A Lega Nord poster exhibits fidelity to Italian culinary tradition.

“Sì alla polenta, No al cous cous”:

Food, Nationalism, and Xenophobia in Contemporary Italy

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Abstract

This thesis explores how food has manifested itself as an integral part of Italian identity throughout history and continues to serve as a defining aspect of Italianess, even as the Italian landscape is changing rapidly due to immigration and global cultural exchange. I note how food fits into both Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of “habitus” and Benedict Anderson’s notion of nationhood as an “imagined community” and invoke these concepts to aid understanding of food’s integrality to Italian culture and society. I examine the current Italian demographic landscape, noting the recent influx of immigrants that has marked the last few decades and the often skeptical or negative responses toward immigrants that Italians hold. Using interviews conducted with both native Italians and immigrant or second-generation owners of foreign restaurants—all in Bologna—I seek to better understand the lived experiences Italian residents from varied backgrounds, ultimately showing that as some Italians cling to their culinary traditions in the face of perpetual change, food becomes a barrier to integration for immigrants seeking to make Italy their home.
Introduction

In Elizabeth Gilbert’s New York Times #1 Best Seller Eat, Pray, Love: One Woman’s Search for Everything Across Italy, India, and Indonesia, Italy serves as an embodiment of life’s pleasures, particularly its culinary ones. Gilbert goes to Italy as the first part of her three-part, yearlong journey—traveling the country and enjoying the food, wine, and art in a glamorized depiction of culinary tourism. The book remained on the New York Times list for 187 weeks, enjoyed Oprah Winfrey’s promotion, and was made into a movie starring the American actress Julia Roberts. We can see, through the successes of this book and its film adaptation, the extent to which foreigners romanticize Italy for its food.

During my year studying abroad in Bologna, Italy, my correspondence with family and friends back home nearly always defaulted to talk about food. A conversation losing steam could be reinvigorated with a question about the best pizza I had eaten recently, or which gelateria was my favorite. There is no doubt that people generally associate Italy with food. As someone with a particular interest in cooking and eating, I was aware of this correlation before I began my year abroad, and knew that Italians hold their culinary traditions in high esteem. But I was not fully aware of the degree to which food is valued as a fundamental element of Italian identity, nor did I realize the fervor with which Italians seek to preserve their culinary traditions. I experienced a full four-course meal topped off with homemade walnut liqueur when I visited a friend’s parents’ house, I listened to my seven-year-old tutee describe her favorite meal to me in detail, and I returned to my apartment at 3 a.m. to find my Italian roommate and her friends preparing an intricate pasta as their late-night (or early morning) snack. For Italians, across ages, genders, and social groups, food is the ultimate form of personal and cultural expression.
Meanwhile, less obvious to the eye of a tourist or study abroad student, Italian news is riddled with stories of boats packed to the brim with North African immigrants, one sinking off the coast of Lampedusa with tremendous loss of life;\(^1\) anti-immigration rallies attended by thousands led by the country’s far right party;\(^2\) and in one case, racist and sexist insults hurled at an Italian cabinet minister born in the Democratic Republic of Congo.\(^3\) Immigrants from North Africa, Eastern Europe and East Asia are arriving in Italy in ever-greater numbers, and the nation is consequently grappling with changes to its culture and customs, including those surrounding food. In this thesis I aim to investigate this changing contemporary landscape of Italy, juxtaposing the country’s distinctive food culture with the current crisis of immigration Italy faces. For I believe that the demographic changes occasioned by this influx of migrants are the constitutive context for understanding the obstacles to the emergence of a vibrant non-Italian culinary landscape in Italy. Perhaps this is one of the sociocultural characteristics setting Italy apart from its Western European counterparts. I am interested, then, in posing the following questions:

- If, as noted by several analysts food is not just something that fulfills a biological purpose, but is also a significant cultural marker, how is this aspect of food expressed in Italy?
- What are the factors that sustain particular culinary traditions, and how do these factors relate to the changes currently underway in Italy?

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• How might we begin addressing these sociocultural transformations through the optic of Italy’s culinary practices?

**Review of Literature**

Understanding the context of Italy’s culinary tradition is necessary before one can reach other conclusions about migrants’ culinary experiences. To this end, a key source is Italian historian John Dickie’s book *Delizia!* (date?), which details the history of food in Italy from the Roman era until today. Dickie’s book is painstakingly thorough, incorporating peripheral anecdotes and minutia that color the story he tells. He conveys the centrality of Italian food to Italian culture, but his book serves as an Italy-centric narrative that does not take into account the experience of marginalized populations in the country. My thesis seeks to read Dickie with a critical lens, injecting underrepresented, ignored or silenced perspectives into his noteworthy historical account, since, as anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot notes, modern, Western-centric accounts of history tend to overshadow or even omit certain underlying realities. Consequently, I want to focus on Italian culinary history in a way that gives voice to previously silenced perspectives.

Massimo Montanari, a historian of Italian cuisine, brings more nuanced accounts in his books *Italian Identity in the Kitchen* and *Italian Cuisine: A Cultural History* (2013). Montanari looks specifically at food’s impact on the history of Italy’s culture and identity. That is, he looks deeper than the factual history of Italian cooking, taking into account the broader implications on Italian society. Much like Dickie’s book, though, Montanari’s works (as useful as they have been to the structuring of my perspective) are Italy-centric. Nonetheless, I use the Italian framework

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laid out by them to situate the experiences of immigrants living in the country, along with other key texts.

An important resource in the discussion of immigrants’ culinary experiences is Anne J. Kershen’s 2002 edited volume, *Food in the Migrant Experience*, which addresses the experiences of immigrants who bring their culinary traditions to new countries in the UK, as well as nutritional challenges that face these immigrants. Culinary racism is not a major theme in the collection, but related topics in the book include anti-Semitic response to Jews’ ritual slaughter practices, and food as a marker of foreignness in England in the 19th century. Thus, the ways that food and culinary practices mark difference and catalyze racism are hardly new. Kershen’s book, however, looks at more specific food-related issues faced by migrants, as opposed to broader ways in which food can serve as a barrier to integration. By contrast, my work seeks to look at issues of food and migration through a broader lens.

The related field of “culinary tourism” is worth examining, as it also addresses the connection of food to familiarity implicit in my topic. In her essay, “Eating Difference: The Cosmopolitan Mobilities of Culinary Tourism,” Jennie Germann Molz describes culinary tourism as “practices of exploratory eating, especially those instances in which eating unfamiliar food or participating in alien foodways is seen as a way of encountering, knowing, and consuming other places and cultures.” Although Germann Molz focuses primarily on the experiences of white, Western, middle-upper class travelers, many of the dynamics at play in her work are directly applicable to the Italian experiences of “other” foods that will be addressed in this thesis.

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Further, ideas of mobility and the connection between food and place play a large role in the discussion of culinary tourism, and are relevant to the discussion of food as it relates to immigrant experiences. Germann Molz suggests, for example, the importance of looking beyond overly simplistic connections between food and place. She highlights the example of Italy and pasta, noting that although pasta is now inextricably linked to the idea of national Italian identity, it “became Italian through processes of globalization, hybridity, and creolization, moving it from its Chinese origins to eventually symbolize Italy” (emphasis added). Germann Molz thus reminds us of the effects globalizing forces such as immigration can have on a nation’s cuisine, even on what are considered to be its most familiar elements. Perhaps the most explicit connection to the idea of culinary racism comes in Germann Molz’ conclusion, where she states, “[E]ating foreign foods entails a quite literally embodied performance of the cosmopolitan characteristics of openness and tolerance toward difference as culinary tourists physically ingest Otherness.” Although her analysis is focused on the tourist who ventures toward the unknown and actively chooses an unfamiliar eating experience, one can also measure the distance from her “cosmopolitan” ideal embodied by a society that actively rejects such adventures within its own borders. Thus, in her frame, the resistance of Italians to ingest migrant cuisines implies, through this analysis, a certain backwardness or lack of modernization. These themes associated with culinary tourism will prove useful to keep in mind throughout this thesis. I hope to build upon the scholarship surrounding culinary tourism—which includes Lucy M. Long’s book Culinary Tourism, a collection of essays on the topic—by exploring more the intersections between race

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6 Ibid., 88. Here, Germann Molz uses the terms globalization, hybridity, and creolization to express how cultural elements can be adapted and co-opted through the course of history in order to fit into a certain narrative.

7 Ibid., 91

8 Germann Molz, “Eating Difference,” 78. Germann Molz notes the relativism of the term “Other,” and argues that “what counts as ‘Other,’ ‘different,’ ‘exotic,’ or ‘novel’ can only be named in relation to what it is ‘Other’ or ‘different’ from.”
and food that arise from the mobility of cuisines with people as opposed to the mobility of people alone, bringing to light food’s potential to define cultural exchanges within a local population.

Several incidents in recent years have illustrated the trend of culinary racism in Italy. Typically such events involve city officials banning a certain type of non-Italian cuisine, such as kebab. However, given the frequency of such occurrences, the scholarship around the topic is relatively sparse. Media theorist Antonia Mazel, currently working on a project exploring the culture and politics of food in Italy, proposed a project entitled, “Gastro politics in Italy: food, national identity, and the invention of tradition” in 2010. The proposal alludes to themes I hope to explore in this thesis: namely, the ways national and regional identities are constructed through food in the Italian cultural imaginary, and how these forces lead to what Mazel aptly refers to as “gastronomic xenophobia.”

In his 2011 thesis, “Food, Migration, and Identity: Halal Food and Muslim Immigrants in Italy,” Massimo Ferrara addresses Italians’ perception of halal food—that is, food prepared in accordance with Muslim law—and looks at the ways in which Muslims turn to Islamic food traditions to stay in touch with their religious and cultural identity while living in Italy. As Ferrara posited, “Muslim immigrants seek in religion a way to find their own identities. Halal butcher shops have become a place where Muslim immigrants can reassert their Islamic identity away from global influences and in a familiar and local setting that highlights their connectedness with their local space.” Ferrara’s paper addresses some of the issues I discuss in this thesis, such as the way immigrants experience their identity in Italy and the degree to which

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10 Massimo Ferrara, “Food, Migration, and Identity: Halal food and Muslim immigrants in Italy” (M.A., University of Kansas, 2011). Ferrara’s paper was written for a Master’s degree for the Center of Global and International Studies, University of Kansas.
they have incorporated Italian food into their diets. His paper does not, however, thoroughly document the way Italians experience immigrants’ cuisine, nor does it consider immigrant populations of non-Muslim origin. I plan to build upon Ferrara’s research by including experiences of other immigrant populations, as well as the multifaceted relationship between, on the one hand, Italians and their culinary traditions, and on the other hand, immigrants and their culinary traditions.

Throughout this thesis, I make use of Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of habitus to shed light on the cultural practices in which Italians and migrants seem to be embedded. Bourdieu elaborated the concept in his 1977 classic *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, widely regarded as one of the most important sociological books of the twentieth century. For Bourdieu, habitus refers to the set of unspoken social norms, or dispositions, that dictate the everyday life of a social group. It would therefore be nearly impossible for an ‘outsider’ unfamiliar with these dispositions to become integrated into the social group in question. It would also be difficult for an ‘insider’ to break away from those cultural traditions that have become unconscious or “common sense.” Given food’s centrality to everyday life, I make use of habitus to explain how food—inasmuch as it can serve as a measure of one’s belonging to a group—may also serve as an ultimate barrier to those deemed ‘outsiders.’ Bourdieu writes,

> The habitus is precisely this immanent law, *lex insita*, laid down in each agent by his earliest upbringing, which is the precondition not only for the co-ordination of practices but also for practices of co-ordination, since the corrections and adjustments the agents themselves consciously carry out presuppose their mastery of a common code…

Bourdieu points to the apparent innateness of the guidelines or practices that constitute a habitus, noting that such practices are inculcated by “earliest upbringing.” Immigrants are at a significant disadvantage, neither having been exposed to this “immanent law” during childhood nor having

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mastered the “common code” that would enable them to automatically act according to the norms that govern the group they seek to join.

The idea of habitus and its associated mores help to account for the existence of something akin to a national group, such as that described by Benedict Anderson’s classic phrase “imagined community.” Anderson demonstrates in his classic 1982 text on the rise of nationalism that members of a national community “will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”12 For Anderson, nationality and nationalism are “cultural artifacts.” That is, these concepts arise organically through shared sociocultural practices. For example, Anderson points to the invention of the printing press and its role in facilitating the spread of vernacular languages as a key moment in the formation of nationhood, as shared language helped to create the notion of a community among those who used it. I will look at food and culinary traditions through Anderson’s framework in an attempt to understand how food plays a role in cultivating national identity.

My thesis may be considered an intervention into current scholarship on food, culture, and migration. My focus is on Italy’s culinary culture, which ironically (as has been the case in most countries) is the outcome of that country’s appropriations of global products. Yet, to my mind, Italy’s cuisine serves as an embodiment of the country’s regionalist history and ideals and, consequently, a cultural space that is relatively closed off to immigrants. In my view, influenced by Italian historian and food expert Massimo Montanari, Italy’s turbulent history of unification left the country’s people yearning for common customs with which to identify, and food became a primary form of expression. Culinary customs (including recipes, the structure of meals, combinations of foods, dining schedules, and more) feed into the habitus defining Italian cultural

citizenship. That is, a fundamental understanding of the unspoken rules that govern the way people eat continues to serve as a prerequisite for Italian cultural citizenship.

The hundreds of thousands of immigrants who arrive in Italy are fleeing their homelands to find new places of comfort, and ultimately to recreate themselves as citizens of another polity. But they are oblivious to these culinary technologies of citizenship. Food, usually accounted for as Italian “tradition,” is a technology of citizenship that seems to define the very idea of Italian-ness. As such, it is my contention that food in this context, with which all Italians are familiar and which they jealously guard, presents itself as a soft but effective weapon in the identification, targeting, and distancing of ‘others.’ These migrants then face an immediate disadvantage given that the very idea of citizenship seems to be filtered through a recognition and participation in this culinary tradition. Simply put, migrants moving to Italy are ‘not versed in the way that culinary practices, which dictate the most important of Italians’ day-to-day rituals and interactions, exercise veritable barriers to the acquisition of citizenship status they crave. On the other hand, migrants seek refuge in the traditions of their own past locations, and may seek to intensify those culinary connections given the sorts of resistances that Italians themselves engage in to secure their ties to their homelands.

Methodology

My project is based on two main sets of interviews, one comprising twenty people of Italian heritage living in Bologna, and the other of thirteen immigrant or second generation owners of foreign restaurants in Bologna. These interviews were supplemented with informal observations and experiences accumulated over the course of my nine-month study-abroad
sojourn in Bologna. I conducted all interviews in Italian (unless the interviewee requested that we speak in English) and translated them.

My questions addressed to native Italians were written with the intent of better understanding Italians’ food habits and habitus, with respect to both Italian food and non-Italian food. I chose interview subjects based on connections I had in Bologna. I relied on peers from my study abroad program as well as Italian friends to put me in contact with people willing to be interviewed. My subjects’ ages ranged from teenage to fifties, and they hailed from all over Italy (although the largest group of respondents was from Bologna). I used the same set of questions to structure all the interviews within this set, but allowed respondents’ answers to guide the course of the conversation. I include gender, age range, and city of origin in describing my participants. Their names have been left out, as they have no bearing on the content of the responses.

I interviewed owners of foreign restaurants to better understand the immigrant experience in general, as well as the environment in which these restaurateurs cook and sell non-Italian food. I entered non-Italian restaurants at random, explained my project to the owners, and requested their participation in my informal survey. Their countries of origin were China, India, Pakistan, Turkey, Iran, and Greece. As with the native Italian interviewees, I used the same set of questions for all foreign restaurant owners, adapting them as necessary as I went along. Also as with the aforementioned set of interviews, I did not include names or restaurant names to protect respondents’ privacy.

Other primary sources include notable Italian cookbooks that shed light on the way food is perceived, and propaganda of the *Lega Nord*, Northern League, an Italian political party noteworthy for its alarmist anti-immigrant rhetoric.
To help situate and interpret my primary research, I rely on existing scholarship, including theories I mentioned above (Bourdieu and Anderson), and other works that serve to illustrate the political and cultural landscape in question.

**Thesis Overview**

Chapter One addresses the connections between food and personal, regional, and national forms of identity. I show how in Italy in particular, children are encouraged to cultivate their personal tastes from early childhood. Then, I highlight the tension between national and regional perceptions of Italian cuisine, and outline the ways in which food has played a role in forging ideas of identity on both of these scales. I show how Slow Food, an international food movement with Italian origins, embodies many of the characteristics that Italian respondents pointed to in describing Italian cuisine. Ultimately, the chapter shows the degree to which ideas of food, identity, belonging, and nationhood are intertwined for Italians. It informs later arguments—which take into account non-Italians and their integration into Italian society—by giving an idea of the extent to which food is embedded in Italian culture.

Chapter Two addresses xenophobia in Italy in recent decades in light of mass immigration to the country, in the context of broader immigration trends in Europe. I look specifically at the *Lega Nord* (the Northern League), a particularly anti-immigrant party from the country’s northern region whose rhetoric echoes, in harsher terms, some of the themes addressed in Chapter One. The Northern League’s propaganda has been widespread and highly publicized over the past two decades, and has included rallies, posters, and speeches. Focusing on the *Lega Nord* helps us to understand the way in which xenophobia is institutionalized within the very politics of Italy. Following discussion of the *Lega Nord*, I look into documented cases of
culinary racism in the country. I define culinary racism as prejudice toward an ethnic group, likely a minority, that is manifested through skepticism toward and/or dislike (or even restriction) of that group’s cuisine, often based purely on the culture with which it is associated. Examples of culinary racism include the banning of kebabs and other non-Italian foods from certain Italian cities, the geographical bias in favor of Italian restaurants in many Italian cities, and simply the reluctance or refusal on part of some Italians to consume unfamiliar foods. I conclude the chapter with perspectives from Italian interviewees, whom I asked about their familiarity with foreign foods, and the frequency with which they consumed non-Italian food. By discussing xenophobia in political, social, and culinary contexts, Chapter Two, in tandem with Chapter One, shows how food can be understood in the context of much bigger trends occurring in the Italian state. We also see how food serves as an everyday instrument by which people opt to accept or reject the other.

In Chapter Three, I examine Bologna and the situation of restaurant owners in the city. Many regard Bologna, known for its food, its university, and its left leanings, as the most liberal city in Italy. In this context I examine the status of foreign restaurants. Based on interviews with restaurant owners as well as my own observations, I note that the clientele of foreign restaurants is largely composed of young people. Additionally, I argue that, for many purveyors of foreign foods, Italy becomes the site where culinary hybridization and fusions are the norm. That is, restaurant owners need to adapt their traditions in order to appeal to the Italian audience. Adopting Michaeline Crichlow’s concept of diasporic habitus, I explain how immigrant or first generation restaurant owners are forced to adapt to or accommodate the challenging Italian environment.
CHAPTER ONE: FOOD AND ITALIAN IDENTITY

During nine months living in Bologna, I became aware of the degree to which Italian culture revolves around food. Italians of all ages have strong opinions about food and appreciate its significance as a defining aspect of their identity. The nine-year-old Italian tutee of a classmate, for example, would frequently regale her English tutor with enthusiastic descriptions of recent meals and her favorite dishes. Meanwhile, her 12-year-old brother would express his horror when told of different ways Americans interpret Italian food (alfredo, for example, which in America is made with cream and often sold as jarred gloop, contains just parmigiano and butter in Italy), as well as certain American classic combinations (peanut butter and jelly, for instance, or chicken and waffles) that were firmly incompatible with Italian cuisine and genuinely incomprehensible to him. Meanwhile, university students, instead of eating on the go or in the library (as American students are wont to do) often take an hour or two out of their days to return home and prepare a full meal, which they leisurely eat in the company of several friends. Meals in general are not rushed, tending instead to be social affairs. Breakfast often consists of sipping an espresso at a bar and enjoying a pastry, perhaps chatting with the bartender or reading the newspaper before leaving for work. It is telling that coffee-to-go is extremely difficult to find in Italy. Coffee, like other culinary rituals, is meant to be enjoyed in a leisurely fashion: one can buy one tiny espresso at a café and sit for hours, never hurried by a waiter.

These particular views when it comes to eating and drinking represent Italians’ deep connection to food. Such connections are nurtured in Italians from early childhood, and these connections come to be key to Italians’ shared habitus, Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of the day-to-
day practices and norms that define a social group. I will explore Bourdieu’s concept further in this chapter.

**Cultivating Culinary Identity**

Aspects of Italy’s culinary sociocultural practices are more readily grasped when compared to those of the US. Anthropologists Elinor Ochs, Clotilde Pontecorvo, and Alessandra Fasulo point to a major difference between American and Italian families when it comes to the dinner table. In many American families, children are rewarded with what they supposedly *want* to eat (sugary desserts) if they eat what they *have* to eat (main dish, vegetables). In Italy, on the other hand, meals tend to end with fruit. The rhetoric that frames the end portion of a meal as more desirable than earlier courses does not exist.\(^\text{13}\)

Ochs, Pontecorvo and Fasulo also note that Italian children are encouraged to assert their preferences at the dinner table, as cultivating individual culinary likes and dislikes is seen as part of developing a personality.\(^\text{14}\) In their comparative study of American and Italian dinner table experiences, the researchers found that Italian parents are particularly attentive to their children’s preferences and often note to provide items that will satisfy all their children in one meal. Their offspring themselves are more vocal and culinarily literate than their American counterparts. Children participate in dinnertime conversations about recipes, food shopping, and new preparations to try. In fact, a five-year old girl, Stefania, questioned the origins of a new type of bread on the dinner table and applauded her father for his choice of baker.\(^\text{15}\) Food is one of the first things Italians learn to form opinions about.

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\(^\text{14}\) Ibid.
I witnessed this phenomenon in my interactions with Bolognese children and parents. One of the subjects I spoke with in Bologna, an economics professor and native of the Veneto region, is the father of the nine-year-old English language tutee mentioned earlier. He told me, proudly, that his daughter’s enthusiasm goes deeper than just excitement over recent meals: she is remarkably passionate about la carne. “For her, meat is the best thing in life,” her father said. He added, “My wife’s father was a butcher, and for him, meat was everything.” His daughter never got to know her grandfather since he died when she was nine months old. Nonetheless, the memories of the man shared with her by her parents have had a noticeable impact. Laughing, her father told me that at age four, she wanted to raise a pig to slaughter for salami and prosciutto.

One would likely be hard pressed to find an American four-year-old with such a profound interest in the origins of deli meats. This Italian case sheds light on just how integral food is to character development in the country.

Bourdieu points to the integrality of food during a child’s development. “It is probably in tastes in food that one would find the strongest and most indelible mark of infant learning, the lessons which longest withstand the distancing or collapse of the native world and most durably maintain nostalgia for it,” Bourdieu writes.16 Anthropologist Sidney Mintz uses this passage in his investigation of why something as commonplace, as biologically necessary as food can be imbued with such cultural significance—and not just in Italy.17 But this “indelible mark of infant learning” persists for Italians of all ages and classes, whereas in other countries it might be overshadowed or masked by nutritional concerns or other learned traditions. Food, indeed, is a strong evoker of memory. In his article “Food and Memory,” anthropologist Jon D. Holtzman

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cites anthropologist David Sutton, noting “how the sensuality of food causes it to be a particularly intense and compelling medium for emotion.” Remembering food is not purely cognitive but rather, food experiences can also evoke memories that are physically and emotionally stimulating. Holtzman notes that ethnic identity is often cited as a context through which food and memory are connected. In the case of Italian national identity, food practices are emphasized in many coordinated arenas of Italian households, conditioning children in their culinary choices from a young age and cementing the links among, nation, food and Italian identity. Because food is a strong trigger of memory, Italians’ connection to food is an emotionally charged marker of identity.

Nationwide attention to the cultivation and appreciation of tastes in food conditions Italian children’s ability and desire to make personal judgments about taste. Those who are born in the country and grow up in Italian households are given the social space and raised to have the ability to speak about food seemingly naturally, and to make personal judgments about it (within the limitations established by their parents). The Italian household, then, serves as an ideal component of the broader Italian habitus and its culinary traditions. There, children have the authority to form their own opinions in an environment that is both the product of and helps produce and sustain a larger cultural system. How has food become so cemented in the imagination of Italians, making it so central to their sense of place?

**Tracing the History of Italian Food**

The roots of Italian cuisine date back to the Middle Ages, and likely were the product of the Romans’ encounters with so-called “barbarians” centuries earlier. Roman nourishment was driven by agricultural pursuits, leading to a diet of bread, wine, and oil, as opposed to the

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barbarians, who depended on meat and other animal products—part of their forest-dwelling and hunting-oriented lifestyle. Born from this intersection, food, historian Massimo Montanari posits, was an “agro-forest-pastoral” model, in which grains were as equally important as meat and dairy. In these beginnings we can perceive the nutritional balance that would become a unifying element of the Italian diet.

Before such a diet can be labeled “national,” however, one must account for the regionalism that characterizes Italian cuisine. Throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, urban centers developed across the territories we think of now as part of Italy. With these centers grew a market for delicacies from specific locations. Parma, for example, became known for its production of parmigiano and prosciutto di Parma. As Montanari explains, “the countryside produces; the city directs the produce to the urban market and gives it the denomination of its own identity; the urban market distributes the product in a commercial space.” Such notions of urban identity persist today, as we still associate Parma with Parmesan cheese, for example. Other cities, although their names may not be as familiar in the U.S. through food-related products, are still anchored by their food production. For example, Modena is noted for its manufacture of traditional balsamic vinegar, and Sorrento for its limoncello.

Also during the Middle Ages, and in contrast to these location-specific products, Montanari explains, pasta became common throughout the Italian peninsula. Although lasagna dates back to ancient Rome and long noodles are of Arab origin, during the twelfth century, the manufacture of dried pasta spread and became industrialized. By the thirteenth century, pasta factories appeared, as did new shapes and preparations of pasta (maccheroni, tortelli, and ravioli, for example). The ubiquity of a simple, recognizable, and adaptable element such as pasta came

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20 Ibid., 8
to represent Italian cuisine. Such common elements “define a powerful and specific cultural identity,” Montanari says. Thus a few key elements become deep-seated universals in the Italian food habitus, even as interpretations vary by region. In pasta we find the play between region and nation that is central to our argument.

**Unified Country, Unified Cuisine?**

Until the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Italian peninsula remained a conglomerate of independent states, including the papal state and those ruled by the French and Austrians. The movement for a unified Italy began in 1848, as wealthy classes rose up against the foreign powers under whose control they lived (specifically, the states of Lombardy-Venetia and Milan challenged their Austrian rule). Revolution was quelled the following year, but the sentiment did not disappear. In 1859, Piedmont-Sardinia orchestrated a push for unity under the guidance of Count Camillo di Cavour. By allying with the French to defeat the Austrians, Lombardy shook foreign control and joined the Piedmontese-Sardinians. Elections in 1859 and 1860 confirmed the northern states’ intent to join Piedmont-Sardinia. Giuseppe Garibaldi’s famous crusade through Sicily and Naples handed over the southern states to Victor Emanuel II, king of Piedmont-Sardinia, allowing him to declare Italian unity in 1861.

The newly formed country was faced with the task of bringing together several previously distinct states, each with its own laws, government, army, culture, and numerous dialects. A sense of a collective Italian identity did not exist among the recently separate territories’ peasant populations. Such a national identity or imagined community, did, however

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21 Montanari, Italian Identity in the Kitchen, 14.
exist between members of the new territory’s bourgeoisie, who were not confined by former regional divisions. Whereas peasants lived in “local circumscribed” spaces, the upper classes experienced a broader “Italy” well before the country’s unification. Further, according to Montanari, “alimentary and gastronomic models—always a decisive element of collective identities—were an integral part of the culture that brought together the Italian territory’s elite leading up to national unification.”

Indeed, Benedict Anderson shows how ideas of nationalism breed from existing cultural norms, as was the case with Italy. As Anderson stated, “Nationalism has to be understood by aligning it, not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which—as well as against which—it came into being.”

Italian cookbooks, which document culinary traditions through the years, evolved to become more national in scope, thereby paralleling the formation of an Italian nation. From the thirteenth to the twentieth century, cookbooks and books about food shifted from local dialect productions, reflective of very specific regions, to nationwide cultural benchmarks. Early cookbooks include several from the Renaissance, such as Libro della Cocina Bolognese (“Book of Bolognese Cuisine,” written in the Tuscan dialect) and Libro per Cuoco (“Book for Cooking,” written by an unidentified Venetian). One of the more famous cookbooks of the time—published in the mid-fifteenth century—was Maestro Martino’s Libro de Arte Coquinaria (“Book of the Culinary Art”), later adapted and printed in 1474 by Bartolomeo Platina as De Honesta Voluptate et Valetudine (“On Right Pleasure and Good Health”), to become “the first printed

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24 Montanari, Italian Identity in the Kitchen, xvi.
25 Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities, 12.
cookbook to circulate throughout Italy." It was translated into Italian 13 years later. Most of these texts, however, were written either in a regional dialect or in Latin, and were thus inaccessible to the entirety of the Italian peninsula for reasons of both limited circulation and illegibility.

The most famous of the Italian cookbooks is Pellegrino Artusi’s *La Scienza in Cucina e L’Arte di Mangiar Bene* (“Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well”), published in 1891. It is in effect Italy’s *The Joy of Cooking*. Artusi (who, incidentally, spent a good amount of time in Bologna) was unable to find a publisher for his initial volume, so he paid out of pocket for the publication of 1,000 copies, which he distributed upon individual request. From this inauspicious beginning, its popularity grew enormously, and the book has been in continuous publication ever since. Published 30 years after Italy’s unification, the book was able to reach a developing middle class as the nationwide language we are familiar with today began to replace regional dialects. The first edition of the book contained 475 recipes, and the 13th edition, the last published before Artusi’s death, featured 790 recipes. Although in all editions of the book the bulk of recipes come from Tuscany and Emilia-Romagna, the scope expanded in successive editions to reflect the cuisines of other regions of northern and central Italy. It did not ever include specialties of the south, as Artusi was not exposed to those regions. But that did not stop it from becoming a cornerstone of “Italianism” during the years following Italy’s unification and beyond.

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27 *The Joy of Cooking* is an American cookbook originally published in 1931 by Irma Rombauer. It has been in continuous publication in America since 1936 (the most recent edition was the book’s ninth) and has sold millions of copies.

Artusi’s work came, in fact, to represent and reinforce the habitus of Italian cooking: that untutored familiarity that any home cook has with her or his ingredients, techniques, and dishes. Artusi’s writing style is conversational and narrative (he writes in the first person); his instructions, approximate. For example, the introduction to a recipe for a basic frittata reads, “Who doesn’t know how to make frittatas? And who in the world has never in their life made some kind of frittata? Anyway, it won’t be all excess to say a couple words about it.” The recipe that follows is not written in a bullet-pointed, step-by-step manner—much like its introductory paragraph, it is quite conversational and informal. This informality and reliance on a shared set of experiences with the reader reminds us of Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, which speaks to the creation of the familiar: the person living on the inside has “a feel for the game”; such feelings become basic common sense, without any need for even thinking about them.

L’Artusi, as Italians refer to it, was written soon after the advent of industrial-scale printing. Given the geographical scope it achieved, in addition to its accessible language and content, L’Artusi can be seen as a prime example of the influence of the printing press to the formation and spread of nationalism Benedict Anderson outlines in Imagined Communities. Anderson points to the intersection of industrial printing and capitalism as crucial to the generation of a widespread idea of nation, as this juncture facilitated the quick spread of a solidified national language. Just as the Italian language was becoming uniform and equalizing, so was cuisine, via Artusi, achieving national significance. Thus Italy’s idea of nationhood was

29 Source’s emphasis
30 Pellegrino Artusi, La Scienza in Cucina e L’Arte di Mangiar Bene (Turin: Giulio Einaudi editore s.p.a., 2001), 166-167.
predicated upon the development of both a shared language and a shared cuisine, both of which went hand in hand thanks to the role played by Artusi’s groundbreaking book.

Food historian Carol Helstosky examines *La Scienza in Cucina* alongside Filippo Marinetti’s *La Cucina Futurista*, an expression of Marinetti’s futurist philosophy written forty-one years after Artusi’s book. Both authors, Helstosky argues, wrote their books with the intent of cultivating a sense of cultural unity through food in order to build a stronger nation. The earlier book was meant to be utilitarian, an instrument applicable to the kitchen. The other, written as part of a larger political statement, was not. In fact, Marinetti’s book advocates for the abolition of dried pasta, the inclusion of something called *brodo solare* (solar broth) into an ideal futurist lunch, and “the dosed use of poetry and music as ingredients to ignite with their sensual intensity the flavors of a given food.” Its deadpan recipes clearly vary substantially from those found in a typical cookbook, and it is obviously not meant to be taken as such.33 Indeed, the book’s publication was met with alarm, particularly to Marinetti’s bolder suggestions, such as the idea of abolishing pasta.34 Nonetheless, Marinetti, like Artusi, conveys a message about national identity through food. Further, he presents through his “cookbook” his broader Futurist ideals of anarchism and fascism.35 (We shall encounter this connection between food and politics again in Chapter Two.) Although Artusi supported building a nation from the ground up while Marinetti promoted state-imposed national identity, both saw how important food was to the Italian nation-building process.36 The fact that two food-focused works are remembered as political statements about the future of the Italian nation is telling and distinctly Italian. It’s hard

36 Carol Helstosky, “Recipe for the Nation: Reading Italian History through *La Scienza in Cucina* and *La Cucina Futurista*,” *Food & Foodways* 11, no. 2 (2003), 115.
to imagine that another country could take books about food as seriously as Italians took (and continue to take) Artusi’s and Marinetti’s.

**Just How Italian Is “Italian” Food?**

Given the intimate connection between Italian food and Italian national identity, it is ironic to note that many items we now think of as staples of the cuisine were brought from far away by foreigners. According to John Dickie, scholar of Italian food, “the history of Italian food begins when spaghetti enters the food dialogue between the Italian cities.”\(^{37}\) In other words, Italian food is unimaginable without spaghetti. Yet spaghetti was imported to Italy (through Sicily) by Muslim invaders during the Middle Ages.

Another celebrity Italian ingredient did not enter the scene until remarkably recently. Antonio Latini was the first to mention tomato sauce in a cookbook published in Naples at the end of the seventeenth century. The tomato, however, remained in a cameo role for another century. The fruit was native to South America and was domesticated before the arrival of Europeans; it was brought back to Europe by the Spanish in the 16\(^{th}\) century and only later made its way to the Italian kitchen.\(^{38}\) Before tomato sauce became prevalent, pasta was often cooked with broth, milk, cheese, sugar, and spices—and even dried fruit.\(^{39}\) Vincenzo Corrado published a cookbook, *Il Cuoco Galante (“The Gallant Cook”)* in 1773, detailing several ways to prepare tomatoes, but even he didn’t mention sauce. The first mention of something resembling spaghetti with tomato sauce (in this case, *vermicelli con salsa di pomodoro*) comes from a cookbook in Naples in 1844.\(^{40}\) In other words, spaghetti was around for about 700 years, and Italy was just a

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\(^{39}\) Dickie, *Delizia*, 72-74.

\(^{40}\) Ibid., 173
few years away from unification before arguably the most easily recognized dish—a veritable staple of Italian cuisine, at least on the international stage—existed in the canon of Italian recipes. Two of the Italians interviewed mentioned the tomato as a key element of Italian cuisine and, interestingly, both acknowledged as an aside that the tomato is not of Italian origin. The tomato stands apart from the other elements of Italian cuisine in this way, the vast majority of which can be traced back to Italian agriculture’s historical roots. It is the only one that, for interviewees, required a disclaimer when being listed among other common Italian ingredients.

The dominant narrative surrounding Italian-ness and Italian cuisine has obscured the true history of the tomato. The late Haitian-American anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot points to global flows that are masked by the tendency of the North Atlantic region to appropriate history to frame itself as a constant locus of power and modernity. Says Trouillot, “Our contemporary arrogance, which overplays the uniqueness of our times, may blind us to the dimensions of what happened before we were born. It may therefore be useful to document the density, speed, and impact of the global flows that made up this Atlantic moment.” The “Atlantic moment” in question is, according to Trouillot, post-World War II, a time in which power and the domination of global exchanges were wholly concentrated in the countries bordering the Atlantic. But centuries of global exchange of goods and people preceded this Atlantic moment, due to dynamic and active European contact with the Americas, Africa, and Asia. The identities and histories that exist today and are deemed “traditional” were created several centuries ago through complex and now hidden processes of transfer, domination, and hybridization. Trouillot, in fact, points specifically to the case of the tomato, noting that although its history as a South American crop is not necessarily denied, that history is significantly overshadowed by the dominant

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41 Ibid., 172-173
narrative that favors the North Atlantic and thus the tomato’s place in the Italian culinary canon. As Trouillot opines, “Culturally, the world we inherit today is the product of global flows that started in the late fifteenth century and continue to affect human populations today. Yet the history of the world is rarely told in those terms.” Trouillot’s argument forces us to reconsider not only the tomato, but claims to authenticity on the part of any location, not least Italy. And as Bourdieu notes, habitus cannot be separated from history. He writes, “The system of dispositions – a past which survives in the present and tends to perpetuate itself into the future by making itself present in practices structured according to its principles...is the principle of the continuity and regularity which objectivism discerns in the social world without being able to give them a rational basis.” The set of norms that have come to constitute habitus are not historically separate and distinct. On the contrary, they are comprised of layer upon layer of history, even if it is only the top layer that one sees. One may also consider these histories to be entangled with the norms they feed, if not as hidden as layering implies.

The historical facts of the tomato’s introduction to Europe stands in opposition to the impression, as we have seen, that many Italians have of themselves: a country with a cuisine completely authentic, deeply rooted, original, and more or less uniform throughout the peninsula.

Spaghetti and tomatoes have had centuries to become integrated into Italian cuisine, but other less obvious ingredients and dishes are constantly being introduced and appropriated and “traditionalized.” The study of Artusi’s 1910 edition will reveal some surprising omissions of dishes today thought of as classically Italian, such as spaghetti alla carbonara or pasta aglio e olio. According to food historian Zachary Nowak, such absences indicate “all the modern

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43 Ibid., 34.
44 Pierre Bourdieu, Outline of a Theory of a Practice, 82.
classics are indeed quite modern, quite recent, confirming that the norm for Italian food history is anything but static.\textsuperscript{45}

In summary, as Dickie states, “The contemporary era is the era of national foods, dishes that, for the first time in history, have united culinary Italy from north to south, and from top to bottom of the social scale.”\textsuperscript{46} This unity is an amalgam of culinary traditions pulled from many distinct regions, sealed together with a shared imagination, possibly spurious but nevertheless active, of what “Italian” means, is, and does. Anthropologists Erick Castellanos and Sara Bergstresser argue the national identification of Italy with food has evolved into something of a superiority complex for Italians. “What has emerged is what La Cecla terms ‘al dente chauvinism,’ the belief by Italians that no one eats as well as they do.”\textsuperscript{47} As much as they might value and celebrate their own cuisine, Italians are often hard pressed to define it, suggesting a defensiveness akin to processes of identity formation in general, where one is hard pressed to define what one is as opposed to what one is not.

**What Is “Italian Food” Today?**

Faced with the question “[W]hat is Italian food?” interview subjects tended to answer in one of two ways. Several respondents offered holistic descriptions of their cherished cuisine, commonly using the word *cultura* to express that often inexpressible connection of habitus to taste (in this case, taste in its literal sense). Respondents were not hesitant to use language expressing a real passion for food and its history. According to a recent university graduate, “[Food] is our way of being. It’s a part of our culture.” Coming from a respondent who seemed

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\textsuperscript{46} Dickie, *Delizia!*, 308.

\textsuperscript{47} Sarah Bergstresser and Erick Castellano, “Food Fights at the EU Table: The Gastronomic Assertion of Italian Distinctiveness” in *Food, Drink and Identity in Europe*, ed. Thomas Wilson (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 188.
relatively aloof about the whole interview process, it was striking to hear such a strong statement. This respondent is not a chef, nor does he have a connection to food that exceeds that of an average Italian; nonetheless, for him and others like him, food serves as a primary means of existing and expressing oneself. This sentiment is echoed in the English-speaking participant’s words: “[Food] is deeply connected with our culture, and every Italian has a deep sense of food.”

Another respondent, who works in a restaurant for a living, used the word “culture” in juxtaposition with art (“[Italian food is] an art—the culture”). All these interviewees highlighted an undeniable position that cuisine holds in the Italian culture and psyche.

Other respondents took a second route to answer “What is Italian food?,” offering common elements across Italy’s varied regions, specifically referring to components like pasta and olive oil, or noting the importance of quality and freshness across all ingredients. Key themes that emerged in many responses revolved around views that Italian food preparations are simple (semplice), traditional (tradizionale), and local (locale).

Semplice

Several interview subjects noted the simplicity of Italian cuisine and how, compared to other cuisines, ingredients are used selectively and sparingly for the sake of appreciating products’ freshness and inherent flavor. A geography professor in her thirties (a native of Cesena, a town near Emilia-Romagna’s coast) summed up the key elements of Mediterranean (including Italian) cuisine: “The food products are definitely the most basic agricultural ones…. In geography we call this the ‘trio of the Mediterranean’: grain, olive, and vine.” From grain, olive, and vine come pasta and bread, olive oil, and wine. Even these four simple ingredients, derived so directly from the “trio” the interviewee described, are enough to paint a picture of Italian cuisine. Italians are not inclined to stray from these basic ingredients, nor do they want to
mask or alter their flavors. Said one Bologna native in his thirties, “Italian cuisine… doesn’t cover the taste with the strong taste of a sauce or other ingredients. So you can taste deeply the taste of pasta or the [primary] ingredients of the meal.” Another college-aged respondent from Cesena, who noted her interest in nutrition and the nutritional value of Italian food compared to other cuisines, said, “In Italy we strive for simplicity because we want a dish that we can taste. Flavor, in a very simple way.” Outside the context of interviews, I have heard Italians argue that if one is cooking a dish with more than five ingredients, something is wrong. Perhaps this is an exaggeration, but it also suggests a pervasive sentiment.

*Tradizionale*

Singling out responses featuring the word “tradition” (*tradizione*) helps provide insight into the Italian cultural—and specifically culinary—imaginary. Several interviewees across age groups invoked *tradizione*. One middle-aged respondent, an economics professor, described (as many subjects did) the differences in cuisine across regions, but noted, “as for common characteristics, let’s say attention to tradition.” Another middle-aged respondent said, “There is a ton of tradition, and a lot of knowledge of how things are done.” A male college-aged respondent said, “Italian cuisine is a great tradition. One of the most ancient Italian traditions. It’s not due to chance that Italy is renowned for its food.” Such responses suggest that Italians tend to believe that Italian food—the kinds of ingredients, the ways they are prepared—has persisted through centuries.

Some respondents note what might be considered the flip side of this appreciation for tradition: they perceive a decline in the quality of food nowadays. One middle-aged man noted

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48 This respondent chose to be interviewed in English instead of Italian, in order to work on his English speaking abilities.
that Italian food “[has become] definitely less good over time.” Another, a college-aged male, said, “Compared to 10, 15, 20 years ago, when Bolognese food was the best, here in Bologna in the last few years the quality has really diminished. Probably because… um… because of the economic crisis; it makes people spend less, so there are lower prices, so the quality necessarily [diminished].” Thus it is not just older interviewees who expressed a nostalgic appreciation of the importance of tradition.

Locale

In my interviews, the notion of Italian cuisine being tied to la terra came up repeatedly. One college-aged interviewee (a Bologna native) said, “I’d say… Italian cuisine is based on fresh products, quality products. Products of the earth. So, local.” Another interviewee (from Parma) of the same age group said, “I would describe [Italian cooking] as a healthy cuisine, simply because it uses products of the different regions.”

A corollary of the emphasis on the local emerged in a number of interviews. When asked what recent changes in Italian food respondents experienced, answers pointed both to a heightened attention to food’s quality as well as to a deterioration of food’s quality. A female college-aged respondent said, “The thing that has changed in recent years is a bigger concentration on good, healthy ingredients—I mean, the quality of the ingredients. There’s a bigger appreciation… it’s even become kind of a trend, almost.” She specifically mentioned the Slow Food movement, to be discussed below, as a key part of this trend. Another college-aged girl described the burgeoning tendency to “live at kilometer zero” (a phrase referencing the phenomenon of growing one’s own food and creating an entirely self-sufficient household) or “return to even more quality.” A middle-aged man said, “It all points to the quality of food. So
[people] go to look for products that are DOC, that is, of protected origin…” DOC stands for Denominazione di Origine Controllata, or Certified Designation of Origin; “protected origin” refers to DOP (Denominazione di Origine Protetta, or Protected Designation of Origin). Both are government-regulated classifications of wines and food meant to protect high quality producers of foodstuffs.

Such acronyms mark local identities. As I have noted, different regions of the country are known for and shaped by their regional specialties. Some have argued for this reason that Italy does not have what can be called a national cuisine. French scholar of urban and tourism studies Julia Csergo calls Italy “a country with a wealth of regional cuisines but no unified culinary tradition.”49 Dickie argues that cities drove the development of multiple culinary traditions in Italy. His book reinforces this claim in its organization into chapters each of which focuses on one city and its significance during a given time period. Further, he calls the description of Italian food as regional “lazy,” noting that distinct variations of tradition exist even within Italy’s regions.50 I experienced Emilia-Romagna’s diversity during a visit to a friend’s family home in Parma, where I ate horse meat for lunch—a specialty of Parma that is nearly as offensive to the Bolognese population, situated less than an hour away from where I consumed it, as it would be to an American audience. Such an experience points to the quite local nature of Italian tastes, in a sense that Bourdieu would appreciate.

There is no question that traveling from region to region in Italy, one encounters different specialties and different ingredients. In fact, 13 out of 20 Italians, when asked if it is possible to define an Italian cuisine, noted that Italy’s cuisine is marked by regional differences. This culinary diversity is linked to a profound appreciation and dedication to agricultural traditions.

and the desire to cook with products that are grown locally: a value that circles back to the second key term we have explored. Freshness is the key. Several interviewees noted the quality and taste of individual ingredients as crucial elements of Italian food. This remarkable regional difference issues, possibly ironically, from a universal tenet of Italian cuisine. Food should be fresh and local. Italian food’s regionalization paradoxically serves as a marker of its nationwide unity.

“Slow Food”: Tapping Italian Tradizioni

Taken together, these varied appreciations of Italian food (simple, traditional, local) suggest the ways in which Italians think of their cuisine as special. This awareness has manifested itself in recent years in the Slow Food movement, an international initiative with Italian origins, whose purpose is to increase the worldwide focus on the local and to secure connections among agriculture, food production, and food consumption. Founded by Carlo Petrini in 1986, Slow Food promotes “good, clean, and fair” food. According to Slow Food’s website, the movement was founded “with the initial aim to defend regional traditions, good food, gastronomic pleasure and a slow pace of life.” The movement kicked off with a demonstration in Rome, protesting the opening of a McDonald’s at the Spanish Steps in the heart of the city.

Sociologists George Ritzer and Elizabeth Malone frame the birth of Slow Food in the context of resistance to globalization and, more specifically, the notion of “McDonaldization.” Ritzer and Malone argue that “The study of McDonaldization and the New Means of Consumption points to the growing power of the corporation over the nation-state in the
globalization process.” Thus, we cannot simply read Slow Food as a mere push for higher quality food. The movement arose during a time when globalization was accelerating and people around the world were starting to resist it. The politics of Slow Food must be viewed in this more interrogative light.

Slow Food’s name obviously contrasts with fast food and the spread of massive chains like McDonald’s. However, a slow pace is another defining characteristic of Italian cuisine. The traditional middle-class Italian meal consists of an appetizer, two full courses, side dishes, and a dessert. Alluding to this standard and the habitus implied in it, one male middle-aged respondent noted, “Now the culture is changed. But 25-30 years ago… if you went [out to eat] and got just one course you would be viewed in a bad light.” He and his wife also noted the changed Italian work schedule. Whereas in the past, they noted, the work day included a long break for lunch that allowed workers to go home and prepare a meal, Italy has shifted toward the nine to five workday, forcing lunch to be consumed on the go so as not to disturb the flow of work. This perception was not limited to one household. Another middle-aged male participant noted, “The lifestyle has changed a bit. For example, for lunch there are many places where you eat quickly… [you] get something on the run, and don’t interrupt the day.” Slow Food, by contrast, promotes a return to perceived cultural roots and traditions, a rediscovery of “the rich varieties and aromas of local cuisines” (to quote from its Manifesto). Even as it has become a movement that is international in scope, thriving on international collaboration, its roots seem deeply planted in the values of Italian food culture as expressed by these interviewees.

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The triad of simplicity, tradition, and regionalism presented by my interviewees and endorsed by the Slow Food movement evokes, perhaps unintentionally, a notorious formulation in modern European history: “blood and soil.” This phrase denotes the ideology of Hitler’s National Socialist Party, with its emphasis on purity of Aryan birth guaranteeing a claim to German land. Mussolini’s Fascisti were “less interested in racial theories,” according to Michael Schäbitz, “but they did have their own brand of ruralism and nostalgia for a “healthier” pre-industrial lifestyle.” The regionalism celebrated in Italian cuisine and promoted by Slow Food is today a larger feature of Italian life, with specific implications for politics. We will explore this connection in Chapter Two.

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CHAPTER TWO: A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

Italians’ passion for food has remained steadfast in the midst of an otherwise dynamic environment. Indeed, the country’s demographic composition has changed dramatically over the past few decades due to a drastic shift from emigration to immigration in the country. These changes have been met with political and legal aggression on the part of Italians unwilling to accept that their country is becoming home to people of non-Italian origin.

In this chapter, I focus on the Lega Nord, a northern Italian political party noteworthy for its blatantly xenophobic rhetoric and propaganda. Since the 1980s, the party and its leader have been working to instill a fear of the foreign in the minds of the Italian populace. Although the Lega Nord is an extreme example, its prominence in Italian politics cannot be overlooked as an indicator of the receptivity of the population to extreme, racist rhetoric. Through examination of this and other aspects of xenophobia in contemporary Italy, it will become evident that the Italian landscape is not a friendly one for immigrants—or, as we will see in Chapter Three, their culinary traditions.

A Demographic Shift

Today, Italy is a permanent destination for millions of immigrants, whose numbers have skyrocketed over the past couple decades alone. The Statistical Dossier on Immigration, a report by the Italian National Office Against Racial Discrimination, reports that the number of foreigners living in Italy increased from 3.4 million to 4.4 million between 2007 and 2012. Of Italy’s foreign residents, nearly a quarter (22.2 percent) come from Africa and another 19.4
percent hail from Asia.\textsuperscript{54} This trend owes its existence to an increasing demand for cheap labor, and a market for at-home care—childcare, housework, and care for seniors—that has largely attracted immigrants and their families.\textsuperscript{55}

Italy’s status as a destination for immigrants stands in stark opposition to its relatively recent role as the source of a huge number of emigrants. During the era of mass migration through Ellis Island, millions of Italians left their country for the United States. For example, during all years from 1900 to 1914, the number of Italian immigrants who arrived in the United States exceeded 100,000 (it exceeded 200,000 during seven of these). This trend continued long after the mass exodus that marked the first decades of the twentieth century. Even in 1967, for example, more than 28,000 Italian immigrants arrived in America.\textsuperscript{56}

The shift from origin to destination occurred swiftly and dramatically, according to journalist Niccolò d’Aquino, who notes that immigrants’ remittances (sums of money sent back to their families in their home countries) increased by 34 percent in 1998, indicating their established status in Italy. Also noteworthy is the number of immigrants living in Italy in 2000, when d’Aquino wrote the article, compared to the 2012 statistics cited above. The figure in 2000 was 1.6 million (including both documented and undocumented), compared to 2012’s 4.4 million—a 175 percent increase in just over a decade.\textsuperscript{57}

This change to the Italian demographic landscape parallels a trend throughout the European Union. Europe has been a battleground for immigration policy since the mid-twentieth century. According to migration expert Christof Roos, the institution of “passport unions


\textsuperscript{55} Maurizio Ambrosini, “Immigration in Italy,” \textit{Journal of International Migration and Integration} 14, no. 1 (2013), 177.


permitting free movement in these states’ combined territories” (even before the EU formally existed) forced discussion not only of travel between these states, but who was to be included in the territory in question. The Schengen Area, established in 1985, includes the majority of EU countries and has since developed to include visa policies governing travel across the region. The European Commission’s website reads, “while having abolished their internal borders, Schengen States have also tightened controls at their common external border on the basis of Schengen rules to ensure the security of those living or travelling in the Schengen Area.” The Schengen Area, then, is presented like an enclosed space with walls that need protection, in line with the “Fortress Europe” imagery that was prevalent during World War II and has recently begun to recirculate.

In the December 19, 1942 edition of The Nation, the German phrase Festung Europa (“Fortress Europe”) was explained in the context of Axis war strategy. Although the term—only in widespread use for about a month by that time—commonly circulated in German, author J. Alvarez del Vayo notes that the idea of Fortress Europe was first proposed publicly in the Italian press. “…It was the Italian press which was chosen to familiarize the peoples of the Axis with the idea that…[the war] could also be won by means of a titanic defense which would ultimately exhaust the fighting strength of the Allies.”

Today’s “Fortress Europe” is supposedly defending itself against a different external threat. Writes Roos, pointing to the EU’s policies on immigration, including refugees and asylum seekers, “arguing from a normative standpoint, many criticise the emerging ‘Fortress Europe’ and deplore the humanitarian crisis taking place at Europe’s presumably sealed borders.” For some nations, though, the European “fortress” model—sealed on the outside and unregulated on

the inside—was not restrictive enough. At a 2011 conference of EU interior ministers, a majority of states voted to reinstate national border controls as a response to “any sudden surge in migration.”\(^6^0\) Regardless of individual countries or government officials’ stances on national regulation versus EU regulation, it is clear that border control is a hot topic and the majority supports tight borders. The issue is continent-wide, and Italy is no exception.

A series of new laws and regulations aims to control the flow of new residents in Italy. As immigrants enter the country to join both the regulated and unregulated labor markets, “[T]he labor market (firms and families), with its workforce demand, has exceeded the conservative forecasts for the recruitment of foreign workers each year, forcing lawmakers to realign legislation retrospectively to match actual market dynamics,” sociologist Maurizio Ambrosini explains.\(^6^1\) Lawmakers recognize migrants’ importance to the Italian economy. For example, much has been written about the international network of domestic care work. Sociologist Dawn Lyon noted in 2006 that Italian families employed approximately 600,000-700,000 people as care workers. The majority of these were foreign migrants, hailing from east and southeast Asia, Africa, and eastern Europe.\(^6^2\) Additionally, Italian studies expert Jacqueline Andall notes the increased presence of immigrants in Italy’s industrial communities. She specifically details the role of African males in the Italian leather industry, noting that some firms rely on solely non-Italian labor.\(^6^3\) These are but a pair of examples of the roles of Italian migrant laborers, but they give an idea of how Italian society has come to depend on their presence.

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\(^6^0\) Nick Allen, “EU moves to end passport-free Schengen travel,” *The Guardian*, May 12, 2011
\(^6^3\) Jacqueline Andall, “Industrial Districts and Migrant Labour in Italy,” *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 45, no. 2 (2007).
Nonetheless, some laws are purely restrictive towards immigrants, and regulate their stay in the country on the basis of conceptualizations of labor that are not consistent with the reality of the immigrant labor market. For instance, the 2002 Bossi-Fini law, drafted by Umberto Bossi, leader of the anti-immigrant *Lega Nord* (Northern League, discussed below) and Gianfranco Fini, leader of the now-defunct neo-fascist National Alliance, requires long-term work contracts in order to extend an immigrant’s stay in the country, irrespective of the fact that many of the jobs in question are regulated by temporary contracts. The law also dictates that undocumented residents found without papers be immediately deported, and that people who attempt to re-enter the country before the expiration of their re-entry ban be detained for six to twelve months and then deported.⁶⁴ Notwithstanding the Bossi-Fini law and other measures taken by the political center-right, the influx of migrants to these temporary jobs continues.

**Xenophobic Politics**

Discussion of the current context of immigration trends and policy in Italy would be incomplete without attention to the *Lega Nord*, the far right party infamous for its xenophobia. The party and its leader, Umberto Bossi, parallel France’s National Front and its leader and founder, Jean-Marie Le Pen. Far right Le Pen, according to a 2002 report in *The Economist*, “eloquently articulates [France’s middle and working classes’] fears of immigrants, crime and the supposed threat posed to France’s traditions by Europe and globalisation.”⁶⁵ Similarly, the late Enoch Powell, who was a conservative member of the British Parliament, was noted for his anti-immigrant rhetoric in the 1970s and 1980s, including his infamous “Rivers of Blood” speech, in which he said (among other statements indicating his concern about the flow of

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immigrants into the United Kingdom), “we must be mad, literally mad, as a nation to be permitting the annual inflow of some 50,000 dependents, who are for the most part the material of the future growth of the immigrant-descended population. It is like watching a nation busily engaged in heaping up its own funeral pyre.” These examples from other European nations show the Lega Nord did not develop in a vacuum. It should be understood in the broader context of anti-immigrant rhetoric sweeping across Europe around the same time.

The Lega Nord became a formal political party in 1992 after several localist movements originating in the 1980s joined forces. According to Italian sociologists Carlo Ruzza and Laura Balbo, Bossi and Silvio Berlusconi, media mogul and four-time prime minister of Italy, both demonstrated the Italian tendency toward populism as a means to construct a more concrete notion of Italian identity. “The collapse of the Eastern Bloc and processes of secularization called for new visions of il popolo.” For Berlusconi, the popolo is “the Westernized affluent consumer”; for Bossi, it is “a society of small producers rooted in strong morals and families, and grounded in strong communities.” Interestingly, despite their seemingly antithetical conceptualizations of the Italian populace, Bossi and Berlusconi were longtime allies, representing different, vocal extremes on the political right. What they have in common, though, is an exclusivist idea of popolo. “Both Berlusconi and Bossi … have contributed to disseminating exclusionary forms of public discourse which are now widely accepted, taken for

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68 Ibid. 167
granted by the public and recurrent in everyday language and practices.” So, although the Lega Nord is particularly extreme in its racist rhetoric, it is not politically or ideologically isolated.

The Lega Nord’s goals have fluctuated between organizing a new federal state and secession of the fabricated northern Italian region of “Padania,” a concept Bossi introduced in 1996. During a speech at the Parliament of Mantua, a northern city, Bossi said:

> After these political elections, you will have heard during the campaign, I had announced that third phase of the fight for the independence of Padania would have begun. The first phase of the League’s fight was very long: it started at the end of the 1980s, between 1979 and 1980, and it was the ethnic phase, with the League pushed forward by simple but courageous men that first stood against the social and cultural effects, more than the economic ones, of Roman colonialism… Now the third and final phase has begun, the last great battle that Padania must fight to liberate itself from the difficult and colonial situation in which we find ourselves.

Bossi speaks of “Roman colonialism”; indeed, the Northern League is based on the idea that southern Italy is a threat to the north, culturally and economically. The Lega Nord constantly frames itself in opposition to others on a fundamental level. Political scientist Dwayne Woods writes,

> the main reason that the Northern League focused its attack on southern Italians is that it required a distinct territorial ‘other’ in order to validate its own purported authentic regional identity. What constitutes a Northerner is the fact that he is different from a Southerner. Northerners are productive, hard-working, honest and civic, while Southerners are parasitical and clannish.

This otherization and desperate clinging to imagined “tradition” form the crux of the League’s rhetoric. Media scholar Isabelle Fremeaux and Daniele Albertazzi, an expert in European politics, note that the Lega Nord gained political traction during a time when the country’s economy was in decline, the Christian Democrats were no longer the dominant

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70 Ibid. 165.
political force, and immigration from Northern Africa and Eastern Europe began to be seen as a threat. Thus, in an era of flux and uncertainty, a party like the *Lega Nord*, emphasizing rigidity, enclosure, and resistance to big change, was destined to take hold.

Fremeaux and Albertazzi write of the prevalence of the idea of “community” in the *Lega Nord*’s discourse—and its inherent hypocrisy. The *Lega Nord* frames Padania as a community of different traditions, but posits that non-northern traditions are far too different to be incorporated into the community. Fremeaux and Albertazzi note that according to the League’s rhetoric, it seems as though “the only cultures that can offer a positive contribution to the Padanian identity are the ones descending from the North (of the country and of the world).”\(^74\) This exclusivity is in line with Benedict Anderson’s idea of imagined communities, but taken to a new extreme. Padania is literally an “imagined” place, thought up by the Lega Nord and defined with supposed shared characteristics that are arbitrarily chosen.

Woods has analyzed the propaganda the *Lega Nord* uses, demonstrating how it cultivates an us-them dichotomy and lauds the value of protecting northern identity through aggressive posters and discourse. As he puts it, “In [Bossi’s] conception of northern identity, what is important is to protect the local dialects, culinary traditions and festivals of each village and commune.”\(^75\) I would like to highlight some of the posters Woods discusses in order to demonstrate the modus operandi of the *Lega Nord*.

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This poster, translated, reads, “They were subjected to immigration, now they live on reservations!” The *Lega Nord* circulated this poster during the 2008 national elections. The party ended up securing 9% of the vote nationally and more than 20% of the electorate in cities throughout the northern regions. As Woods notes, “the league presents itself as the voice of an exploited and colonized ‘people.’” 76 The *Lega Nord*, it would seem, based on this poster and borrowing Woods’ analysis, needs to defend itself against so-called threats of exploitation and colonization from the unruly southerners, or even non-Italians.

The *Lega Nord* has singled out Chinese and Turkish immigrants as distinct threats. “First the Chinese, Now the Turkish. Small and medium businesses at risk,” reads the translation of the poster in Figure 2. The League published this poster in the context of discussion around Turkey’s proposal to join the EU—a discussion that, for the *Lega Nord*, also included anti-Turkish rallies. Turkey and China, like all non-Padania entities, represented economic and cultural threats.

Woods quotes secretary general of the League in the Veneto region: “‘the truth is that the people have realized we need to protect our local economy from the fast food of MacDonald, Chinese food and couscous. . . . The same realization is needed to stop the negative effect of on our
factories and jobs before it is too late.” Here, food is explicitly brought into play. Restaurants are those businesses at particular risk from foreign competition. It is unsurprising that food is used in the League’s rhetoric: restaurants are both culturally and economically charged; the former is especially true in Italy, as we saw in Chapter One.

One of the Lega’s posters (see Figure 3) explicitly uses food as a rhetorical tool to drive home who belongs and who is outside the national polity. Translated “Yes to polenta, No to couscous. Proud of our traditions,” this poster invokes food to represent an imagined authenticity. The choice to pit polenta and couscous against each other makes sense since both are versatile starches. However, both food choices are notable in this context for other reasons. Polenta, as opposed to pasta, is considered the starch of Northern Italy\textsuperscript{78}, signaling the Lega Nord’s regional affiliations. Further, polenta is made of corn meal, which, as we saw with the tomato, is not native to Italy. It is particularly ironic in an image touting the alleged Italian-ness and tradition of polenta. Meanwhile, as I discovered from personal experience and interviews, couscous, a traditional Berber dish made from semolina, is one of the most common ingredients not typically thought of as Italian to be incorporated into Italian cuisine. The Lega Nord poster presents couscous, a “foreign” food generally welcomed by the Italian palate, as a threat to authentic Italian culture.

\textsuperscript{77} Dwayne Woods, “A critical analysis of the Northern League’s ideological profiling,” 199.
In the 21st century, the Lega Nord continues to exhibit “religious intolerance and xenophobic aggression, with an explicitly anti-immigrant language.” Its discriminatory policies have been evidenced not only through aggressive rhetoric, but also in its political practices.

In 2009 National Public Radio told the story of a Christmas-time operation in the northern town of Coccaglio (governed by the Lega Nord) that was referred to as “White Christmas.” Police carried out door-to-door searches for illegal immigrants in the town of 7,000 people, 1,500 of whom are of non-Italian descent. The searches took place throughout November and December and culminated on Christmas Day. Residents without adequate documents had their right to residence revoked. The event itself is proof of the extremism of the Lega Nord. However, its significance was rendered yet more potent by remarks from Claudio Abiendi, the

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town councilor in charge of security. “For me, Christmas is not the holiday of hospitality, but rather that of the Christian tradition and of our identity,” Abiendi said, according to the NPR report. Likewise, Franco Claretti, Coccaglio’s mayor, is quoted in a news broadcast as saying, “There’s no place for illegals in Italy. They can’t work, they don’t get social services, and can’t integrate into society. But they have to eat, so they’re easy victims for exploitation—cheap workhorses.”81 The event was approved by the Italian interior minister, Roberto Maroni, another Lega Nord member.82 The extremism and the deep reach of the party are illustrated clearly here. This explicit racism is not expressed in isolated cases. Rather, the political force behind it carries power and influence at the national level.

According to political scientists Heidi Beirich and Dwayne Woods, Umberto Bossi, who led the Lega Nord until 2012, “repeatedly speaks of lost community values and identity.”83 For example, in a 2002 speech given in Venice, Bossi said, “Of course, the problem of what to call the industry of planetary homogenization and depersonalization that threatens to extinguish ethnic cultures and nations emerges.”84 Here, Bossi posits the existence of a very real and immediate threat to culture. This type of extreme rhetoric links the Lega Nord to far-right racist movements throughout Europe. Bossi himself has declared, in Woods’ paraphrase, “the wave of illegal immigrants landing in Sicily could be stopped with ‘a few cannon shots at the boats bringing them.’”85

In a March 3, 2002 speech to the party, Bossi spoke about the dangers associated with immigration without tight regulation. “If immigration started in hordes, instead of being controlled, it would impose its living conditions, its beliefs, those which we, time and time again, have determined to be medieval superstitions.” In that same speech, Bossi referred to the European Convention on the Human Rights conference in 1950, saying “The 1950 Convention of Human Rights says one simple thing: the liberty of immigrants stops where our liberty begins.” Bossi’s rhetoric presents immigration as a zero-sum game, much as the poster discussed above presents a choice of either polenta or couscous, not both. In another speech given in September 2003, Bossi said, “We have a lot of immigration from the Third World, accepted not just to destroy and relativize our culture and our history, but also in the illusion that bringing cheap manpower, maybe even slaves, our businesses could better bear international competition.” He understands foreign cultures as insidious and corrupting, and the value of foreign laborers as deceptive. Clearly, Bossi demonstrates a serious mistrust of immigration and an unwavering belief that drastic measures must regulate the flow of foreigners into Italy. This speech was given the same year that the Bossi-Fini law passed.

Within this glaringly xenophobic rhetoric, Islam has become a specific target for the *Lega Nord*, who view Muslims as a double risk due to their alleged terrorism and their threat to Italy’s Christian identity. In 1993, for example, Bossi claimed, “Civility on one side, barbarians on

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87 Ibid.
the other. The Western world and Islamism.” This statement, made near the beginning of the Lega Nord’s existence, evinces the party’s DNA and adds another dimension to one’s understanding of the above posters. The fact that the Northern League has maintained a band of supporters even with its explicit anti-immigration rhetoric sheds light on the degree to which many Italians have accepted racism in mainstream politics. It also denotes a definite fear of the “other” that has characterized contemporary Italian history.

It is telling that the aforementioned National Office Against Racial Discrimination (Ufficio Nazionale Antidiscriminazioni Razziali, or UNAR), the body responsible for publishing some of the immigration statistics noted above, even exists. The office was founded in 2003 in response to a European Union directive ordering the establishment of national bodies to promote racial and ethnic equality. Its stated purpose is to promote “equal treatment and the removal of discrimination based on race or ethnic origin.” Although the organization deals mostly with specific cases of discrimination related to housing, workplace inequality, or access to health care, it takes up less easily tracked injustices as well. For instance, legal scholar Andrea Crescenzi notes that immigrants face discrimination as a result of their lower level of Italian language proficiency and are often targeted by police for their skin color. However, Crescenzi also remarks that the Italian UNAR might not be the independent body the EU dictates. It operates under the Department of Rights and Equal Opportunities, the director of which is appointed by the Prime Minister. UNAR’s politics, then, run the risk of being swayed heavily in favor of the

92 “Ufficio,” Ufficio Nazionale Antidiscriminazioni Razziali, accessed October 27, 2014
93 Andrea Crescenzi, “The Role of Equality Bodies,” 339
dominant political rhetoric at the national level, which, as we have seen through examination of the *Lega Nord*, can be hostile to ethnic minorities in the country.\textsuperscript{94}

Throughout Italy, ill will toward foreigners is documented and dramatic. A 2014 Pew Research survey revealed that a vast majority of Italians view other ethnic groups in a negative light. Of those surveyed,\textsuperscript{95} 85% expressed an unfavorable opinion of Roma people and 63% held an unfavorable opinion of Muslims—the highest figures of the seven European Union nations surveyed in both categories. Only their opinions of Jewish people were milder than the other European countries covered in the survey. Even so, there was still a significant documented animosity at 24 percent, putting Italy behind just Greece and Poland.\textsuperscript{96}

**Italian Attitudes to Non-Italian Foods**

Given Chapter One’s discussion of the strong sense of identity expressed through Italian culinary practices, and an influx of immigrants paired with a widespread mistrust of foreigners, it is perhaps unsurprising that many Italians have resisted the introduction of immigrant cuisines that have trended over the past few decades. For example, one interview respondent, a 33-year-old male, said he never ate non-Italian food—and he had no reason to. “It’s kind of something silly… tasting something different from the best. It’s like for you, you can’t support the Italian basketball team, because you have NBA. It’s the best.” For him, all other cuisines are not worth his time. Although this quote was one of the more explicit ones I heard, his sentiment was echoed in other conversations. What is notable, though, is the ways that Italians of different ages

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 340
\textsuperscript{95} 1,000 adults
apparently think about and define these cuisines on a sliding scale of “foreign-ness” based on when and where they are eaten and who is doing the eating.

Exclusion

The most explicit example of culinary racism is the recent banning of certain ethnic restaurants in Italian towns. In 2009, the walled Tuscan city of Lucca—“where even Sicilian food is considered ethnic”—outlawed the opening of ethnic and fast food restaurants in the city center beyond the four kebab joints that already existed.\(^97\) Similar restrictions, mostly driven by the *Lega Nord*, have been enacted in Cittadella (a small town in Veneto) and Forte dei Marmi (a beach town in Tuscany which banned all “foreign” restaurants). The trend is evident even in cosmopolitan centers. For example, in Milan kebab has been banned, albeit along with other foods to be eaten on the street, such as takeaway pizza and gelato—possibly as a response to a corrosion of the Italian tradition of seated meals taken at a leisurely pace (see Chapter One). Politicians responsible for these cases have cited kebabs’ incongruence with “tradition” and “cultural and historical identity.”\(^98\) Forte dei Marmi mayor Umberto Buratti said, “This measure has nothing to do with xenophobia—it is about protecting and valuing our culture. We would also say no to American hamburger chains.”\(^99\) Buratti cites a putative burger ban as proof that banning foreign restaurants is not xenophobic—but his use of the word “protecting” suggests a reflexive defensiveness against the perceived foreign threat.\(^100\)

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\(^98\) Ibid.

\(^99\) Nick Squires, “Italian town bans any new kebab shops or other ‘ethnic food,’” *The Telegraph*, October 14, 2011.

\(^100\) It is possible the ban has since been lifted, as a Google search quickly reveals the presence of both a sushi restaurant, Kooka Sushi, and a hamburger restaurant, 1950 American Diner, in Forte dei Marmi. Nonetheless, the ban existed less than four years ago and Buratti is still mayor, so the sentiment driving the ban has probably not have changed significantly.
Even when kebab houses are allowed, they tend not to be accepted or patronized widely. The Times’ account of kebab houses notes that these joints are popular and inexpensive choices primarily for younger generations. This trend is summed up best in one quote from a Lucca resident: “I’ve never tried one, but my kids like them.” Over the course of my interviews with Italians, I found that kebabs are mostly popular among college students. The two respondents who specifically mentioned eating kebabs were university students; another respondent—the director of my study abroad program—said she views kebabs as mostly eaten by students. In fact, during my time in Bologna, I noticed that kebab joints were most active after 2 a.m., when many students stopped after leaving a bar or club. Even among students, eating kebab did not typically replace a regular meal, but tended to be consumed as a snack.

Acceptance or Avoidance: A Generational Difference?

Beyond the question of kebab, the interviews I conducted with residents of Bologna reveal a generational gap in relation to foreign foods more generally. A middle-aged male respondent who said he eats non-Italian food a couple times a month noted that his young daughter is very interested in trying new foods, and encourages the family to cook Chinese food at home. He said the family browses the internet for “classic” Chinese recipes “just for fun.” Speaking of his daughter, he said, “She eats everything…. In Bologna, we say, ‘She would eat the table too.’ … She’s open to anything … any new culinary experience.”

Another middle-aged respondent, whom I interviewed along with his wife and 18-year-old son, distinguished generational tastes in his response as well. He mused, “Our parents probably have an idea of cuisine that is [exclusively] Italian cuisine. For them, food is Italian food.” He noted the evolution of the food scene in Italy from his parents’ time to his children’s

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101 Rachel Donadio, “A Walled City in Tuscany Clings to its Ancient Menu.”
time. “Anyway, we grew up in a moment in which hamburgers arrived, and then other dishes arrived that weren’t Italian, but they became daily and in common use, and [the children]… [Son’s name] will tell you, on the other hand … once a week, he goes to eat non-Italian?” His son confirmed the estimate.

As confirmation, most of my college-aged respondents said they were far more likely than their parents to eat foreign foods. One college-aged male respondent who has lived in Bologna his whole life and reported he eats non-Italian food a couple times a month, said, “My parents, being … well, old by now, are very connected to tradition. So, it’s hard for them to adapt to a new culinary culture, that is, it’s hard to get acquainted with a different type of food.” This type of response was repeated several times: respondents said their parents were very attached to tradition and thus unlikely to stray away from Italian food.

Fidelity to their culinary tradition is a “pull” force for many older Italians, but “push” forces, such as suspicions about quality and safety, exist alongside these to create avoidance of foreign foods. One college-aged female respondent told me her mother’s reaction to foreign food is one of distrust. “I go to eat in a restaurant of a different culture; the first reaction [my parents] have is ‘Who knows what they’re giving you? Who knows what type of food they have? Who knows…’” She observed this type of sentiment is fueled by news stories questioning the content of foreign restaurants’ food. She noted, for example, that a Chinese restaurant was recently rumored to be serving dog meat. A 2013 article in Il Mattino di Padova summarized the gossip, repeating a story that a customer supposedly found a dog tracking ID chip in her stomach after she had eaten at the restaurant. The restaurant owners went to the police to combat this defamation.
Such beliefs express distrust of foreignness that one finds present in Italian official discourse and scholarly studies as well. In 2006, a group of Italian food scientists published a report on the presence and types of foreign foods in Italy and the need to conduct further research to determine their composition and nutritional content. The language of the 2006 report verges on pejorative in its explanation of the questions that the article hoped to answer. An excerpt, translated to English, reads, “[T]his article hopes to analyze some problems related to the alimentary habits of ethnic groups in Italy, the diffusion and consumption of traditional ethnic foods and the modifications and adaptations that they have undergone in the welcoming country.”

The use of the word “problems” (problematiche) as opposed to a more neutral term, such as “considerations” or “new circumstances,” distances and others the “ethnic groups” in question. Likewise, referring to Italy as the “welcoming country” (paese di accoglienza) puts the onus of adaptation or adjustment on the immigrants, whose culinary traditions are seen as needing modification to be acceptable to Italians. Such defensive attitudes crop up repeatedly in events, policies, and writings that concern the presence of foreign foods in Italy.

“Not in My Kitchen”

Even among Italians I interviewed who seemed very comfortable consuming non-Italian food in restaurants, I noticed a hesitation to serve non-Italian food in their own homes. One respondent in her 30s, who said she eats non-Italian food more than three times per week, was not so enthusiastic when it came to serving guests Chinese, Indian, or one of the other non-Italian cuisines she likes to eat. When asked if she would ever prepare non-Italian food if she invited friends over for dinner, she responded:

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Yes, but I would advise them beforehand. Because some friends are happy to try new things, they’re the friends with whom I might go eat Japanese food, so sometimes we do sushi nights where we work together to cook sushi. But, with some more traditionalist friends, I couldn’t do it. I mean, with them, I would have to make a plate of *tagliatelle* and if I suggested something else, I don’t know, Chinese, they wouldn’t be happy.

Another respondent, the same one who cooked Chinese food with his daughter, drew the line of experimentation at cooking for guests. Asked the question about preparing foreign food for guests after a series of questions about his relationship with non-Italian food, he answered, “No. That I wouldn’t. I would prepare… Emilian cuisine; [that is what] I would prepare.”¹⁰³ The border not to be crossed in these cases seems intimately related to the personal sense of space and identification connoted by home.

*All Foreign Foods Are Not Equal*

In some cases, Italians also seemed to subconsciously think about non-Italian foods hierarchically—that is, some foods give the impression of being more foreign than others. For example, one middle-aged male respondent was telling me about how he occasionally prepares Chinese food. When I asked if this was the only non-Italian food he prepares at home, he said, “Oh, no, if you mean truly, I don’t know… we make quiche Lorraine, or wurstel and kraut.” The respondent’s moment of hesitation before moving from Chinese to French and German food demonstrates that, unconsciously, he does not rank these cuisines equally. He did not immediately think of French and German foods as non-Italian, but recognized that they were when I pressed him. Similarly, in a conversation with a family (two middle-aged parents and their teenage son), the father noted the necessity to “distinguish which are Italian dishes” when arriving at a count of how many times they eat non-Italian food per month. They didn’t

¹⁰³ *Emilian* refers to the cuisine particular to the Emilia half of the Emilia-Romagna region, of which Bologna is the capital.
immediately think of hamburgers and wurstel when conceptualizing their relationship with non-Italian foods. Such blind spots suggest that some foods, notably European dishes, are less “foreign,” less different than others, and are more likely to be seamlessly included among Italian foods.

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These responses, taken together, help indicate the extent to which food serves as a border or rather, a barrier. It may also be seen as a technology serving not simply to satisfy the palate of a certain people, but also to distinguish that community. It is a facet of sovereignty in a community that seems unable, even unwilling, to think of itself beyond its invented culinary geographies. The discourse of tradition is vital to this curious reconstitution and renewal of community. As Wendy Brown suggests, in a different though helpful context, such a discourse of borders and sovereignties is actually a sign of a weakening political sovereignty. According to Brown, “sovereign nation-states no longer exclusively define the field of global political relations or monopolize many of the powers organizing in that field, yet states remain . . . symbols of national identification.” Brown notes the proliferation of symbolic walls, limits, and boundaries—such as we have seen in both the political and the culinary imaginaries of Italians—just at the moment when globalization has entered a new epoch of capital freely transcending national borders. Brown’s concerns with physical walls and borders may be extended to the cultural barriers discussed here.

At the same time, as numerous globalization analysts have shown, this propensity of capital is encountering a wave of resistance which attempts to re-localizes place. Here one sees

that food has also become an instrument to make life for the other unpalatable. Taken as a constitutive context for understanding the racialization discourses of the other, namely the immigrants who have traveled long distances to find places of comfort within Italy, food adds to the fierce nationalism of a significant section of the Italian population, served up to keep out or unsettle these immigrants, making it difficult for them to feel at home there.

Yet in spite of these culinary barriers, migrants nonetheless attempt to create spaces to express their own sets of practices, to generate a “diasporic habitus” sheltering them from these exclusionary projects of nation re-building, to facilitate new ways of being in an unwelcoming place. How they accommodate and resist is the subject of the next chapter.
CHAPTER THREE: FORMING A “DIASPORIC HABITUS”

As demonstrated thus far, the Italian environment, with its cherished culinary traditions, is not necessarily the most welcoming to immigrants, particularly those with non-European origins. My research and primary contact with Italy took place in Bologna, the country’s seventh-largest city in terms of population. Bologna is not necessarily a “typical” Italian city. For the most part, it is known for being a left-leaning city, largely defined by its dominant student population thanks to the city’s centerpiece: the nearly one thousand-year-old University of Bologna.

Notwithstanding Bologna’s liberal slant, to be explained in more detail below, interviews with the city’s residents (presented in Chapter Two) unearthed sentiments that reinforce the notion of Italy as a country resistant to changes in important cultural traditions, particularly those concerned with food. In this hostile environment, immigrants start new lives, build families, and pursue livelihoods. Sometimes, capitalizing on the knowledge they bring with them from their former homes, they open restaurants. For immigrant restaurant owners in Bologna, cooking their food serves as both as a means of making a living and as a way to preserve connections to the cultures of their home countries. The art and necessity of cooking differently in a different land produces a “diasporic habitus” in the restrictive Italian context.
**Bologna: La Dotta, La Grassa, La Rossa**

The city of Bologna is important to Italy’s history, culture, and cuisine. Examining the city’s slogan—*la dotta* ("the learned*), *la grassa* ("the fat"), *la rossa* ("the red")—reveals the specific features of Bologna that have been significant to Italy and Europe since the Middle Ages.

“The learned” is a label inspired by the University of Bologna (UNIBO), the city’s hub and the impetus for its development. Gabriele Bonazzi, historian of Bologna, writes simply “It is the University that made Bologna and not vice versa.”¹⁰⁵ UNIBO is believed to have begun offering courses in 1088, making it the oldest university in the Western world. Since the Middle Ages it has attracted scholars from all over Europe, making it a hub for scholarship and a crossroads of people and ideas. In fact, Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio—the three major figures in classical Italian literature—all studied at UNIBO.

Bologna’s nickname of *grassa* refers to its prosperity and the quality of the city’s food. However, Montanari argues, the name was reinforced precisely because of Bologna’s status as a university town, which allowed for the exchange of culture. “The extraordinary gastronomic identity of this city was born not of the unprovable superiority of its municipal importance,” Montanari says, “but rather of its ability to exploit it, to activate a network of relationships that in this case were particularly extensive.”¹⁰⁶ Indeed, Dickie says visiting scholars would leave Bologna with tales of the city’s delicacies and the pleasantness of their stays. Calling a place “fat” did not hold negative connotations as it does today. Far from it: from the sixteenth century

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¹⁰⁶ Montanari, *Italian Identity*, 9
up to the middle of the twentieth century famines “seemed as natural as the rhythm of the seasons” to Italians.\textsuperscript{107} Fat was a state to be aspired to rather than avoided.

Bologna was known for its food around the peninsula even as the region’s delicacies remained far out of reach for most of the population. Giulio Cesare Croce, an author contemporary with Shakespeare, was raised poor in the Bolognese countryside. His writings, viewed today, provide a glimpse into peasant life and the peasant diet, but not much as one might think. Instead, Croce’s writings allude to the diets of the bourgeoisie, experiences he and his peasant compatriots likely never had, but were eager to read about anyway. According to Dickie, “In Baroque Bologna, as elsewhere, the food culture of the wealthy moulded the sensibilities of the poor. The myth of Fat Bologna is a case in point: while it was created among the professors and students, it soon spread to the town at large.”\textsuperscript{108} UNIBO was the crux of Bolognese society; high Bolognese society fostered the city’s reputation for its food. Thus food and education in Bologna are closely linked in the city’s history.

What makes Bologna so culinarily noteworthy? As the capital of Emilia-Romagna, set in the Po River valley, Bologna is the center of a fertile region supplying some of the most prominent components of Italian cuisine. Located within an hour train ride of Bologna are Modena, home of balsamic vinegar; Parma, home of “the king of Italian cheeses”\textit{ parmigiano reggiano} and\textit{ prosciutto di parma}; and Piacenza, home of the equally prized cheese\textit{ grana padano}. “Spaghetti Bolognais” is the American interpretation of Bologna’s own rich and savory\textit{ tagliatelle al ragù}—but never let an Italian see you eating this\textit{ ragù} with the wrong kind of pasta. Other noteworthy Bolognese staples are tortellini, lasagna, and mortadella (when Americans eat bologna, they’re eating a pitiful, processed imitation of mortadella, the spiced pork sausage that

\textsuperscript{107}John Dickie,\textit{ Delizia!}, 137-138
\textsuperscript{108}Ibid. 142
Bologna celebrates with an annual festival). Bologna does not have the big tourist attractions of Rome, Venice, Florence or Milan; however, it attracts gastronomic tours because food is so fundamentally important to the city’s identity. Bologna’s tourist website has a section dedicated to *enogastronomia*, providing information on wine tourism, recommended restaurants, cooking lessons and traditional recipes.¹⁰⁹

The significance of *la dotta* and *la grassa* to Bologna thus become obvious, but the meaning of *la rossa* is a bit more nuanced. The overt meaning refers to the hue of Bologna’s buildings—viewed from above, the city has a decidedly warm color from its tile roofs. However, red has also come to represent the city’s left leanings, an element that differentiates Bologna from the more conservative parts of Italy and makes it particularly interesting to examine in the context of immigration. After World War II, Bologna became the center of Italian communist activity.¹¹⁰ Although the city’s communist identity is not as strong today as it once was, its left leanings persist; even as the city’s permanent population gets older, the civic community remains in flux with foreign students and immigrants. According to Gabriele Bonazzi, Bologna is a mix of old and young, students, professionals, and unskilled workers, representing a variety of different cultures co-existing in relative harmony.¹¹¹ We see, then, a certain complexity in the red city, rendering it a rich landscape for the study of immigration in juxtaposition with a storied tradition of Italian culture. The deep-rootedness of culinary traditionalism even in the context of a left-leaning city hints at the difficult road facing foreign restaurant owners in Bologna.

¹¹¹ Gabriele Bonazzi, *Bologna nella Storia Volume II*, 350
Situating Bologna’s Immigrant Restaurateurs

I interviewed several non-Italian restaurant owners in Bologna regarding their experiences owning foreign restaurants. For the most part, such establishments are concentrated in the areas of the city known for student activity and nightlife. Outside of the zones marked on the map in Figure 4, non-Italian restaurants are few. Indeed, almost all of the non-Italian restaurants I visited are in the northeast region of the city, where most of the University of Bologna campus is located and where students spent a good portion of their free time. The foreign restaurants that aren’t located near the university are on the city’s west side, on or near Via San Felice, another region for nightlife frequented by students. Of the twelve owners of non-Italian restaurants I interviewed, all mentioned that students make up part of their clientele. Seven said their customers are mostly or entirely students. These findings coincide with the views represented among my Italian interviewees that young people are more likely to seek out non-Italian foods.
Anthropologist and sociologist Davide Però, an expert on migrant labor conditions, uses Bologna as the setting for his ethnographies, which focus on centers of first shelter and refugee camps in the city. Però outlines the discrepancy between the lived experience of migrants to Bologna—which he describes as “the traditional ‘showcase’ city of the Italian Left”—and the city’s official rhetoric. He quotes a variety of official civic publications along with statements of the Democratic Party of the Left, all of which indicate those entities’ purported anti-racism, anti-xenophobia, pro-inclusion stances. Però contrasts this language with his first-hand observations of the run-down, unhygienic, peripherally located refugee camps and centers of first shelter, in addition to immigrants’ accounts of their experiences in the city. He quotes Hamid

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Bichri, author of a book on immigrants’ issues in Bologna, whom he describes as “one of Bologna’s immigrant leaders.” “The Moroccan immigrant in Bologna is forced to live in a parallel city to the one which surrounds him/her,” Bichri notes.\textsuperscript{113}

The geographic positioning of foreign restaurants in Bologna echoes this insight. The clustering of these establishments results from the availability of appropriate buildings and likely customers, issuing in a ghetto-like concentration of non-Italian food purveyors that parallels and has its place within the larger Italian community of Bologna. One Bolognese street with a heavy concentration of foreign restaurants is Via Petroni, located in the heart of \textit{la Zona Universitaria}. Via Petroni and the surrounding area have been written about extensively in Italian newspapers. In the last few years alone, ordinances about the hours and rights of \textit{gelaterie}, kebab shops and other vendors have been in flux. A 2013 article in \textit{La Reppublica} explains the policy as it stood then: suppliers of groceries and non-prepared foods (\textit{alimentari}) must close at 10 p.m., shops like kebab stands must close at 11 p.m., and bars and other locales must close at 1 a.m. The article notes that legislation regarding the policy had recently increased in severity, meaning that a violation would be seen as a criminal act instead of the less severe failure to adhere to a civil ordinance.\textsuperscript{114}

I spoke with two owners of restaurants on Via Petroni, and both noted the official civic restrictions that limit the success of their businesses. They told me they were forced to close their establishments at 11 p.m., while bars were allowed to remain open until several hours later. One owner, who moved to Bologna from Iran in 1979, said he believed he would be forced to close his restaurant due to the harshness of the public policies governing street life.

\textsuperscript{113} Hamid Bichri, \textit{I Soldi della Miseria} (Bologna: Extra Edizioni, 1995), 35, quoted in ibid., 169.
\textsuperscript{114} “Pugno di ferro sui locali di via Petroni: ordinanza prevede denunce penali,” \textit{La Reppublica Bologna}, March 14, 2013, \url{http://bologna.repubblica.it/cronaca/2013/03/14/news/pugno_di_ferro_sui_locali_di_via_petroni_ordinanza_prevede_denunce_penali-54582251/}.
The city is stupid. They leave [the bars] open, the bars that sell alcohol, hard alcohol. We, who don’t sell anything [alcoholic], have to close at 11. You can’t understand their rationale. It’s typical Italian rationale… Just Via Petroni, just Via Petroni! It’s condemned to be a failure. Just us. Just the artisans.

Whatever the official reasons for these sanctions, the owners I spoke to certainly believed they were being specifically targeted by the city and its policies. To quote Bichri once again, “we have a Left that, while talking in favour of immigrants’ rights, in practice vigorously opposes the immigrants’ presence in the name of the ‘good of the city.’”\textsuperscript{115} Whether immigrant restaurant owners are being intentionally targeted by the city cannot be determined definitively. But at least on Via Petroni—the street where foreign restaurants seem most heavily concentrated—purveyors of foreign foods sense a distinct threat.

There is little doubt that there exists a discrepancy between inclusionary rhetoric and the lived reality of the immigrant experience in Bologna. Between official policies of exclusion and the resistance of Italians to eat unfamiliar foods, immigrant restaurant owners are left feeling decidedly “other,” even in Bologna, considered Italy’s most liberal city.

**Challenges of Running a Foreign Restaurant**

The following sections explore some of the everyday challenges foreign restaurateurs face in doing business in their adopted home.

*Difficulty of Sourcing Ingredients*

Primarily, Bologna’s non-Italian restaurants are Chinese, Japanese, Indian or Pakistani, and Turkish. For the most part, the owners of these restaurants are immigrants from the corresponding country, or the children of immigrants from these countries. Migrant restaurateurs in Italy often have to be creative in order to acquire the ingredients they need to prepare their

non-Italian cuisine. In other words, foreign restaurateurs face obstacles that owners of Italian trattorie or ristoranti do not encounter. For example, some foreign restaurateurs I spoke with noted that they had to acquire non-Italian ingredients from larger cities like Rome or Milan, import directly from the country of the cuisine itself, or buy from fornitori (“vendors”) who import ingredients.

Furthermore, the resulting dish sometimes differs widely from the version made in the country the cook calls home. According to economist Alberto Grandi:

We have seen how large-scale migration generates unforeseen effects on the gastronomy of migrating and host populations alike. As well as cultural and social elements, objective factors such as availability of ingredients and raw materials play a key role. There is in essence a process of hybridization through which immigrants’ food takes on local characteristics of the destination, which may differ widely from the home country.\(^{116}\)

Simply the fact of preparing the food in a different place results in hybridization of the original. This is a common occurrence faced by restaurateurs, especially those operating in small cities. Yet, this is an area that could allow for deliberate policy aimed at keeping certain traditions out of particular places.

Food purveyors serving kebab encounter special difficulties in sourcing their meats. One proprietor of an Indian restaurant that also sells kebab told me the Italian government, specifically the Azienda Sanitaria Locale (Local Sanitary Firm, ASL), has imposed many restrictions on the production of kebab within the country, forcing vendors to import prepared kebab meat from abroad (primarily Germany). A publication by the Italian Ministry of Health outlining the disease or bacteria risks associated with meats and fish includes the countries of

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origin for all of the products in question. All kebab products listed (“kebab,” “doner kebab,” “chicken and turkey kebab,” and “chicken kebab”) are listed as hailing from Germany.¹¹⁷

*Necessity of Mixing It Up*

Not only is the provenance of kebab meat worth noting. In Bologna, as in many other European cities, kebabs are sold not only at restaurants that provide food of a similar tradition (e.g., Turkish or North African), but also at a variety of restaurants where kebab is not culturally congruent—for example, the meat is often sold alongside pizza and panini (by non-Italians, in most cases) or Indian curry dishes (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. A fast food shop on *Via dell’Indipendenza* sells an eclectic mix of takeaway fast-food items. This is the only non-Italian restaurant on the street, which is Bologna’s main area for shopping. *Source:* Photo by author.

¹¹⁷ “Direzione Generale per la sicurezza degli alimenti e della nutrizione UFFICIO VIII,” *Ministero di Salute*
Kebab has achieved the status of a pan-European fast-food staple, offered nearly as widely as hamburgers (in fact, in Bologna, kebabs as snacks appear to be significantly more prevalent than American fast foods). Taste for kebabs followed the large influx of Turkish people into Germany during the latter half of the twentieth century. Then, “in the 1990s, there was a sort of ‘McDonaldization’ of the kebab house, and a limited number of franchises spread out all over Europe from Germany. Rising numbers of Turkish immigrants to Europe soon created demand in countries like Italy where such tastes and requirements had previously been relatively small.” Still, the demand for kebabs in Italy is not universal, but the prevalence of the meat in a variety of contexts denotes its status as commonplace. Given its popularity across Europe, it makes sense that owners of restaurants (even those that are not Turkish or North African) provide kebab, an item that has achieved a level of popular recognition higher than other non-Italian foods.

As Figure 5 suggests, the one Italian food that is often linked to kebab by fast food purveyors and restaurateurs is pizza. The chef of an Indian restaurant offers pizza at his restaurant for customers or their children who are not comfortable eating Indian food. This level of accommodation would likely not be found at an Indian restaurant in the United States, or the United Kingdom where large numbers of Indians are concentrated, indicating in Bologna a greater need to draw in and accommodate a customer base that includes those who are unfamiliar and even uncomfortable with the cuisine in question.

Hybridity is evident too in the fusion characteristic of most Asian restaurants I investigated. As noted above, there is a general rule that the type of restaurant reflects the home cuisine of its owner. But an exception exists in the case of Japanese restaurants. Sushi restaurants are fairly common in Bologna, though I did not meet any Japanese immigrants in my

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research. All owners of sushi restaurants I visited were Chinese, and in most cases, the sushi restaurants served Chinese and other Asian food alongside sushi. Noted one Singapore-born owner of an Asian fusion restaurant on the city’s west side, “sushi is in fashion.” She observed that serving only Chinese or only Japanese food, as opposed to the mix her restaurant offered, would limit the flow of customers to her establishment.

Such fusion leaves the impression that individual national cuisines do not have enough cultural capital to draw Italian customers on their own. Rather, customers seem to be attracted to broader ideas of non-Italian food. During interviews with residents of Bologna, for example, people mentioned their interest in *cibo asiatico*, or Asian food. Only upon further questioning did they specifically mention Chinese, Japanese, or Indian food.
One of the main sources for foreign ingredients in Bologna exemplifies this tendency toward fusion as well. Asia Mach, a grocery store located near the city’s university zone, carries a wide variety of non-Italian ingredients. The store was founded in 1988 by Mach Van Hung and run by his son, Angelo Mach, both of Chinese origin. Originally a vendor of Chinese ingredients, the store now carries an inventory representing cuisines from all over the globe. It stocks, among many other items, bags of rice and boxes of Cantonese noodles along with packets of Mexican chili and fajita spices. It also has cooking implements, table settings, dishes, and ingredients sold in bulk—essentially, it carries all kitchen-related items associated with cuisines that would not be available in an Italian grocery store (Figures 7, 8, and 9). This commercial space typifies the hybridity and mixing associated with immigrant food culture in Bologna.

Figure 7. Dishes and cookware sold at Asia Mach in Bologna. Source: Photo by author.

Figure 8. Rice sold in bulk at Asia Mach in Bologna. Source: Photo by author.

In general, non-Italian restaurants in Bologna tend to be small, family-run establishments. Many restaurant owners I talked with moved to Bologna with family or friends and run their restaurants with no more than two or three friends or family members. For example, a young proprietor of a Turkish restaurant runs the establishment with two of his family members, both of whom moved to Bologna from Turkey. Likewise, a Pakistani restaurant owner who has lived in Bologna for more than 15 years runs his restaurant with his wife.

In nearly all cases, the owners of the restaurants I spoke with also work as the establishments’ chefs. Their lives are dominated by work. Time away from work tends to be dedicated to their children or other home upkeep tasks. Said one Pakistani respondent, who opened his restaurant in 2000,
There isn’t free time. I have to bring the kids to school in the morning, I have to go shopping, and then I come to work here. After 3 [p.m.] I go to pick up the kids and bring them home, then I watch TV for about an hour, then I come back to work until about midnight or one a.m. and when I go home, I go to bed. I’m always busy.

Similarly, other respondents with families to attend to expressed this lack of free time. Only one respondent, a college-aged Turkish male, noted that he frequented popular places for Italian students, such as clubs, parks, and movie theaters. He was also one of few respondents to note that his friends included Italians as well as people of other ethnicities.

For the most part, interviewees expressed a sense of detachment from the rest of Bolognese society, due in part to the fact that their experience of Bologna is substantially limited (given the amount of time spent at their restaurants). And although their restaurants may be centrally located, their customers do not make up a representative sample of Bologna’s population, as shown in Chapter Two. Furthermore, all respondents, when asked if they could identify a broader presence of culture or community of their country of origin in Bologna, said cultural elements beyond food, or other indefinable notions of their native cultures, were not to be found in the city. Foreign restaurant owners, then, rely more on their restaurants—and the spaces they occupy—to fill a cultural void and create a sense of belonging and home in a territory with which they were (in most cases I investigated) not acquainted at birth. This phenomenon can be understood as living a “parallel” life, evoking Hamid Bichri’s insight quoted above in connection with the spaces Bologna’s immigrants occupy in their adopted city.

**Restaurant as Home: Creating a Diasporic Habitus**

Most of the chefs I interviewed told me the recipes they use in their restaurants are the same as those they use at home. The chef of a Pakistani restaurant, who prided himself on
forming relationships with his (mostly student) customers, said he cooks in *casalinga* (housewife or homemaker) style. In fact, for owners of foreign restaurants, their workplaces serve almost as extensions of their domestic spheres. Many restaurant owners prepare foods exactly as they would at home; additionally, several noted that they eat most of their meals in the restaurant. Combined with the fact that many owners work with their spouses, children, and close friends, foreign restaurants grant their customers a certain level of intimacy. It is as if they are inviting their clientele into an extension of their home. It makes sense that these foreign restaurant owners need to create a personalized and comfortable space for themselves in the midst of an environment that has proven to be quite hostile, as shown in Chapter Two. According to Grandi, [food] transmits values that have crystallized over time as well as economic and cultural elements typical of the society of the home country. Along with language, food is one of the strongest elements of identity binding migrant groups.”

Consequently, it is to be expected that the physical spaces associated with these cultural elements would play an important role in cultivating a sense of belonging.

All restaurant owners noted that they eat both the cuisine of their home country in addition to Italian food. They did not mention the consumption of cuisines beyond their own and that of their host country, apart from one employee (not owner) of a sushi restaurant, born in Bologna, who said he enjoys foods from several different cuisines. Given food’s role as a cultural anchor and powerful evoker of memory as demonstrated in Chapter One, it makes sense that someone in an environment where elements of their culture are not otherwise readily accessible would rely on their native cuisine as a direct link to their home.

Food, then, seems to serve as a sort of cultural safe haven—a reproducible, portable, and highly memory-charged cultural artifact with which immigrants construct a sort of “diasporic

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habitus,” a Bourdieu-inflected term coined by sociologist Michaeline Crichlow. As she describes it, “Habitus… remains as a conditioning force forming agency, or as a ‘womb of space’ productive of boundaries, ontologically shaping yet also enabling the emergence of these conditional and strategic politics articulated in the movements of people seeking translations of place.”\footnote{Michaeline Crichlow, \textit{Globalization and the Post-Creole Imagination} (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 32.} Perhaps ironically, like the Italians themselves for whom food is a pivotal marker of their nation, migrants, too, express their identities through their production of spaces where food serves as the primary mechanism to enact projects of homeliness. For immigrants, these “translations of place” happen first with their migration to Italy and also via the transplantations of kitchens into foreign environments. The kitchen, with its implicit cultural significance, is a crucial space in the construction of habitus for immigrants. Rebuffed by their reluctant hosts, migrants attempt to solidify their new locations. That is to say, they create diasporas, reconstituting their connections to their homelands in a dynamic fashion. As Crichlow writes, “The idea of diaspora…facilitates an optic that destabilizes the over-determinism of locales through its focus on global processes, imaginations of diverse places, as well as on the plurality and flexibility of traditions, communities, and temporalities.”\footnote{Michaeline Crichlow, \textit{Globalization and the Post-Creole Imagination}, 184.} Immigrants must create spaces of welcome and living—diasporas—surrounded by locals, whose own livelihoods are under attack in a climate of economic neoliberalism and globalization.
CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that Italy, its food, and its people are intimately connected. The industries of gastrotourism and enotourism depend on this connection, drawing visitors who want to experience the country through their taste buds and chefs who want to share their passion for Italian food with tourists. Italy’s passion for its own cuisine is a defining characteristic of the country, one that no doubt contributes to making the country vibrant and attractive to millions of visitors annually.

However, as this thesis shows, the centrality of culinary traditions in Italian culture, as much as it reinforces Italians’ identity and belonging in Italy, plays a powerful role in making newcomers to the country feel ostracized and marginalized. Some Italian families and individuals, of course, are more open to foreign cuisines than others. But overall, the Italian social space does not welcome traditions outside local culinary canons.

I have shown that the centrality of what is deemed tradition in cuisine parallels the pervasive political discourses that serve to make those with different backgrounds and traditions feel unwelcome. In this regard, we can see how xenophobia in Italy is exhibited through not only explicit political rhetoric, but also daily interactions and (non)engagement with cultures considered incongruent with narrowly defined Italian tradition, in a somewhat micro-aggressive fashion.

Immigrant restaurant owners in Italy attempt to sell foods with which many Italians have unfamiliar, uncomfortable, or unwilling relationships. This difficulty is augmented by the fact that immigrants’ restaurants exist amongst hundreds of other options purveying food many
Italians were weaned on almost exclusively, and which plays such a crucial role in the production of Italian identity.

Although this thesis addresses some of the main issues facing immigrants in Italy with regard to food, my work is still exploratory at best. For example, my sample of interviewees was too small to draw definite conclusions, so I used secondary materials to bolster the findings of my research. However, to supplement and fortify these findings, a more thorough survey that gathers far more data on Italians’ perceptions of foreign foods is needed. Such a survey would plot or track more precisely and closely the eating habits of Italians, e.g., how often they consume foreign foods, and on what occasions. It also would more systematically track the demographic composition of clientele at various foreign restaurants. Given more time for research, I would incorporated an analysis of important differences in the quality and prestige of foreign restaurant options, distinguishing between fine dining and cheaper options and corresponding differences in clientele and dining occasions. This type of data, based on a larger sample size, would convey more systematically the culinary components and practices beyond the consumption practices captured here. That is to say, such research would demonstrate more consistently the triadic relationship among food, nationalism, and identity. Moreover, I think further exploration would require more ethnographic research guided by the protocols of anthropologists—participant observation, including as Renato Renaldo suggests, a “deep hanging out.”

Additionally, a language barrier was at times prohibitive during my research, primarily with the respondents of non-Italian origin. In several cases, the respondents did not understand the question I was asking, nor did I understand their responses. And in general, these respondents

123 In 1998, the noted anthropologist Clifford Geertz coined the term “deep hanging out” to convey the idea that anthropologists should immerse themselves among cultural groups or experiences at an informal level. See http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1998/oct/22/deep-hanging-out/
demonstrated a level of discomfort with the Italian language that prevented them from providing more thorough or forthright answers. Had I been a native or fully fluent Italian speaker with more time at hand, I might have been better able to rephrase my questions or make more sense of answers that were phrased in a manner unfamiliar to me.

Notwithstanding these shortcomings, I am convinced that my research draws a fundamental connection between food’s importance to Italian identity and the difficulties faced by immigrants regarding integration in a new land. I believe that conducting similar studies in other European countries would be beneficial, as they would reveal definitively whether or not Italy is indeed an outlier in terms of “culinary xenophobia” due to the exceptional importance of food in Italy’s culture and history. For example, Germany came up in my research as a country where foreign ingredients appropriate for migrants’ cuisines are more readily available. Foreign foods—particularly doner kebabs—have been popular in the country for several decades now. A 1999 article in *German Life* magazine, for example, illustrates the popularity of kebabs at the time. Up to the time of that article, kebabs had been growing in popularity thanks to the large presence of Turkish guest-workers in the country. The kebab phenomenon took off in Berlin and spread throughout the country—according to the article, in 1999 the average German consumed 10 kebabs annually.\(^{124}\) Comparing European countries in terms of how normalized foreign foods have become could play an important role in better understanding how dramatic and/or problematic (or not) the Italian situation might be. And beyond the question of food, it would be useful to compare the countries’ immigration policies.

Regardless of how Italy compares to other European countries, it is clear that food cannot be overlooked as a potential barrier to integration. As we have seen here, it can be wielded as a

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‘soft’ weapon, but a weapon nevertheless in the repertoire of micro-aggressions directed at the “other.” More generally, though, it cannot be denied that racism in Italy exists on every scale—from nationally publicized discourse courtesy of the Lega Nord to firmly held individual beliefs that no food in the world could possibly be better than home-grown, indigenous Italian food.

If one excludes Italy’s tomatoes and their associated pastas, which have become indigenized, foreign foods are still a relatively new phenomenon in Italy. Many interview respondents observed, for example, that the influx of foreign foods began around the 1980s, in line with the influx of immigrants to the country. So there are still many Italians who grew up in the country before foreign restaurants were as widespread as they are today. Perhaps with time and familiarity, and when the current college-aged, seemingly more adventurous generation become parents, non-Italian foods will play a larger role in the development of children’s tastes and options in a way that they currently do not. Also, since the Slow Food movement and Lega Nord emerged around similar economic developments in the world in general (notably the rise of globalization and an economic regime of neoliberalism, which has no doubt been seen as threatening to national sovereignties), one may well argue that ruptures in those regimes—leading to better economic conditions—might very well redound to the benefit of migrants.125

Though tied to cultural identities that nations generally guard jealously and zealously, food nonetheless has the potential to be a diplomatic tool. In fact, one of the concepts that inspired my interest in food’s cultural importance is gastrodiplomacy, a term coined by communications and diplomacy scholar Paul Rockower. As he defined it, “Gastrodiplomacy is a broader public diplomacy attempt to communicate culinary culture to foreign publics in a fashion that is more diffuse [than traditional diplomacy], and tries to influence broader audiences rather

125 One may even argue that the Slow Food movement, given its parallel rise in the context of the re-nationalization of place, might also be seen as much more than a concern with purely food politics.
than high-level elites."\textsuperscript{126} So although as we have seen, food can function as a border or barrier, it may also be used as a tool to foster greater understanding of a culture on an intimate level. How and in what ways food might transcend patterns of othering and racializations that themselves emerge from other longer term projects embedded in how the West was made, as Michel-Rolph Trouillot might assert, remains to be seen.\textsuperscript{127}

\textsuperscript{126} Paul Rockower, “Recipes for Gastrodiplomacy,” \textit{Place Branding and Public Diplomacy} 8, no. 3 (2012).
Appendix

I used two different sets of questions to guide my interviews: one for interviewees of Italian descent, and the other for interviewees of non-Italian descent. In general, I asked all interviewees all the questions on the relevant list, but adapted as appropriate over the course of each interview. I also asked each participant to sign a waiver indicating their consent to participate in my research.

**Domande per I partecipanti italiani** *(Questions for Italian participants)*

- Che cos’è il cibo italiano? Si può definire la cucina italiana? *(What is Italian food? Can you define Italian cuisine?)*
- Quanto spesso mangia I cibi non-italiani? *(How often do you eat non-Italian food?)*
- Prepara mai dei cibi non-italiani a casa? *(Do you ever prepare non-Italian food at home?)*
- Cosa prepara? *(What do you make?)*
- Che tipi di ristoranti frequenta? *(What types of restaurants do you visit?)*
- Se invitate degli amici a casa sua per una cena, preparereste mai un pasto non-italiano? Perché? *(If you invited friends over for a dinner, would you ever prepare a non-Italian meal?)*
- Ha notato qualche cambiamenti culinari a Bologna nei anni recenti? *(Have you noticed culinary changes in Bologna in recent years?)*
- Che cos’ha cambiato? *(What has changed?)*
- Seconodo lei, perché ci sono questi cambiamenti (o perché non ci sono dei cambiamenti) *(In your opinion, why have these changes occurred?(or why aren’t there changes?))
• Come risponde ai cambiamenti? (How do you respond to these changes?)
• Per quanto riguarda il cibo, I suoi figli (o I suoi genitori) hanno degli abitudini diversi dai suoi? (With regard to food, are your children’s (or parents’) habits different than yours?)

**Domande per i partecipanti immigrati (Questions for immigrant participants)**

**Domande generali (General questions)**

• Di dov’è? (Where are you from?)
• Perché ha deciso di venire a Bologna? (Why did you decide to come to Bologna?)

**Domande sull’impresa (Questions about the establishment)**

• Quando ha fondato la sua impresa? (When did you set up your business?)
• Perché ha fondato un ristorante? (Why did you set up a restaurant?)
• Come ha trovato questo posto? (How did you find this location?)
• Lavora con altre persone del suo paese? (Do you work with other people from your country?)
• Con quante persone lavora? (How many people do you work with?)
• Di dove sono? (Where are they from?)

**Domande sul cibo (Questions about food)**

• Com’è il cibo del suo paese? (What is the food like in your country?)
• È difficile trovare qualche ingrediente a Bologna? (Is it hard to find some ingredients in Bologna?)
• Le manca il cibo del suo paese? (Do you miss the food from your country?)

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• Come sono diversi i cibi che lei prepara a casa e al ristorante? (How are the foods you prepare at home and at your restaurant different?)
• Che cosa prepara di solito a casa? (What do you usually prepare at home?)
• Quali cibi preferiscono i suoi figli? (What foods do your children like?)
• Come sono cambiate le sue abitudini culinarie da quando è arrivato in Italia? (How have your culinary habits changed since you arrived in Italy?)

Domande sulla cittadinanza/identità (Questions about citizenship/identity)
• Come si trova a Bologna? (How are you/how do you feel in Bologna?)
• Che cosa fa per divertirsi? (What do you do for fun?)
• Chi sono i suoi amici? Come li ha conosciuti? (Who are your friends? Where did you meet them?)
• Si sente capace di praticare la sua cultura a Bologna? (Do you feel able to practice your culture in Bologna?)
• Si sente benvenuto nel suo quartiere? (Do you feel welcome in your neighborhood?)
Dichiarazione di Consenso (Consent Waiver)

Margot Tuchler
Informazione di Contatto: +39 3348492365
margottuchler@gmail.com
Via Belmeloro 7, Bologna, 40123


Se è d’accordo, chiederò qualche domanda sulle sue abitudini culinarie e anche la sua esperienza (in un senso più generale) e la sua vita a Bologna. Mi piacerebbe usare qualche quotazione nel mio progetto, ma se preferisce che non lo faccio o non è d’accordo con la pubblicazione di qualsiasi informazione, è libero a dirmi e rispetterò la sua richiesta. Userò un pseudonimo nel progetto finale.

Registratorò l’audio di questa intervista solo per l’uso mio—dopo aver trascritto l’intervista, la registrazione sarà cancellata.

Se non vuole rispondere a una domanda, possiamo continuare alla prossima. Se non si sente al suo agio a qualsiasi punto dell’intervista, non è obbligato a continuare. Per ogni domanda, è libero a darmi una risposta lunga come vuole.

Se le serve qualche altra informazione, può contattarmi al mio indirizzo di email, scritto sopra, o al mio numero di telefono.

Se è d’accordo con ciò che è scritto sopra, le prego di firmare sotto. Grazie per la cooperazione!

Firma del partecipante: __________________________________________

Nome: __________________________________________

Data: __________________________________________
## List of Interviewees

### Immigrant Interviewees (Country of origin, gender, approximate age)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>40s or 50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
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</tr>
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<td>China</td>
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<td>30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>40s or 50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
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</tr>
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<td>50s or 60s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>30s or 40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>female</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>20s</td>
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### Italian interviewees (City or region of origin, gender, approximate age)

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<th>City/Region</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
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<td>Parma</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Arezzo (Tuscany)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Syracuse (Sicily)</td>
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<td>40s</td>
</tr>
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<td>40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
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<td>male</td>
<td>teenage</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Veneto region</td>
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<td>40s or 50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Turin (Piedmont)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Ancona (Marche)</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
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<td>20s</td>
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<tr>
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<td>male</td>
<td>30s</td>
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<td>female</td>
<td>20s</td>
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<tr>
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<td>20s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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128 5, 6, and 7 are two parents and their son, who were interviewed together
129 13 and 14 are in a relationship and were interviewed together
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