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Immigrant entrepreneurs' culinary, symbolic, and commercial hybridization of Brazilian food in France

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ABSTRACT

In the context of immigration, immigrants' foodways in their country of origin meet those practiced in the host country, causing transformations in food practices. This research focuses on the hybridization practices carried out by Brazilian immigrants who develop small businesses in the food sector in Lyon, France. Motivated by their cooking skills, the income, and the desire to offer their country's cuisine, they start up their own food-related small businesses. To benefit from a large clientele, they combine Brazilian products and dishes with the French culinary model, as much as they combine the entrepreneurial formalism in France with the *jeito brasileiro* ("Brazilian way") of doing business. Their practices allow us to understand the forms in which hybridization operates and its consequences.

KEYWORDS

Food; hybridization; immigration; Brazil; France; anthropology

Introduction

Anna¹ is a 31-year-old Brazilian woman who has lived in France for 6 years. She manages her own small business in the Lyon area, cooking and selling *salgados*—salty food made from wheat, corn, or manioc dough, sometimes filled with meat or cheese, eaten with the hand, and consumed as a snack. She notes, "Most of my customers are Brazilians [...]. After the Brazilians, there is the Portuguese clientele and only after that a few French people, but to get the French clientele, it... it takes longer!" Like several other women from Brazil, Anna chooses an entrepreneurial path in France in connection with Brazilian food. These businesses owners sometimes have to take into account the food preferences of the majority of the population of the host country, which they call the "French people".² As we can read in Anna's discourse, this adaptation to locals' expectations can be difficult, which raises the question of the connections between food cultures in the context of migration.

In general, transnational migrations affect immigrants' cultures as much as local cultures (Audebert and Dorai 2010; Faist 2000) which includes food practices. Pioneer studies, especially that by Calvo (1982), tend to simplify the situation, described as contact between an immigrant's national food culture and the food culture of the immigration country, in which the immigrant can either keep their original food culture, abandon it, or adopt part of the local food culture. This vision suffers from two main pitfalls: a rigid definition of food culture and a unidirectional vision of the effects cultural contact, missing the influence of immigrants' cultures on local cultures. Fifty years of work since Calvo's publication has complexified its definition. It is now perceived as a complex concept, not uniform even in the same territory—even less at national level—and changing over time thanks to intercultural influences (Mintz 1996; Counihan and Van Esterik 2012; Anderson 2005; Klein and Watson 2016). Crenn, Hassoun, and Médina (2010) suggest that the mutual influence of local and immigrants' food cultures always exists. . Thus, there is no such thing as a complete assimilation, nor perfectly upholding food practices similar to those prior to migration. There is more of a continuum between an attachment to past food practices—often reimagined—and adoption of local habits, in connection with past preferences and reinterpreted. Abbots (2016, 128) states that “neither the foodways ‘from here’ nor the foodways ‘from there’ are static, but are instead subjected to multiple influences and change”. Thus, migration tends to give birth to *hybridization*. This concept has been used by several authors to characterize the mutual influences that result from cultural contacts (e.g. Young 2005). Applied to food, it relates closely to the concept of *métissage alimentaire* described by Poulain and Tibère (2000). It designates the consequences of intercultural contact on food cultures, from the differentiation through appropriation of products or practices, to the creation of bridges and common spaces through innovative concepts that mix different influences.

Syncretism can be found in every food culture. The transnational exchange of food products, which has existed since at least antiquity, has led to incorporation of foreign influences even without the presence of immigrants. One of the most famous traditional French dishes, the *cas-soulet*, results from the incorporation of a bean from South America into stews from the southwest of France (J.-P. Poulain 2012). But often, immigrants play an important role in this circulation and adaptation of ingredients and dishes. The pizza is an interesting example. It circulated along with different waves of Italian emigration, with separate evolutions in the south of France and in the US (Sanchez 2007). The destiny of Mexican cuisine in the south of the US, brought by immigrants and transformed through influences such as fast food, is another (Pilcher 2012). Ingredients from the home country can be brought by immigrants directly or through

shop owners who sometimes travel long distance to bring back a specific food, such as the Haitian shop owners in the Dominican Republic described by Hippert (2021, 135). When ingredients cannot be found, a different kind of syncretism can result from the incorporation of new ingredients; but often immigrants mention that “it has a different flavor”, as a Haitian immigrant explained to Hippert (2021, 71).

Thus, immigrants compose a space of in-between practices (Bruneau 2004), resulting from combinations (Abélès 2008; Laplantine and Nous 2009) and symbolic border fluctuations (Alexandre-Garner and Keller-Privat 2014).

In in-between spaces, how far do Brazilian food entrepreneurs go in adjusting their food offerings? To what extent are adjustments essential to their economic success or survival, and to their relevance in France? By exploring the reasons and the extent to which they create hybrid practices, we will see that they perform hybridization in different dimensions. Some are easily visible when they relate to food products and displayed symbols. Others concern more discreet aspects of foodways, such as trading modalities. First, we will examine the role of Brazilian food entrepreneurs in the Brazilian community, and how opening to a larger clientele implies a processes of hybridization. Second, we will question the importance of trading modalities, as a marker of Brazilian identity and as an adaptation to the commercial culture in France.

Ethnographic methods

This research³ focuses on 36 Brazilian immigrants⁴ from different regions of Brazil, most of whom are from the large metropolises of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Goiânia, and their peripheries. The ethnographic fieldwork was conducted by Marie Sigrist (hereafter referred to as Marie) between August 2018 and February 2019 in the French metropolitan area of Lyon, named “Le Grand Lyon” (“Greater Lyon” in English).⁵ It is the second largest metropolis in France, the first one being Paris (Authier et al. 2010) and has the second largest Brazilian community⁶ in France. This justifies the choice of this territory as a field of study. This population has been investigated very little by other anthropological research on migration. In France, studies on immigrants’ food practices tend to focus on more larger communities, like North or West Africans. Marie’s Brazilian contacts also influenced this choice, as we detail below.

It is challenging to find and meet Brazilian people in Lyon, where they constitute an invisible minority. The latest census indicates that the Brazilian population represents around 0.7% of all immigrants in France (Insee 2018). In Greater Lyon, Brazilian immigrants represent less than 4,000 of the 1.4 million inhabitants, or less than 0.3% of the population. To

overcome this issue, we used the snowball sampling method, described by Olivier de Sardan (2015), which allows access to the inter-knowledge networks of each respondent. At the beginning of the fieldwork, Marie mobilized two Brazilians from her private relationship circle. They gave her the contact information of two other Brazilians. After each interview, she tried to get direct contact information for potential further respondents. Two criteria were defined to determine the individuals to be interviewed: their Brazilian nationality and the fact of being an immigrant (by their intention to reside in France and the achievement of legal status). Having a food business was not an initial criterion. During the research, Marie noted the recurrent mentions of food trade between Brazilian people. Furthermore, this food trading was also present in the Facebook group “*Os Brasileiros lyonnais*”,⁷ where online participant observation was conducted. We decided then to focus the fieldwork on these food businesses. In the end, among all respondents, 13 work in the food trade related to Brazil. Among them, 6 are involved in the creation of a legal company whose main activity is either the import, resale, and/or cooking of Brazilian food, while 7 carry out their food activity informally (not legalized). They are mostly women (eleven of them).

The fieldwork consisted mainly in observations in the places where Brazilian immigrants are present for cooking, trading, provisioning, and consuming food. The main location was Brazilian immigrants’ households, because they are generally their only place of business. Other locations were streets where some food trade was conducted and food stores. Additionally, observation of internet-based networks used by the community, such as WhatsApp or Facebook groups, was conducted. Marie conducted 26 semi-structured interviews with immigrants, focusing on their life in Brazil and France, their migration story, their perception of food culture and food systems in Brazil and France, their daily food practices, and their relationships in Lyon. In parallel, several informal conversations appeared as useful sources, with Brazilian immigrants, sometimes clients of the Brazilian entrepreneurs, and with a few non-Brazilian people (French spouses of Brazilians, and Portuguese and South Americans with professional or friendly relationships with Brazilians). Most interviews and informal exchanges were conducted in Brazilian Portuguese.

Marie speaks French as a mother tongue and is fluent in Portuguese. She is a white French person, but she conducted an academic internship in Brazil then lived in France with a Brazilian partner for 7 years, in an environment surrounded by Franco-Brazilian transculturality. She feels familiar with Brazilian culture but at the same time distant because she was not born or raised in Brazil. This ambiguity appears in the identity that some people attributed to her. For example, in a Portuguese food store, after she introduced herself in Portuguese with an accent from the

Brazilian state of Minas Gerais, the Portuguese seller said to her boss, “João! There’s a fake Brazilian woman who is asking if we used to have Brazilian clients here!” The expression “fake Brazilian” translates this distant familiarity between the ethnographer and the subjects in an interesting manner. This position, common for ethnologists, is useful to get closer to the subjects but requires a constant balance between distance and familiarity.

The social inequality between the investigator and the respondents is also to be taken into account. Before their migration, the participants occupied a plurality of social statuses. They came to France with the hope of increasing their income or obtaining professional advancement, either individually or for their family, but most of them report suffering from economic difficulties and feel downgraded from their situation in Brazil. Their households are in working-class neighborhoods (Villeurbanne, Vénissieux and Lyon’s eighth and ninth districts), which have high rates of social housing and where residents have fewer degrees and lower median incomes (Authier et al. 2010). This reflects their position at the bottom of the socioeconomic scale in France. For example, Cristina, a 38-year-old woman who has lived in France for 2 years, lives with her family in a dilapidated building in one such neighborhood, after having gone through a chaotic migration experience with indecent housing and the professional exploitation of her husband on construction sites. It was not easy to conduct ethnography, because of their busy schedules and their social position. For them a work day is often synonymous with survival or daily life improvement, while Marie’s position was that of a French native and middle-class woman employee. Moreover, some women run a food business with illegal status and requested secrecy. Marie had a power—and an unfair feeling—of denunciation, that could put them in danger. Thus she perceived the time of the interview and the secrecy as a gift from the interviewees. One day, she spent almost three hours in the home of Gisele, a 47-year-old Brazilian woman, interviewing and observing her while she cooked food to sell. When Marie was going to leave, Gisele said, “*Uma mão lava outra*” (“One hand washes the other”). This Portuguese expression means that a service rendered must lead to another in return. She was expecting some gift or donation in return. To implement fairness in the ethnography, we did reciprocal gift-giving as theorized by Marcel Mauss (2007). The participants were not paid, but the purchase of food was a solution. First, because it constituted the reciprocal gift, and second because it positioned Marie as an accomplice in their illegal activities and thus legitimized a bond of trust. It thus allowed her to do participant observations and to observe their informal practices and the sociology of their clients.

Culinary and symbolic hybridizations in Brazilian food businesses

Brazilian food entrepreneurs in Lyon

As mentioned above, a set of Brazilian food entrepreneurs was discovered through fieldwork in Lyon and shared a lot of characteristics. It consists of 13 people, mostly women, who cook Brazilian dishes at home and sell it informally (i.e. without legal declaration). This network and the social conditions in which it takes place was described in detail in a previous publication (Sigrist, Bianquis, and Michaud 2022). As this paper will focus on hybridization processes, we will describe this network more briefly here, for the reader to better understand the background context.

These Brazilian women are immigrants, generally working in other jobs in parallel, mostly in the care domain (childcare, life assistant, home helpers, housekeeper) or as cleaners. They offer Brazilian prepared food, such as *salgados*,⁸ in particular *pão de queijo*, which are tapioca flour and cheese rolls; dishes like *feijoada*, which is a popular and typical dish based on black beans, pieces of pork in sauce, rice, cabbage, crushed cassava, and orange; *churrascos*, a barbecue meal; and sweets made from sweetened condensed milk or milk jam. They sometimes advertise on social networks, especially on Facebook or WhatsApp groups, but their contact information and offers mostly circulate through word-of-mouth within the Brazilian community. They cook at home in their own kitchens. Orders are taken by phone (SMS, WhatsApp, or Messenger), and the products are either retrieved at their home or delivered. The delivery can be to the client's house or a location suitable for both client and delivery person, such as a metro station. These deliveries, called *entrega*, can be made by the cook herself, a relative (husband, children, etc.), or friends. Payment is in cash. Of the 13 entrepreneurs, 6 had converted or were in the process of converting their business into a legal activity.⁹ The other 7 cook and sell food informally only (see Sigrist, Bianquis, and Michaud 2022).

Feeding the Brazilian community... and beyond?

All 36 of the participants who were interviewed, whether they are food entrepreneurs or not, said that they seek to consume prepared food that they identify as “Brazilian”. For example, Iris, a 30-year-old Brazilian woman who has lived in France for 3 years, confides, “Listen, I’ve looked everywhere here to be able to make *pão de queijo* but unfortunately, I couldn’t find any sweet manioc starch to cook it!” Why do Iris and other Brazilian people search for these products? We noticed that, as a cultural landmark, Brazilian food provides “some comfort”, as stated by Toni, a 42-year-old Brazilian man, who has lived in France for 4 years. It helps to mitigate the *saudade*, a current Portuguese word expressing nostalgia,

an empty feeling, and hope at the same time. Immigrants' nostalgia for the country of origin's cuisine is a common feeling described in many works, such as that of Russians in London and Paris (Bronnikova and Emanovskaya 2010). Thus, Afro-Caribbean and Portuguese food stores provide relative relief thanks to the possibility of acquiring industrial products imported from Brazil or ingredients required in Brazilian recipes. We can emphasize here the syncretic dimension of these ethnic food stores, as they tend to attract customers beyond their initial national display. This phenomenon was also mentioned by Williams-Forson about Ghanaians in New York who use Chinese and Japanese food stores to find ingredients for their recipes (Williams-Forson 2019).

In migratory contexts, it can be difficult to cook dishes identical to those in the country of origin.¹⁰ In fact, most of the Brazilians interviewed list provisioning issues as a limitation. First, they report the expensive cost of some imported food, such as tropical fruits, cassava flour, or Brazilian food industry products. Also, the interviewees who do other jobs (23 interviewees) lament a lack of time for cooking, like other urban working people (Fischler 2001; Fumey 2007). They also lack time for provisioning in the ethnic food stores, which are either on the outskirts of Lyon or in the central, gentrified district Guillotière, which the interviewees live far from. In addition to this remoteness, the limited supplies offered in each store sometimes force individuals to go to several before finding the right ingredient. Íris explains: "One day I went to a store to buy cassava starch and *goiabada* [guava paste typically used in Brazil], I couldn't find anything. I went to another one, there was nothing there either. I went to another one, nothing, in another one... In the same day, I did nothing but walk all day long to find what I wanted only at the end of the day". In addition, we must also consider the long cooking time needed for Brazilian cuisine (Fajans 2012). Flávia, a 27-year-old, confirms: "Some ingredients... for example the *paçoca* [candy made out of ground peanuts, sugar and cassava flour]... sure, I can find some but it takes work to make it afterwards. It takes a while". This burden of time for cooking weighs more heavily on the women interviewed, as they often take care of the food tasks in the home in addition to their work life, sometimes composed of several jobs because of their precariousness (Sigrist, Bianquis, and Michaud 2022). Sometimes they also report a lack of culinary knowledge to cook typical recipes. All of these reasons explain why most of them prefer to order "Brazilian" dishes or snacks from third parties who are also Brazilian immigrants having small businesses cooking or reselling prepared food. Helena, a 37-year-old Brazilian woman with 11 years of residence in France, is one of them. As a reseller of food products imported from Brazil, she knows perfectly well who her customers are: "Brazilians. Brazilians for sure. The majority of my customers are

Brazilians”. She also confirms that the main clientele of these cooks is other Brazilian immigrants, seeking food they cannot prepare themselves.

Brazilian cooks designate the food that they offer as “Brazilian” because it is strongly linked to Brazilian foodways. These are prepared food frequently cooked in Brazil and usually consumed during friendly or family gatherings and festivities on weekends, such as the *salgados*, *feijoada*, and *churrasco*. By consuming them, immigrants not only calm the *saudade* of food products associated with Brazil, but they also seek to symbolically get closer to all that remains “over there”, especially family and friends, thus satisfying this strong “desire to return to one’s origins” as Cristina defines it.

However, the challenge for food entrepreneurs is not only to satisfy Brazilian people but to entice some of the other French population in order to acquire a larger clientele and not be solely dependent on the Brazilians in the area. This is especially the case for entrepreneurs who decide to officialize their activity. The extra cost, in terms of investments and taxes, requires them to significantly increase their turnover and thus their clientele. Amanda, a 43-year-old Brazilian woman who arrived 16 years ago and who owns and manages a *lanchonete*,¹¹ testifies: “You have to make sure to have a mixed offer if you want it to work. You have to mix it to please them both [French and Brazilians] because otherwise it doesn’t work”. Therefore, the aim is to create food in-betweenness, both Brazilian and French. They engage in a process of *bricolage*: the composition of a structured whole, based on “heterogeneous objects” that come from other ensembles (Lévi-Strauss 2010). This bricolage using elements from different cultures aims to solve a problem (Lévi-Strauss 2010) and thus to reach a compromise (Laplantine and Nouss 2009). This adaptation to local foodways was described by Hassoun in the context of West and North African restaurants in New York (2010), showing the way they take into account the local conception of healthy food. Tuomainen showed a similar phenomenon in Ghanaian restaurants in London, and underlines the implied risk of losing immigrant customers if the food moves to far from their expectations (2018). This echoes the discourse some interviewees’ comments about one Brazilian restaurant in Lyon, as we will see further. Next we discuss where these hybridization processes take place.

Culinary hybridization: mixing in the kitchen

During cultural contact, food culture mixing may occur (Certeau, Giard, and Mayol 2006; James 2003). In the process of targeting Brazilian and French clients, Brazilian food business owners seek to ensure that their cuisine includes the food characteristics of both national cultures, both visually and in terms of taste. Sofia, a 44-year-old woman who has lived

in France for 5 years, produces and sells *pão de queijo*, a product highly identified as Brazilian by all respondents. When she started her company, she had to adapt the size of her *pães de queijo* to the French context. In Brazil they are the size of a large potato and are eaten for breakfast or between meals, which suits Brazilian immigrants in Lyon, according to Sofia: “There are people who buy *pão de queijo* to consume it early in the morning for breakfast, but that’s because they are Brazilian. [...] Here breakfast is sweet, while ours is salty”. But according to Sofia, the French do not like these consumption contexts:

“I sell the big *pães de queijo*, the traditional ones like in Brazil, but there are people here who can’t understand the act of eating such big *pães de queijo*! They say, ‘Do you really eat this in the morning?!’ so we say, ‘Yes, we do.’ And some people say, ‘Oh, but it’s not for appetizers?’ So I say ‘no’”.

Sofia first thought of trying to change the consumption practices of the French to the Brazilian way, but without success: “I have to educate... my market so that they understand, but I think it’s a difficult education to do”. So, she had to arrange her recipe for a French context, choosing to offer it at a time of day and in a smaller size adapted to French customers: “I adapted the size of the *pão de queijo* for the aperitif. It works. They [the French] love it. They say it’s a drug... so they can’t eat only one! They want a mountain of it (laughs)”. In Claude Fischler’s words, Sofia is carrying out a “transfer of structure” (2001), taking the *pão de queijo* from the structure of Brazilian breakfast or snack to that of the French “apéro”.¹² The success of this initiative led Sofia to broaden her offer as an aperitive: “I already have products with Comté¹³ cheese flavor, now in *Grana Padano* cheese... Also, I have the Italian chorizo, the one with parmesan cheese and oregano and black olives and thyme. In fact now I have five *pães de queijo* products that are used for the aperitive!” Sofia thus took into account not only the French taste for French products, but also for Italian products, creating multicultural hybrids.

These adaptations are an alternative to the Brazilian *Minas* cheese, traditionally used in the *pão de queijo* recipe, that is expensive in France because of import costs, according to Sofia. Food substitutions are common in immigrants’ dietary practices (Calvo 1982). It appears that Sofia’s substitutions are particularly suited to the tastes of French customers but her Brazilian clients also like them. For example, they really like the Comté cheese. Also, the smaller size is not inconvenient, as Brazilian clients such as Felipe, were observed eating several in a row. This shows that innovations toward local taste do not inevitably drive immigrant customers away.

Exclusion of an ingredient is another type of transformation. For example, Amanda is aware that some preparations can be considered too salty, too seasoned, or too spicy for French taste. She explains, “When I’m going

to cook Brazilian food, like you see... very spicy, heavy in *tempero* [seasoning], it's not going to work, the French won't like it". However, she cannot totally exclude these characteristics because they are constitutive of the Brazilian diet: "*Tempero* is when you make it with oil, garlic, and onion as a base. That's the way we prepare everything in Brazil" she said. So Amanda found a middle ground in the business of *pasteis*, a doughnut in the shape of a rectangle or a half-moon fried in oil and topped with a preparation seasoned with meat, shrimp, or vegetables. She does not incorporate *tempero* when preparing *pasteis* but puts it in a little basket on every table to let each customer choose the seasoning they want: "I put all the condiments, all that stuff, in a small basket. If they want to spice it up, they put it as they like". In her words, this makes it possible to "do something a little more neutral". Just as Garnier (2010, 201) observed a "refreshing of specialties" by African restaurateurs in France, Sofia and Amanda participate in the reconstitution of national dishes through their culinary hybridization.

Hybridization of symbols: mixing stereotypes

One of the first steps to interest both French and Brazilian people is to communicate in both French and Portuguese, which can be seen in marketing campaigns. Alice, a 32-year-old Brazilian woman who has lived in France for 7 years, publishes all of her advertisements for her Brazilian meat small business in both languages. Other aspects of communication also reveal efforts to open up and even hybridize. Hybridization appears in visual marketing, especially in logos. Anna uses the Eiffel Tower on a Brazilian flag as the logo for her *salgados* company. Similarly, Sofia illustrates the website of her *pão de queijo* production company with a drawing of the Corcovado linked to the Eiffel Tower by a bridge as metaphor for her cuisine, literally bridging Brazilian and French cultures. Nino, a 43-year-old Brazilian man who has lived in France for 4 years, places the Brazilian, French, and Portuguese flags in the window of his grocery store, which he also defines as "Brazilian, Portuguese, exotic." Contact between two cultural groups tends to make stereotypes more obvious to individuals (Flecheux 2000). Food, as a major cultural parameter of a social group, does not escape this accentuation.

Bringing Brazilian national symbols into a company's visuals aims to evoke a Brazil that is easily identifiable for the French—through the colors of the Brazilian flag, the football, the beach, or tropical images (Fajans 2012; Laplantine 2001)—as well as to evoke the emotions of Brazilian immigrants who miss their country. According to Appadurai (1996), marketing, through advertising, arouses a sense of loss linked to individuals, families, ethnic groups, and social classes and aims to create nostalgia for

a supposedly lost authenticity. Brazilian business owners express a mission to respond to this lack: “My dream is to have a place where people will rediscover the emotions of Brazil” says Amanda. Inserting green elements in the company’s web page, displaying illustrations of the Amazon rainforest and photographs of Amerindians on the walls of the *lanchonete*, or exhibiting animal sculptures on the shelves are all practices that contribute to this mission. However, Amanda is not from the Amazonian region and did not show any link with this region during the interviews. Thus, she does not use these decorative elements as personal references but to fit the common stereotyped representations of Brazil as a tropical forest that many French people have. This suggests that these kinds of symbols target non-Brazilian clients more than Brazilian immigrants, but we did not get precise information in the interviews allowing us to say whether some, such as the Brazilian flag, also touch Brazilian clients.

However, these authentic characteristics that refer to Brazil are not sufficient to reach the French. As Garnier (2010) has observed on the subject of African restaurants in France, the food associated with these places acquires an edible value for the French consumer only when it approaches “a mode of presentation or transformation of modernity”, that is to say, when it comes close to the standards of consumption that they conceive as modern.¹⁴ In this sense, a valorization of what comes from the Western model appears in the marketing and within the interviewees’ comments. On Sofia’s website, one can find this sentence, which reveals what could be named “gourmetisation” of *pão de queijo*: “Added to the unique flavor of our *pão de queijo* a slight French touch to makes it even more gourmet and modern”. For Sofia, modernity is therefore about consuming a product in a Western context. During an interview, Sofia also admits that she is trying to refine her offer: “I need to have a product that is more top-of-the-line, more gourmet”. To do this, she focuses on current dietary concerns widely valued by the middle-upper classes in France, such as “healthy food” (e.g. Adamiec 2017) and alternative foodways (organic, gluten free, vegetarian, or vegan). For example, she put on the back of her product packaging a description of its contents as “naturally gluten-free”.¹⁵ This idea of giving a refined image to the product to attract non-Brazilian customers was found in another context during the fieldwork. Erico, a 55-year-old Brazilian who has lived in Lyon for 10 years, is a retailer of frozen *pães de queijo* made by a large Brazilian company. Nevertheless, he also aims to associate his *pães de queijo* with a more elitist image to sell them to high-end establishments in the French capital. He says,

“For example, yesterday I was in Paris to make sure that our *pães de queijo* was selected to be served at the celebratory Lusophony dinner in Paris [...]. And also, I am in the process of making a contract with a big brasserie near the Opera too, to sell my *pães de queijo*. So, something in my offer is changing”.

Beyond attesting to a desire to match the food offered in the French consumption model, the vocabulary used by the respondents (“more gourmet and modern”, “more top, more gourmet”, “selected”, “celebration”, “gourmet brasserie¹⁶”) reveals an inferiority complex strongly linked to the colonial relationship between Europe and Brazil. Such attitudes that value what comes from Europe or the United States over local production are common in Brazil, in many cultural fields other than food. Historically, the bourgeoisie groups that emerged from European colonial movements were opposed to marginalized and oppressed groups such as indigenous peoples and slaves (Ribeiro 1995). Even today, this hierarchy strongly appears in common representations in Brazilian society, placing foreign elements (individuals, *habitus*) at the top of the social ladder by associating positive perceptions with them, especially when linked with North American or European origins (Oliven 2001). This vocabulary also reveals immigrants’ desire for social advancement in France, because of the social and professional downgrading they experienced when coming from a Southern country (Chamozzi 2009; Rosenfeld et al. 2009). This notion of *gourmatisation* was used especially for products intended for French consumers. Brazilian immigrants do not seem to expect this type of food. We can thus hypothesize that this vision does not only represent an appropriation of local standards but reflects representations that already existed within Brazilian society. But it may have been reinforced by local discourse surrounding French gastronomy (culinary TV shows, celebrity chefs, or UNESCO recognition of the Gastronomic Meal of The French as an intangible cultural heritage).

Offering Brazilian cuisine and the mobilization of symbols of Brazilian culture are ways that Brazilian entrepreneurs give themselves and their Brazilian clientele a connection to their country of origin. By mixing them with characteristics and symbols of the French culinary model, the entrepreneurs target French customers to ensure a broader clientele. However, it can be difficult to please both, as the example of a Brazilian restaurant shows.

The rejection of a Brazilian restaurant

There is a Brazilian restaurant in Lyon aside from Amanda’s recent *lanchonete*. We did not manage to include its owner in our fieldwork, but several interviewees mentioned it. They present it as frequented mostly by recent Brazilian immigrants, in quest for sociability and sometimes a job. They sometimes continue to frequent the restaurant for a while, but generally move away from it as they find new social circles and Brazilian food providers. The main reason they avoid it after a while is because

they do not like the food. They do not consider it to be really Brazilian, but more oriented toward non-Brazilian customers. This is an interesting situation because in other situations, ethnic restaurants have been shown to be important places for immigrants' sociability in the long term, even for Brazilians in Boston (Asunção 2011). As we did not have the opportunity to taste the food and interview the owner, we cannot expand on this example further than what the interviewees told us. However, we can suggest that its rejection can also be linked with its formal status, as we will discuss now.

Remaining within the rules while bending them: an in-between strategy

Formalization of the Brazilian food businesses

Brazilian entrepreneurs must adapt to local trade laws and take the necessary steps to create a company. Anna, for example, learned how to start her company and engaged the administrative process: "I had the opportunity to participate in a training course to understand how to have a food business here. Then I went ahead and registered, you see... I have created my company".

There are many reasons to formalize¹⁷ their activity. Anna said, "I have so much love for cooking. And it was when I got sick, from depression, that I thought to myself that I had to do something I liked". Sofia, a 44-year-old Brazilian woman who arrived in France five years ago, testifies that she is looking for a business project: "There are Brazilians who are able to pay 90 euros for *salgados*! I said to myself, 'Look at the market! Come on, I'm creating my company!'" Others express the need to comply with the law, such as Sandra, a 30-year-old Brazilian woman who arrived in France seven years ago: "I have to go back [to the Chamber of Commerce and Industry] to ask them for an appointment, to see what they are asking for, what to do... to ensure compliance".

Starting a food business is not easy. Brazilian workers who want to register administratively must comply with bureaucratic and health standards (Hassoun 2014; Tran 2014). French and European laws frame storage, preparation, and presentation of foodstuffs with the aim of preventing risks of contamination at the time of consumption. To abide by the law, entrepreneurs have to improve their physical space. They must acquire regulatory furniture and equipment to have a kitchen and a reception area that meet standards for cleanliness, conservation of food, and separation of cooking and storing areas from bathrooms.¹⁸ For example, Alice chose to conduct her Brazilian meat business from home and she has to adjust her home to comply with legal standards. "All these hygiene laws are

complicated. Our separate professional kitchen will soon be ready to be used and then it will be really professional, it will come!” She also explains that she and her husband had to borrow money to transform their garage into a professional kitchen, including cold storage for meat. She had to invest in a ventilation system, install sinks, cookers, and new refrigerators and freezers to keep minced meat at a regulated temperature between -18°C and $+2^{\circ}\text{C}$ and cooked preparations between -12°C and $+3^{\circ}\text{C}$ as stated in the laws. On the other hand, business owners, regardless of their status, have to pay fees and charges for the creation of their enterprise (from 45 to 198 euros depending on the status and the size of the company) and for the operation of the business (Rogulski and Rey 2015; Service-public 2018). This includes yearly charges such as income tax, social security contributions, and property tax, but also the cost of professional training and the tax on consular chamber fees (URSAAF 2021). All of these constraints explain the reluctance of some entrepreneurs to formalize their activity. But it appears to be one of the barriers to targeting French consumers.

Informal food trade: the continuity of Brazilian business culture

During a conversation, Sofia complains about French customers:

“I can’t understand how they work! They are willing to buy but they want a fixed point of sale. Or they want to buy through a shopping website. I don’t have either. They can’t understand that I live nearby, that I can sell to them from my house or go to their house! [...] They want to buy but they don’t buy! It’s weird, isn’t it?! Well... well... I don’t understand... how it works. I don’t know if they’re afraid that I’ll run away with their credit card at the time of payment, those things”.

These comments demonstrate one of the culinary trade problems between Brazilian and French people. French people, unlike Brazilians, have more confidence in standard business enterprises. The creation of a company within the formal French framework aims to respond to a fiscal and legal constraint as well as the cultural constraint of adapting to the way of doing business in France. Sofia complains again, “You see...you have to follow a... a buying logic [...]. That [informal food trade] doesn’t exist for the French! They can’t do it!”

Nevertheless, in Brazil, informality—defined as a way of conducting activity that is not part of a country’s legislative texts (Bouffartigue and Busso 2016)—is normal and predominant. Currently, 40% of the Brazilian working population is engaged in informal work activity (IBGE 2020). Informal trade practices are a strong part of the trade culture of services and goods, notably for food (Durães 2002), inherited from enslaved African populations in Brazil during the Portuguese colonization (Soares 2017).

Additionally, informality is so embedded in Brazilian culture that people use the expression “*jeito Brasileiro*”, which means “Brazilian style”, to refer to doing something outside of the rules or through a creative informality. Informal trade is also a way of survival in the current economic crisis that is characterized by a reduction in formal employment and a rise in unemployment (Durães 2013). We thus understand that more than an economic or a legal constraint, informality is part of the cultural value food vendors offer to Brazilian immigrants. Buying food in the “Brazilian style” activates memories and reinforces the ability to reduce *saudade*. Does that mean that those who choose to formalize their activity give up their Brazilian clientele?

Actually, by adopting this “buying logic”, as Sofia said when talking about formal French trade rules, Brazilian entrepreneurs do not renounce informality. They use hybrid transaction practices, mixing Brazilian practices with French commercial standards. They use informal cooking and selling practices to sell products that they strongly identify as “Brazilian”, in parallel with their legal activities. Sofia indirectly reveals these practices: “You tell me ‘Sofia, I want a kilo of *pão de queijo*’, you come, I give you the package, you pay me. End of story!” The practices considered informal include cooking in the home kitchen, selling food through instant messaging (WhatsApp, Messenger) or digital social networks (Instagram, Facebook), negotiating the place and time of the transaction, and resourcefulness at all stages of production and sale (Sigrist, Bianquis, and Michaud 2022). Due to a lack of time, and in the process of launching their business, they often produce all or part of their food at home: “In June 2015, my business was created but I never opened a physical shop. I work from home. It’s a small business”, explains Anna. Unlike her, Amanda has a formal kitchen that complies with legal standards and a regulated production area but she sometimes relocates the dough production for her *pasteis* to her home, at night, to save time and to keep the dough at the right temperature:

“Sometimes I make the *pastel* dough at night! Otherwise I don’t have the time! [...] Otherwise, I do everything here [in the *lanchonete*’s kitchen]. The only thing I don’t do here is the dough, because for doing it, you need space and... it mustn’t be too hot, it mustn’t be too cold, you want to have the right temperature. That’s one thing...that! *Pastel* making... it’s not easy!”

Sofia is in a similar situation, storing her products in large freezers in the hallway of her small apartment while waiting to finish her professional installation in a collective culinary production laboratory in a nearby town. Sofia still does the transactions, responds to orders *via* social networks, and delivers her products to customers’ homes, on the street, or in metro stations. Her Brazilian clients pay mostly in cash. Nevertheless, she recently

acquired a portable credit card reader that connects to her phone *via* an application, so that French clients also buy her products: “The French want to pay with cheques or with credit cards... Otherwise, they don’t trust it”. This notion of “trust” underlines the importance in French culture of controlling what is eaten, which includes the traceability of the food, hygiene control, and labeling (Poulain 2002). Indeed, analyzed in terms of “moral economy” (Fassin and Eideliman 2012), in France eating well is part of the norm and obligation to be a “good” person in the moral sense. In the present case, payment by credit card is thus preferred to payment in cash precisely because of the traceability it involves. Alice’s activity is another example of this kind of mix of formal and informal trade practices. She practices informality in parallel with her formal butcher shop. She sells Brazilian style pizzas *via* social networks and delivered, with cash payment. She explains, “Well, the informal part is the pizzas; that’s what I sell only for Brazilians. But the meat has never been informal. Meat, desserts... have always been in the law... always within the framework of French law”.

These practices are mainly aimed at their fellow Brazilians who are happy to find these informal practices in the host country. The ethnography reveals several examples. Alice’s Brazilian pizzas are often ordered during parties for Brazilians in parks or at home. Sofia delegates some trading tasks to South American friends. Brazilian entrepreneurs in particular, address posts on digital social networks used mostly by Brazilian immigrants to inform them of upcoming informal food sales. The informality appears to the respondents as a way to foster networking. Lastly, informal practices, in addition to formal practices, help mitigate social and economic difficulties in the context of impoverishment due to settlement in a Northern country and to the significant expense of starting a business in France. During the interview, Amanda explains that after four months of her Brazilian *lanchonete*’s existence, she still cannot make a profit: “I still don’t make a profit. Indeed, at the beginning, it’s not easy [...] Here, everything is complicated”. Additional informal activities are then a good way to “make ends meet”, as said by one owner.

Brazilian entrepreneurs reach the French in formal settings and Brazilians through informal business practices. Through this expanded clientele, they increase their profits and ensure economic independence. On one hand, formal activities, being visible, are a way to be accepted in the local commercial and food culture. On the other hand, because of discretion and local contempt, informal practices are quite invisible locally to French people. Nevertheless, they are recognized and claimed by Brazilian citizens. In this sense, the informal food trade makes it possible to affirm the Brazilian food trade culture and identity. As an economic, cultural, and networking strategy in a diaspora, the informal food business is a way to

empower immigrants who move from a Southern to a Northern country, reminding us that the in-between can sometimes be a tool of power (e.g. Stoller 2008).

Conclusion

It is a challenge for Brazilian entrepreneurs to sell products that convey Brazilian representations to both Brazilian immigrants and the French. They must deal with the cultural norms, tastes, and symbolic representations of each. For Brazilian immigrants, it must be festive looking and taste like what they used to eat in Brazil and be sold informally to activate and reinforce the Brazilian network. Only then can it the objective of calming their *saudade*. For “the French”, the notion of *saudade* is not part of the discourse. The food must be perceived as authentic Brazilian food, but with traceability and safety. This research emphasizes the compromises which are important in in-betweenness. The need for an in-between, to please both and to not compromise each other’s preferences, sometimes creates indecision and results in “counter-mixing” (Goldman 2015) and creates an unidentifiable item, which is what the Brazilian entrepreneurs try to avoid. That is why they will change some methods, to become acceptable for non-Brazilian consumers, only if it does not challenge the acceptability for the Brazilian immigrants. This can imply either changes small enough to still please Brazilians (like the size of the *pao de queijo*) or the ability to personalize the product (like putting the seasonings on the table) or the transaction (keeping formal and informal activities at the same time). In this process, some in-between innovations become acceptable for both, like the incorporation of Comté cheese in the *pão de queijo*. This shows that in-betweenness is also a source of innovation and can generate interculturality.

However, the objectives of these entrepreneurs are also personal. When the Brazilian entrepreneurs insert French food culture traits into their food, they use mechanisms which help them with their economic survival, for their own integration and to protect themselves from exclusion in a country where immigrants from Southern countries often suffer social degradation and marginalization. At the same time, the convocation of Brazilian culinary and symbolic characteristics appears to ensure the continuity of the Brazilian identity in the diaspora, and thus not to compromise their individual identity as well as a collective immigrant identity. This in-betweenness can thus represent an empowerment, which is especially revealed by the mobilization of informal practices. Invisible in the eyes of the host society, both because of the necessary discretion due to its prohibition but also its non-recognition by the French, these practices are visible, valued, and used by Brazilian immigrants. But this

empowerment needs to be moderated, as we also revealed that the informality is generally suffered by the research participants, who are often willing to formalize their activity. That's also what Abranches notes in her critical approach of informality in the context of West-African migrations in Lisbon, warning against the “neo-liberal discourse” which can underpin such vision (Abranches 2022: 266). But anyway, using this “*jeito Brasileiro*” for food trade, the Brazilian food entrepreneurs also assure the continuity of Brazilian identity. It allows them to strengthen bonds and to better navigate the difficulties of migration. This study have not focused on the economic dimension and its implications but research on financial advantages of migrant workers directed by immigrant entrepreneurs or on the competition from immigrant established food business in the host country could be possible perspectives.

Notes

1. Participants' names have been changed to respect anonymity.
2. Interviewees often uses the terms “French people” or “the French”. Using these terms in this paper, we do not want to simplify an artificial cultural category that would not take into account the cultural diversity within the French population, or to exclude the Brazilian and other immigrants from this French population. We are only using it to report Brazilian immigrants' usage to designate the non-Brazilian French population.
3. This work is part of the PhD thesis in anthropology “Transnational food dynamics. Food practices of Brazilian immigrants in France (Lyon) and French immigrants in Brazil (Salvador)”.
4. We are intentionally using the term “immigrant” instead of “migrant”, despite its potential negative connotation, because we want to stress the stability of the population participating in the study. We focused only on people aiming to stay in Lyon long-term, with a legal status. On the contrary, in recent work and especially in French, the term “migrant” tends to be used for people who are in the course of migration, not stabilized and often in an illegal situation.
5. Throughout this article, we will talk about “Brazilians of Lyon” to characterize those who live in the city of Lyon as well as in the smaller municipalities which are included in Le Grand Lyon.
6. This number was given by the Brazilian consul in Lyon, but we were not able to cross-reference it.
7. Facebook group for Brazilian people living in Lyon and its conurbation.
8. Salty food made from wheat, corn, or manioc dough, sometimes filled with meat or cheese, eaten with the hand, and consumed as a “snack”.
9. One person is a meat wholesaler, one delivers agrifood products directly imported from Brazil, one has a little snack restaurant receiving clients on site, and the others cook at home and deliver their food.
10. As Bronnikova and Emanovskaya (2010) pointed out with regard to Russian immigrants for example.
11. Food place in Brazil, open on the street, preparing and selling salty and sweet snacks and drinks.

12. Aperitive, pre-dinner snack moment.
13. Cheese made with unpasteurized cow's milk from the French region of Franche-Comté. It is an important Denomination of origin (AOC) food product in France.
14. Here, the concept of “modernity” is to be understood in the context of globalization, in which the ways of life and social organisation, that appeared in Europe since the 17th century, spread with global influence, creating discontinuities with traditional social systems (Giddens 1990).
15. Traditional *pão de queijo* does not contain gluten because it is made with cassava flour.
16. In this case, “brasserie” refers to typical restaurants in big French cities, where it is possible to have a quick meal through single dishes or a daily meal.
17. The term *formalization* is used to designate the upgrade to compliance with legal obligations, which allows them to move from the informal to formal economy.
18. These constraints are specified at the national level on the governmental website Legifrance (2020) and at the European level by the European Parliament (2004).

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