

How 3 years of fieldwork shows the need to overcome stereotypes and look at these eater-actors in a new light

Interview

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AlimAdos, a field study of young people and their family and social environment conducted with two CNRS Laboratories and the support of ANR (French National Research Agency)

In a few words, what is the AlimAdos research project and what is new about it?

VP. AlimAdos is first of all a research project that used qualitative methods to understand food behaviors, i.e. that looked into practices and not only the discourse on these practices. The in-depth fieldwork called on ethnological and anthropological methods: participatory observation, interviews, food intake journals used as a tool for dialogue. The research took place over a 3-year period in conjunction with the French National Research Agency and two CNRS research laboratories in Alsace and in Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur (PACA), two regions that are highly representative of French diversity, both having a regional food culture and populations of different origin that mix there. This situation gives rise to compromises and hybridization between various culinary traditions as well as between the latter and what the agrifood and food service industry has to offer. To sum up AlimAdos in a few figures, it involved some fifteen researchers, over 500 informant families, more than 1500 interviews and hundreds of observation situations...

Upon completion of the AlimAdos research, you found it necessary to “deconstruct the AlimAdos research” and stop looking at teenagers through adult eyes. Why?

ND. In modern societies, adolescents arouse both envy and fear. Their youth is appealing, as are the freedom and independence many of them enjoy. What do they do, how do they manage when left to their own devices, in what way do they resemble and differ from the family they come from: such are the sorts of questions that torment adults with regard to adolescent practices in general and their food behaviors in particular. This issue becomes an increasing cause for anxiety when combined with the current development of fast food and junk food and with it, the proliferation of opportunities to eat badly that adolescents may succumb to. Torn as they are between a passive image that makes them indiscriminate consumers and the insistence on “being yourself” and the myth of the sovereign individual, these youths cannot be heard without shifting the adult-centered perspective and listening to what they have to say, trying to understand their experience, observe their ways of doing things and partake in the creation of their world.

So the relationship adolescents have with food does not automatically imply poor eating habits?

ND. Talking about poor eating with respect to adolescents is in line with the tendency to “pathologize” this age group and view young people as subject to risk, who are in danger and who endanger the society they belong to, whether these dangers are overweight, standardization and globalization of food behaviors, the end of traditions and the failure of transmission ... “Teenagers eat badly” is an adult stereotype, but it is also what teenager say about themselves, internalizing adult preconceptions about them. And yet detailed field observation shows that the nutritional dimension is omnipresent in adolescents’ remarks and behaviors, that adolescent gastronomy exists and that it is possible to understand how food is a factor not only in building bodies but the construction of identity as well and it is sometimes used to mark out boundaries! Furthermore, adolescents demand the right to eating enjoyment, a demand that they apparently feel a need to express in reaction to all the negative messages they hear about teenage eating habits and all the restrictive messages.



Yes, it makes sense to talk about adolescent gastronomy

What are youth likes and dislikes and does it make sense to talk about adolescent gastronomy?

VP. Yes, it makes sense to talk about adolescent gastronomy. Teenagers have their own sensory and aesthetic criteria and are very attentive to appearance and odor: they thus consider some food “ugly” or “gross” food and on the other hand value what is fresh, raw and crisp. As Christine Rodier has observed,

for them, appearance is more important than taste and food that “*doesn't look like anything*” is unlikely to appeal to them. “*Just looking at it turns you off. It doesn't look like anything, you don't know what's on your plate,*” says Matthieu, 15. For adolescents, the dish should be pleasing to the eye and its content neither sticky nor gelatinous, and fat “*that you can see on your plate*” prompts disgust: “*I don't like that, there, it's fat, it's not meat, just wobbly fat, it makes me want to puke,*” says Claire, 13, before a dish of meat. Vegetables as well are easily considered ugly: “*Broccoli isn't very appetizing to look at, sometimes I even get goose bumps looking at it*” (Aurélien, 14). Not to mention cauliflower “*that smells awful*”... Fresh, crisp and raw food, whether it is vegetables or dairy products, are associated with pure and healthy. Raw food appears synonymous with purity whereas the cooked provokes disgust. “Crunchy” is fresh, as opposed to “limp” and is contrary to “dry” which brings to mind “old.” And “old” is hardly a quality!

What are teenagers’ other criteria? Is food that tastes good also healthy or non-fattening?

AH. Young people appreciate preparation and cooking methods that don't alter foods. The food should look like what it is. The Thai wok is often mentioned, as Maxime, 15, says, “*with the Thai wok, you can tell the produce is fresh and everything is cooked before our eyes.*” For teenagers, what is pleasing to the eye tastes good and fairly often is healthy. For instance, among young Alsatians raised in the Turkish culture that Hatice Soytürk observed and listened to, representations associated with dairy products, whatever they may be, correspond to a positive vision of milk and pertain both to health benefits as well as to cultural values. As if the link to dairy products had to do both with an affective tie and a sense of belonging to a given group, without shutting this group off from the outside. Turkish teenagers claim to be looking for softness, the creamy, melt-in-your mouth texture of soft cheeses with an edible rind (brie, camembert) and, like their families moreover, claim to eat a lot of yogurt, which in such families is viewed as a functional food or a medi-food before the word was coined. As Kevin says: “*We eat a lot of yogurt at home. We drink it. We make sauces with it. I personally eat a lot of it [...] Yogurt is natural, it's healthy. My grandmother always said it was medicine. It helps cure sick people who have stomach or intestinal problems. A lot of Turkish women eat yogurt to lose weight. It's good for you.*”

Speaking of yogurt, having to eat yogurt with a soup spoon at the school cafeteria, like having to eat fruit cocktail in a water glass, detracts from the pleasure youngsters expect of such foods, notes Christine Rodier.

You talk about «shuttle food” and “mediator food” or “frontier food.” Could you explain, giving example?

ND. “Shuttle food” makes the connection between the world of childhood and the world of adolescence: milk, cookies, sweets, and breaded foods. Milk has a very particular status. Drinking milk has childish connotations: “*I can't see myself drinking milk like coke, that would be uncool,*” says Mégane, 15. Like Ah-cène, 17: “*I used to like milk. Now, I have trouble imagining smoking my morning cigarette with a glass of milk.*” At the same time, milk remains a comforting and consoling food, teddy-bear food, so to speak, that makes one feel good: “*When I'm lonely and feeling down, I love to make myself a bowl of hot chocolate. It reminds me of when I was little,*” states Sophie, 15.

“Mediator foods” or “frontier foods” establish a link between food intakes that are specific to the age group and family food intakes. They sometimes require renegotiation about meaning and ways of doing things: for instance, through halal food, bringing pizza into the house or taking lamb out of the house, or as Martine, 55, who lives alone with her son Florian, says: “*because I don't feel like cooking and besides, it's more relaxed, we make ourselves a sandwich or little things to snack on, ham, cheese, potato chips, we sit down in front of the TV and there...*” The quest for pleasure that enjoys transgressing the rule of what is nutritionally correct and in a relaxed eating atmosphere belies the false truth of a clear opposition between structured family cooking and young and thus irregular eating habit.

The AlimAdos research shows that the teenage taste and culinary repertoire is less limited than what is often said. What is it?

VP. There are “fetish foods,” those that characterize what is called the “fast food generation”: hamburgers, sodas, potato chips, instant Chinese noodles, which have become a “young” product not for what they are but via the bold usage teenagers make of them. But the adolescent dietary and culinary repertoire goes well beyond that. Of course they like hamburgers, shish-kebabs, pasta, but they also like “*foie gras sandwiches, because those little canapés aren't enough!*” sauerkraut, *bäkeofe*, bouillabaisse, cheese



"it's delicious, I love cheese that stinks like Munster, and Roquefort and Reblochon, too," and even frogs' legs and vol-au-vents... ! Grandparents, especially grandmothers, play a major role in the discovery of tastes and dishes. Teenagers generally speak of the meals prepared by them with great pleasure, tenderness and emotion. The figure of the "grandmother" crystallizes good eating, which does not overlap the nutritional or gastronomic dimension but mainly expresses the affective dimension of "done for me," "take one's time" ...

Appropriation of urban spaces, street food: a style, nomad foods and body skills to construct a common culture

To what extent does "style," the image adolescents want to project, play a role in these preferences and rejections?

VP. It is important in the choice of food or the way it is eaten: for instance, the milk fountain in the school cafeteria is no longer used by adolescents after 8th grade, since milk is taken for a kid's drink, good for 6-graders but not beyond! Drinking milk at that particular place (i.e. in junior high, among peers) would be acting like a baby: in 7th grade it still goes, but after that it is no longer thinkable. In relation to style, food must also be easy to eat and/or easy to take away: such is the case of hamburgers and fries, but certain yogurts as well, in particular drinkable yogurts, carryout pasta, individually wrapped cheese portions. Teenagers praise food simplicity, which implies other relations with time and space, because they are looking for ways of eating that are compatible with mobility and rapidity. "*There's too much stuff on the plate*" is one frequent remark. We could also quote Sandrine, 13, lecturing her mother: "*I tell her: if you'd made something more simple, I'd have eaten it.*" But there again, things must not be overly simplified because special dishes that take time to simmer and call up a family "tradition" are very popular.

Eating out, taking over the urban space via street food, is important for adolescents. What meaning does it hold for them?

ND. By taking over public areas or away from the adult gaze, in any case "other" spaces – streets, parks, shopping centers, dead ends, parking lots – young people assert their independence or difference. In Strasbourg they have taken over the modern sculpture on Place du Marché Gayot as a bar on which to place food that they eat standing up. The point is not to sit down in an ordinary position in a specially designated area: "*Sitting down is for old people,*" "*the main thing is to eat together and be left in peace, like a corner where you can spread out.*" "*We share what we have among buddies, it's only normal.*" Young people occupy space noisily, noise enables them to appropriate the space and divert the everyday use adults make of it. The space must be transformed to appropriate it, by liberating the body they can shed the weight of institution and enjoy themselves together. Investing the urban space and youth mobility in this space cause them to develop what Mauss called body techniques and that adults aren't aware of. This is one of the main messages gleaned from the work on eating out in town and street food developed by Meriem Guetat, Nicoletta Diasio, Marie-Pierre Julien, and Gaëlle Lacaze.

You talk about style and street food. What is the relationship between style and food among adolescents? Isn't style more related to ways of dressing?

VP. No, precisely. And it is an essential finding of our research that, to understand adolescent food behaviors, you can't just look into eating habits. Adolescents can't be carved up into segments. In other words, eating is a total social act and adolescents don't eat the same way, or the same foods and in the same places depending on whether they're listening to teckonik or rap or R&B, whether they are frequenting one area or another, dressing one way or another; and even depending on the relationship they have with their body. In fact, body norms also partake in this. Some teenage girls discard the norm of absolute thinness for a fuller ideal body image, more shapely, more muscular, more massive, highly influenced in that by the body and look of rap and R&B stars such as Lea Fararh, Beyoncé or Diam's and Amel Bent for instance. These girls convey an image of plump, healthy bodies and have a very clear discourse on what they eat and the fact that they expend the energy they ingest through physical activity. In this case, their eating habits are less focused on dietary restrictions. Other adolescents are more into thinness, extreme slenderness, even skinniness (not anorexia) that describe another range of styles; both are urban, participating in different foods and ways of moving, perceptions of physical activity and ways of dressing. Moreover, analysis must take into account the group's influence and the need to feel comfortable in a group

(no matter the size, it's a group of friends) that shares the same values, including food values of course

What body techniques do young people eating in the street develop?

ND. Downing a big sandwich, without it dripping all over, without splattering one's clothes, and without eating the paper wrapped around it is no easy chore. You have to grab it with both hands, squish it just enough to be able to take a big bite, but not too much so that the contents doesn't ooze out. When one of them eats greedily or gets it all over, he or she is considered a pig and friends says "*you eat like a barbarian*" or "*like a hick.*" What's more, you have to be able to eat while walking fast down the street, without bumping into something, while talking and even sometimes with headphones in your ears. Because by eating and running through the city, adolescents incorporate the urban space together. When they remain stationary to eat, they are sitting in a row watching people go by as if they were in a show, or else in a circle, which enable them to see and be seen, to demonstrate their dexterity and also monitor the conformity of the other group members.

What criteria do adolescents use to define good nomadic foods?

VP. Foods consumed with pleasure should be ready to carry out, practical and not expensive, no hassle, easy to eat with your hands or with rudimentary utensils, to be able to be eaten while on the move. Packaging takes on a central importance, the object has to be able to be carried out, it must be new, it has to be able to be shared (portions), to circulate and especially have received the approval of "other" adolescents. Sometimes the packaging is the food itself: such is the case of pitas and shish-kebabs, both container and object of consumption. These criteria are valid for street food consumed elsewhere because the main thing is to invest places and times that are not set aside for eating: school corridors, restrooms, infirmary waiting room, etc.

The ever-present nutritionally correct and dietary morals

You speak of the omnipresence of food and nutrition in the AlimAdos research. How is it reflected?

VP. It was obvious right from the beginning of our research, it being perceived from the start by the adolescents, parents and educators we met with, in relation to obesity and eating disorder-related issues. The start of the AlimAdos preliminary studies coincided with the launching of PNNS 2 (National Nutrition and Health Program), and even if AlimAdos researchers systematically explained that they weren't the "PNNS watchdog," that they weren't there to judge whether eating habits were nutritionally correct or not, the normative nutritional discourse loomed in the background. During initial contacts, the same question came back a number of times: "*Is it to find out if we eat a balanced diet?*" Informants have definite opinions and the cautionary messages are recited by heart... For Thomas, who is 18, a balanced diet means "*eating meat once a day, salads, you have to eat bread, cheese. There, I'd say that's it, nutritionally. It goes with the 5 fruits and vegetables a day.*" The number 5 raises several questions among both youth and parents: "*Fruit and vegetables is pretty vague... vegetables don't have the same thing. If you eat 5 apples, it's not like eating 5 leeks. I dunno, there are sweet fruits. Bananas are high in calories, they're sweet. So if I eat 5 of them a day... or take avocados, they're very fatty,*" (Louis, 16). In this regard, many say: "*I don't know how they do it. For me it's impossible.*" Because they're expensive or because "*you only have 3 meals, so you have a vegetable at each meal, so that only makes three,*" (Catherine, 50, mother of 4 children), or because the messages broadcast through advertising creates confusion: "*It's contradictory, they run a commercial for McDonald's and they tell you to avoid eating too much fat or salt,*" (Sana, 18).

How do young people react to nutrition messages?

ND. The reactions are varied. As Christine Rodier shows, some young people don't feel they apply to them: either because they don't have a weight problem, or because the exhortative and repetitive nature of the messages "*goes right out their ears,*" "*fills their heads,*" and that "*by keep repeating them you don't even hear them anymore.*" Some found these messages normal and natural and these messages, along with controversies about food, help to strengthen attitudes of discipline, restriction and self-control. Often cited as "dangerous" are sodas, candy, syrups, Nutella, mayonnaise, potato chips and various cocktail foods, cakes and ice cream and, among youths of Maghreban migrant stock,



a family diet that is “*too greasy: too much oil, too much bread.*” The reference to nutritional and body norms is constant and marked by dietary morals, overweight being presented as the consequence of lapses and the stigma of an inability to exercise self-discipline.

What are the consequences of these dietary morals?

AH. As Pascal Hintermeyer points out, the very strictness of dietary morals carries the risk of “breaking down.” So people have to be wary of their favorite dishes and festive occasions, beware of themselves, their emotions and down moments that trigger compensations through food. By viewing everything in terms of restriction, adolescents view certain foods as treacherous enemies always prepared to do damage – they are foods that “betray” – and they also become accustomed to switching between moments of discipline, lapses and regaining control. Wariness sometimes borders on phobia: a phobia of fat, sugar, industrial food, etc.

How are health and thinness norms experienced in families?

AH. Mothers, who do their best to prepare “*solid meals*” with food that is “*healthy*” express their incomprehension, even the bafflement, because adolescents hardly touch what they serve. Mothers using cunning to make them eat vegetables, children use cunning to slip out to eat. The obsession with thinness and the complementary fear of overweight are often a source of conflict in families. Adolescents are hungry and parents are often afraid of adolescents’ hunger, they’re afraid they’ll gain too much weight. “*My father’s a gym teacher, he drives me crazy. He won’t buy anything for me to snack on, he’d even lock the cupboards so I can’t steal something!*” explains Chloé, 15, who says she’s “*starving*” when she comes home from school and downs something quickly on the sly before her father gets home, because he doesn’t think a snack is necessary at her age...

Do adolescents perceive a relationship between beauty and nutritional norms?

AH. Body norms are often justified using reasons drawn from preventive discourse and the links that are made between food or nutrients and pathologies. Many adolescents have internalized these nutritional discourses and for them, frequent intake of “fatty” foods poisons their bodies and damages their health as Tom, age 14, explains: “*Fat gives you cancer, clogs your veins and gives you heart trouble and after, when you’re fat, you can’t walk any more, so you’re like an old man, you walk slow and pant, you get tired real easy. Forget about steak and fries every day or you’ve had it.*”

How do adolescents compose a meal like breakfast, for instance, which is considered essential in nutrition discourse?

First of all, there is a wide range in this meal that goes from “no breakfast at all” to “in several segments at different times and places” (for instance orange juice or a bowl of milk at home, a piece of pastry or pizza on the way to school) and including a more typical sit-down breakfast at home. We have noted several age groups with a break around age 13-14 marked by a refusal of what had composed breakfast until then (hot chocolate, cereal, toast) and numerous variations. Around 14-15, childhood breakfast beverages (milk, café au lait, hot chocolate) are abandoned for beverages that open on to the adult world (tea or coffee) often with orange juice as a transition. Later, around age 18-19, we note a return to a more structured breakfast. What is very clearly observed is that adolescents argue that they have no time to eat in the morning, they eat a lot of pastry products outside the home. Lastly, we also note a certain degree of ignorance about some foods such as butter, often confused with margarine.

Have a nice body, at least a “normal” body, so as not to be noticed (or scorned)...

What is a nice body for French adolescent boys and girls today?

VP. Somewhat muscular, even rounder morphologies are not devalued, even for girls. Slimness nevertheless remains an aesthetic ideal toward which one should strive. As Dorothee Guilhem and Meriem Sellami point out, the idea is to create a socially valued façade, at least so as “not to be noticed,” i.e. to conform to norms in others’ eyes, not to be pegged as marginal. Marginal means “intellectual,” or “unhip,” for Béatrice, 17, who explains: “*You don’t want people to look at you, you don’t want to stick out,*

afterward they talk about you, insult you. Some say, “Hey fatso! Move! If you show up in weird clothes it’s the same thing, you get insulted for anything. That’s the way it is, you have to be like others, you can have your own personality but you have to be able to pull it off and there are girls who won’t talk to you anymore, they’ll act like you don’t exist.” You can’t have “an old body,” you have to have “a normal body.”

What is an “old body” and what is a “normal body”?

ND. Adolescent girls have internalized the cult of youth and through it they have formed an interpretation of what they call an “old” body. A body they call old can be the body of a woman who has experienced maternity and who has filled out or one of a slender young woman of 25 dressed in a skirt and blazer. As for a normal body, it is very often mentioned as something desirable. Valérie (15, Marseille) gives a very precise description of it, recorded by Dorothee Guilhem: “*I want to be normal, normal is not fat, not skinny, a slim waist, with a bust, not flat-chested. It doesn’t look good when your breasts don’t show. Not a belly because it’s ugly, it should be flat and smooth when you touch it. Thighs that aren’t fat, thin, buttocks but that aren’t big either, just right, not that hang out of your pants.*”

Do body norms weigh as much on boys as they do on girls?

AH. Body norms weigh on both boy and girl adolescents, but in different ways and they don’t call up the same range of feelings, particularly that of guilt, which is very feminine, as appear in the observations and remarks recorded by Dorothee Guilhem, Nasser Tafferant and Meryem Sellami. Moreover, they have different ways of talking about them, especially when it comes to body shape and beauty. The image of the body is different: where a bulge will appear excessive and lead to dietary restrictions or a desire for restraint and guilt among girls, it will go unnoticed by boys. Not because they don’t care about their body or other people’s bodies but because they have a much greater margin of “tolerance” than girls do, both for themselves as well as in gauging the body of the opposite sex. They also have a different perception of dietary excess. For boys, having a few extra kilos (up to 5-7 kilos “too many”) doesn’t make them turn ugly; they remain “normal.” Moreover, weight is translated in terms of energy, muscles, a much greater capacity to expend oneself physically through sports than girls, who see sports more as a means to alter body aesthetics than in terms of energy or letting off steam. For boys, the image of a healthy body is not only tied to aesthetics but to sports and energy. “*I think girls eat less than we do, but that’s only normal, we need to eat,*” claims Stéphane, 16. Girls second this: “*Boys eat a lot in general, they don’t pay attention to themselves. When I says they don’t pay attention, I mean, they don’t care if they put on five kilos, they’ll say they have muscles,*” (Aurélie, 13).

How do adolescent boys and girls see themselves, look at themselves and judge their bodies and their eating habits respectively?

VP. First of all, and as anthropologists AlimAdos researchers must stress this, beauty relates to values. People don’t judge themselves or others as handsome or beautiful the same way everywhere in the world, and what is beautiful here is ugly elsewhere. As regards French adolescents today, their multiple and mixed origins makes understanding of their aesthetic canons of the body, body shapes and ultimately the food required to maintain them even more complex. As regards the distinction between boys and girls in adolescence, we have perceived a strong distinction in the way they see themselves. Boys are much more tolerant not only toward themselves but also toward girls. After age 15-16, they even stress the fact that femininity necessarily means a little fat. Girls look at their bellies, their thighs and their buttocks, whereas boys look at them more as a “whole,” first their face and hair but mainly the whole picture with a strong focus on a healthy, well-groomed looks. They thus don’t understand girls’ obsession about “a few ounces,” and the dietary restrictions that go with them. This incomprehension runs deep and often gives rise to mockery: “*they stress out as soon as they eat a French fry,*” (Moussa, 12) or “*they act like, I’m done’ but their plate’s still full, they say if they put on a pound they’ll die,*” (Julien, 13).

Girls focus on boy’s faces and acknowledge that boys can eat more and more bad food because they work it off doing sports. Such recognition of the athletic, muscular body associated with masculinity has its limits, too, as does skinniness. Thus, aside from top-level athletes whose over-muscular body is seen as a necessity, adolescents find “too” much muscle ugly. Going overboard with the “*washboard abs*” is deemed superficial, stupid, too concerned with keeping up appearances.

Another point with regard to body aesthetics where boys and girls agree: an anorexic body is the epitome of ugliness, compared very harshly with the image of a corpse dried out from the inside. They find obese bodies ugly but can still see positive values, whereas there is no value whatsoever in their image of



extreme skinniness which in the adolescent mind is associated with psychological and physical illness.

At what age do children start thinking they're too fat and want to lose weight?

ND. For the large majority, adolescent girls think they're "too fat," and starting at the age of 12, they claim they should "try to lose weight," or not gain weight. But the concern with slenderness starts will before that age. The 7-year-old sister of an informant already listed the fatty foods she should avoid so as not to get fat: "Oil, French fries, cookies, bread, chocolate, cheese, grilled cheese sandwiches, fatty meat, except for chicken which is good because it makes you grow breasts," (Tasnime, 7, Strasbourg).

What are mother/daughter relationships with regard to the body and weight?

AH. Mothers and daughters are subject to the same body norms, often share the same desire to lose weight and sometimes tend to accuse one another of not watching their weight enough. For mothers, it's snacking that makes their daughters gain weight, and daughters can't stand advice or "lectures" from their mothers or even their desire for connivance: "How can she say I'm fat? She doesn't even see how fat she is," thus exclaims Amel, 16, who says she's exasperated by her mother's repeatedly putting her on diets. Another mother, who wants to wear the same clothes as her daughter, offers to share diuretic pills that are supposed to make you lose weight. Meryem Sellami reports these remarks and analyzes them from a psycho-sociological approach to mother-daughter relations in a migratory context through conflicts about family food. She considers that by rejecting the mother's control over their diet, girls refuse to identify with their future nourishing role and it therefore seems illogical for them to eat with their mother and especially to lose weight like their mother. And if they alternate weight loss and gain, it's as much the "mom effect" as it is the "yo-yo effect."



New generation halal, a question of borders and identity

Does halal have the same meaning for young people today as it does for their parents?

ND. The practices and representations of Muslim adolescents have gone the same way as others: they are adopted, reinterpreted and then rejected, and so on and so forth. As Christine Rodier and Julie Lioré show, eating halal is a way of establishing a symbolic distinction between "us" and the "others," in observing certain taboos, they define their identity by erecting a socially relevant borderline. For instance, when Malek, 14, declares: "We're Muslim, we don't eat like the French. For example, we don't eat pork like you do, we eat halal." But whereas for the parents' generation, you were a good Muslim if you observed the taboo on pork and liquor, for young people today, the notion of halal has progressed and gone from meat to everything else: even peas can be considered halal unless they've been cooked in a sauce with bacon.

How are food taboos learned and appropriated?

VP. Food proscriptions are learned naturally at home where mothers only cook food that's allowed: "that's the way it is at home, I've always been used to it, it's normal for me," or "for everything we need to know we have either the computer or our parents," young people say. Teenagers filter things through their own logic and behave vis-a-vis taboos in very individual ways: "as we grow up, we're the ones who set the taboos," says Tazim, 18. Their knowledge of Islam is a popular one. For Inès "there are three rules to obey: remain a virgin until marriage, not eat pork and not drink." Some allow themselves chicken: "I tell myself that chicken doesn't have too much blood, that's the way I think, others will say no." Candy has become a source of dilemma and feeds endless internet forums due to the gelatin it contains: Mervé explains, "Chinese dishes aren't halal, I don't think," and one teenager asks another whether if you say "bismillah" when you cut a pig's throat, that makes it halal. The other answered, aghast, "no, not pigs." And Sabrina at 16 "would rather starve than eat pork," whereas the Koran says the opposite.

Don't the Muslim informant families all practice Islam the same way?

AH. No, they don't, and we could take the example of ground beef that differentiates North African families from Comorian or sub-Saharan African families: young Maghrebans categorically refuse ground beef at the school cafeteria, whereas some of the latter accept it. Christine Rodier and Julie Lioré have managed to decipher the enigma of ground beef thanks to Said, father of a large family who explains: "Of

course I'm not going to have my children eat beef [at home] that's not halal, not on your life, it has to be halal [...] but what can I do with a kid who's at school until 5 p.m.? [...] If you have to eat ground beef at the school cafeteria, you eat [...] I'm not going to let a kid starve until 5 in the afternoon." Khanify, mother of a Senegalese (Soninke) family, has a similar viewpoint. The hypothesis of a relation to France and to the colonial history of these various migrant populations remains to be explored. It is obvious that an adolescent does not observe a food taboo simply because he is Muslim but because he is a descendant of parents who came from a country, a region and a village and that his parents experienced a specific type of immigration.

Second generation halal is negotiated within the family. What do these negotiations pertain to?

ND. All display the same deference for a norm that each one interprets differently. Mutton is at the center of these negotiations. Mutton is a medium of social revenge for the first generation, but it is rejected by the second generation, particularly among young girls who find it "too greasy." Eating halal meat allows young people to formulate new demands in the family, to negotiate the definition of custom or tradition, to desethinicize it. Halal enables them to reformulate tradition and modernity: "We're sick of mutton dishes from our country, and they're so heavy. So when I can go shopping with my mother I try to get her to buy French foods, prepared dishes for instance, assuring her that what we'll be eating is really halal."

How does halal partake of the definition of an identity?

VP. Au sein des In Muslim families, the desacralization of mutton enables them to reshape the inner contours of frontiers. Religion is not always the primary motivation: what matters for some teenagers is to "boycott McDonald's," and the explanation of their preference for doner kebabs contains anti-authority and protest elements that don't mention religious or spiritual grounds. Conversely, AlimAdos researchers have noted that non-Muslim adolescents observe Ramadan or eat halal, thus asserting membership in a group and a differentiation process with regard to others.



The school cafeteria, cooks and kids: "I love you, me neither" relationships

What do teenagers say about the school cafeteria?

ND. Meriem Guetat and Julie Lioré spent a lot of time listening to youths and professionals, listening to them and watching them. Adolescent opinions are very divided and range from "the school cafeteria is tops," to "it's good 1 out of 10 times," to "it's rubber made in China, it's recycling," to the darker "basically, we eat," or "it's edible." Knowing that some of their comments are derogatory out of principle, and so as not to look bad among friends... However, cooks and managers know that if they don't satisfy the adolescents, they won't eat and will waste food or stuff themselves with bread. "When the food is bad, we only eat bread," the students comment, also saying that by taking a lot of bread on their tray, they're sure not to leave with an empty stomach. The professionals' main goal is thus to offer adolescents food they want to eat, otherwise "it's dismal at the dishwasher." In general, most students acknowledge that the school cafeteria at least makes sure to serve a balanced meal: "Yes, it's balanced, it's varied, we always get vegetables, meat and a dairy product," or "it's balanced, we have an appetizer, a main course and desert."

What tricks do cooks use to appeal to the adolescent appetite?

AH. Teenagers are hungry and they have to be able to "get through the day." So, to get them to eat cauliflower, zucchini and other vegetables, there's nothing like cream, white sauce and melted cheese to do the trick. "We make sure the kids eat at lunchtime, without focusing mainly on balancing, but without serving noodles and French fries every day either," explains a cook in Marseille who, in his gamble to make them like mussels and fries, had to keep at it and overlook the bushels and bushels of mussels he had to throw out.

Where does the wariness that adolescents develop with regard to cafeteria food come from?

ND. As Meriem Guetat and Julie Lioré very well show, a whole narrative is constructed around school cafeteria meals. They describe how, when observing the course of a meal, they enter a world of effervescence where everything is significant, from the slightest gesture to the most innocuous remark. Youths hyper-mobilize their senses, which are expressed in comments such as "It's awful all the way from eye to mouth," or "The vegetables aren't good, they're all limp and soft." Freshness, hygiene and cooking methods are all cri-



ticized. In institutions without their own kitchens, part of the wariness seems to arise from the impossibility of connecting the food eaten to an identified place and method of preparation. Paradoxically, the more the system sends signals of sanitary inspection and food safety (headwear, gloves and white coats), the more the slightest suspicious object becomes cause for concern: modernity generates constant doubt. These signs of cleanliness and hygiene detract even more from the affective dimension of school cafeteria food affective that adolescents already lack.

What can be done to restore trust?

AH. One example comes from the head cook of the lycée in Salon de Provence who managed to stimulate a new nutritional dynamic by inviting all the half-boarders who wished to visit the kitchen. By doing so, he did away with the purely functional aspect of the dishes offered by the school cafeteria and managed to put these young eaters in touch – unexpectedly – with the professionals who prepare their food. By definition, it will never replace the affective relation that youths have with the dishes prepared by their mother or grandmother, but it's important.

Does eating at the school cafeteria reflect family socio-economic situations?

VP. The school cafeteria serves as a mirror to them. Some school cafeterias lose a quarter of their frequentation every year in the third quarter. In general, the “*third-quarter dropouts*” occur in schools attended by fairly privileged milieus, those who have enough purchasing power to buy a sandwich or a salad with their pocket money or their parents' employer meal vouchers. The number of food supply places near a school, such as pizza trucks, snack bars, bakeries and grocery stores, serves as a good indication of adolescent purchasing power. Even if some students bring a packed lunch... it's usually salads for girls. The good old school cafeteria nevertheless has a few assets, and that's why some, like Maitena, 14, prefer it “*for the atmosphere*,” even if at home they eat what they want: “*At the school cafeteria, there are good-looking guys.*”

Adolescents as agents that transform family habits and as actors of a constantly re-invented tradition

Adults often worry that “good” cooking and dietary traditions will be lost and that they are no longer handed down. Is this fear justified?

ND. : No, this fear is not justified. It's important to realize that transmission is a dynamic process made of selections, interruptions, continuities, shifts and transformations. New things introduced by younger people, who incorporate them enabling the acquired heritage to adapt to new contexts and ultimately to last, nourish tradition. Modernity and tradition are not opposites just as globalization, as Appadurai has shown, does not imply the mere homogenization of cultures which themselves are always changing. Because cuisine is at the crossroads of the sensorial, the symbolic and the social, it constitutes an important vector of transmission and identity reformulation. It embodies both a concern for continuity, in the reproduction of tastes, odors, cooking methods and intake methods, and the basic need to innovate and open up to others through exchanges, the circulation of new products and the introduction of other technologies for processing food.

What role do adolescents play in constantly shifting culinary traditions?

VP. Young people are not only the recipients of a vertical type of transmission, they are also actors in a “horizontal” circulation of information as well as agents that help transform family practices. What AlimAdos researchers have heard from young people and observed among them and in their surroundings are the multiple ways of innovating: by introducing new ingredients, new food associations, other table manners, which doesn't mean that tradition is not also sometimes valued... What does “French food” mean to a Senegalese family in Marseille? Mamadou, 12, boils it down to “*simple things like French fries with ketchup or chicken with peas, and yogurt and wine.*” As for “French food” compared to “Malagasy food,” the demarcation line runs between rice and noodles. Mothers cook both to make the children happy, but their parents stick with rice. “*Malagasies eat rice morning, noon and night, Malagasies always eat rice, that's how we are,*” explains Moussa, 17, and his sister Marie, 15, adds: “*Noodles are good when there's sauce, it's a change from rice, but they don't have enough spice. I couldn't eat them every day. I'm used to rice, not noodles, but I know for the French it's not the same. They eat more noodles than rice.*” Laotian

families also talk about rice a lot and many adolescent girls Florence Strigler has met declare: “*If I marry a French man, he'd better like rice!*”

Between nutritional norms and nutrition education

Family eating habits, the ideal of slimness, preventive nutrition messages... There's actually no lack of norms, is there?

AH. It's true, adolescents are faced with an overload rather than a lack of norms, but as Christine Rodier shows, they reinterpret them and work around them in multiple combinations in which the apparently chaotic practices do not stem from a lack of compliance with the rules but rather a plurality of ways of constructing one's own food habits in one's own image. However, to want to try to transform youths into agents of family change to transform parents' and elders' eating habits via lessons at school, is to attempt to give adolescents a moral responsibility they are not yet ready to assume and that is not easy to deal with. In fact, it means assigning them the mission of bringing various types of norms up to standard and they then prefer to hide behind a family norm that relieves them of having to deal individually with contradictions between different types of normativity. As Marie-Pierre Julien points out, adolescent eating habits and the various normative justifications that they give for them can be understood not as risk-taking, inabilities or failings, but rather as answers to this contradiction that forces them to construct themselves as autonomous subjects in very binding normative contexts.

Is all normative education in vain? And what sort of dietary education do families provide today?

VP. No, food education is absolutely not in vain, on the contrary, we note that food education is in the image of our adolescents: diverse, hybrid, sometimes fragmented. AlimAdos researchers have observed an attachment of adolescents to the family meal and a set of rules, even when they are the first to disparage or transgress them between ages 13 and 17, but the benefit of which they acknowledge as of age 17-18. When we speak of food education, the variety that adolescents appreciate most has to do with taste, pleasure and conviviality. Thus, many adolescent informants show a very strong attachment to their grandmothers, to traditional dishes, to smells and ways of preparing (often with a mother/grandmother comparison as regards culinary virtuosity!) and the handing down of them. Food education is disparaged when it is too close to normative discourse or when parents remind them of theoretical dietary guidelines. In those cases, gaining independence can be seen in food behaviors that circumvent parental control. For instance, in cases where families prefer organic food and frugality, we have observed adolescents who have hiding places for food. This “violation” of established rules occurs with the support of one or more family members. Siblings, but also sometimes father and grandmother who give pocket money or candy, chocolate or cookies. But there too is a very important form of food education with the recognition of the right to eating pleasure.

Are all adolescents equal in terms of food education?

ND. No, not all adolescents are equal when it comes to food education and knowledge of taste ranges or different cuisines. Aside from individual variations of sensory skills, taste appreciations also depend on the parents' socio-professional category, which influence the culinary repertoire but also their food symbolism. The AlimAdos research shows that adolescents from families not having a history of international migration, from the middle or upper classes, have a greater culinary repertoire. Going to restaurants, having cookbooks at home and mothers' food purchases foster the discovery of new tastes and consumption of various dishes. In mixed marriages or when one of the parents is of mixed blood, adolescents also mention culinary specialties such as “maffe” in a Franco-Senegalese family or “pieds paquets,” in a Franco-Malagasy family. Adolescents in these cases have two separate culinary repertoires, but one of the two seems to predominate the other (usually the mother's cuisine). These culinary repertoires are also invested with special meanings, they result from the meeting of two cultures. They can become, particularly for adolescents between 18-19, an object of family memory and of the history of one branch of the family that shapes a particular type of food education.

