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## **Modern Methods for Producing the Traditional The Case of Making Halloumi Cheese in Cyprus**

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Throughout the history of mankind, cheese production has been one of the technologies of agrarian subsistence economies that allow people to utilize surplus milk during the milking season in such a way that it can be preserved for consumption later in the year. The number of cheese production methods developed by many cultures is legion. In Cyprus, a cheese called halloumi has been part of the traditional food system for centuries. Halloumi cheese is produced by curdling milk by rennet, followed by a boiling stage of the curd in its own whey which works as pasteurization. The resulting cheese traditionally was preserved in brine halting bacterial development.

Being a highly nutritious food item, halloumi remains a very popular casual food in contemporary Cyprus society. Halloumi is typical for Greek-Cypriot food culture, as an important ingredient in dishes associated with religious holidays, but also known to the Turkish-speaking Muslim population of the island. While it is not unique to Cyprus but also known to the populations of the Eastern coast of the Mediterranean, it is neither produced nor consumed in Turkey or Greece. Therefore, for Cypriots it is an element of unity joining the two main communities on the island.

### **Introduction: From Tradition to Modernity**

Traditionally, halloumi making was embedded socially as a gendered activity and a practice based on communal collaboration, with the women in a village forming groups that would pool the meagre milk production of the small number of animals owned by individuals households. This practice, typical for an agrarian scarcity economy, while still wide-spread well into the 1970s, has largely been abandoned today, as Cyprus has transformed itself from a poor post-colonial economy into a prosperous society with a booming service sector. However, halloumi is still produced by households in rural areas, and even though techniques have been modernized, many of the implements and procedures as those handed down through the generations are still used. Village-based halloumi production in many cases is today executed by small-scale family enterprises, as in contemporary Cyprus, "authentic" village-style halloumi fetches high prices via direct marketing to domestic consumers. Halloumi used to be made either of goats' or of sheep's milk. Now, a mixture of both is not uncommon. Also, with the introduction of cattle on the island since the 1960s, cows' milk has begun to be utilized widely for halloumi making. This is especially true for the industrial production of this cheese. Since the 1970s, halloumi is available to Cypriot consumers as a mass-produced commodity which is manufactured by big dairy companies. Halloumi has also established itself successfully on global markets.

How has this traditional food been affected by the technological and economic changes that these transformations entail? In order to answer this question, the authors conducted a series of interviews in Cyprus, both with village-based halloumi-producing households as well as with industrialists and technical staff in modern cheese manufacturing. Direct observation of the production process gave us additional insights and allowed for comparison not only of verbal representations but of actual practices and technologies. The research also engages oral history testimony in order to reconstruct the patterns of traditional

cheese making as it was practiced in the 1960s.

Since then, Cypriot society has undergone a rapid modernisation process, set off when the island was released into Independence from its former status as a British colony in 1959. The 1974 invasion by the Turkish army and subsequent occupation of one third of the island by Turkey up until today caused massive displacements of population who became refugees as well as an economic breakdown. However, the economy of the Republic of Cyprus had an unprecedented revival since the late seventies, often labelled “the Cyprus economic miracle”, with industrialisation, but particularly the development of a strong service sector creating steeply rising per capita incomes. The advent of mass tourism and the still-continuing expansion of the tourism economy contributed to this. Tourism is also an important factor in opening new consumer markets for halloumi cheese. Clearly, the culture and society of the Republic of Cyprus has undergone very drastic changes within a few decades. Today, a considerable part of the population has an urban middle class lifestyle, characterized by mass consumption and modern technologies. The changes in halloumi production have to be understood against the backdrop of this transformation of Cyprus from a poor and agrarian colonial and postcolonial economy to a prosperous modern society.

### The Traditional Method of Making Halloumi Cheese

Up until the 1970s, halloumi cheese was exclusively produced according to traditional methods.<sup>1</sup> The recollections of an elderly lady, Nitsa, who spent her childhood and her adult life up to the Turkish invasion of 1974 in a village in the Morphou district in the north west of the island which is presently under Turkish occupation are a good example of the procedures followed then and also of the skills needed for halloumi making. In a village like the one that Nitsa comes from, making halloumi using goats' milk was a communal activity, due to the fact that the number of goats, usually two, and the relatively small amount of milk that each family had did not suffice to make halloumi individually. Women formed small groups of about ten to pool their milk and produce halloumi. The maximum amount of milk required for this was about 60 liters, corresponding with the volume of the heating vessel, called "hardji", which each woman had in her home. Women collected their daily milk production and brought it to the home of one of the members of their group. Depending on the amount of milk they contributed, it was determined how much time each could have making cheese for their families. Membership in such a small, provisional cheesemaking cooperative was by no means automatic, as Nitsa reports:

Making halloumi can be a laborious activity that needs a lot of co-ordination, and you must be the mistress of the place, and an active member of the halloumi making community of your neighbourhood. You always have some doubts when you first try to get in the group. But I had to try [...] After all, they wanted me to be a member of their group. I was very generous when measuring my milk. I was also very clean, something that was the cornerstone for making good halloumi. There was no reason for me not to be wanted in the group.

Usually, the amount of halloumi produced was sufficient to serve the families needs. Halloumi was also sold to co-villagers as well as to other customers who put their orders for a certain quantity, ranging from about five to sixteen okes, which amounts to seven up to twenty kilos. Another way of trading the product was by taking it to central markets in the nearby towns.

Nitsa proceeds to narrate her experiences of making halloumi:

So I found the group of women with whom I was going to collaborate. But my

experience until then was only based on observations of how to make halloumi. I never made it myself. Now time had come! During the first year, when I was making my halloumi at a friend's house my mother used to come and help me whenever I was making halloumi. In the second year however, when I decided to make it in my own house, my mother was not very happy in coming to help me so early in the morning every day. So I called my aunt Maria, my mother's sister who used to live in a nearby town to come and give me a hand. I was getting on very well with her and when I requested her help she was glad to provide it. Don't worry, my daughter, she said, I will be there early in the morning.

Next day I had everything ready. When my aunt came and saw all the preparations I made, her face was shining. I could see how proud she was for me. I was very proud of her, too. She was my aunt to whom I could turn to when I needed help.

Collecting the ingredients and setting up tools and workplace were a vital first step. While knowledge of the procedure could easily be picked up by simply watching others, the actual skill of making halloumi could only be acquired by becoming actively involved in the production process. This is what Nitsa recollects of the first time when she made halloumi with her aunt,

Come on she said. Let's start. She washed herself and I gave her a clean towel to dry her hands. The miracle was beginning to take place. She uncovered the big vessel and she pushed the curd with her fingers from the sides of the vessel. The curd was easily separated from the hardji walls. It is ready, my dear, she said. She looked at the curd once again and very decisively made the move. Light the fire, she said. A small fire was needed to keep the curd warm. She made the sign of the Cross on the surface of the curd, which was called "yiali" which means "the glass". "Ελα Χριστέ τζαι Παναγία μου βάλε το σιέρι σου τζαι βοήθα μας" "Come on, Jesus Christ and Virgin Mary, give us a hand, help us," she whispered, and she immediately started breaking the curd into pieces. This allowed the curd to separate from the liquid. All the curd sank down to the bottom of the big vessel and was left there "to sleep" for about ten minutes. She then removed it all, by using both her hands.

I admired her way. When I saw her doing that I said to myself: she is the one to teach me how to make halloumi. I must admit however that I learned quite a lot from my mother too. She was also very good in making the halloumi cheese. After all, she was the wife of a shepherd and making good halloumi was their primary task. My aunt Maria went on like that the whole morning. We first made the halloumi and then the anari cheese, which is the whey cheese produced after the halloumi. We boiled the halloumi, folded it in two's, salted it and then let it cool down. We placed it in big jars, and covered it with salted and minted whey. We very carefully closed the jar so no air was allowed to get in, and put it aside. We looked after it for forty days, making sure that always the whey was fully covering all the halloumi in the jar. During these forty days period the 'xiarostima' also takes place, which is 'the removal of the disease'. This is the removal of the froth rising to the surface of the container. We did this two or three times a week, until no more froth was rising to the top. After this the removal of the cheese fat that was rising at the top followed. This fat was being used for making pastries whenever we bake bread. It was delicious!

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Today, halloumi is still produced domestically much along the same lines of the procedure sketched out above. However, many halloumi producers who are village-based and make halloumi at home have incorporated changes into their production and have become more commercially oriented. For them, halloumi production is no longer one of the many seasonal activities of an agrarian household but provides them with their main source of income year round. Our example for this type of halloumi production, which represents an intermediary stage between the traditional production and the large-scale industrial companies we will address subsequently, is the small business of Maria and Andreas, a couple who are also refugees from the occupied areas and who are residing in the refugee housing settlement of a small village in the central plain of Cyprus about half an hour drive by car from Nicosia, the capital. Their main occupation is to run a farm with about thirty five live stock, and to make halloumi cheese from the milk they produce every day. The sale of animals also contributes to their income.

At the back of their house, their halloumi-making laboratory is located. In this small room of about ten square metres, they are very busy everyday .from six o'clock in the morning until twelve o'clock midday. The workplace is laid out in an economical fashion. On the lefthand side, a stainless steel bench replaces the traditional wooden "tirokamnos". Next to the bench is situated the boiling vessel which substitutes for the traditional "hardji". Onto this bench, the cheese curd is transferred from the boiling vessel . This vessel is gas-heated and holds up to five hundred liters of milk. This is the amount of milk that they have available everyday to produce cheese with..

Maria has learned the skill of making halloumi from Andreas after they got married. Even though she knew theoretically how to make it, having observed her mother, she had not yet been practically involved in making it. In no way she could be considered as a professional before she met Andreas. Andreas, however, had been a professional dairy worker in one of the biggest cheese factories of Cyprus for three years. He then decided to become an independent small entrepreneur. Andreas asserts,

Here we make the real halloumi the traditional type, the one which our parents used to make. I must, however, admit that at the factory I learnt a lot. I have become aware of the importance of hygiene and other technical aspects, which have to be considered when we make halloumi on a larger scale. Regarding the method we employ we have not changed anything from the one which was used traditionally. You will see this in few minutes. But we are using new equipment all made from stainless steel, we do not use wood for heating the milk either. We had to modernise our installations, we got to have hot and cold water supply, things that made our work a lot easier, cleaner and much more efficient and at the same time do not change the traditional character of our halloumi.

Even though the workplace and many of the implements used have been transformed, the basic procedures and the ingredients going into the cheese making process are still very much like those reported on by Nitsa. This allows Maria and Andreas to make a strong claim on the traditionality of their product.

Transformations of Halloumi Production in the Village Context: From the 1960s to the Early

## 21st century

A comparison of the the recollections of Nitsa from the 1960s with the production methods employed by Maria and Andreas clearly shows the transition from the traditional, communally - based cooperative production to a small family enterprise in the modern setting. While the product is considered traditional, the production itself is adapted to modern standards. Therefore, one can label this method "modern traditional", as opposed to the village-based traditional pattern. There are several important differences between the two to be identified.

The original village method for making halloumi did not employ any technologies or materials imported from outside the village. Everything was of local origin, including tools and utensils, energy sources, tables, containers etc. This was the case until about 1960. Then, the first technological innovation introduced was the use of industrially produced rennet. Nitsa's mother Sophia had still used a type of home-made rennet that was made by drying the stomach of a baby lamb fed with milk and nothing else. This traditional rennet was called "pythkia", meaning "the thing that causes a liquid to set".

In the "modern traditional" form of halloumi making employed by family enterprises in many Cypriot villages, modern technology and energy sources such as electricity and gas are commonplace. Stainless steel implements and ergonomically manufactured equipment facilitate the process. While in the traditional village setting, a portion of the house that was also used for other purposes temporarily served as a halloumi workshop, nowadays, there is a room dedicated exclusively to cheese production.

Another noticeable difference has to do with changes in animal husbandry. Hygiene and safety legislations today no longer allow for animals to be kept in the yard of the house. The practice of the past, when each family kept a few goats, has disappeared. As a result, the gathering of women, pooling their milk for making halloumi also no longer exists. This change corresponds closely with the transformation of family patterns and gender roles in contemporary Cyprus, and ultimately also impacts on the type and quality of halloumi produced. Obviously, the "modern traditional" method exemplified by Maria and Andreas is much more commercial in character than what Nitsa witnessed and participated in. Today, up to six hundred litres of milk go into a daily production of fifty to sixty kilograms of halloumi, whereas in the village setting in former times, a maximum amount of about sixty litres of milk could be pooled and would amount to little more than five kilograms. While Maria and Andreas spend much of their time every day in the production of halloumi and manage to make a living from the production of halloumi, in the original village setting, income from halloumi would merely supplement the family income at certain times during the year. Today, production is year-round. In the village setting, only the women of the household would engage in production for a period of a few days, and do so in cooperation with other women in the same village. Today, in the "modern tradition" production, collaboration occurs only within the family. Rather than continuing the older type of collaboration between households, hired help from outside is employed in case the workload is too much for the family.

In the traditional setting in the village, women cooperated and this created an event of sociability beyond the framework of the family household. It also meant that the woman in whose house the production took place was under close scrutiny for cleanliness. In the modern traditional setting, production is a private activity within the family. The communal collaborative element no longer exists. This is a significant change. In the new context, a variety of social, agricultural, economic, family and communal factors no longer blend together in the way they used to in the past. Family roles and responsibilities appear to be changing, too. In the "modern traditional" method in the case we examined the man of the

house not only was very actively involved but he had a leading role in the operation. He was actually the one who taught his wife how to make halloumi. In the 1960s village setting, this was a production process that the women alone were responsible for. In the past, the skill for making halloumi was handed down by the women in the family informally. Today, the children of halloumi makers rarely take up their parents' concern and the chain of intergenerational transmission is broken.

The scale of production directly relates to the agricultural policies. Such policies also have an impact on the choice of ingredients used for halloumi which in turn also influences consumer preferences. Before the fifties, only halloumi made exclusively from sheep's and goats' milk was known. Starting with the 1960s, halloumi was also made from cow's milk. This was accepted, provided it was produced by traditional methods. Cows' milk then gradually penetrated the market, with the consumers' acceptance of the products predicated on the "traditionality" of manufacturing rather than, as before, the origin of the ingredients

Another noticeable difference has to do with the stages of maturation. According to the village tradition, halloumi was not considered to be ready for consumption until forty days had elapsed after its production. Only with the "xiarostema" mentioned by Nitsa the maturation process was fully completed. In the case of "modern traditional" production, halloumi can be consumed on the same day that it has been produced, it is often sold unsalted and not preserved in whey. Many people now prefer halloumi fresh, soft and without any salt, a taste preference that may also be a reaction to the more recent awareness about the health hazards of high-salt content diets. In the old traditional method, halloumi had to be placed in jars and covered with salted whey, after the production of anari cheese. Today, much of the whey that is a by-product is no longer processed but quite a lot of it is thrown out - something that would have been considered a crime in the agrarian scarcity economy of days gone by. .

The changes listed above represent only a selection of the most obvious transformations that affect halloumi production within the village setting. Some of these changes are not always noticeable to the ordinary consumer. Interventions and changes such as the ones listed may undermine the traditionally defined authenticity of a product. Yet, the shift from the traditional village setting to the small-scale family enterprises seem to constitute no threat to the quality and organoleptic traits of halloumi cheese. Certainly, halloumi making continues to be a source of pride and identity for those who engage in this culturally as well as economically significant activity.

### "Shepherds of Cyprus": Industrial Brands and Global Marketing

With the industrialisation of post-Independence Cyprus, halloumi was catapulted into the global economic arena. Halloumi today is found at speciality cheese counters and in supermarket shelves practically all over the world, and the product has made major inroads into convenience food processing in the United States and Great Britain. Since the 1970s, halloumi has developed into an important mass market commodity in Cyprus, produced by half a dozen large dairy companies which dominate the national market for cheese and other milk products. They have translated the traditional cheese making techniques into a rationalized process and transposed it into high-tech modern factory settings, full of gleaming stainless steel and shiny tiled surfaces. Here, formally trained cheese workers wearing hygienically correct clothing initiate and monitor the biochemical processes of cheese making, amid the ceaseless din of machinery, as successive batches of milk, curd and cheese go through the stages of the production process 24 hours a day. The industrialisation of halloumi production, as of any food product, implies an economic logic quite different from the traditional village and the small-scale family enterprise. Large scale production reduces the cost for individual items, and the rationalisation of production - including hygienisation

and more generally, the application of scientific knowledge - increases productivity. Industrialisation is predicated on a socio-technical system quite different from the agrarian economy that was the context of traditional halloumi production, including modern transportation networks, refrigeration technologies, and a system of market distribution of commodities far beyond the face-to-face framework of the village. Marketing halloumi worldwide has also necessitated major efforts towards the standardization of form, size and weight, producing easy-to-pack, rectangular cheese blocks of about 250 g each.

What most of these companies produce falls under the government-defined product specification of "fresh" halloumi. Industrial cheese is usually vacuum-packed individually and refrigerated, as opposed to the traditional product which is introduced into large containers with a brine solution where it will keep without refrigeration and can be consumed in its "mature" form later. What is important here is that in comparison to mature halloumi, fresh halloumi is much milder in taste because of its considerably lower salt content. In an interview, one of the big-time halloumi industrialists pointed out, that this way, the product has become more palatable to "other cultures, mostly the European cultures". Indeed, exporting halloumi constitutes the major business of the large companies, halloumi cheese being one of the leading food export items of the Republic of Cyprus. The dramatic increase of industrial halloumi production by Cypriot companies in recent years is entirely export-generated and -geared. Between 80 to 99% of the total halloumi production of these producers go abroad, close to 50% of their total dairy products range. Since the 1980s, the Cypriot producers of industrial halloumi have become global players.

The global promotion of halloumi engages advertising agencies, major international trade fairs and world-wide web sites. In Cyprus, factory-made halloumi is considered an industrial commodity, marketed by the producers as an achievement of modernity, convenient, rational and above all, hygienic. In the global arena, the image of the product is reversed. It is its purported traditionality and its status as regional speciality found nowhere else that makes for its competitive edge. Halloumi is sold to global consumers by creating marketing strategies geared to individual countries and consumer groups, involving fancy packaging and quaint recipe booklets rife with idyllic pastoral images, and never omitting references to the so-called Mediterranean Diet. This is exploited to the maximum by a new product line created by one of the major companies exclusively for the American market under the registered trademark of "Shepherds of Cyprus".

These export-oriented companies, based in Cyprus and locally-owned, are in intense competition with each other for market shares internationally and aggressively expand their distribution into new countries each year, most lately to Japan, Brazil and the Russian Federation. But the global market for halloumi is also contested by dairy producers in other countries who attempt to copy the Cypriot product. The Cypriot government as well as company lawyers are involved in a series of largely successful legal battles internationally over the registration and protection of the Cypriot product. Ironically, transnational legislation passed in order to prevent authentic regional food products from being exploited by foreign producers does not work for the protection of local village-based enterprises. Rather, it is to the advantage of the big corporations in Cyprus who have both the capital and the aggressive chuzpe to engage in the arduous process of having their industrial products registered internationally, at the same time as at home in Cyprus, they are attempting to shoulder local producers out of the market.

### "You eat one halloumi and you die": Risk Management and the Implementation of Scientific Knowledge

In the running-up period of the Republic's accession to the European Union, the government

has been aligning the food sector with EU standards of food safety and consumer health. Before, only those corporations exporting to Europe were subject to the very same strict food safety regulations that the EU imposes on its member states. Companies targeting the global market for their products had to implement major changes on production premises in order to ensure the maximum level of hygiene as required by the pertinent EU directive<sup>2</sup>. Acquiring new equipment and retrofitting of manufacturing buildings required huge financial investments, something that only the successful companies could afford, as the Cyprus government did not subsidize the necessary changes.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, Cyprus has applied for accession to the European Union and will become a full member by 2004. The European Commission considers food safety a key element in its recent enlargement process. As a result, the tightening of Cypriot food legislation in recent years has already resulted in major changes especially for the small production units of the type that Maria and Andreas represent. With 2003, a new set of laws has come into effect that calls on all food processing establishments to comply with more rigid regulations that so far were only imposed on those producing exports for the EU. The EU-directed implementation of new legislation, in the case of halloumi production in Cyprus, is already now resulting in a re-organisation of the economy. The big industrialists welcome recent measures to curb "unregulated" food production by declaring home-based village-style halloumi production a public health hazard. It is to be expected that small and medium-sized food production units will be put under a huge strain to comply with the new legislation. A process of economic concentration where less powerful economic actors are pushed out or else bought up by a declining number of dominant companies seems inevitable, paving the way for an increased involvement of multinational companies that so far have been kept at bay.

While the new legal regulations put small-scale producers in a difficult situation, the large companies do not view them as restrictions. Rather, they consider themselves forerunners and pioneers of progress, setting standards in food safety by their own practices that implement modern scientific knowledge. The technical director of one plant was trained abroad as a biologist and subscribes to international online journals in food technology and microbiology in order to keep up-to-date. He asserts, "today, there is no excuse not to be informed about the latest developments regarding your industry". He is also a passionate crusader for hygiene in the food sector of Cyprus:

We are talking about nasty bacteria - salmonella, listeria, Staphylococcus aureus, Bacillus cereus. You eat one halloumi and you die. Food safety is not something any government or rational person should even discuss. It is a must. It has to be forced, better today than tomorrow. There can be no discussion about this.

Besides enforcing a strict hygiene regime within their manufacturing facilities and precisely monitoring temperatures and times, the industrial dairy processing companies who produce halloumi also emphasize that they introduced new elements into the cheese making process to ensure food safety, such as cooling down the cheese after heat treatment very rapidly with the use of refrigeration technology to avoid bacterial contamination. Halloumi is flavoured with salt and fresh mint leaves; in the industrial process, autoclaved dried mint, devoid of spores, is used exclusively.

The managing director of the major Cypriot halloumi exporting company claims that "the villagers' product is not safe, it is hygienically very, very risky. There have been cases reported of poisoning. But from a well-organized factory like ours, everything is checked and safe." The discourse on food safety denigrates village-based producers as "poisoning people on a daily basis". While it is true that there have been isolated cases of food poisoning by

bacterially contaminated halloumi as late as the early 1990s, even in the past, this appears to have never taken on epidemic proportions. In the traditional production process, food safety already was an important concern. Village women took care that the ingredients were fresh and implements and personnel clean. Special practices embedded in the traditional production process were aimed at making sure that the product would pose no danger to the consumer. This was of course no effective safeguard against the bacterial contamination of sensitive foodstuffs. Yet, skills and techniques passed on informally between the generations, the embodied knowledge acquired by experience, and the strict social control imposed within the village-based cooperative groups of women pooling milk to communally make halloumi all combined to ensure that a "good" cheese resulted. Conversely, the modern methods manufacture "safe" products based on scientific knowledge. Industrial halloumi is a product of the new culture of measure and manage.

#### "We take our halloumi from Maria:" Trust and A Social Aesthetics of Taste

This "safe" halloumi devoid of risk should be expected to instill what in today's economy is called consumer confidence. However, for large portions of the Cypriot population, "safe" halloumi does not connote "good" halloumi. Rather, domestic consumers often avoid the industrially manufactured product if they can help it, finding its taste bland and of little appeal. There are some objective reasons for that. The industrial product has a much lower salt content, and often contains little or no sheep's and goats' milk which traditionally form the basic ingredients, substituting it with cows' milk which, even though its yield is considerably lower, is cheaper and readily available in large quantities year-round.

Many Cypriot halloumi consumers continue to procure their supply of "tasty" halloumi from villages via direct marketing from local producers. Relatives still living in rural areas provide them with traditional products which are considered more distinctive in taste. Furthermore, for middle and upper class urbanites, in recent years it has become quite a fashion to have a "halloumi lady" in some village that they place orders with. They will tell you, "We take our cheese from Maria in Akaki village", or: "The wife of the mukhtar of Pelathousa makes this halloumi". The commercial village-based halloumi producers Maria and Andreas that we reported on before are a good example for the fact that the reputation of excellent local halloumi producers may in some cases be known island-wide, and it is a matter of pride and prestige to be counted among the regular customers of such a producer. However, one of the large dairy industrialists affects an air of superiority:

They imagine that industrial cheese is made with all sorts of artificial additives, so they believe that when they buy cheese from a farm, it will not have any preservatives. But between me and you, this is the most unhygienic cheese on earth.

However, market research on the preferences of domestic consumers in Cyprus that was commissioned in 2001 by another one of the big companies "found that the village-type halloumi is still very popular, and the consumption of this halloumi exceeds 60% of the total halloumi consumption" within Cyprus. Responding to the established preferences of local consumers, the big companies are now trying to cut into the market dominated by home-based producers and small to medium-sized regional operations. Last year, a few of them started to produce "traditional" halloumi geared to the domestic market. As one CEO in an interview with me last year asserted, "we were encouraged by these studies to produce a village-style halloumi" which is named after a rural region famous for its village-based cheese production. His company buys milk from local agriculturalists of this area. "We use entirely sheep's and goats' milk from this area. But the production takes place here, under the

modern aspects of food safety and hygiene, in order to avoid problems one could well have in a village area." The newly invented, mass-produced "traditional" halloumi is made widely available throughout the mass market of Cyprus. The competitive edge of the newly introduced product is constituted by a simulation of traditionality and its combined promise of food safety ensured by experts and scientific knowledge. The claims of the manufacturers to the traditional character of the product rests on the assertion that it contains the proper ingredients from a suitable origin, resulting in a product with an organoleptic quality coming quite close to the "real thing".

Is it, however, percentages of protein, relative water and fat contents, degree of saltiness and roughness of texture distinctive of the hand-made product that make Cypriot consumers drive to out-of-the-way villages and pick up their pre-ordered batches of halloumi, in cheese kitchens that may not always be in complete accordance with modern hygiene standards? There is another agent in the socio-technical system of halloumi production and consumption that needs to be acknowledged here, namely the establishment and maintenance of trust between economic actors.

### Conclusion: Cheese "Wrapped In Trust"

Social theorists, going back all the way to Georg Simmel, have identified the establishment of trust between social actors and between actors and institutions as one of the main challenges that modern societies have to cope with<sup>4</sup>. Niklas Luhmann distinguishes between trust, which entails awareness of circumstances of risk and is thoroughly modern insofar that it acknowledges the fact that most contingencies are humanly created, and confidence as a pre-modern attitude.<sup>5</sup> According to his distinction, those Cypriot consumers opting out of the industrial food safety complex may well be classified as exhibiting the persistence of confidence, a belief in the taken-for-granted-ness of familiar things and a resulting disinclination to consider alternatives. But do those enjoying "unsafe" cheese act in blissful ignorance of the risks attached to the product? Rather, our findings point to a social aesthetics of taste coming into play here. It engages cultural values and social relations, and quite consciously weighs the risks, both of less-than-perfect taste and of potential bacterial contamination. Village-style halloumi, then, is considered the superior product not only because of its ingredients and the procedures of its production, but because it is predicated on a direct face-to-face relationship between producer and consumer, based on trust and shared cultural assumptions. The trust vested in a particular producer that is validated through reputation and experience undergirds the marked preference for domestically made, "tasty" cheese and, for the consumers, significantly seems to reduce the inherent risks. Sellers and buyers are not engaging in anonymous transactions, and the producer is immediately accountable for the quality of her product. Thus, the village halloumi swimming in cloudy brine in huge plastic bottles, then, is wrapped in socially produced trust, while the industrial halloumi is generated within the framework of an "abstract system" (Anthony Giddens) of factory-based production, modern technology and global food marketing. Abstract cheese does not inspire trust in the same way.

In Cyprus, only one or two generations ago, making halloumi cheese was a skill that most rural households, or more precisely, their women, had and exercised, provided they had access to fresh milk. As a vernacular knowledge, the competence to make halloumi was widespread throughout society, openly accessible and not restricted to specialized experts. Cypriot consumers today do not only remember their mothers and grandmothers producing halloumi in the past, but also do not accept why this competence should now be vested exclusively in the industrial dairy complex. The contemporary practice of direct marketing of halloumi in Cypriot villages, also, in an important way, represents an attempt to chip away at

the divide between producers and consumers that emerged with modernity. Even though in the past, rural women were selling surplus halloumi to co-villagers as well as on markets and to regular urban clients, halloumi making, then, in effect did not create a product, if we view a product as an entity that both generates and presupposes a distinction between producer and consumer. The preference of many domestic consumers in Cyprus for “unsafe” cheese can be read as an act of resistance against the global economic procedures that Cypriot society has been integrated into.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup>This reconstruction is based on Nicos Andilios' familiarity with the process of halloumi making, and many instances of observation of how halloumi was made in the villages of Cyprus in the past and also in contemporary times.

<sup>2</sup>European Union Directive 92/46/EEC concerning the health rules for the production and placing on the market of raw milk, heat-treated milk and milk-based products. National legislation in Cyprus incorporated major changes corresponding to this directive already in 1995 and 1996. See Regulation 86/95 of the Milk and Milk Products Hygiene (Production and Processing) and Control of Cowsheds, Sheep and Goat Sheds and Dairies. Further “harmonisation” of the legislation concerning raw milk quality was passed in Parliament more recently.

<sup>3</sup>See Final Report Of A Mission Carried Out In Cyprus From 11 To 15 December 2000 In Order To Evaluate The Operation Of Controls Over The Production Of Milk, Heat Treated Milk And Milk-based Products Destined For Export To The European Union, European Commission, Health & Consumer Protection Directorate-General 2000. See [http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/inspections/vi/reports/cyprus/vi\\_rep\\_cypr\\_1232\\_2000\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/inspections/vi/reports/cyprus/vi_rep_cypr_1232_2000_en.pdf)

<sup>4</sup>Giddens, A.: *Consequences of Modernity*. Stanford 1990, pp. 26

<sup>5</sup>Luhmann, N.: *Soziologie des Risikos*. Berlin/New York 1991