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Food identity / food quality: synergy and antagonism

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Introduction: Love and fears

The complex relationship between the identity and the quality of food is well summarized in Levy Strauss's simple but relevant expression "*food must be good to eat and good to think about*"¹. This requirement is increasing in the current context, from the point of view of both the identity and the quality of food. These two elements are inextricably linked in the products we eat, but belong to different categories and require different analytical approaches.

The demand for identity reflects the upheaval of established identity references in a world that has been subjected to rapid change. We shall avoid using the fashionable term "globalization", which has been appropriated by journalists. From a scientific point of view, this way of naming ongoing changes can prevent one from thinking about them, particularly in an analysis of changes in food identities, which are far from "globalized". Thus, in a changing world, food acquires an essential role in one's search for oneself, in the individuation of people and societies.

Traditional breads, farmhouse cheeses, local wines in France, Spain or Italy, village-made couscous in Algeria or Morocco, attiéké in Côte d'Ivoire or Pampas meat in Argentina are just

¹ Levy Strauss, 1964, "Le cru et le cuit", Paris, Plon.

a few examples. These acquire a new dimension and confirm that in France, "wine is not just wine"² and that a version of this statement can be applied to all the different dietary cultures.

At the same time, we are witnessing demands and uncertainties regarding the hygienic and nutritional quality of food. A recent regulation (dated April 2004) on the labelling of GM products (when their presence exceeds 0.9 %) is proof of this. Thus, consumers are made responsible for their food choices and the biotechnology companies are rather pleased, hoping that this legislation will deprive European legislators of arguments against GM crops. However, at this stage, nobody can yet make the claim, based on scientific evidence, that the consumption of these products is either harmful or harmless to health.

Another example is the use of the colouring agent canthaxanthin in salmon farming. The European Union scientific committee on food noticed a link between ingestion of this colouring agent and retinal damage as early as in 1997³. The consumers' fears and distrust are increasing, and not without justification. Research into improving food safety is becoming one of the priorities in agronomic and food research.

In this presentation, we address a central issue: how demands for food identity interact with hygiene and nutritional requirements, and how the producers, in particular family farmers, are taking these changes into account in their strategies.

To address this question we shall present:

- (i) a historical perspective of the relationship between food identity and food quality;
- (ii) an analysis of the processes of identification / qualification of food, based on field work: "*queijo de coalho*" (curd cheese) in the North-East of Brazil
- (iii) the economic consequences of cultural phenomena.

I. Identity / quality: a historical perspective

1 Changing identities

² Braudel Fernand,

³ European Commission, 27-1-2003, press release 36-2003 "Un saumon moins coloré, mais sans danger pour les yeux" [Salmon with less colour, but safe for the eyes].

Almost two centuries ago, Brillat Savarin⁴ quoted an old German proverb: "*man ist, was man isst*" by claiming, "Tell me what you eat, I will tell you who you are". However, three implicit meanings in this assertion need to be clarified:

- i) **Food does not have an intrinsic identity:** it is man who chooses what is eaten and identifies what is edible. What interests us therefore is the process of food identification carried out by people living in society.

- ii) **The dynamics of products:** in every era, people have had to face the identification of new products arriving in their plates. The decision to accept or reject them often involved a long process. The tomato (from the Nahuatl word "tomatl") was introduced into Southern Europe in the first half of the 16th century, but took about two centuries to appear on Parisian plates. It was only in the 20th century that its consumption in the form of salad became common, because even in the 19th century it was often advised to boil tomatoes for two or three hours to remove "toxic substances". New products keep arriving, either through the innovations of the food processing or biotechnology industries, through the distribution of "exotic products", or through the reintroduction of "new old products" (the Jerusalem artichoke or buckwheat grains for example). The adoption or rejection of these products greatly depends on the way in which man identifies them.

- iii) **Identity dynamics:** people constantly have to confront the identification of new products, but not all people are the same. Here we touch on an essential point, as regards both food and the wider social issues. Through lack of a deconstruction / reconstruction of their identity references under the influence of current trends, we are observing "ethnic withdrawals" in many parts of the world, which contradict the supposed existence of "globalization". Indeed, identities have to be considered, but they are dynamic identities. One's reference to oneself necessarily involves one's reference to others, taking identity dynamics into account, and is therefore

⁴ Brillat Savarin Jean Anthelme, 1825, "La Physiologie du goût", réédition Hermann.

related to the history and references of each culture: that which it has borrowed and that which results from the mixing of cultures. Research on products with a geographical indication (GI products) has to take this into account. It is not a question of tracing back the product's history, but of putting it back in its current context. Let us repeat that processes of identification are not restricted to GI products. There is no "erosion of the link between the foodstuff and its identity"⁵. New products (hamburgers, fizzy drinks, diet products and others) also require their identity relationship with consumers to be reconstructed.

2. Identity / Quality: debatable relationships and signs

Using a historical perspective, we can see that the desire for a certain type of product has not always led to improved nutritional quality. For example, the colour white has always been a symbol of purity. Wedding dresses, the white coats worn by doctors and nurses, and the Pope's clothes are white. White is also a symbol of purity in Chinese culture and in voodoo rites, the priestesses are dressed in white. A preference for white products has been a decisive criterion in food choices in various societies, applied for example to sugar, bread and rice, although we know today that brown sugar, wholemeal bread and whole rice are healthier than their white, "pure" equivalent.

Identifying the purity of a product, based on the symbolic value of the colour white has resulted in some "nutritional mistakes" in certain societies at certain times. Similarly, one could say that in the current context, territories and terroirs "sell well", but a terroir product that "has identity" is not necessarily better in terms of food hygiene. In countries of the Southern hemisphere, and even in the North, the reverse is quite often true.

Queijo de coalho curd cheese from the North-East of Brazil is a typical example of this. It is known that it does not meet all the food hygiene standards: the producers refuse to pasteurize their milk as the monitoring bodies require, and even veterinary service inspectors risk buying cheese from producers (for its identity and not for its hygienic quality). The regional

⁵ Saunier Claude, 2004, "Les nouveaux apports de la science et de la technologie à la qualité et à la sûreté des aliments", rapport au Sénat OPECST N° 267.

reputation of some products can lead to the misuse of signs of identity. It therefore seems important to us to distinguish between the signs of identity and the signs of quality that are directed at the consumer. Brands sometimes use traditional names, local languages or toponymic references to emphasize the identity of a product. This is absolutely legitimate if there is no protected geographical indication, but sometimes leads to misuse of these identity signs.

3 Identification cues and food trends

We consider food as "a complete social phenomenon"⁶, which means that food involves all social relationships. A system of interactions is thus established, in which food is on one hand a relevant approach for reading social trends, but on the other hand, we cannot understand food phenomena without addressing social relationships.

It is impossible to analyse changing food identities without placing them in the wider context of the changing society, because it is not the identities of the products themselves that are at the heart of our study but the processes of identification to which they belong and the cues that people use to identify products.

It is important to clarify this idea. "Identification cues are the perceptible and memorial basis on which we build our various ways of inhabiting the world, depending on the different ways we relate to ourselves and to others. Identification cues are the indicators of two sets of relationships: collective relationships concerned with belonging to a community, and individual relationships concerned with reciprocity in social exchange and communication. They symbolize two types of relationship: our integration in a community and how we differentiate ourselves from other individuals. The question can be analysed at different levels, from cultural references such as name, language, nationality, to family-related references"⁷. The issue is therefore highly complex: identity phenomena require analysis of different categories and on different levels.

⁶ Mauss Marcel, "Les techniques du corps", dans "Anthropologie et Sociologie", Paris, PUF, 1980

⁷ Ortigues E., 1989, "Entretiens", Le Coq-Héron N°115, pp. 58-72.

Thus, each individual contains different levels of identity, which fit together like a set of Russian dolls. Everyone has a surname and a forename, belongs to a family or clan, can be simultaneously “Breton”, “French” and “European” and has a religious faith (or may have none) etc. Areas of collective identity, of different dimensions, form between the individuals that live in a society. These range from belonging to a profession or a local community (it is not by chance that names often refer to a profession, such as butcher, baker, miller, or a place) to membership of an international community. From this standpoint, the construction of a European identity is a fascinating challenge.

The aspects outlined above only serve to show the extent of the problem that an analysis of food identities poses. One thing is certain – we are witnessing a rapid change in these identities, because we are dealing with dynamic situations that are evolving fast. The fact that French wine has broken into the Japanese market is not unrelated to new symbolic constructions and social distinctions surrounding wine, and with which some Japanese consumers now identify. The same could have been said about the adoption of whisky by certain French consumers after the Second World War. In Latin America many products that used to be looked down on as "peasant" or "Indian" commodities, are finding a market with certain consumers nowadays. *Frango caipira* (farmyard chicken) in Brazil and quinoa (*Chenopodium quinoa*) in Peru are just two examples of this⁸. For a long time in European countries, white bread was synonymous with purity, but today there is a trend in preferences towards bread with more colour, which evokes the countryside, even when there is very little about it that is rural. It is actually this symbolic dimension that is the basis of this economic phenomenon⁹. We will see below that the market value is often hard to justify without referring to the product's symbolic value, hence the importance of analysing the relationships between the processes of identification and qualification of food.

II Processes of identification and qualification of food, *queijo de coalho* in the North-East of Brazil.

1/ The identification cues of Nordeste cheeses

⁸ Muchnik José, 2003, "Le monde peut-il nourrir le monde", Colloque INRA, Palais de la découverte Paris.

⁹ Bourdieu Pierre, 1994, "Construction sociale de l'économie, Raisons pratiques, Paris, Seuil.

Nordeste is a problem area of Brazil¹⁰. It is divided into two geographical zones: a wet coast, with a high population density, concentrated in urban centres, and a semi-arid hinterland, with a small population (Sertão). The history of Nordeste includes a wealth of events and personalities that have marked the entire Brazilian nation. One example is the war of Canudos (1893-1897), a revolt of farmers and recently freed slaves against the regime of the time. Another is *Lampião and his cangaceiros* (1920-1930), a group of armed men, who stole from rich farmers and weakened the government's authority. Of no fixed abode, they roamed around Sertão inspiring both fear and admiration in the population of small farmers. Sertão has a special significance for Brazilians. It is reputed for its ruthless climate, which condemns the region to periodic droughts and its population to temporary migrations. Its historical characters and its landscapes have inspired numerous artists, poets and writers. Many films and songs describe Sertão and contribute to the construction of this collective identity. In the collective imagination of the Brazilians, the people of Nordeste are described as strong and brave, as sung by José Barrense Dias: "*O Nordeste é complicado, Quem é forte sobrevive, quem é fraco, já se vai, Gente heroica corajosa pra valer que nunca foge da luta para poder sobrevive*" (*Nordeste is complicated, he who is strong survives, he who is weak leaves; heroic, brave people, who never flee before the struggle to survive*).

The history of Nordeste is strongly associated with the development of livestock farming, which enabled its inland areas to be colonized and led to the economic growth of the region. In 1930, Abreu spoke about the Leather Civilisation¹¹. For many years, a cultural heritage grew up around livestock farming, combining Portuguese, Indian and African influences. Today, 'vaquejadas' (horseback races) and the 'cowboy mass' are organized periodically, and help to keep this heritage alive. The leather hat, boots and waistcoat became, for city-dwellers, symbols of an explicit desire to display a regional allegiance. The language of clothes states a sense of belonging in both city-dwellers and country people. Moreover, livestock farming is often considered as a hobby, in homage to the rural origins of the Brazilians who have become city-dwellers. There is also some prestige attached to owning a fazenda (ranch), which undoubtedly confers social status¹². As far as food is concerned,

¹⁰ They, 1995. *Le Brésil*. Paris, France, Masson, 265 p.

¹¹ Abreu, 1930 in Andrade 1986. *A terra e o homem do Nordeste*, São Paulo, Brasil Atlas, 238 p.

¹² Caron P., 1998. *Espace, élevage et dynamique du changement. Analyse, niveaux d'organisation et action. Le cas du Nordeste semi-aride du Brésil*. Thèse de Doctorat en Géographie, Université Paris X - Nanterre. 396 p.

cheeses and sun-dried meat are an integral part of this heritage. Several types of cheese are produced in Nordeste, including *queijo de coalho* (a pressed curd cheese) and *requeijão* (a cooked cheese produced by lactic acidification).

Unlike the leather hat, which in the city has become an object of identity for festive or occasional use, traditional cheeses are still staple foods. In a survey of consumers in Aracaju, a city in one of the States of Nordeste, more than 75% of people said they consumed these traditional products and 70% consumed them every day, usually for breakfast. *Queijo de coalho* and *requeijão* are eaten uncooked, or melted on corn meal. *Queijo de coalho* is also used in a typically Nordeste dish, *cartola*, which consists of frying cheese on bananas with cinnamon and sugar.

In the processes of “heritagisation”, a staple food that is consumed every day can become a product of special value, recognized and appreciated by a wider group or by people outside the community¹³. Local consumers eat it without paying it any particular attention. This familiarity may explain why little action has been taken to promote these foodstuffs over the last twenty years, whereas a lot of projects have concentrated on typical Nordeste products (its music, festivals and history etc.).

2/ The tension between identity and quality

The relationship between identity and quality is rather complex, and far from obvious. As the supply chain lengthens, uncertainty about the quality of products increases. In this context, consumers ask more and more questions: Where does the product come from? Who processed it? Has the retailer tried to increase profits by adding water, salt, or preservatives? Faced with these uncertainties, consumers try to identify the product, to understand it, using its sensory and memory cues. When they buy cheese, consumers from Aracaju use their sight (the presence of whey indicates the freshness of the product, the presence of a hard crust shows that it is an old cheese) and taste (several consumers eat a small piece of cheese to test its texture, salt content and freshness). They also try to identify the retailer (who often comes from the same village or lives in the same district), the origin of the product, and the place where it was made.

¹³ Bérard and Marchesnay, 2000

- *Place names and language as signs of identity, but...*

Cheese from Gloria is well known on the regional market, and retailers specify this origin by showing consumers an identity sign, a label. However, reference to a place is sometimes misused by retailers- they may sell products of dubious quality or deceive consumers about the origin of products. A lot of cheese that claims to be from Gloria is sold in various cities of the states of Nordeste. Similarly, for an uninformed French consumer, Sisteron lamb brings to mind a traditional system of production, based on free-range lambs fed a rich diet from high Alpine pastures. However, Sisteron lamb comes from all over France, and is so-called simply because it is slaughtered in one of the biggest lamb slaughterhouses in France that is located in Sisteron. In other cases, language is used as a sign of identity and can mislead the consumer about the origin of the product. Ovine producers in the Pyrenees gave the name “El Xai” to their Red label lamb (xai means lamb in Catalan). Even if the lamb is from Gers, Ireland or Poland, when it leaves the slaughterhouse, it will have a Catalan name¹⁴. In the case of Gloria cheeses, the illusions created about the origin of the product facilitate the consumer’s attraction to products that sometimes do not meet hygiene standards. A study on the hygienic quality of cheese in the region of Gloria showed that the milk that arrived at the cheese dairy was of poor quality. Tests performed on samples of the products revealed that the levels of pathogenic flora in the milk were much higher than those allowed by food hygiene standards in the State of Sergipe and this flora developed further in the curd. Several contamination problems were revealed during the manufacturing process. Salmonella was sometimes observed in the cheese when the milk had not been contaminated¹⁵.

Table 1: Official standards for milk and by-products (national commission of rules and standards for food, Brazilian ministry for health - resolution 18.78-31 / 03 / 1978-Brésil)

	Salmonella	Total coliforms	Faecal coliforms	<i>Staphylococcus aureus</i>	Total aerobic mesophilic flora
Pasteurized milk	Abs/ 25 ml	10/ml	2/ml	-	3x10 ⁵ /ml
Pressed unripened cheese/ ricotta	Abs/ 25 ml	-	10 ² /g	10 ³ /g	-
Cooked cheese	Abs/ 25 ml	-	10/g	10 ² /g	-

¹⁴ Boutonnet Jean Pierre personal communication

¹⁵ Pinaud, 1997. queijos consumidos em Aracaju- qualidade sanitária in Encontro de Pesquisa sobre a questão agrária nos tabuleiros costeiros de Sergipe

- *Many products with the same name*

The pressed curd cheese - *queijo de coalho* - is found throughout the Nordeste region. However, this generic name hides many variants in terms of manufacturing methods (cooked curd, semi-cooking, external salting, soaking the curd in brine). This variation allows a wide range of products to be offered on the urban markets of Nordeste. We noticed that the quantity of salt in Gloria cheeses differed according to its target market. Cheese for the Salvador market was much more salty and was cooked for longer than cheese for Paraiba. The single name of Gloria cheese therefore covers different formulations. This system does not facilitate the codification of practices: "production systems that are particularly well developed from a cultural point of view and that include many variants associated with different places are hard to place in protection systems"¹⁶.

- *Changes in traditional products to satisfy the market*

The traditional nature of these products does not prevent them from changing. The manufacturing practices used by producers change to offer products that meet new demand. As we have just seen, the history of Nordeste cheeses dates back to the colonization of inland Nordeste. Cowherds milked cows and made cheese. The climatic conditions of the region made it possible to preserve the cheese by sun-drying and salting. These perishable products were quickly sun-dried so that could be stored. Several producers from this region point out that in the 1950s Sertão cheese was very dry and very salty. It could be stored for more than a year. Nowadays, *queijo de coalho* is very different: it is a pressed curd that is slightly salted and very wet. It is this type that is popular on urban markets. Living things have the potential to evolve and generate considerable variability, and man draws on this. A race of animal, a cultivated plant, a product such as a cured meat or a cheese is the result of accumulated knowledge, practices, observations, and adjustments and should be seen in relation to the way it is represented. But it also has a limited lifespan¹⁷. The recent changes to Nordeste cheeses pose new health risks and yet this product has fed generations of producers with no problems.

¹⁶ Casabianca, 2002. Construction socio-technique de la qualité: Enjeux autour de la codification des pratiques dans les cas des produits d'origine. Communication à l'atelier CIRAD INAO Les indications géographiques et les appellations d'origine Montpellier 3 septembre 2002.

Bérard and Marchesnay 1998 Les productions agricoles et alimentaires locales traditionnelles: savoir-faire, patrimoine et normes In INRA CIRAD CNEARC, Systèmes agroalimentaires localisés et construction de territoires, document provisoire, Montpellier, pp 43 –50.

¹⁷ Berard and Marchesnay, 1998. sic

2.1 The first step of the qualification process: hygienic quality and the institutional recognition of unofficial cheese dairies

This step results from two observations: there is great irregularity in the hygienic quality of the product, due to uncertain manufacturing conditions in the cheese dairies that operate in an unregulated sector.

Besides the technical action and solutions, certain differences of opinion rapidly came to light. The first disagreement was related to the role and the importance of family farming in local development; the second related to differences in the perception of the quality of the products. The first confrontation involves different views on the development of Nordeste family farming. Supporters of family farming are proud of its specificity and adaptive capacity. On the other hand, the proponents of high-productivity farming are calling for a social program to retrain the weakest or less productive producers. The conclusion of these debates is particularly important in that it influences the measures taken regarding the unofficial cheese dairies.

Secondly, there are two opposing views on cheese quality. One aims for a completely safe product (produced by the cheese industry) and puts an emphasis on consistency and hygienic quality. The other regards cheese as a symbol of a rural society with its own identity, know-how and a strong relationship between products, their production system and their terroir. These arguments and debates are strongly reminiscent of the confrontation between two conceptions of cheese during the interwar years in France (Delfosse, 1995)ⁱ.

The current qualification process is the result of a compromise between the various stakeholders and institutions, each having different interests and positions. Laying aside these fundamental debates, manufacturers have agreed to improve the production conditions of the region's cheeses. Addressing the hygienic quality of the products involves enforcing the rules and procedures that are already in place and adopting common sense practices. Research has been carried out as part of this project, in partnership with the fraud squad. It has led to relaxation of the regulations for small businesses in the State of Sergipe. Various technical and organizational innovations have been adopted by manufacturers. They have improved the

conditions of production and have made the work easier. Some examples are the use of stainless steel equipment, washing with bleach, pasteurizing the curds, wearing boots and uniforms, building platforms at the entrance of the cheese dairy so that the churns are not brought in, and using mosquito nets.

However, one controversial subject has not been resolved: the use of unpasteurized milk for making cheese. Zoonoses, such as brucellosis, tuberculosis or foot-and-mouth disease are still very common in the region. There is uncertainty around the legal monitoring of the application of health measures. Currently, neither the fraud squad nor the producer organizations and unions are able to guarantee the quality of the milk. The proponents of "pasteurized-only" and the upholders of unpasteurized milk have agreed upon an intermediate position. This consists of requiring the use of heated milk initially, until the major zoonoses have been eradicated. They will then try to organise a return to the previous situation.

The project could have stopped at this stage, but a commercial strategy based only on the hygienic quality of the product seems limited considering that the milk industry can easily fulfil these conditions, and at a low cost. Other strategies to defend the market for rural cheese dairies have to be explored. This is the objective of the second step, which aims to answer the following questions: What should be specified? Which quality procedure should be implemented? Can territorial specificity be claimed for cheeses produced in the region of Gloria?

2.2 Second step: the territorial qualification of products

This step is still in progress. We have already presented the various sensory and cultural reasons why the consumer is interested in the origin of a product. To use the product's origin as a sign of quality one has to assume that there is a strong link between territory and quality, and in particular between terroir and the characteristics of a product (Beranger *et al.*, 1998)ⁱⁱ. It also means assuming that consumers recognize this link and value it, and are willing to pay for it through the system of geographical indication labelling. In the case of unregulated and unstandardized products, a reference to their origin is more of a sign of identity. The main issue that remains is how these signs of identity could become signs of quality, in particular for animal products. There is still a strong antagonism between both sides of the equation at present.

III The economic consequences of this cultural phenomenon

1 Product differentiation: an opportunity for family farms

“Specific quality products” with a strong identity represent an alternative for family farms faced with the withdrawal or relocation of intermediaries such as multinationals and big agro-processing companies. Specific quality production, when associated with specific distribution channels (direct selling, local markets, specialized supply chains), can also be a solution to the fact that small farmers are excluded from supplying generic products, the commercialization of which is increasingly controlled by supermarkets, especially in underprivileged countries. This exclusion arises from the supermarkets’ demands regarding manufacturing quality, homogeneity and also quantity, which small family farmers find difficult to meet.

In the current context of market saturation, the search for a competitive advantage based on product specificity and authenticity appears to be a plausible strategy that may improve the competitiveness of family farms. When conducted well, this strategy means that the market supply is better controlled and exchange is better coordinated and no longer dominated simply by price. In this case, the quality of the product acquires importance in the negotiation between the parties involved. *"The search for a strong identity reduces substitutability by other products"*¹⁸ Briand (1995)ⁱⁱⁱ. There are many examples of added value that is sufficiently profitable to enable specific production conditions to be maintained, when consumers enjoy the product. This enjoyment can result from either objective or subjective parameters. *"AOC products have a strong capacity to stimulate not only consumers’ objective appreciation of their organoleptic qualities, but also the subjective idea they have about the product"*¹⁹ (Briand, 1995)^{iv}

In order to make specific quality products, producers rely on and highlight the value of the specific production conditions that give the product its strong identity. This is consistent with

¹⁸ *"La recherche d'une forte identité réduit la substituabilité avec d'autres produits."*

¹⁹ *"Le produit d'AOC a une forte capacité à stimuler chez le consommateur non seulement l'appréciation objective de ses qualités organoleptiques, mais également l'idée subjective qu'il s'en fait."*

the increasing demand from consumers for authentic products. "*The specific expectations of consumers in terms of quality can help family farmers to position themselves in promising niches*"²⁰ (Cerdan, Sautier, 2003)^v

Promoting the value of specific quality products promotes recognition of the technical and cultural heritage on which their production is based. This is in line with the strategies of supply chains that aim for better distribution of profits and it contributes to the development of these products' regions of origin.

2 Standards to be built

The development of specific quality products is confronted with problems and contradictions, especially with regards to hygiene standards. The consumers' desire for authentic and typical products does not exclude hygienic quality, which is demanded either directly by consumers or by the public institutions. In many cases, small producers that sell products recognized as being authentic by consumers do not comply with the manufacturing hygiene standards defined by public institutions. Support for these producers often starts by discussing how they could comply with standards. This constitutes both a constraint and an incentive to implement innovative processes that would allow technical production systems to be adapted to new quality requirements.

Making the product comply with standards may conflict with its specificity and authenticity. This is true for the use of unpasteurized milk in cheese production, as we have already mentioned. Moreover, standardization may involve a significant investment that small farmers cannot always recover. They are then excluded from production. Defining and implementing hygiene standards is not only an important aspect in building quality and (where necessary) in the trade-off between hygienic quality and cheese authenticity, but it also has economic and social implications for producers. "*Hygiene standards are supposed to protect the consumer, but their main effect is to favour industrial producers at the expense of farmers*"²¹ (Chabrol, 2004)^{vi}

²⁰ "*Les attentes spécifiques des consommateurs en termes de qualité peuvent permettre aux agriculteurs familiales de se positionner sur des créneaux porteurs.*"

²¹ "*Les normes sanitaires sont censées protéger le consommateur, mais elles ont surtout pour effet de favoriser les producteurs industriels au dépens des producteurs fermiers.*"

Furthermore, in Europe and particularly in France, supply chains that deal in specific quality products can encounter other problems due to the dominance of the supermarkets. Indeed, when supply chains for GI products have to negotiate with central buying departments, they are confronted with constraints regarding consistency and homogeneity that can have huge repercussions on the organization of the production, and its local embeddedness (Frayssignes, 2001)^{vii}. There is a risk of standardization and loss of the attributes that constitute the specificity of the product for the consumer. Therefore, negotiation about codification of the manufacturing procedures with the aim of constructing a specific quality agreement must involve a compromise that takes into account the different views, while preserving the characteristics that underlie the product's specificity. "*The quality of a traditional product with a strong identity necessarily involves the construction of new compromises between territorial characteristics and the new demands of consumers and public institutions*"²² (Cerdan, 1999)^{viii}.

3 The skill of the consumer

One of the main aspects of a product's differentiation strategy is that the consumer must develop the ability to identify the product. In most instances, consumers have an incomplete knowledge of how the product is made and of the signals sent out to them. This knowledge is highly dependent on the promotional campaigns that are used. It raises the issue of the information that is relevant to consumers, and therefore the cognitive processes in the construction of consumers' preference profiles. Hence, the strategies used by commercial brands that aim to benefit from the notoriety of certain regions or cultural phenomena can confuse the consumer's perception and compete with specific quality products. "*Despite the distinctive features of production systems that have a geographical indication, AOC products are increasingly confronted with competition from commercial brands (sometimes from distributors) that refer to their often rather vague origins.*"²³ (Frayssignes, 2001)^{ix}

It is in the interests of the supply chains that deal in specific quality products to clearly distinguish themselves from conventional manufacturers, by adopting a promotional strategy

²² "*La qualité d'un produit traditionnel chargé d'identité passe nécessairement par la construction de nouveaux compromis entre les caractéristiques territoriales et les nouvelles exigences des consommateurs et des organismes publics*"

²³ "*Malgré les particularités des systèmes productifs bénéficiant d'une appellation, les produits AOC sont de plus en plus confrontés à la concurrence de marques commerciales (de distributeur ou non) faisant référence à des origines plus ou moins vagues.*"

for their products that allows them to be clearly identified and a transparent policy of guaranteeing the indicated quality. This is a necessary condition in order to ensure a sustainable higher price, and therefore a sufficient return on their efforts.

In order to ensure that products meet consumers' expectations, the construction of the quality of the products needs to be based increasingly on dialogue and negotiation between producers and consumers. This can take different forms, depending on the qualification strategies used (official quality markings, individual or collective brands, etc.). Various devices have been developed to ensure this balance. In the case of the "queijo de coalho", a cheese contest that was held in Gloria had an important role in the construction and recognition of territorial quality for the traditional cheese of Sergipe. Since 1998, this contest, which emphasizes the organoleptic quality of cheese, has been organized during the annual agricultural show of Gloria on the initiative of a group of researchers, cheese producers and technicians. The cheese is judged in a group tasting, followed by a public vote. By allowing institutional, professional and social recognition of traditional expertise in cheese making, this contest contributes to the regional notoriety of Gloria cheese and to building up the consumers' skills.

In other contexts, different initiatives have been taken. Some examples are cooking contests, festivals based around local products and the "taste workshops" organized by the "Slow Food" movement. These workshops last 60 to 90 minutes, during which time different types of product (chocolate, cheese, raw ham, olive oil, etc.) are tasted by the public, while specialists or producers make comments about the products. This approach is based on the idea that these products should be "*tasted, compared and memorised*"²⁴ (Briand, 1995). These workshops are designed as opportunities for taste education with the aim of helping to making consumers more "*wise, skilled, demanding*"²⁵ (Chabrol, 2004).

The sustainable development of specific quality products will only be possible if consumers recognize their specificities and appreciate them. It must therefore be based on communication strategies and on opportunities where producers, specific products and consumers can meet.

Conclusions

²⁴ "*se dégustent, se comparent, se mémorisent*"

²⁵ "*avisés, compétents, exigeants*"

Food is a whole that has been divided among various disciplines by scientific research methods; but it is necessary to reassemble the whole, putting back together these partially opposed elements, which nevertheless provide the cohesion of the unit.

Identity / Quality: In a world that changes, individuals and societies are trying to reconstruct their references and their belongingness. Food plays an important role in this reconstruction of identity. In different societies, certain products will be granted a more or less important place in this process. Consumers will therefore seek out products that have strong identity, either by according extra value to well-known products, by reviving certain traditions or old new products such as buckwheat and black pigs, or by creating what may one day become a tradition. References to the place of origin, to language, to old names for things etc. are the basis of the signs of identity on these products, which correspond to certain organoleptic properties. These are the signs that consumers look for in order to identify them. However, quality requirements in order for these products to be put on the market are becoming increasingly restrictive, particularly in countries of the Southern hemisphere where authentic products are usually unregulated. How can the tension between the identity and the quality of these foods be resolved? This is an important issue, to be dealt with through finalized research programs, which have to take both the sociocultural and biotechnical characteristics of the food into account. The equation includes compliance to standards, the authenticity of the products and the economic conditions of the producers. It is not easily solved.

Symbolic value / Economic value: in the same way that the opposition between culture and nature is dialogistic rather than antagonistic, we observe that symbolic values do not only constitute a cultural representation, but are also closely linked to the price of the products on the market. We can clearly say, without any euphemism, that identity sells well, particularly in the current context of quality labelling where the same word can be used to express very different things. Authentic foods talk, they give sense to people who are consumers but more than just consumers. There is an opportunity here that family farmers can take: they can use the language of authentic food to facilitate their recognition by consumers, to communicate with them, and to sell them their product. This act of selling is not just an economic act, but also an act of creation and reconstruction of social bonds, with food acting as the mediator.

Specific products/ Standardized products: before we end, we would like to point out that there is no fixed antagonistic opposition between specific and standardized products. The existence of standard products may on the contrary motivate consumers to look for product differentiation, and for example, in certain situations, to seek out a craft beer, a farmhouse yogurt or a village-made couscous.

Family farming has to struggle against the concentrated agrifood system (supermarkets, big wholesalers, etc.) and also work with it. Given the power of these distributors, it is in the small farmers' interests to use cunning rather than confrontation. Just a small amount of "destandardization" in certain supply chains can create significant market access for small farmers. The challenge is to redefine and give symbolic value back to these products, even standard ones (such as drinks, pasta and chocolate.). It may be just the start, yet many examples can already be found.

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ⁱⁱ Beranger, C., Casabianca, F., Sylvander, B., Valceschini, E., 1998. « Propositions pour un nouveau programme INRA de recherche pluridisciplinaire sur la qualité liée à l'origine des produits » In 'Qualité des produits liée à leur origine', actes du séminaire, Paris, 1998/12/10-11, 13-19, INRA.

ⁱⁱⁱ Briand H., 1995, "L'appellation d'origine contrôlée: une politique agricole originale". In *Différenciation et qualité des produits alimentaires*. Edition ENITA Clermont Ferrand, Collection actes, pp. 43-48.

^{iv} Briand H., 1995, "L'appellation d'origine contrôlée: une politique agricole originale". In *Différenciation et qualité des produits alimentaires*. Edition ENITA Clermont Ferrand, Collection actes, pp. 43-48.

^v Cerdan, Sautier, 2003, Construction territoriale de la qualité des produits de l'élevage dans le Nordeste Brésilien. CD Rom issued from the Agrifood System Seminar, GIS SYAL, Montpellier, oct. 2002.

^{vi} Chabrol D., 2004, "Pas d'agriculture paysanne sans consommateurs avisés!", XXIVème conférence de la FAO pour l'Europe – Consultation de la société civile, 3-4 mai 2004, Montpellier. 4 p.

^{vii} Frayssignes J., 2001, "L'ancrage territorial d'une filière fromagère AOC - L'exemple du système Roquefort." *Economie Rurale*, n°264, juil. août 2001. pp. 1-16.

^{viii} Cerdan C., 1999, "Qualité territoriale et dynamique d'entreprises: les fromageries artisanales dans le Nordeste Brésilien". *Performances humaines et techniques*, n° 101, Sept. Oct. 1999. pp. 32-38.

^{ix} Frayssignes J., 2001, "L'ancrage territorial d'une filière fromagère AOC - L'exemple du système Roquefort." *Economie Rurale*, n°264, juil. août 2001. pp. 1-16.