

SESSION 4: TO EACH HIS OWN MILK

Presided by Françoise Sabban

Senegal, a Land of Milk: From Local Milk to Powdered Milk. The Reinvention of an Urban Dairy Culture

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Milk, a product with strong identity connotations, is at the center of changes in Western African traditional society. Local milk production primarily comes from **extensive smallholders in rural areas** that make use of natural pasturelands. But some of the milk also comes from **semi-intensive and even intensive periurban farms**. Traditionally, milk is consumed in a variety of forms: fresh milk, curdled milk, butter cream, butter oil, milk beverage mixed with cereal mush or with couscous... The milk tradition is basically rooted locally in the land, among social groups, in local cultures. Dairy products are thus **the expression of particular cultural identities and heritages** that can be found for instance among the Peuls, but also among many pastoral or agro-pastoral groups.

In Senegal, the share of local milk in the national economy is considerable. Production amounts to 120 million liters, 84% of it made up of cow's milk. Milk remains an essential component in the pastoral or agro-pastoral diet, but is also a source of income for breeders that have a reliable distribution outlet (up to 80 % of their annual revenue).

Yet **this cultural heritage seems threatened by the workings of the market economy.** Local milk production in West African countries, being far short of the national demand, is supplemented by massive imports of milk powder. Between 1994-1996 and 2004-2006, milk imports to West Africa more than doubled. In Senegal, in particular, **local milk** is in strong competition with **milk powder**, which is overrunning urban markets and even making its way into food habits both in urban and rural areas. In 2007, Senegal imported 40,000 tons of milk valued at 58 billion CFA francs (i.e. seven times the country's Livestock Ministry budget).

Should this situation be interpreted as a loss of competitiveness of local milk? Or does the boom in milk powder correspond to a diversification of dietary practices, the market for local milk developing alongside that for powdered milk?

The factors that contributed to milk powder penetrating dietary habits are varied. **Urban lifestyle** is the first factor of change. In Senegal, over 52% of the population lives in an urban environment. New forms of consumption have cropped up in cities: breakfast and eating outside the home, discovery of new recipes; the development of new eating styles; but also the emergence of new demands in supplying, transport, and new health risks. These changes in consumer habits are thus based in new urban identities and new beliefs in which powdered milk plays a major role. Tastes change, and some consumers, especially the younger fringe living in cities are no longer able to appreciate the specificity of the local dairy culture or the taste of local milk.

The opening up of the Senegalese market in the context of **globalization** has considerably altered the ways local production is promoted and the way market transactions are handled. The food industry uses imported milk powder almost exclusively, as it is less expensive. The same observation can be made regarding smallholder dairies that are increasingly converting to milk powder production and sales for lack of a regular supply. The "market" in dairy product consumption is taking on a greater role to the detriment of domestic trade and family relations. **Advertising** thus plays an ever more determinant part and conveys new images of modernity. Milk is becoming the symbol of health, dynamism, and conviviality. But advertising messages are not devoid of references to tradition: brand names draw inspiration from the traditional nomenclature and lend the product "local" color. And some producers **choose to use local milk, which is more expensive, in order to position themselves in quality segments.**



In answer to the growing consumer demand in cities and collection centers, new trades have appeared such as delivery carriers, and small processing industries are gradually emerging, an essential factor in job creation.

Finally, the development of powdered milk seems to be progressing in parallel with the development of the local milk market. And even if some consumers indifferently drink local milk and milk reconstituted from imported powder, others consider products made from local milk as “specific” products. Thus **quality management of local milk** in production and processing is an essential **element of competitiveness**. In fact, many producers and manufacturers are better able to compete with imports by promoting the special quality of local milk. The fact nevertheless remains that **the preservation of cultural values** in the context of a market economy is a question that local actors must take seriously. The Senegalese consumer must constantly choose between consuming local milk or milk powder. And it indeed seems today that **urban African culture** feeds on both one and the other.

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A PhD in geography and researcher with the Office of Macroeconomic Analysis at the Senegalese Institute of Agricultural Research. His work focuses on questions relating to the spatial organization of breeding activities and land use planning. His youth spent in a zootechnical research center honed his interest for breeding. His research thus turned toward the dairy sector. His doctoral dissertation is entitled *Les territoires d'élevage laitier à l'épreuve des dynamiques politiques et économiques: Éléments pour une géographie du lait au Sénégal*. He is also the curator of the exhibition “*Mon lait, je l'aime local [I Like My Milk Local]*.”