleasure	Flexitarian

Table A.2. Logics of meat market legitimacy maintenance facing practical forms of contestation: co-optation and the articulation of empty nodal points



Nodal point	Principal actors in the discursive formation/ reproduction	Concepts		Dominant consumer subject position
		Animal	Meat	
Flexitarianism (Empty)	Lobbies, Industry, Media, State	Object capable of suffering	Pleasure	Flexitarian
 Contestation: “Symbolic” – A Reconstruction of the Market for Meat Meanings				
Criminality	NGOs, activists, media, philosophers	Sentient	Murder	Vegan
 Naturalization: Decredibilization and mythical stabilization				
Natural	Lobbies, Industry, Media, State, Philosophers	Object capable of suffering	Necessary	Carnivore

Table A.3. Logics of meat market legitimacy maintenance facing symbolic forms of contestation: naturalization through decredibilization and mythical stabilization

Discursive-Hegemonic Logic of Market Legitimacy Maintenance	Co-optation	Naturalization
Purpose	Consensus-building, negotiation, and integration of practical forms of contestation	Discrediting symbolic forms of contestation
Functioning	Nodal-point creation and articulation. Emptiness	Naturalization of the market and consumption practice through mythical narratives. Conflict Acceptance and Instrumentalization
Types of discourses mobilized	Use of scientific and “rational” discourses	Use of historic and philosophical discourses
Limits	Meaning contradictions, development and dissolution of symbolic demands	Limiting the audience

Table A.4. Logics of market legitimacy maintenance