

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

Food safety has become a subject of public as well as academic debate over the past decade, ever since a series of food scares placed the safety of a range of foods, and particularly meat, (back) onto the policy agenda across Europe. This study begins its journey in the early 1990s in rural England and from there will move on to Germany, the Netherlands, and finally, the policy setting of the European Union (EU). In each of these four contexts, food safety policy came to be a contested policy field as a result of a series of food scares, such as the discovery of the possible link between the cattle disease Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (hereafter BSE), which, according to the current scientific consensus, developed out of industrial feeding practices, and a new variant of Creutzfeld-Jakob-Disease (hereafter nvCJD), its fatal human counterpart.

The series of food scares, however, were taken up in divergent ways across the contexts to be studied here. To begin with, German and Dutch authorities as well as the European Commission long considered BSE to be a British problem that could be confined to national boundaries by means of import bans. When domestic cases of the disease were discovered in Germany, however, BSE was broadly received as a symptom of the ills of industrialized agricultural food production, and politicians consequently called for an Agricultural Turnaround (*Agrarwende*). In England, where BSE, also known as ‘mad cow disease’, hit the hardest in numerical terms, calls for ‘putting the consumer first’ dominated the BSE episode as well as criticisms of a ‘policy culture of secrecy’. Both in Germany and in England, policymakers reacted with a promise to remove the influential agrarian lobby from food (safety) policymaking. In contrast, upon the discovery of BSE in the Netherlands, the Dutch authorities understood BSE to require more efficient coordination and improved safety controls and dismissed the German call for a de-intensification of food production. Despite these *divergent* interpretations of what these threats to food safety stood for, however, food safety now constitutes one of the most harmonized EU policy areas.

This study explores the reasons for which the very same risks are taken up in divergent ways across national contexts and over time, and why, in spite of this divergence, we have also seen the rapid and successful mobilization of a common, transnational, EU-based policy approach in the domain of food safety. The paradox between divergence on the national level and apparent convergence at the level of the EU motivate the central research questions of this study:

1. How has food safety been taken up as a policy issue in England, Germany, and the Netherlands since the 1990s?
2. How can we explain the different ways in which food safety has been taken up across the national contexts?
3. How can we explain the emergence of a transnational policy approach, given the divergence on the national level?

In my approach to these questions, I begin with the assertion that food safety is not a coherent concept with a single meaning but takes on different connotations depending on the context in which it is articulated. In other words, food *safety* does not solely refer to the technical qualities of an end-product (such as the hygienic handling of meat). Transcending micro-biological qualities of a particular product, food safety denotes the control of every step ‘from farm to fork’: the way a farm animal is raised and fed; where it is transported and by what means; the way it is slaughtered and consequently turned into sausage, ham, pork chops, or dog food; the way meat is subsequently distributed; checked for its safety; who finally consumes it and how, and on the basis of whose nutrition advice.

Throughout their travels, foodstuffs hence take on a variety of connotations, and the policy fields that are touched upon during those travels along the ‘food chain’ have increasingly been merging. Food safety becomes linked to agricultural policy, then to environmental problems, is then set in relation to public health as well as consumer protection policy, and, finally, turns into a policy issue of individual health, too, when the fight against rising obesity rates becomes a subfield of food policy. While ‘food policy’, for the purpose of this study, denotes the broader frame of reference, I refer to the object of inquiry as *food (safety)* - with parentheses - throughout this thesis in order to do justice to the dynamic and fluid nature of what food (safety) policy stands for and how it has developed over the past decade.¹

In recognition of this fluidity and the contextual contingency of the meaning of food (safety), as a preliminary definition, food (safety) policy can be understood as a *policy discourse*, denoting ‘a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorizations that are produced, reproduced and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities’ (Hajer 1995: 44). At the same time, a discourse analysis is a political analysis, as it helps us consider the dominant positions of certain actor formations that

¹ When referring to institutional responsibilities that concern controls for food safety in the strict sense (e.g. measures to prevent food poisoning), however, I leave out the parentheses. At times, I will refer to the construction of distinctions between food safety and food quality, hence also leaving the term spelled out.

are informed by and together push for particular discourses in a hegemonic manner while others remain marginal.

In line with interpretive approaches in policy analysis (cf. Fischer 2003; Fischer and Forester 1987; Hajer 1995; Hajer and Wagenaar 2003; Wagenaar forthcoming; Yanow 1996; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006), the concept of discourse (with its emphasis on meaning), notably, is not limited to its linguistic connotation, i.e. sets of words, or the utterances of individual persons. Instead, I view discourses as embodied in particular, material practices, through which they become reproduced and contested. For instance, on the concrete, empirical micro-level of an organization or institution, discourses can be identified in the organization's declared aims (e.g. the mission of a given consumer association or a governmental food safety agency), the range and nature of its activities, and its strategic (non-)participation in coalitions and alliances.

Accordingly, this study draws on written and spoken material from governmental food (safety) agencies, members of the food and feed industry, and non-governmental organizations (hereafter NGOs), including policy documents, reports, minutes of meetings and parliamentary debates, speeches, press releases, and newsletters. Beyond qualitative document analysis, this study draws on over 60 interviews with governmental officials, scientists, journalists, nutritionists, members of the food and farming industry, and NGOs in the areas of environmental protection and consumer advocacy (see appendix A for the list of interviews conducted). Rather than beginning from the commonly assumed distinction between policymakers, scientists, members of the industry, and citizen groups as separate actor-categories in the policymaking process, the primary aim of these interviews was to 'parse' the logics that define actors' modes of operation and to infer the relative strength of rival discourses that inform the policymaking process, both at a national and at the transnational level of the EU. In other words, this thesis begins by identifying discourses, not pre-given actors. Below, I provide additional motivation for and explanation of the two-fold focus of this study.

1.1 Diversity and Convergence: beyond a comparative approach

Within the existing literature on the effects of the food scares, scholars have either constructed single-country case studies - i.e. addressed 'food safety crises' in a given country - or contextualized those in a comparative framework. Most frequently, both these types of studies have been based on the analysis of one single food scare - most commonly BSE (e.g. Millstone and van Zwanenberg 2005; Oosterveer 2002; Loeber and Hajer 2007; Vos and Wendler 2006). Beyond comparison, studies have increasingly focused on the transnational, global dimension of food (safety) issues (e.g. Oosterveer 2007), and some scholars have specifically addressed the

process of European integration in this area (Ansell and Vogel 2006; Vos 2000; Oosterveer 2002; Loeber and Hajer 2007).

While studies in these fields have generated important questions and insights, a key aspect has not been discussed: how to explain the parallel developments of, on the one hand, a growing transnational policy discourse in this policy area and, on the other hand, the different ways in which food (safety) has been taken up as a policy issue in individual policy contexts. To begin with, the divergence across countries requires a comparative framework that can account for the differences in interpretation. At the same time, rather than focusing on a single food scare, a diachronic approach is necessary in order to assess the relative significance of one or another food scare and the ways in which earlier experiences of food scares (and other experiences related to food) can shape the experience of later ones. Likewise, a study of the apparent convergence at the level of the EU requires an approach that is sensitive to empirical detail in developments over time.

The existing approaches to Europeanization offer some insights but only limited tools for the development of such a two-fold approach. In much of the scholarship, Europeanization refers to the impact of EU policy on the domestic level (for instance, Risse, Cowles, and Caporaso 2001). Such a ‘top-down’ or ‘download’ view of Europeanization, however, leaves us with little consideration for the discursive specificities of national contexts, and tends to presume a ‘natural’ development of EU policy whenever the nature of a particular policy issue ‘objectively’ requires transnational cooperation. The second main strand of this scholarship conceptualized Europeanization as a ‘bottom-up’ mechanism. In this view, member states seek to ‘upload’ their preferences and ‘interests’ onto the transnational level, as a result of which Europeanization of particular policy fields will take place. Chapter two will engage with this literature in more detail, but for now it suffices to note that this study is situated in between these two extremes as it considers both divergence on the national level and convergence at the transnational level. While mindful of the circumvention of some of the theoretical contradictions between the two conceptual extremes, in this study, the term Europeanization generally denotes the successful development of a transnational, EU-based approach whereby particular events, phenomena, and ‘facts’ are *re-narrated* and the meaning of ‘food safety’ and thereby rearticulated as transnational issues in a specific vocabulary. In contrast to other scholars of Europeanization, however, I do not take EU policy discourse as a given in its degree of harmonization. In fact, the very observation of (regulatory) harmonization in light of the heterogeneity discernible at the level of individual countries leads me to scrutinize and question the apparent ‘harmony’ at the level of EU policy discourse.

By analyzing food (safety) policy as a case of *Europeanization*, this study offers both empirical and conceptual contributions to the existing literature. This study demonstrates that Europeanization is not a process that will ‘naturally’ occur when a given policy issue requires such a policy approach. Instead, this thesis posits that Europeanization hinges upon the negotiation of common, shared understandings around events, phenomena, or discoveries. It is therefore crucial to investigate what these ‘shared understandings’ are, and to reconstruct the development of the vocabulary on the basis of which seemingly pre-defined actors in the policy process, such as scientists, members of the industry, policymakers, as well as environmental campaigners and consumer organizations, have come to communicate about ‘food safety’ in a transnational setting. While refraining from hypothesizing causal relations, this study offers new ways to study the formulation of policy in contentious areas. Taking such insights further, the reader may infer claims regarding the quality of interaction and vocabulary required in transnational policy discourse that forms the backdrop of both policy formulation and implementation.

In order to further delineate the object of inquiry for this thesis, the next section discusses, first, the features of the pre-BSE policy infrastructure in general terms, highlighting the special status of agricultural food production in European integration, the role of the industry, and the related institutional infrastructure. Second, in subsection 1.2.2, I capture the return of food (safety) onto the policy agenda across countries as the result of two ‘boundary transgressions’: the national/transnational boundary and the distinction between animal health and human health (that is, the species barrier). Subsequently, subsection 1.2.3 recounts the most prominent food scares since the 1990s, as they will structure the presentation of the discourse analysis in the empirical chapters of this thesis.

1.2 Trembling cows, shaky boundaries: the status of food (safety) in the EU

1.2.1 The status ante quo

This subsection discusses the central features of the pre-BSE policy infrastructure on the transnational level for the purpose of better understanding the disruptive impact of the food (safety) issues that marked the 1990s and early twenty-first century. The aim is to provide the reader with an initial snapshot of the status ante quo, as food (safety) and agricultural food production carried very specific meanings in Europe after WWII, and these meanings were to shape the development of an EU-based food (safety) policy approach, too.

Until the 1990s, food (safety) was typically a matter of national regulation in the EU, and regulatory styles as well as the historical development of food (safety) regulation (including food

safety standards, the role of public health agencies, and consumer advocacy) varied across contexts for a considerable period of time, certainly until the arrival of the EU single market. Although the European Commission had been preoccupied with regulating foodstuffs since the 1960s, its efforts remained driven by the technically defined economic objective to secure the free movement of goods within the internal market. EU intervention in this largely nationally regulated policy field was therefore reserved for particular instances where food (safety) regulation was considered to be a potential trade barrier.

Beyond the effect of the internal market principle, the development of a broader food (safety) policy approach was hampered by the fact that EU institutions were not designed to deal with food (safety) or consumer protection, let alone public health (Vos 2000). The development of food (safety) policy at the EU level was hindered by inefficient institutional coordination, given that responsibility for food (safety) was compartmentalized between Directorate-General (DG) VI (Agriculture), DG III (formerly Internal Market, then Industry), and the Consumer Protection Service, and the Directorate for Health and Safety (DG V).

An additional feature of the pre-BSE regulatory infrastructure concerned the position of scientific experts. A lack of synergy and coordination among the dispersed scientific committees reproduced an exclusive and insufficiently transparent system of expertise. Moreover, the committees' exemption from clear supervision rendered them unaccountable and prone to political pressures from national member states and industry actors. When BSE was first discovered on the European continent in 2000, the institutionalized authority of scientific experts was called into question, and experts were charged with dishonesty, incompetence, and with working in the interest of the food industry, rather than for consumers. While these accusations occupied a particularly important role in the post-BSE policy discourse in the English context, one can also observe them in Germany and the institutional context of the European Parliament (hereafter EP).

Beyond inefficient coordination, lack of institutional design, and the overriding principle of free trade, the specific status of agricultural production in post-WWII Europe marked the slow development of an EU-based food (safety) policy. Building on the post-war shared understanding that food security, nutrition, and agricultural productivity would constitute the primary policy priorities, the Treaty of Rome establishing the European Economic Community (EEC), signed on 25 March 1957, already comprised the foundational provisions of the Common Agricultural Policy (hereafter CAP). The relationship between the Community authorities and the representatives of the agricultural sector was left unaddressed by the Treaty, but the Commission expressed its interest in close cooperation early on and invited

representatives of agricultural organizations to attend the 1958 Stresa Conference (Italy) as observers.

The most far-reaching agreement reached at the Stresa conference was to support agriculture by means of guaranteeing that the prices that farmers would receive for their products would not fall below a certain level. In addition to the position of member states, the CAP was influenced by transnational industry actors, too - for instance, by the Committee of Professional Agricultural Organisations (COPA), an EU-based agricultural lobbying group which was founded in as early as September 1958. This lobby organization, notably, was not only present at the founding conference in 1958 in Stresa but has since continued to view itself as a partner in policymaking, rather than a lobby group (EU11-FA; cf. Grant 1993).²

Long before the discovery of BSE on the continent, therefore, agricultural (food) policy occupied a 'special status', which came to be reflected in the number of administrators allocated to the former DGVI, as well as in the extraordinarily influential policymaking role of the Council of Ministers in this domain (Chalmers 1999).³ Due to this 'special status' of the CAP, for a considerable period of time, food and agricultural production was neither linked to food (safety) nor to consumer protection or public health. Equally, concerns regarding environmental sustainability did not become integrated into agricultural policy until later, as chapter seven will show, and a focus on sustaining an efficient and productive internal market remained dominant until food (safety) was taken up as a more broadly defined transnational issue in the late twentieth century.

A notable exception was the EP, where consumer protection featured more strongly in policy discussions than in other EC institutions. At the dawn of the BSE crisis, the food (safety) infrastructure had also started to show some signs of change; for instance, the area of consumer protection had been firmly institutionalized in the 'independent' Consumer Policy Service in 1989. Yet this institutional move and thereby the introduction of a stronger consumer policy did not receive immediate attention (Chalmers 1999: 105), even though the legal competence of the Consumer Policy Service was extended through the Maastricht Treaty in 1991. Over the years, a considerable number of initiatives followed, each progressing towards the establishment of consumer protection as a central tenet of European policy making (Burgess 2001: 97ff).

² Another prominent organization in the field was the Commission of Food and Drink Industries, which was replaced by the CIAA (Confederation of Food and Drink Industries of the EEC) in 1982.

³ In 1999, what was then called the Directorate-General for Agriculture (DG AGRI) employed nearly 1,000 administrators and spent 40 billion Euros per year (Chalmers 1999: 98).

To sum up, the following central features characterized the pre-BSE EU regulatory regime: the overriding principle of the internal market and the free movement of goods therein; the authoritative status of scientific experts; the special political status of the CAP; the influence of the food and feed industry in agricultural policy; the entrenched role of member state policymakers, institutionalized in the powerful position of the Council of Ministers; and the resultant disadvantaged position of consumer health and consumer protection concerns.

Beyond these institutionalized features, the pre-BSE food safety regime was characterized by two sets of boundaries: the species barriers, which disconnected animal health from human health, and the national/transnational boundary. In the next subsection, I shall address the disintegration of these boundaries.

1.2.2 What's in a border? The transgression of two boundaries

Following the aforementioned announcement of the link between BSE and nvCJD in March 1996, the EU announced a worldwide export ban on all British cattle and beef on 27 March, which constituted an unprecedented measure.⁴ Particularly given the principle of the free movement of foodstuffs within the EU internal market as one of the founding ideas in the establishment and institutionalization of the EU, this reaction constituted one of the key moments of transformation during the BSE crisis. As Tim Lang puts it (Lang 1998: 76), just at the moment when human beings no longer needed a passport to cross borders, cows now actually had to have one.

Contesting the notion that BSE was solely a 'British problem', the government of the United Kingdom (hereafter UK), in turn, initiated a policy of non co-operation with EU partners until the ban would be lifted, and applied to the European Court of Justice to have the ban overturned in May 1996. In late June of that year, the European Heads of Government agreed to the 'Florence Framework' established for the progressive removal of the ban.⁵ Even though the ban imposed by the EU was finally lifted in August 1999, things did not immediately return to 'business as usual'. Rather, the EU-based decision to lift the ban was met with resistance in some

⁴ Commission Decision 96/293/EC installed a prohibition of exports from the UK of bovine animals, their semen and embryos; meat of bovine animals slaughtered in the UK which may enter the animal feed or human food chain or materials destined for use in medicinal products, cosmetics or pharmaceutical products; and meat-and-bone-meal (MBM) derived from mammals (Philips, Bridgeman and Ferguson-Smith 1998, Vol. 16:1).

⁵ The Agreement set up five pre-conditions for the resumption of exports (BSE 1998): a selective slaughter programme of 'at risk' animals to speed up the eradication of BSE in the UK as well as improved systems of animal identification and tracing; legislation for the removal of MBM from feed production premises (e.g. mills) and farms; the effective implementation of the Over Thirty Month slaughter scheme (only meat from cattle younger than thirty months is permitted for human consumption); and, finally, a strict and effective removal of specified risk materials from carcasses.

EU member states: Germany delayed its lifting of the ban, and France even upheld the ban until 2002, in spite of a European court ruling that declared the continued French refusal to lift the ban ‘illegal’ (BBC 1998; Millstone and van Zwanenberg 2005). The discovery of BSE in domestic herds in Portugal, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, and Germany between 1999 and 2001 further aggravated this ‘cattle battle’, which reached a peak at the Council Summit in Nice in December 2000. This latter phase is sometimes referred to as the ‘second BSE crisis’ (cf. Oosterveer 2002), which was marked by the virtual disintegration of the national/transnational distinction.

The questioning of national boundaries went alongside a disruption of the concept of a ‘species barrier’ with regard to food (safety), a distinction that had structured the previous policy approach inasmuch as agricultural and food (safety) policy were not integrated with public health and consumer policy. In order to better understand the impact of the crossing of the species-barrier, let us return to February 1986, when ‘cow 133’, raised at a farm in Midhurst, Sussex, died after experiencing head tremors, weight loss, and uncoordinated movements (BBC 1998). These ailments were later identified as symptoms of a novel progressive spongiform encephalopathy in cattle and came to be known as BSE, a disease that belongs to a group of diseases that affect a number of different mammals and are known as Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (TSEs), or prion diseases. The discovery of BSE puzzled scientists and farmers alike, as symptoms of this kind had previously been observed in sheep only.⁶ In October 1987, BSE first made the headlines of a UK national newspaper, which spoke of an ‘incurable disease wiping out dairy cows’ (*Daily Telegraph* 1987, 15 October).

While according to the current state of knowledge, the BSE agent was distributed by the feeding of so-called contaminated Meat-and-Bone Meal (hereafter MBM), the precise cause of BSE remains unclear (DEFRA 2001). Early BSE studies in the 1980s established a resemblance between BSE and a disease that occurs among cannibals in New Guinea. Other scientists hypothesize that the scrapie agent jumped the species barrier of cattle, whereas others assume that BSE might have been an already existing disease, though never diagnosed before, which spread due to modifications in the production of MBM, a by-product of the rendering industry that was used as animal feed (ibid.). Alternative explanations, such as the idea that BSE may have been caused by environmental factors, such as the use of organophosphates (Purdey 1994), or that it could be an inbreeding phenomenon, have also been discussed (BBC2 2001; DEFRA 2001). Strictly speaking, none of these hypotheses has been proven (TSE Forum 2008).

⁶ Scrapie, which affects sheep and goats, has occurred in UK flocks for over 250 years. While some of the symptoms of the disease are very similar to those of BSE - it attacks the nervous system of sheep and goats and causes death - studies have not shown any link between scrapie and human illness (DEFRA 2001; FSA 2001b).

In the scientific community, prion diseases are now commonly assumed to result from the build-up of abnormal prion proteins in the brain and nervous system. Research suggests that the shape of prion proteins (which do occur naturally in animals and humans) can be altered through the consumption of meat infected with BSE (FSA 2001b). If this occurs, changes can be triggered in other proteins in the brain, which may then cause the brain to develop sponge-like features and fill with holes (*ibid.*). This condition, which eventually leads to death, is known as new variant of Creutzfeld-Jakob Disease (nvCJD), a disease of which close to 200 humans worldwide have died at the time of writing (CJD Unit 2008) while an additional 877 victims are assumed to have died as a consequence of BSE (Department of Health 2007; CJD Unit 2008).

Despite the scientific uncertainty that reigned throughout the 1980s and the early 1990s and despite the suspicion that variants of spongiform encephalopathy may bear the capacity to spread from animals to humans, governmental spokespersons and politicians in the UK repeatedly insisted that ‘British beef is perfectly safe to eat’ (see, for instance, BBC 1998). In May of 1990, Minister of Agriculture at the time, John Gummer, even enacted this stance by feeding his daughter a beef burger in front of British press. Yet, some six years later, on 20 March 1996, Health Secretary Stephen Dorrel was forced to announce that there was a possible link between BSE and nvCJD (*ibid.*).

The announcement triggered a wide range of developments. Beef consumption dropped dramatically, in the UK and elsewhere, even if only temporarily.⁷ The government commissioned scientific research on spongiform encephalopathy in cattle, focusing on the nature and cause of BSE/nvCJD and its potential to cross the species barrier. Policymakers urgently needed scientific advances that could provide a basis for policy measures that would restore public trust and guarantee the safety of beef for human consumption. Policy measures and institutional rearrangements were set in place in the affected countries to varying, yet overall significant, extent. New food safety agencies were created in a number of EU member states as well as at the level of the EU. These developments, in turn, incited a flurry of research across the social sciences, dealing with what has become commonly known as the ‘BSE-crisis’.⁸ The contributions of this literature are further discussed in chapter two.

⁷ By May 1996, beef consumption had dropped by about 25% in Britain and 30% all over Europe. Spread over the whole year (1996), however, consumption fell by a mere 7% (COMM 2006a). Beef consumption again dropped rapidly and even more drastically in some countries, such as France, during the ‘second BSE crisis’ in 2000-2001, when BSE was discovered in France and Germany (cf. Oosterveer 2002).

⁸ The problematic aspects of the ‘crisis’ terminology in the context of BSE (cf. Forbes 2004) will be discussed in chapter two, section 2.3.2

As this subsection sought to illustrate by means of reconstructing the breakdown of the two boundaries, using BSE as a primary example, a new research subject emerges that is characterized by the ‘uncanny’ crossing of the species barrier and fundamental scientific uncertainty. Having focused on BSE thus far, below I introduce an overview of the other major food scares over the past decade as I will return to them in the empirical chapters.

1.2.3 Crisis after crisis: An overview of major food scares

Given the range of food scares over the past decade and the diverse interpretations thereof, it is necessary to introduce in some detail the most prominent recent food scares, which are at the center of the present inquiry. The choice of ‘crisis instances’ presented here is based on interview accounts recorded for the purpose of this study, in which interestingly, BSE was not always mentioned when respondents were asked about the most important, or traumatic, food scares experienced in the course of their careers. Notably, food safety risks such as *Campylobacter* bacteria and mycotoxins are left out here, as the focus of my analysis consists of, first, the moments of transformation that have brought about broader shifts in policy discourses, and second, those crisis moments that were transnational in nature.⁹ Moreover, an analysis of the debate surrounding genetically modified organisms would require an in-depth study in its own right.

While most commentators agree that the BSE episode in 1996 constituted the most significant instance of crisis with respect to food (safety) in Western Europe since WWII (see Loeber and Hajer 2007; Oosterveer 2002; Millstone and van Zwanenberg 2006), this study does not limit itself to an analysis of the BSE crisis alone, but takes into account other food scares, such as the discovery of dioxins in meat and dairy products, as well as the repeated outbreaks of swine fever and Foot-and-Mouth Disease (hereafter FMD). Strictly speaking, the latter two instances are matters of veterinary control rather than food (safety).¹⁰ This study, however, does not seek to uncover what something ‘really was’. Instead, the meanings that were attributed to particular diseases and the events around them form the object of inquiry.

Just when the EU institutions began to engage with the subject of food (safety) as an EU competency, in May 1999, it appeared that significant quantities of dioxin had entered the food chain through contaminated animal feed in Belgium. Dioxins are produced in small

⁹ It is also important to note that this study does not address the occurrence of Avian Influenza (AI), also known as ‘bird flu’, because of the recent nature of the issue. The discursive construction of AI as both an animal disease and later a public health risk deserves attention in future research, not least because of the undoubtedly transnational nature of the disease.

¹⁰ Only in very rare cases may FMD be infectious for humans.

concentrations when organic material is burned in the presence of chlorine. As chemical compounds, dioxins are considered carcinogenic and can cause developmental and reproductive problems. They are absorbed primarily through the intake of fat, as this is where they accumulate in animals. In the course of the investigation into the origins of the outbreak, around 150 feed distributors across Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands were identified that could have been involved in the (cross-)contamination of Dutch and Belgian animal feed (in particular fat products), and consequently food intended for human consumption, too (Berenschot 1999: appendix 9: 1-2). As a consequence of the contamination, approximately seven million chickens and a total of 60,000 pigs had to be slaughtered (Laurent 2006). Ever since, the industrial chemical by-product dioxin has been the cause of numerous food (safety) alerts.

Another scare - of particular importance in the Netherlands - was the 1997 outbreak of contagious Classical Swine Fever, which led to the preventive slaughter of 10 million pigs in the Netherlands. In total, around 1,200 pig farmers were affected by the outbreak. Another serious outbreak in the UK (East Anglia) in 2000 affected 16 farms (DEFRA 2007). A total of 74,793 pigs including those on contact farms were slaughtered to eradicate the disease (ibid.). The cause of this most recent outbreak was not established conclusively, but was most likely the result of pigs feeding on a contaminated imported pork product (ibid.). The disease, which may affect pigs and wild boars, is transmitted by way of either direct contact between animals (secretions, excretions, semen, blood), or indirect contact through shared premises, implements, vehicles, clothes, instruments, and needles. Similarly, it can spread through farm visitors, veterinarians, pig traders, or insufficiently cooked waste fed to pigs. As there is no known cure, affected pigs must be slaughtered and the carcasses buried or incinerated (OIE 2002). In 2001, an EU framework plan set out measures for the control of classical swine fever. The plan provides a general framework for member states to draw up their own more detailed contingency plans (Council 2001).

In January of 2001, an outbreak of FMD was reported in England, producing tremendous public unrest when images of burning carcasses were conveyed in the media on a nearly daily basis. A number of regions affected by the outbreak even had to be closed off in order to avoid further spreading of the disease in the UK. Arguably, this carried particular connotations in England, where landscape and the outdoors (such as public walking trails) are traditionally highly valued. One month later, the Netherlands reported an outbreak of FMD on a mixed veal-calf/dairy-goat farm in Oene, in the central part of the Netherlands. The likely route of infection was traced to the import of Irish veal-calves to the Netherlands via an FMD-contaminated staging point in France. During the FMD outbreak, livestock on 2,655 farms was culled, among

them 85,186 cattle, 121,437 pigs, 32,633 sheep, and 8,297 goats (de Klerk 2002: 789). As far as the most recent outbreak in early August 2007 is concerned, the original site is believed to have been a laboratory site in Surrey, England. Again, the uncertainty surrounding the reconstruction of infection routes as well as the difficulties in developing containment strategies indicate the significance of diseases such as BSE and FMD in challenging the species boundary, hence disrupting the differentiation between animal health and human health and hence food production and food consumption, as well as the national/transnational boundary.

Keeping in mind the empirically complex and fluid nature of the object of inquiry, below, I give a preliminary introduction to the approach of this study, which seeks to capture both divergence on the national level and convergence at the transnational level.

1.3 The approach

1.3.1 A new lens: The importance of meaning

This thesis develops and employs a new ‘lens’ through which one can capture the significance of the transgression of boundaries (animal/human; national/transnational) in the context of the food scares experienced over the past decade in Europe. The tasks are threefold: First, the discourses that inform food (safety) policy will have to be distilled from a systematic examination of the empirical material gathered, as well as their specific composition, the elements of which are captured here in terms of individual, but interlinked ‘notions’. Second, the discursive categories - terms that seem similar but can be used in diverse ways - which are commonly employed in the respective national contexts will have to be analyzed in terms of the divergent meanings they bear. In other words, people may use the same general terms, such as ‘food quality’ or ‘consumer rights’, yet they may mean different things in different contexts. Finally, the challenge will be to explain the simultaneous *divergence* and *convergence* in the context of food (safety) policy over the past decade by employing discourse theory within a comparative and in-depth study of Europeanization. This study will illustrate that a focus on the contingency of meaning and contextual particularities is the most useful approach for (i) explaining the diverse ways in which food (safety) was taken up as a policy issue in different national contexts and (ii) identifying the discursive vehicles that made the mobilization of a common, EU-based approach possible in this policy context.

Identifying the particular historical junctures that make the renegotiation of meaning possible is of key importance here. Following Ernesto Laclau (1990; cf. Roslyng 2006 on the salmonella crisis in the UK), this study conceptualizes the experiences of food scares as

dislocations, that is, moments whose meanings and implications could not be understood within the predominant ways of thinking about, and hence regulating, food (safety).

Since dislocatory events (be it discoveries, accidents, or the introduction of new technologies) cannot be understood within the predominant discursive framework, they expose the socially constructed and ambiguous nature of the food (safety) regime in existence at a given point in time. In such a way, dislocatory moments can produce a reshuffling of policy priorities, of identities, and of the roles and responsibilities associated with the policy field in question. In the case of food (safety), dislocations can then produce a questioning of what it means to be a policymaker, a scientist, a member of the food industry, and last but not least, a consumer.

Such disruptive moments, however, are not merely traumatic but facilitate the generation of new meanings and identities. Whilst ‘food safety’ can become partially disconnected from its institutionalized, discursively sedimented meanings, dislocations give way to the emergence of new discursive formations. These new discursive formations, in addition, may draw on older, previously more marginal discourses that now come to be empowered as an effect of ‘productive crisis moments’. This study will employ the concept of dislocation as a truly empirical category by means of identifying the concrete symptoms, such as institutional ambiguity (Hajer 2003), that a dislocation produces, alongside the ways in which such moments of (productive) ambiguity lead to changing policy practices.

1.3.2 Case selection

This study does not begin from a prior notion of causal mechanisms in the Europeanization of food (safety). Instead, an initial empirical observation of variation forms the starting point, the variation of meanings across England, Germany, and the Netherlands. Given these grounds, this thesis is based on an inductive research design, whereby the case selection was motivated by observing *different* outcomes despite similar conditions; that is, institutions were rebuilt along different discursive lines and diverse policy notions became dominant despite similar policy challenges. The three countries were all shaken by the disruptive effects of food scares over the past decade, and the effects were substantial enough to bring about institutional redesign, whereas the rationale behind and the language accompanying those changes often varied. An additional commonality between them is their established membership of the EU as well as the amount of interaction among them and vis-à-vis the EU institutions. All three member states have a stake in the future of the CAP and have typically been engaged in trying to influence the EU in this regard, often to divergent ends. Finally, the three case study countries fulfilled practical criteria, too, in terms of the linguistic and physical accessibility of policy communities

there. By interviewing most respondents in their native language, the ‘lost in translation’ effect could be kept to a minimum, which is a significant advantage considering of the centrality of language in this study.¹¹

1.4 Outline of the study

Following this introductory chapter, chapter two will further carve out the object of inquiry. Rather than providing a mere literature review, however, the aim will be to identify the conceptual and empirical logics along which food (safety) can be considered a *contested* policy issue. To that end, the chapter begins by discussing the literature on EU integration and addresses the shift towards a Europeanization perspective in this body of scholarship. Next, the chapter situates the core puzzle of this study in the literature on Europeanization in general (for instance, Börzel and Risse 2000; Radaelli 1997, 2000; Schmidt 2008) and subsequently the scholarship on EU integration in the field of food (safety) policy specifically (e.g. Ansell and Vogel 2006; Oosterveer 2002; Vos 2000). Subsequently, subsections 2.4 to 2.7 trace out the empirical logics that make for the specific nature of the object of inquiry of this study by discussing the literature on the status of scientific expertise in this policy area (for instance, Hilgartner 2000; Jasanoff 1997, 2005; Millstone and van Zwanenberg 2001; Nestle 2003), writings on the category of ‘the consumer’ and her role in food (safety) policy (for instance, Gabriel and Lang 1995; Everson 2005), the meanings of the concept of ‘trust’ and its relation to food scares as an experience of ‘risk’ (e.g. Beck 1992, 1999), and literature on the role of crisis regarding institutional change and continuity (e.g. Boin and ‘t Hart 2000; Bovens and ‘t Hart 1996; Hood 2002; Hood and Rothstein 2001; Majone 2000).

Chapter three develops the theoretical and methodological basis of this study by contextualizing its approach in a poststructuralist discourse-theoretical framework. First, the chapter discusses the ontological and epistemological assumptions underlying the analysis. This is followed by a sketch of the philosophical background against which poststructuralism developed, namely the structuralist linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure and the subsequent critique of Jacques Derrida (1972) and political theorists such as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985; Laclau 1990). From there, the chapter proceeds to discuss and delimit poststructuralist discourse analysis as well as its relevance for the subject under consideration here. In particular, the notions of *dislocation* (Laclau 1990) and *institutional ambiguity* (Hajer 2003)

¹¹ All interviews and foreign-language documents were translated by the author. Where applicable, translations are indicated in citations throughout this thesis.

will be explicated and adapted for the purpose of the empirical analysis, whereby I shall specifically emphasize the dimension of practice-as-discourse.

Having discussed the ontological, epistemological, and theoretical choices that shape my analysis, I then proceed to construct the concrete analytical framework on which the subsequent empirical chapters are based. This analytical framework rests on five inductively distilled discourses that inform food (safety) policy: ‘good governance’; ‘environmental sustainability’; ‘market efficiency’; ‘consumer protection’; and ‘public health’. Whilst for the sake of comparability, these discourses were assigned equivalent titles, or labels, the specific composition of these discourses, captured as individual, yet interlinked notions, form the object of inquiry. Specifically with regard to the discourse of ‘good governance’, a label was chosen that matches the general content of this discourse, that is, an appeal to an ‘ideal’ mode of governance that is based on notions of transparency, responsiveness, and due diligence. Good governance, in other words, refers to *how* things are done, rather than only about *what* is done. The contextually contingent compositions of the five inductively derived discourses appear visually summarized in a table in each empirical chapter. Chapter three concludes by discussing the methodology employed in more detail and raises critical issues related to discourse-analytical comparative research as well as the benefits thereof.

In line with the three central research questions posed above, the empirical part of this thesis includes three individual country-based chapters (four, five, and six) that present the findings of the discourse analysis of food (safety) policy in England, Germany, and the Netherlands, respectively. These chapters address the first two research questions: 1. *How has food safety been taken up as a policy issue in England, Germany, and the Netherlands since the 1990s?* 2. *How can we explain the different ways in which food scares have been taken up across the national contexts?* In each of these chapters, I situate the individual case study in its socio-historical context through a discourse-analytical lens. This historical overview places the current wave of criticism regarding agriculture and food production in context and makes visible that some of the discourses that shape the current policy programs did not emerge suddenly after the epidemics of BSE and FMD, but were already present, albeit in more marginal positions in the discursive field at particular historical junctures. Keeping these discursive traces in mind, the chapters then move on to examine the contemporary policy discourse in the particular context. By drawing on the concepts developed in chapter three, I identify the key moments of discursive transformation and point at overall shifts and continuities in the food (safety) policy discourse in the respective countries.

Chapter seven is devoted to the third research question, which investigates the rapid Europeanization of food (safety) policy vis-à-vis the diversity across contexts: *How can we explain the emergence of a transnational policy approach, given the divergence on the national level?* By tracing the evolution of EU-based food (safety) policy, the chapter highlights the ways in which food (safety) as an object of policy came to represent a transnational, *European* matter. After an introductory section, section 2 discusses the ways in which food scares posed a discursive challenge to the dominant discursive logics of the food (safety) regime at the time, whereby previously fixed meanings of food (safety) became disconnected from their sedimented meanings. Subsequently, section 3 of chapter seven revisits the key moments when the events related to a series of food scares – particularly BSE – became *re-narrated* in transnational, European terms. After revisiting institutional rearrangements, the fourth section of the chapter is devoted to the discourse analysis of an overall recognizable policy discourse at the level of the EU.

In order to explain how the divergent interpretations and problem definitions were discursively bridged in the negotiation of a transnational, EU-based policy discourse, the chapter identifies three central, ‘integrative’ notions that define food (safety) as a European issue and temporarily stabilize the meaning of ‘food safety’ at the level of the EU: the notion of being a member of the food chain; the notion of being a ‘stakeholder’ in food (safety) policy; and the notion of (being) a transnational consumer. It is the quality of these notions as ‘nodal points’ (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; see also Howarth, Norval, and Stavrakakis 2000: 8ff.) that form the backbone of, and can help explain the successful mobilization of Europeanization in this policy field: These notions are elastic, seemingly neutral, and malleable in their meanings. Their functions are to temporarily fix meaning, to create a sense of interdependence, to facilitate cooperation across institutional and national boundaries, and, in their connection at the level of discourse, to blur the commonly assumed functional differentiation between policymakers, scientists, members of the industry, and citizens. I conclude that, while EU food (safety) policy discourse does have a character of its own, the openness of the nodal points leaves room for divergence of meanings with respect to the adoption and implementation of policies at the level of individual member states. In other words, harmonization need not entail harmony, but openness and flexibility.

Finally, the concluding chapter draws together the findings across the studied contexts in a comparative fashion. Beyond the comparative summary, the chapter also highlights how the composition of particular discourses observed at the national level resonates in the transnational, EU-based policy discourse. The purpose of the latter is not to define causal relations (a ‘bottom-

up' conceptualization of Europeanization), but as the basis for suggesting further research in this area. The chief part of the chapter, however, is devoted to a discussion of the central empirical and conceptual contributions of the present study and suggests avenues for further research on discourse theory, its use in policy analysis, as well as the specific topic of food (safety) policy.