

# 1 Eating traditional food

## Politics, identity and practices<sup>1</sup>

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### **Traditional food: a term which resists definition**

The idea of editing a book on ‘traditional foods’ emerged from a three-day international conference entitled ‘Traditional foods’ organised by the Department of Food Sciences of the University of Puducherry, India, 1–3 December 2010. I was invited, as an anthropologist, to chair the introductory session entitled ‘Diversity of traditional foods’. This panel aimed at approaching the subject in the context of the social sciences. However, except for one chapter, the contributions have not been included in this book because of their lack of involvement with food culture. Indeed, after a brief presentation of the communities (mostly tribal) which consume the targeted traditional foods, and some historical outlines, the presentations immediately shifted to the field of nutritional sciences, focusing on the nutritional values of these foods. The failure of most of the speakers to develop their presentation on the cultural aspect of traditional foods has to be understood as due to the absence of awareness of food studies in disciplines other than those of biotechnology and nutritional sciences. The historical background of famine, hunger and undernourishment in India which continues to pervade the imagination, as pointed out by Sunil S. Amrith (2008),<sup>2</sup> may justify the focus on nutritional sciences in the field of food studies, as well as that on economic sciences in the domain of the social sciences. Apart from the pioneer studies by R.S. Khare (1976a, 1976b, 1992)<sup>3</sup> and R.S. Khare and M.S.A. Rao (1986), few Indian researchers have examined the practices of preparing and consuming food in contemporary India from the perspective of tradition, either on a daily basis or during biographical and religious festivities and rituals. The works of Anil Kishore Sinha on traditional sweetmeats (2000), of Chitrita Banerji (2001, 2006, 2007) and Manpreet K. Janeja (2010) on memories of dishes prepared by grandmothers and mothers, the studies on evolution of consumption of foodstuffs and dishes by Om Prakash (1961), K.T. Achaya (1998a, 1998b) and Tuk-Tuk Kumar (1988), and on the adaptation of Indian foods in colonial cuisine (Brown 1998, Sangar 1999), are exceptions.<sup>4</sup>

The infeasibility of compiling a book of chapters by the panel constrained me to search for experts exploring traditional foods in diverse cultural areas and contexts. The chapters which compose this book, by the plurality of their

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approaches, political, identity, religious, symbolic and medical, allow not only for deepening the recurrent values attributed to traditional foods evoked by the panellists (identity, religious and nutritional), but also for debating the relevance of definitions of the subject developed by two extensive European programmes, EuroFIR and TRUEFOOD; of these, that of EuroFIR has been retained by the FAO.

The first question that arises with regard to the term ‘traditional foods’ is what people have in mind when they employ it. According to what criteria do they qualify a foodstuff or a dish as traditional? In which situations and contexts, whether social, religious, ideological or political, may a food be given traditional value, positive or negative? In the sixth synthesis report of EuroFIR on Traditional Foods in Europe, Elisabeth Weichselbaum and her colleagues argue that “Although the term ‘traditional foods’ is widely used, and everybody has a rough idea of what is meant by it, there are hardly any definitions that clearly define traditional foods.” (2009: 4). In common belief, traditional foods often evoke cultural heritage, the know-how shared and transmitted, quite often by word of mouth, amongst a more or less wide group of people (family, clan, territory, country or a geographical region covering several countries, such as rice in Asia or olive oil in Mediterranean areas). They suggest an extensive past which defines them as being tasty, healthy and in harmony with nature; many of these attributes are rooted in memory and imaginary. Lin T. Humphrey states that “In memory culture, where we find traditional recipes and food stories, ‘traditional foods’ may refer to either the kind of heritage or history that we actually had or the one we only wish we had. When we label food traditional, it is usually a mark of approval.” (1989: 163). Nevertheless, as the author emphasises, “‘tradition’ is a value-laden word” and “food depends on total context in our memories and with our associations to develop such meanings and identification and such positive and tasty connotations” (Samuelson quoted by Humphrey *ibid.*): this leads to a certain blurring, elasticity and heterogeneity of what may be perceived as a traditional food. The recipes that Humphrey has collected from her students<sup>5</sup>, who had investigated what they understood by traditional foods, are particularly illuminating on the conceptual variability of the term. The students qualify their selected recipes as traditional either because they are used by their mother or grandmother, they are hand-made, they include some unusual ingredients, they are served on special occasions (religious or biographical celebrations) or they are ‘good to share’ with their peers. Humphrey comments that the choice of recipes by students is not oriented according to long-term use and cultural relationship, but to the role they play in their social life, to “create and enforce a sense of identity with both past and present family and friends.” (*ibid.*: 168).

Compared to Humphrey’s students, the representation of traditional foods by the contributors of the panel ‘Diversity of Traditional Food’ was conventional: they inscribed this category, explicitly as well as implicitly, within long-term use. They explicitly supported the long-term consumption of traditional foods by mentioning historical evidence drawn from ancient texts such as the

Ṛg Veda<sup>6</sup> or from normative literature such as Manusmṛti or Gṛha Dharma which codify food consumption and patterns according to the eater's identity<sup>7</sup> or biographical rituals, respectively. On the other hand, they implicitly called upon the long use of traditional foods as they associated them with indigenous communities, predominantly tribes, who produce, collect and consume them. Another criterion which emerged from most of the papers was the healthy, even medical, value that their authors attributed to these foods. This relationship is not surprising as, on the one hand, food in Indian traditional medicine is fundamentally allied to medication for preventing and treating diseases<sup>8</sup>, and on the other, studies on food in India, as mentioned above, focus predominantly on the field of dietetics and biotechnology.

To return to the fundamental question 'what is a traditional food', it is surprising that few countries have proposed a definition although it might be an added-value for marketing. The only attempts come from European countries which have carried out two extensive cross-national/cultural surveys, both funded by the Sixth Framework Programme of the European Commission. The first study, TRUEFOOD, involving six regions selected in seven European countries (Belgium, France, Greece, Italy, Norway, Poland and Spain), aimed to develop innovations in the food industry in order to help producers of traditional foods "to maintain and expand their market share in a highly competitive and increasingly global food market" (Guerrero et al. 2009: 345). The objective was to make agricultural products financially attractive in order to alleviate rural depopulation. An understanding of the way in which consumers from rural as well as urban areas defined and perceived traditional food products was the first step of this programme (Almli et al. 2011; Guerrero et al. 2009; Pieniak et al. 2009). A definition was produced based on interviews (Guerrero et al. 2009):

[a traditional food] is a product frequently consumed or associated to specific celebrations and/or seasons, normally transmitted from one generation to another, made with care in a specific way according to the gastronomic heritage, with little or no processing/manipulation, that is distinguished and known because of its sensory properties and associated to a certain local area, region or country.

The analysis of cross-national/cultural data resulting from the TRUEFOOD programme revealed important differences in the perception of traditional foods between the seven countries involved in the programme. Although the general apprehension of traditional foods was very positive (from 5.51 to 6.03 on scale 1–7), the reasons for which each European country valorised them varied significantly in terms of organoleptic properties and environmental and economic advantages, as well as in their inscription in the patrimonial field and in religious and biographical celebrations. This significant variability adds to the paramount difficulty of finding a consensual definition for a term as abstract and culturally-connoted as that of traditional foods.

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The second study is the programme EuroFIR (European Food Information Resource) involving 13 European countries. With the objective of investigating the health value attributed to traditional foods through interviews on selected ingredients, cooking methods and dishes, the programme endeavoured to develop a definition of ‘traditional foods’ (Trichopoulou et al. 2006; Weichselbaum and Costa 2009). The definition by which ‘tradition’ means “conforming to established practice or specifications prior to the Second World War”<sup>9</sup>, is presented by Weichselbaum et al. (2009: 4–6):

[...] a food with a specific feature or features, which distinguish it clearly from other similar products of the same category in terms of the use of ‘traditional ingredients’ (raw materials or primary products) or ‘traditional composition’ or ‘traditional type of production and/or processing method’.

This definition was developed by clarifying three terms. ‘Raw material or primary product’ is understood as “either alone or as an ingredient, which has been used in identifiable geographical areas and remains in use today (taking into account cases where use was abandoned for a time and then reinstated) and its characteristics are in accordance with current specifications of national and EU legislation”. ‘Traditional composition’ is defined as “the uniquely identifiable composition (in terms of ingredients) that was first established prior to the Second World War and passed down through generations by oral or other means (taking into account cases where composition was abandoned for a time and then reinstated) and when necessary is differentiated from the composition defined by the generally recognised characteristics of the wider group to which the product belongs”. Lastly, the ‘traditional type of production and/or processing’ is specified as “the production and/or processing of a food that 1- has been transmitted from generation to generation through oral tradition or other means and 2- has been applied prior to the Second World War and remains in use (taking into account cases where composition was abandoned for a time and then reinstated) despite its adjustment to binding rules from national or EU food hygiene regulations or the incorporation of technical progress, under the condition that production and/or processing remains in line with methods used originally and that the food’s intrinsic features such as its physical, chemical, microbiological or organoleptic features are maintained.” This definition was adopted by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) during the 26<sup>th</sup> FAO Regional conference on Europe in Innsbruck, Austria, on 26<sup>th</sup>–27<sup>th</sup> June 2008 (<ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/meeting/013/K2473E.pdf>).

The definition given by EuroFIR is, admittedly, more elaborate than that of TRUEFOOD, but it calls for comment. First, the definition delimits the time prior to which a food consumed today can be classified as traditional. This time limit, as emphasised by Elise Billard in this book, tends, however, to be ethnocentric and does not fit in with the representation of traditional foods by people. As demonstrated by Sandrine Ruhlmann in her chapter, the Mongolians consider dumplings as belonging to their food culture, even

though these products, which originated in China, have entered their diet recently. Secondly, the inclusion of “restated food” into the EuroFIR definition, i.e. dishes and ingredients having benefited from a revival after a period of abandonment, is all the more uncertain when other elements of the definition are considered. Certainly, the goal of “maintaining the physical, chemical, microbiological features” is difficult to respect due to the changes that have affected production of foodstuffs (agricultural methods, environmental issues) and of dishes (processing and cooking methods) and, when “restated foods” are concerned, it is simply unrealisable as data from the past are missing. Thirdly, “maintaining organoleptic features”, i.e. characteristics such as taste, flavour, odour, consistency, etc. which are subjective, is all the more impossible where “restated foods” are concerned as their perception is distorted by memory and imaginary. Lastly, the definition fails to take into consideration the fact that traditional knowledge and know-how are far from being homogenous and fixed. In cuisine, as in siddha medicine on which I have been conducting research, recipes, like formulas, may have evolved according to the creativity of the cook or the practitioner, often with a competitive aim. Cooks, like traditional practitioners, are not always eager to reveal their recipes, omitting, sometimes deliberately, to mention ingredients which make their dish or remedy different in taste or in efficacy. In a certain way, secrecy may be a component of cuisine, as it is a feature of alchemy.<sup>10</sup> Compared to the EuroFIR definition, that of TRUEFOOD, despite its weakness, corresponds better to the common representation of traditional foods, as it specifies: the continuity between generations, transmission of knowledge and know-how, seasonality of food (with reference to nature) in daily consumption and during festival time, sensory properties of food and relationships between traditional foods and cultural heritage whether local or national. In other terms, the definition of EuroFIR is clearly directed by a legal intention, perhaps with a commercial objective even though the aim of the programme was to examine the healthy aspects of traditional foods. That of TRUEFOOD, although its objective was precisely commercial, has a much more anthropological dimension; its failure to mention the time period during which a food or ingredient may be called traditional may reflect discrepant perceptions of traditional foods by consumers. Nevertheless, the research papers of the teams involved in these two programmes provide some information on the representations of traditional foods by consumers that complement the definitions. For example, while terms such as local, territory, community, culture, are omitted in the definition of EuroFIR, Trichopoulou and her colleagues (2007: 426) specify that “traditional foods include foods that have been consumed locally or regionally for an extensive time period.” While the definition of TRUEFOOD is silent on the consumption period necessary to classify a product as traditional food, Luis Guerrero and his colleagues (2009: 345–346) specify: “Traditional [related to food] means proven usage in the community market<sup>11</sup> for a time period showing transmission between generations; this time period should be the one generally ascribed to one human generation, at least 25 years”. This period, significantly shorter than that proposed

by EuroFIR, is obviously debatable as it is oblivious of the boom in the food industry, transport, catering, tourism, migration and communication tools which accelerate circulation of products, people and recipes. The relevance of these two programmes is justified by their teams as a means for protecting traditional foods against the risk of their disappearance. However, one may deplore the lack of investigation into the reasons why some traditional foodstuffs or dishes are being abandoned while others have been granted national or international recognition, such as ratatouille, a vegetable dish originally from Provence which is now prepared all over France and neighbouring countries, curries originally from India declared a national dish in England, or pizza from Italy consumed, admittedly with variations according to local taste, all over the world (Bell and Valentine 1997). Moreover, these programmes have not sought to grasp the broadness of the concept of traditional food that people use, according to context, for supporting or, inversely, for counteracting economical, political, medical and identity claims. The following excerpt from Uma Narayan's work related to food, quoted by David Bell and Gill Valentine (*ibid.*: 2), expresses the plurality and ambiguity of representations attributed to traditional foods:

Thinking about food has much to reveal about how we understand our personal and collective identities. Seemingly simple acts of eating are flavoured with complicated and sometimes contradictory cultural meanings. Thinking about food can help reveal the rich and messy textures of our attempts at self-understanding; as well as our understanding and problematic understandings of our relationship with social Others.

Food in general, and traditional foods in particular, are providers of personal or collective identities, and markers of social and cultural representations as varied as aesthetics, pleasure, ethics, memory, politics, lifestyle and well-being. The multilayered representations of traditional foods, and the diversity of contexts in which they are appropriated by a group, a community or a nation, are the focus of this book.

### **The construction of the concept of traditional food through ten cases studies**

The book presents ten case studies, rooted in different cultural areas, which analyse the processes of valorisation, instrumentalisation, adjustment, adoption and reinvention, at stake in the construction of a food – ingredient as well as dish – as traditional. In order to reproduce the diversity of attributes of traditional foods developed in each of these studies, the arrangement of the book has been to avoid any classificatory topics which might reduce the chapters to their major focus. The book, rather, unwinds like a thread on which an important attribute of traditional foods tackled in one chapter is then deepened by the following chapter(s). The thread uncoils through three aspects of traditional foods: construction, dispossession and appropriation or invention, engaged with

more or less deeply in each chapter, definition and regulation, nationalism and identity, and relation to health.

The three categories of products – amaranth, insects and *pulque* – explored in Chapter 2 are unquestionably traditional: their consumption by prehispanic communities is reported by Spaniards who established themselves in Mexico, and has continued thank to the intermixing of Spaniards with indigenous people. However, as discussed by Esther Katz and Elena Lazos, their consumption has never been linear: according to period, it faced some restriction for religious, moral and/or social reasons. If these products have survived till today, it is partly because they have benefited from a revival movement fostered by their nutritional quality which promotes them to the rank of what the authors name “super-foods”. The revitalisation of traditional ingredients, recognised for their nutritional values, agricultural advantages or their sustainability with regard to the food security, is a worldwide movement made necessary by the repeated crises which, each time, throw light on inequities regarding food affordability in terms of access and cost, detrimental effects of intensive cultivation and irreparable loss of biodiversity, etc. As crucial as the revival of traditional food ingredients is, their benefit to the populations who have the most need of them is diminished: while the promotion of amaranth has profited indigenous people of Mexico who, not having stopped consuming it, have now revived its cultivation and sold amaranth-based products to the well-off, promotion of insects has not had the same result. Indeed, how is it possible to convince marginalised communities to consume foods which have contributed to their ostracism? The reluctance to consume insects echoes what I have observed in South India concerning the revival of millets for improving the nutritional quality of the diet of poor. As millets were deprecated as ‘food of poor’, ‘food of villagers’ or ‘coarse cereals’, the poor and villagers avoid consuming them as much as possible while higher classes, sensitised by nutritional discourses, turn to them to improve their health, especially to prevent or treat diabetes. Following a process similar to that described by Katz and Lazos, the enthusiasm of higher classes for millets has led to a significant increase in their price which make them barely affordable for the poor. While the insects’ price inflation stems from the combination of a degraded environment that has reduced drastically the availability of insects and from the valorisation of insects as gastronomic components, that of millets results from the fact that their production, not supported by government programmes, does not face the new requirement from the food industry, restaurants and food markets that attract the health conscious higher classes.

In contrast to the three Mexican foods which, even though they have experienced periods of fluctuation, have been cultivated, produced and consumed since time immemorial in Mexico, the Chapter 2, by Elise Billard, based on the case of Maltese cuisine, shows that the meaning accorded to the term ‘traditional’ is hardly fixed. Her chapter contributes with relevance to the debate on the definition of a traditional food. It deals with the impossibility of establishing a clear definition of the term ‘tradition’ and, concomitantly, of its association with food. Rather than defining these elusive terms, which might

be counterproductive, it proposes to examine the way knowledge and practices are transmitted within a community. Relying on Timothy Ingold's work (1997), the author argues that the transmission and preservation of culinary know-how including gestures and experiences, is more relevant than the recipes in books<sup>12</sup>. The author's opinion does not support the EuroFIR and TRUEFOOD projects which, promoting the standardisation of recipes for marketing purposes, risk reducing the diversity of knowledge and skills. Her statement resonates with the situation I have observed in the field of siddha medicine, where industrialisation of remedies, modelled on bio-pharmaceutical practices, leads to a transformation and a significant decrease in the repertoires of traditional formulas (Sébastien 2010). While the formulation of remedies in ayurvedic or siddha medicine relies upon a combination of multiples ingredients, ayurvedic and siddha pharmacies have developed new formulas by using only two or three ingredients selected for their active properties. If such ingredients are used in these medical systems, may these remedies still be called traditional? Such a transformation raises questions about the impact of the industrialisation process on traditional foods in terms of authenticity and recognition compared to those made at home or in restaurants. The industrialisation process is selective and reductive: it ends up imposing uniformity on traditional dishes which are essentially as variable in composition and taste as they are dependent on the virtuosity and improvisation of the cook, and on the regional identity from which they originate. Observations in the field of traditional foods do not allow merely investigation of how skills are transmitted and how a dish may differ from the original, but also shed light on discrepancies in discourses and in political debates articulated from a nationalist perspective. The production of olive oil, the iconic product of Mediterranean countries, has recently been introduced into Malta with the help of the European Union. Although in the distant past, olive trees were cultivated there, the use of olive oil in cooking has not been attested. The reintroduction of olive trees has allowed the Maltese to produce an oil that they called 'traditional'. By inscribing their culture in the list of Mediterranean countries recognised for their healthy diet<sup>13</sup>, they rewrite the history of their country, erasing traces of the people (Arabs, British) who colonised them and transformed their agriculture by developing cotton crops (Arabs) and sheep breeding (British), even though these influences are still present in their dietary pattern. In an identity construction, the question of the time prior to which a food may be labelled 'traditional' is not an issue. On the contrary, historical facts may be denied and reconstructed in order to support the claims as is cogently demonstrated by Ruhlmann in her chapter on the valorisation of dumplings by Mongolia. However, the historical background is one of the proprietary criteria for a traditional food to be recognised, and thus the historical evidence is meticulously examined in documents for obtaining a certification of traditional food at the national and international levels, as Chapter 4 by Delphine Marie-Vivien, on geographical indications (GIs) shows in the Indian context.

The classification of foodstuffs and dishes under the "traditional" label undoubtedly offers advantages for both producers and consumers. Antonia

Trichopolous and her colleagues (2007) argue that the designation of marketed traditional foods protects products, producers and consumers. The products and producers may benefit from a newly booming market due to the fact that 'traditional' is an added-value for consumers in search of authenticity, and certification protects the consumers from false claims. Obviously, as mentioned above, a certification does not always guarantee the authenticity of a product as the choice of the ingredient or the recipe has been defined by the person or company who has submitted his/its application. The examples of products proposed for obtaining the GI designation in India are particularly relevant to the analysis of the issues raised by certification. European countries have been first in creating designations, among which some are used worldwide. These designations, defined in 1992 and redefined in 2006 by the European Council Regulation, aim to prioritise either the link between a food and its place of origin and production (Protected Designation of Origin, PDO; Protected Geographical Indication, PGI) or the method (culinary patrimony) used to produce it (Traditional Speciality Guarantee, TSG). Although certain food products would fit the TSG designation, the GI is the one India has chosen and for which it enacted the GI Act in 1999. The GI designation has been accorded to several agricultural products cultivated in a delimited territory such as Darjeeling tea, Coorg oranges, Virupakshi Hill Banana, Malabar pepper, etc.; sometimes the designation name corresponds to the variety of a plant such as Navara rice (Kerala). It has also benefited some food products, known and made all over India but particularised by a recipe developed by a manufacturer, such as the two sweetmeats, Dharwad *pedha* and Tirupati *laddu*. As discussed by the author, this designation may be misused due to the fact that the commercialisation of *pedha* and *laddu* under the label Dharwad *pedha* and Tirupati *laddu* is the monopoly<sup>14</sup> of only one family and the temple committee of Tirupati-Tirumalai who applied for the designation, while the recipe and the processing mode of preparing these sweetmeats is shared by other manufacturers of the region. On the other hand, when a product is not clearly designated by a geographical name obtaining the label is complicated. The case of Basmati rice presented in the chapter is particularly illustrative as repeated applications for GI designation have been rejected.<sup>15</sup> Compared to Navara rice for which the applicants succeeded in demonstrating a link with the region and culture of Kerala, the cultivation of Basmati rice covers too wide a territory to benefit from the GI designation. Indeed, while Basmati refers to a variety of rice which was cultivated in Pakistan, North India and Bangladesh, several cultivars have been developed from the aromatic Basmati 370 variety developed from a local rice in 1933 at a rice research station now located in Pakistan (Singh 2000). The first attempts to certify Basmati rice resulted from the necessity of protecting it from biopiracy when the US Patent and Trademark Office granted a patent on Basmati rice developed by Rice-Tech Inc., Texas (Mukherjee 2008). While India had to enact laws to protect its collection of rice germoplasts from biopiracy by international seed agencies such as Syngenta (Lutringer 2012), it had no law for protecting its foodstuffs within the World Trade Organization. The enactment

of the GI Act in 1999 was initiated at this critical period. Interestingly, the author mentions that the political party which enacted the law was the Bharatiya Janata Party. This party, made up of ultra-right members, is well known for its nationalist positions and reinterpretations of history aiming at denouncing outsiders who pervert Indian culture (see Sébastia Chapter 6 in this volume) and sack the richness of the country. If the interest of the GI designation is born from a will to protect the knowledge, know-how and natural resources of the country, the objectives of the applicants in registering a product are today driven by the same intentions for which these designations were established, that of commercial benefits for producers. This especially concerns those aiming at the international market, and consumers too, as the Indian middle and upper classes are increasingly attracted by the concept of tradition, be it applied to foods or to any goods such as sari, shawl, textile or soap

The valorisation of traditional foods with a political and nationalist intention highlighted in the two previous cultural contexts, and also evoked in Chapter e, as Mexico had inscribed prehispanic food to its patrimony to gain recognition from UNESCO, is one of the major topics developed in this book. Dumplings in Mongolid, as discussed by Ruhmann, are regarded as “authentic” and “true” Mongolian foods, although introduced only in the 1970s and are certainly of Chinese origin. Having progressively entered the food system of Mongolians, dumplings have acquired the same attributes and values, physical, symbolic and soteriological, as those with which traditionally consumed foods were endowed, especially mutton and dairy products. Due to these attributes, they hold a prevalent role in the festive meals whose symbolic function is to maintain the order of the universe. In addition, whereas Buddhism with its hierarchical system was combatted by the socialist regime, the democratic regime which emerged after the collapse of the RSSR has been promoting Mongolian identity, with Genghis Khan as the emblematic figure of nomadism, as well as Buddhism. In this political and religious reconfiguration, dumplings have acquired a preeminent place as Mongolians use them to express certain Buddhist karmic conceptions, especially those of distributing accumulated happiness and, in return, gaining merit towards auspicious rebirth. Such a process of construction is a contemporary example of invented traditional foods in line with the ideas of invented tradition presented by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983). In his introduction, Hobsbawm argues that invented traditions “give to any desired change (or resistance to innovation) the sanction of precedent, social continuity and natural law as expressed in history” (*ibid*: 2). The denial of the origin of dumplings which stems from a long period of conflict with, and domination by, the Chinese, allows the Mongolians not only to legitimise their contemporary practices, but also to support their representation of the world and their beliefs and ethics.

The process of appropriation of a food, with claim to a traditional origin, is at the heart of the actions led by Dalit students (lower castes in Hindu stratification) of the Osmania University at Hyderabad documented by Brigitte Sébastia. In contrast, however, with the dumplings of Mongolia or the olive trees of Malta, the food the students claim is beef, a product which is neither

borrowed from another food culture, nor whose consumption was interrupted for a long time. Qualifying beef as a traditional food may seem as strange as inadequate, as this ordinary ingredient is consumed all over the world. But in India its consumption gives rise to a very peculiar situation. Due to progressive restriction on cow slaughter influenced by Buddhism and Jainism, and its vehement condemnation since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century by Hindu nationalist movements, consumption of beef was given up by castes of middle and upper status, and became a marker of Muslim and Dalit identity. While Muslims and Dalits have been encouraged to change what the nationalists interpreted as an 'evil' habit, the present day situation is reversed as, thanks to an improvement in their socio-economic status, lower Dalits are able to raise their voices to claim their rights to eat what they called their traditional food. However, the beef *biryān*, they select to support their claim is far from being a traditional Dalit dish. It is an invented tradition or, to quote Claude Lévy-Strauss, a '*bricolage*' (see also Rühmann) which serves, not to legitimise contemporary practices or to support a representation of the world as in the case of dumplings, but rather to de-stigmatise a foodstuff and make it appreciated, nutritional values participating significantly in this construction.

The strategy adopted by Dalit students to endorse a positive image of a traditional food which has contributed to their marginalisation is rare. More common, as demonstrated above through the consumption of insects or millets, is to renounce to the foods which are ostracised or are ostracising. The situation examined by Liora Gvion shows that this is not always possible, as a traditional food may be an effective instrument to subdue a community. Analysing the reality TV programme Israeli 'Master Chef', the author shows how the Israeli Chefs construct and reproduce the stereotypical image of the Palestinian community of Israel, as being seldom disposed to change their conservative attitude. Unlike the Dalits, the Palestinian contestants resist throwing back the image expected by the Israeli society. But to stay in the competition, they have no alternative but to admit their inability to adapt to the modern values of the society in which they are living and to demonstrate their attachment to their food heritage. The Palestinian food patrimony is presented by the Chefs as poor; this ignores the fact that certain of its dishes have participated in the creation of the Israeli cuisine which is a combination of recipes and know-how borrowed from diverse cultures within which Jews lived before establishing themselves in Israel (Ranta 2016). This story of the dispossession of a traditional food is not different from that of the dumplings originating in Chicia: in these two situations of conflict, to deny any quality to the adversary, such as being the creator of a traditional food, permits those who act in this way to position themselves as superior.

In other contexts, the appropriation of food patrimony from others is not accompanied by their dispossession. It is because high values are attributed to them that some traditional foods are appropriated or borrowed. These values may reflect cultural preference and closeness as in the case of olive oil in Malta, or their nutritional qualities,<sup>16</sup> or the quest for authenticity as demonstrated

by the Indian food recommended by French ayurvedic practitioners (see Commune in this volume). The former two, cultural preference and nutritional properties, are the values that the Bolivians, studied by Edouard de Suremain, emphasise in expressing their nostalgia for a time of abundance when they lived in Argentina as migrants, and in describing their miserable life since their return to Bolivia. Nostalgia, and more precisely the nostalgia for food, has been widely designated as a contribution to the nationalist and identity construction of migrants (Holtzman 2006). Foods from the motherland, quite often qualified as traditional, are highly valued compared to the foods of host countries. For example, in the context of migration studies of Indians, the works on food culture have especially benefited from the contributions of Indian migrants. The nostalgic memories of the food consumed at home, either analysed (Mannur 2010; Ray 2004) or expressed (Banerji 2001, 2006, 2007; Brown 1998) hold an important place in this context. Such feelings are in line with a construction, even an idealisation, of the nation<sup>17</sup> in which Indian culinary culture is one of the components, whether in a situation of migration (Mannur 2010, Srinivas 2006) or at home (Appadurai 1988, Srinivas 2006). Anita Mannur, underlining the valorisation of Indian food in diasporic milieus, calls it “culinary citizenship”, i.e. “a form of affective citizenship which grants subjects the ability to claim and inhabit certain subject positions via their relationship to food” (Mitra 2011: 434–5). This identity construction through the mirror of memory is a feature shared by migrants. As John D. Holtzman asserts, “ethnic identity forms a central arena in which food is tied to notions of memory, although not necessarily framed in those terms.” (Holtzman 2006: 366). However, the repertory of traditional foods of the motherland, sometimes imagined, invented or reconstructed, is not always as valorised as it is for the Bolivian returnees. In their poor country, migration is a means to escape poverty and food insecurity, and the return home is an experience all the more bitter in that they do not find any work as would allow them access to good food, i.e. food available only to rich people. Such a situation is obviously far from that of Indian migrant writers. Belonging to elite groups, these writers know about Indian food culture only from the varied and rich food they ate in childhood, and eat during their holidays at home. The books of Chitrata Banerji, for example, full of tastes and smells, relate her food discovery of India. In contrast, de Suremain points out that the return home for the Bolivians entails difficulties in coping with a monotonous and scanty diet and the deprivation of what they call Argentinean traditional foods, especially beef and bread, two valued items accessible in Bolivia only by prosperous people. The discourses of Bolivian returnees between the food of “there” and the food of “here”, to use the dichotomy of the author, point to the decline in their socio-economic status due to their impoverishment; they have become *indiecitos* (small Indians) again, and have also lost legitimacy as they are no longer able to nourish their children adequately. While, “there”, the place of plenty, the children’s bodies, fed with nutritious and fatty foods, were strong and well developed, “here”, the place of scarcity, their body is deteriorating and becoming weak. The main food featured in their memories of “there” is meat, especially

beef. Mirroring the Dalit students' claims, they attribute a high nutritional value to it. Even though their consumption of beef in Argentina was limited to Sunday and festive days, their deprivation in Bolivia is regarded as very detrimental to the health of their children.

The question of healthy foods is at the heart of the final three chapters which approach these foods from the point of view of the diet recommended by a governmental policy, by dieticians or by ayurvedic practitioners. A model of a sustainable and healthy diet is all the harder to define as each country has its own conception of food, oriented according to ideological and socio-cultural criteria, as clearly epitomised in this book. This complexity leads to a cacophony of dietary recommendations, fuelled by diverse ideologies and often contradictory or unsuitable for the food pattern of the targeted people, with the result that they are poorly adhered to. Dietary concepts, so popular today, are in fact an old story. They form a significant part of traditional medical thought (Farquhar 2002; Sébastia 2015; see also de Suremain and Commune in this volume); to this extent that they have entered the discourses of lay people. They have also influenced theories on the prevention of disease, as Detlef Briesen demonstrates in his chapter on Germany. He is not concerned with traditional foods because Germany does not, properly speaking, have a food culture; the German tradition lies in its strong and lengthy involvement in creating a healthy diet. It played a pioneer role in the nutritional sciences which were applied in agro-industry for developing processed food affordable by all socio-economic groups. While meat consumption, especially of pork, was especially promoted to enhance the nutritional quality of the diet of the poor, vegetarianism found a fecund field in this country preoccupied by the health of its population. Drawing on theories and influences as diverse and heteroclitic such as: the humoral balance of the Hippocratic physiological system, the vitalism movement, derived from the '*principe vital*' of Jean Jacques Rousseau, the ideology of National Socialism aimed at elevating moral German behaviour by eradicating smoking, drinking and meat-eating and, more recently, the Negative Nutrition, concept used by Warren J. Belasco to describe a movement that emerged in the 1960s in US inciting consumers to eat less and to question their own food habits, the valorisation of the vegetarian diet, or at least, of a diet based more on plant food, has been progressively spreading. The inclination of Germany towards a healthy diet has favoured the development of organic agriculture that started in the 1920s, as a result of which the country is the second biggest market for organic products in the world after Denmark. The historical, sociological and medical conditions which lead to a valorisation either of meat consumption or of vegetarianism differ. But these theses, all aiming at promoting good health through a diet supposedly nutritional, confuse the representation of an ideal diet or, playing with the terminology of Warren J. Belasco (1989), what a positive diet is. This confusion partly explains why people tend not to be compliant with the food recommendations prescribed for preventing or treating food-related disorders.

A marked resistance to following dietary recommendations is epitomized by French people with hypercholesterolemia. The difficulty nutritionists face in

convincing their patients to comply with their food prescriptions leads them to turn to sociologists in order to understand the causes. The chapter by Tristan Fournier reveals that attachments to traditional foods and to eating habits and environment are the main factors hindering compliance. This gives rise to two observations. First, traditional foods to which “patients” are attached are not always healthy, cheese and processed meat being the two products inherent to French food culture that are most mentioned. This observation stands as a counterpoint to common sense about the healthy value attributed to traditional foods as was focused on by the EuroFIR programme and mentioned by Indian panellists at the conference “Traditional food”. The fact that traditional foods may have some consequences for health, or are too calorific compared to the energy requirement of modern life, may lead to their being abandoned. The agro-industry has been penetrating this field to develop more healthy traditional foods, but the organoleptic properties of these foods meet with lukewarm appreciation from consumers. Secondly, the social and familial environment in which food habits are rooted is a significant obstacle to following food recommendations. While people are prone to comply with prescriptions when they are alone in front of their plate, compliance becomes a real challenge when the sharing of food takes place in the circle of family, social or professional relationships. The sharing of food being an important part of the commensal relationships which link an individual to a group, the observance of food recommendations is all the more difficult in that the food culture in which these relationships are inserted accords great importance to the sharing of meals. This is the case in France, well known for its sophisticated *manières de table* centred on culinary hedonism as a value favouring dialogue and conviviality (Poulain 2002). This is also the case in India where, although its *manières de table* are entirely opposed to the French model, the meal being swallowed rapidly quite often with scant conversation, the repeated invitations which are intrinsic to the commensal obligations of people expose those with diabetes to breaking their regimen frequently and to consuming the rich food they are served.<sup>18</sup> Not only is temptation high when people on a particular regimen are exposed to their favourite dishes while the rest of the family is not constrained by the same regimen, but also the refusal of a dish or the impossibility of sharing the same menu during a friendly meal or a business lunch creates awkwardness.<sup>19</sup> Medication is, in these cases, the best recourse to treat food-related diseases and to avoid health complications. But medication, notably in the long-term, as in the treatment of chronic diseases, is not always accepted because of its iatrogenic effects, either real or anticipated. Failure to take medication is common, at least till secondary problems occur, and resort to another medical system, called in western countries alternative or complementary, may become a second option. This is the topic explored in the last chapter of this volume.

The practice of ayurvedic medicine in France, as Nicolas Commune observes in his contribution, is hardly visible. Compared to Germany, for example, where pharmacies sell Chinese medicine and spas, run by graduate ayurvedic practitioners, offer Indian medicines and massages, ayurvedic centres and

clinics are limited in their practice. Although unconventional medical systems increasingly enter hospitals, and unconventional remedies pharmacies, French legislation is reluctant to support medical systems other than biomedicine and homeopathy and imposes restrictions, one in particular being the obligation not to treat diseases. This restriction obliges ayurvedic practitioners to invest in the field of prevention and thus to develop their knowledge of foods, and especially traditional foods, which form an important part of the therapeutic universe of this medicine. But, using the food repertoire of India when practising in France is not without difficulty. Today exotic foods are increasingly available in France, facilitated by the import market developed by ethnic or specialist wholesalers to respond to the demands of foreign communities, and of French consumers, enthusiasts for new products. But the diversity of these imported products is not sufficient for the needs of ayurvedic practitioners, so that they are obliged to create a new repertoire of 'traditional foods' able to replace those recommended in the ayurvedic texts. The process of replacement described by Nicolas Commune that uses complex and subtle tools, exposes the inventiveness and the dynamic work of innovation, adaptation and re-appropriation of certain practitioners in juggling with diverse sources of knowledge in order faithfully to practise ayurveda according to the tradition, and/or to distinguish themselves from their peers. The process of replacement also reveals the plasticity of 'Indian traditional foods' which may be substituted for by French foods in order to fit in with ayurvedic tenets. However, not all ayurvedic practitioners support this form of adaption which, according to them, does not respect the pure ayurveda.

The large variety of contexts supported by rich ethnographic material explored in the articles presented in this book shows that the reality behind the valorisation of a food or dish as traditional is more multiple and complex than the criteria used by the two European programmes for evaluating the perception of traditional foods by individuals would suggest. The concept of tradition is so deeply ingrained emotionally, culturally, ideologically and politically, that the definition of traditional food resists any simplification or standardisation.

## Notes

- 1 The language editing of this book has been partly funded by the French Institute of Pondicherry. My heartfelt thanks to the Institute and to my colleague and friend, Mary Boseman, who did her best to improve the quality of the texts written by authors, in many cases not Anglophone.
- 2 Here I refer to the remark by Sunil S. Amrith (2008: 1012): "The government of food in modern India developed alongside an imagination of hunger; the language of science, and in particular nutritional science, was central to both."
- 3 These books by R.S. Khare doubtless concern food-related tradition in a wide sense. Nevertheless, the significant limitation of these books, intrinsic to the Brahmin identity of their author, is that they focus only on the consumption of, and attitudes to, foods of the vegetarian upper castes of North India. As Jack Goody argues regarding Khare's food study carried out in Lucknow, a town famous for its rich and elaborate Mughal cuisine: "Wherever he can, Khare takes a 'cultural' view; and

- culture for him has its ‘orthodox’ expression in Hindu cosmology” (Goody 1982: 123).
- 4 Compared to the scarcity of research on food in social sciences, as Arjun Appadurai had already pointed out in 1988, the production of cookbooks is rapidly expanding. While the author argued that this literature, stemming from the middle classes (corresponding to today’s upper classes), tended to distinguish itself from the moral and medical concepts related to Indian food culture, this is less true today as many cookbooks, relying on the rapid development of metabolic diseases, aim to promote a healthy diet quite often valorised through vegetarianism.
  - 5 The study was conducted at Citrus College, California.
  - 6 The Rg Veda is one of the four Hindu canonical texts made up of hymns written in Vedic Sanskrit which, according to philologists and indologists, were composed between 1500 and 900 AD.
  - 7 The Manusmṛti or Mānava dharmasāstra (Codes of Manu) is a legislative text dated 200 BC on the etiquette of social classes, mostly of the three first *varṇa* or brahmanical categories (Brahmaṇa, kṣatriya and vaiśya). Subjects related to food such as what, how and when to eat, with whom to eat and how to prepare food hold an important place as food is ambivalent: it nourishes as well as pollutes (symbolically) the body and mind.
  - 8 Food and diet, from one point of view, is a vehicle for maximising the efficacy of a remedy (for example, ingredients such as honey, milk, warm water, etc. or eating an unsalted or cooling diet, etc.), and from another, foods interfere in the body balance maintained by the three *doṣa*, *vāta-pitta-kapha* (flux of energy and substances, generally translated as humours).
  - 9 According to Trichopoulos et al. (2006: 503), the historical event of the Second World War has been chosen because it is considered as “a time barrier before the food industry revolution, where populations still applied simple and time-honoured approaches.” Compared to the definition of ‘traditional’ which was formulated first by the Commission of the European Communities, 2005, “Traditional means proven usage on the Community market for a period at least equal to that generally ascribed to a human generation” (ibid.), that of EuroFIR is more precise from the point of view of time.
  - 10 The association between food/cuisine and medicine/alchemy is all the more pertinent in the Indian context. As well as close relations with matter, spirituality and the psyche, many ingredients of medicinal preparations and dishes (spices such as pepper, ginger, turmeric, etc., lemon, milk, honey, dates, *ghī*, green leaves etc.) and apparatus (pots, grinders, mortars), are common (Sébastien 2012).
  - 11 The usage of “‘etailed s ted terms Aal medecommunity market” in this sentence and elsewhere in TRUEFOOD articles is not clear.
  - 12 Arjun Appadurai (1988: 3) has pointed out that cookbooks presuppose “often an effort on the part of some variety of specialist to standardize the regime of the kitchen, to transmit culinary lore, and to publicize particular traditions guiding the journey of food from marketplace to kitchen to table.”
  - 13 The Mediterranean diet, considered as healthy for the balance of its components, was inscribed in 2010 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. On the website of UNESCO, the Mediterranean diet is defined as: “characterized by a nutritional model that has remained constant over time and space, consisting mainly of olive oil, cereals, fresh or dried fruit and vegetables, a moderate amount of fish, dairy and meat, and many condiments and spices, all accompanied by wine or infusions, always respecting beliefs of each community.”  
<http://www.unesco.org/archives/multimedia/index.php?s=flyplayer&pg=33&vl=Eng&vo=2&id=1680> (download January 17.02.2014)
- See also the website of a Maltese company, producer of olive oil, which makes copious use of health and medical arguments in promoting its oil: <http://wardija.tripod.com>

- 14 The term 'monopoly' is borrowed from an article by Meghna Banerjee and Susanah Nausahd (2010) which argues that GI registration "may encourage formation of undesirable monopolistic practices" (ibid.: 109). The authors criticise the use of the GI designation of Tirupati *laddu* as an abusive form of the commercialisation of faith that profits the temple organisation. This designation is obviously a case of misuse, but it is not surprising: the commodification of rituals and religious goods has significantly developed in India, *prasad* being just one example of the transformation of a sacred gift from the deity into a commercial item supposedly sanctified by the deity.
- 15 The GI has been, however, granted to seven North Indian states in February 2016.
- 16 Although not evoked by Elise Billard, olive oil has acquired its very high reputation from research on the benefits of the Mediterranean diet which has pointed to the chemical properties of the oil for preventing cardiovascular diseases. However, this oil has always been highly valorised in Mediterranean cultures, as food as well as medicine. In Ancient Greece, it was used to massage the bodies of athletes as a means of preventing and healing injuries (Domikos et al. 2010); olive oil and olive leaves were recommended as food and as remedies by the Prophet Muhammad for preventing and treating many health conditions (Saad and Said 2011).
- 17 Nation is used in the sense of a collective sharing of a set of idioms, representations and practices which gives it its uniqueness compared to other nations (Anderson 1991; DeSoucey 2010).
- 18 As I have noticed during my open discussions with patients with diabetes about their perception of the diet recommended by siddha practitioners or by dieticians, and with dieticians working in various clinics, the frequency of social invitations is one of the factors most often mentioned to justify non-compliance with the regimen.
- 19 Regarding my experience as a French woman who dislikes the taste of cheese, each time cheese is served I am systematically questioned about why I do not eat it. My response has quite often been followed by a discussion on such an aberration.

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