

## Illegal Marketing and consummation of "*Bushmeat*" In the Context of Ebola Risk in Côte d'Ivoire: Socials And Logicals Strategies of The Actors.

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### Original Research Article

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**Abstract:** The Ebola epidemic from 2014 to 2016, which is hitting Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, three West African countries, will lead the Ivorian authorities to develop a prevention plan because of the country's geographical proximity to the first two cities. These measures include a ban on hunting, marketing and consumption of "*bushmeat*", but despite numerous awareness-raising campaigns and the restrictive nature of this measure, which exposes offenders to penalties ranging from simple fines to prison sentences, hunting, marketing and consumption of game have not diminished. Many individuals and restaurants have maintained this consumption throughout the crisis period. This resistance and the circumvention of the ban by scaffolding clandestine strategies for supplying markets and households with game highlight popular perceptions of the epidemic, the risk and the receptivity of the authorities' discourse in times of crisis. In other words, this situation raises the problem of individuals' relationships to the social norms erected in times of crisis. This article, based on data from a qualitative study carried out in Abidjan (the economic capital of Côte d'Ivoire) and Odienné in north-western Côte d'Ivoire, on the border with Guinea, discusses strategies to circumvent this prohibition measure and the rationale behind them. The study will present the actors involved and the supply chain of "*bushmeat*" in an illegal way, analyse the use of forms or strategies of circumvention by the actors of the "*clandestine*" bushmeat sector and show the stakes of the population's resistance to the standards of prohibition of game consumption.

**Keywords:** Ebola - Côte d'Ivoire - bushmeat - ban measure.

### INTRODUCTION

In 2014, in response to the spread of the Ebola epidemic in West Africa and the very real risk of contamination due to Côte d'Ivoire's geographical proximity to Guinea-Conakry and Liberia, affected by the disease, the Ivorian government took preventive measures, including a ban on hunting, marketing and consumption of bushmeat. Indeed, by a communiqué dated 26 March 2014, the Ivorian government announced a package of measures to prevent the outbreak and spread of Ebola virus disease in Côte d'Ivoire. Among the measures adopted was a ban on the hunting, marketing and consumption of bushmeat. The role of animals in human contamination having been demonstrated since the first cases of Ebola in 1976 in Zaire (now DRC), this ban is therefore part of the panel of restrictions developed by the World Health Organization in times of epidemic.

However, this prohibition was not unprecedented in terms of restrictions on hunting and consumption of game, since since 1974, Ministerial Order No. 3/SEPN of 20 February 1974 prohibiting hunting in Côte d'Ivoire has prohibited the hunting and marketing of game. However, the Order limits the number of game per hunter to two (02), intended solely for domestic consumption. Marketing is prohibited. But this Decree has never been applied in practice and is ignored by the majority of the population. Large-scale hunting, the establishment of commercial chains and game consumption has developed spectacularly over the years, with popular restaurants specialising in the sale of game. It can also be found on the menu of starred restaurants. Bushmeat markets have been created and are publicly known supply points. It is therefore in this context of significant game movement that this new ban linked to the Ebola risk comes into play.

This is why, in its strategy of awareness-raising and prevention in emergency situations, the Ivorian government has made this ban one of the measures whose offenders are exposed to several forms of repression, ranging from simple fines to prison sentences. Despite the public health emergency that presided over the decision, this ban will be one of the most controversial measures, generating rumours and various reactions among the Ivorian population, especially in forest

regions where game is at the heart of eating habits. The media coverage of the one-year prison sentence of a game hunter in the west of the country and the arrest of women restaurateurs who continued to offer bushmeat to their customers indicate that the ban measures met with deaf and passive resistance. Hunters, traders and consumers of game have never fully respected the ban.

On the basis of this paradox, what are the social rationales that justify the strategies of circulation, marketing and consumption of bushmeat by the Ivorian populations in violation of the ban on Ebola risk? Answering this question on the social logics (genesis of Ebola, social norms, representation systems, social practices, social relations between actors) that justify the adoption of such behaviours, amounts to identifying the actors present in the bushmeat supply chain during the prohibition period, describing strategies for circumventing the measure by actors in the illegal bushmeat sector during the prohibition period and showing the stakes of the population's resistance to the prohibition standards in a context of Ebola risk.

## METHODOLOGY

The study is based on qualitative data collected by a team of two (02) researchers and four (04) investigating agents<sup>1</sup> during the period January to March 2017... The qualitative approach of this research justified the use of semi-directive interviewing, Focus-group Discussion, direct observation and document analysis. The semi-directive interview made it possible to verify and deepen the relationship between the different variables retained (strategies for the circulation, consumption and sale of bushmeat and social logics), with reference to Ghiglione and Matalon [1]. The interviews, first exploratory and then formalized on the basis of interview guides, collected information on issues related to the dimensions of the problem studied. Spread over six (06) communes, including five (05) in Abidjan (Yopougon, Cocody, Abobo, Treichville, Port-Bouet) and one (01) in Odiénné<sup>2</sup>, 04 focus-groups and 37 individual interviews were conducted. The Focus-groups were made up of bushmeat consumers, nationals of Ebola-affected countries and, often, health workers. The idea was to stimulate debate in a group of 6 to 12 individuals on the strategies and rationales underlying game consumption during a ban period. The individual interview guides were administered to 24 consumers, 06 health workers, 04 bushmeat traders, 01 NGO managers, 02 departmental health directors, interviews with bushmeat consumers (including consumers in a ban context), and traders were conducted on the basis of a systematic survey of restaurant, bushmeat and network sites. Practitioners, Departmental Directors and NGOs working for them, were sensibly mobilized on the basis of their ability to provide information on ban standards and Ebola disease. The selection of focus participants was made by the network according to the characteristics of the participants we wanted to have in the focus groups (consumer, Ebola country national, health worker). In the discussions, we focused on the social context or genesis of the Ebola virus epidemic, the place of bushmeat in the daily lives of different communities, the systems of representation of bushmeat, the norms prohibiting consumption and sale, the relationships of individuals with meat and strategies to circumvent the ban, in short the social resources that justify the use of strategies for the consumption, circulation and sale of bushmeat in a ban context. This approach made it possible to identify the stakes of these social behaviours among the actors under study.

However, despite the measures taken, this research has encountered difficulties. The first and most important is related to the period of the study. Indeed, the study is part of the process of lifting the ban. Many people were reluctant to participate in this research, considering it a stunt to arrest people who had not respected the prohibition measures (some sellers had already been arrested and amended for illegal selling). The second difficulty concerns health workers, some of whom were hesitant or simply declined the offer to participate in the study despite the presentation of the authorization signed by the National Research Ethics Committee (NREC). They used the confidentiality of Ebola files as a pretext to avoid our investigation. Despite these difficulties, strategies to compensate and overcome these constraints made it possible to complete the research. Other strategies include the use of informal surveys, the use of a network technique by a focal point to recruit and negotiate appointments, the conduct of telephone surveys and the adoption of note-taking. The data collected (on digital media using dictaphones or note-taking), were transcribed, codified and processed. The analysis of the thematic content [2] of the corpus thus obtained, served to identify the following results: (i) Actors involved in the bushmeat supply chain. (ii) The use of forms or strategies of circumvention by actors in the illegal bushmeat sector. (iii) Issues of the population's resistance to prohibition standards among actors.

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## RESULTS

### The stakeholders and the capital's meat supply chain bush

If the marketing and consumption of bush lavender continued despite the ban and the surveillance measures adopted, it was because it had determined actors who developed a clandestine supply chain. This is why this first part of the results sets the scene for these actors and the supply system.

### The actors involved

In this study, the social categories of actors identified are, inter alia, hunters, sellers or traders, consumers and authorities responsible for monitoring the effective enforcement of restrictive measures.

First of all, hunters: they are the upstream actors of all bushmeat-related activities. They are classified into several groups according to geographical areas and hunting practices. Bahuchet S. [3] identified four types of hunters in his classification, including two rural groups and two other non-indigenous groups. The former are made up of villagers, who are also farmers and specialized societies, mainly Pygmy hunter-gatherers. The two groups alloctones, from other regions or cities, are "poachers", specialized hunters and employees of forestry companies. In the context of this study, the categories involved are generally village farmers [3] and "poachers" or specialized hunters<sup>4</sup>. Trapping or gun hunting, the techniques are now individual. The use of the rifle obviously requires ammunition, which is expensive (like the rifle itself, although locally manufactured, rather unsafe rifles are frequently circulating!). Hunting is often nocturnal, using electric torches Bahuchet S. (idem).

Then the sellers or traders. Once the meat has been killed, traders are responsible for selling it on the consumer market, either fresh or on the menu in their restaurants. This means that the group of traders is made up of intermediaries between the hunter and the restaurateur and restaurateurs.

The category of consumers is of diverse social class. All in all, urban consumers can obtain their supplies from two different types of suppliers: the retailer and the restaurateur. He can thus buy his game "raw" or in the form of a cooked dish, in a place of consumption. Finally, in the consumer group are the authorities responsible for enforcing the prohibition. These are generally police forces, gendarmerie, water and forests but also health workers included in the monitoring committees in the context of the Ebola alert.

### The supply chain

The Ivorian populations in general and those encountered during this study are dependent on the game trade for their supply. They therefore consume them during daily, occasional or festive meals, at home or in public places. This game or "bush" meat, which has been illegal since the ban, comes from all rural areas of the country's regions (North, South, East, West and Centre). As we said earlier, it is the result of hunting by trapping or by using shotguns. Bushmeat comes from fields, from classified or unclassified forests.

*"the meat comes from all over the country. Hunters or people with fields kill with guns or traps."* Comments from a trader in Yopougon

The transport of bush lavender to the capital during the ban period required the emergence of relay persons or a multiplication of distribution actors working either in a network (with complicity) or individually depending on the context. In the first case, it is the hunter who sells his game himself in the city, to households and restaurants where he offers it to the users he meets. But the latter case has become less frequent since the arrest and media coverage of a hunter. Hunters are now suspicious of strangers interested in bushmeat... In the second case, intermediaries are involved in the sale of the game on the consumer market. They are the ones who facilitate the circulation of most of the fruits of hunting in rural areas. They go to remote areas, villages and hamlets, collect and smuggle meat to the cities. Bahuchet & Ioveva [3] acknowledged that the most frequent chain has two intermediate buyers, including the collector and the reseller. The collector travels to the forest to meet hunters and transports the meat to the city. As for the reseller, he will

<sup>3</sup> The villagers are clearly involved in commercial hunting. Generally, this activity is in addition to all the others, agriculture, collection of non-wood products, etc. (cf. Bahuchet, chapter Production systems; Trefon&Defo 1999; cf. also Noss 1995).

<sup>4</sup> Poachers: the recession and its attendant layoffs have pushed many unemployed people out of the cities, increasing the number of professional hunters. They live in hunting camps inside the forest massifs, without contact with the villages, and they are considered dangerous, even suspected of being reprisals. - In Gabon, for example, the unemployed are looking for a more profitable and less constraining activity than agriculture and are involved in commercial hunting. Many hunting camps have been established around the reserves, near railway stations and logging sites. Some have even become villages with heterogeneous populations, where Gabonese from all regions and foreigners live together - particularly Equatoguineans (APFT surveys, M. Indjiely).

market it in the city to consumers. Resellers are generally urban dwellers. The collectors are often urban dwellers too, but not only. The collector can supply consumers directly, either by visiting regular customers at home or by meeting them at the point of arrival of packages, which may be a bus station. This is also where retail dealers, usually women, who will sell game in the form of cooked dishes in their restaurants, come to buy their supplies. The third form of delivery is the individual form. Consumers themselves went in search of this meat in rural areas and hid it in bags and suitcases to bring it back to Abidjan without the knowledge of the security forces. These comments by the respondent testify to this:

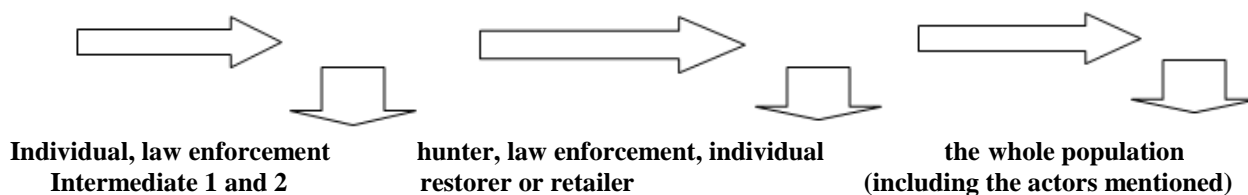
*"Because I myself travelled a lot, I left with the meat in Korhogo to come to Abidjan, I took with the hunters, I smoked it well there in Korhogo and I put it in my travel bag."*

The last category of relay in the transport of game to the capital is, according to the interviewees, composed of security guards responsible for ensuring the enforcement of the prohibition measure... Indeed, although they are entrusted with the role of law enforcement officers for any breach of the bushmeat law, these individuals are not disconnected from the traffic and clandestine consumption of bushmeat. They do not hesitate to use their social position<sup>5</sup> to transport this meat. In such a context, these dressed bodies are perceived as corrupt actors. They provided illegal traffic with financial resources. The speech of this Abobo consumer respondent illustrates this idea:

*"I think that the agents who themselves are in charge of monitoring, of denouncing, themselves were involved in this, they like money and scheming."*

The assessment of the identification of actors and the description of the illegal bushmeat supply chain shows that interpersonal and sustainable relationships are established between actors. According to the speeches collected, some collectors have their hunters, resellers have their privileged collectors, and regular consumers are provided by the same resell

**Hunters Collectors Resellers Consumers Consumers**



**Diagram:** Actors and supply chain for bushmeat in the context of Ebola.

As the challenge is to ensure the regularity of the supply and sale and consumption of bushmeat despite the ban, the development of resilience strategies is an alternative for them.

**The development of strategies for the circumvention of the prohibition measure by Actors in the bush lavender sector**

In Côte d'Ivoire, although there have been no cases of Ebola, rumours of suspected cases and the country's proximity to affected countries such as Guinea-Conakry and Liberia have prompted specific normative and practical measures to prevent and alert against the epidemic. The analysis of the data collected shows that, faced with restrictions on "bushmeat", populations have developed strategies to avoid the new standard. These strategies, although divergent according to the actors and their position in their relationship to this meat (consumer or seller), sometimes tend to be common. These strategies work because they operate in a socio-political context where the disease is analyzed by populations under an ideological prism highlighting the conspiracy theory, hence the social representations and idea systems that de-dramatize Ebola and trivialize the ban on bushmeat. They are symbolic in the sense that codes and expressions are put in place for sale and consumption and they are structural in the configuration of the relationships at work in sale and consumption.

**The socio-political context and conspiracy theory, de-dramatization and trivialisation of the disease as forms of resistance to the ban**

<sup>5</sup> The position of law enforcement officers often gives rise to advantages. And even if it's not a law, these agents are generally bound by their vehicles and the entire crew.

This practice is common for administrative vehicles.

### **The socio-political context and conspiracy theory**

The socio-political context in which the Ebola alert operates in Côte d'Ivoire is problematic. Indeed, after several years of military-political crises that shook the country [4-6], rumours have become commonplace according to the actors. The crisis has led to the emergence of many rumours and very strong perceptions in popular discourse. Thus, the series of armed conflicts has very often been perceived as a conspiracy, an imperialist war of the former colonial powers led by the former metropolis (France), which wanted to install docile and manipulable rulers at the head of the country. Under these conditions, all the actions taken are interpreted by the population as a strategy of political pressure aimed at getting leaders to accept leonine decisions or contracts.

The fear, confusion, multiplicity and speed of the sequence of events caused by these crisis situations have most often led to a strong demand for information, which has led to the circulation of many rumours. Froissart P [7]. states that "rule n°1 the disaster attracts rumour as it attracts information, no more and no less [...] rule n°2, every disaster generates a double discourse, rational and irrational, objective and subjective, scientific and folkloric. »

Epidemics, whether time-bound or rapid, are among those contexts that provoke rumours. The speeches and debates around Ebola disease in Côte d'Ivoire were made in this climate of rumours and the people's relationship to the disease proved to be closely linked to the country's history and the daily experiences of the Ivorians. The history of colonial domination, the effects of post-colonial intervention by the former colonial powers on the African continent, their support for some regimes and their role in destabilizing others have shaped many discourses accusing them of being at the root of the virus. Consequently, resistance to preventive measures is supported by ideologies that paint this disease as a plot, a media manipulation orchestrated by Westerners in the vanguard of the struggle. It is on this "conspiracy" perception that violations of the ban on hunting and consumption of bushmeat have been built, and the comments of our respondents below illustrate these accusations well.

*"I always say that it's white people's politics. If we don't collaborate with them, they'll fix you things you can't get away with. It's the same people who will find the drugs. It's the same people who find the diseases. Why can't we Africans find diseases ourselves? It is the same people who will leave there to say such a disease is in your country, it is they who always find a cure for it. It's French politics, we're used to them."*

*"Guinea has always refused the French, eh. They have always refused. They didn't want France at home until now. But France forces itself to go back there but they refuse so it's all bullshit there. That's why they put Ebola in their house. America, France, Russia, all of them, the same things."*

*"As we say, it's white that contaminates the world, we think they have the antidote. If they come to a country and maybe they have to exploit something like gold, they send this disease. We saw that in the Congo. They were exploiting Zairian minerals while the population died from Ebola there."*

The analysis of the above corpuses shows that the social chaos created by the Ebola epidemic seems to have left many events open to interpretation, free to serve as a springboard for rumour. In the general atmosphere of suspicion, any event - the mere presence of the virus - appears as a potential springboard, to such an extent that in the case of this epidemic, unexplained facts have served as support for either an "independent" rumour or an integrated rumour that is part of a more global account of the disease. Ebola is therefore presented as a post- or neo-colonial disease: "white" foreigners are considered responsible for the misfortunes in the former colonies [8]. As Niang [9] points out, people - who still have the injustices of the colonial and postcolonial periods in mind - do not trust the Westerners who came to help them. The indexation of foreigners in epidemic situations is one of the most immutable popular reactions since the great medieval epidemics [10-14]. According to G. Bibeau and R. Murbach [15]:

"Prejudice and the search for scapegoats reappear as soon as silence is no longer possible, the balance between individual and collective rights is weakened and human responses to the threat of contagion are part of what appears to be a very limited repertoire"

It was the rumour of the plot that led people to develop techniques to circumvent the ban on the circulation and consumption of game. Certainly a "conspiracy" perception has favoured a trivialization and de-dramatization of the epidemic, which has psychologically comforted potential consumers.

### **De-dramatization and trivialisation as forms of resistance to the ban**

Several ideologies and perceptions tend to de-dramatize and trivialize the epidemic of Ebola disease and the measures for its prevention. This de-dramatization and trivialisation of the disease are ideological resources aimed at legitimizing strategies to circumvent exceptional measures taken on the basis of the level of risk.

### **The discourse of ordinary illness**

By designating the dysfunction of the human body, the doctor contributes to creating the social reality of the disease. The medical judgment therefore has a legitimizing function, rehabilitation of care and patients as well as a de-dramatization of the disease [16]. From the interviews, it appears that Ebola is considered a disease like any other. Indeed, for practitioners, any new epidemic disease is dangerous and causes concern. But in the long run, it tends to disappear with its emotional charge. The eloquent example is, according to them, HIV/AIDS, which has triggered panic fears since its emergence and which, in recent years, seems to be contained even if no definitive treatment has been developed to date. The medical discourse is therefore ambivalent; stating on the one hand that it is a dangerous lethal disease, and on the other hand that there is no need to panic because the means to control it exist. They argue that this was due to the discovery in the 1990s of an Ebola strain in Côte d'Ivoire, called "Ebola Taï [6]" after the name of the eponymous region in the region where it was discovered. The presence of this strain in this forest has never caused Ebola in the region or in the country.

*"There is a subspecies of Ebola that has appeared in Côte d'Ivoire. So Ebola exists in the west of Côte d'Ivoire but it is less pathogenic, i. e. it is less deadly, less virulent than Ebola virus Ebola zaire. So it already exists. Now if the Ivorian policy was to take measures to prevent people from becoming infected. I think it is beneficial,"* says one practitioner.

### **The spiritual perception of the disease**

Ebola disease is also considered a curse or curse. According to actors under study, the countries affected by this epidemic have an enormous spiritual responsibility in this situation, which is not just a coincidence. Their populations are said to have transgressed prohibitions or offended their gods. The solution therefore lies in reparation for the damage, which consists in invoking the clemency of the gods through ceremonies and rites required in such circumstances.

Since Côte d'Ivoire does not have, according to them, the same spiritual beliefs as these countries affected by the epidemic, the risk of contamination is impossible, hence the uselessness of the battery of measures adopted by the government. This perception justifies and encourages the consumption of bushmeat in this ban context. This representation is no different from that of many Guineans who perceived this disease as an expression of a "fossi" curse [12]. Indeed, in a context of the sudden onset of the epidemic in this country that had never known it, the first cases of successive deaths in the same family were interpreted as a sign of punishment or a curse. The first cases in Macenta and Guéckédou were interpreted as reprisals by a fetish against a unilateral breach of a spiritual pact. Deaths in Coyah have been associated with a history of palm oil theft. In Forécariah people were talking about a history of money theft and adultery. This spiritual conception of disease is one of the features of African culture. As Djemo Fotso [17] points out,

"To some extent, there is no difference between a disease, a prolonged drought that burns crops or an excess of rain that floods them (...), the death of a child, the sterility of a woman, the lightning that strikes a person or (...) "falls" on a field or on a house. Some reasons for this:

- Both have a responsible person and need to be repaired.
- Whatever the nature of it, there is in all this the revelation that (...) something has been upset in the order of things.

A violent epidemic or disease that temporarily or permanently invalidates its carrier is perceived, according to the African conception, as a sign of a disruption of the order of things. For traditional societies, therefore, disease is a signifier whose meaning is the relationship of the individual or community to the "order of things". Whether it is true or false, what matters is that people believe in it viscerally, hence the aphorism so widespread in the South: "a death is never natural".

This perception, which consists in considering that the individual is not at risk if he has not violated a ban, has reinforced game consumers in their posture. This is reflected in the following speech:

*"We eat bushmeat and we have always eaten it. Guineans and Liberians know what they did to their ancestors and geniuses to deserve this fate." Focus group of consumers in the commune of Port-Bouet.*

### **Bushmeat: a social product**

For some respondents, bushmeat has always been socializing in the sense that it is a game that is most often shared throughout the community, especially during festive or painful events. Game is at the heart of the life of many communities.

<sup>6</sup> In 1992, a biologist working in western Côte d'Ivoire, in the Taï forest, was contaminated by a virus whose tests will indicate that it is a less virulent strain of Ebola. She survived the contamination and in turn did not contaminate anyone.

*"Bushmeat represents, well, something sacred, if I want to say it too much, maybe when you arrive at someone's house and they give you bushmeat, it means the person has too much esteem for you; too much respect for you, unlike the other chickens we always eat in Abidjan, so that's why bushmeat is a little exceptional"; "Imagine the joy of the patriarchs when a young person each week offers them a agouti or a hedgehog. »*

All these representations are explanatory resources for the trivialization and de-dramatization of risk while justifying and facilitating the sharing of strategies to circumvent preventive measures such as banning the sale and consumption of bushmeat. They are a real source of motivation for game consumers, especially since, for them, all germs and bacteria are destroyed when they are exposed to a temperature of 100°C., which is, according to them, the cooking temperature of their game.

But in this context of repression of traders and consumers, circulating bushmeat is not so simple. Unannounced raids by police forces in restaurants and media coverage of arrests will lead traders and consumers to develop a system of communication codes aimed at misleading the vigilance of authorities and the curious.

### **The use of codes and expressions by stakeholders as a means of circumventing the bushmeat ban in the context of Ebola risk**

Faced with the ban on all bushmeat-related activities, people have developed practices to circumvent the new regulations. Codes, expressions and relational networks have been mobilized to escape the repression net.

#### **The mobilization of a panel of codes and expressions by game traders and consumers**

To ensure that bushmeat consumption is sustainable during this ban period, game traders and consumers will, as part of the government's deterrent actions, develop a communication system that escapes the authorities and ordinary citizens. Each restaurant had its own codes and expressions that allowed consumers to order a dish of bushmeat from its restaurateur. There was a diversity of codes, some of which were cross-cutting. On the one hand, we note on the one hand, the codes made up of the first letters of the animals on the unacknowledged menu of the gastronomic spaces. For example, the letter "A" referred to agouti, "B" to deer, E to Hedgehog, P to pangolin, S to monkey, etc. This strategy is well illustrated by the words of a Yopougon consumer:

*"Mr. Good listen, when you arrive in the restaurant... in any case you have to be a local elder otherwise it's not worth it and then it's a code, that's it. You have to be initiated to know the code. So if I want a damn banana dish with agouti, when the waitress comes I say to her, I want a damn dish with A" that's a little bit".*

On the other hand, there was the use of names, code words and expressions. These include "débo", "secret", "yesterday's meat", "Déborah", "Ancient", "Curdents", "Ebo", "The old man", "Give me the same thing", "Give me my order that I asked you" and in the last hours, some people used to say "Ebola". This attribution of the disease's name to meat was a kind of trivialisation, a mistrust of the disease on the part of individuals who did not believe in it. In some restaurants, waitresses would ask customers if they wanted to eat outside or inside. Customers who are familiar with the codes know from this proposal that "eating indoors" means that there is game on the menu and that a discreet place is reserved for potential consumers.

*"The code frequently used at Toulepleu<sup>7</sup> was the word SECRET and others. As soon as we said there was a secret, we knew immediately that bushmeat was available in the area. And the transaction took place outside the trading venues and out of sight. ", Testimony of a Toulepleu consumer health worker visiting Abidjan during the study.*

*"When you arrive, "give me a secret", "ah and my dish I ordered? "Give me the old man, that's how it was. They called it Ebola. They say is what is old ya, is it Deborah ya, is it secret ya. That's what they called it. Speech by a restorer at Abobo N'dotré.*

In the end, these codes served as a means of communication between customers and restaurateurs and thus defined their way of operating the relationship that bushmeat structured in the context of prohibition.

#### **From the relational framework to the mobilization of "unauthorized" actors**

Codes and expressions functioned within a particular relational framework. They were based on friendly, family relationships cemented by trust, solidarity and confidentiality between consumers and restaurateurs. The possession of the code was not a sufficient guarantee to be used for game. In addition to holding the code, it was necessary to be known to the conservator or to be accompanied. The general suspicion that hovered maintained a feeling of mistrust among restaurateurs who were reluctant to serve bushmeat to the first person who came along; regardless of the code they held.

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<sup>7</sup> Toulepleu is a city bordering Côte d'Ivoire with Liberia

"It was trust even because it was risky. If she doesn't know you and you come and tell her, even if you say the name, she won't help you. Or you are accompanied by your friend whom the woman knows. Comments from an Odiénné consumer.

This relational framework went beyond consumers and restaurateurs. Indeed, the circulation of bushmeat was carried out with the complicity of certain security agents of Côte d'Ivoire as mentioned above. Responsible for monitoring the ban and themselves avoiding routine controls because of their function, some have taken the opportunity to act as a relay between hunters and retailers. They go so far as to alert shopkeepers in the event of a planned unannounced raid by police forces on restaurants for controls.

*"I know of cases where these police officers who are supposed to control there, when the prefect decides or the sub-prefect decides that we will go down into the maquis to check whether people eat or not, it is they who warn the maquis tenancières to say good... Those who come to control, say that you have to keep, hide, when you come, there is nothing and then you come back out with that, you sell."*

Analysis of such statements shows that corruption is an effective strategy according to the actors to pay for the services of enforcement agents. As a result, some of them were smuggling this meat in return for a financial resource.

### **Camouflage and game transport strategies to the capital**

Individual practices to circumvent the ban on bushmeat consumption have been developed. These are individual consumer initiatives. They themselves mobilized strategies to consume this meat. In this regard, according to the respondents, these consumers concealed the dried bushmeat in their clothes; put it in travel bags and suitcases to bypass excavations in the various corridors. Some even went as far as going down before the corridors with bushmeat to avoid possible police or gendarmerie controls, as evidenced by the following words from a consumer:

You pack it well and put it in your clothes in your suitcase. They pack it well as if it were a suit and then they come with it. Because we were going through the luggage. Often also when cassava and peppers come, we put these in to send.

The perceptions and different practices of social actors and controllers (have encouraged, legitimized and facilitated the circumvention of the hunting ban, the marketing and consumption of bushmeat. These representations respond to issues that go far beyond food needs.

### **The stakes of the population's resistance to prohibition standards**

#### **The preservation of spaces of weak social ties**

Individuals living in society and in community are enrolled in relational networks that allow them to establish a set of mechanisms that facilitate their integration and integration. Thus, the consumption of bushmeat in some areas is a symbol of unity and conviviality.

"People ate as well in rural areas as in urban areas. And among friends, we sometimes meet around these dishes to share a drink. And this takes place in an atmosphere of conviviality and joy. This is very important to us.

Weak links are forged between the actors through the consumption of bushmeat in the same gastronomic areas, since it was an opportunity to meet people and engage in festive activities.

However, the emergence of Ebola has challenged relationships between individuals. Indeed, according to the actors, Ebola has been a factor not only in restructuring but also in weakening social ties. This remark is as important as the ideology of the social product that bushmeat represents shows that bushmeat builds and maintains social spaces of weak ties. These social ties can be defined as the set of social relationships between individuals or groups: the network, the community and the collective identity. The network refers to the individual who may belong to different networks at the same time. The community is based on emotional and proximity ties that must be distinguished, in their nature and form, from the ties produced by society, such as relationships related to the exercise of a professional or associative activity. Collective identity is made up of ties of belonging, similarity; common representations or values. Speaking of these relationships, Granovetter M. [18] starts from a definition of the strength of a relationship as "a (probably linear) combination of the amount of time, emotional intensity, intimacy (mutual trust) and reciprocal services that characterize this relationship".

After having demonstrated that strong ties are never bridges, in other words, they do not allow groups of disjointed individuals to be linked together, he deduced that information that would only circulate through strong ties



would be likely to remain confined within restricted "cliques", and that on the contrary, it is the weak ties that allow it to circulate in a larger network, from clique to clique. As a result, it is their weak links that provide individuals with information that is not available in their restricted circle: "Individuals with whom we are weakly linked are more likely to evolve in different circles and therefore have access to information that is different from that received [19]".

### **Game consumption as a means of preserving cultural values and affirming privileged social groups**

#### **Preservation of cultural values**

The consumption of bushmeat is legitimized by an ideology of preserving cultural values. Indeed, some communities give this resource a prominent place as a social product. Thus, it occupies an important place in customary ceremonies. It is an integral part of the cultural identity of some peoples. The risks are therefore worth the effort for these populations who refuse to sacrifice their cultural identity on the altar of a health emergency that they do not perceive as such, as the following words from a consumer they met in the municipality of Cocody highlight this situation.

*"I am Agni," he said. "The bushmeat here is what we know. That's what we eat, that's what we've been used to since we were born. In our country, there are no big fish out there. It's bushmeat that's for us. So we can't leave because White said. Our parents there, they know each other well, it's never made anyone sick. In our country, if there is no bushmeat, it is because there is no meat because we take everything for granted. It is the bush that we have in our village, and it is bushmeat that we find in the bush.*

The perpetuation or preservation of cultural and identity values engages social actors in forms of deviation and resistance to prohibition measures.

#### **Game consumption perceived as an indicator of a rewarding social status**

Analysis of the data set shows that the consumption of bushmeat in urban areas is perceived as an external sign of a certain social descent. If in rural areas it is a sign of a lack of financial resources to buy domestic meat (chicken, beef, fish...), In cities, it is an indicator of social well-being. As the cost of bushmeat is prohibitive for many Ivorians, as it is high compared to that of domestic animals, consuming it regularly is perceived as having a privileged diet. Thus, linked to the question of identity, the prohibition could be a sign of the erosion or even the disguise of this comfort or this rewarding statutory dynamic.

#### **The capture of financial resources as an economic challenge of resistance**

Any social actor who adopts behaviour is first and foremost guided by a concern for rationality or logic. For the essential motive for all human activity is self-interest. We see the emergence of an emotional or even psychological principle that defines the purpose of economic activity: man obeys only the reason that gives substance to rationality. This subject is universal. Self-interest and rationality are permanent regularities at all times and in all places. In linking this principle to the context of this study, it is important to mention that this tends to be true. Traders and collectors have revealed that the issue of circumventing the ban is an economic one. Indeed, the ban has disrupted the law of supply and demand. The clandestine nature of the operations made demand remarkably higher than supply, with the risk factor driving up bids. Consequently, the illegal trade in bushmeat, at the moment of any illegal mass consumption product, will generate huge profits that will be captured by the actors who develop effective strategies often involving crooked control agents.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study reinforces those relating to bushmeat, Ebola and population resistance to measures to prevent and control the epidemic. The results show that it is the representations of the disease in relation to the socio-political and economic context in which it operates that have led individuals to violate the measures prohibiting all activities concerning bushmeat in context. This research is therefore a continuation of those that deal in a general way with the spread of Ebola disease [20, 9, 21], the social consequences of Ebola disease [22]. It is an extension of the studies of the communication on Ebola for the strict application of preventive measures carried out [23, 24, 24]. It goes beyond the socio-anthropological studies of Moulin A.M. [26], Faye S.L. [12], Desclaux A. and Sow K. [27], Anoko J.N. [28] and using data from some studies on the bushmeat sector [3, 29, 30, 31], she extends the analysis of authors such as Duonamou L. [32], Kouadio T. [33], Niakate H. [9], Cooney D[31]. The study also shows that populations are social actors with a social experience and experience that puts them in conflict with the norms set out. It departs somewhat from approaches that present Ebola as a disease that scares the entire population and, as a result, subjects all individuals to strict compliance with prevention standards.

In addition, the study shows that Ebola risk representations and government alerts do not always work in the direction of institutional norms. Populations are reappropriating certain ideologies to justify and legitimize their resistance practices and the circumvention of prevention standards. They are strategic players in Crozier's sense. Finally, in relation to the sociology of health, the study highlights some limitations of the institutional and normative logics of

public health and shows that, depending on the social context, norms, idea systems, practices and relationships, social actors produce resistance mechanisms that contradict the formal protection mechanisms in place for the prevention of Ebola.

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