

# Artisan Minas Cheese in *Zona da Mata* in Minas Gerais: its knowledge and representations

## O Queijo Minas Artesanal na região da mata mineira: seu saber-fazer e suas representações

Belisa Lamas Gaudereto<sup>1</sup>  
Luciano Rodrigues Costa<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universidade Federal de Viçosa, Centro de Ciências Agrárias, Departamento de Economia Rural. Viçosa-MG, Brasil.

Correspondence  
Belisa Lamas Gaudereto  
E-mail: belisa.gautocis@gmail.com

### Abstract

This article was written after a research with producers of artisanal Minas Cheese, a Brazilian Intangible Cultural Heritage, who live in the Zona da Mata of the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil. Our objective was to analyze what representations of such cheese makers are about the knowledge involved in cheese manufacture and how they are linked with the health laws regulating this knowledge. Therefore, it was underpinned by theories about know-how and collective representations, which contributed to field research and further analysis. Based on participant observations and conversations held with the producers and their families, previously approved by the Research Ethics Committee, it was noted that the representations of this knowledge go beyond the moment and time when cheese is made. As a food item produced very close to or inside the household, all spaces belonging to it contribute to the construction of representations and interact with know-how itself on a daily basis. In this context, know-how can be considered the result of the articulation of a series of spheres connecting the life and the history of these people.

**Keywords:** Knowledge. Representations. Minas Cheese. Tradition; Zona da Mata. Cultural Diversity.

### Resumo

O presente artigo foi elaborado após uma pesquisa realizada com produtores de Queijo Minas artesanal, Patrimônio Imaterial Brasileiro, residentes na Zona da Mata de Minas Gerais – Brasil.

Nosso objetivo foi analisar quais as representações desses queijeiros sobre o saber-fazer envolvido na fabricação de seus queijos e como elas se articulam com as leis sanitárias que regulam esse saber. Para tanto, ancorou-se em teorias sobre o saber-fazer e representações coletivas, que contribuíram para ir ao campo e, posteriormente, analisá-lo. A partir das observações participantes e conversas realizadas com os produtores e seus familiares, previamente aprovadas pelo Comitê de Ética, foi possível perceber que as representações sobre esse saber-fazer ultrapassam o momento e o tempo, nos quais o queijo é feito. Como um alimento produzido dentro ou muito próximo da unidade doméstica, todos os espaços a ela pertencentes contribuem para a construção de representações e dialogam cotidianamente com o próprio saber-fazer. Nesse contexto, o saber-fazer pode ser considerado fruto da articulação de uma série de esferas circundantes da vida e história desses indivíduos.

**Palavras-chave:** Saber-fazer. Representações. Queijo Minas. Tradição. Zona da Mata. Diversidade Cultural.

## Introduction

Origin of cheese in the world refers to a legend that says it was (minor god in Greek mythology) Aristaeus, son of (one of the most important and complex of the Olympian deities in classical Greek and Roman religion and Greek and Roman mythology) Apollo, the first cheese maker twelve thousand years before the Common or Current Era (BCE).<sup>1</sup> History of cheese can also be observed, according to Ginzburg,<sup>2</sup> between the processes of the (group of institutions within the government system of the Catholic Church whose aim was to combat heresy) Inquisition in 1584, when the miller (from Montereale, Italy) Domenico Scandella, also known as Menocchio, was condemned for cosmogony (or cosmogeny), defending ideas related to milk putrefaction. Cheese production would have gained strength during the course of the (post-Roman Republic period of the ancient Roman civilization) Roman Empire, as pointed by Perry,<sup>3</sup> when its techniques were perfected and spread throughout the territories dominated.

There are indications of cheese making in different historical periods, in which the technologies of the contemporary world did not exist, which places cheeses, according to the Brazilian National Historic and Artistic Heritage Institute [*Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional* (IPHAN)],<sup>1</sup> among “Products related to the capacity of human observation associated with the need to preserve foods that are highly perishable, such as milk” (p. 138).<sup>1</sup> In Brazil, the beginning of the production of Minas Cheese (type of cheese traditionally produced in the Brazilian state of

Minas Gerais) is associated to the period of gold extraction in the region where today is the state of Minas Gerais, as pointed out by Meneses,<sup>4</sup> rapidly spread throughout the state.

The production of Minas Cheese, as well as other cheeses also made with raw milk, has long coexisted with dilemmas that directly affect the know-how of Minas Cheese and all the ways of thinking, feeling and acting that it mobilizes. From the 1950s onwards, Brazilian laws based on current norms from the United States began to gain ground in Brazil supported by scientific discoveries such as those of (French biologist, microbiologist and chemist) Louis Pasteur on heating milk to 62 °C, a temperature sufficient to eliminate microorganisms harmful to human health. Scientific discoveries such as Pasteur's have promoted sanitary laws that have since become part of artisanal producers' daily lives with sanitary rules and notions.<sup>5</sup>

In Brasil, in 1996 the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Supply (*Ministério da Agricultura, Pecuária e Abastecimento*, abbreviated MAPA) publishes notice 146,<sup>6</sup> which regulates milk products quality. Among several requirements, this notice has determined sixty days as the time required for the elimination of microorganisms harmful to human health in the absence of pasteurization. Cheeses that would not comply with this rule would not be allowed to be marketed.

As an alternative to resisting the changes proposed by health laws, throughout the decade of 2000 cheese producers in some regions of Minas Gerais, such as Serro and Canastra, have applied for having their cheeses turned into a cultural heritage in an attempt to safeguard the know-how that is a characteristic of their products. In 2011, the Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Supply (MAPA),<sup>7</sup> through Normative Instruction 57, allowed artisanal cheeses made from raw milk produced in regions considered to be traditional producers to be sold with less than sixty days of maturation. Although this latest MAPA opinion may have helped producers in traditional regions, those who remain outside them continue to have to deal with the problem in their daily lives.

It is within this general context, between laws and traditions, that this article is inserted and seeks to analyze the representations arising from the Minas Cheese know-how by artisanal producers from the (forest area, the narrow coastal plain between the Atlantic Ocean and the dry *agreste* and *sertão* regions in the northeastern Brazilian states of Maranhão, Piauí, Rio Grande do Norte, Paraíba, Pernambuco, Alagoas, Sergipe and Bahia) *Zona da Mata* in Minas Gerais. The region, which was the field for this research, is not recognized by MAPA as a traditional Minas Cheese producer. However, there are in *Zona da Mata* several artisanal producers of this cheese, which, because they are not formalized, many nor even municipally, do not have an official registration in the region. This fact makes infrequent the presence of health inspectors, unlike what happens in regions with a higher number of formalized cheese makers. This scenario is interesting to understand how the know-how involved in this artisanal production is represented by the producers themselves, in a region that is outside cultural heritage processes and also inspections, which more frequently reach the regions considered traditional producers.

Against this background, which mixes traditions, stories and legislations, this article aims to analyze the collective representations about the Minas Cheese know-how in *Zona da Mata* in Minas Gerais. The objective was also to understand how these representations and the know-how are positioned and (re)organized in view of sanitary laws regulating the manufacture of cheeses made with raw milk.

## Methodology strategies

Analyses in this article were based on participant observations and conversations with cheese makers anchored in theoretical references that deal with social representations and know-how. The research, which had authorization and signing from an Informed Consent Form (ICF) by all participants, occurred in three different cities in *Zona da Mata* in Minas Gerais, two located in the microregion of Viçosa and one in the microregion of Ubá. To ensure producers' secrecy, the names of these cities did not appear in this article neither the producers' actual names. The research carried out with cheese producers from *Zona da Mata* was approved by the Research Ethics Committee (REC) of the Brazilian Federal University of Viçosa in 2016 through opinion no. 1.637.363.

In each city, a farm where cheese is produced was visited. In the places visited, the process of making cheese is shared among people from the same family or with close neighbors. Altogether, seventeen people participated in the study, of which three women, one from each city, were considered by the rest of their group as those responsible for making cheese. The other people were: four women with other occupations which at that moment were not directly linked to making cheese and ten men also participated and some would contribute to cheese production by milking the cows and commercializing it. The men who did not participate daily in this production were workers in the city, students or retirees. Even though not all the seventeen people would be directly working with cheese production, they would be immersed in a family cheese culture, contributing with their opinions in the conversations and observations.

At times, in the course of the research, conversations would be exclusively with the women producing cheese or only with those responsible for other activities. Conversations with the people involved in this process would be built together with participant observation during the stages of cheese production, milk production, coffee break, lunch, a walk through the yard, during guitar or accordion playing sessions and between several others situations. The use of observation made it possible to understand cheese producers' subtle actions that have a significant symbolic weight in their daily lives.

In this article, reflections about information acquired with the research were split into three topics. The first one deals with notions involving workshop, day-to-day and learning some know-

how, which articulates the representations contained in actions and positions taken on by the producers in the daily life with the way the know-how is constructed. The second topic deals with the representations of memory involved in the know-how that originates the Minas Cheese by these producers in the *Zona da Mata* of Minas Gerais. Finally, some perceptions about the ways in which these cheese producers deal with sanitary legislations in their realities shall be approached.

## Homes as workshops

The universe of homes and their daily routines is mixed with the construction of knowledge. Cheese production differs from that presented by Bitter and Bitar<sup>8</sup> about makers of *acarajé* [a dish made from peeled beans formed into a ball and then deep-fried in dendê (palm oil)] and *tacacá* (a soup common to North Brazil) foods that are understood as street food and therefore must be made on streets. On the contrary, the production of Minas Cheese in the region studied refers to homes and family. Since cheeses are not made in cheese factories or any exclusive site separated from the house but rather in a room in the residence, it was possible, and unavoidable, to observe other aspects that complement the sense of know-how and not exclusively the manufacturing process.

Even if cheese makers would be able to reach the cheese-making areas in the yard without going inside, the arrival in the field, or rather the arrival at the producers' home, would literally take place through the front door. In this way it would only be possible to get to the place where the cheese is made after touring the whole residence. In the path between the entrance – living room – until reaching the site where cheese was made, stops would be made by the residents themselves who would tell stories about some situations lived, family, furniture, appliances and photos. Elements that at some point would cross the cheese making history.

As observed by Mary Douglas,<sup>9</sup> such welcoming made it possible to notice that “The home-made experience of crossing a doorway can express many kinds of entrances” (p. 141). In this case, the house and the ways in which those people related in and with the site could contribute to thinking about representations involving know-how and the Minas Cheese. Some of these people, realizing that there was interest in their stories, brought family photo albums strewn with more stories, allowing entrance into an even more personal and subjective universe. It was possible to understand that they would not build know-how and their cheese without all these stories, people and objects.

This possibility of observation contributed to the realization that, as some food made at home, cheese does not only lie in the site – the workshop – in which the cheese curd is made but as some food that articulates and is symbolically present in all sites in the houses. This involves, as stated by Jodelet,<sup>10</sup> individuals in some sense of social belonging, given from experiences and actions internalized by people of the same collectivity. In this way, as the author affirms, social

representations are shown as some knowledge medium that can be collectively constructed and shared. Therefore the number of people in the same family involved in cheese production is expressive. And even in people who do not help directly it is possible to realize that they understand the cheese economic importance and historical value for the family.

Proximity between the place where a product is produced with craftspeople's place of residence is something elucidated by Sennett<sup>11</sup> as some common reality in the medieval period of ancient craftspeople. Medieval workshops in craftspeople's houses were, according to Sennett,<sup>11</sup> romanticized by some socialist authors, who saw in this spatial configuration of workshops inside the houses the possibility of work in humane conditions. However, the author deconstructs this relationship made by socialists, arguing that the house was not some place of full harmony but also, in the contemporary world, large companies and laboratories organize their production in a more reflexive way and close to the idea of workshops as places for creation and learning.<sup>11</sup>

On the idea of workshop for Sennett<sup>11</sup> it is worth considering here two points that dialogue regarding the field research analyzed in this article. The first one is that, for Sennett,<sup>11</sup> workshops are associated with some master's authority, who knows the site and knows how to use everything the workshop has to offer. The workshop is also responsible for maintaining cohesion and unity within some group. In the past such goals would be achieved through rituals and religion. As for most current periods, originality fulfills this role, becoming "A new form of authority, an often ephemeral and silent authority" (p. 95).<sup>11</sup>

Among the groups surveyed, in each family of producers there is the recognition of women as the main one or, as expressed by Sennett,<sup>11</sup> masters of cheese know-how. Their skills are, at times, exalted as some guarantee of production success and continuity. For Cláudio, 49 years old, his wife's trained and skillful taste, as the one who makes the cheese that he sells in the city, is crucial for success and guarantee of customer satisfaction. According to the producers, several factors contribute to changing cheese flavor. Among them, some type of grass, which they call "stick grass," which at the beginning of the research was disrupting one of the producers' production and trade.

*And on Sunday a cow was there eating [stick grass], pass to cheese! And she tastes the curd [points to Laura] and identifies right away! And that she has figured out all by herself by tasting and observing the cattle! Then she is going to separate the cheese tasting like grass and age it for consumption at home. It is not for selling! (Cláudio, 49 years old, cheese maker).*

In addition to recognition, this statement also emphasizes that the practice and routine involved in the know-how are dynamic. The know-how has its own logic and guarantees, through practice, as stated by Assunção,<sup>12</sup> its reproduction but also innovations. It "encompasses adaptations, improvisations and experiments carried out by social agents and presents trajectory, history and development" (p. 154).<sup>12</sup> The know-how, as stated by Dutra,<sup>13</sup> corresponds to some universe lived,

accessed only by certain people, that articulates specific perceptions and feelings to those who were allowed to know and practice it.

Another aspect about the idea of workshop for Sennett is that, for the author,<sup>11</sup> workshops in the contemporary world would have disassociated themselves from houses, a fact that does not occur with cheese producers in *Zona da Mata* in Minas Gerais, who participated in this research. There is, however, some difference in the scenarios studied here: the house is the workshop. This link between home and workshop may be associated, in the context researched, with the fact that women are the main responsible ones for cheese production. This is a characteristic that differs from what was researched by Abreu<sup>14</sup> in the Serro region, where cheese manufacturing is traditionally carried out<sup>a</sup> by men's hands and the "workshop" would be located in the houses basement, in a site not as domestic as kitchens. Abreu<sup>14</sup> also comments that with the new health regulations the "workshops," called in the Serro region cheese rooms, had to go to some place even further away from the residence.

As for *Zona da Mata*, the cheese "workshops" location, behind the kitchen, is related to what was stated by Pierre Bourdieu<sup>15</sup> regarding constructing the role of women in society, which is associated with private environments. Thus, in-house workshops do not only mean some place where everyone has easy access to but also some place where the know-how master rules and handles everyday. Often the production mixes with the house environment, as in the case of cheeses resting in the domestic refrigerator, because "As they are sold fresh, we leave them [the cheeses] in the refrigerator of the house itself. But just for some time, only until they are taken to the customers or these come here to get them!" (Isabel, 40 years old, cheese maker). It was possible to perceive that cheese production in the field in question is articulated to various domestic activities, such as preparation of breakfast and<sup>b</sup> lunch, housekeeping, among other activities related to this universe.

The arrival of milk, fresh from the cow, to put the rennet in and let rest, coincides with the breakfast time, when everyone wakes up and has their first meals before going to work. After placing the rennet, the milk is reserved until the moment it is "just right," when it is possible to withdraw the whey and knead the cheese in their pans. This point, however, does not have some pre-regulated time to be reached. And according to 42-year-old cheese maker Laura, "It depends, you know. It depends on the day's temperature, the amount of milk to be used to make cheese. It depends on a lot of things!" Due to the inconstancy of cheese right point, throughout the morning the producers, while waiting and watching milk turn into cheese, do other tasks inside and outside their houses.

---

a The tradition here is thought by taking into account the individuals' behaviors fluidity, as also highlighted by Abreu.<sup>12</sup>

b Native category.

As a result of a daily routine related to domestic activities, cheese know-how is represented by the producers as some simple and common everyday activity, although the complexity of making cheese has been observed during the research. Perceiving the right points to cut, squeeze, turn the curd out from the pans, among countless other skills developed daily by the practice, as in the case of the grass that modifies the cheese taste. As observed by Camargo,<sup>16</sup> in the context of Trentinian-Tyrolean foods, making food, or cheese, is something that, for them, is not very complex because, as stated by Isabel (40-year-old cheese maker), “We know it. Then we make it.” This view from cheese makers about the know-how itself reveals something similar to the universes researched by Dutra<sup>13</sup> and by Camargo.<sup>16</sup> Universes in which know-how happens within families, throughout life, among women, through observation and speech. In the cases studied here, the transmission of know-how has shown to develop “in gerund: they have learned to make it by watching and making it; they have learned to make it by making it” (p. 244).<sup>13</sup>

In the same vein, men can also, throughout their lives, in everyday life and seeing how to make it, learn how cheese is made. Although some tasks are performed and reproduced more by some people than others and can be divided by gender, age or time availability, this organization is not so rigid and others in these groups have already performed tasks normally carried out by others. “Once I went to a doctor with my mother and when I got here my father had already made the cheese!! And he even knows how to make it correctly!” (Isabel, 40 years old, cheese maker). This speech helps to illustrate the possibility of work frontier fluidity within these groups, where a task such as making cheese, which is traditionally exercised by women, can also be performed by a man when necessary. However, it should be made clear that even with this fluidity the Minas Cheese know-how and all the mechanisms that it mobilizes are recognized and represented<sup>16</sup> within these groups as belonging to specific women.

### Cheese makers and the representation of memory

Social representations can at first be thought of as a way found by people to support their actions in and in view of the world. They allow us to think about observable or scientifically reconstructed phenomena, as stated by Denise Jodelet.<sup>10</sup> For this author, representations can be found on different occasions and through the speeches “Be brought by words and conveyed in messages and media images, crystallized in behaviors and in material and special organizations” (p. 17-19).<sup>10</sup> It is also through observation and speech that Froehlich<sup>17</sup> perceives representations as a way of revisiting the past and tradition. Therefore, this author indicates that often there is some dramatization of traditions, like in an attempt to legitimize them.

The picture on the living room wall in one of the houses depicts the family current cheese maker’s mother’s grandmother. As she passes in front of this painting, it makes her speech draw



on the memories of the stories of how she learned from the “old people” to make cheese. Stories that mix and in some points coincide with the other residents’ individual memories. Looking at her great-grandmother’s painting, Isabel, 40, tells how she learned to make cheese, a simple recipe from her point of view, and some ways of proceeding that were her great-grandmother’s and were passed through to the family. In the course of these stories, some memories of remarkable moments, some directly related to cheese production and others not so much, would come to the surface.

This relationship, which occurs in the present, between the know-how and people of the past, shows the collectivity in the know-how,<sup>13</sup> which is a consequence of memories of knowledge transmission and memory within a group, in which the members rely on stories lived and told by ancestors. These memories of past people and facts help to think about the character of know-how as representative of a specific competence. Some knowledge that in this case endows some women with a certain power because they are the owners of this know-how and, symbolically, of memories of former owners. People who, at some point, were important to the current producers’ whole family. Those who contributed and through the memory still contribute to the constitution of an individual and also collective identity of these groups in view of themselves and also the society to which they belong. In all three cases the producer groups are recognized in their respective cities as cheese producers or cheese makers.

Thinking about how one has learned to make cheese, one of the first and recurrent inquiries in the conversations between researcher and producers made them remember moments of family loss, parties and times when cheese was the main source of livelihood for these families. Thinking about the past led to reflections from at least one person in each group, usually the older ones, about times when money earned with cheese gave them access to certain goods, education, health, or safety by bringing extra income or being the main income at the end of the month. The speeches from the memories on the history of know-how within these groups can be characterized by what Candau calls a collective metamemory,<sup>18</sup> which is collectively claimed from some supposed memory in this group as the original one, which when claimed contributes to constituting identities.

When recalling the cheese trajectory in the family, several people from the same family group mentioned the same facts and dramas, which made it possible to perceive that these memories contribute to attributing unity to the group,<sup>11</sup> just as they attribute representation and symbolism to know-how and cheese itself. In this sense, Candau<sup>18</sup> also contributes to the idea of selective memory, in which a group maintains that only those memories that are meaningful to them can be revived, allowing to reveal what they want to the people with whom they relate.

The Minas Cheese know-how represents for these producers something that is not only their own, but their ancestors’, people who have struck the family history and still remain in it, either by the sensations revived by the painting on the wall or by the cheese know-how. Some cheese that the great-grandmother would make, whom some of the present producers have not gotten

to meet. Or else they would not be old enough to personally remember the great-grandmother's practices in cheese production. And it only got to be apprehended from the mother or grandmother, through observation and speech. However, in any case, these are the roots articulated by memory, which legitimize what they do and, as stated by Candau<sup>18</sup> and Cardoso,<sup>19</sup> constitute a crucial part of building their identity.

Memory representation for the construction of identity and know-how in the present does not negate the women's know-how peculiarities. Their skills, the result of routine practice,<sup>20</sup> are clear not by the conversation, but by seeing them acting, seeing them producing the cheese. It should be emphasized that this routine should not be thought of as something monotonous and ingrained, based on a productivist logic, but rather thought of as some flexible frequency that allows discoveries, as highlighted by Schwint.<sup>21</sup>

In the midst of conversations with one of the producers who contributed to this research, it was revealed by her that “the ancestors,” meaning her ancestors, would make cheese in a manner similar to what is done in traditional regions where the cheeses would be placed in shelves during the maturation process. However, according to this producer, “With the fridge we no longer need to make it like that. Also because clients like it [the cheese] very fresh” (Laura, 42 years old, cheese maker), stating that there are clients who will ask that cheese made the day before be reserved for their purchase.

This producer's speech includes mostly the way in which Minas Cheese is produced and marketed in *Zona da Mata*. It is possible to perceive in the producer's discourse the resorting to the past as an attempt to value “ancient (and also new) customs, habits and sociabilities” (p. 16).<sup>17</sup> In this quest for valorization and authenticity, memory can be an important resource, as it is requested and used by people of the present, making facts of the past to be reconstituted with the eyes of the present, as emphasized by Candau.<sup>18</sup> And although there are these changes, it is necessary to emphasize that they are built on the bases of knowledge acquired with the ancestors, because, as observed by Dutra,<sup>13</sup> know-how is some collective knowledge above all, where the product also has collective authorship, often supported by memory.

### Legislations, know-how and conflicts

The processes changes that have taken place over time in the ways of making Minas Cheese show that these women possess knowledge that is added to what has been apprehended from “the ancestors,” knowledge built from daily activities, covered by previously non-existent influences.<sup>17</sup> It is in this day and age, in the present, that this traditional know-how remains, articulated to the skills, perceptions held by the producers, involving what went right, what did not work and why it

worked. They are the interstices of daily life, added to the producers' ability, which lead to these changes and if these are not carried out by modifying one thing or another in traditional ways, cheese may not work, as the producers point out.

*The weather is no longer as the one at the time when I learned it. And what about when my grandmother would make it? Here one lives and learns! (Lúcia, 50 years old, cheese maker).*

*For example, when it is cold I put some water, some warm water around here, you see. It is for the curd to reach the right point. Otherwise one loses milk which at this time is even less (Laura, 42 years old, cheese maker).*

In the moments of practice, comparative statements and scenarios have arisen that “the ancestors,” “they would make it in a way,” “they would make it like that,” “they would make it with this,” but “today I make it this way,” “this way is more practical,” “this way is more correct.” These assertions help to think that some tradition does not necessarily need to be static and that know-how can be modified according to the several needs and inventions that can facilitate and/or improve the product. And this also constitutes know-how, as pointed out by Schwint.<sup>21</sup>

Although the relationship between the family memory and the learning and continuity of the cheese know-how in all groups was perceived, it was not possible to verify the desire and concern regarding the continuity of this practice in the families. Because this is some knowledge assimilated and constructed in everyday life, without any crucial learning moment or rite of passage for demarcating and assimilating know-how, it may be that the idea prevails that when it is necessary, and if it is necessary, daughters, grandchildren or nieces shall do it. Some know-how whose learning is related to daily life also has the execution related to daily life. As one of the producers said about her 20-year-old daughter, claiming that this one might even know how to make cheese, but never bothered to do it, “She has always had other concerns in her life!” (Lúcia, 50 years old, cheese maker).

This uncertainty as to the future of production plus small manufacturing, an average of 25 cheeses a week and little money to make the changes required by sanitary legislation are among the justifications from the cheese producers who participated in this research in relation to formalizing their productions. And even as sanitary inspection being something inconstant in these producers' daily lives, it was possible to perceive the existence of a certain apprehension regarding the possibility that at any moment there shall be inspections in their properties and their cheeses points of sales. In the course of the research, situations were gradually mentioned about when they had their cheeses or from acquainted cheese makers discarded by inspectors where they were sold or on roads while they were taking them to be sold in urban areas.

*But most of these folks fining, the inspectors, they have never even seen how cheese is made! They don't even want to know how it is made, if the milk is clean, if the cow is clean! (Carlos, 47 years old, cheese maker).*

Carlos' speech reflects the existence of some mutual incomprehension about the knowledge belonging to different spheres of knowledge and of some inspection taking place in a *top-down* fashion, as observed by Vitrolles,<sup>22</sup> without the participation of persons who exercise the regulated craft. From the producers remains the look on the others who do not share with them only the practical knowledge of making cheeses but also of memories and belongings. In addition to being food or some commodity, cheese is part of a symbolic logic.<sup>23</sup> In this case, it represents not only the effort from the work performed at present for its manufacture but it is also the ancestors' work, the individual and collective past of each person involved in production, family stories, good and bad moments lived by them.

It was possible to perceive some tone of incomprehension regarding this inspection, which, even though it is not constant, focuses on these artisan producers and, according to them, "does not go after the cheese factories." During the research, while telling their stories, trajectories in the production of cheese and carrying on their chores, these cheese makers ended up reflecting on themselves and their work on cheese production. Some producers showed the difference between their cheese and the way it is made with those of other producers as well as the factories. The words industry and factory were generally used to refer to the factories of the regions in which they lived, their competitors selling in the city.

Each of the groups surveyed formulated from themselves a construct embedded in notions about right and wrong in making cheese, thoughts based on their experiences, memories and the meanings they attribute in their lives. Such construction constitutes each one of such groups as some "us" who, while at the same time are observed and characterized,<sup>22</sup> also perceive and formulate fashions of being for "the others." The debate on cheese prices serves to illustrate this perception:

*There are some (cheeses) which are inexpensive but they are not good! There are factories out there that come near here to get some milk and they put caustic soda so that milk is not going to spoil, you know. They say it is to preserve the milk inside such trucks. Then they put too much caustic soda. I have a cousin, he does this to milk. He says folks put caustic soda as soon as milk leaves farms, in the milk tank (Laura, 42 years old, cheese maker).*

Laura's speech mentions cheeses made in factories which according to her do not have the same quality and purity of her cheese, using as an argument what someone in the family said, one who obtains milk from rural properties to take to large factories. Representations that are made of what is clean and dirty are based on what is lived and culturally seized.<sup>9</sup>

The differentiation presented by Laura between the quality of her product and the others' provides relationships of identity to what is produced and is given by know-how which, despite being some learned knowledge, also develops and reveals characteristics of each individual and

their time. However, as stated by Zarifian,<sup>20</sup> reaching the point where the product has such characteristics takes time until the rules are fully assimilated. Therefore, “It is necessary to have them fully assimilated, to have mastered the specific skills needed, which are not objectified, but which must have been able to add originality” (p. 158).<sup>20</sup>

*Our cheese is made with raw milk! It is not boiled [pasteurized] just as ones sees around. No! We make it, squeeze it and put it in the fridge every day! We make the Minas cheese indeed! (Lúcia, 50 years old, cheese maker).*

It is possible to perceive in other manufacturers’ speech some feeling that is similar to Lucia’s, who expresses a certain honor in producing in a handcrafted way the Brazilian cheese *frescal*, which is produced and sold in *Zona da Mata*. Another cheese maker, 40-year-old Isabel, said that her cheese “only has rennet and chemistry salt; the rest is all from here! And cows here eat grass and live loose!” This sentence also indirectly expresses some comparison with cheese from factories in order to enhance the quality of their cheese, free from “chemicals.” The zeal presented and cherished by artisanal producers is not about what is said to them from the sanitary norms but rather from what has been apprehended throughout their experiences and is part of their memory and identity.

Even the modifications made by the producers in the ways of making their cheeses are carried out from experience achieved in their daily practices, aiming at improving the cheese they produce and “having a good reputation in the city” (Cláudio, 49 years old, cheese maker). Even if it is to incorporate new technologies required by health legislation, such as gloves and plastic pans, the logic of care and quality thought by producers is different from that preached by standards. For example, as long as hands and utensils are “very clean,” there is no problem whatsoever. Practices that, if considered in other contexts, which legitimize the sanitary logic, could be seen as impure and reprehensible practices.<sup>9</sup>

The idea of time representation dealt with by Schwint<sup>21</sup> with the aim of understanding the different logics of know-how that guide the work of craftsmanship in general can contribute to understanding the context analyzed here. For the author, individuals relate at all times to the world, to which they are integrated through aspects such as body, objects, nature, ethics, the symbolic and the imaginarity. Dimensions that can interact in different ways with each artisan and, when assimilated according to collective and individual history, contribute to constructing know-how as something determined and that shall be endowed with its own characteristics and identities.

In the midst of processes of sanitary, judicial, social, cultural and identity transformation, the craft Minas Cheese made in *Zona da Mata* also changes, without losing its traditional know-how, seized by these producers and reproduced throughout the last century. It can be said that it presents itself as identities that are (re)constructed over time and thus go on (re)constructing

borders, identifications and representations that contribute to the construction of their own know-how and constitutes their identities.<sup>21, 25</sup>

## Final thoughts

Minas Cheese can be associated with some people, those from Minas Gerais and their culture, giving their contribution to the construction of identities and representations. Therefore it is possible to think about Minas Cheese both from its material and immaterial aspects as an element that, as pointed out by Gonçalves,<sup>25</sup> fulfills the identity and constitutive function of subjective aspects of certain groups. Minas Cheese is capable of arousing in producers, consumers and the population a series of specific representations that can be regarded as an identity.<sup>17</sup>

The analyses carried out in this study have sought to shed light on the producers' representations about Minas Cheese on this product know-how, showing that it is the result of the articulation of a series of aspects surrounding these individuals' life, history and present. It is possible to perceive the know-how directly related to a set of techniques, the houses and everything referring to them. Linked to the past and people belonging to it, the cheese know-how is constructed by articulating rules, practices, routines, memories, feelings and changes.

It can be inferred that, in this case, know-how acts as a representative of a group and a product, but it can also be considered as some kind of thread of stories, happy and sad moments from the past to the present of specific groups. Therefore, know-how, which always occurs in the present, develops and represents the ancestors, thus conferring identity to groups and individuals holding it. For these producers, know-how, as well as cheese, represents the guarantee of an income that at the end of the month shall help with the families' expenses but it also represents some guarantee that the past, existing in these people's collective memory, materializes in gestures and cheese as the final product.<sup>18</sup>

Based on this research, it can be said that the Minas Cheese know-how represents senses and feelings, highlighted from these groups' memories. Memories involved in this know-how are varied. Memory of the great-grandmother's cheese that was "different," the way the grandmother would knead it, remove its whey. Memory of an era in which its commerce allowed purchases or when inspectors would confiscate all the cheese they would be taking to sell in town. Handmade Minas Cheese, although source of income, is also of meanings, a way of remaining connected to the past, even when incorporating modern practices and utensils. Being the moment in which know-how is practiced, the moment in which, unnoticed and unpretentious, past meets present.

## References

1. Brasil. Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional. O registro do patrimônio imaterial: Dossiê final das atividades da Comissão e do Grupo de Trabalho Patrimônio Imaterial. Brasília: IPHAN; 2006. 138 p.
2. Ginzburg C. O queijo e os vermes: o cotidiano e as idéias de um moleiro perseguido pela Inquisição. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras; 2005.
3. Perry KSP. Queijos: aspectos químicos, bioquímicos e microbiológicos. *Revista Química Nova* 2004; 27(2):293-300.
4. Meneses JNC. Queijo artesanal de Minas: patrimônio cultural. Dossiê Interpretativo. Belo Horizonte: IPHAN; 2006.
5. Cruz FT, Menasche R. O debate em torno de queijos feitos de leite cru: entre aspectos normativos e a valorização da produção tradicional. *Vigilância Sanitária em Debate* 2014; 2(04):34-42
6. Brasil. Portaria nº 146, de 7 de março de 1996. Aprova os regulamentos técnicos de identidade e qualidade dos produtos lácteos. *Diário Oficial da União* 11 mar. 1996.
7. Brasil. Ministério da Agricultura, Pecuária e Abastecimento – MAPA. Instrução Normativa nº 57 de 15 de dezembro de 2011. Estabelece critérios adicionais para elaboração de Queijos Artesanais. *Diário Oficial da União* 16 dez. 2011.
8. Bitter D, Bitar NP. Comida, trabalho e patrimônio. Notas sobre o ofício das baianas de acarajé e das tacacazeiras. *Revista Horizontes Antropológicos* 2012; 18(38):213-236.
9. Douglas M. Pureza e Perigo. São Paulo: Perspectiva; 2014.
10. Jodelet D. As representações sociais. In: Jodelet D. organizador. *As representações sociais*. Rio de Janeiro: Ed. UERJ; 2001. p. 17-41.
11. Sennett R. O artífice. 5ª ed. Rio de Janeiro: Record; 2015.
12. Assunção VK. Onde a comida “não tem gosto”: estudo antropológico das práticas alimentares de imigrantes brasileiros em Boston [tese]. [Florianópolis]: Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Centro de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas. Programa de Pós-Graduação em Antropologia Social; 2011.
13. Dutra RCA. Maneiras de fazer, modos de proceder: a tradição reinventada do pão de canela na serra da Mantiqueira, Minas Gerais. *Revista Horizontes Antropológicos* 2012; 18(38):237-253.
14. Abreu ES. Produção artesanal da microrregião do Serro: tradição, legislação e controvérsias [dissertação]. [Viçosa]: Universidade Federal de Viçosa, Centro de Ciências Agrárias, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Extensão Rural; 2015.
15. Bourdieu P. A dominação masculina. 11a ed. Rio de Janeiro: Bertrand Brasil; 2012.
16. Camargo FM. “Cozinhar é alimentar as futuras gerações”: estudo antropológico sobre a culinária trentino-tirolesa do bairro de Santa Olímpia, Piracicaba-SP. *Demetra* 2015; 10(3):663-674.
17. Froehlich JM. A (re)construção de identidades e tradições: o rural como tema e cenário. VI Congresso de La Asociación Latinoamericana de Sociología Rural (ALASRU). GT: Diversidad Cultural Rural, 2002.

18. Candau J. Antropologia da memória. Lisboa: Instituto Piaget; 2005.
19. Cardoso R. Building senses of “community” Social Memory, Popular Movements and Political Participation. *Vibrant* 1983; 10(1):134-144.
20. Zarifian P. Objetivo competência: por uma nova lógica. São Paulo: Atlas; 2001.
21. Schwint D. La routine dans Le travail de L'artisan.P.U.F. *Ethnologie Française* 2005; 35(3):521-529.
22. Vitrolles D. When geographical indication conflicts with food heritage protection: the case of Serrano cheese from Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. *Anthropology of Food* [Internet] 2011; 8. Disponível em: <https://aof.revues.org/6809#quotation>
23. Sahlins M. Cultura e razão prática. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar; 2003.
24. Goffman E. Estigma: notas sobre a manipulação da identidade deteriorada. 4a ed. Rio de Janeiro: Livros Técnicos e Científicos; 1988.
25. Gonçalves JRS. Antropologia dos objetos: coleções, museus e patrimônios. Rio de Janeiro: Coleção Museu, Memória e Cidadania; 2007.

Received: June 27, 2016

Reviewed: November 17, 2016

Accepted: November 25, 2016