NOVEL FOOD, NEW MARKETS AND TRUST REGIMES

Responses to the erosion of consumers' confidence in Austria, Italy and the UK

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ABSTRACT: The public debate around food confidence stimulated by food scares, the opening up of wider food markets and the introduction of GM foods provides an opportunity to analyse citizens' identification with their community sociologically, as it is reproduced through mundane practices. In order to do so, this article examines the GM food debate in Italy and the implications for food and agricultural policy of Austria's entry into the EU. Britain, with its highly industrialized agriculture and political commitment to open markets and new technologies, acts as a bench-mark. We distinguish between disembedded and embedded trust regimes; the former being predominant in freer markets and the latter a resource which can be mobilized in cases where remnants of 'traditional' agricultural production and supply can still be found (Italy and Austria). The increasing emphasis upon the regional origin of food, its traceability and organic production by key actors – the state, consumers' movements, retailers and marketing boards – we interpret as a confidence-building strategy which attempts to address deficits in disembedded trust resulting from widening chains of interdependency, crises such as BSE and the introduction of unfamiliar new technologies.

Key words: trust; trust regimes; food consumption; GM food; consumer movements

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'Wenn du weißt woher's kommt, weiß't was'd isst.'
{If you know where it's from you know what you're eating.}

(Advertising slogan for Schärdinger cheese)

'Una lezione? Rispettate il mercato degli altri.'
{A lesson? You must respect other people's market.}

(Giuliano Amato on the events in Seattle)

Introduction

Modernist theorists from Weber to Habermas have insisted that modern notions of community membership emerge only where community comes to be defined in political terms, when we are no longer *Volksgenossen* (bound together within a real or imagined community of fate and customs), but citizens of the state (*Staatsvolk*) (see e.g. Weber 1917 (1994): 103). However, as another modernist, Ernst Gellner, repeatedly reminded us, the modern state is a cultural as well as a legal and administrative achievement (e.g. Gellner 1983); but how does legal-political membership translate into a sense of belonging to or identification with a particular bounded nation-state *society*? Sociologists and historians in particular have tried to address this question, but their answers tend to point either to further abstractions (e.g. Habermas' 'constitutional patriotism': see e.g. Habermas 1998), or else focus on extraordinary events such as collective and effervescent rituals (Durkheim {1912} 1995). The latter places the agent's subjective identification with the community outside 'profane' space and time. It is the exceptional event and exceptional state of mind that fixes our sense of belonging. While attractive, this explanation has the same limitation as the view that our sense of community is intimately associated with crises or with war; namely it overemphasizes the importance of the exceptionally intense sense of belonging: 'most of the time the experience of national membership is faint and superficial. Only in struggle does the nation cease to be an informal, contestable and taken-for-granted frame of reference, and becomes a community that seizes hold of the imagination' (Balakrishnan 1996: 210).

Here we want to try out a different approach; one influenced by Michael Billig's notion of 'banal nationalism' (Billig 1995). This approach gives the 'faint and superficial' sense of belonging its due weight and recognises that while community (e.g. the nation) only rarely 'seizes hold' of our imagination it never quite lets go of it either. It is not the exceptional event (be it war or ritual) alone which imbues us with our subjective sense of belonging, but the 'banal' practices of everyday life; what we habitually do and in whom and what we habitually trust: 'the metonymic image of banal

nationalism is not a flag which is being consciously waved with fervent passion, it is a flag hanging unnoticed on the public building' (Billig 1995: 8). Whereas, broadly speaking, Billig places a semiotic and linguistic emphasis on how 'apparently latent identity is maintained within the daily life of inhabited nations' (Billig 1995: 69), we want to focus on daily actions of a strongly mundane and practical character, namely those around the consumption of food. In this context, food consumption is a significant object of study on at least two accounts. First, as a practice in which the identification with a particular community is literally ingested (*einverleibt*), it may help to understand identity as being partially but significantly reproduced through habit, repetition and embodiment. Second, food consumption is now a very dynamic field, with changes and innovations which are, to some extent, jeopardizing its workings as a taken-for-granted route to identification and belonging. In other words, food consumption is both imbued with trust and constitutes a territory for the negotiation of trust and for the practical translation of political belonging.

Indeed, within the social sciences, food consumption has been associated with symbolically mediated notions of order (e.g. Douglas 1966; Douglas and Isherwood 1978). Particular foods are associated with festivities, set apart for specific categories of people, deployed to indicate self-indulgence or self-restraint and to speak of one's own beliefs and of one's one place in the community. The small, private cooking routines of everyday life have contributed to the 'us and them' logic of community-building setting local produce against faraway crops, the national against the foreign. In many European societies food is crucially linked to a sense of belonging to a national community and to the ways each nation has customarily portrayed itself and, often derogatorily, the 'others' (French 'frogs', German 'krauts', Italian 'spaghetti', etc.). While there is no essential national food, food consumption has been implicated in the purposive construction of national communities of taste (Bell and Valentine 1997; Palmer 1998). From the beginning of the nineteenth century a number of gastronomic works (e.g. Brilliat-Savarin 1822 (1985)) appeared across Europe, matching the development of restaurants and intellectualizing food in ways unprecedented since the days of the Roman Empire. They responded to a mixed agenda, including the education of the public, the consolidation of a sense of national identity and superiority, and even the marketing of one's own national 'heritage'.

Under the pressure of contemporary consumer culture (relying on the local appropriation of an ever growing list of items from abroad and on the mediation of diet or style experts), those customary practices and beliefs which derive from traditional (national and regional) culinary culture may come into conflict with both a taste for novelty and expert

advice. In Europe, in particular, the voices of experts have increasingly been called upon to counter the erosion of consumers' confidence following a succession of different food crises.[1] If food scandals have paved the way for a problematization of food consumption, new technologies in the form of 'gene technology' have been portrayed as confronting the consumer with 'alien' foods, even in countries like Italy where food crises had been relatively quickly and quietly absorbed. Furthermore, European societies are both facing the effects of increasing globalization in the food trade and undergoing a process of harmonization and integration, with countries like Austria having recently opened up their internal food market by joining the wider EU trade area. Under these conditions the link between everyday practices and community has become increasingly problematic. 'Traditional' and tacit forms of trust may no longer be sufficient. Yet, precisely by examining the responses of Italy to genetically modified (GM) foods and of Austria to its entry into the EU, as compared to the way trust in food has been addressed in the UK, we may see that similar resources are by no means simply melting away.

Europe, GM food and the politicization of food consumption

The debate over GM food – which reflects the most diffused GM crops considering mainly single-gene modifications, i.e. herbicide-tolerant varieties and BT varieties that inhibit various insects – has raged through the newspapers worldwide (Durant *et al.* 1998; O'Mahony 1999). Certainly, the commitment to 'gene technology' by the world's major public research institutions and the biotechnologization of R&D both in the private and public sector have already established enormous path-dependence (Buttel 1999: 2).[2] Yet at the last WTO meeting in Seattle, the EU opposed

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1. The erosion of food confidence in contemporary Western countries has been widely debated (Fischler 1988; Maurer and Sobal 1995; Sellberg 1991; Szerszynski 1999; Wildalwsky and Dake 1990). Among the wider public, the fears associated with food shortages have been replaced by preoccupations with food adulteration and food poisoning (Beardsworth and Keil 1997). On scientists' rankings of food hazards, microbial contamination comes top and pesticide residues and deliberate food additives bottom. However, opinion surveys show that laypeople are particularly uneasy about pesticides residues and preservatives (Hobam in Maurer and Sobal 1995; see more widely on risk perception, trust and the environment Douglas 1992; Szerszynki 1999; Wildalwsky and Dake 1990).
2. 'Gene technology' is a novel form of biotechnology which, in contrast to conventional plant breeding, involves the transfer of foreign genes not previously present into a species gene pool (Nottingham 1998). Drawing the line between old and new biotech is itself an issue. Opponents wish to stress discontinuities (often expressed in terms of different time spans; see Adam 2000), while supporters deny the necessity of specific information on grounds of sameness of results.

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the USA in that (like the developing countries) it was against the liberalization of biotechnologies (*Financial Times*, 6 October 1999). Comparing US and EU data on GM food in terms of produce, regulation and public response, two very different profiles emerge. In 1998 three-quarters of global GM cropland (28 million hectares) was in the USA and concerned soybean, corn and cotton (Buttel 1999). Europe accounted for virtually nothing in terms of produce, crops having being tested mainly in France, UK, Belgium and Holland (Nottingham 1998). In the USA, the tendency has been to regulate biotechnology using existing policies set up to deal with chemicals, while producers have been rather aggressive and successful in resisting special labelling (Buttel 1999; Hoban 1995). In Europe, national responses have varied greatly (Commandeur *et al.* 1996).[3] Yet interest groups, social movements and NGOs at national and European level have managed to put health and nutritional issues and, to a lesser extent, ecological ethical considerations, on the agendas of the various responsible legislative bodies. On the whole, even markedly pro-GMO governments, like the UK, have reconsidered questions they had previously dismissed or officially resolved and have devised more precautionary measures, such as increasing the amount of evidence for demonstrating safety (Levidow *et al.* 2000; Levidow and Carr 2000). European governments are indeed more ambivalent than their American counterparts (BEPCAG 1997). EU policy reflects this ambivalence.[4] On the one hand, when dealing with economic competitiveness, the European Commission has expressed the view that the rate of growth in the

3. For example, facing their European partners in July 1999, the UK (together with Spain, Portugal and Ireland) did not sign the document promoted by France and backed up by Italy, Denmark, Greece and Luxemburg which asks for a freeze for the authorization for GMO farming and commercialization, while Austria, Germany, Belgium, Finland, Holland and Sweden took a middle position. An excellent set of national studies on the way different European nations (Austria, Denmark, Spain, France, Ireland and the UK) have dealt with GMO and the precautionary principle can be found in a recent monographic issue of the *Journal of Risk Research*, (2000, 3, 2: 209–70) edited by Les Levidow, Susan Carr and David Wield.

4. In comparison with other regions, biotechnology is extensively regulated in the EU. Indeed, it has been argued that the EU has the strictest regulation worldwide (Smith and Kim 1998; see also http://www.oecd.org/ehs.country.htm which contains information about the laws on GM food in many European and non-European nations). The EU has taken a comparatively long time to allow patents on genes, and in 1998 it passed a directive harmonizing patent rules across its member states which allows them for animals and plants but not humans, bans cloning, and also bans changing human genes in such a way that the changes would be inherited. While labelling has been introduced, the directive on the labelling of GM food has meant that the European Commission dropped its proposal that the wording 'may contain GMO' be used when it is uncertain whether GMO are present and, more importantly, the enzyme technology at the processing stages which is where the use of GM is presently most pervasive is not the subject of current labelling regulation. All in all, the EU wants to govern –rather than ban – biotechnology: while most research on GMO is

biotechnology industry has to be 'substantially higher' if Europeans are to become major producers. On the other hand, the 'precautionary principle' (better safe than sorry) which has recently been restated in the White Paper on Food Safety has already been widely adopted. This sometimes appears as an ex-post rationalization of the EU's peculiar need to govern and proportionally represent different national agro-alimentary systems – witness, for example, the genesis of the rejection of Bovine Somatotophin (BST), a synthetically produced hormone which can increase milk yields and which is now prevalent in the US dairy industry (Barling and Lang 1999; Mepham 1996).[5]

If we take survey data at face value, the USA and the EU public seem to converge in their scepticism towards GM food. A summary of opinion polls conducted in the USA shows that, on the whole, results are similar to those found in a 1997 Eurobarometer opinion poll where – despite the use of an inverted question 'Is it not worth putting special labels on GM food?' – 78 per cent of the respondents wanted these products to be clearly labelled (Consumers Union 1999a). Yet differences again emerge when one notices how criticism is cast. The Consumers Union – the powerful American consumerist organization – places 'greater oversight of genetically modified foods' including 'pre-market safety reviews' and 'proper labelling' at number seven on their list of 'Top Ten Consumer Needs for the Year 2000' (Consumers Union 1999b). In general it has campaigned merely for the introduction of regulations requiring labelling and has looked to the European Union as a model both for labelling and safety review (Consumers Union 1998). Detailed labelling of food products has certainly become an important strategy of 'reidentification' (Fischler 1988) of food, which entails formalized guarantees of purity and quality, often sponsored by official bodies. However, European consumer organizations – some of which have strong links with environmentalism – are more vocal about the fact that the central issue of labelling is not food safety, which may require restrictive measures, but offering consumers the choice of whether or not to buy GM food. European consumers' scepticism about GM food and heavily industrialized food production in general has also opened up new opportunities for a slice of European producers and retailers who have both the economic flexibility and the cultural attitude to cope with a 'greening' of demand.

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productionist rather than consumerist or welfarist (Barling and Lange 1999), the EU is trying to keep some measure of political control on it, i.e. the US$15 million recently deployed to fund a European Biomolecular Engineering Programme (Smith and Kim 1998: 23).

5. The differences in national practices may be seen as offering precautionary opportunities and, more widely, they may be a resource of a less technocratic and more democratic model of harmonization (Levidow *et al.* 2000).

Despite vast national and regional variations and the fact that certified organic products still amount to only a small fraction of the whole food sector, figures on demand increases for organic food are impressively high in Europe.

Even as concise an account as this shows that GM food has been politically problematized in Europe in ways which are unknown in the USA. While it would be interesting to consider how this may or may not foreshadow something of an international trade war, in this article we are concerned with the peculiarly European reasons and outcomes of such problematization. There are a number of wider institutional, cultural and economic factors involved in the current politicization of food issues. First, agricultural policy in member states – and in particular many forms of agricultural subsidy which served to safeguard the importance of individual countries' food supply – has been taken over, at least since 1970, by the Community (Kapteyn 1996). This has meant that governments, farmers and retailers have all become very familiar with EU lobbying and policy-making and have grown accustomed to thinking of food issues in political terms. Second, egalitarian views that have been associated with a higher level of involvement with environmental issues and genetic engineering and which represent a threat more at the social than the personal level (Frewer *et al.* 1994) are arguably more widespread in European societies. These views are probably associated with a long-standing tradition of social democracy (Mepham 1996). This links to our third point, namely citizenship: when compared to the USA, EU institutions have not only recognized the need for a strong environmental policy – probably responding to the development of green parties across Europe – but they have also favoured a higher level of consumer representation with in-built organizations such as BEUC counterbalancing the division of food issues into scientific, economic and ethical which undermines public participation and representation. Finally, these factors are underscored by the political economy of the progressing transition to a single market. When a common market is being created as fast as innovations are introduced into the technological basis, the potential scope of the market is enormously enlarged and the fact that we cannot exit from it (but only from specific goods) becomes an issue (Hirschman 1979). Previously obvious boundaries which commanded trust in everyday exchange practices can no longer be taken for granted. The market itself appears more clearly as a public good which not only has to be preserved from monopolistic tendencies, but also increasingly makes sense only in relation to the 'public' whose 'good' it is supposed to serve. This has been highlighted by some contingent historical events, and in particular by a string of food scandals which have been portrayed as national rather than supranational matters.

If we follow this Hirschmanesque line of thought, the progressive

transition to a single market and food market innovations are likely to have a strong effect on consumer–producer relations. Matters of trust and loyalty need to be re-negotiated in the petty politics of everyday life and mapped on to different symbolic spaces. Consumers may come to play a more direct political role by responding to their newly visible ascribed status: they may behave as 'consumer-citizens' with mobilization, boycotts or new buying patterns; or they may behave as 'citizen-consumers' providing the necessary legitimization for state or regional attempts at protecting/promoting the local and the traditional. Countries across Europe are obviously divergent in the strategies they are likely to adopt. The first response appears typical of countries like the UK, where product standardization is crucial for consumer confidence and powerful corporations are met by a variety of consumer interest groups. The second response is more likely to occur in countries like Italy or Austria where tradition, locality and personal relations are still strong as a basis for trust and where protectionist measures are in place to promote sustainable farming.

The UK and disembedded trust

Whereas Austria and Italy represent cases where at the level of policy, and perhaps even more at the level of rhetoric, attempts are made to assure consumer confidence through appeals to traditional patterns appropriate to the ever more problematic context of national or sub-national systems of production and consumption, the UK position represents that of a market open both to free trade and technological innovation. The UK can be taken, in somewhat ideal-typical fashion, to stand for a highly industrialized agricultural sector combined with a polity friendly to open markets and new technologies. It may also be said to be reliant upon notions of consumer sovereignty on the one hand, and upon what we may call 'disembedded' trust on the other – i.e. a form of trust which is universalistic and institutional rather than traditional and localized.

The UK's anti-protectionist position is consistent both with the more industrialized nature of its agricultural production[6] and its stance – under both Tory and New Labour governments – in favour of the principles of openness and flexibility in general. The UK government's position is quite clear from the following position statement in a Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) document:

6. Illustrated, for example, by the fact that in the UK only 2 per cent of the workforce is employed in agriculture (11.3 per cent in catering) (1996 figures). The agro-food section contributed 2 per cent of GDP in 1989 and 1.4 per cent by 1996 (MAFF 1997).

> In August {1998}, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food . . . set out his vision for a strategy for the future of agriculture, for an *efficient*, *forward-looking* and *modernized* agricultural industry to *meet the challenges in the future*, for farming to be: *competitive*, *diverse* and *flexible* in order to respond to ever *changing market opportunities*; *responsive* to consumer wishes for example, concerning the welfare of animals, and the quality and value of produce; environmentally responsible given its major influence on the countryside, wildlife, water, soil and air; and an integral part of the rural economy. The consultation explained that responsibility for achieving this goal rests with farmers and with the farming industry, but that Government has an important role to play too: in setting the *right policy and regulatory framework*, both for the farming industry and for the wider public, and in recognizing the burdens that legislation may impose; and, in securing fair conditions of competition in relation to farmers in other countries and, in some cases, giving direct encouragement through regulation, advice or incentive.
>
> (MAFF 1999: para. 98; emphasis added)

While recognizing the public's (or rather the consumers') environmental and animal welfare concerns, the minister's stance, as reported here, continues to emphasize competitiveness, diversity, flexibility and responsiveness. It emphasizes too that the chief responsibly rests with the industry (not with the government) and that the state's role is advisory and regulatory. This 'level playing field' conception of the state's role is made even more explicit later in the document:

> The Government is committed to reducing the regulatory burdens imposed on business by improving the quality of legislation to ensure that Regulations abide by the five key principles of good regulation as defined by the Better Regulation Task Force – transparency, accountability, targeting, consistency and proportionality. It is also committed to removing outdated and unnecessary regulations. All regulatory departments, which include the devolved administrations, are drawing up Deregulatory programmes to take this initiative forward.
>
> (MAFF 1999: para. 121)

The government's national policy has been echoed externally in two key areas: first, in its negotiation stance on the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP); second, in its responsiveness to US-led biotechnology. With regard to the former, the UK's position was almost the opposite of Austria's (see below). Whereas the latter emphasized the importance of accommodating protective measure to new conditions and specific problems, the UK argues not merely for cost reductions, but also for a radical liberalization of the CAP. Similarly, with regard to genetic modification

of food, at least until opposition to and possible environmental side-effects of GMO became clear, the UK government viewed such technology as a welcome means to realize those values of innovation, modernization and competition evident in the future-orientated language of the above quotations. Even when it became necessary to respond to the problems of introducing new agricultural technology, the government was slower to act than were the major food retailers. Sainsbury, for example, has endeavoured to exclude GM-derived ingredients from its own brands and has been pivotal in setting up the European consortium of retailers to source GMO-free products. More radically, the large ASDA food retailing chain banned gene-manipulated products from its stores in an attempt to steel a march both on its main competitors and government policy. It may be said that the UK is the best example for a trend which is present, to a lesser degree, in most European countries: the private sector is superseding the public regulatory function through what might be called 'commercial precaution' and myriad company- or sector-specific rules and guidelines (Barling and Lang 1999: 64; Levidow and Carr 2000).

Following the commercial blockage, government policy itself was not one of banning but – again consistent with the principles of neo-liberal policy-making – of consumer choice via ingredients labelling. Rather than pre-empt the decision of the sovereign consumer – as ASDA had done – the government emphasized the centrality of informed consumer choice. Just as the responsibility for modernization, competitions, etc. rests with 'the industry', so the consumer is ascribed both the ability to make informed choices for him or herself and his or her family *and* the responsibility for the consequences of those choices. Again the role of government is regulatory and advisory; i.e. largely restricted to providing a pluralistic forum to ensure the adequacy of the labelling that is to inform those choices.[7] If ingredients labelling constituted one side of the strategy of dis-embedded trust, reliance on expert scientific advice constitutes the other. An Advisory Committee of Novel Foods and Processes was established consisting largely of scientific experts. It was to the judgement of this Advisory Committee that MAFF appealed in response to growing concerns over GM foods (e.g. MAFF press release, 'Vote of Confidence in Approval System for GM Foods', 18 February 1999).

Agriculture in the UK has long focused on growth, profits and

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7. The picture is somewhat more complex and governments are not unitary actors. The hegemony of neo-liberal policy-making did not go unchallenged even within government agencies. The position of MAFF was not, for example, identical to that of English Nature (the government body concerned with issues of rural environment). As the government's policies shifted in response to popular opposition to gene technology, so English Nature welcomed each concession; in effect each government shift from a regulatory to an interventionist model of the state.

efficiency – the least-cost combination of factors relying on the substitution of cheaper industrial by-products for natural inputs. However, the UK is where the most vocal and radical resistance to new agricultural innovation can be found – witness Greenpeace's campaign against Monsanto – and where the level of confidence in the authority of science or of policy-makers has been undermined. The latter is related to the fact that in the UK there have been several food scares[8] since the mid-1980s, ranging from salmonella in eggs to the outbreak of BSE. These have often been portrayed as resulting from poor controls and the heavily rationalized nature of British farming (Mitchell and Greatorex 1990). Because of the government's slow response to food scares, official reassurances concerning food safety have been largely counter-productive (Miller and Reilly 1995).[9] Public trust in traditional authority figures, policy-makers and scientists has declined, while food campaigning groups have retained public credibility (Shaw 1999). The BSE scandal has in many ways sparked an awakening both in the British and the EU of debate about issues of food and risk (Kjaernes 1999). It has worked as a gateway to address the food safety implications of industrialized farming, with many consumers discovering that they are willing to pay more for quality and transparency. A recent study of the UK, Belgium and Norway, for example, shows that the preference for ecologically cultivated foods is higher in the former countries which have recently experienced scandals that have drawn attention to farming and the supply system, rather than simply to the final product (Berg 2000). Thus, on the whole, while we may say that in the UK consumers have experienced a loss of control of the long chains of dependency in the phases of production, distribution and preparation of food, they have also started to address this loss (Fine and Leopold 1993).

The resources available in a country like the UK are, however, likely to be different from those which can be marshalled in countries where more traditional supply systems as well as more localized trust relations are still widely significant. While there is, for example, a comparatively large and fast-growing market for organic products, British governments have not, in contrast to the Italian and Austrian cases, made much attempt to mobilize the sentiments and practices surrounding this alternative sector by appealing to local production and consumption patterns in the face of legitimization deficits. Indeed, as concerns with possible contamination of organically grown crops by GM crops have illustrated, the research trials have enjoyed priority over organic production up to and beyond the point where the issue became a political and media one (see e.g. MAFF press release, 'MAFF Replies to Greenpeace: Planning Permission for GM

8. For a discussion of the notion of a food scare, see Beardsworth and Keil 1997: 163–5. Most commentators consider that the media have a crucial role in this phenomenon, but remain unclear as to its dynamics.

Crop Trials', 23 August 2000). The public debate on food and trust has also been cast in terms which place emphasis on technocratic solutions and disembedded strategies. Although groups such as Friends of the Earth have tried to support 'farmers' markets' in urban areas, the UK debate has not included much reference to traditional, local and artisan production and much less attention is paid to homogenization of flavours and loss of cultural identity than to animal welfare (Adam 2000). A more universalistic frame – placing emphasis on consumer rights and information – is probably coterminous with the steady rise of vegetarianism. While it is a much more complex phenomenon, when it is placed in the context of food scares and the GMO debate, vegetarianism appears as a 'strategy of confidence' (Sellberg 1991) which may help to deliberately develop a repertoire of trusted foods and then exclude all others from the diet. As a special type of 'food sectarianism' (Fischler 1988) – i.e. an attempt to introduce a sense of order into everyday eating by fixing boundaries – vegetarianism is paradoxically well adjusted to universalistic views. It does not require localism, it is often predicated on transnational animal rights and it is deeply ambivalent towards traditional ways of eating.

Traditional gastronomy, gene technology and food scares in Italy

In contrast to the UK, Italy has a strong and mixed agricultural sector combined with a polity which has not been so neatly shaped by neo-liberal philosophy. Here, in facing the erosion of confidence, political actors as well as interest groups and commercial enterprises are willing to use different rhetorical resources. Thus, in countries like Italy, transparency and quality seem to take on slightly different and peculiar meanings, with both supermakets and labelling playing out their roles differently. Particularistic values are comparatively very important for trust relationships, and food culture – including strolling around markets and even those details of food preparation which could appear as grotesque – is presented as an item of national and regional belonging (and pride).

Constant reminders of the deep cultural value of Italian gastronomy and of regional peasant traditions as well as the regulation of products of excellence is crucial to the way Italian consumers, producers and regulators have responded to the application of GE to food, and, more widely, to issues of food policy in the age of food scares and globalization. Unlike Germany which has a long tradition of fierce public discussion about the environment and GE, the Italian debate on GM food is very recent, discussion of GE having been long confined to humans, i.e. gene therapy and *in vitro* fertilization (Van Dalen 1997). However, since 1997 both Italian investment in biotechnologies and the public debate on GM food have

grown rapidly.[10] The latter has coincided not only with the first modified soybean cargo ever to arrive in Europe, but also, and more significantly, with a string of food scandals, above all the BSE crisis which eventually engaged the attention of the Italian public.

BSE has been portrayed in the Italian media as something foreign, something coming from a different country where people do not know how to eat and how to farm. *Mucca pazza* (mad cow disease) was described as 'British', just as the Dioxin crisis in pork and poultry was later to be branded 'Belgian'. Many newspapers reported how smuggled stocks of British beef or unchecked Belgian pork had been seized by Italian authorities. At about the same time as the onset of the discussion on *Mucca Pazza*, consumers were also scared by botulin virus which developed in a pack of *mascarpone* cheese, killing one person. However, the response of the Italian state and of the health minister was very quick and decisive and the media tended to portray this as a one-off tragic accident rather than a productive deficiency. Subsequently, in the days leading up to Christmas 1998, Italians had to turn their attention to what was defined as an act of *ecoterrorismo*: the deliberate poisoning of *panettone* by a group of ecologists aimed at setting the public against Nestlé. This purposely harmless attack was actually the catalyst for the first prime-time television debates on food safety.[11] GM food became a media issue, not only discussed together with other biotechnologies and framed within the existing bioethical discourse, but also set against the paramount safety and naturalness of '*prodotti nostrali*' (home-grown products, *lit.* products from us): the Italian, local produce.

Such us-and-them logic ('us' being traditional, local, sustainable, natural and moral) appears to have become entrenched ever since, repeated over and over again when BSE has been discovered in French cattle. What is more, it has only superficially been touched by the first case of BSE on Italian soil in late January 2001, after fewer than 4,000 tests had been carried out. The press as well as the magistrates were fast in tracing this case back to an 'international fraud', the result of cheaper foreign cows being illegally imported and then sold as Italian. The plot fitted the wider frame. On the day when the case had been officially confirmed, one commentator cried:

10. Italy has no large-scale chemical industry or a tradition of research in biotechnology. Yet in 1999 Italy was second after France for the number of GM field trials, i.e. 233 in total. Of the 2,200 billion lira which constitute the budget of European biotech companies, 1,300 are from Italian companies. At present there are 210 companies specializing in biotechnology in Italy, with 20 billion lira being their R&D budget (*Salute* 5, 202: 26).

11. This attack was only marginally against GMO (Nestlé uses them without declaring it) and more specifically against the company's promotion of surrogate milk in Africa where, due to poor water, this has resulted in higher levels of child mortality (*Diaita*, 1999, 4, 1).

Perfidious Albion . . . it's the origin of our tragedies. {Margaret Thatcher} wanted to save low-price British meat and allowed animals to be fed with animals . . . today our health and our gluttony are paying for her roughness. Our health may be taken care of by two ministers which every government should appreciate . . . but what about our palate? . . . In Palermo, precious casket of a culinary tradition of hunger, poverty and survival, the fumes of cow bowels {which are traditionally} fried at the corners of the streets have gone (for the moment at least). *Ca'meusa* bread (bread with spleen) has disappeared, *caldume* (cow breast and veal penis) is considered with suspicion, three hundred people are ruined, with no job, and thousands of gourmets have a broken heart.

(*La stampa*, 16 January 2001)[12]

Eating, another voice reminds us, should not be considered as a pure physiological function disjoined from 'pleasure'; this in turn is linked to 'knowledge' in the form of 'culture of raw materials and of respect for nature', and allows one to feel safer because, alongside 'large distribution' and 'massification', 'another world survives, and it is more widespread than one may think of, even if it is small-scale and scattered all over' (*La stampa*, 17 January 2001). These gourmand pleasures have a local and very often a regional connotation, as has become obvious when the EU ban on T-bone steaks was perceived as threatening the 'culinary pride of Tuscany', i.e. *Fiorentina* – a traditional thick T-bone steak (*La repubblica*, 30 January 2000). 'Commodified overproduction' is not only contrasted with traditional eating patterns – 'fifty years ago we consumed 15 kilos of meat per year, now we consume 84: pumped up, anaemic, tasteless, but multiplied by the exponential commodification of the McDonald's-style factory line'; it also features as the cause of consumers' irrational fears – against all probability laws, we are more scared of BSE than heart diseases 'because, the more we try to invent new markets, the more we do not know who we are and where we live' (*L'espresso*, 1 February 2001).

A similar rhetoric merely radicalizes themes which were already present in the public debate. Even in a glossy dossier on '*Mucca Pazza*' heavily influenced by the technical and abstract language of the nutritionist (*Focus*, December 1999) we had found some advice on how to 'eat and keep peace

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12. The Italian health minister has repeatedly claimed that Italy is in a much better position than other European countries because it has acted faster and more responsibly due to its 'alimentary tradition'. As a famous oncologist and vegetarian, he has said repeatedly that Italians could switch back and eat less meat, thereby reducing Italy's depency on beef imports. While it is true that Italy has been fast in adopting and even promoting directives on food safety (e.g. feeding cows with animal proteins was banned in July 1994) implementation has been poor and extremely varied across the peninsula, as the two major Italian weekly magazines have recently pointed out (*L'espresso*, 25 January 2001; *Panorama*, 1 February 2001).

of mind': 'trust your butcher; the most important thing is the relationship with one's own supplier'; 'prefer organic products'; and finally wait for the new 'identity card for beefsteak', a 'label with all the data on the animal and its diet, on the farmer and on the butcher'. These few lines suggest that more accountable producer–consumer relations are demanded, with small retailing being seen as playing a role alongside labelling. Product standardization and labels are one way of, as it were, bringing products home. They are historically related to the development of the more universalistic and technocratic forms of trust which are typical of a heavily industrialized food system with its mass production and distribution. In a market like the Italian one – where small retailers and farmers' markets have long occupied a dominant position and supermarkets command a comparatively small fraction of the relatively high amount of trust placed in food (Berg 2000) – labelling is required to place a greater emphasis on traceability. Supermarkets themselves have managed to succeed by relying on a modernized version of traditional consumer relations. This is evident, for example, in the successful strategy adopted by COOP, which has promoted loyalty via customer affiliation with shared dividends, its own vaguely counter-cultural militant magazine, and high quality own brands which rely on regional strengths and produce.

The advice offered above also portrays organic foodstuff as comparatively 'safer'. This is a widespread tendency: organic products have been invoked against not only BSE but also GMO. Articulating the familiar themes of quality as cultural tradition and territorial awareness, newspaper reports on GM food not only appear side by side with stories about human GE – as in the UK (Nerlich *et al.* 1999) – but also repeatedly refer to the homogenization of taste. They reiterate the thought that these products present a threat for artisan products, for traditional foodstuffs linked to local peculiarities. One widespread feeling is that Italians do not need to have the genes of the Mediterranean diet mixed in the laboratory with those of arctic fish, or, as the Minister for Agriculture declared in autumn 1999: 'one should not be biased against biotech, but surely one cannot claim that our agro-alimentary system could be valorized by the introduction of GMO either' (*Corriere della sera*, 14 October 1999).[13] Using similar arguments, Italy has successfully campaigned against the

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13. It is perhaps not surprising that a survey conducted in summer 1999 for the national newspaper *La repubblica* with a sample of over 500 internet users pointed out that quite a few Italians are sceptical of all processed foods (15.7 per cent thought they were dangerous to health) and the majority believe that buying Italian is the best way to avoid danger (55.6 per cent). The survey also showed a remarkable degree of knowledge as to organic food (88.2 per cent) and GM food 74.2 per cent). All in all, 25.8 per cent of the sample thought all genetic modifications were dangerous to health and 41.0 per cent thought some were. Labelling was considered an important issue for more than three-quarters of the sample (*Salute* 5, 192: 24-5).

EU directive on GM wine. As the vice-president of *SlowFood* – an association for the promotion of quality food – has declared: 'wine is meaningful if it contains the perfumes, the flavour, the history of a territory and a culture: all things which a test-tube cannot deliver' (*La repubblica*, 27 January 2001).

GMO (and BSE) offered an occasion to stress the cultural value of Italian gastronomy – witness the wide media coverage which regional food festivals are finally enjoying. At the same time, Italian gastronomy is increasingly accorded a political function, being contrasted with a withering away of national identity and a diminishing sense of responsibility for one's own local community. These are very strong, widespread and identifiable feelings if the US ambassador in Rome has perceived the need to send an open letter to a major Italian newspaper, arguing that one may love Italian traditional cooking while being pro-GMO (*La repubblica*, 13 February 2001). Yet one should not forget that such feelings are also probably not unrelated to the configuration of Italian agribusiness. Small and medium-sized farms are still very important and there is a strong presence of small groceries, open markets and farmers' markets, especially in the centre and the south of the peninsula. Furthermore, AIAB (*Associazione Italiana per l'Agricoltura Biologica*) reports a growth of nearly 50 per cent in organic acreage since 1997. Indeed, according to AIAB statistics, Italy is the biggest producer of organic foods in Europe, its organic farms amounting to nearly half of all European organic farms. Farmers' associations have become vocal as to the competitive advantage that Italian agriculture could gain by a sharper switch to organic production which could also stress the unsubstitutability and uniqueness of the territory. Finally, internal demand for organic products has also grown rapidly following the BSE crisis; recently, it has even been 'institutionalized' in that, as reported by the Green Movement *Legambiente*, over a hundred state schools were serving only organic meals by the end of 2000.

The debate on GMO has escalated rapidly.[14] Environmentalist associations, notably the *Associazione Verdi Ambiente e Società* and *Comitato Scientifico Antivisezionista* and some consumer associations such as *Agrisalus* and *Comitato Consumatori* have repeatedly asked for a block on any procedure aimed at commercializing GM food in Italy. A petition prepared for the last regional elections (February 2000) quite blatantly equated the 'defence of food safety' with the 'renunciation of GMO' and asked for the 'promotion of local and high quality produce, without the use of chemicals dangerous to health and the environment' (http://www.regionali.net/

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14. Even voices in the Catholic Church, including a speech made by the Pope in January 2000, have called for greater awareness of GM foods on grounds of international justice as well as human dignity and safety (http://www.regionali.net/documenti/chiesa-ogm.htm).

appello.htm). Green associations have mounted many demonstrations especially concerning food served to children in schools. While the national state has not done much by way of legislation, regions have been active. They have enacted quite different policies towards GMO, ranging from a ban on trials together with standards aimed at safeguarding traditional productive systems in Tuscany, to the laws banning the use of GM food in schools, hospitals and public institutions in Lazio and Marche, to the City of Milan which has declared itself *Comune Anti-transgenico*, despite the fact that Lombardia is one of the regions with a higher number of GMO field trials, to Emilia-Romagna where most GMO are produced alongside a growing organic output (http: //www.regionali.net/situazione-attuale).

On these grounds, Italy differs profoundly from the UK. The public debate on food safety and GMO has developed comparatively late, but many politicians have taken a strong line, especially those from the vocal Green Party. Above all, when we come to what the concerned voices are actually saying, they are not quite the same as the British ones. To be sure, there are similarities. In both countries the debate seems to follow the general pattern that has been identified as typical of technical controversies (Hoban 1995: 193–4) and there are a number of international actors involved who resort to similar claims. As suggested, however, while a universalistic frame is typical of the UK debate, in Italy the local and regional, the national and the traditional dominate. If, according to a recent study (Shaw 1999), experts even in the UK construe consumers' greater sensitivity about food as being the result of their increased separation from the processes of food production, in Italy this separation is felt all the more. Above all, it is construed as the recent outcome of globalization and as entailing a loss of national, or better, regional identity. In the wake of EU negotiation on GMO, one influential commentator described the matter thus:

> I do not know whether GM food is poisonous. No one knows, not even the scientists who develop them. Too little time has passed to verify its biological effects, yet it's probably enough to consider their psychological and symbolic influence. . . . The aroma of one's mum's cooking or of one's own home town have such a power that we get infinite nostalgia when we can no longer find that particular flavour. {Nothing} can compensate the Triestino for losing his turnip soup or the Brianzolo for being deprived of his slice of stale bread with lard. It is not just a matter of smell and taste, it's emotions, evocation, memory. Globalization . . . convenience food as American call them . . . affects quality of food . . . it destroys any taste which evokes a belonging, a reciprocal recognition, a specific identity and a neat, strong memory.
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> (*La repubblica*, 26 June 1999)

It is to the regional peasant tradition that Italians are invited to resort for confidence-enhancing strategies. Regions are indeed crucial, both at the level of rhetoric and of practices (regulation, production, exchange and consumption): it would be very difficult to understand the dynamics of trust in the Italian food market without taking into account regional variation and, conversely, such variation delineates the specificity of the Italian case.

After an initial moment of panic, the debate on GM food in Italy is probably settling down to accommodate a variety of voices, including those more positive ones which seek to discriminate between good and bad biotech innovations (i.e. much of the early criticism was cast against products which gave no extra benefit to the consumer, thus being even irrational in terms of a cost–benefit analysis.[15] In addition, attention is shifting to the preservation of traditional Italian products. Many newspapers proclaimed that Italians had already lost the battle over chocolate when the EU ruled that up to 5 per cent of non-cocoa fat can be included in chocolate without altering the name of the product, something which affects artisan chocolate production in Italy (*La repubblica* and *Corriere della Sera*, 19 March 2000). More recently, traditional and artisan production has appeared to be threatened by EU efforts to harmonize food safety laws. These efforts are based on the so-called HACCP directive which, following the prescriptions for food safety in airspace, is detrimental to artisan, local products and well adjusted to standardized mass-produced goods. Italian regions had to apply for special concessions on traditional foods which do not meet the EU directive on food safety. The difficulty in pinning down all traditional products, to select, preserve and certify, has proved overwhelming. Fears of homogenization, of loss of national and regional identities, are soaring in the Italian press – even losing one typical product means a loss of national identity, says the president of *Legambiente*.

These emotional appeals sit alongside much more mundane preoccupations with the way high-quality, typical gastronomy is crucial – both practically and symbolically – to the 'art plus food' packages that attract millions of tourists to the Italian regions. The Italian Minister for Agriculture (like his Austrian counterpart) has thereby claimed that instead of being defensive, Italy should campaign for a directive which adds value to and protects traditional techniques fostering high quality across European nations in order to capitalize on all typical products (*La repubblica*, 15 April

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15. For example, the cloning of some historic pine trees which had been celebrated by the poet Carducci, useful medical applications and a number of progressive or utilitarian critiques of the the panic provoked by GM food (including a translation of Tony Blair's biotech manifesto) have appeared next to newspaper reports on EU negotiation about GE in summer/winter 2000; even traditional Italian produce is said not to be incompatible with some 'gene' technology (*Le scienze*, October 2000).

2000).[16] Still, when compared with the Austrian response to the challenges posed to traditional agriculture by the transition to a single market, it cannot be said that the Italian government has made great efforts to mobilize value change. The very development of organic farming-like the survival and re-evaluation of local traditional produce, is more to do with civil society and market actors. Likewise, the national government supports the precautionary principle and has been willing to adopt EU directives on food safety; yet it has been reactive rather than proactive in implementation, with regions as well as a myriad actors in civil society having had an important – if uneven – role in it.

Austrian food policy post-EU entry

Austria's entry into the European Union in 1995 exposed a previously protected national agricultural system to a new and wider market while limiting the rights of the state to subsidize its farmers. The immediate result was that in 1995 average prices for agricultural produce were between 20 per cent and 50 per cent lower than in the previous year (Leidwein 1996: 422–3). At the same time, the structure of the CAP was not designed to adequately support the kind of marginal hill farming which constitutes a significant proportion of the country's agriculture. Anxiety among farmers that their livelihoods were threatened found its counterpart in suspicion among consumers that the types and quality of food to which they had become accustomed would be undermined by cheap imports from other EU countries (e.g. irradiated Dutch tomatoes), despite the fact that the government held out cheaper food as a major carrot in the run-up to the entry referendum of 1994. The impact of entry into the EU's free trade zone and of growing internationalization in food retailing is illustrated by the fate of Austria's national-based food retailers who had long been the objects of attention of larger German chains. Large sections of food retailing are currently in the hands of German concerns, and in particular REWE which, by 1997, was the market leader with a 32.6 per cent share of the Austrian food market (www.rewe.de).

Just as the deregulation of global markets undermines consumer confidence, so the exposure to a more regionally specific free trade zone created distrust among Austrian consumers as well as posing political and economic problems for policy-makers. Here we want to discuss briefly how the three major institutional players – the state, the quango marketing boards,

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16. Yet the soul of Europe, no less than the one of Italy, is twofold. We get high-quality small, traditional products and mass-production of surrogates at the same time. In Italy for example, producers of *Grana* and *Parmiggiano* (DOC and DOP certified) are angry at the Bavarian production of grated 'Parmesan' (*L'espresso*, 18 May 2000).

and the food retailing chains and producers– sought to address both the practical problems *and* the question of trust and consumer confidence. The response to genetic engineering again illustrates this issue of trust or the lack thereof. In 1997 a petition for a referendum (*Volksbegehren*) collected 1.2 million signatures (in a population of *c*. eight million) demanding (1) a ban on the import of GM foods, seeds, etc.; (2) a ban on the release of genetically modified food or animals; (3) no patents on life. While commentators who wish to defend GM research and production have noted that 'it is to be feared that Austria's plan to go it alone in its total rejection of new technology will lead to an isolation which will in the long run result in untold damage to the country's economy and culture' (Ruckenbauer 1998: 599), the attitudes displayed by the petition do not diverge as radically as one might expect from government strategy which went beyond EU standards (e.g. those of Directive 90/220) to set what Torgersen and Seifert have called an 'Austrian standard' for the assessment of biotechnological risk (Torgersen and Seifert 2000).

The government sought to protect the interest of its farmers (who also constitute a significant support base for one of the governing coalition Parties, the ÖVP). The Government's case to the EU – and also its own strategy – was set out in the *Österreichisches Memorandum zur Land- und Forstwirtschaft in den europäischen Berggebieten* (BMLF 1996), otherwise known as the '*Bergbauernmemorandum*' {memorandum on hill farming}. The memorandum notes that technical developments in agriculture have further disadvantaged marginal (and thus already disadvantaged) areas and, if allowed to develop according to market forces alone, would result in the eventual depopulation of many rural areas and the cessation of agricultural production within topographically difficult terrain (see Leidwein 1996: 428–9). On a more positive note, its also argues that hill farming makes a multifunctional contribution; not merely economic but also ecological and cultural. The memorandum stresses the role of marginal agricultural regions as '*Ressourcenspeicher und Erholungsräume*' {resource repositories and recreation areas}. It makes a number of specific proposals: (1) that the EU develop policy on the basis of regions sharing common geographical characteristics (and thus problems) rather than on the basis of administrative units alone; (2) that cross-subsidy policies take more account of the specific problems faced by hill farmers; (3) that economic development policy supports regions in which multiple occupations are necessarily common (e.g. part-time work in factories or tourism undertaken in order to support the economy of the farm); (4) securing and improving the income of farmers from forestry work via intensification of the management of forests as a source of renewable energy. The memorandum concludes by noting that 'only a strengthening of the region which takes account of both economic and social aspects can offer a lasting

basis for livelihood in hill-farming areas and among hill farmers' (BMLF 1996).[17]

The other side of the government's strategy within this new context – and one which fits well with the strategies of the marketing boards and retailers – was to emphasize the one competitive advantage that low-intensity agricultural production has over high-intensity production, namely the quality and distinctiveness of the product. The most obvious – and important – manifestation of this strategy was the shift towards organic farming particularly within the alpine region. The switch to organic production seems, here much more than in the Italian case presented above, related to the need to add value and to protect local and traditional products during the transition to a wider market. High value added would compensate for low production, and EU entry opened up a European-wide niche market of high-earning, health-conscious and quality-seeking consumers. The very anxieties which high-intensity agriculture produces could be turned to the advantage of low-productivity marginal production, but in order to do so it is first necessary to secure the home market as a launching pad. This side of the strategy is explicitly set out in another document, *Ecoland Austria Concept* (BMLF 1997a), written by (or on behalf of) the Minister, Wilhelm Molterer, and put out by the Ministry's PR department.

This document's starting point is the impact of growing environmental consciousness, and Molterer presents his ecoland concept as three 'theses': '1. An intact environment is vital for survival; 2. the country needs agriculture; 3. ecology must pay off.' Thesis 1 emphasizes sustainability, thesis 2 expresses the same concern about sustaining rural populations as the *Bergbauernmemorandum* and calls for an 'ecologization of the tax system', and thesis 3 emphasizes both quality production and the utilization of alternative technologies (e.g. the use of biomass as a sustainable energy source). Interesting for us is, first, the emphasis upon the trust engendered by low-intensity production: 'Austria has had no cases of BSE. . . . Austrian farmers are also sceptical about the use of genetic engineering in food production.' Here the document emphasizes the specific qualities of the national styles of agricultural production in contrast to the more industrial, and perhaps by implication less trustworthy, styles to be found elsewhere. Second, the document quite explicitly appeals to consumers to play their part in the national strategy: 'it is the consumer's responsibility to continue to stimulate the adopted policy with consumption patriotism

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17. Austria's strategy was quite successful at EU level. The Ministry was, for example, able to secure EU subsidies for organic farming and to influence the reform of the CAP in the direction of the strategy set out in the two documents discussed (see BMLF 1999). This success is endangered by the state of Austria–EU relations following the inclusion of the FPÖ in government. Molterer and EU Agricultural Commissioner Franz Fischler (both ÖVP) have had a difficult hand to play.

and a high quality and health awareness. . . . Animal protection must also pay off for small-scale farmers, the consumers must not let them down' (BMLF 1997a). This is a very candid attempt to mobilize a value change – greater ecological awareness and health consciousness – for the sake of a national strategy, and of course the notions of 'consumer responsibility' and 'consumption patriotism', which would be quite foreign to the language of his UK counterparts, are especially telling. The customary link between consumption and freedom of individual choice is here broken for the sake of a greater good: kinder animal husbandry, sustaining the rural population and a more competitive national agriculture. Here, more than in the Italian case, we find an attempt to link policy to perceived value changes influenced by the relatively strong ecological movements of the 1980s and 1990s within the German-speaking parts of the EU.

This appeal to consumer concerns and anxieties on the one hand and values on the other at state level has its precise echo in the responses of the other two major institutional actors: the marketing boards (both national and regional) and the food retailers/producers, and here again issues of trust and national or regional identity are central. Whereas previously marketing boards and retailers would have emphasized technocratic controls (e.g. hygiene) in their attempts to reassure consumers, what one currently finds is an additional emphasis upon moral issues (e.g. *artgerechte Tierhaltung* – husbandry taking account of animal welfare) and, in the name of traceability, locality. The minister's appeal to a general consumption patriotism here gives way to local or regional patriotism. The strategy of the marketing boards was to introduce a full range of food labelling not merely with regard to quality, but also place of origin. Austrian wine labels, for example, normally carry the place of production, but there is as yet no equivalent of the official Appellation Contrôlée. The huge demand for wine generated by food retailing chains means that prestigious wine-growing areas such as the Wachau cannot always supply the demand and their wines are blended with those from other regions, rendering the label meaningless. To address the suspicion this has raised and to assure the reputation of Austrian wines (now largely recovered from the 1980s wine scandal),[18] the marketing boards intend to introduce the Appellation Contrôlée, but this system has already in effect been generalized to other food products and in particular (after BSE) to meat. The AMA (Agrarmarkt Austria – the national marketing board) introduced a labelling programme (*Gütesiegelprogramm*) in 1994 specifying three criteria: high quality, Austrian origin and independent control.[19]

18. When glycol (a component of antifreeze) was added to some poor-quality sour wines to make them taste smoother.
19. Though ironically it turns out that some 'Austria' labels merely mean *processed* in Austria.

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The regional marketing boards (e.g. the milk marketing boards) take the second criterion a step further via regional labelling. Local produce, or at least produce whose locality is known, enjoys and engenders trust. Unlike ingredients labelling, labels of origin appeal to embedded trust; to those sentiments displayed by the fact that although most food shopping is done in super- or discount markets, the highest reported levels of consumer satisfaction are with local peasant markets (*Bauenmärkte*) (BMLF 1997b: 96). Organic food above all illustrates the combined impact of moral or value issues with questions of localized trust (the two are in fact closely related given the environmental cost of long-distance haulage). Some 54 per cent of Austrians consume at least some organic produce (BMLF 1997b: 85) and the country has the highest proportion of organic farming within the EU.

The problems of trust and the possible strategies of addressing them as deployed by the marketing boards have been taken up by the food retailers and producers themselves. For the Austrian market, the German chain REWE (owners of Billa and Merkur) has introduced a wide range of organic produce under the ingenious brand name *Ja! Natürlich*, operating independently of the chain but trading exclusively through it. *Ja! Natürlich* comes complete with a *Weltanschauung* as well as high-quality organic produce produced in cooperation with some 5,000 organic farmers. Traditional methods of production, animal welfare and traceability are cornerstones of its self-identified 'philosophy' and most of its produce comes from within or close to the Hohe Tauern National Park in Salzburg Province (www.janatuerlich.co.at).

As suggested, facing novel foods and wider markets, the state together with other institutional actors seeks to address the trust shortfall. New forms of regulation can be introduced to reassure consumers at sub-state level (e.g. by marketing or retail organizations). In the Austrian case we also see a dual-track strategy appealing and responding to both (real or assumed) new values influenced, for example, by social movements (e.g. ecological and health consciousness) and NGOs, *and* an appeal to almost pre-modern forms of loyalty (i.e. the very ones allegedly replaced by the nation-state) such as forms of local patriotism. Problems of trust are addressed via an appeal to a variety of loyalties: towards the nation (Molterer's 'consumption patriotism') or even more closely bounded loyalties at a regional or sub-regional level. The political actors appeal to the former, while (ironically) multinational concerns such as REWE as well as the regional marketing boards appeal and respond to the local loyalties and use culturally embedded trust and local identification as a resource. Third, while the motives may remain instrumental (political or commercial), the consumer is not addressed as a rational egotist but as a social agent; as a bearer of new and old values and loyalties as well as

preferences. The seemingly clear line drawn between consumer and citizen becomes blurred not because the state appeals to the citizen merely as a consumer, but because commercial bodies pursue their economic interests by responding and appealing to the demands lodged by their customers as citizens.

Our point is not that these strategies have to 'correspond' straightforwardly to the 'reality' of production or consumption. Even in Austria they do not do so – as recent evidence of the 'doping' of pigs illustrates – and the consumption patterns which most closely correspond are largely restricted to a highly privileged sector. Most production remains industrialized mass production and most consumption remains price-conscious mass consumption. Rather, these are trust-building measures which seek to clothe – often 'modern' – patterns of production and consumption in the aura of tradition. Nevertheless, there are policy implications for production and supply if these strategies are to retain their plausibility and force, as the volte-face in Germany's agricultural policy in the light of the first known BSE cases in the country illustrates ('*Klasse statt Masse*' {quality not quantity}). In the Austrian example we see some movement among producers, retailers and policy-makers in the direction of the demands made by NGOs and the values embodied in those demands (see Torgersen and Seifert 2000: 212 and 216).

Conclusion

What broader themes do these different responses illustrate? Novel foods and the exposure to a wider market (like the deregulation of markets) create not merely the familiar economic problems of intensified competition. To borrow Mary Douglas' categories, each enlargement or deregulation of a market constitutes a move towards low grid/low group; the chains of interdependence are extended but with a corresponding weakening of their intensity and hence impairment of trust (Douglas 1992). Wider and diversifying markets thus bring problems of legitimacy into the political sphere and trust in the cultural sphere. The last two are closely linked: in large-scale complex societies where less formal sources of trust are insufficient, state regulation has historically acted as a source of trust (as illustrated by nineteenth-century legislation against the adulteration of basic foodstuffs such as beer). Many commentators have claimed that this historic function has vanished from contemporary 'post-industrial' or 'postmodern' societies. However, when we look at the British, Italian and Austrian cases presented above, we may say that analyses stemming from the Beck–Giddens reflexive modernity thesis have tended to overstate the case. In such analyses we find support for a theory of homogenizing

individualization: 'it is not like simple modernity any more, when the regulatory authorities took care of the risks and kept the foods you should not eat out of the country. The reflexive burden {of choice} is placed upon the shoulders of the individual' (Almas 1999). In contrast, we have seen that each individual still makes his or her choices in the context of regulated markets. Even the strongly individualistic formulation of consumer rights in the 1960s demanded this. Yet it is true that such formulation has coincided with food regulations moving out of the realm of national politics into the sphere of international organizations, from WTO to WHO to IOCU. This trend is further complicated in the EU context where issues of consumer protection – from the formal recognition of consumer rights in 1972 to the White Paper on Food Safety in 2000 – have often been linked to issues of product harmonization.[20] Still, as suggested, nation-states continue to play an important role as regulators, although they have to operate within a wider framework of constraints and their actions may be more or less proactive and formal across different nations. Our problem is thus not so much whether consumer policy is in effect an integral part of modern 'governmentality' (Foucault 1978); it evidently is. Rather, we were interested in showing *how* food consumption is actually articulated in a multi-level play of boundary-drawing, where belonging and trust inevitably bring the market and politics together as preconditions for exchange and legitimization.

While, at least since Simmel's *Philosophy of Money*, we have known that individualization is a trend associated with increased monetarization and

20. If the Treaty of Rome did not refer specifically to consumer policy, in 1987 article 100A (on the necessity to have a high level of consumer protection in the elaboration of the legislation for the common market) was added to it. This constituted the basis for numerous directives aiming to harmonize product safety rules as well as to get consumers represented by financing the development of consumer organizations in member states where they were still weak. The Maastricht Treaty includes the strengthening of consumer protection among the legitimate activities of the Community and considers such activity as something more and different from the mere legislation of the common market (CCE 1994; Goyens 1992). The White Paper on Food Safety (http://europa.eu.int/comm.dg24/library/press.press37_en.html) envisages the establishment of a European Food Authority which will implement adequate measures of risk assessment, gather information and take responsibility for communication with the public. It also proposes a wide range of food safety laws on manufacturers' responsibility, on traceability of feed, food and its ingredients, and on the application of the precautionary principle. Consumer protection organizations have also been very active at the EU level and the development of the consumer movement has contributed to blurring the boundaries between the notions of citizens and consumers. However, consumer protection organizations are generally endorsing the model of consumer sovereignty based on individual choice which may yield to paradoxical rhetorical and practical turns when reasons for voice are to be found in the circumstance that choice is itself the product of particular social and political circumstances and it is not universally self-affirming (Sassatelli 1995).

globalization, Simmel himself pointed out that we should not equate it with a decline in social action (Simmel {1900} 1990). In this way, we looked at forms of disembedded and embedded trust relations. In other words, we have taken the view that economic action is forever 'embedded' in Granovetter's sense (Granovetter 1985). Likewise, discourses on food consumption and safety are still rooted in social relations (Dreyer 1999), yet these relations take on very different forms. To portray such a state of affairs we have considered that each society is characterized by a relatively stable and coherent set of definitions of and institutional approaches to food safety, namely by a particular *trust regime*. A trust regime is thus a 'frame' (Goffman 1974), sustained both in activity and mind, which orientates the identification and interpretation of new information as well as policy-making. These reactions will in turn feed back into the initial frame, thereby introducing a dynamic element into the system. The notion of trust regime may help us to understand qualitative variations which survey data may struggle with. Trust levels vary greatly across Europe; to understand such variation we need to have a better sense of *how* trust is characterized in different countries.

In this light, we have looked at the UK, Italy and Austria as representing a spectrum running from relatively industrialized and technology dependent to more artisan forms of agricultural production. Each country or region is trying to further its interests by supporting, supporting conditionally or resisting the pressures to open up to new markets and new productive technologies. However, our primary concern has not been with agricultural policy itself, but with the forms of trust engendered or undermined by these policy positions. Of course, both embedded and disembedded trust relations are present in all countries, mixed in different proportions across regions and product categories. Thus, while supermakets' internal safety policies as well as formal ingredients labelling have become widespread in Italy and Austria, even in the UK we find a demand for organic produce which resorts to myriad localized Green basket schemes or high-quality meat mail orders entailing direct sales from small farmers (James 1993). Still, on the basis of an ideal-typical logic, we may take Italy and Austria on the one hand and the UK on the other as examples of two different trust regimes: the former relatively more particularistic (and personalized), the latter more universalistic (and institutional).

In times of crisis and change, such different regimes may well differ in the particular way they will deploy a variety of diverse trust-restoring strategies. Where there is strong state support for free trade and technological innovation we are witnessing the strongest forms of popular opposition. The UK has not only experienced some of the most militant and best organized anti-GM food protests, but also manifestations of wider

anti-neo-liberal and anti-globalization protest. The strategy of key actors in the Italian and Austrian cases has been somewhat different. To a degree, the kinds of sentiment which lie behind protest in the UK have been mobilized in Italy and Austria to support government strategies (or the strategies of marketing boards and even retailers). Here the trust shortfall has been addressed via an appeal to those very local loyalties which appear merely eccentric or Luddite within the context of a freer market. The direction which political actors 'choose' to take may be less a function of ideology than of the practical problems and options they face. More open markets must rely on a disembedded trust regime based on standardization, while in the case of Italy and Austria we see such a regime at least supplemented by alternative trust-restoring measures based on embedded national or sub-national loyalties: 'tradition' as a solution to 'modern' problems. But support for disembedded trust itself rests upon another form of quasi-traditional embedded trust, namely trust in policy-makers and experts. Yet this resource too is limited, stretched not only by the much documented and commented upon delegitimation of political processes but also by a no less striking delegitimation of expert knowledge. Incidents like BSE have brought the two together, intensifying the difficulty and rendering classically modernist forms of governance problematic.

On the whole, as we have seen, there are strong signals of the politicization of food. Food may be linked to issues of political legitimization, becoming the object of a continuous struggle. This remains the case even where most actual consumption and production does not correspond to the practices rhetorically invoked in the appeal to a residue of embedded trust. Indeed, it is not only the political sphere which may remind consumers that they are citizens, but practices of consumption themselves – with all their ambivalence in terms of individual autonomy – may take on a political significance. The interaction between producers, retailers and consumers is originating new styles of consumption which work as confidence-building strategies. To do so they often appeal to a more 'political' notion of the consumer. Even in US society, the rise of 'counter-cultural cuisine' – involving a tendency to avoid processed food and to shop at natural food stores and linked to the environmental movement and to a variety of alternative food production and marketing approaches (Belasco 1993) – not only means that marketing and retailing agents may provide ecological information to their customers. These styles of consumption may also represent a catalyst for people's questioning big companies and government statements about food. Consumers may want not only to be able to assess the purity of the product, but also to evaluate the whole method of production, possibly opening the way to a more political engagement (Brom 2000). In Europe, at least in some countries like

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Austria at the national level and Italy (although here more at a regional level), we arguably achieve a more direct political involvement in this process and the consequent attempt to mobilize and govern protest within the context of more explicitly political communities of trust.

All in all, and each in its own way, our cases show the extent to which mundane practices such as food consumption are crucial to people's sense of belonging to a political community. Changes in food technologies at the global level and in food regulation at the EU level have provided many European citizens with an occasion to focus their attention on traditional foods and productive procedures which cannot do without a local dimension (e.g. with the need of a particular light water, a particular marsh ecosystem, a particular set of sulphuric caves, etc.). They have also provided a forum to discuss what it is to be part of the European Union, what the Union should do in the context of globalization and what powers the regions and the national state should have. Ultimately they show that citizenship is possibly more than ever linked to the way our daily practices are negotiated at many different levels in the face of wider political and economic changes.

Acknowledgements

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