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ABSTRACT

While cod (*bacalhau* in Portuguese) occupied for centuries an important place in the diet of the Portuguese, it is also true that we cannot understand this constant presence regardless of changes in fisheries, trade networks between the North Atlantic and Southern Europe, drying techniques and the social context of consumption during the same period. This presentation revisits different kinds of old and new sources that refute the idea of a simple continuity in the consumption, fishing and drying techniques of *bacalhau*. Mapping discontinuities in these different historical contexts brings us to consider the collective memory built around the *bacalhau* as a social force, more active than ever. At the same time, this memory is itself the product of a continuous process of reinvention, selective and labile, that constantly renegotiates the place that the “faithful friend” has in the imagination of communities that claim, in one way or another, their commitment to the idea of “portugality”.

KEYWORDS

Portugal, salt cod, *bacalhau* tradition

THE FABLE OF THE COD AND THE PROMISED SEA

ABOUT PORTUGUESE TRADITIONS OF *BACALHAU*

THE SEA, THE COD AND THE NATION

Bacalhau is an essential ingredient of Portuguese cuisine and, at the same time, a well-known national symbol such as Fado music, the Sanctuary of Fátima or Cristiano Ronaldo. This humble cod, salted and dried, was celebrated in the past through various forms of cultural expression. Literature, theatre, music, caricature, photography and film have, in turn, perpetuated the memories of fishing on the far banks of Newfoundland, the drying process on the Portuguese coast and the consumption both on national territory and within the communities of the Portuguese diaspora, scattered around the world. Some ports of the North of Portugal that took part in the “great fisheries” in the past, today also compete locally for the right to transform this memory into heritage. This crossfire between social and political arguments usually reinforces the rather long-standing, but still quite consensual assumption of a national tradition that includes fishing, drying and consumption of cod, emphasizing antiquity, authenticity, typicality and uniqueness of the different material and immaterial realities associated with it. The *bacalhau* tradition is also frequently used to assert Portugal’s maritime vocation, invariably invoked in times of crisis to legitimize nostalgic projects advocating the return of the elected people to the promised sea¹.

At the end of a 1967s National Geographic Society documentary, *The Lonely Dorymen, Portugal’s Men of the Sea*, the narrator Alexander Scourby concluded: “Soon again, husbands and wives must part to await the end of the long summer alone. To them, it is accepted as a way of life; for life is synonymous with the sea. It is their home, their heritage. A host that has sustained them during all the time they have lived on its shore. It is the very breath of Portugal and their indomitable men of the sea”. This final comment reflects the image of the national cod fisheries as a resurgence of the glorious past of the Portuguese Nation, faithful to its maritime vocation, and promoted all along the dictatorial regime. Today, 40 years after the fall of the dictatorship, it is still common to conceive the *bacalhau* tradition as an expression of the Portuguese maritime vocation. *Bacalhau* tradition continues, at the same time, to be presented inside and outside the country, as a common heritage shared by all Portuguese, which distinguishes their own national character from other European peoples.

A recent “fait divers” can help to understand the important place the *bacalhau* tradition still has in the national culture today. Until a few years ago, the European Union only authorised the use of phosphate as processing aid during the freezing process of the raw material, before salting the cod. Producers who had developed techniques to enrich

¹ See an example of recurrent rhetorical use of the promised sea thematic in the inaugural speech of the Portuguese President, opening the “*Portugal e o Mar, A Nossa Aposto no Século XXI*” conference (Cascais, 21 October 2010). Available at <http://www.presidencia.pt/?idc=22&idi=48296> (accessed 30 October 2013).

cod with phosphate (Lindkvist *et al.* 2008, 115), seized this opportunity to sell it in Europe as an additive free product. In March 2011, the Standing Committee of Food Chain and Animal Health (SCFCAH) clarified the European regulation by considering polyphosphate and other phosphates as food additives no matter what the stage of the process when they are being introduced (SANCO – DI(2011)D/310301). During the next months, this new position of the Commission led to the reinforcement of the legal prohibition of phosphate addition in salted fish by several countries, including Norway and Denmark (Bjørkevold *et al.* 2012, 18).

However, one month before, the Danish Seafood Association and the Norwegian Seafood Federation submitted a request to the Directorate-General for Health and Consumers Affairs (DG SANCO) of the European Commission to integrate diphosphate (E 450), triphosphates (E 451) and polyphosphates (E 452) to the European list of food additives² that are authorised by the Union to cure cod³. This proposal was based on scientific evidences proving that chemical elements protect effectively salted fish from oxidation (European Council 2013, al. 6), conserving the white colour of the flesh and the natural taste of the fresh cod that, according to their opinion, was appreciated by consumers in some traditional markets of salt cod, such as Spain, Italy and Greece.

Since then, the consequences of introducing this kind of food additives to salted and dried cod has been analysed by the Expert Group on Food Additives belonging to the DG SANCO. Alerted by Portuguese members of this group, several political parties of Portugal officially questioned the European Council in 2012 about the consequences of this change in the food additive regulation⁴. With regard to this question, the Portuguese government expressed its official position at a DG SANCO meeting in Brussels on March 6, 2012. They claimed that the use of polyphosphate in salt cod industry would signify the extinction of the Portuguese traditional cure, elevating the humidity of the green cod and turning all the dry process economically unviable. The Portuguese delegates again expressed their concern about the proposal of the Scandinavian countries at the SCFCAH meeting in January 2013. They argued that phosphate addition threatened “the survival of a national gastronomic product, which has a long tradition and represents a very important cultural value for Portugal as a national dish”.⁵

We will now try to track discrepancies between such conception of the *bacalhau* tradition and the testimony of historical sources, often invoked improperly to claim the specificity and the monolithic nature of the Portuguese cod tradition.

² EC regulation no. 1333/2008 – Annex II.

³ GSEAPI, n.º 2971, 30 April 2012.

⁴ Questions of the European Parliament for written answer to the European Commission no. E-001162/2012, P-001798/2012, E-002097/2012.

⁵ Council of the European Union, Note 5739/13, DENLEG 6/AGRI 41, 25 January 13, Annex.

THE TROUBLED WATERS OF THE ATLANTIC COD SAGA

Scandinavians had been the first European people to maintain a large-scale cod (*Gadus Morhua*) commercial trade in the Northern Atlantic, probably since the end of the first millennium AD (Barett *et al.* 1999, 2008, 2009). The air-dried technique, used to preserve cod by taking

advantage of the dry weather during the boreal regions' cold season, contributed since the Viking period to the expansion of commercial cod fisheries into the Northwestern Atlantic (Perdikaris *et al.* 2009, 63). Basque fishermen, who followed Baltic peoples in Northern seas since the Middle Ages, may have been the first to disseminate a new curing technique in regions of high latitude: salting the fish before drying it, a technique used to cure the fish in the Mediterranean for thousands of years (Kurlansky 1999a, 53). Portuguese, Norman, Breton and English fishermen, who joined the Basques in the Newfoundland banks around 1500, adopted this curing technique too (Pope 2009, 15). European fishermen came back every year to Newfoundland and Northwestern America to fish cod in shore waters⁶. They landed every day to split, wash and salt the fish before letting it dry out on cobbles, and later on wood flakes in the so called fishing rooms, some rudimentary establishments on the coast that were used at the same time as a night camp and as a curing station (*ibid.*, 400). Only the fish caught at the end of the fishing season was heavily salted in order to preserve it during the journey of return (*ibid.*, 27). Cod was, in this case, only dried later when the fishermen came back to their homeport. This process is documented in Portugal for the first time in 1572 at the northern port of Aveiro (Madahil 1959, 21). Later, fishermen of the Baltic regions started themselves to preserve cod with the salt they had to import from Southern Europe, even if they did not totally abandon the local air-dried cure tradition and continued to export dried cod to the rest of Europe (Lobo 1812a, 264). They used to pickle cod during eight days in brine with salt from France, Portugal and Spain. After running off the pickle juice, they salted the cod again and packed it definitively into wooden casks ready to be traded (Pontoppidan 1755, II: 159; Lobo 1812a, 267–268).

In the same period, the English Navy gained supremacy in the Northwestern Atlantic and claimed both Newfoundland and the Northwest Coast of America as a colonial territory of the British Crown. England gradually denied access to fishermen of other nations to the fishing rooms at the Newfoundland coast, among them the Spanish and the Portuguese who, in any case, had never been a major player in the migratory fisheries during the 16th century (Pope 2004, 16). During several centuries, the fishermen of these two countries interrupted their fisheries in the Northwestern Atlantic (Amorim 2001, 66–67). French, American and Dutch fishermen, for their part, adapted the disregarded air-drying technique, used before only to preserve the last catches of the ending campaign, to pursue their offshore fisheries in the Grand Banks without landing at the Newfoundland's coast as they used to⁷. They had now to prepare the fish entirely on board, before salting it directly on the bulk, in the sump of the boats or in wood barrels (Lobo 1812, 265–266; Azambuja 1835, 33). The cod they fished during the campaign was now only air-dried when they came back home, and not every day as they used to do at the Newfoundland's fishing stations.

⁶ Portuguese fishermen also had a permanent fishing settlement near Cape Breton in the early years of the sixteenth century (Donovan 2009, 337–340)

⁷ Norman fishermen were probably the first starting offshore fisheries in the Grand Banks already in the sixteenth century (Pope 2009, 14, 22)

Meanwhile, salted cod gained a very large market in Northern Europe but also in the Western and Eastern Mediterranean, mostly disputed

by French and English traders (Brière 1982). English merchants now supplied Portuguese ports (Pope 2004, 93), gradually turning this country in one of the world's largest importers, while most of the cod that the Portuguese fished in the past was previously exported to the Basque country (Garrido 2004, 35). Cod had already become a staple food of the ordinary people, in the middle of the 18th century, or even before (Amorim 2009, 266–267), and been gradually adopted by the upper levels of Portuguese society. Some monasteries used cod to feed their employees since the 16th century. In the 18th century, salt cod was already part of the daily diet of religious communities (Braga 2004, 48). At this time, and on a daily basis, meat continued to be only accessible for the rich, being the preferential source of protein for the upper classes (Braga 2005, 185). However, during the many days of fasting imposed by the Church (Braga 2004, 43–44), fish replaced meat even on the plate of the most fortunate. There was a seasonally unbalanced supply and demand of fish in the coastal port markets during the fasting periods, increased by the fact that local fishermen only salted and/or dried part of the fish they caught, ensuring its preservation for a moment of great demand. Frequently, the local fisheries were only able to supply the local market, and some fishing ports were even forced to import fish to cover their own needs (Lobo 1812b, 406). The supply of cod turned gradually into an important factor in Portugal's excessively unbalanced trade with England, a fact that was well described by contemporaneous writers (Azambuja 1835, 33; Martins 1988, 38).

The sardine and the cod were now consumed at all levels of Portuguese society, at least during fasting. However, not everybody had access to the same product range. Consumers soon established a hierarchy of fish quality by using an empirical classificatory system based on the size and the salt content of the fish, distinguishing cods from different supplying regions by a particular combination of these variables. The colour of the fish flesh was already a criteria used to evaluate the quality of the curing technique and the freshness of the product. At this time, some consumers appreciated the yellowish tone, while others associated this colour to rotting fish (Lobo 1812, 283, 286–287, 289, 298–299, 308–309). The latter ones valued the whiter flesh, typical of the heavy salted fish from the Northern Europe.

The idea of a *bacalhau* tradition was born at this very moment, being mostly understood as a fishing tradition, invoked since the early 19th century to claim the historical right of the Portuguese fishermen to access the Newfoundland banks (Azambuja 1835, 12). After 1835, they finally came back to the Grand Banks through the initiative of the Companhia de Pescarias Lisbonense, but the society was rather quickly extinguished in 1857 (Garrido 2004, 41). Another company, the Bensaúde & C., returned to the Northwestern Atlantic after 1872, sharing with the company Mariano & Irmão, founded in 1884, the monopoly of this activity during the rest of the century (Soeiro *et al.* 1999, 54). At this time, the knowledge that had been accumulated by the first generations of Portuguese fishermen during the Newfoundland fisheries was already

completely lost (Azambuja 1835, 34). The Companhia de Pescarias Lisbonense was obliged to recruit experts in England to train their own crews. The same happened some years later with the Bensaúde & C., which recruited Azorean fishermen, previously trained in line-fishing techniques in the United States of America (Teixeira 1967/1968, 88–89). The one-man dory boat that Portuguese fishermen would be the only ones to continue to use until the end of the 1960s (Cole 1990) was in fact inspired by the warys, a kind of fishing boat developed by American fishermen around the middle of the 18th century (Silva 1892, 176; Garrido 2004, 29). The Portuguese fishing companies were now subject to the same kind of restrictions imposed by England to other nations and joined their predecessors from the offshore banks, preparing and salting cod on board and air-drying all the catch only when they returned to the homeland. With the renewal of the Portuguese fisheries, green cod (wet salted cod) arrived again at the fishing harbours of Portugal, to be dried in processing units located close to the homeports of cod fishermen, which were, until 1903, mostly Lisbon and Figueira da Foz. At Aveiro, the cod drying activity only restarted a few years later, after an interval of three centuries. In the next decades, this port became the main centre of the Portuguese cod industry (Cascão 2001, 88).

On the other hand, the gradual strengthening of a patriotic feeling in the intellectual *milieu*, which marks the second half of the 19th century, gave a new meaning to the *bacalhau* tradition (Sobral *et al.* 2013, 620). *Bacalhau* was now elevated to national food of the Portuguese people (Ratazzi 2004 [1879], 287). From then onwards, the *bacalhau* tradition will not only be understood as a fishery tradition but also as a central element of Portuguese foodways. *Bacalhau* became rapidly the principal agent of an emergent invention process of the national cuisine (Sobral *et al.* 2013, 637–641). Recipes with salt cod, being known to be cooked in more than one thousand ways, became a must in almost every Portuguese cookbook, at least since the 20th century (Moutinho 1985, 182–183). The idea that *bacalhau* matches with the typical melancholic mood, the *saudade*, and with the *fado* music that is inspired on it, thus forming a distinctive Portuguese national character, emerged at the same period (Queiroz 2008, 331).

THE GLORIOUS DAYS OF THE *BACALHAU* CAMPAIGN

A new cycle of the Atlantic cod trade started in the 20th century. The English who dominated the Portuguese market in the past have now to compete with other northern nations such as Iceland and mostly Norway, a country that during centuries had fished cod in its own shore waters. On the other hand, the expansion of national railroad systems, the development of new conservation techniques, and particularly the invention of an artificial freezing technique, contributed progressively to the decline of the salt cod market in Northern Europe and America (Secretaria de Estado do Comércio 1967, 15). However, inhabitants of some southern European countries, who had no habit of eating fresh cod, remained faithful to the salted product. In Portugal, *bacalhau* was

still the cheapest source of protein and frequently consumed on a daily basis by the industrial workers of the coastal cities, particularly in the northern parts of the country (Moutinho 1985, 180–181). During World War I, the future leader of the Portuguese dictatorial regime, António Oliveira Salazar, learned as academic researcher about the tremendous social impact of the shortage of cod supply (Salazar 1917/1918), which was one of the factors that ultimately accelerated the decline of the young Republic and led to its official end through the Constitutional Act of 1933. The new leader, consequently, established as a national priority the need to ensure a constant and affordable salt cod supply on the Portuguese market, a goal of his economic programme that is known today as the *bacalhau* campaign (Garrido 2004, 52). At the same time, politic propaganda was used to disseminate a new narrative of the *bacalhau* tradition at all levels of Portuguese society, refocused on the line-fishing activity and the anachronous sailboats of the White Fleet⁸. The return to the Grand Banks was now seen as a resurgence of the glorious maritime past of the Portuguese Nation, faithful to its maritime vocation (Peralta 2008, 205). The White Fleet expanded during this period, but the imports from northern countries continued to supply an important part of national demand (Garrido 2001). At this stage, *bacalhau* was still a common meal for low-strata, urban consumers in northern and southern cities. The cod they could afford was generally of national provenience, smaller and inferior in quality (Abel *et al.* 1998, 81) to that of imported cods (Cajeira 1941, 65), which were only affordable to the affluent. The cure used by the Portuguese was known as *Nacional* or *Canadiana*, because Canadian producers had previously developed this cure. This technique, rudimentary and cheap to apply, requires the simple drying of green cod without soaking or salting it again (Tropa *et al.* 1958, 10–11), thus achieving a durability of six months with a very low production cost and making the final product affordable even for the poorest consumers. This cure was easily recognizable by its characteristic pale yellow colour.

Quantities, prices and the cod's quality were strictly controlled by a governmental institution known as Comissão Reguladora do Comércio do Bacalhau, founded in 1934 (Garrido 2004, 119–133). However, the cure of imported cod continued to be very variable, in opposition to the national one. The curing technique depended mostly on the provider's supply of each port of the country, and indirectly on their commercial network in the hinterland (Duarte 2001, 326). Independently of its origin, imported cod, known as *asa branca* (white wing)⁹, was generally subject to a more complex and more controlled curing process, being more prized than the national product that was cheaper but considered less cured by more demanding consumers (Cajeira 1941, 65). At this time, Newfoundlanders disputed with Norwegians the reputation to sell the higher quality product. Fishermen of the island continued to catch the cod near the coast like in the 1500s and would dry it almost immediately after catching it, using less salt to cure it. In the east coast of Newfoundland, cold and dried winds favoured the curing process

⁸ The Portuguese fishing fleet is internationally known as the White Fleet since World War II (Kurlansky 1999b, 200).

⁹ During the dictatorial regime, foreign suppliers were forced to remove the black membrane covering the cod's belly (peritoneum) to distinguish the imported product from the national one (Castro 1958, 28). Some producers still use today the unofficial designation *asa branca* for high-standard salt cod, thus keeping up the memory of the elite's preference for the imported salt cod during the dictatorial regime.

naturally (Pope 2004, 28). This category of light salted cod was locally known as light-salted shore fish and as *bacalhau inglês* in Portugal. It distinguished itself from the others by his thickness and his characteristic strong yellow or gold colour, being also known for this reason as *bacalhau de cura amarela* (Castro 1958, 5). The higher-class consumers of northern Portugal especially appreciated it, leading Newfoundland suppliers to send large and medium fish up there, in contrast to Lisbon, where they mostly exported the less appealing small shore fish, acquired by the capital's retailers to satisfy less demanding clients (Ryan 1986, xxi). The southern elites preferred the typical *cura branca* (white cure) of Norwegian cod (Garrido 2004, 314). The white cure, also known as *cura islandesa* (Castro 1958, 5) or *cura sueca* (Garrido 2004, 314), consisted in salting again the soaked cod (Castro 1958, 5). This curing technique, used two centuries before by the Norwegians, as we saw before, permitted to obtain perfectly white salt cod but with the disadvantage that it could only be kept during two or three months.

National producers eventually tried to replicate these techniques to compete with foreign providers in higher price categories. They imitated both yellow and white cure of *asa branca*, adapting the Norwegian and Newfoundlander curing methods to treat the green cod brought in by the White Fleet instead of shore cod used by both of these producers. The whiter colour, characteristic of the *cura branca*, was obtained by salting green cod twice after washing it instead of drying it directly (Grémio dos Armadores de Navios da Pesca do Bacalhau 1940, 78). Producers familiar with the Newfoundlanders' curing techniques copied *cura amarela*. Even if the final product had some similarities, the curing process was very different. The heavy salted green cod had to be soaked before it was dried with a lesser content of salt, characteristic of the Newfoundland cod. Portuguese producers soaked the green cod in a solution of sodium metabisulphite before drying it, to obtain the characteristic yellowish tone and, at the same time, a less salted and more dried final product (Castro 1958, 5)¹⁰. However, during this period they only used these two techniques – more sophisticated and more expensive than the *cura nacional* – for a small part of the cod they processed, destined to a limited group of more demanding clients.

THE BIRTH OF THE PORTUGUESE TRADITIONAL CURE

The gradual decline of the cod populations in the Northwestern Atlantic and the liberalisation of the national market at the end of the corporative regime also dictated the agony of the Portuguese fisheries in the Grand Banks and the disappearance of the national market of the pedestrian cod that working class people consumed on a daily basis until then. During the transitional period to democracy, the poorest enlarged the Portuguese diaspora all around the world in order to ameliorate their living standard. They had now the economic capacity to consume *bacalhau* despite rising salt cod prices, now unaffordable for working class members that choose to stay in Portugal (Secretaria de Estado do Comércio 1967, 22). *Bacalhau* tradition

¹⁰ In the 1970s, “cura amarela” (also known as “cura de Viana”) already refers to big cods, unsalted before being dried alternatively in natural and artificial conditions in the drying units of Viana do Castelo (Martins 2013, 273).

converted during this transitional moment into an ethnic identifier of expatriated communities, acting equally as symbolic connection with the motherland. In 1968, members of the Portuguese community in Johannesburg created the first *Bacalhau* Academy with the purpose to perpetuate this culinary tradition in South Africa. In 2011, there were already 55 academies disseminated all over the world.¹¹ Ancient colonies as Brazil and Angola, with large Portuguese communities, are today important salt cod markets with a growing demand (Dias *et al.* 2001, 113). In Portugal, the financial income from immigration and the integration of the country in the European Union gradually elevated the national standard of living during the next decades. The access to different kinds of food, like fresh meat, reserved before to higher incomes, was now open to most members of society. Portuguese consumers stayed, however, attached to familiar products like olives, cheese, dried sausages and salted pork ham, reserved to festive days during the dictatorial regime. Fishes like sardine and *bacalhau* continue also to be appreciated (Lopes 2006, 98). However, cod is no longer the staple food it used to be in the past. The typical *bacalhau* consumer is today older and belongs to the middle-class, less frequently to the higher strata of society (Duarte 2001, 334). The Portuguese, however, continue to be the largest world consumers of salt cod with an estimated consumption of 30 kg/year per capita (Willemsen 2003, 31).

At the same time, Portuguese cod industry became more and more dependent on imports after the adhesion of the country to the European Union in 1986.¹² Local producers still cure cod but they actually fish a very small part of the cod they cure. This industry, which in times was part of an integrated manufacturing activity in the hand of vessel owners, was reborn as an independent industrial segment, importing most of the cod, frozen¹³ or green, from northern producers in order to be able to continue to respond to the national demand. The modernisation of the production chain during the 1990s provided the conditions for the start of a more diverse product range, such as frayed codfish and ultra-frozen soaked cod, to satisfy the growing demand for this kind of products in the national market (Duarte 2001, 330–331). Portuguese producers have presently to deal in their own national market with the very strong and competitive Northern European offer, supported by a substantial investment in research, mainly induced by fish companies and driven by the commercial interests of this industry (Oliveira *et al.* 2012, 559). The *bacalhau* tradition, previously intended at the same time as fishing and consuming tradition, was now ready to turn into a curing tradition by the hand of new actors in a context of commercial competition over the leadership on the Portuguese salt cod market.

After the decline of the White Fleet, the cod industry tended to concentrate near to Aveiro, at Gafanha da Nazaré (municipality of Ílhavo), an important shipyard during the dictatorial regime (Carvalho 2001). The head office of the Association of Cod Industrialists (AIB) was founded here in 1993. This concentration tendency in the geography of production

¹¹ <http://www.academiamae.com>.

¹² Portugal is today the world's main importer of green salted cod (42%), the second importer of frozen cod (13%) and the third importer of dried salted cod (27%) (Dias *et al.* 2001, 105).

¹³ During this period, the modernisation of the curing process advanced very slowly in Portugal in comparison to others producers. In the 1940s, state authority began to encourage the construction of artificial cold storages in the main areas of production to preserve the cod in better conditions. Only after 1960 did Portuguese units adopt the tunnels that permitted to dry the cod in artificial conditions, reducing this part of the process to 30/40 hours and thus less demanding on human resources (Teixeira 1967/1968, 41). Portuguese companies constructed cold chambers in their own installation, allowing them to import frozen raw material (Duarte 2001, 326, 329).

and the institutional representation of the industry contributed in the last decade to a change in the consumption habits of the Portuguese. AIB is today an influent lobby that actively, and at different levels, participates in the preservation of the *bacalhau* tradition, collaborating with local non-governmental organisations such as the *Bacalhau* Confrary and the Friends of the Maritime Museum of Ílhavo, which are assuming the mission to preserve a tradition that they consider to be a fundamental element of both local and national identity (Peralta 2008, 203–249; Coelho *et al.* 2011). The leaders and active members of these institutions often belong to families that in the past provided the White Fleet with sea officials. They do not necessarily work on fishing vessels or in the seafood industry but have generally a qualified professional activity compatible with a medium or high degree of education (Peralta 2008, 251–255), giving them the authority to legitimate their own narrative of the *bacalhau* tradition, which they disseminate at social events and through the media into the nation's public sphere. Their own perspective of this tradition is particularly influenced by the northern higher-class cod consumption pattern of the time of the Newfoundland fisheries, which they emulated and passed on to the entire national market during the last decades.

Some consumption habits of this sociocultural *milieu* are now extending to the whole society. Thus, Sobral and Rodrigues (2013, 629) note that the inhabitants of northern cities celebrated Nativity on the night before Christmas with a meal of cod in order to respect the Catholic interdiction to eat meat the day before Christmas, a custom that dates at least from the 19th century. In the beginning of the 20th century, the rich inhabitants of Lisbon used to have a festive meal based on meat, generally turkey, served at noon on Christmas day. Until today, in some regions of Portugal, where the Christmas meal is taken after Midnight Mass, meat continues to be preferred to cod, but *bacalhau* is now the national favourite food for Christmas Eve. In fact, when it comes to purchasing cod, the average amount that the Portuguese spend per act is presently higher during Christmas season than throughout the rest of the year, and they eat about one third of their six kilos of annual consumption during this festive period (Reis 2011, 38).

On the other hand, even if the big cod from Newfoundland, which in the past was preferred by local elites, totally disappeared from the markets¹⁴, the memory of its prestige has been translated into a positive value, attributed to the characteristic yellowish colour that some producers continue to imitate with the intention to pass it as the top level of the traditional *bacalhau* (Gomes *et al.* 2011).

Yellow cure finally appeared in 2005 as legal category in the Portuguese food legislation among other categories of salted cod. By law, in order to earn the designation “*bacalhau salgado de cura amarela*”, the cod should have a characteristic strong yellow colour¹⁵. Today, consumers tend to ignore that a few years earlier this class of salt cod was not contemplated in the Portuguese legislation.¹⁶

¹⁴ After 1950, Canadian fisheries moved their strategic focus to the North American frozen and fresh cod market and the Newfoundland salted and dried cod disappeared progressively from the Portuguese market (Alexander 1976).

¹⁵ Decree-law no. 25/2005 of 28 January, *Diário da República*, 1st series-A, no. 20, p. 697.

¹⁶ Ordinances no. 144-D/75 of 3 March 1975, no. 599/76 of 12 October 1976, no. 642/81 of 24 July 1981, no. 355/87 of 29 April 1987.

BACALHAU TRADITION HAS A FUTURE ... AS A COMMERCIAL LABEL

In order to withstand northern competitors, AIB recently prepared a proposal to the UE for the elevation of the salt cod label “Produced following the Portuguese tradition” as Traditional Specialty Guaranteed (TSG).¹⁷ The Council Regulation (EC) of March 2006 defines TSG as foodstuffs “intended for human consumption or foodstuff with a traditional composition, or produced according to a traditional production method” but does not need to be made with local products. Producers are only obliged to use traditional raw materials without any chemical additives, to follow traditional preparation methods, and to commit themselves to specify and control the distinctive characteristics of their product. The salt content of cod cured in the traditional way must be equal to or less than 20% and the moisture content equal to or less than 47%. It is relevant to note that the cod exported by the Norwegians to Portugal before 1960 would fall into this range of values (Tropa *et al.* 1958, 28) and therefore be considered a traditional Portuguese product if nowadays the yellow colour of the flesh was not one of the main criteria used by AIB to distinguish traditional Portuguese cure from others. For this reason, the *cura branca*, used by Portuguese producers to imitate Norwegian white cure and appreciated in the past by southern elites, is today not considered to be a Portuguese traditional curing technique. This TSG perpetuates at the same time the pale yellow colour characteristic of the *cura nacional* (the staple food of the working class during the dictatorial regime) and the yellowish colour of the *bacalhau de cura amarela* (preferred by the northern elites in the past, but with a currently low demand on the Portuguese market), which is now promoted as a gourmet product (Gomes *et al.* 2011), designed to conquer the “foodies”, that is the 21st century elite of global consumers, always looking for authentic foods, both local and traditional.

BEYOND THE FABLE OF THE NATIONAL TRADITION

The “European phosphate crisis” demonstrates that the idea of a *bacalhau* tradition continues to be very active in the social arena and in the post-national world we live in today, surprisingly in the same way this notion was mobilised in the past by intellectual elites to cultivate the national pride. As Elsa Peralta (2008, 145) argues, even if the versions of the past that were brought to the public domain in the 19th century are very different from the current versions, more volatile and fragmented, they will nonetheless inform and shape the contemporary repertoire of possibilities. The rather long-standing, but still quite consensual assumption of a national tradition that includes fishing, drying and consumption of cod, emphasising antiquity, authenticity, typicality and uniqueness of the different material and immaterial realities associated with it, shows the resilience of this particular conception of tradition, inherited from the counter-enlightenment movement and characteristic of what we can call a “national outlook”. This notion was used by Ulrich Beck (2006, 30) to describe a kind of essentialist outlook,

¹⁷ AIB officially presented their TSG proposal at 10 January 2011, though it has only been published two years later in the Official Journal of the European Union (EC no. PT-TSG-0007-0064, 8 October 2013). In April 2014, the European Commission officially recognized “Bacalhau de cura tradicional portuguesa” as TSG (Official Journal of the European Union, 24 April 2014, L 121-20, no. 409/2014).

dominant since the First Modernity, that tends to separate historically interwoven cultural and political reality. In such outlook, each culture is understood as an island that is strongly related to a national territory, inside of which each culture remains unchanged, but still under threat of erosion by excessive permeability to cosmopolitan influences. In such perspective, tradition, regarded as a calcification process, permits to create an artificial continuity between past and present, searching in the past for cultural practices and believes that, because of their supposed originality, are judged useful to reinforce the cohesion of the national community. On the other hand, preserving shared traditions for the next generation guaranties the continuity of the national collective in the future. Such timeless conceptions of cultural transmission allow to cut off cultural heritages according to political frontiers, or tend, on the contrary, to congregate different sorts of dated realities that do not necessarily belong to the same series of historical facts.

In the Portuguese case, the belief in a maritime vocation, invariably invoked to respond to national crisis, complements the symbolic capital of the *bacalhau* tradition, acting retroactively as substantiation and expression of such vocation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wants to thank Cheila Almeida for commenting and to André Tomé for his review of this text. Any error is obviously the entire responsibility of the author.

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