



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI MACERATA

DIPARTIMENTO DI STUDI LINGUISTICI, FILOLOGICI E LETTERARI

MODERN AND COMPARATIVE LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES

CICLO XXX

“IDENTITY ON THE MOVE”

FOOD, SYMBOLISM AND AUTHENTICITY IN THE ITALIAN-AMERICAN MIGRATION PROCESS

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ANNO 2018

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Introduction

The late 1960s and the early 1970s saw a surge of popular as well as scholarly interest in ethnicity, with significant production of scholarly analyses of ethnicity, immigration, and intergenerational relationships among first generation immigrants and their descendants. In particular, Italian American communities played an active role in the phenomenon of ethnic revival.

In the context of this inquiry into ethnicity, Food Studies also emerged as an interdisciplinary field that examines the role that food plays in constructing our sense of identity. Researchers have been challenged to go beyond focus on the aesthetic pleasure of food to a broader analysis of how personal and collective identities are constructed through food choices. In fact, food means much more than mere sustenance: it is a cultural expression that defines who we are and how we differentiate ourselves from others.

My work contributes to the study of the human experience of “food space”, understood as a social construction that encompasses patterns of human behavior and their sensory relationship to a place. It also explores the theme of ethnic entrepreneurship. In fact, from production to consumption, food represents both a physical, geographical and territorial area as well as a cultural, social and economic sphere of debate between tradition and innovation.

Indeed, food symbolizes a chain of meanings that shapes our culture and identity and incorporates the eater into a specific culinary framework. Like language, food is a relatively conservative system of symbols that human beings internalize from the time they are born. On the other hand, food practices and preferences also reflect changes in the way people prepare and consume meals in different historical circumstances.

This is particularly true in the experience of Italian migration to the United States. Study of food choices offers a unique perspective from which to examine the evolution of ethnic identities in space and time and to gain understanding of the fluidity of our identity. Furthermore, it is safe to say that Italians have always had a straightforward relationship with food as a factor of cultural identity. In the Italian American experience, also, food has been of exceptional importance both as a culinary tradition and a socio-cultural and economic element of innovation.

As an identity maker, food tells us stories of nostalgia, assimilation, resistance and change, and helps us comprehend the negotiation of our ethnicity in the “liminal space of alterity” (Rollock 66). As Italians immigrated to America, they brought their food system with them, but they also tried new products and recipes, and adapted their cooking and culinary style

to the American habits and tastes. In doing so, they forged a hybrid culinary culture that merged tradition and innovation and helped create a new sense of belonging in an unknown place.

The core of this research project is a multi-generational investigation of the multifaceted Italian immigration process, using food culture as a vehicle for examining how immigrants lost their old identity and forged a new one in a foreign land. The focus on the United States was motivated by the fact that starting in the late 19th century, it was one of the primary destinations for Italian emigration. In fact, 5.5 million Italians moved there between 1820 and 2004 (Cavaioli 221).

To explain how regional cuisine in America became a collective symbol of ethnicity and a factor of a distinct national identity for Italian Americans, I adopted the model created by Werner Sollors and Kathleen Neils Cozen regarding the “invention of ethnicity”.

The overall purpose of this dissertation is to examine how food served as a nostalgic link with the homeland for the first generation, a cultural compromise for the second, and a tool in formulating a hybrid ethnicity for later generations. The lens of food is also used to explore the development of Italian ethnic entrepreneurship, followed by the rise of Italian restaurants during Prohibition and their role in the process of culinary homogenization and invention of tradition in the contemporary world. Finally, two case studies are presented and discussed, and a qualitative approach is used to analyze the creation of a solid Italian American identity in contemporary America through the use of hybrid food practices.

The opening chapter presents an overview of Italian immigration to the United States, and then discusses methodology. The chapter first explores the large-scale migration that affected Italy and Italian cultural history for over a century, and then follows the development in time of food and foodways, “the eating habits and culinary practices of a people, region, or historical period”.¹

The first section of this chapter describes the cultural significance of food and its role in constructing a national identity beyond the borders of Italy. The segment starts with analysis of the early phase of the Italian Diaspora to the United States, during which Italy was still a nation of regions, each with its unique way of cooking. Next, the historical analysis focuses on the subsequent variation in food habits during the mass immigration.

The chapter concludes by illustrating the theoretical framework used to explore different dimensions of ethnicity. It describes changing ideas about the concepts of assimilation and

¹ The definition of “Foodways” was taken from Merriam-Webster Dictionary <http://bit.ly/2ifl3i9>

Americanization, reviews the debate on cultural pluralism, and provides an overview of theories about the invention of ethnicity, and how they are used to understand the construction of identity.

The second chapter starts from the assumption that identity is socially constructed and constantly changing. It analyzes the not-fixed nature of food, explored through three distinct but often overlapping spheres: “individual memory”, “collective memory”, and “invented tradition”.

In terms of “individual memory”, we see how the first Italian immigrants tended to conserve their regional traditions, and how as the years passed, their remembrances of Italy no longer corresponded to the contemporary reality of a country left decades before. Through the perpetuation of rituals of eating at home, the first immigrants promoted a “mythical tradition” by selecting ancestral values and transmitting them to following generations.

In terms of collective memory, we can observe the conflict between the first and second generation of Italian immigrants in response to the social pressures of their new country. Here, the elders use food and symbolic rituals to keep their children close, while the second generation struggles to give birth to a new innovative culture, closer to the American one. This intergenerational conflict is solved around the “table” through a food-based contract that helps to create a more cohesive identity. The result is a step forward into a more united Italian-American cuisine. The analysis ends with the representation of later generations committed to recreating a separate culture of food as a symbol of creolized identity.

Chapter three, the first empirical chapter of the dissertation, analyzes various literary forms in which second, third and contemporary generations of Italian-Americans reminisce on or seek to learn more about their heritage, and shows the importance of Italian food in shaping Italian-American identity. This part focuses on intergenerational changes in the expression of food identity and construction of a new ethnic identity.

The fourth chapter outlines Italian food economic history in America, in an ethnic narrative that brings together economic, social and cultural aspects of the Italian diaspora in America, from the early inexpensive restaurants that offered diners traditional Italian home-cooking, to the development of a recognizable Italian-American style of cooking. Moreover, the chapter focuses on the cultural dialogue between local ethnic cuisines and the globalized world, to show how the process of culinary integration in modern times passes through cross-cultural understanding. The section ends with an exploration of the ‘Italian sounding’ phenomenon in the US, in which restaurant chains and the food industry use images, colors and product names very similar to their Italian equivalent but with no direct links to Italian traditions or culture. This phenomenon adds more fuel to the fire of the debate about “authenticity” and has serious ramifications for the future of the Italian food market in America.

The final chapter provides an ethnographic description of what it means to be an Italian-American today and explores how Italian restaurants currently fit into the American culinary tradition. Using the theory of the invention of tradition, it describes two ethnographic researches in Naples, Florida, to analyze how contemporary Italian Americans manifest their ethnicity through food as a symbol of belonging, and explores how Italian food is marketed in contemporary ethnic restaurants in the U.S.

The first case study examines how Italian-Americans have used food-related collective symbols of *Italianità* to shape their identity. The analysis starts from the assumption that Italian-Americans defined their Italian roots over time through a years-long process of selecting cultural meanings and picking and choosing from fragments of tradition. Therefore, through the case study we can see the ways in which contemporary Italian-American culture is an invention that has selected traces of tradition and used food as a symbol in the effort to adapt to the culture of this new homeland.

The second case study is presented to analyze if and to what extent Italian restaurants in contemporary America use a social construct of “authenticity” in advertising their fare. They seek to create an impression of genuineness for non-ethnic customers. Once again, the term “authenticity” is used here to mean an invention, because restaurateurs actually do not offer historically accurate regional dishes or contemporary Italian cuisine, but rather serve innovative dishes that seek to meet American consumer expectations about what “authentic” Italian food should be. Thus “authenticity” is a non-objective category, inasmuch as traditional dishes are modified and transformed in space and time to create an illusion of what Italians ate or eat in the homeland. This chapter shows food as a non-static element, the preparation of which constantly changes and evolves, and looks at the way Italian identity is perceived and sold today in America.

1. Italian immigration into the United States

1.1 The Italian Diaspora: Over a Century of Migration

As well expressed by Donna Gabaccia, the history of Italian emigration encompasses many diasporas from a variety of Italian regions. Those leaving Italy had no clear sense of national identity (Gabaccia 2000, 1), because until its unification in the 19th century, Italy was a patchwork of the papal states, kingdoms, duchies, and provinces. The early immigrants saw themselves as Christians first, and then as citizens of particular towns or villages, but they had no awareness of being Italians. Before 1861, when the Italian Kingdom was proclaimed, Italy “was a nation in name only” (Mangione; Morreale Prologue XV), where a man from Sicily was simply a *Siciliano*, and a woman from Naples a *Napoletana*.

Thus migrants identified themselves in terms of their urban and regional roots and the common values held in these areas. Like other migrants, Italians were emotionally attached to their origins, and the majority of them started the migration as sojourners, intending to return home after they had earned a sufficient amount of money. Outside Italy, Italian immigrants had a sense of belonging to their hometown, a single village – the *paese* – and to the network of their fellow townspeople who, like them, had made this journey (Gabaccia 2005, 144-145).

Examination of the unique Italian immigration experience, especially in the case of the migration to the United States, illustrates how Italian *paesani* with their distinct regional identities and traditions became Italians first and then Italian-Americans.

The Italian diaspora was a large-scale migration that affected Italy and Italian economic history for over a century, especially during the 19th and 20th centuries. It was estimated that between 1876 and 1976 approximately 26 million Italians immigrated to other countries searching for better living conditions, although about half of them returned to their homeland at a later time (Pretelli 15).

Until about 1880, the preferred destinations were neighboring countries like France, Austria-Hungary and Switzerland. Starting in the late 19th century, they began moving to the New World as well, seen as a place of opportunities and freedom, with northern Italians travelling largely to Europe and Latin America, and southern Italians moving to North America.

Historical sources indicate that the Italian migration to the United States occurred in several distinct stages (Gabaccia 2000; Luconi; Pratelli 2008, Bevilacqua; De Clementi; Franzina). The first stage took place approximately between 1870 and the outbreak of the First

World War, peaking after 1889, the second phase between the end of World War I and the beginning of WWII, while the third began after World War II and continued until the 1970s.

Migrants from all over the world were attracted by stories portraying America as a land of “Milk and Honey”² that promised prosperity and the opportunity to participate in the American Dream. Unlike Italy, in fact, America “was an idea long before it became a place, and as idea, it enveloped all hopes of complete freedom, real equality, absence of persecution and unlimited potential for living life to its fullest” (Gardaphe xi). In this regard, Emanuele Crialesse’s film *Nuovomondo* (2006), based on an Italian family’s migration journey from a small village in Sicily to the New World, ends with an imaginary sequence in which the main characters swim in a river of milk. According to the unrealistic expectations of many an Italian immigrant, America was the land of opportunities where giant carrots grew and coins fell from the sky.

The reality that awaited them belied the stories they had believed. Though the American imagination saw Italy as the land of art, sun and history, Italian immigrants faced prejudice and hostility motivated by racist attitudes that saw them as genetically weak (Pretelli 15), an uncivilized and primitive people with a natural propensity for violence, a situation that made assimilation more difficult. Italian immigrants were treated badly and portrayed as violent criminals not only by Americans but also by other immigrant groups from northern and western Europe. Wherever they settled, Italians were often met with prejudice, and especially in the United States, where they were represented as mice poised to infest the city and insulted as ‘dagos’, ‘wops’, or ‘guineas’³ (Pretelli 100).

During the first stage, over four million Italians entered the country via Ellis Island⁴ attracted by higher wages and the “American Dream”⁵. America was a magnet for migrants from the poorest parts of Italy, where most people were poor, uneducated and unemployed (Gabaccia

² According to Collins English Dictionary, “Land of Milk and Honey” refers to a phrase used in the Book of Exodus in which the Lord promises to bring Israelites into a land flowing with milk and honey, far away from Egypt. <https://www.collinsdictionary.com>

³ According to Merriam-Webster, “Wop” is a denigrating name used to indicate a person of Italian or Spanish birth or descent. Probably originated from the southern dialect term “guappo”, it means “thug”, “pimp”, or “criminal”. “Dago” is another word that came to mean a member of a Latin race. A derivative of the Spanish name *Diego*, it was originally coined in the seventeenth century to label Spanish or Portuguese sailors. In the nineteenth century, the word became famous in the USA and used as a contemptuous term for Italians, due to the mass immigration. Guinea, instead, represents the vilest accusation that can be utilized against Italian Americans. The term refers to the Guinea Coast of Africa, by the last decade of the 19th Century; it was being applied to Italians to underline how their skin was darker than Nordic skin and thus more similar to the African one. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>

⁴ Ellis Island was also called “The Island of Tears” or “Heartbreak Island” because, as reported by the Government, about 2% of Italian immigrants were denied entry through Ellis Island Immigration Center and thus deported back to Italy.

⁵ The “American Dream” was coined in 1931 by historian James Truslow Adams in his book *Epic of America* (1931).

1999, 12). Mostly illiterate and unskilled men from Campania, Puglia, Basilicata, Calabria, Sicily and Sardinia, driven by lack of land for the rural population and internal political and economic problems, left their homeland for New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and New Orleans, or, following their memory of sunny Italy, for California and Florida (Luconi; Pretelli 88).

During these stages of Italian immigration, Ellis Island, located in upper New York Bay, was the federal immigration station as well as the main entryway to the United States. It remained so until 1954, when it was officially closed and later transformed into the Museum of American Immigration. In his book *Mount Allegro* (1946), Jerre Mangione, a Sicilian-American writer, whose parents immigrated in America during the first wave, wrote that “Ellis Island was little more than a prison in those days” (Mangione 63). Immigrants were subjected to physical inspections and mental exams to determine whether they were fit for entry into the United States. Immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, in particular, were treated with less dignity and respect, as they were considered inferior, unskilled and uneducated, compared to the northern European immigrants. For them, failure to pass the examinations would probably lead to separation from the rest of the family for good as family members who passed the examination were allowed to enter, and those who failed were forced to return to their country of origin.

The second stage of migration started after the end of World War I, provoked by the rise of Fascism and the extremely difficult post-war economic conditions. A census of Italian emigrants conducted at the height of the post WWI period by the Italian Foreign Ministry estimated that in 1927 there were about 9,200,000 Italians who were living overseas, 7,700,000 of whom were living in America (Cannistraro; Rosoli 675).

This second wave temporarily troughed with the outbreak of World War II, as both the Fascist and the American governments introduced legislation restricting migration. During the Second World War, the discrimination progressively increased. When Benito Mussolini sided with Hitler against the Allies, the Italian immigrants were required to carry identity cards that could identify them as “resident alien”, and thus control their illegal movement to different places in America. Fascism was popular among Italian immigrants in the United States, motivated by their sensitivity to the U.S. restrictions on the mobility of immigrants, and the anti-Italian prejudice (Gabaccia 2005, 149). In this respect, Fascism reinforced the romantic sense of Italian ethnic identity, as a distinct group abroad.

The third wave of Italian immigration followed World War II and continued until approximately the 1970s. The massive unemployment in the immediate aftermath of World War II was quite destructive for the Italian domestic economy and forced many Italians to settle

elsewhere. However, during the decades following the end of the war, America was not as popular a destination for Italian immigrants as it had been during the previous mass migrations.

New restrictions on immigration, such as the McCarran-Walter Act or Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, were issued to reinforce the system of immigrant selection, with a consequent reduction in the number of Italians moving to America. But although the Act of 1952 specifically limited immigration from southern and Eastern Europe, it nonetheless placed priority on family reunification, and thus the third immigration stage was characterized by immigrants allowed to enter the country for purposes of household reunion. The post-war period also ushered in changes in the civil and social life of Italian Americans when the new generations born or raised in the U.S. aspired to become more American. It is difficult for scholars to define exactly when the “Americanization” process for Italian immigrants took place. The majority of Italians who left Italy during the nineteenth century could only speak their local dialects and were only interested in remaining connected with each other. Instead, the second generation and following generations felt the need to become more American in order to be accepted by the dominant culture and thus succeed in life, and to this end, for a time, many disregarded or even rejected their Italian heritage. With the progressive disappearance of the unassimilated greenhorn⁶ first generation, these generations were gradually Americanized (Pretelli 100).

The extensive historical documentation and study of this intergenerational change helps us understand not just why but how it happened. In the 1930’s and 1940’s, when the second generation reached adulthood, they started to experience the complexities of being in between two different cultures. While the Italian tradition dominated the private sphere, the American one controlled the public side of their life, creating an intergenerational conflict. From about the 1940s on, the children of Italian immigrants, partially disassociating themselves from their parents, ventured further across the United States, working in various careers and slowly integrating themselves into the broader society. To be successful, they began to embrace what their parents had rejected in terms of traditions and behavior closer to the mainstream country.

In his memoir *The Heart Is the Teacher* (1958), the Italian-born American educator Leonard Covello⁷ remembers how his generation was becoming American by learning how to be ashamed of the Italian culture (Covello; D’Agostino 2013, 32). An observation by Fred L. Gardaphe recounted in *Leaving Little Italies* (2004) sheds light on how the Americanization

⁶ The word “Greenhorns” is here used to refer to the newly arrived immigrants.

⁷ Leonard Covello is also well known as a teacher and reformer, and as the founder and first principal of the Benjamin Franklin High School in East Harlem neighborhood (New York).

process affected the second generation Italian Americans. “Just as the Italian immigrant to the United States was for the most part alienated from the mainstream economy [...] the second generation, the children of immigrants, became social immigrants, searching for acceptance in the larger society, something that would be easier for them once they lost the alien trappings of *Italianità* and mastered the means of obtaining power in American society” (Gardaphe 4-5).

Ironically, they became interested in their Italian ethnicity when the second and subsequent generations of Italian Americans experienced better integration into the cultural mainstream. With the ethnic revival of the 1960s and 1970s, ethnicity became a source of pride, and ethnic studies became increasingly popular.

The new interest in ethnicity of the late 1960s began when the people lost their faith in the American dream (Gardaphe 18). In the 1960s and 1970s, as African Americans began to affirm pride in their ethnicity and fight for their right to share in the American Dream, and also in the wake of the anti-Vietnam War protests and the revolutionary changes of mores and ambitions in these turbulent decades, the Italian Americans of later generations also became active participants in the ethnic revival, searching for their traditional values and heritage.

By the 1970s, the multicultural identity previously confined to private life started to find its public voice against the tyrannies of the WASP⁸ establishment. In this context, Italian-Americans expressed a new interest in the language, art and cuisine of their heritage, and the third and following generations in particular began a search to seek out their Italian roots, reconnecting with their Italian relatives in the homeland.

The positive effect of the ethnic revival helped the Italian Americans not to simply melt into the American culture but to create an ethnic community that shaped mainstream Italian-American culture.

⁸ According to the Cambridge Dictionary, the informal term *Wasp* refers to the White Anglo-Saxon Protestants, considered the most influential and wealthy group in the American society. It was mainly used to label a white American whose family originally came from northern Europe. <http://dictionary.cambridge.org>

1.1.1. Food Culture in the Italian Immigration Experience

The exodus of Italians started with the unification of Italy and grew during the following fifty years, to become one of the greatest migrations in world history (Mangione; Morreale 32). As mentioned above, Italians of the first stage of immigration tended to define themselves in terms of their native village and the related *paesani*, or fellow villagers, and seemed to feel they shared little in common with those from other regions.

Then, as noted by historian Stefano Luconi, by the time the Second World War started, these internal sub-national divisions were overcome, a result of a number of factors, among them the end of mass immigration, the spread of fascism and nationalism, anti-Italian propaganda and the rise of a second generation (Luconi 2003, 98). As a result, they slowly but remarkably developed a sense of national cohesion within the ethnic group that had not existed before the Italian Diaspora, and they laid the foundations for the Italian-American culture we know today.

Although the early Italian immigrants tried to reconstruct their identities in the New World by looking back to their tradition from the Old World *paese*, many Italian-Americans worked hard to negotiate and generate their identity as a sum of two separate cultures, their Italian heritage and the new American way of life.

To this day, for many Italian-Americans, one especially important facet of Italian culture defines what it means to be of Italian blood: food. In fact, for the first immigrants, food was essential to the conservation of the Italian identity, and for the following generations, it was similarly fundamental for the creation of an Italian-American ethnic culture. It continues to shape the sense of who they are and how they identify themselves to the world.

In this context, food studies offer a potent lens for exploring how food and foodways shaped Italian-American culture. A study of the past and present of Italian food in the United States, ranging from an intergenerational conflict solved around the table to a strong food-based ethnic economy, offers a compelling narrative of the struggle for ethnic recognition and the pursuit of social and economic power (Almerico 1).

Food studies challenge researchers to find the deeper meanings of the food choices and habits of centuries of migrations, and often reveal stories of resistance, assimilation and change. In fact, examining the what, where, how, and why of food as a symbol of ethnicity helps us develop a better understanding of our cultural identities over time.

1.1.2. *Birds of Passage* and the tension of assimilation

Any study regarding Italian emigration to the United States during the 19th and 20th centuries must also examine the common phenomenon of return to the homeland. Such migrants were disparagingly labeled *uccelli di passaggio* or “birds of passage.”⁹ While many southern and eastern European immigrants travelled to America to find work and improve their financial condition, with the intention of then returning to their homeland, this trend was particularly characteristic of Italian immigrants, more than any other ethnic group in America.

It has been estimated that from 1907 to 1911, 73% of the Italians who entered America subsequently returned to Italy¹⁰. Many of the millions of Italian peasants who arrived in the New World as a result of the agricultural crisis did so with the intention of returning to their homeland. Before the First World War, in fact, most of the *uccelli di passaggio* were single males, uneducated and with little desire to learn English and become part of mainstream American culture.

During this first major stage of Italian immigration to the U.S., which began around 1870, many of these immigrants who came with the intention of returning to their homeland were helped by more well-informed compatriots who functioned as middlemen¹¹ between newcomers and American employers (MacDonald; MacDonald 86). The *padrone* system became widespread in the United States approximately after the end of the Civil War, reached its period of greatest influence in the 1890s (Center for Migration Studies 91). The middleman was usually an Italian agent in America who acted as a labor boss for Italian newcomers and the American companies that sought low-cost workers. He generally provided transportation, food, clothing, and accommodation, asking for money in exchange for his services. Historians have expressed conflicting opinions about these *padroni*, some viewing them as corrupt opportunists, and others describing them as generous men ready to help their fellow villagers. In any case, it is undeniable that the *padrone* played a fundamental role in directing Italians in America (Iorizzo 74).

⁹ The term was used in the United States, already in the 1840s, to refer to British immigrants. It remained in use through the late twentieth century to refer mainly to European, Asian, and Latin American immigrants <http://bit.ly/2yZig6R>

¹⁰ The estimate was reported in www.digitalhistory.uk.edu

¹¹ The pattern of temporary work for Italian immigrants was based on a *padrone* system where an Italian “boss” or “patron” worked as a middleman in the labor trade to help the poor and unlettered Italian immigrants obtain transportation, temporary accommodation and work in North America. The *padrone* supported the new arrivals in exchange for “bossatura”, a commission that the Italians laborers had to pay as a bonus for obtaining their employment (Luconi; Pretelli 17).

The phenomenon of Italian “birds of passage” in America was a fundamental aspect of the Italian immigration experience. Their “love of homeland despite excruciating hardships, their commitment to financially assist those left behind in the old country, their desire to settle in closely-knit neighborhoods in the United States, and their resulting slow social assimilation and economic progress within American society” (Puleo 51) strongly characterized the first stage of Italian immigration.

By the time of the First World War, as Italian migration to the United States became more stable and the number of immigrants grew, Italians started to organize themselves into communities based on their birthplace. The primary purpose was to settle within an environment safe from prejudice and discrimination, and thus to promote their own businesses and preserve their culture.

In fact, as mentioned in Section 1, prejudice was often a fact of life for immigrant groups. Americans not uncommonly voiced alarm at mass migration, especially from southern and eastern European countries, and expressed the desire to check the flow of such “undesirable immigrants,” motivated by assumptions about the racial inferiority of these peoples and their will to maintain the population white, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant.

Milton Gordon asserted that the expectation of “Anglo-conformity” held sway during much of the second half of the nineteenth century. According to Gordon, it was assumed that ethnic groups should rapidly conform to and become assimilated into the dominant white American culture. Anglo-Saxon people considered themselves to be superior to other ethnic groups, especially those coming from southern and Eastern Europe, such as Italians, Jews, Slavs and Greeks (Cavaioli 216).

The ugly experience of prejudice based on assumptions about racial inferiority was well expressed by the Sicilian American writer Vincent Schiavelli, in his novel *Bruculinu, America*¹² (1998): “to American Brooklynites, the Sicilian immigrants were spaghetti benders, greaseballs, dirty guineas, wops and dago bastards to name but a handful of the common ethnic slurs of the day” (Schiavelli 30).

In the first half of the twentieth century, the Chicago School of Sociology¹³ had significant influence on studies of immigrant assimilation. Although a product of the early 20th

¹² In *Bruculinu, America: Remembrances of Sicilian-American Brooklyn, Told in Stories and Recipes* (1998) Vincent Schiavelli offers an image of the life in the Italian neighborhoods of Brooklyn. The author tells us about the ethnic customs and secret recipes he learned from his grandfather, a Sicilian master chef.

¹³ Chicago School of Sociology, known simply as the Chicago School, pursued sociological studies of European ethnic immigrants in America and gave rise to the first assimilation theories during the late 1920s and early 1930s.

century and subject to criticism over time, assimilation theories were a starting point for many scholars interested in understanding how the integration process occurred (Alba; Nee 1997, 827).

Two major theories – straight-line assimilation and segmented assimilation – sought to explain the migration problem, especially that of the second generation¹⁴. The classic or “straight line” assimilation theory, articulated by the Chicago School in the 1920s, considered immigrants as different ethnic groups who had to be incorporated into mainstream culture through a progressive process of contact and assimilation. It was expected that immigrants should abandon their heritage through a generational transition and thus over time become indistinguishable from native inhabitants. The term ‘the melting-pot’ epitomized this straight-line ideal of cultural assimilation. Coined by the playwright Israel Zangwill as the title of his 1908 play, the term describes the main character’s enthusiastic view of America:

There she lies, the great Melting Pot—listen! Can’t you hear the roaring and the bubbling? [...] Ah, what a stirring and a seething! Celt and Latin, Slav and Teuton, Greek and Syrian,—black and yellow—[,,] East and West, and North and South, the palm and the pine, the pole and the equator, the crescent and the cross—how the great Alchemist melts and fuses them with his purging flame! Here shall they all unite to build the Republic of Man and the Kingdom of God. [...] What is the glory of Rome and Jerusalem where all nations and races come to worship and look back, compared with the glory of America, where all races and nations come to labour and look forward! (Zangwill 155-156)¹⁵

Much later, in 1993, a chief alternative to the linear assimilation model, “segmented assimilation” theory, was proposed by Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou in response to the changes in new waves of ethnic immigrants and their children (Xie; Greenman 966). The theory suggested that different immigrant groups could be assimilated into different segments of society, according to the social context in which they were embedded. Their sociological model was based on the observation that social and economic barriers and advantages shape how immigrants incorporate different aspects of the new culture.

In recent decades, the process of Americanization has appeared to be non-linear, and above all, resistance to assimilation by various immigrant communities has become increasingly evident. Given that the first Italian immigrants chose to form ethnic enclaves to preserve

¹⁴ For a good summary, see Mary Waters, Van Tran, Philip Kasinitz and John Mollenkopf in the article “Segmented Assimilation Revisited: Types of Acculturation and Socioeconomic Mobility in Young Adulthood” (2010).

¹⁵ When “The Melting Pot” opened in Washington D.C. on 5 October 1909, former President [Theodore Roosevelt](#) leaned over the edge of his box and shouted, “That’s a great play, Mr. Zangwill, that’s a great play.” (Szuberla 3-20).

traditions, it can be said that they recreated themselves in America, and that theirs was far from a forced assimilation process.

A key aspect in maintaining Italian cultural boundaries against American assimilation during the mass migration was Italian food and foodways. For a long time, the culinary habits of the village of origin continued to be the principal reference in the everyday food life of immigrants. As historian Harvey Levenstein reminds us in his article “The American Response to Italian Food, 1880 – 1930” (1985), although “the first generation of Italian immigrants faced tremendous pressure to change their eating habits” (Levenstein 76), no culinary tradition has been as strong as the Italian one in conserving its cultural identity.

In this sense, ethnic food proved to be one of the strongest forms of conservation and preservation of a perceived Italian cultural identity against the excesses of Americanization and offered a familiar context in which Italian migrants could at least momentarily feel at home.

1.2 Food and national identity: the construction of *Italianità* in America

Transnational migration experts agree about the importance of food and foodways in shaping Italian identity during the mass immigration into the United States. Until the 1920s, in fact, there was no such thing as “Italian food” (Levenstein 76).

During the early phase of Italian migration to the United States, Italy was still a collection of regions. It was politically, culturally, and linguistically divided, and had a complex and unstable political and social past. Each town and village had its unique way of cooking. Italian immigrants, the majority of whom were from the south, brought to the New World a distinct Italian culinary tradition, mainly based on their southern cuisine.

Examination of the Italian linguistic unification process can help us understand the process that gave rise to the national cuisine. When Italy was unified in 1861, Italians were still speaking the dialect of their regions, and considered it their true mother tongue. In fact, just as the version of Italian that became a national language was late in being embraced, so too was Italian cuisine late in evolving into a “national” form.

As the food historian Massimo Montanari reminds us in his book *Italian Identity in the Kitchen, or, Food and the Nation* (2013), in the beginning, Italy was a decentralized network of multiple *Italie*, in which there were many urban centers surrounded by multiple rural communities with different local languages and traditions. Only over time did the Italian national

language and cuisine evolve from regional languages and the local food traditions, as a process of cultural creation brought forth a common cultural heritage. Many scholars agree that the idea of a national cuisine itself is nothing but a cultural creation or artifact (La Cecla 1998, Cinotto 2013). The historian Franco La Cecla, in *Pasta and Pizza* (1998), tells the story of how Italian cuisine was born in the south of Italy, under the Arabic influence, and how it later became the basis for the development of Italian gastronomy.

The “invention of tradition” was a concept espoused by E.J. Hobsbawm and T.O. Ranger in the eponymous book published in 1983. The editors argued that many traditions often regarded as ancient were actually recent or even invented, and noted that the phenomenon could be seen especially in the development of a nation and nationalism, where the idea of a national identity was fundamental to national unity.

In the case of Italy, Pellegrino Artusi, author of *The Science of Cooking and the Art of Eating Well* (1891), played a prominent role in this process of “invention of tradition.” An Italian businessman and writer, Artusi was the author of one of the most significant Italian cookbooks of modern times¹⁶. His cookbook was the first to feature all the traditional dishes of local Italian cuisine, and thus helped promote the country’s cohesion. The political intent of the cookbook was also supported by the new Italian bourgeoisie, eager to distance Italian from French cooking, which until then had reigned supreme as the model of haute cuisine.

Pellegrino Artusi is considered by many experts to be the spiritual father of Italian cuisine, but it is more likely that the immigrants themselves were the real promoters of the national meal. La Cecla notes that in countries other than Italy, pasta and pizza became synonymous with *Italianità* for the host culture and other ethnic groups who enjoyed these foods.

In the case of the Italian-American diaspora, Cinotto noted that the first Italian immigrants performed their domestic life while challenging the America lifestyle. Within this new environment, Italian ethnic food started to emerge as part of the culinary experience in America as the food habits of Italian immigrants evolved during the mass immigration, influencing American culture and in turn being influenced by it. Italian migrants brought with them not only their luggage and prized possessions, but also the various ingredients and traditional recipes of their districts.

¹⁶ As Daniele Tricarico reminds us in the online article “Cucine nazionali a confronto. I percorsi della cucina italiana in Gran Bretagna” (2007), Artusi mixed new and old elements of the Sicilian, Neapolitan and Lombard cuisines and transformed the kitchen table into a strategic place of national unification and identity.

Gradually, immigrants started to interact with fellow immigrants from other Italian regions, acquiring new ingredients and cooking techniques from them. They also began to learn from other ethnic groups, assimilating these new elements, and from the dominant American culture as well, adopting American foods and food practices. In the course of this process, as culinary *campanilismo* or parochialism opened up to a more national gastronomic identity, Italian American came to form a new Italian cuisine that was recognized as such in the broader American culture.

To sum up, in the Italian diaspora, food became the reference point for what it meant to be an *Italiano* with a national awareness, and not just a *cristiano*. Once in America, it was only by comparing their own culinary traditions with those of other immigrants and the broader American culture that the *paesani* from particular villages or towns finally found their gastronomic identity as Italians (Mangione; Morreale Prologue xv)

1.3. Eating Cultures: Different Theories About the Italian American Table

As the concepts of assimilation and Americanization idealized in the image of the “melting pot” began to be discredited, interest turned to the alternative concept of cultural pluralism, and then ethnic identity. Originating in the transcendentalist movement developed by pragmatist philosophers such as Horace Kallen, William James, John Dewey, and later by Randolph Bourne, the idea of cultural pluralism was based on the assumption that all ethnic groups had the right to maintain their differences within the host culture, and that acceptance of diverse cultures actually strengthened American society.

Just as assimilation theories were criticized for promoting cultural separatism, so too cultural pluralism has come under fire, because it is seen to undermine the fundamental dialogue between homeland traditions and the new culture of the hosting country.

The debate between the two perspectives, the assimilation theories and cultural pluralism, was lively during the early twentieth century but diminished during the Great Depression, as restrictive immigration laws stanching the flow of immigrants for a period. Discussion about ethnicity found new impetus in the wake of the Civil Rights movement, and in the 1960s and the 1970s Ethnic Studies began to be popular (Luconi; Pretelli 20), especially among such “white”

ethnic groups¹⁷ as Italian Americans. The phenomenon gave birth to a great amount of research about the nature of ethnicity as a form of human collectivity. Gradually, Caucasians of various ethnic backgrounds found a renewed pride in their roots.

In this period, in search of an alternative to the dichotomy between assimilation and cultural pluralism, academic debate began to focus on different dimensions of ethnicity. Many scholars saw the rise of a new appreciation of ethnicity in the 1960s as proof that the linear assimilation theory was erroneous and that ethnicity was not simply a biological fact carried by the earliest immigrants, which had to be incorporated into the mainstream culture. This new approach to ethnic studies set the foundations for the emergence of theoretical models used to analyze ethnicity as a social construction of each national group, one that emerged from a continuous process of definition and negotiation between the old tradition and the dominant culture (Luconi 1996, 1).

For some scholars, like Michael Novak, primordial ethnicity continued to influence the descendants of the immigrants. Others, like Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan, put an emphasis on the cultural component of ethnicity, defining ethnic groups as “interest groups”. For them, ethnicity should be examined as a foundation of social organization related to socioeconomic position, and minorities should be seen as forces struggling within the larger society (Cinotto 2001, 13-14).

In the Italian American case, one of the best analyses of ethnicity as cultural construct was offered by the historian Werner Sollors, in his book *The Invention of Ethnicity* (1989), shaped after Hobsbawm’s and Ranger’s *Invention of Tradition* (1986)¹⁸. Sollors provided a new critical framework for understanding how identity is built, defining ethnicity as a process of social construction accomplished over historical time. In his view, ethnicity is the fruit of a process of “invention which incorporates, adapts, and amplifies preexisting communal solidarity, cultural attributes, and historical memories” (Conzen et al. 11).

Sollors began by criticizing past studies that looked at the ethnic groups as a static unit, and chose to focus on the process of identity negotiation between immigrant generations and the dominant American culture. In his reflections, immigrants carry with them a cultural heritage, the perception of which undergoes a series of changes when it comes into contact with the new social and economic context, and thus he sees ethnicity as a process of constant reinvention necessary to address change within the ethnic group and the hosting context. In other words,

¹⁷ “White Ethnicity” refers to white immigrants and their descendants who were not “Old Stock American” (descendants of the 17th and the 18th century settlers of the thirteen colonies) or “White Anglo-Saxon modern Protestant” (people with British Protestant ancestry).

¹⁸ In this book, they focused on the creation and spread of modern verbal and non-verbal cultural symbols.

ethnicity “marks an acquired modern sense of belonging that replaces visible, concrete communities whose kinship symbolism ethnicity may yet mobilize in order to appear more natural” (Sollors 1989, XIV-XV).

In his conclusion, Sollors appropriated the idea of “symbolic ethnicity” formulated by Herbert Gans, a deconstructionist who theorized that the ethnic revival movement was not a rebirth of ethnicity but rather a reaction to its decline. In his essay “Symbolic ethnicity: The future of ethnic groups and cultures in America” (1979), Gans defined ethnicity as an identity chosen by the immigrant generations and correlated with iconic cultural elements. He wrote that third and subsequent generations of European immigrants in particular lived a kind of “symbolic ethnicity”, in which they were nostalgically dedicated to their cultural tradition but lacked the opportunity to properly experience it. Gans considered the ethnicity of the first immigrants as authentic because it was an essential part of the immigrant daily life. But, as the functions of ethnic cultures and groups diminished over time, gradually ethnicity took on an expressive rather than necessary function, becoming more of a leisure-time activity than a distinctive character in people’s life (Gans 9). For Gans, ethnicity was doomed to fade away within the forces of the assimilation.

In the wake of Gans, the sociologist Richard Alba, in his book *Italian Americans: Into the Twilight of Ethnicity* (1985), described the process through which many first, second, and third generation Italian-Americans were integrated into American society, and remained with little sense of ethnic cohesion. Given growing intermarriage rates and the reduction of differences in education and occupation between the new generation of Italian-Americans and WASPs, he asserted that Italian-Americans were moving into the twilight of their ethnicity due to a profound transformation of the Italian ancestry group.

As we can see, both Alba and Gans used new theories of assimilation to define the concept of ethnicity and underline the decrease of the ethnic identity of the Italian Americans of the second and following generations, and thus the creation of a symbolic one. With Sollors, this idea of “symbolic ethnicity” was taken to the extreme, as he studied how symbolic ethnicity and American identity are created in different contexts and how the process of immigrant adaptation works. Starting from the assumption that ethnicity is a social construct, that is, something essentially invented, and he argued that ethnicity does not have to do with biology. Immigrants are active participants in the construction of their identity, one that must be renegotiated continuously especially within the same ethnic group, which is by no means homogeneous.

In this panorama, Italian immigrants and their American-born offspring in the United States provide a unique case in point. During the mass immigration, Italian communities were

organized in enclaves of regional origin, with specific dialects, rituals and religions, and where internal conflict over the ethnic nature of the group was inevitable. Kathleen Neils Conzen et al. cogently asserted, “One of the purposes of invented traditions was to provide symbols and slogans which could unify the group despite such differences” (Conzen, et al. 11). The symbolic ethnicity had to “provide the basis for solidarity among the potential members of the group; mobilize the group to defend its cultural values and to advance its claims to power, status, and resources; and, at the same time, defuse the hostility of the mainstream ethnoculture” (Conzen et al. 12).

In the context of ethnic change, where newcomers struggled to negotiate their particular place within the larger American society, “food became an integral part of that effort” (Gabaccia 2000, 176). Sollors’ idea of ethnicity helps us to understand the invention of the culinary tradition of Italian immigration in the United States. According to Cinotto, study of the nutrition and rites of eating in the Italian migration experience in America shows how multiple identities of invented traditions developed within the host country.

Indeed, the Italian-American gastronomic tradition offers proof of Sollors’ theoretical model, since it represents a perfect example of cuisine as invented ethnic “narration”, in which food serves as an instrument for the conservation of culture and for mediation and negotiation of Italian identity in America.

1.3.1 Toward a Reconstructionist approach of the food ethnic identity

Sollors’ work was a milestone in the field of Migration Studies. His *Invention of Ethnicity* helps us to understand how Italian immigrants negotiated the intersection between their ethnic group and the mainstream culture, and thus invented their identity as Italian-Americans. Sollors viewed modern ethnicity as a “collective fiction” that relies on the symbolism of kinship rather than on real relationship. In his view, the effect of authenticity is achieved “not by some purist, archival, or preservationist attitude toward a fixed past but by a remarkable openness toward the ability of a specific idiom to interact with outside signals and to incorporate them” (Sollors 1989, XV).

In *Beyond Ethnicity*, Sollors argued that ethnicity in modern day America has taken the form of voluntary or multiple-choice ethnicity. Quoting Parsons’ position, he says that “however strongly affirmative these ethnic affiliations are, the ethnic status is conspicuously devoid of

social content” (Sollors 1986, 35). Therefore, American ethnicity in the contemporary world “is a matter not of content but of the importance that individuals ascribe to it” (Sollors 1986, 35).

Sollors’ contribution to the ethnic debate is crucial to our understanding of the Italian-American experience. However, he has been criticized by many scholars for his non-historical approach to ethnic studies. Based on Werner Sollors’ previous work, in “The Invention of Ethnicity: A Perspective from the U.S.A” (1992), Conzen and her colleagues have built a new conceptual framework for understanding ethnicity. Like Sollors, they do not consider ethnicity to be a primordial category, but they reject his idea of ethnicity as a “collective fiction”. While Sollors considers ethnicity a cultural invention that is realized in a specific historical moment and under specific power relations, in their view, ethnicity is a process of construction that continually incorporates preexisting attributes and memories.

One of their most important contributions was to highlight how all of American history has been engaged in this process of ethnic redefinition. Indeed, they support the idea that ethnic traditions were invented to unify the ethnic groups, but they place them in a real life context and social experience. In this regard, the re-definition of traditions by the immigrant groups took place through active decision-making. “Ethnic groups in modern settings are constantly recreating themselves, and ethnicity is continuously being reinvented in response to changing realities both within the group and the host society. Ethnic boundaries, for example, must be repeatedly renegotiated, while expressive symbols of ethnicity (ethnic traditions) must be repeatedly reinterpreted” (Conzen et al. 11).

The theoretical framework of this research project, then, stems from the theory that Conzen and the others have put forth about ethnicity. They criticize Sollors’ idea that ethnicity is devoid of social content.

Moving from the previous debate on ethnicity, my work focuses on food and its cultural identity and examines how food and culinary traditions have been reinvented, remade and remixed from the first generation Italian immigrants to the new expatriates in America. The theoretical framework is used here as a guide for understanding food as constructed cultural identity in relation to a historical process in which ethnic groups constantly redefine themselves in a diasporic context, through a dialogue between tradition and innovation. Like ethnicity, in fact, “ethnic cuisine becomes only a subjective and self-conscious reality when ethnic boundaries are crossed” (van den Bergh 395). Therefore, it is all the more interesting to examine how ethnic food is recognized as such when it comes into contact with other cultural identities.

As Italians traversed the Atlantic to immigrate to the United States, as they crossed social boundaries from the lower to upper classes, as they passed beyond their cultural identity defined

by their Italian hometown or region, they experienced at once the fluidity of their identity and its resistance to change. In this process of constant ethnic redefinition in the Italian-American experience, we can see how foodways were a key part of the forms of relationships within the ethnic group and with the dominant culture, and how they contribute to defining not only Italian cuisine abroad but the Italian American identity as a whole.

2. The Others in Ourselves: Negotiating Food Cultural Boundaries

2.1. *The Meaning of Food: From Nature to Culture*

Since ancient times, food and identity have always been closely tied to the migration experience. Before the coming of farming, the first hunters and gatherers were constantly on the move from place to place in search of nourishment. As shepherds brought their flocks to new grazing or watering areas or farmers cut and burned new swaths of farmland, people lived in harmony with the rhythm of nature, and the quest for food was their principal reason for mobility.

At least during this first stage of migration, though, food was most likely more a biological need and part of a cultural process. According to the historian Montanari, only with the transition from a primitive to a domestic economy did food cultivation, preparation, production and consumption become a cultural act that led to the development of specific social and economic structures. As a result, with the beginning of human civilization, societies started to develop a system to produce, prepare, and adapt food to their own taste and thus establish the basis for future culinary trends.

In the formulation of the structuralist Claude Lévi-Strauss, one of the pioneers in the field of Food Studies, food is indeed considered a product of cultural practices through which human beings distinguish themselves from animals and lay the foundations for their civilization. For Lévi-Strauss, the use of fire to cook food is the invention that makes human beings human. In the book *Le Cru et le Cuit* (1964), he explored the relationship between nature and culture and defined cooking a metaphor for the transition of nature into culture, through which food becomes a central component of human identity. Lévi-Strauss used binary oppositions, such as raw-rotten, to explain how culinary rites represent social convention, founded on a cultural basis, that determines what is edible and what is inedible¹⁹. Hence, food and cooking can be considered a language that unconsciously translates different social structures, which vary from place to place and from one period to another.

In line with Lévi-Strauss's theory, in the essay "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption," Roland Barthes defined food as "a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behaviour" (Barthes 24).

¹⁹ In *The Raw and the Cooked* (originally published in French as *Le Cru et le Cuit*, Claude Lévi-Strauss claims that culinary rites represent an acquired phenomenon where cooking is structured by the culinary triangle: raw/cooked/rotten which involves the binary opposition between nature/culture (Elyada 2010).

Beyond being mere nourishment, then, food becomes a model of representation of a whole system of meanings that strengthens the bonds between ourselves and others and defines our belonging to a specific cultural identity.

Following Werner Sollors' construction of ethnicity, subsequent research has shown that the way individuals express their identity through food and culinary rituals reveals two key points. First, identity, as an essential component of the human species, is both socially constructed and constantly changing. Second, our food choices define who we are and how we shape our identity over space and time. Thus, food represents a central sense of collective belonging, which includes the individuals in an ever-evolving culinary system (Fischler 278-279).

The notion of food, as an expression of a cultural identity that is not fixed but in evolution, is particularly evident within diasporic contexts, where food and culinary culture recreate, negotiate and perform identity in the alterity. In fact, among the outward manifestations of culture, cuisine is unique in the sense that its acceptability occurs as a two-way process of interaction between an ethnic group and the wider society (Gans 133-134). The phenomenon of migration as a transitional stage offers an ideal setting for investigating the process of construction and deconstruction of identity.

The immigration experience gives us a particular insight into the fluidity of identity, which produces both change and resistance (Koc; Welsh 1). This is particularly true among the Italians, and the exceptional importance of food in the Italian American experience is key to understanding "our ties to the past and our current identity" (Gabaccia 1998, 121).

In looking at the culture of Italian-Americans, it is fundamental to use more than one lens to discern how the process of integration took place. In fact, examining how the first Italian immigrants prepared and consumed food allows us to understand how the early Italian American culinary traditions evolved and how those traditions subsequently came to influence American culture.

2.1. The sphere of "Individual Memory"

To offer a broader picture of the meaning of eating, we will explore the conservative and innovative nature of food use through three distinct but often overlapping spheres, those of "individual memory", "collective memory", and "invented tradition". Analysis of these spheres

of meaning can help our understanding of how food is seen by different generations in different environments, and how it is interpreted and negotiated within the mainstream culture (Parasecoli 419-420).

The sphere of “individual memory” primarily regards the deep-rooted food-related family rituals of the first generation Italian-Americans. The memories of individual immigrants kept alive their culinary identity and their heritage of Italian cuisine. Italian immigrants formulated a mythical tradition by choosing to emphasize certain ancestral values, which were then inevitably modified as these immigrants interacted with those from other parts of Italy and with the host society.

As this happened, food gradually became the symbol of shared rituals, habits, codes and rules that helped to keep their culture alive and define the ethnic group as a whole. In this sphere of “collective memory”, shared ethnic patterns played a role in the construction of Italian-American food identity. Identity values moved from an individual dimension to a collective one and immigrants opened up to a more national culinary and cultural identity, while bridging the generation gap perceived between Italian immigrants and their American-born offspring.

At the same time, being uprooted from the motherland and transplanted in foreign places led the Italian Americans to rethink their own culinary patterns within the new dominant culture. With the social changes wrought by emigration came a transformation of the collective sphere into a symbolic one that represents the continuation of centuries-old processes. In this symbolic sphere, the original food tradition of the immigrant’s home village was adapted and hybridized, and became a key factor in the construction of a new Italian-American identity and cuisine.

The realm of the family grounded a profound sense of ethnic identity and nostalgia for the Old World. Here, adherence to a specific food tradition transmitted and validated values carried over from the homeland.

The first Italian immigrants used food as a way to express their culture and to preserve the values of their ethnic identity. Especially in the Italian American *diaspora*, eating habits remained linked over time with the nostalgia for the lost food, as a metaphor for the loss of their homeland and the break of social and emotional bonds (Horn 160).

Cooking, eating, and sharing a meal with family members became a way to represent a sense of self-identification (Luconi 2004, 206), to transmit their heritage and their signifiers, creating a place of belonging in the foreign country.

From the very beginning of the Italian presence in America, the culture of food production and consumption was the center of family life and served as the first medium of communication among family members. Within the family, the tastes and aromas of home

cooked food helped to shape a familiar micro-universe in the challenging environment of this new land.

Wherever possible, the first Italian immigrants cultivated the fruits and vegetables of their hometown in backyard or rooftop gardens and grew herbs and spices at home to add familiar flavors to their food. This preservation of Old World lifestyles is well represented by second-generation immigrant Joe Vergara in his novel *Love & Pasta*²⁰ (1968). As he grew up in Queens during the 1930s, his parents were committed to maintaining the authentic Italian food traditions they had grown up with:

While Pop was transforming our back yard into a miniature Calabrian farm, Mum was equally rural indoors. Her agricultural interests too centered on food. Every window sill, shelf, and foot of free floor space was occupied by potted herbs and spices – basil, chives, tarragon, sage, parsley, and others [...] Pop was never happier than when eating foods picked fresh out of his garden. During the week, he always took lunch from home, since he could not bring himself to eat the tasteless sandwiches from the nearby luncheonette (Vergara 55-57).

Many historians of Italian American immigration have emphasized how family was socially and psychologically essential to preserving a bond with the traditional Italian culinary culture.

Looking at the Italian American community of East Harlem between the 1920s and 1930s, Cinotto noted that food culture played a central role in the construction of a specific family ideology that functioned as point of reference for many Italian Americans in the formation of their identity (Cinotto 2013, 51). Fabio Parasecoli, in the essay “Food, Identity, and Cultural Reproduction in Immigrant Communities” (2014), explained that Italian families dealt with the disorientation experienced in this new country by recreating a sense of communion around food (Parasecoli 418). Like Parasecoli, Gabaccia wrote that eating habits at home symbolized and defined the boundaries of cultures (Gabaccia 2000, 8) and helped to bridge the distance between the abandoned homeland and this new, unknown country. Similarly, Luconi highlighted that for Italian-American families, ethnic food afforded a sense of self and way to negotiate their own space within the broader American society (Luconi 2004, 206).

²⁰ This autobiographical novel describes his Sicilian immigrant family in America and recounts their attempts to stay true to their heritage while adapting to the dominant culture.

Finally the anthropologist Vito Teti asserted that in the migration experience, food was symbol of nostalgia and reflected the need to re-appropriate identity. “Comfort food”²¹ was shared around the dinner table with a sense of profound sacredness because it evoked memories of traditional recipes and flavors left behind. In this way, as immigrants used the cuisine of their country of origin to create a space for themselves in their new setting, (Teti, 2001, 587), it became one of the most important symbols of family identity.

Scholars have regularly pointed to this strong family ethos to explain the importance of food culture and rituals of eating in representing the core of Italian American identity against American values and behaviors. The immigrants’ *cucina casalinga*, or home-made cooking, was continuously used to preserve their identity and highlight their diversity and sense of superiority in the face of the dominant culture. Remembering his youth in Brooklyn during the 1950s, Gambino wrote in *Blood of my Blood* (1974):

To all Mediterranean people, food is the symbol of life, of all that is good and nourishing [...]. Thus these people find the attitude of some Americans toward food worse than barbarous. This attitude, characterized in the extreme by the American food stand where one eats bland mass-prepared food on the run, is seen as sacrilegious. To the Italian-American, food is symbolic both of life and of life’s chief medium for human beings, the family. (Gambino 17)

On the contrary, Americans perceived the food eaten by immigrants as something alien and “of poor nutritive quality” (Cinotto 2014, 7). During the first half of the twentieth century, in response to the process of conservation of identity promoted by Italian migrants, the American government started to consider the Italian Food tradition as a culture that needed to be subjected to controls and re-education (Cinotto 2004, 1). The tomato, for instance, so important in Italian cooking, was seen as harmful while fruits and green vegetables were considered as food with no nutritional value (Levenstein 78-79)

This negative perception of Italian food and lifestyle resulted in campaigns launched to raise awareness about the health risks associated with a particular food. Cooking Classes run by American social workers were organized to teach Italians what to cook in an effort to speed the assimilation of this ethnic group into the dominant culture. Inevitably, these clashing beliefs

²¹ *The Atlantic Magazine* reported that the definition of “comfort food” has been traced back at least to 1966, when the *Palm Beach Post* used it in a story on obesity: Adults, when under severe emotional stress, turn to what could be called ‘comfort food’—food associated with the security of childhood, like mother’s poached egg or famous chicken soup” <https://www.theatlantic.com>.

exacerbated the sense of isolation of Italian immigrants and only served to delay their integration into mainstream culture.

In this challenging scenario, diasporic food eaten within the family unit represented an entire cultural heritage to be perpetuated and “handed down from generation to generation” (Tomasi 9). In this sense, the physical space of the house can be seen as the spatial context where the Italian culinary tradition most strongly influenced the development of children’s eating habits. While American food was becoming more homogenized and standardized, Italian immigrants were growing their own vegetables and cooking at home with traditional methods that elicited the participation of the whole family. In this way, insisting on the value of continuity of their traditional diet, the family unit operated to retain control over the children.

In the first Italian-American homes, the families spoke dialect, cooked traditional recipes and acted Italian, and the children absorbed the ways and ideals of this cultural environment. The family home was also the heart of the ethnic society that functioned both as a protector of the food culture and as a collective and territorial network for the extended family. As Vincent Schiavelli reminded us in *Bruculinu America* (1998): “in the household, they were Sicilian first, Brooklynites second and Americans only in matters of national allegiance” (Schiavelli 79).

At home, family members celebrated their own culinary tradition in a different way from the rest of the community and women were considered the keepers of authentic recipes (Cinotto 2009, 7). Italian American domesticity was the product of efforts to recreate old values in a new space, where family gathering and food sharing conveyed an image of continuity with a tradition left behind.

At least during the first phase of migration, immigrants remained loyal to the *cucina casalinga*, mainly based on the southern-Italian culinary model, despite the inevitable changes induced by the migration phenomenon and the culinary assimilation process promoted by the American government.

For instance, going out to eat at a restaurant was uncommon and even “Italian” restaurants were considered to be contaminated by the American taste. According to Joe Vergara’s mother, this restaurant food was almost blasphemy compared to the sanctity of fresh and genuine food. In *Love and Pasta* Vergara reminisced:

She rarely consented to eat out, but when it was necessary, she tried to avoid Italian restaurants. She especially disliked the pizzerias that featured mass-produced spaghetti and meatballs; this she considered fit only for pigs. She once accused the owner of such a place of

doing more damage to Italian honor than all the combined membership of the Mafia (Vergara 59-71).

Analyzing the strong food tradition in Italian American homes, we can understand how Italian food managed to resist American influence and thus distinguish itself within “the great American minestrone” (Sciorra 6).

In summary, when the first Italian immigrants began to move from the poorest Italian regions to the United States, they immediately experienced a loss of identity. Moreover, the insecurity of their lives, and the discrimination and negative stereotypes they faced during the migration experience, suggested that “family intimacy was the most dependable source of emotional and material strength” (Cinotto 2013, 53). Consequently, in America they favored relationships based on kinship and place of birth and, among other strategies, used home cooking as a way to preserve what their identity culture stood for.

In many ways and for a long time, the Italian-American identity remained intact because of its outstanding bond between food, local culture and family relationships. As well express by Cassandra Vivian in *Immigrant's Kitchen, Italian* (1993), the immigrant families fulfilled their need to honor the homeland by transmitting the legends, superstitions, recipes and food traditions of its past. The realm of domesticity and food was central to the development of the Italian American culinary identity, by maintaining the main aspects of its cuisine and resisting outside pressure.

2.2. *The Sphere of “Collective Memory”*

While the first Italian immigrants to the United States were ‘birds of passage,’ single men intent on earning enough to return to their homeland with a sum of money to start a family, whose immigration, housing and jobs were organized by “padroni”, (fellow Italians in America who served as go-between for American firms and the immigrants), and who tended to live with other such immigrants, the phenomena soon changed to one in which entire families of Italians immigrated.

As family migration assumed massive proportions, the Italian immigrants who arrived in America settled in urban areas close to fellow Italians, giving rise to enclaves that would provide a sense of familiarity in the New World. “Chain migration” based on international

bonds of kinship and friendship soon became the innovative mechanism that characterized the growing network of migrant flow. Therefore, in a few years, the creation of ethnic communities helped to create the milieu and lifestyle of their local villages in their new home.

Historically known as Little Italies, these ethnic enclaves served to support Italians as they transitioned to their new life in the U.S., while keeping the family and homeland identity alive. As a container of regional identities, Little Italies were divided into sub communities of Calabrian, Genoese, Sicilians and so on, with specific dialects, foods and rituals that sought to maintain strong ties with the homeland and to stay isolated from American society.

In the beginning, the small ethnic enclaves were marked by strong *campanilismo* (parochialism, or literally “bell-towerism”) that prevented immigrants from establishing nationally integrated ethnic societies (Luconi 2003, 91). Each group “had its own section of the street, and its own men’s club and women’s auxiliary” (Vivian at al. 1). The *campanilismo* of the Italian ethnic group was particularly evident in food habits and ethnic entrepreneurship, and was used to preserve regional and local differences within the Little Italies. For example, in the Italian community of East Harlem, the “alimentary geography reproduced cultural and territorial divisions, creating in the perception of the other group an apparent coherence and unity, reinforcing the sense of belonging and difference of the people of the community” (Cinotto 2001, 166).

In the wake of the 1921 and 1924 Quota Acts in the U.S. and the Fascist anti-emigration policies in Italy after 1927 (Luconi 2003, 93), many Italian immigrants decided to settle in the United States definitively, where they shared common life experiences and, unfortunately, also prejudice and discrimination. By the late 1920s, as mass migration ended, Italian immigrants tended to distinguish themselves from non-white ethnic groups²² and gradually opened up to a stronger national consciousness. Consequently, food choices also reflected that attitude (Luconi 2004, 210).

The collective aspect of the Italian American food culture, as a national product, was constructed through constant interactions between different community members and the host culture (Parasecoli 423). A key factor in the phenomenon of the rise of an Italian cuisine is the fact that when Italians moved to Little Italies, they gradually made their private life public. Using food as a distinctive source of ethnic pride, they slowly started to create a unique Italian community by providing collective spaces such as outdoor markets, grocery stores, restaurants,

²² In “The Taste of Place: Italian Immigrants in New York Shape a Foodscape, 1900-1950”, Cinotto argues that repulsion at the smell of the other ethnic group’s food created conflicts and caused Italian immigrants to imagine that they stood on a higher level in the hierarchy of immigrant peoples.

public ritual events and festivals that helped consolidate the national alliance and create a public ethnic memory. Outside the home, public gatherings and celebrations emphasized the role of food as a symbol of the Italian-American life. In this way, the cuisine that Italians formulated in America was the outcome of a process of resistance against repeated challenges from neighboring ethnic groups and the dominant culture.

In this context, the emergence of the American-born second generation contributed to the growth of Italian American culture because though they had no ties to the homeland, they were nonetheless affected by anti-Italian sentiment, and in response contributed to developing a new sense of a nationally-cohesive Italian ethnic group (Luconi 2003, 98). As this happened, culinary dialogue between the two generations gradually took place, with several moments of tension. While parents of American born children were proud of their traditional values, such as moral and social responsibilities, respect for authority within the family and hard work, their children, on the other hand, tended to adopt such American values as individualism, independence, and self-realization, leading to conflicts within their families.

As the immigration flow came to an end, the Italian American second generation became numerically predominant and, attracted by the American lifestyle, started to reject family values and traditional behavior and to demand independence from parental control by rejecting everything that could be considered Italian.

The frustrations and contradictions experienced by the second generation Italian Americans were well expressed by the Italian-born American educator Leonard Covello, whose life's work was the struggle to lift the low education levels among immigrant communities. Covello believed that the main reason for the poor educational achievements of the second generation was the conflict between their contrasting cultures and worlds. As an immigrant himself, he perfectly expressed this sense of not belonging to a specific place:

Now I was living what seemed like fragmentary existences in different worlds. There was my life with my family and Aviglianese neighbors. My life on the streets of East Harlem. My life at the Home Garden with Miss Ruddy. Life at the local public school. Life at whatever job I happened to have. Life in the wonder-world of books. There seemed to be no connection, one with the other; it was like turning different faucets on and off" (Covello 2013, 33).

In this dimension of conflict, Cinotto identified school, in particular, as a public ground in which the children of immigrants experienced for the first time the strong cultural differences between the private place of the family and the public space of the wider American culture. In

this period, public schools became special agencies of food acculturation for the Italian immigrant students, to limit the authority of the family in terms of food.

At the beginning of the 20th century, food education in school was not a marginal activity. The high rates of malnutrition among immigrant children prompted the establishment of specific School Health Programs to promote the American diet, considered to be more scientifically correct than immigrant culinary culture.

The beliefs of American teachers reflected the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant prejudice according to which immigrants from southern and Eastern Europe were culturally and morally inferior. Schools tried to do their best to “Americanize” immigrant students not only by providing lessons about patriotism in the U.S, American values, and American standards of hygiene but also and above all, by organizing food education programs to reform immigrant food habits, considered as dangerous²³. By establishing food education as a curricular activity, the school mission was, in reality, to transform Italian American schoolchildren into agents of assimilation of their parents and thus to call into question the authority of the family itself (Cinotto 2013, 32).

Coviello, who grew up in the midst of this turbulent tension (Johanek 231), illustrated how the American public school worked to develop a sense of inferiority in Italian children by devaluing the education they had received in their families.

I remember the teacher gave each child a bag of oatmeal to take home. This food was supposed to make you big and strong. You ate it for breakfast. My father examined the stuff, tested it with his fingers. To him it was the kind of bran that was fed to pigs in Avignone. ‘What kind of school is this?’ He shouted. ‘They gave us the food of animals to eat and send it home to us!’ ‘What are we coming to next?’ (Covello 2013, 18).

The process of Americanization of the second generation promoted by the school and other public institutions deeply distressed the children of immigrants and made them feel ashamed of their family sphere. Leonard Covello illustrated the apprehension and anxiety felt by Italian American students at school, where classmates might refer to them as ‘wops’. A child might throw away the sandwich with fried peppers and onions prepared by his mother because it would certainly ruin his reputation (Covello 1967, 339). This painful condition was common

²³ As reported by Harvey Levenstein in the remarkable article “The American Response to Italian Food, 1880-1930,” *Food and Foodways*, American institutions criticized the Italian way of preparing food. From their point of view, for instance, tomatoes, containing oxalic acid, were considered carcinogenic, and green vegetables were seen to offer little nutrition (Levenstein, 2002, 78-79).

among Italian immigrant students, who criticized the hostility and lack of understanding of their parents. In classrooms, Italian-American children observed the manners and the culinary habits of their classmates and teachers, and learnt that the Old World food standards were considered as foreign and risky to their health.

Inevitably, Italian immigrants exhibited conflicting reactions to the Americanization strategies proposed by public institutions. In Helen Barolini's novel *Umbertina*²⁴ (1979), for example, Calabrian immigrants derided the American teachers and the nutrition education programs, "in a display of allegiance to the Italian traditions" (Luconi 2004, 208).

These American *femmine* know nothing. My Vito comes home and says his teacher told the class they should have meat, potatoes, and a vegetable on their plates every night, all together. Like pigs eating from a trough, I tell him. In my house I have a *minestra*, a second dish, and a third dish. And beans if I want to! Madonna, that skinny American telling us what to eat! (Barolini 1999, 69)

For the immigrants, food was a symbol of memory and continuity, and a means for safeguarding the authority of the parents and maintaining control over the children. For this reason, the first Italian immigrants started to blame the American process of assimilation for causing their children to depart from tradition.

American-born generations responded to the quarrel by adopting a strict separation between the private realm and the public sphere. While respecting their alliance to their home sphere, they ignored the consensus of their parents and started to enjoy their freedom in the public world by acting like Americans. In this regard, parents started to label their kids as *mangiacake*²⁵ (literally "cake eaters") to admonish them for eating American fast food on the street. This forbidden practice completely contradicted the formal Italian meal, centered on the ritual sharing of food around the table. To contain the rebellion, families required the presence of all (and only) family members during meals. As Gambino wrote in *Blood of My Blood* (1974):

²⁴ Through the lives of women belonging to the same family, this multigenerational novel reconstructs the immigration history of Italian-American women from Calabria to the United States.

²⁵ In *Leaving Little Italy: Essaying Italian American Culture* Fred Gardaphè wrote that while Italians were derogatorily called spaghetti benders, Italian immigrants referred to Americans as "Merdcians" *merde di cane*, or dog shit, and "Mangia checchi" or "cake eaters" (Gardaphé, 139).

Pranzo, dinner, was a gathering of the entire family. The only outsiders to be sometimes invited were godparents and occasionally honored 'friends' [...]. The American custom of children regularly visiting at their friends' homes for dinner was unknown in my neighborhood. Whenever one of us (influenced by the media) would broach the idea with parents, the response was always an unyielding: You come home for dinner! (Gambino 22).

In dialectical opposition to the American style, eating together was a way to humanize a hostile and challenging environment, where nostalgic food was used in memory of the abandoned homeland. However, the Italian American second generation viewed the conservative and authoritative Italian cultural model as an obstacle to their success in the American world.

At this point of divergence, Italian immigrants started to redefine the intergenerational relationships within the family. Quoting the studies of Michael Eula on the Italian American community of East Harlem, Simone Cinotto argued that Italian immigrant parents gradually realized that their coercive education was no longer effective in controlling their children's behavior, and thus they started to adopt new strategies. In short, once again the answer was found in food.

As a flexible symbol of collective identity, immigrants started to use meals as important tools of socialization and cohesiveness, as they negotiated the intergenerational conflict around the table. The "generational contract" consisted in allowing children to behave in the "American way" in public, in exchange for taking part in convivial family rituals in the private sphere (Cinotto 2006, 25). Sunday Dinner became the ritual par excellence of this compromise.

As one of the most enduring customs in the Italian-American culture, weekly Sunday dinner consisted of the whole extended family congregating around the table, sharing stories, playing with children and enjoying the unity of the family. The family gathering not only celebrated tradition, but also provided a ritual for strengthening family ties. Most importantly, it symbolized the immigrants' victory over the food scarcity that had characterized their previous lives in Italy, the land of misery. Every Sunday, the family gathered to eat this large quantity of food that America had promised to them, and to keep alive a cultural food tradition by passing it on to their children and grandchildren. In this regard, an immigrant woman told Covello that she was delighted to see that her children and grandchildren, although Americanized in their appearance, kept eating good and healthy food, in line with the good Italian tradition. (Cinotto 2010, 24-25).

Most second generation children accepted the agreement because it did not conflict with their lives outside the home and because, among all the ridiculous and old-fashioned traditions, the custom of the relatives gathering to eat together was actually enjoyable as a way to be part of

that family. For Vergara, eating together was a pure moment of joy. In *Love and Pasta*, he expressed this sentiment beautifully:

And then came the antipasto – anchovies, salami, roasted peppers, prosciutto, cheese, and artichoke hearts – followed by a delicate soup with tiny meatballs, lasagna, stuffed peppers, zucchini, roast chicken, and a seemingly endless succession of appetizing courses. [...] Food was God's gift to be enjoyed; preparing it was a happy privilege and eating it an occasion for unrestrained pleasure and gaiety (Vergara 108).

The emphasis on collective food consumption had important implications not just in the re-socialization of the children but also in changing the restricted role of Italian immigrants' women within the Italian patriarchal family. Typically, during the period of mass migration, Italian immigrant women in America kept to the conservative concept of family honor, in which the woman's activities were mainly confined to the home. They were good housewives with unique culinary skills, whose duty was to feed the family, take care of the children and be good homemakers for their husbands. But in America, they for the most part abandoned the rural southern Italian expectation that a woman should obey the uncontested authority of the husband, and no longer did the work of feeding animals and laboring in the fields.

The inevitable shift in the eating habits of immigrants forced the family to rethink women's authority as wives and mothers. In America, Cinotto argued, "women were in charge of supervising the emerging ethnic domesticity" (Cinotto 2011, 21-22) and sustaining family networks. They contributed to the home economy, "managing family money, purchasing goods from the market, earning additional income through household labour" (Cinotto 2011, 22) and deciding who could be invited to convivial events and who could not.

This feminization of family life was the result of the interaction between the public and private spheres of life. While promoting strong adherence to the Italian culinary model and thus supporting the spread of the Italian traditional culinary culture, women gradually started to prepare foods that were not so commonly eaten in the homeland, such as beef, or adopted cooking techniques in line with American practices. In a certain way, they integrated the content of their Italian know-how and style in the kitchen with the American form of consumption (Levitt 44).

Nevertheless, despite their increasing integration into U.S. culture, their commitment to maintaining Italian cuisine and cultural tradition did not lessen, even in the face of discrimination.

Overall, then, Italian immigrants in Little Italies managed to find a compromise with the dominant American culture by publicly affirming their culinary tradition. To do so, they opened up to the culinary traditions of other Italian regions, negotiated a generational contract with their children, and adapted their traditional recipes to the new collective sphere. The result was a step forward into a more united Italian-American cuisine.

2.3. *The Sphere of “Invented Tradition”*

Modern cultural exchanges, with the movements of tourists and migrants and the spread of multiculturalism, have shown more than ever how traditions, including culinary ones, are not crystallized structures. Food culture is modified in space and time as cultures and individuals come in contact with each other and interact.

This is seen in the rise of the Italian culinary tradition through different processes of Americanization of the Italian heritage, a product of interaction between the Italian immigrants, their communities, the following generations and the wider American culture. This mixture of variations and contradictions connected with the broader availability of new commodities and the desire to acquire more “aristocratic” products motivated immigrants to modify their system of symbols and behaviors. Gradually they adapted their rustic dishes in their American kitchens, producing a more nationally-cohesive and later an Americanized Italian cuisine.

As we have seen, various late twentieth century ethnic studies demonstrated that many Italian traditions that American assumed to be authentic were actually the result of a complex historical process of struggle and negotiation. The historian La Cecla explained that the rise of an Italian national cuisine and identity, as a whole, was the direct result of the connections among Italian ethnic communities abroad. Instead, according to Cinotto, Italian American cuisine was the result of an American invention in which Italian immigrants reshaped their food habits in response to social pressures (Cinotto 2013, 22) and generational changes.

As Italian immigration came to an end, diasporic food modeled on the Italian cuisine pattern underwent further changes to adapt to the demands of a different rhythm of life (Parasecoli 422). When the ethnic landscape of Little Italy began to change in the 1930s, food started to play a fundamental role in mapping the culinary geography of the Italian neighborhoods. Within ethnic communities, Italian immigrants “saw, smelled, and over time, tasted each others’ local and regional food”. Moreover, “although utterly invented in America,

certain dishes, spaghetti and meatballs as a case in point, become fixtures in Italian homes” (Diner 53). As a result, Italian immigrants established a new cuisine that was not necessarily related to the cuisine of origin, but was the product of an initial process of cultural invention.

A lively anecdote about how external pressure reshaped the “authentic” Italian tradition in America is offered by Joe Vergara in his autobiography. He tells us that on Sundays, his family used to organize a “spaghetti-eating contest,” the food competition being the American aspect, and the pasta being a clear symbol of Italian cuisine. Remembering the competition, the author writes that:

each contestant had to eat his entire antipasto (a full meal in itself), a roast chicken, a third of the cheese, and at least two pieces of fruit. Whoever, in addition, ate the most spaghetti was to be crowned the winner (Vergara 42).

In this celebrative image, this collective culinary experience shows a new shared identity as Italians but also the clear influence of the Americanization of the ethnic group. As Vergara’s mother clarified, although the “spaghetti contest” was a family ceremony, in Italy there was no such thing as wasting food in a competition. Not by chance, in the article “Everybody Likes Italian Food” (1989), John F. Mariani remarked that food in America remained expensive for most of the Italian immigrants with low wages, but in Italy the situation was much worse. In Sicily, for instance, up to 85 percent of family income was needed to feed the family, compared with 50% in the United States. Hence, a “spaghetti eating contest” was exclusively a product of American life.

As mentioned, a subsequent step in the process of culinary invention occurred with the rise of the second Italian American generation. During the 1920s and 1930s, the second generation continued to display many of the parental habits in terms of food, ethnic marriages and occupations, but starting with the Great Depression, American-born children moved further from the culture of their ancestors in an effort to become more American. Turning away from their “Italian-ness”, especially after World War II, they started to change the structures of the ethnic community, opening up to mixed marriages and developing their own businesses, often relocating to cities throughout America. In doing so, they contributed to spread the Italian national cuisine and identity as a whole in the U.S.

In *Una famiglia che mangia insieme* (2001), Cinotto demonstrated the importance of food and rituals during the Italian immigration experience and identified food as one of the strongest symbols of ethnic identity. He argued that the Italian food culture was the result of a process that

reshaped the gastronomic *contadina* (peasant) culture in Italy in urban-industrial America. (Cinotto 2001, 32-33). On the one hand, food was strongly related to the place of origin and served as one of the main instruments of cultural conservation for the first Italian migrants in America; on the other hand, food and food rituals abroad played an important role in shaping the Italian national identity.

Drawing upon an extensive number of resources and documents, Cinotto wrote that in their multi-generational struggle for personal and group identity, Italian-Americans created a distinctive culinary culture as a symbol that met the need to build a life in their new land. Cinotto defines the Italian American food culture as an invention of tradition.

However, despite the popularity of what seemed to be a unified Italian cuisine, still in the 1950s and 1960s Italians faced prejudice and negative stereotypes against their community, as in the past. It was only with the rise of the third and fourth generations that Italian-Americans reconstructed the lives and values of their ancestors to celebrate the cultural identity brought to the new country by their Italian families. In this regard, Marcus Lee Hansen described a sociological phenomenon of “third generation interest”, in which these descendants of immigrants desired to learn about their heritage and to embrace the cultural origins that the second generation deliberately threw away. “What the son wishes to forget the grandson wishes to remember” (Lee Hansen 9).

Later generations manifested nostalgic allegiance to and pride for their cultural heritage, even without incorporating the tradition into their daily life. This change in the perception of ethnic identity was evident in the publications of several ethnic cookbooks written by Italian American writers in celebration of Italian American culture. “The model for these cookbooks was indisputably American, even as their subject matter often was not” (Gabaccia 1998, 181).

Cookbooks were of particular interest to scholars of ethnic food habits, who until then had focused on oral traditions transmitted from generation to generation. In these cookbooks, transcriptions of traditional recipes served the double purpose of celebrating the Old World and transmitting to posterity the Italian culinary techniques that risked being forgotten.

Cinotto asserted that the revived interest in ethnicity in the 1970s and 1980s promoted the concept of food as one of the most significant elements of ethnic heritage, one to be rediscovered and treasured. But at the same time, Italian American food was criticized as a bastardization of “real” Italian cuisine. Several scholars of ethnicity observed that as new generations were born, the Italian American culture was abandoning its roots: in the words of Alba, the new generations were facing the twilight of their ethnicity.

On the contrary, even though most members of the third or fourth generations knew little about Italian culture, they continued to somehow relate with their heritage and, above all, kept alive food rituals and celebrations that affected their growth within the Italian American families. While rejecting the cultural ties of their ethnicity during the years of growth, third and fourth generation Italian-Americans showed, later, a commitment to the Italian and Italian-American culture that goes past the previous generations.

Multi-generational devotion to traditional Italian cuisine has been a unique element of cultural continuity for American-born citizens of Italian descent, at the border between two cultures. Italian American foods offer a powerful narrative of tradition and innovation in which immigrants created their identity in a hostile American environment.

In the sphere of individual memory, food was produced to “interact physically, emotionally, and cognitively with the surrounding Otherness” (Parasecoli 419). In the collective sphere of memory, culinary traditions were developed and somehow transformed by the earlier generations to respond to a need for Italian-ness in the United States. Finally, in the transnational dimension of the Italian American ethnic identity, later generations negotiated and created a creolized²⁶ identity that brought innovation to tradition.

It seems then, that the theories of Hobsbawm and Sollors are solid. The creation of a sphere of invented tradition in United States was not the result of a transposition of the original culture into the New World, nor was it a process of total assimilation into American culture. On the contrary, the birth of an Italian American cuisine was an invention, the result of exchanges and hybridizations between the ever-changing Italian micro universe in the U.S and the American macro universe (Di Renzo 398).

²⁶ The concept of “creolization” of identity refers to the theory developed by philosopher Édouard Glissant and applied to the study of emigration from the Caribbean. For Glissant, creolization is a phenomenon fundamental to understanding the New World experience. According to his theory, the creolization process, unlike that of acculturation or assimilation, is a creative and open adaptation by which some cultures adopt aspects of other cultures without rejecting their own (Glissant 2007).

3. Searching for my Food: the Experience of Italian American Writers

3.1. Autobiography and the Quest for Identity

Just as an autobiography is a valuable vehicle for constructing identity through storytelling, so the story of one person's life can be useful as a metaphor for an entire historical phenomenon. As an autobiographer recounts the vivid images of her memory, we can observe the process by which identity is produced through mediation between self-representation, past history and present culture.

It has been said that autobiographical writing is a constant process of self-knowing that produces a particular version of identity in which the multifaceted reality "is socially constructed by human beings who experience their lives in a holistic and interrelated way" (Abrahão 31). The aim of an autobiography is thus to explore the intimate connection between ourselves and our experiences, between the narrative of the past and the negotiation of our current personality on an individual, relational and collective level.

As a qualitative research method for international migration research, the study of autobiographical narratives is particularly useful because it provides crucial understanding of the process by which migrants defined their identity in relation to others. In illustrating pathways of settlement in an unknown land, autobiographical writings by migrants allow us to analyze not just how their ethnic groups resisted the social pressures brought to bear by the dominant culture of their new land, but also to imagine the inevitable external influences and the cultural change that occurred among first generation immigrants and subsequent generations.

Particularly in the history of Italian immigration to America, analysis of the difference between the personal narratives of first and subsequent generations can highlight how a collective identity has been constructed by creating a bridge over the gap between generations and by negotiating the boundaries between sameness and difference.

In *Leaving Little Italies*, Gardaphe argued that the writing of autobiographies by Italian Americans was a relatively recent phenomenon, among other reasons, because such stories were told only as part of family oral tradition to educate new generations and find temporary relief from the hard reality (Gardaphe 83).

One can imagine that it would not have occurred to the first generations immigrants, who were largely illiterate farmers who spoke only their local Italian dialect, to write their experiences in Italian or English for a larger audience. However, in a century-long process of cultural evolution, as the children and grandchildren of immigrants were educated in American

schools and gained command of the language and a larger view of the dominant culture around them, many Italian-American authors wrote about themselves and their experiences using English and making a great contribution to the American literary scene.

First generation Italian immigrants used mainly oral narratives to portray their loss of belonging to their homeland, and their sense of being strangers in a strange land. This corpus of anecdotes, proverbs and letters produced in dialect by these first immigrants was later incorporated into the autobiographies of their children and grandchildren. As recounted by the younger generations, these personal stories of the homeland appear to be more the image of a mythical past than a factual representation.

In the case of the autobiographical novels written by second generation Italian Americans, we find feelings of resentment and rejection of their ethnic heritage. Many second generation immigrants used memoirs to dramatize their personal experience of living in between two cultures, and did everything they could to deny the traces of their Italianness in the New World.

The change in content and sentiments between second generation autobiographical fiction and that of following generations mirrored the process of integration that took place as the years passed. In fact, in reading the personal stories written by third and fourth generations, we can observe the deconstruction of the ethnic self and the process by which the authors recuperated and renegotiated that self in America during the ethnic revival. For the Italian American narrative, particularly the autobiographical account of food reveals much about the formation of personal identity, the construction of a national character and the ethnic inheritance within the migration experience.

In the last few years, several studies in migration history have underscored the centrality of food within the Italian American literary experience. In the writers' memoirs, we see how cooking and eating together helped to express the sense of self as individuals and as an ethnic society, and to facilitate the negotiation of a safe space in a foreign land (Luconi 2004, 206). At the same time, as Levi-Strauss and Barthes have pointed out, the meaning assigned to food and eating rituals was important to the evolution of an Italian American tradition expressed in literature. What and how Italian Americans ate was instrumental in defining a hybrid identity connected with a specific ethnicity but continuously challenged by internal as well as external factors.

To offer a more detailed analysis of the symbolic use of food encoded in Italian American culture, we will examine Italian American autobiographical narratives by Jerry Mangione, a

second generation writer, Helen Barolini, a third generation author, and the contemporary Laura Schenone.

In *Mount Allegro: A Memoir of Italian American Life* (1943), Mangione told us stories of his Sicilian family and the lives of the Sicilian immigrants in Rochester, New York, in the first half of the twentieth century. Through his memoirs, the writer provided an opportunity to experience the progressive stages of identity development, starting from the Sicilian subnational culture and arriving at an American identity. Mangione recounted his youth in Little Italy, showing the immigrants' sense of attachment to their roots, and also described his efforts to escape that oppressive community culture and gradually negotiate his identity as a Italian-American second generation.

With *Festa: Recipes and Recollections of Italian Holidays* (1988), Helen Barolini celebrated the rediscovery of Italian food by combining the description of traditional recipes with the observance of holidays. Like other third generation writers, Barolini highlighted the special bond between food and celebrations and took us on a culinary journey to her family homeland in the search for better understanding of her past, rejected for years.

Finally, Laura Schenone, the author of *The Lost Ravioli Recipes of Hoboken: A Search for Food and Family* (2007), fascinates us with her obsessive quest to find the authentic recipe of her great-grandmother's ravioli. In search of the ancestral Genovese dish, Schenone traveled from New Jersey to the coast of Liguria, where she rediscovered her ethnicity but learned that there are many different versions of the same recipe, tweaked by each successive generation.

3.2. Jerry Mangione in *Mount Allegro*

Considered by some critics to be an extraordinary sociological portrait of Sicilian immigrant life in America, Jerre Mangione's *Mount Allegro*²⁷ has been defined an icon of ethnic Italian-American literature. In *Blood of my Boob*, Gambino described the memoir as a delightful autobiography of Mangione's childhood in Rochester (Gambino 228), in a precarious balance between the preservation of cultural heritage and the process of Americanization. Even though the memoir is neither strictly factual nor fictional, Mangione provided realistic details about the

²⁷ *Mount Allegro* is the epithet coined by the narrator's relatives to name the neighborhood where the extended family lives. Successively the neighborhood was renamed "Macaroni Town" by Jerry's Uncle.

traditions and culture of the Sicilian enclave in western New York, using food as an expression of continuity, memory, tradition and compromise.

The main character of *Mount Allegro* is the author's alter ego, Gerlando Amoroso. Mangione wrote the book as a nonfictional work but, as he claimed in a 1981 *New York Times* interview, when his publisher Houghton Mifflin insisted on publishing it as a fictional memoir to reach more readers, he agreed to accept this definition, and changed the names of his characters, calling himself Geraldo Amoroso. At the same time, he forced the publisher to include an ironic disclaimer in the book, stating: "The characters in this book are fictitious and have fictitious names. Anyone who thinks he recognizes himself in it is kindly asked to bear that in mind". In creating an alter ego and presenting him as a fictional character, Mangione escaped from the constrictions of reality and wove a fictional story with added to describe precarious balance between the preservation of cultural heritage and the process of Americanization

In *Mount Allegro*, Jerre Mangione/Gerlando Amoroso recalled his childhood in his Sicilian American neighborhood of New York and his departure from that ethnic community as a young man in search of his own identity. The first section features reminiscences of Amoroso's/Mangione's youth within the extended family, and the ethnic *campanilism* of the neighborhood that revolved around a mythicized image of the Old World. In this section, the author hid his voice in favour of the moral folktales told by relatives to celebrate the spirit of Sicilian ancestors and teach the new generations about the dignity of their origins.

The second part focuses on Gerlando's adulthood, describing the exacerbation of the conflict that he felt as a second generation Italian American, caused by this bicultural identity, and the subsequent integration into American mainstream society.

The last part culminates in his trip back to Sicily in search of his authentic roots.-Through Gerlando's visit to Italy, Mangione showed us the inevitable process of the Americanization of his ethnic story by presenting the image of a mystified Sicily, different from the one Gerlando had incorporated, growing up as an Italian American in the United States.

Food is of paramount importance in *Mount Allegro*. We see how faithfulness to the family meal was the means for recreating a sense of community and reinforcing family bonds and ideology. Mangione situated the centre of life in the intimacy of the home, a space dedicated to memory, where members ritually transform themselves into a community and hide from the discriminative and coercive outside world. The heart of the first part of the novel is the stories told during the convivial family gathering, where the large quantity of food and the pleasure of sharing are "the most tangible expressions of the dream of immigrants who had known only scarcity" (Cinotto 2013, 54).

The surname “Mangione” or big eater, reminds us of never forgotten food traditions (Coccopalmeri 219) and rituals that celebrate a victory over hunger and poverty. This new prosperity is especially visible during the commemorations of some ethnic traditions such as Sunday dinner, when family and close relatives congregate together in a celebration of the magnificent abundance of their food and the glorification of their cultural heritage.

Writing about these ceremonies, Mangione reminded us that during the week, a meal of soup or some spaghetti, with some meat and a salad were more than enough:

But on Sundays and holidays it was assumed that your appetite became gargantuan and, besides soup and salad, you were expected to stow away at least three different courses of meat, four or five vegetables, along with celery and fennel, all topped off with pastry, fruits, and nuts (Mangione 131).

All this eating was also accompanied by bread and wine in line with the traditional theory that “U vinu ti fa sangu” (Mangione 24) or *wine strengthens your blood*.

In the above-quoted passage, Mangione also described the role of women in the extended family in preparing food for convivial family gatherings, and their place as the representatives responsible for continuing their traditions. Mangione ended by describing the women of the family house, busy cleaning up and gossiping after the meal, while the men play *briscola*, a traditional Italian card game. He also recounted the speeches of Uncle Nino, one of the more educated members of the family and a key character of the memoir, because he is the one who entertains the children with Italian stories about *Girgenti*, the Sicilian hometown of the extended family.

Another facet of Sicilian-American life represented in great detail by Mangione was the traditional Italian concept of hospitality, manifested through food. Cinotto explained, “many immigrant families spared no expense on feasts that accompanied baptisms, confirmations, weddings, and funerals” (Cinotto 2013, 55). Mangione’s descriptions of the bounty of Sunday dinners and the extravagance surrounding family celebrations of an individual’s rites of passage illustrated the importance of reinforcing ethnic community relations and marking the value of each individual member of that family.

From the Italian immigrant’s point of view, food during banquets had a double social function. On the one side, it was needed to maintain the cohesion of the extended family and thus obtain a certain social recognition. On the other side, it was used to determine both inclusion and exclusion of certain individuals and thus safeguard the privacy of its members. Strangers, for

example, were not allowed to take part in the social ceremonies, but the selection of certain relatives rather than others was taken as such an offence by the *paesani* who were relatives and came from the same village', that could also end in significant disputes (Cinotto 2013, 56).

On this subject, Mangione wrote that the failure to collect all the people under the same roof was considered such a lack of respect that the quarrel could continue for so long that the relatives forgot the original reason for the quarrel (Mangione 131).

But convivial gathering and eating habits also provoked cultural clashes between parents and children. The second generation felt torn between their Italian identity and their American one, and sometimes were embarrassed by their Italian American relatives when they compared them to other American families. Mangione described feeling ashamed of his family's habits on more than one occasion, and only in later years would he come instead to appreciate them. In this regard, one particular scene of *Mount Allegro* magnificently describes this feeling of shame provoked by the Italian families' picnics in public spaces, next to other American families:

I had a particular dread of picnics in public parks. Spaghetti, chicken and wine were consumed with pagan abandon then and the talk and laughter of my relatives filled the park like a warm summer breeze. A few feet away would be an American family quietly munching neatly cut sandwiches that came out of neatly packed baskets – and drinking no wine, of course, but iced tea with trim slices of lemon stuck into the brims of their glasses to make them look pretty (Mangione 222).

This description portrays the shame provoked by the ethnic differences and the aspiration of the second generation to be more American, despite their families' beliefs. While the young Mangione was afraid of what the well-mannered Americans would think about this Sicilian eating festival, on the contrary, his relatives were cynical about the American habits. From their point of view, in fact, "they have no manners; they licked their fingers after a meal, and they chewed gum and then play with it as though it were a rubber band" (Mangione 223).

In recounting his memories and his past experiences, Mangione portrayed a whole generation of Italian American children who struggled to reject the roots that they did not recognize as their own in order to find their independent voice. In fact, at the heart of the generational tension, we find the second generation's request for conventionality and desire to be like most people. It is no coincidence that Mangione's memoir opens with his sister's words: "When I grow up I want to be an American" (Mangione 1).

The process of Mangione's separation from his family and the Sicilian enclave seemed to reach a turning point when eighteen-year-old Gerlando/Gerry leave his Sicilian relatives to

become part of the broader American world by attending college in Syracuse and later working in the publishing industry in New York. The moment he separates himself from the extended family, he lays the foundation for his Americanization and his identity transformation, choosing to make a total break from the Old World.

But by leaving home, the narrator gradually realizes that the Americans did not differ so much from Mount Allegro's citizens. Paradoxically, although he continued to resent some family habits and traditions through the years, once he abandoned the ethnic neighborhood, he began to become more curious about his Sicilian roots. Far from his family, Gerlando/Jerry discovers that the bonds are still strong, and starts to appreciate his family's talent for living. This new sense of the past and new interest in his origins culminates with his journey to Italy to see the land of his ancestors.

The last section of the memoir recounts Mangione's experience of an extremely poor Sicily, devastated by years of wars and historical changes that no longer correspond to his family memories of a mythological country left decades before.

I had heard and read a great deal about Sicily's poor living conditions but, without actually coming face to face with them, I should never have known how shocking they were; I might never have realized that human beings could live in such poverty. The scenery was a revelation because I had come to Sicily expecting to see green meadows, gently undulating hills, and long stretches of vegetation. What I saw made me understand what time and nostalgia must have done to my relatives' memories (Mangione 246).

On the one hand, the dignity of people, who lives in Girgenti, still appears similar to what Gerlando/Jerry had learnt from his parents' stories during his childhood. As he saw their extreme decorum despite the poverty and their profound sense of hospitality, manifested through food, he recognized that there was still a link between the Old World and the Italian American New World. As remarkably expressed in one of the final passages:

They took turns at dining me and each one tried to feed me more than the others [...]. It was obvious that none of them could afford the quantities of food they served me, yet each family swore that their meal was but a snack and that I was starving myself before their very eyes (Mangione 253).

But Mangione was shocked to discover the poverty that surrounded the town and the ignorance of his Italian relatives, who believed that in America everyone is wealthy and that the streets are

covered with gold. Just as his Italian American relatives had a mythic idea of Italy, so his distant Italian relations had a mythologized vision of America.

Gerlando/Jerry's journey to Sicily is one of the most significant parts of the memoir because he was compelled to look at his cultural heritage with his own eyes. His journey back to his roots showed him how his culture of origin had been modified under the pressure of Americanization. By dramatizing the Sicilian-American conflict, using food as a means of identity, Mangione revealed the important process of development of his hybrid self. His return to Italy made him understand how nostalgia must have altered his family memories, and similarly how the stereotyped image of America had influenced the Italian peasant's perception.

In *Mount Allegro*, Gerlando/Jerry serves as a metaphor of cultural amalgamation applicable to the experience of all second generation Italian Americans. Looking back, Gerlando/Jerry came to understand that his identity was neither Italian nor American, but the product of a negotiation between two ever-changing cultures. The result is the creation of an Italian American identity, as Sollors has theorized, in which the Sicilian footprints are somehow still alive.

3.3. Helen Barolini's *Festa*: A Memoir of Italian Recipes

Before the 1960s, relatively few works of ethnic literature were produced because of the general context of American assimilation. Especially in the Italian American case, only a few educated descendants of Italian immigrants had written ethnic narratives. However, in the late 1960s, with the national surge of interest in ethnicity, members of the Italian American third generation began to manifest interest in their cultural heritage and a desire to rediscover their roots. In this context of historical change, with better English skills than previous generations, and greater awareness of ethnic tensions, they wrote narratives exploring their status as members of two cultures.

Donna Gabaccia wrote that during this ethnic reaction against the American nationalist consensus, preparing Italian food was seen as a special way to embrace and recover the original culture of the homeland, and thus interest in this cuisine became an integral part of the revival (Gabaccia 1998, 176). One of the first contributors in the search for ethnic identification through food was Helen Barolini.

Barolini's work has been acclaimed for the representation of the intercultural bond between America and Italy, where the author lived for many years after marrying Italian writer Antonio Barolini. The encounter with Barolini marked a first turning point in her journey to the recapture of her ethnic identity. As neither spoke the other's language, after several attempts to communicate using Spanish, French and Latin, they discovered their shared language in food. Through food, Helen Barolini learned Italian and regained her Italian-ness.

A third generation Italian born in Syracuse, New York, Barolini was one of the first women novelists to write in the ethnic genre with a specific focus on the female role in the Italian American experience. In the book *Festa: Recipes and Recollection of Italian Holidays*, Barolini provided not only two hundred traditional Italian and American recipes related to specific holidays, "from St. Nicholas sweetmeats in December and perciatelli with sardines and fennel for March's St. Joseph's Day, to figs with prosciutto for summer's Ferragosto and pumpkin gnocchi for an American Thanksgiving in Italy" (Antoinette Bosco, *Litchfield County Times*) but also shared autobiographical information, curiosities and anecdotes, family stories and remembrances of her childhood. As she researched and wrote the cookbook, a year-long feast of personal memories and traditional recipes observed during celebrations, she gained better knowledge of the culinary traditions of her ancestors, and strengthened the bond with her ethnic roots (Cocopalmeri 222), creating a bridge between the United States and her ancestral homeland.

The book opens with an autobiographical introduction and closes with the explanation of how to cook dishes for an American Thanksgiving in Italy. Each of the other chapters describes a feast-day and provides the recipes for that particular celebration. But, beyond the transcription of the recipes, what *Festa* really represents is a memoir of Barolini's culinary experience during her life in Italy, where food is used as a means to reinforce the cultural tradition. At the same time, the author took a step forward in destroying the stereotypes of Italian women as domestic slaves, by using cultural memory to turn "the women's room, the family kitchen, into an embassy of cultural tradition" (Gardaphe 92).

Barolini underlined the strong relationship between food and celebrations, and stressed the link between recipes and memories. In one of the most outstanding statements in the cookbook, Barolini remarked that by eating she remembers. Food is the medium of her remembrance, of her memory of Italy (Barolini 2002, 13). The writer also used the mother figure to better "show the ties connecting Italian Americans to their native land" (Luconi 2004, 206) and thereby reveal the reconstruction of a collective identity. As she wrote:

Starting in her kitchen, my mother found her way back to her heritage, and this, I suspect happened for many Italian American families who were rescued from lives of denial by the ethnic explosion of the sixties (Barolini 2002, 7).

In the introduction to *Festa*, Barolini exults in her re-conquered Italianità, one she had consistently rejected during her childhood in America but later re-evaluated during her sojourn in Italy. Like Mangione, Barolini reminisced on her youth in America and emphasized how her ethnic background was a source of a painful embarrassment on different occasions. In this regard, one particular scene of *Festa* acutely describes this uncomfortable feeling towards Italian food:

Once in a while my mother would have me accompany her to the North Side to get cheese [...] in an important store which I hated to enter because of the smells -- smells that were Italian and which intensified my own determination not to be. [...] I even hated Josie's pastry shop because Josie, who made all those foreign-looking cookies, was fat and foreign looking herself, with black circles under her eyes and an uncorseted figure - not at all the image of life I was seeing each Saturday afternoon at the movies. (Barolini 2002, 3).

But Barolini is not just a representative of the third Italian generation in America with an identity crisis. She related in the autobiographical first chapter that she grew up in an Italian family that had struggled to become more American ever since they arrived in the country, rejecting their Italian heritage and feeling ashamed of being recognized as such. In the first part she described this unusual relationship with Italian food, explaining that it was only at her grandmother's house in Utica that she had her first truly foreign foods, that is, Italian food (Barolini 2002, 2).

As she entered adulthood Barolini began to reconsider her roots, especially in terms of food, which soon became the most important link with her cultural heritage. "Italy is as close to me as appetite", she wrote in the first sentence of *Festa* (Barolini 2002, 1). Therefore, it is not surprising that her first Italian memory was a gastronomic one.

In the opening paragraphs of *Festa*, Barolini recounted that during her journey to Italy in the summer of 1948, her first experience of the Italian food taste happened when she bought a *mortadella* sandwich right out of the train window at the Ventimiglia station. Eating that sandwich gave Barolini an almost religious sense of communion with the cultural heritage that her own family had denied for years in order to become more American. At that moment, food became the medium of her memory and the taste of that *panino* afforded a Proustian

reminiscence of a “transcendent exaltation” (Barolini 2002, 1) that she had once experienced long before, as a child at her grandmother’s house.

As a producer of knowledge and historical narratives herself, Barolini reflects the work of most third generation writers, who, after joining the American middle class, go back to their family roots to explore the transformation of their ethnic identity, retracing the stages of the development of their self-perception.

Unlike Mangione, who travelled back to Sicily mostly to strengthen his American identity, Barolini used her memories to look back to her past and to “create a sense of how traditions both survive and died in the experience of succeeding generations” (Gardaphe, 88).

Barolini’s work takes readers on a metaphorical trip into her ancestral past to show how this double culture has shaped the creation of the Italian American identity. Like other third generation Italian Americans, Barolini personified the ethnic anxiety experienced by an apparently integrated Italian American generation that lives in the shadow of a dual culture and is eager to address the ethnic tension that this causes. The result, as well expressed by Richard Gambino, is a quest for identity.

It is important to underline that, unlike second generation Italian Americans, who had grown up in an undoubtedly Italian sphere, the third generation was born and raised in an environment where the Italian basis was not as clear (Gambino 158) and where the process of Americanization had already reached its goal. “If the children of Italian immigrants to America became true Americans in the economic sense”, wrote Gardaphe, then it was their children who have become Americans in the cultural sense” (Gardaphe 106).

Paradoxically, although the third generation was raised according to the standards of the dominant American culture, they had a greater opportunity to examine their cultural heritage from a more intellectual approach and better define what it meant to be Italian American, because they had access to a higher level of education than did the previous ones. Because they were better integrated into the mainstream culture, they felt freer to recover their lost Italian identity.

Reconsidering for a moment Gans’ position, the third generation re-appropriated such rituals as the preparation of special Italian dishes for traditional holidays, in order to feel close to their original homeland and to re-claim membership in their ethnic group, even though they knew that these meals, for example, were symbolic gestures, as they no longer celebrated these religious feast days or no longer gathered regularly with relatives, who had long since moved far away to pursue their careers or business opportunities. However, the culture battle fought by the third generation to solve the ethnic tension took the form of an intellectual and self-conscious

struggle. For the third generation, the construction of ethnicity took place through an inevitable evolution and transformation of reality itself, in which the recollection of rituals represents historical pieces of reality within the invention of tradition.

Not by chance, Helen Barolini concluded the cookbook *Festa* with a reflection on tradition as a continuing invention that still tells us who we are:

There is in human nature that makes us express symbolically what is deep within us. The danger is not in ritual becoming superstition or mere formality, but in human beings becoming so depersonalized that they lose their need for mysteries, and so their humanities. Ritualizing is not archaic, but a continuing renewal of the collective experience. Ritualizing makes real to the participants who they are and where they come from” (Barolini 2002, 356).

3.4. Laura Schenone and the *Lost Ravioli Recipes of Hoboken*

Food is considered one of the main sources of identity in terms of membership in a given culture. A culture is expressed through the various aspects of eating, such as the use of specific ingredients; of certain procedures for preparing foods, such as pit roasting, or boiling in a cauldron over a fire, or deep frying, or baking in a tangle or a tandoor etc.; of special ways of consuming meals, such as sitting on chairs at a table and using utensils, or reclining on cushions and carpets on the floor, or eating by hand from a common dish, or serving the men first and then allowing the women and children to eat.

As we have seen, the role of food and its social and cultural meanings are particularly significant especially in the process of identity construction among immigrants, where food is used as a vehicle for retaining cultural identity.

Principally for the early immigrant generations, food, in the sense of comfort food, was strongly connected with the motherland and contributed to fostering a sense of ethnic belonging in the foreign land. At the same time, immigrants, who live in contact with other cultures, inevitably modify the way they eat, opening up to more national community food and defining their space in the new country. In fact, there is not just one mythological culinary tradition for an ethnic group or culture. It is not true that cultural identity in cuisine, as in the whole cultural reality, is unique and unrepeatable. It is said that identity exists in many different forms, and food, despite its fairly conservative nature, is one of the best ways to show the validity of this affirmation.

Food is used to share historical origins and transmit traditional values, but as a factor of a cultural identity, it is also in constant flux. People adapt their food habits in space and time, especially when they come into contact with other cultures. Thus as the Italian immigrants came into contact with the American culture and the cultures of other immigrant groups, they appropriated culinary elements from these cultures and incorporated them into their own culture, and the other cultures did the same thing. Their identity was fluid, multiple, and ever changing.

A prime example of an autobiographical novel that illustrates the many-sided phenomenon of identity traditions through food is *The Lost Ravioli Recipes of Hoboken: A Search for Food and Family* (2007), in which food historian and ethnic writer Laura Schenone alternated lyrical prose with old photographs and family recipes in the story of her search into her Italian American family history. Although the author is of mixed Italian-Croatian heritage, in this book she pursued her curiosity to explore her father's Italian heritage, through a search for the authentic recipe for her great-grandmother's Christmas ravioli, which she only knew in its Americanized form.

Starting with an intrepid journey to find the origins of the family's famous Christmas ravioli, Schenone gained a deeper understanding of her cultural heritage. Throughout the book, she struggled to find answers to many questions. Why did her ancestors use the Americanized cream cheese in an authentic recipe for ravioli? Was she an "authentic" Italian, or only a strange mix of heritages without a common identity? What does it mean to say that a ravioli recipe is authentic? What could she do to stimulate her children to get closer to their food tradition?

Part culinary journey, part memoir and part detective story, this book relates an obsessive search for her "dish of happy times" (Schenone 257), a symbol for her need to reconnect herself and her children with their Italian heritage. Like most of the Italian American generations born or raised in America, the young Schenone was not interested in the Italian side of her ethnic roots. Only as an adult did she start to study Italian and seek deeper understanding of her Italian-ness; in doing so, realized how food is intimately connected with her family history.

Over the years, I had come to see the importance in food, its brightness in human history. Now I was a mother and home all the time. Children had to eat, and I was constantly in the kitchen. Suddenly I wanted to be able to make something wonderful—wonderful not just because it tasted good but because it could span generations and tell a story—a story I was part of, somehow, a story to which I would add. I decided to find an old recipe, a recipe that preceded the big machine of technological food, before test-tube flavors and before megaindustrial products. A recipe I could trace from my family, back into history, further and further back into an ancient past (Schenone 13).

This strong need to recreate a connection to the past motivated her to contact many of her Italian American relatives to look for the old ravioli recipe. But like the original recipe inherited from her great-grandmother, the recipes handed down to her other Italian American relatives seem to contain the same American ingredients, such as Philadelphia cream cheese, that show a process of adjustment and adaptation of the traditional cuisine after the migration.

Realizing how irrational is to use American ingredients to create a typical Italian dish, she resolved to find the authentic ravioli recipe that her Genovese great-grandmother had brought with her to New Jersey a century before. Desiring to reconnect with her Italian roots and to give her children a sense of their heritage, she decided to take the whole family from the New Jersey suburbs to the family's homeland on the Genovese coasts, the village of Rocco, where her great-grandmother was born, and then to the nearby town of Lumarzo where "all peoples named Schenone" (Schenone 86). There, they were able to meet distant relatives, and through conversations with them they gradually learned the history of the Schenone family, heard stories of loves and losses, and gained insight into the emigration experience of the family. As she learned about the geography of taste²⁸ of her family homeland, she was taught traditional cooking techniques, tasted the finest artisanal Italian foods, and gained insight into the bonds between food, family and her Italian cultural heritage.

The original goal for her journey, however, was not achieved. Searching for the way to make ravioli the way her Genoese great-grandmother had, Schenone came to see that her expectation was unrealistic. She came up against the fact that many women of previous generations, many of whom were probably illiterate, never wrote down their recipes. The recipes were learned as grandmother, mother and daughter worked side by side; the daughter observed a pinch of this and a handful of that, and perhaps over the years added her own variations to the method. In this regard, Schenone had a valuable conversation with Sergio Rossi, director of the Genoa chapter of the organization devoted to conserving the culture and foods of the Mediterranean. She learned that there are many types of ravioli, many ways to roll the dough, different styles of cutting and thus thousands of ways to interpret the ethnic tradition. This conversation sparked an open dialogue with her Italian past and the present American culture that inevitably made her question the idea of her family myth.

²⁸ The expression "geography of taste" was coined by historian Massimo Montanari in his book *Il Cibo come Cultura* to indicate how the culture of a certain region is expressed through different tastes and local products.

I want to taste, [...] I want to know what these dishes should taste like. I want authentic. I want to know what my great-grandmother made before she left.

- Sergio shakes his head slowly. - There is no one taste. Each village has its own way. Each family has its own way. Things vary even within a family. I can share with you my tradition. However ... if you spend time, you should eventually be able to recognize for yourself what is authentic. What is your tradition I ask? [...] The taste memories are in my blood and in my soul” he explains gently (Schenone 131).

Thus it can be argued that just as there is no one way to make a dish, so there is no one true culinary experience of the homeland. Tastes and flavours are cultural products and cuisine is a symbol of civilization: just as each country has its own specificities and mythologies, so each family has its own way to prepare and consume meals, even within the same family tree.

Schenone’s book symbolizes the perceptive voice of a generation that wants to rediscover its ethnicity, even as that ethnicity is in its twilight. In fact, Schenone’s search yielded several versions of ravioli recipes from her distant relatives in Rocco and Lumarzo, and a new bond with these members of the family in Italy. After learning the procedures for preparing homemade ravioli in the style of all her relatives, she shared the finished dishes with her family: the older members recognized the Genovese authenticity, and the younger ones appreciated the wonderful flavors.

We have got three kinds of Ravioli: Old Schenone ravioli (Millie and Susan's), Laura Schenone ravioli (a mix of Old Schenone plus Maria Carla), and Lou Palma ravioli (no spinach inside, inspired by Lidia;) [...] Bowl after bowl gets served, and soon everyone is trying to distinguish which kinds are which. “This is the Tessie kind!” declares my father. “You got it, Laura!” I shake my head. “No, that's mine...I cooked it with wine.” “I want to taste a Lou Palma,” says my brother-in-law. “Mmmm.” says my nephew. “Oh, man,” says my father. “Oh, Aunt Tessie” (Schenone 102).

The irony of the whole book is that the search for authenticity that motivated Schenone to travel to Italy caused her greater uncertainty about her ethnic heritage. Finding the ravioli recipes of her distant relatives did not help Schenone solve her dilemma about authenticity. On the contrary, the journey back to her Italian homeland made her aware of how Italian culinary traditions had been transformed and readapted for generations in Italy as well as in America. In seeking to reclaim her heritage, she came to realize that the culinary tradition of her relatives in Italy had evolved, just as the one handed down to her by her Italian American mother and

grandmother was a product of change, and thus was actually an artificial construction. Italian Americans created a new cuisine that reflects the Italian one, but does not duplicate it.

Reflecting on Schenone's odyssey to unravel the mystery of her great-grandmother's ravioli recipe, the reader is led to realize that it is very difficult to recapture the authentic recipes from a century or more ago. Most women of these generations did not write down their recipes, and the ingredients they used may no longer be available in the form available at the time. Thus "authenticity" is a fraught term. In her efforts to find a culinary identity, Schenone found that her ethnic heritage has neither a definite beginning nor a definite end. Her story about her journey to Italy illustrates for her readers the continuous process of adaptation, negotiation and recreation that makes past and present, personal stories and collective identities overlap, but that finds its roots in individual and family memories.

4. Taste, Smell, and Flavor: The Italian Restaurant in America

4.1. Ethnic Entrepreneurship: the Historical Development of the Italian Food Market in the U.S.

Since the first Italian immigrants moved to America, food has always been a significant source of ethnic pride and an influential aspect of the whole Italian American immigration experience. Italian food in the U.S. developed from distinct regional traditions, and from the beginning of migration to modern times such dishes as pizza, lasagna, or spaghetti with ragù have become a classic part of the American diet. In fact, Italian food has today become one of the most popular ethnic foods in America.

Ethnic entrepreneurship during the various waves of Italian migration (Tirabassi 76) played a key role in the development of this popularity. As reported by Simone Cinotto, with the first wave of immigration, mostly from the most disadvantaged areas of the Italian south, “the importing, production and sale of food has played an important part in the growth of the Italian American business community” (Cinotto 2013, 105).

The kn-based chain migration networks and the close contact that ethnic businesses in America maintained with the old country helped most of these first generations of Italian immigrants preserve their cultural identity. They established their own food markets and sold familiar ingredients to their compatriots. As the demand grew for fresh food from American vegetable gardens as well as imported Italian food items, a number of Italian entrepreneurs gradually built small food business to meet these needs.

Ethnic food products in America were available at small specialty grocery stores and ethnic markets, established in neighborhoods with large populations of Italian immigrants. These shops, owned or managed by Italian immigrant families and specialized in their regional food (Levenstein 77), soon became important social institutions within the neighborhoods, serving as gathering places, informal post offices or even job agencies (Lobel 14).

Not surprisingly, ethnic food markets were especially beloved places of belonging because of the multi-sensorial experiences of familiar smells, sounds, and tastes that reminded visitors of their homeland. Quoting an immigrant’s words as reported in Maria Sermolino’s work, Cinotto highlights how the olfactory characteristic of the ethnic market was crucial to the identity of the space.

There was the reassuring fragrance of warm bread, the heady aroma of roasting coffee, the musty smell of wooden barrels filled with wine, the pungent odors of ripe olives and anchovies in brine, of gorgonzola and provolone cheese and hanging salami (Cinotto 2009, 5).

Connected to a specific ethnic enclave economy, ‘these Italian American businesses celebrated their *italianità* and fostered a sense of pride in being from Italy or of Italian descent. The first Italian entrepreneurs attracted their fellow *paesani* to their businesses mainly by offering particular ethnic products. In this regard, relating the words of an Italian immigrant resident in Boston, Donna Gabaccia reported that in Boston’s Italian North End, Italian American customers usually went “to a particular store because it carried their favorite brand of sausage, or something special from the *paese* [hometown] in the old country”. On the contrary, “no grocery store would ever attract - for example - Avellinese customers if it did not carry *soprasatta* (a sausage made from pig’s head) at Eastertime” (Gabaccia 2000, 77).

The strong role of immigrant-run food markets, producers of Italian food products in America and importers of such products from Italy, in the construction of a diasporic culinary identity has clearly helped Italians to preserve a strong and distinctive Italian American cuisine to this day. Nevertheless, in the decades that followed the Italian mass migration, food habits and rituals of eating inevitably underwent changes, as Italian American ethnic food shops expanded their offerings to include not only traditional products of their heritage but also American foods. As Tirabassi affirms in the essay “Italian Cultural Identity: Italian Communities Abroad and Italian Cultural Identity Through Time” (2003), while remaining distinctively conservative, a different Italian culinary system emerged over time as an innovative culture, clearly shaped by the homeland, but reformulated within the American culinary landscape.

A decisive turning point in the evolution of the Italian food business in America occurred during the First World War and the immediate post-war period, when the production of ethnic food took on nationalist connotations. As reported in *Making Italian America: Consumer Culture and the Production of Ethnic Identities* (2014) edited by Cinotto, for the duration of the war, the Italian Alliance with America and the Italian Fascist movement fostered stronger feelings of nationalism among immigrants, and this was also reflected in terms of food. During the late 1920s, “a transitional convergence occurred between Italian Fascists who crafted and exploited regional customs to advance a collective national identity within Italy, and immigrants in the United States who, while informed by the regional tradition of their local *paesi*, increasingly conceived of themselves as sharing a common nationality” (Cinotto 2014, 75).

The new sense of a collective national identity in the ethnic clusters from different regions, however, was not the only factor that affected the new way of producing and consuming Italian food. When Italian immigrants gradually began eating dishes from other regions of Italy, and thus “nationalized” their food, they also opened up to a more Americanized cuisine.

The assimilation of Italian products into mainstream American culture was furthered as mass media campaigns on the radio and in magazines advertised such ethnic products. “Popular magazines such as *The Ladies’ Home Journal* and *Good Housekeeping* began to introduce Italian Food to middle-class Americans as a fun, acceptable transgression” (Cinotto 2004, 8) showing a first change in the nature of ethnic food consumption.

At the same time, American protectionist legislation promulgated to increase tax revenues from Italian food import duties paradoxically motivated Italian Americans to take over a greater share of the ethnic food market in the U.S., as they found it more advantageous to produce in America the food products that their fellow immigrant countrymen desired (Gabaccia, “Pizza, Pasta, and Red Sauce: Italian or American?” (2006)).

In this new socio-economic scenario, the culinary transformation was continued by second generation Italian Americans. Raised and educated in America, they gradually transformed their family food businesses into bigger Italian American companies. They climbed the social ladder more quickly than the previous generation had and found success in the creation of Italian ethnic markets, by taking some aspects of their Italian life (traditional and genuine foods) as well as aspects of their American one, applying to their business the capitalist economy of the United States.

Despite the fact that in the period following World War I there was a strong process of Americanization of the immigrant communities, a number of changes that followed the war pushed the American culinary business to open up to a more cosmopolitan and exotic flavor.

First, the perception of ethnic food changed during Prohibition. Between the 1920s and 1933, the production, importation, transportation, and sale of alcohol was banned nationally in an effort to eliminate the scourge of alcoholism. While Prohibition apparently reduced the consumption of alcoholic beverages, it also sparked an unprecedented era of criminal activity to provide them illegally, and led to the proliferation of illegal drinking locales known as “speakeasies²⁹.”

Many Italian Americans transformed their ethnic stores and restaurants into illicit establishments, and set up businesses outside Little Italies. Free from legal competition, they

²⁹ According to Merriam-Webster’s dictionary, speakeasies, also called a blind pigs or blind tigers, were illicit establishments where alcohol was sold during the Prohibition era (1920–1933).

managed to seduce the more bohemian American consumers attracted by opportunities for transgression, but also by the exotic flavors of Italian dishes. The Great Depression also played a transformative role in the evolution of Italian American food-related businesses. Historian Lizabeth Cohen argued that it forced many small ethnic shops to offer more homogenized and Americanized products (Luconi 1996, 569), and brought significant changes to the American diet itself and the food production system.

According to Levenstein's studies, the Great Depression era promoted frugality in the kitchen, and this gave a remarkable boost to the rural food habits of the Italian immigrants in the United States. The scarcity of meat as well as innovation in the field of nutrition contributed to a reevaluation of Italian food. In this period of crisis, fruit, pasta and vegetables, the basis of Italian cuisine, were hailed as nutritious and economical dishes, generating new interest in producers and purveyors of Italian American food.

4.1.1 Italian Food in the American Way

This rise in interest in Italian American food paved the way for the growth of Italian American food-related businesses. Starting in the late 1930s and the early 1940s, many small ethnic businesses turned into medium-sized companies, "some of which gradually developed into large firms that attracted a nationwide Italian American consumer base" (Cinotto 2013, 134).

In line with the transformation of the ethnic market in the Little Italies, Italian consumers started to lose interest in buying only authentic Italian products. At the same time, both for logistical and conservation reasons, Italian American food entrepreneurs gradually started producing food products, such as Italian *parmigiano*, directly in the U.S. rather than importing them. In this evolving economic scenario, in which there was a lack of proper labelling and packaging regulations and enforcement, there was also a proliferation in the number of Italian American businesses that sold foods labeled and promoted as Italian, but which were anything but (Cinotto 2013, 170-171). These Italian-American entrepreneurs sustained the creation of a diasporic Italian food culture that soon began to be *perceived* as authentic.

After World War II, when U.S. soldiers returned home with a new interest in the foreign cuisines they had experienced, businesses began to see the great potential for these food products. Gabaccia noted in "Pizza, Pasta, and Red Sauce: Italian or American?" (2006) that

once combatants returned to America, they played a leading role in making the American diet more multiethnic. The Italian ethnic food business was affected by this historical change as consumers began to acquire a new taste for Italian foods. Thus the story of Italian American cuisine passed from the first generation with its homemade food enjoyed almost exclusively in a family setting, to later generations of Italian food producers for a broader public. In the period between the Second World War and the 1950s, the Italian food industry in America improved in food supply and production technologies. At the same time, the number of successful Italian American food entrepreneurs grew, as they promoted traditional items with modern production methods. The Ronzoni Macaroni Co. for pasta, the Margarella Candy Corp. for candies and the V. La Rosa & Sons for olive oil are some of the better known Italian American companies that reached success in the American food industry in those years (Costantini 5).

After the 1950s, Italian American cuisine continued to evolve as companies radically transformed traditional home cooking into more industrialized food products. In this challenging panorama, the American food industry began to see ethnic markets as business opportunities, and large American corporations began to acquire Italian ethnic food enterprises (Gabaccia 1998, 151). Well known to all Americans are the “Chef Boyardee” products, first produced by the Italian American Ettore Boiardi (1897–1985), owner of the canned spaghetti Food Products Company. One of the pioneers in the production of canned Italian food for mass consumption, he created a vast enterprise, which after the war was acquired by American Home Products, and in 2000 by ConAgra (Camillo et al. 550).

Once again, Italian cuisine as a socially mediated taste changed to respond to the needs of new non-ethnic customers. As researcher Giovanna Costantini wrote in the essay “Italian Food: The Pride of a People without Borders” (2014), during these years, some foodstuffs were totally invented but promoted as Italian, while other, more rustic, foods were completely modified by adding different ingredients to create stereotyped recipes for non-Italian consumers. Historians regard this invented cuisine with “new” ethnic dishes to be worlds away from the traditional Italian food identity.

Though the success of Italian American food businesses in the 1940s and 1950s paradoxically led to the loss of a distinctive brand identity (Tirabassi 79), the rise of the ethnic revival movement at the end of the 1960s brought forth a demand for more traditional food. In the 1960s and 1970s, dissatisfaction with the banal, uniform and standardized food offered by industry in previous decades created the conditions for the spread of interest in and availability of more Italian-inspired regional dishes (Cinotto 2004, 15).

In this context, third and fourth generation Italian Americans, who were more willing to actively embrace their ethnic identity than the second generation and who were also better informed about culture of Italian cuisine than the previous generations, began communicate their distinctiveness within the cosmopolitan American culinary culture and to travel back to Italy to rediscover their roots. As active consumers and producers themselves, from the 1970s and onwards, they brought a focus on traditional and authentic Italian cuisine to the food business, underling the importance of lighter ingredients such as olive oil, herbs, and greens (Cinotto 2004, 17).

Today, Italian American cuisine, evolved from traditional Italian food, stands on its own as a distinct culinary tradition. Several historians have agreed that the Italian American *cucina* is one of the best examples of an invention of ethnicity, created throughout various waves of Italian immigration and by the Italian American descendants. In recent decades, modern Italian Americans and Italian food entrepreneurs have tried to promote higher quality authentic food. For better or worse, to the horror of some chefs in Italy but to the benefit of Italian-American food entrepreneurs, Italian American cuisine has continued to be one of the most significant elements of the Italian immigrant heritage in America.

The product of continuous changes and adaptations since it was brought by the first immigrants, Italian food has permeated American cooking to such an extent that it has become one of the most popular ethnic foods in America. From a cultural point of view, as an amalgam of rustic dishes belonging to the southern Italian culture and then adapted for American tables, Italian American food has been fundamental in the lives of Italian immigrants and their descendants, and also served as a vehicle for constructing Italian American ethnic businesses in the United States.

4.2. The Rise of Italian Restaurants in America

Familiar Italian American restaurant chains, such as The Olive Garden, with their spaghetti and meatballs or fettucine Alfredo and their décor featuring such stereotypical Italian images as the skyline of Rome or a rustic country kitchen, have become undeniably famous all around America. In order to properly understand how these symbolic expressions of an imaginary Italian ethnicity have become the leading markers of the Italian American identity and the emblem of Italian food in America, a close critical examination is needed.

Although the Italians were one of the most influential European immigrant groups for the American restaurant sector, Italian restaurants in America, as a marketable ethnic food experience, are actually a quite recent phenomenon (Cinotto 2013; Camillo et al.).

During the first wave of immigration, when Italian seasonal workers arrived with intention of making money and then returning to a better life in Italy, the few Italian immigrants who began food businesses in America did so to feed the single working men of the local community, in exchange for money. These first immigrants, without a wife or family by their side, lived in low-cost boarding houses managed by other Italian entrepreneurs. The dining rooms served a daily meal of cheap but familiar Italian fare, sometimes mixed with French and Continental cuisine, usually prepared by the women of the host family (Denzin & Faust 143).

The first change in the Italian restaurant scene in America occurred after World War I, when American legislation limited the movement of “birds of passage”, with the unplanned result that Italian immigrants started to properly settle in America and the existing ethnic enclaves became more stable, and members felt more ethnic cohesion. In this new scenario, women and children joined their husbands and fathers in the New World.

During this diasporic transition, Italian immigrant children or the children of immigrants were taught at American schools to eschew their traditional food because it was not nutritional or unhealthy. Though their parents strongly resisted these attempts at nutritional reform by the dominant American society, historical changes inevitably pushed the younger generations to embrace a more hybrid culinary system (Teti 594).

In the subsequent decades, the old boarding houses were gradually converted to family-run eating establishments. For example, Philadelphia’s oldest Italian restaurant, *Corona di Ferro*,³⁰ was one of the first boarding houses for single males to be turned into a family eating place and later definitively converted into a proper Italian American restaurant. Considered to be the forerunners of the Italian restaurant industry, these early businesses served food inspired by the home-cooking from their regions but, in truth, had already incorporated additional ingredients available and affordable only in the New World.

But a real breakthrough in Italian American dining began in the 1930s, when Italian ethnic food began to appeal to a wider American public, particularly artists and politicians who were rebelling against the American upper class and eager to try an exotic and “dangerous” taste (Camillo et al. 550).

³⁰ “Cortina di Ferro” traces its origins to the end of the 19th century. The historical information was reported in the article American’s Oldest Italian Restaurants and published in November 2011 by Janice Therese Mancuso <http://bit.ly/2gGweTg>

From Prohibition to the rise of a new American middle-class in 1940s and 1950s, Italian restaurants gradually expanded, helped by a strong network of Italian immigrants and the ethnic community. In the 1930s, New York was unique in the country because it already had about 1000 Italian restaurants throughout the city (Gabaccia 1998, 81), though most of these table d'hôte eateries were extremely austere, undecorated and dirty.

During the early 1930s and the following decade, the Italian American food industry expanded and the influence of Italian cuisine continued to grow. In addition, Italian restaurants achieved even greater success, especially by adapting their regionally distinct cuisine to produce dishes more suited to American tastes in order to attract a wider clientele. In this new economic and social scenario, the Sunday Dinner tradition and its multicourse meal was preserved, but “the American influence was seen in larger portions as well as in the incorporation of meat into traditional vegetables and pasta dishes” (Denzin & Faust 142-143). Soon, “Spaghetti and meatballs, with tomato sauce or ragu” (Barone 115), became a well-known Italian American dish that was commonly eaten by American families.

This hybrid, which would become the Italian American food style, grew even more after World War II, when restaurants started to adopt a homogenized Italian style and to provide a romanticized version of Italian décor, to attract non-ethnic white clients. In this regard, Donna Gabaccia argues that the exotic atmosphere, the stereotypical image of a mythological Old World setting, and cheap home cooking attracted many Americans and tourists. Going to restaurants “became a kind of ethnographic adventure, a journey to discover a culturally complex and racially puzzling population on the frontier of the largest American metropolis” (Cinotto 2013, 193). What is more, when Italian Americans in the 1960s and 1970s began searching for their roots by exploring authentic Italian cuisine, they forged new bonds with their family homeland. Soon, clientele of Italian American ethnic restaurants experienced these businesses as symbols of the Italian civilization in the United States.

By the 1960s and 1970s, ethnic food had gained wider popularity, but with distinctions. Italian American food, for example, was not considered to be a high-end cuisine, while French food was. In their analysis of the changing nature of ethnicity, Liora Gvion and Naomi Trostler wrote that at the dawn of the ethnic revival, Italian American food ethnicity was “neither integrated into the mainstream culture nor acknowledged as a distinctive entity” (Gvion & Trostler 955). Therefore, in those years, although Italian-American restaurants definitively helped to shape the invention of an Italian American cuisine (in line with Sollors' theory), they were still unable to properly locate ethnic food as a proper “institution”. In the 1970s and 1980s and following years, Italian American cuisine finally reached gourmet status (Denzin & Faust

143) and American consumers no longer saw the Italian restaurant industry as an exotic business. In the essay “Commodified identities: The myth of Italian food in the United States” (2004), Davide Girardelli wrote that between 1987 and 1997, Italian restaurants in America experienced a 123% increase in total sales (Girardelli 308).

Italian American restaurants contributed to creating a fictional image of the Italian culinary system in the United States. The nationally aired television advertisements by restaurant chains such as Fazoli’s, Olive Garden, Panera, and others that specialized in Italian cuisine, featured images meant to convey family, togetherness, roots, and belonging, in settings meant to evoke a traditional Italian family garden or kitchen. In this way they “constituted the basic structure of the myth of Italian food in the United States” (Girardelli 307).

In line with Gans’ position, in this new panorama, Italian American restaurants exploited old traditions as symbols borrowed from the past, using, for instance, Italian paintings and music. Many of the Italian businesses portrayed themselves with symbolic images of an Italy left behind and many Italian-inspired regional dishes became popular in America such as “Grissini, semolina bread, risotto, broccoli rabe, arugula, radicchio, Gorgonzola, pesto, prosciutto, pizzelle, cannoli, zeppole, torrone, gianduja, panettone and where espresso were common additions to meals.” (Marcuso 2010 – online article).

The new Italian American generations contributed to the invention of symbolic ethnic restaurants “in the sense that they contextualized dishes in a setting that explained their origins, and the way in which they had changed” (Gvion & Trostler 959).

During the ethnic revival era in America, ethnic Italian American restaurants perpetuated a notion of authentic Italian cuisine that contributed to creating a fictional image of the Italian culinary system in the United States.

Over the course of the years, the idea of the comfort food served in Italian immigrant boarding houses or in first generation immigrant homes was transformed and exploited to make an Italian American ethnic identity, though the Italian authenticity in question is more of a marketing strategy than a reality.

In this sense, the history of Italian American restaurants shows how food can never be completely defined as a fixed cultural element but must be seen as an uninterrupted negotiation between past and present. Even though it is no wonder that the Italian ethnic communities in America grew and died, only to be reborn in other forms (Parasecoli 2014, 434), they cannot be considered simply as passive subjects of historical change. Therefore, when we talk about invention of culinary tradition we not necessarily entail production of complete fakes, unrelated to the past and without historical coherence.

To conclude with the example of the Olive Garden chain, studying ethnicity through restaurants helps us understand the way the ethnic group has dialogued with the dominant culture to invent a hybrid tradition based on the myth of the old country.

In this view, the modern Italian American food chains are a further step in the creation of a tradition, based on ethnic clichés and marketing models. The Olive Garden bases all its advertising on the *Italianità* theme. Their motto “When you’re here, you’re family”, exploits stereotyped images of Italian family togetherness through a shared culinary heritage, to reach a broader American public, hungry not only for comfort food but for precisely this sense of belonging

This mythological representation of an Old World with its traditional Italian music and spaghetti with meatballs expresses the Italian American experience but as perceived by Americans (Parasecoli 2014, 253). On the contrary, as we will see in the case studies, this stereotypization is being recognized for what it is, an invention for marketing purposes. In recent times, the combination of a new ethnic entrepreneurship together with a higher acculturation in the food sector has contributed to a new appreciation of truly authentic ethnic food.

4.2.1. Fusion or Con-fusion? A new multicultural cuisine

In recent years, with the emergence of culinary multiculturalism in the globalized world, ethnic restaurants have become central symbols of postmodern life. What is more, after years of being stereotyped, ethnic cuisine has for the most part become a form of international entertainment and experience, no longer relegated to the domestic and community sphere.

In the case of the Italian food culture, Cinotto explained that the contemporary food revolution has promoted a new sense of respect for “authentic” Italian ethnic food in the U.S. In the last few years, several Italian American associations, cultural centers, and culinary schools and foundations have spread all over America, eager to restore lost culinary traditions and also to explore innovative variations on foods of the Italian cultural heritage. Among them, the National Italian American Foundation (NIAF)³¹, together with the Italian Cultural Institutes and the Order

³¹ The National Italian American Foundation (NIAF) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, educational foundation founded in 1975 by Jenò Paulucci and dedicated to preserving Italian American heritage. <http://www.niaf.org/>

of the Sons of Italy (OSIA)³² have played a prominent role in promoting a better understanding of Italian-American history and heritage, also in terms of food (Petrelli 119).

The new cultural and economic phenomenon has also been supported by numerous descendants of immigrants, proud of their ethnic food and pleased to be identified as Italian Americans. Many of them, having attained economic security and motivated by a desire to understand how their ancient culinary traditions developed over the years, have travelled to their region of origin and tasted the local food (Cinotto 2013, Petrelli & Luconi, Parasecoli, Costantini)

At the same time, as the general American population has shown increasing interest in sustainable, healthy and genuine food, the demand for more experienced chefs and food producers has grown. Following this trend, many Italian American restaurants and cooks have tried to limit cliché dishes and turned to a more artisanal cuisine, albeit prepared with modern techniques and creative innovations.

The evolution of this tendency has also been supported by food TV programs, cooking competition reality shows and mass media devoted to the food sector (Camillo et al. 551). In this regard, it is no coincidence that the Italian American Joe Bastianich, a judge on the Masterchef television program, has gained such visibility that he is recognized as one of the world's best chefs of Italian cuisine.

In recent times, food has become not just a source of nourishment and a way to learn about different cultures, but also a vehicle for amusement and intercultural dialogue (Costantini 10). Recent American pop culture has shown increased willingness to expand its palate to appreciate ethnic foods and this popular interest has spurred academics and food critics to extend their analyses to ethnic cuisines from all over the world.

As reported by Cinotto in the essay "Now That's Italian! Representations of Italian Food in America. Popular Magazines, 1950-2000" (2004), magazines in the 1950s focused exclusively on the gastronomic aspects of Italian food, while in the 1970s and afterwards, the key issue was authenticity (Cinotto 2004, 5). The popularity of ethnic cuisines in general has been further enhanced by the significant increase in the number of printed ethnic cookbooks and the use of social media, which together have contributed to making these culinary traditions more accessible to the wider population.

³² The Order of the Sons of Italy (OSIA) is the the largest and oldest Italian American organization, founded in 1905 and dedicated to promoting Italian and Italian American culture, language and traditions <https://www.osia.org/>

In this context, food movements and new lifestyles in a globalized world have also given rise to the current phenomenon of fusion cuisine, which mixes elements of different culinary traditions. This innovative trend has contributed to the creation of hundreds of new culinary flavors, most of which had not even existed in previous decades (Homemade Oil-Pickled Mackerel Pizza, in Japanese-Italian food mainstays, Microwave Mexican Manicotti, in Mexican-Italian cuisine, and so on).

At the same time, science-based cooking, such as molecular gastronomy, has made possible the invention of further new dishes and recipes by playing with physical and chemical food transformations.

Coming back to Italian food in America, with the globalization of food culture and the new intercultural scenario, a further form of culinary experimentation has emerged. On the one hand, the multicultural food dialogue has contributed to a new revival in the ethnic food history, supporting the creation of multicultural dishes. Nowadays, cooking Italian food with French techniques, for example, or mixing an Italian regional flavor with Mexican spices has become the new normality. On the other hand, modern Italian American food entrepreneurs have turned to a more real and traditional Italian cuisine.

The second trend has prompted many American entrepreneurs and chefs “to seek careers in the culinary arts and to open “Italian style” restaurants” in the United States (Camillo et al. 551). Particularly in the case of successful Italian food chefs, the possibility to spend time in Italy and learn how to cook in the Italian way has increased the success of Italian American restaurants in America. In their desire to be competitive, these Italian American cooks have built some of the largest Italian restaurant chains in the United States. Using the skills acquired in Italy in America, they have innovated their Italian food and developed a new form of Italian food culture in America.

Analysis of the contemporary American panorama suggests that ethnic food in America has become an integral part of the food culture. In the article “A model of historical development and future trends of Italian cuisine in America” (2010) Camillo and other authors wrote that “Italian cuisine is no longer exotic, meaning that it is no longer a novelty, due to its overwhelming popularity; its ingredients are readily imported into or produced in the U.S. without constraints, and the popularity of Italian restaurants in America will continue to have an impact on the country’s culinary evolution” (Camillo et al. 551). Therefore, after a long period of culinary racism, Italian ethnic food has turned out to be one of the most celebrated cuisines in the world.

The rise of culinary tourism has also helped to transform the fear of foreign food into pleasure and admiration. As Jennie Germann Molz described in her essay “Eating difference: The cosmopolitan motilities of culinary tourism” (2007), culinary tourism, as the exploratory experience of eating alien and unfamiliar food, has helped persuade people to become consumers of the food and experiences afforded by other cultures and places. (Germann Molz 77). As such, in culinary tourism, food is not so much a tangible good that is consumed, but an intangible experience of exploration and adventure.

It could be argued that glocalization, “the practice of conducting business according to both local and global considerations,” (Oxford Living Dictionaries) has transformed multiculturalism into an even more multifaceted reality, “in which belonging, loyalties and identities tend increasingly to be multiple” (Bassetti17).

Looking at the history of food through a broader lens, it is undeniable how foodways, as a marker of cultural differences, also offer one of the most significant means to experience cultural diversity and thus promote integration. In this sense, analysis of the evolution of Italian food in America provides insight into the discrimination against a minority ethnic group and the subsequent reconciliation of the dominant and the minority groups.

While in America Italian ethnic food has finally reached acceptance and even prestige, we still see in the U.S. and other countries a certain prejudice against other foreign cuisines. There is a certain hypocrisy celebrating some ethnic foods while expressing disapproval of others when at issue is not an objective judgment of the pros and cons of the various cuisines, but an expression of dislike of the ethnicity in question. For example, in 2011, the Italian extreme right party *Lega Nord* (Northern League) promulgated the slogan “Più Polenta, meno Kebab”³³, (more polenta, a traditional northern Italian hot dish made of corn meal, less kebab), an obvious slur against Turkish and northern African immigrant communities. In the case of the *Lega Nord*, this culinary discrimination was aimed against specific ethnic minorities they considered to pose a risk to the nation’s identity.

Conversely, as seen in the story of Italian immigration in America, on a cultural level, food hybridization does not necessarily destroy food cultural heritage. While is important to cherish our culinary heritage in order to protect our roots and forestall the creation of a homogenized and uniform global flavor, at the same time, the process of integration needs to take place through cross-cultural understanding. Identity is complex and dynamic, and is

³³ Literally, “More Polenta less Kebab” is a slogan created by the Italian extreme right party Lega Nord as a means to safeguard Italian food heritage from foreign cultural contaminations (10 Agosto 2011) <http://bit.ly/2z6HCjd>

explored, shaped and validated especially when it comes into contact with others who are different.

To conclude, as the historian Massimo Montanari pointed out in *Il Cibo come Cultura* (2004), food forms part of the basis of our identity and in seeing how our food differs from that of others, we build our perception of their alterity. Identity is not the exclusive product of genetically transmitted characteristics, nor should it be in contrast with other cultures. Our identity can live peacefully, sharing symbols and meanings with one's group and those of others as well, because identity can find its lifeblood in the alterity.

4.3. The Authentic Fake: The Phenomenon of "Italian Sounding"

Lately, the process of glocalization has made the world more interdependent, and this holds for the food sector as well. The explosion of global movement of people has also promoted new interest in ethnic food products and the history behind them.

In the case of Italy, the recent surge of Italian food exports to the United States is due to increased consumer knowledge about food culture and stronger demand for genuine and healthy foods. Today, many Americans have incorporated an Italian taste in their culinary life and "have certainly become familiar with the variety of quality Italian food products and the health benefits associated with their consumption" (Anderson 9).

Research conducted by the Italian Institute for Services for the Agricultural and Food Market³⁴ in 2017 confirmed that America is the third most important destination for such Italian food products as such as pasta, cheese and oil. This is echoed in a Coldiretti³⁵ study based on data from the Italian National Institute of Statistics, which indicated that Italian agri-food products in America reached a historic record of 73 % growth from 2008 to 2016.

The Made in Italy denomination has become an international icon of high quality: food consumers associate it with good taste, freshness and strong tradition. In fact, Made in Italy food includes excellent certified and branded products, particularly appreciated in international markets (AGI 2016).

³⁴ "ISMEA" is a government financial institution created with to develop the competitive capacity of Italian agriculture and the Italian food system <http://bit.ly/2sDrDRU>

³⁵"Coldiretti" is the largest agricultural professional organization in Europe, concerning the Italian agri-food sector <http://bit.ly/2qVYhxE>

Looking at the historical and economic evolution of the Italian food industry, it is undeniable that food has played and continues to play a significant role in the Italian economy, with the United States as a key export market for Italian companies in the food sector. However, the significant increase in popularity of Italian goods abroad and Italian ethnic restaurants all over the world has been paralleled by the proliferation of businesses that try to sell inferior quality, low-cost imitations of Italian food products.

This phenomenon of “Italian sounding” is particularly widespread in countries that have been the main destination of Italian emigration. It calls into question the definition of “authenticity” for the future of the Italian ethnic food market abroad. According to a 2014 report by the Italian police forces regarding intellectual property and counterfeiting, which summarized data on their seizures of counterfeit goods, “Italian sounding” is a subtle form of Made in Italy imitation related especially to the agri-food industrial sector, in which producers imitate images, names, colors and packaging of Italian products to trick consumers into thinking the product is an Italian one.³⁶ It is considered a dangerous trend because, in the worst case scenario, these poor quality products may cause consumers to have health problems, but even if it does not come to this, they can cause consumers to lose trust in Made in Italy products and thus harm the prestige of this denomination. Similarly, the value of original certified brands will also depreciate in the eyes of these consumers (De Filippis 188-189).

The “Italian sounding” phenomenon is not new: many Italians emigrants gradually built food companies in their new countries by producing primary ingredients of the Italian tradition, mainly fresh ingredients such as cheeses and vegetables (UIBM 3-4). In the case of Italian emigration to America, many of the first generation immigrants, who maintained strong cultural bonds to their homeland, became entrepreneurs and established food companies that imported Italian products. Over time they adapted their offerings to suit American tastes and lifestyles.

As the years passed, Italian Americans together with American entrepreneurs developed new “Italian” products, similar to the authentic ones, but no longer the same. It should come as no surprise that the United States, where Italian communities are quite well rooted, has been reported to produce the highest number of Italian sounding food products in the world (Il Sole 24³⁷ 2014).

³⁶ The information has been taken from “La lotta alla contraffazione in Italia nel settore agroalimentare 2009-2012” (2014).

³⁷ “Il Sole 24 ore” is an Italian newspaper specialized in political and economic analyses of national and international issues. This information was reported in the article [“Italian sounding fight to top the agenda of Milan Expo 2015”](http://www.ilsole24ore.com/) (27 October 2014) <http://www.ilsole24ore.com/>

Although the phenomenon has not been declared illegal in countries other than Italy or even properly quantified, it is still considered a form of fraud by Italians and inevitably leads to a huge loss of profits for Italian food exporters because it gives foreign companies an undeserved competitive advantage in their own country. The problem is particularly significant for Italian exporters to the U.S., most of which are small and medium-sized enterprises that cannot compete with bigger American food corporations that produce their Italian sounding products directly in America or with other American-based Italian companies involved in food production (Symbola 12).

In the last few years, the world-wide value of the “Italian sounding” market has been estimated at some 60 billion euros, 24 billion of which in North America alone (CNAC³⁸ 29). The Italian Food & Drink Industry Federation reported that in 2015 the phenomenon created a turnover of 54 billion euros, with negative effects for consumer health and for the defense of authentic food products in the Italian food business (Federalimentare 7). According to an analysis conducted by Coldiretti that same year, two out of three Italian food items circulating abroad were Italian-sounding products, with consequences not just in economic terms but also regarding damage to the image and reputation of the Made in Italy denomination³⁹.

From a wider perspective, discussion on [causes and consequences of the problem](#) or suggestions for solutions have not yet received sufficient attention. Italian agrifood professional associations and farmers’ confederations continue to denounce foreign companies for the unfair competition.

A different point of view was offered by Cembalo and colleagues in 2008, in their interesting analysis of the US market. They considered the imitation of Made in Italy products not as the simple copying of items, but rather as an adaptation of the products to different tastes and palates. In addition, others have argued that despite the damage, fake Italian brands have nonetheless helped keep Italian agri-food products in the public eye worldwide (De Filippis 16).

Considering these factors, one may wonder about the meaning of authenticity, especially regarding ethnic Italian food in America, which has already been reinvented over the years. The word “authentic” derives from the Greek⁴⁰ sense of “genuine”. As noted above, the perception of authenticity in cuisine evolves in space and time, influenced by personal and collective experiences of a specific culinary ethnic culture. What is authentic to one person might not be so

³⁸ CNAC: Consiglio Nazionale Anticontraffazione in “Priorità in materia di lotta alla contraffazione” November 2011

³⁹ The information was reported in the article “Contraffazione: Coldiretti, pirateria cibo made in Italy vale 60 mld” (5 October 2015) <http://bit.ly/2yKi76G>

⁴⁰ This etymology of “authenticity” was taken from <http://bit.ly/2A1Ti7d>

to another: the concept has much more to do with how we feel about something than how we actually define that thing.

On the contrary, speaking about modern cuisine, especially in economic terms, the use of the word authentic implies that the content of the product is not “fake”. This is the meaning Italians have in mind when they refer to the “Italian sounding” problem: they do not consider the possibility that the food products are not imitated, but adapted.

However, there are those who argue that for small and medium businesses in Italy, including food exporters, even more fatal than the “Italian sounding” phenomenon is the exceedingly burdensome government bureaucracy that bogs down all aspects of business⁴¹.

It is important to consider all the variables of this problem in order to find a solution that will alleviate uncertainty about Italian food products and enable consumers to know exactly what they are purchasing.

In this challenging scenario, however, the phenomenon has recently been re-cast as a chance to reaffirm the real nature of Made in Italy products, thus turning a problem into an opportunity. Some Italian entrepreneurs want to work together to create a proper recognizable brand and educate foreign consumers to distinguish “fake” food items from the real ones.

Italy needs to exploit the opportunities arising from this phenomenon to drive home the importance of high quality, authentic food products from Italy, by investing in consumer education campaigns and exercising strict quality control on food exports.

To this end, businesses should be encouraged to invest in educational digital technologies and social media tools that can help them more directly and efficiently contact decision makers and consumers who are more willing to pay for high quality, safe, and, of course, delicious food.

⁴¹ In the article *L'Italian sounding? Può essere un'opportunità. Fa più danni la burocrazia (ecco qualche esempio).*” *Il Sole 24 Ore*. 9 Mar., 2017, Fernanda Ruggero writes that Italian government has also been criticized for failing to support the efforts of start-ups and alternative small and medium businesses to internationalize their food market.

5. Ethnographic Research in Florida

5.1 Case Study: Italian Americans performing a symbolic authenticity

Purpose of the study

In the history of Italian food in America traditions appear to remain significant during the processes of evolution and negotiation because they are founded on embodied experiences in the history of a people (Parasecoli 2014, 439). Study of food in the context of immigration shows the unstable nature of socially constructed food identity as well as its historical and emotional importance.

Guided by the theory of Sollors and Conzen regarding the invention of tradition, in this chapter I investigate aspects of Italian-American ethnicity in Naples, Florida. The case study provides ethnographic insight into what it means to be an Italian-American today, and delves into how contemporary generations perform ethnicity (such as family gatherings to celebrate holidays and eat together etc.), using food as a modern expression of ethnicity that can be considered an invention of tradition but with traces of the past.

Taking into account changes in contemporary time, continuous improvement in education and the phenomenon of globalization, the sample selected is used to demonstrate how the modern expression of ethnicity can be considered as an invention of tradition but with traces of the past. The results of the analysis are then used to suggest future trends for executing Italian ethnic identity through food in the postmodern era.

In line with the above considerations, the research question addresses itself to the following problems: How do Italian-Americans perform their ethnicity nowadays? What Italian-American activities and gatherings serve to enact their ethnicity?

Research Design

The research began with the identification of a purposive geographic sample. The selection of the destination is justified by an interest in studying an area that has not yet been investigated.

While Tampa is the only city in Florida with historical Italian neighborhoods, whose residents, descendants of Italian immigrants who came during the 1890s, attracted by the cigar industry and

sunny climate, have a strong sense of their cultural heritage⁴², we chose for this study the city of Naples,⁴³ which does not have a historical Little Italy or long-standing Italian American neighborhoods, because it is one of the most popular destinations for a modern “migration” trend among contemporary Italian-American generations, that of leaving their home states to spend their retirement in an area with a warm climate. Thus Florida, and Naples in particular, is an ideal location for observing these new warm weather “migrants”. These Italian-Americans afford a quite variegated sample because they have come from different states and have different Italian regional roots, though southern Italy figures predominantly. This is useful because the inclusion of different samples to analyze the same phenomenon strengthens the legitimacy of the results (Camilo et al., 552).

Sample

The specific target population for this study consisted of members of the Italian Cultural Society⁴⁴ in Naples, most of them well educated, retirees, and who are already committed to promoting Italian culture in the United States

A convenience sample was selected based on the availability of the organization and the opportunity to interview the members of the Society, all belonging to a second and third Italian-American generation⁴⁵. The data collection process included semi-structured interviews with 10 members of the Society.

Data analysis

A qualitative research method was used to collect qualitative data through analysis of the Italian Cultural Society website and interviews, which were conducted in English, though at times those interviewed used a few Italian words as well.

Questions were formulated to obtain information on how the interviewees perceived Italian ethnicity in modern times, and to learn about their personal experience of Italian food as one of the strongest markers of identity.

⁴² The historic neighborhood of Ybor City, in the city of Tampa, on the west coast of Florida, was populated almost entirely by immigrants during the 1890s. Prominent among these immigrants were a group of southern Italians who moved there because they were attracted by the sunny climate, which reminded them of sunny Italy, and the jobs available in the cigar industry <http://www.niaf.org>

⁴³ Naples is one of the wealthiest cities in the US. Throughout the 1870's and '80s, magazine and newspapers described Naples and its bay as "surpassing the bay in Naples, Italy" (<https://www.naples-florida.com/hiscul.htm>).

⁴⁴ "The Italian Cultural Society of Naples, Florida, was started in 1998 by a small group of Italophiles who wanted to bring to Southwest Florida the joy of experiencing Italian culture on a regular basis". <http://www.italianculturalsociety.com/>

The transcripts of the interviews were studied using quantitative content analysis, specifically, by selecting core thematic categories, assigning them codes, and analyzing them to discover common relations and patterns.

Content Analysis

Seven thematic categories were chosen: Ethnic Identification, Knowledge of Italian language, Direct Experience of Italy, Borrowing and Code Switching, Recreation of Tradition, Perception of Authenticity, and Interest in High Quality Italian Food. For each theme, specific examples were chosen to illustrate how contemporary Italian-Americans express their ethnic identity as shown in Fig.1

Categories	Top Terms (Frequency)	Examples
Ethnic Identification	American values; Born in America; English language; Being Americans; Cultural Heritage Pride; Italian Roots; American Education	"I can say readily that I'm American with two cultural heritages"
Knowledge of Italian Language	I speak Italian; Grandparents spoke broken English and dialect; Italian learnt in Adulthood; Learnt Italian in Italy	"I speak a bit of Italian, but my parents or my grandparents didn't teach me the language.
Direct Experience of Italy	I went to Italy; I lived in Italy, I saw the place where they were born;	"I have been in Italy a lot of time and I often travelled to the area where my family came from"
Borrowing and Code Switching	Pasta; Mozzarella; Prosciutto; Bruschetta; Nonna; Mamma; Pranzi, Pranzo	"My mother would cook a PRIMO and a SECONDO, and I never knew until the first time I went to Italy that that's was the reason why she did it"
Recreation of Tradition	Grandmother's recipes; Italian food for holidays; Sunday Dinner; Family gathering;	"For me, food is much more than just food. It is the whole life. It is the company; It is the taste; It is the smell; It is the nostalgia"
Authenticity Perception	I go to Italian restaurants; Authentic Italian Food; I'm able to distinguish between Italian food and Italian American food; Italian American food is heavier.	"I'm able to distinguish between Italian food and Italian American food because at least in term of food I grew up as Italian"
Interest to Italian Quality Food	Light and fresh; Organic; Quality Food; Shopping in ethnic grocery stores; Genuine; Healthy.	"In Italy people are years ahead then us in terms of organic, fresh and quality food"

Fig.1 Italian-Americans: content analysis

Ethnic Identification

The “Ethnic Identification” category of analysis was used to explore the changing meaning of ethnic identity among Italian-Americans, in particular to examine the degree to which they identify with the American and Italian cultures, and to explore how ethnic identification influences the way today’s Italian-Americans perform Italian traditions in their life.

All interviewees strongly identified with the American national identity. Nine out of ten said that they felt American first and foremost, and grew up in the predominant American culture. One interviewee, whose mother/father was born in Italy’ said she/he was educated by the family to act like an American. The interviewees who had one Italian-born parent said they were educated by the family to act like Americans.’

For those of us who were the second/third generation, we spent a lot of time with grandparents, and they wanted us, the grandchildren, to be Americans because life was easier here than in Italy (Respondent 7)

Who in general were poorly educated, did not speak English well, and thus had difficulty moving up the economic ladder in American society. The initial discrimination and prejudice endured by the first Italians in the host country motivated them to raise their children and grandchildren as Americans so that they could fit in and thus more easily achieve the American Dream. Even the one interviewee (respondent 3) who indicated that he/she identified more strongly as Italian than American, said he/she was educated in line with the mainstream culture.

Furthermore, all interviewees attended American schools, where they gained a better command of English than their forbears had. Italian immigrants generally spoke dialect and could barely express themselves with their broken English (Gabaccia 2000, 1).

The responses about perception of identity indicated that in their formative years, interviewees were influenced by their identity as Americans, and some Italian traditions were abandoned. “We were supposed to grow up as Americans” said interviewee 2, “and we probably lost part of our cultural and personal heritage for good”. Nevertheless, although they stressed their attachment to the American identity, they also showed enormous pride in their Italian heritage. In fact, interviewee 6 said there was no other nationality he would rather be.

Analysis of the interviews indicates that the Italian ethnic identity lived on in their memories and attitudes. Those interviewed intensely valued their Italian roots and wanted to

explore the Italian identity in both personal and collective terms, as manifested in their desire to join the Italian Cultural Society.

I wanted to connect with other Italians and in this organization I felt very included and for the first time in my American life I felt I could share my past with someone who actually experienced the same (Respondent 10).

The findings provide useful insights on how the Italian identity is still rooted in the personality of the interviewees. While they feel American, the interviewees continue to use symbols and practices to display their Italian heritage. Within the Italian Cultural Society, for instance, they spend time eating traditional Italian recipes together, discussing their memories, playing Italian games and studying the Italian culture. These symbols can be seen as signifiers of a tradition rooted in their memories, and alive in their sense of belonging to the Italian identity.

Knowledge of Italian language

All the interviewees manifested at least basic knowledge of Italian, while others had a proficiency level. In confirmation of their assessment of the predominance of American culture during their childhood and youth, they all indicated that they had learned Italian once they were adults, not when they were children.

I speak a bit of Italian but honestly my parents or my grandparents didn't teach me the language. My grandparents were speaking a broken English while my father, as I said, he wanted to speak English at home (Respondent 1).

Italian is an important feature for understanding the degree of Americanization in the display of Italian ethnicity in the U.S., and knowledge of the language of their forbears appears to have contributed to a deeper understanding the representation of Italian ethnicity in America, especially that concerning food. This is particularly true when it comes to assessing restaurants that claim to be Italian rather than Italian-American. The interviewees with a higher level of Italian said they could tell how authentic an Italian restaurant was by reading the menu and analyzing the spelling of the Italian words. Respondent 10, in particular, noted that all Italian-American restaurants incorrectly spell the word "ossobuco," using a double "c".

The findings suggest that although all the interviewees learned Italian in adulthood, those with a better knowledge of Italian seemed better able to distinguish between what is Italian and

what is not, or in other words, to identify authenticity.

Direct Experience of Italy

Travel to their family homeland is another vehicle by which the interviewees expressed their identity. Regardless of how much emphasis was placed on their ethnicity during their childhood and youth, all of them had chosen to explore the land of their roots.

It is interesting that most, but not all of them had travelled to the cities and towns where their families were born. For example, interviewee 10 said: “Yes, I walked the street of Chiaia to see what was like, and I went to Lipari and Stromboli”, but interviewee 5 said: “I go to Italy pretty often, but I have never been in the villages where my families grew up”.

The fact that eight out of ten Italian-American interviewees were so curious about their roots that they travelled to see the areas where their family had come from, speaks volumes about the emotional need to reconnect with their origins. Many used government and family immigration records and documents to delve into the history of their forebears. Furthermore, the two interviewees (1 and 9) who had not visited the Italian hometowns of their family were among the youngest members of the group. Their decisions may have been motivated by the practical aspects of a busy work life and lack of free time, but also may have been conditioned by nature and degree of their interaction with their Italian-born family members, who may have been quite old when the interviewees were quite young. In contrast, although they all went to Italy when they were young, most of the oldest participants were retired and thus would have had more time to travel to Italy, more than once.

In addition, they probably had had more interaction with their Italian-born grandparents, affording them a stronger sense of the family past, and motivating them to undertake a journey to discover their roots in Italy. The only exception was interviewee 3, the youngest, who indicated that she identified more strongly as Italian than American, and said that she had grown up in an Italian environment. Thus, according to the data, we can suppose that those whose families remained very united in America or with a stronger ethnic memory are more likely to explore their roots, searching to know more about their family history.

Borrowing and Code Switching

“Borrowing and Code Switching”⁴⁶ is a fundamental category of analysis used as

⁴⁶ According to De Fina, in linguistics, “borrowing” indicates when one language adopts words from other languages, while “code switching” occurs when a speaker fluent in more than one language moves back and forth between the different languages.

significant index of ethnic affiliation and sense of belonging. Analysis of this linguistic phenomenon is useful in understanding “how Italian ethnicity is constructed as a central element in the collective identity” (De Fina, 371). It appears to be particularly significant when referring to food.

Italian words and Italian vernacular phrases in the collected data served mainly to talk about food preparation and consumption. Food practices are implicitly related to memories and traditions (Fig.2)



Fig.2 Word Cloud

The interviewees used such other Italian words as *madre* and *nonna* when talking about food practices during holidays. These figures were the custodians of the family heritage and traditions, especially those regarding homemade food.

Recreation of Tradition

The corpus of the interviews contains many utterances about food, which confirms the idea of what Italian-American generations look for when it comes to identity building. Participants demonstrated a strong, although sometimes altered, knowledge of culinary traditions and food celebrations as expressions of non-verbal identity. Asked whether she still observed any Italian traditions with their family, respondent 3 replied:

Yes, I do, totally. In fact, next month I will be in New Jersey with the whole family just cooking, drinking and eating Italian stuff. I already know that. Plus I do a lot of Italian baking recipes at Christmas. I make trees with cookies. I still cook Italian food and do Sunday Dinner like I did when I was a kid although today it is more difficult because we are all in different cities or some of us are already gone. When we have the chance to stay all

together, we all always have a proper Italian meal. That's what put us together, and we just spend the day drinking and eating, like for hours as you do, in Italy. We have a proper pranzo.

According to the data collected, Italian traditions regarding food production, preparation and consumption continue in present days. Many Italian-Americans interviewees said that they prepare the meal the same way their grandparents and parents did.

Although my mother was a real American and she wanted to be American, when she died she told me "Please, keep alive our traditions, keep alive my recipes". So every year, during Easter I prepare struffoli and homemade bread, and I send it to my sons who are now living all over the world (Respondent 5)

Nevertheless, the interviewees said their observance of food traditions was limited to specific occasions, especially weekends, holidays, and religious celebrations such as Christmas and Easter, a confirmation of Gans' theory (1979) that the recreation of these practices has become more a leisure time performance than a daily life activity. According to Gans' "symbolic ethnicity" model, the ethnicity of the first immigrants was authentic because it had a fundamental function in their lives. The ethnicity of the descendants, on the other hand, can be defined as symbolic because it does not play an essential role in daily life.

Even so, for all the respondents, food appeared to be a source of comfort because it is embedded in their personal experiences. In fact, when interviewees talked about nostalgic food, they manifested a strong relationship between the present and the past, and a clear bond with their Italian ethnicity.

Italian food is my soul, it is my past and my present as well (Respondent 8).

Perception of Authenticity

In the history of Italian immigration in America, Italian immigrants and the following generations have used food traditions as authentic markers of their heritage (Almerico 1). But the 'authentic' cooking that Italian-American immigrants have been doing for over a century was already an amalgam of Italian regional and American products.

Today in America, it is undeniable that traditional Italian cooking techniques and habits have been consciously or unconsciously modified. For instance, interviewee 8 said he kept alive some of the traditional recipes his grandmother used to make, including "lasagna with

meatballs.” This dish, as had been described by the informant, did not and does not exist in Italy, but he considered it an authentic Italian one. The dish is an invention of tradition, given the denomination of Italian. What is more, interviewee 10 spoke about the Prince brand of pasta, but it is American, not Italian. As an Italian American, he perceived the brand as Italian, but this brand would not be considered such in Italy.

I grew up with Italian food. “Prince Spaghetti” -...oh Wednesday is “Prince Maccheroni day”. Trust me, you can check on Google or the radio (Respondent 10).

The findings indicate how the perception of authenticity is based on an emotional feeling, rather than on objective criteria. Authenticity is subjective, and is perceived in many ways. Nevertheless, according to the data collected, contemporary Italian-American generations are visiting Italy to regain a sort of legitimacy about how the Italian identity is manifested.

When I’m in Italy my friends always let me see how much tomato sauce I should put on pasta. Here they overdose with portions. Just one portion of pasta. We eat pasta and maybe salad we are not used to different courses and that’s what most of the Americans do when they go to Italian restaurants. They order for just one course and they expect that to be huge (Respondent 2)

The data collected suggest that interviewees who had spent more time in Italy and had a close relationship with Italian people are more capable of understanding how the perception Italian authenticity has been modified over space and time.

Interest in High Quality Italian Food

As Americans have become more familiar with Italian food in all its variety, many have begun seeking out vendors who offer high quality Italian food. This is particularly true for those interviewed for this study, most of whom define Italian food as “healthy”, “fresh”, and “organic”.

I eat pasta every day in Italy, but I don’t gain weight because it mostly depends on the way how you cook and the fresh ingredients and so on. In Italy they are years ahead of us in terms of organic and fresh and good food (Respondent 9).

In addition, as ethnic food entrepreneurs in America have sought to encourage consumers

to introduce a taste of *Italianità* into their meals, the interviewees have become even more aware of “authentic” Italian food. While not all interviewees buy Italian food often, when they do so, all of them choose high quality “authentic” Italian food, as they seem to share the idea that Italian food is quality food.

When choosing a product with their ethnic identity in mind, the interviewees most often selected food. They used the criteria of freshness and genuineness to assess the authenticity of Italian products in America. This trend of interest in more fresh food has interesting ramifications for the future of Italian ethnic entrepreneurship in America.

Discussion

The results of the study suggest that Italian American interviewees seemed to keep performing their ethnicity, using food as the principal means to display their identity and remain anchored to their traditions. Despite the limited number of people interviewed, which certainly cannot represent Italian American culture as a whole, the findings nonetheless illustrate how the interviewees are engaged with their heritage and convey their feelings about their ethnic history. While almost all those interviewed said that they identify themselves first as Americans, the sense of ethnic nostalgia manifested through food memory appears to remain to be deeply rooted in their identity, especially for the older interviewees, who have a stronger bond with the past. Furthermore, the high education level of the interviewees, their knowledge of Italian, opportunities to travel, and wider access to information have helped them gain a superior understanding of the Italian identity as a whole.

As such, the case study offers proof of Sollors’ theoretical model, in that it provides a perfect example of the invention of tradition, but with the historical meaning of identity still alive, and a desire to live a more authentic Italian experience. In this perspective, better knowledge of one’s cultural heritage appears to be the main key to keeping alive the ever-changing constructed traditions. In a world that tends toward the globalization of flavors, attention to diverse and high quality foods appears to be the way to take the good from the past and educate new generations to continue the process of innovation, starting from tradition.

5.2. Case Study: The Invention of Tradition in Italian Restaurants

Purpose of the study

In America, increasing consumer demand for more artisanal food has paved the way for the spread of businesses offering more traditional cuisines, among them many new Italian-owned restaurants dedicated to restoring the authenticity of Italian cuisine in America.

Nevertheless, while on the demand side there is a request for more ethnic food, on the supply side the concept of authenticity has been inevitably adulterated to accommodate the cultural significances of the host country and to “create an economically viable market niche” (Lu & Fine, 536). Publications about Italian restaurants in America have reported on a new trend of ethnic Italian restaurants that are incorporating more authentic Italian ingredients, but also indicate an attempt to respond to a different market.

Using the theory of the invention of tradition proposed by Sollors and Conzen, the chapter investigates how Italian identity in ethnic restaurants in America is advertised and sold. The study looks at how Italian ethnic restaurants use the impression of authenticity as a strategic resource to respond to consumer demand. In line with the above considerations, we formulated the following research questions: How do Italian restaurant owners make their food appealing to non-Italian customers? How do contemporary Italian restaurants position their offering and advertise their dining experience to best meet market conditions?

Research Design

The spread of Italian grocery stores and the development of gastronomic tourism have been paralleled by increased interest in well-established Italian restaurants that emphasize the healthfulness, history and quality of their cuisine. Given the growing vigor of the ethnic food economy in the U.S. and increasing demand for Italian dining in particular as an experience rather than just a food,⁴⁷ a number of Italian restaurants decided to expand operations to include locations in the U.S. In this context, Italian restaurants, with their emphasis on home-style cooking and family atmosphere provide a significant model for the examination of ethnic Italian culinary experiences.

The results of the study offer “food for thought” about future trends in the evolution of ethnic Italian restaurants in the United States, in particular, the importance of “artificially

⁴⁷ According to the article “A model of historical development and future trends of Italian cuisine in America” (2009) Italian restaurants and pizza restaurants represent nowadays the most popular type of cuisine in America, with 16,783 operations.

preserving” Italian culture while at the same time offering options on the menu that cater to tastes.

Sample

Naples was selected for the study because its economy is based largely on tourism and because it is one of the wealthiest cities in America, with the sixth highest per capita income and the second highest proportion of millionaires per capita in the US⁴⁸.

To gain understanding of ethnicity as public expression of identity in the American marketplace, 10 Italian restaurants in Naples and its environs were selected for analysis, chosen on the basis of the willingness of the owners and chefs to participate in the study. Moreover, to better analyze the potential conflict between change and continuities in the manifestation of ethnic authenticity, the sample was limited to connoisseur-oriented restaurants, as their customers appear to have “greater temporal and economic resources and more extensive cultural capital” (Lu & Fine, 545). As part of the data collection process, 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted with owners and chefs of Italian restaurants with different regional culinary backgrounds such as Abruzzi, Sicily, Tuscany, and Lombardy and so on. All the restaurants are family businesses with experience in serving an international clientele. Of the 10 interviewees, 8 were Italian, 2 were Italian American but with Italian education. All of them had moved from Italy to America to expand their Italian restaurant business to a location abroad. 8 were owners and chefs while two were employees.

Data analysis

Qualitative data were collected through interviews and analysis of the restaurant websites and as a qualitative research method. Except for one, the interviews were all recorded in Italian, the mother tongue of those interviewed. The factors analyzed were not only the words spoken, but also the meanings and the emotions conveyed by the tone of voice and the use of pauses. Questions were formulated to gain information about the degree to which the restaurants had Americanized their offerings to fit into the American food market. In a process of quantitative content analysis, the responses were transcribed and core thematic categories were identified and assigned codes, then these items were analyzed to discover common relations and patterns.

⁴⁸ Reported by the Miami New Times <http://bit.ly/1PGlQiy>

The results of the analysis were then used to suggest future trends for Italian restaurants in the United States. It is likely that the commoditization and branding of ethnic identity will increase.

Content Analysis

Six thematic categories were identified for analysis: consumer behavior, degree of Americanization, perception of authenticity, restaurants as socio-cultural experiences, food product selection, the Italian sounding perception. For each theme, specific examples were drawn from the interviews and analyzed to understand the concept of authenticity in today's Italian restaurants in America as shown in Fig. 3

Categories	Top Terms (Frequency)	Examples
Consumer behavior	Consumers with higher awareness and education; Interest in the origin of foods; Interest in Italian cuisine and culture; Interest in ethnic taste	"Consumers becoming more aware of what they're eating. I can say that because all my clients are Americans."
Degree of Americanization	Traditional Italia food; innovation in tradition; consumer expectations issue; regional cuisine; Italian ingredients.	"The basic ingredients are Italian and the way how we prepare it is Italian. Then there are innovation and consumer expectations."
Perception of authenticity	Italian symbols and codes; Use of Italian language; Use of Italian employees; Domestic environment	"All our decorations are items from the family. We use "old" bottles of wine, big bottles, baskets from the family, to other items such as Olive oil dispensers (made of copper), high-quality paintings from places in Italy."
Restaurants as socio-cultural experiences	Consumer demand for cultural experiences; interest in exotic environment; domestic image; human contact; cultural education	<i>"We always take a few minutes to speak to our guests, to educate them about the dish they are eating as well as in the real Italian cuisine."</i>
Food product selection	Italian Suppliers; local vendors; U.S. distributors or importers; certification food products	<i>"We get all our imported products from U.S. distributors or importers. Some of these distributors are Italians"</i>
Italian Sounding perception	Not familiar with the term; growing problem; Italian fault; need to invest.	"Those are all imitations. That is the reason why we import our products from Italy through our distributors."

Fig. 3 Italian Restaurant in America: content analysis

Consumer behavior

Consumer behavior regards the dishes diners choose in Italian restaurants in America. The data collected were analyzed to ascertain whether and to what extent customer preferences caused restaurants to adapt their fare to American tastes. All those interviewed agreed that contemporary American consumers appear to be more aware of the characteristics of authentic Italian food and are more willing to experience different flavors in Italian dishes they have not tried before.

All interviewees, especially those who have been running the activity the longest, seemed to recognize a general change in consumer behavior in the last fifteen or twenty years, which they attributed to higher education, better disposable income and the opportunity to travel to Italy and experience the culture. They acknowledged that this openness to new Italian dishes did not characterize all their customers. For example, interviewee 7 said:

Customers who have had the opportunity to travel to Italy were more appreciative of the dishes we offer and more open-minded about trying new dishes. Those who have never been out of the U.S. are less open to trying new dishes and foods. Unfortunately, Americans think that the “Italian-American” food they eat in the U.S. is actually “real” Italian. As we all know, they are way off or far from the truth.

The data indicate that while the well-educated customers desire a unique culinary experience and are willing to pay for authenticity, general consumers are still inclined to associate Italian cuisine with the Italian-American one, which has been in evolution throughout the whole Italian migration history.

Degree of Americanization

Though the corpus of the interviews contains many utterances regarding pride in the authenticity of the Italian cuisine served, a careful look at the data indicates a quite evident degree of Americanization in the types of dishes presented.

For example, the menus of interviewees 2 and 5 include “Fettuccine Alfredo” and “chicken parmesan”, clearly Americanized fare offered to cater to the cultural preferences of the non-ethnic customer, perhaps because in the first case, the business is more of a workplace cafeteria than a proper restaurant, and in the second case, the chef is Italian-American, and thus

has a dual culinary culture.

Nevertheless, all those interviewed said they do not strictly follow tradition, first, because doing so would not sell well, and second, because they feel that in order to be competitive in the contemporary food market they to be innovative and creative.

We simply try to fit their vision of the world and memories and images of Italy, but there is no falsification. After all, in Italy as well, the food and the taste have been renewed. Customers nowadays have changed, and they ask for innovation while also expecting tradition (Respondent 3).

This suggests that even restaurants that vaunt Italian born chefs and authentic Italian cuisine must compromise by adapting their dishes to American tastes and finding ways to innovate, be it with new technologies and methods or with alternative dining settings.

Perception of Authenticity

The “perception of authenticity” category regards the use of stereotyped Italian symbols as identity markers to fuse continuity of tradition with processes of innovation and help sell the business.

Those interviewed acknowledged that they manipulated images and codes use to represent tradition, in order to give legitimacy to their restaurant. They indicated that creating a comforting environment for their customers is the first step in educating them about a more authentic Italian culture. Speaking of which, one of the respondent explained that they recently redesigned the interiors and the entire style of restaurant according, using pastoral and mountainous images of Abruzzi.

Americans love Italy and they love the domestic experience related to it because that's what they have found out travelling to Italy or watching movies and cooking programs or following an Italian stereotype. The use of symbols is justified by the fact that, whether we like it or not, this is what attracts customers the first time. It is pure marketing (Respondent 5).

According to the findings, the illusion of authenticity appears to be used as a means to have customers accept their dishes. The marketing strategies aim to make the “exotic” food seem familiar for non-ethnic customers.

An exception to this trend was interviewee 6, whose restaurant was the only one to use an

English name instead of an Italian one.

In our previous restaurant, American customers associated our cuisine with the Italian-American one. So we decided upon a different dialogue to try to educate the customer through a new form of education other than the classical one (Respondent 6).

They made this decision based on the type of clients they were dealing with - mainly educated customers and with possibility to travel - and their desire to promote education through direct experience rather than images.

Nevertheless, for all the restaurants, the illusion of authenticity was more a matter of image than of substance, that is, it was a strategy used to fit into the market niche, and did not entail manipulation of the ethnic identity in terms of the ingredients, product quality or preparation techniques. Considering authenticity as a non-objective category, these practices might be seen as a way to maintain traditions in the face of changing culture.

Restaurants as socio-cultural experiences

All those interviewed recognized that in the future, food tourism will go beyond the current model of restaurant business, offering authentic dining as a socio-cultural experience that educates customers. Taking advantage of increasing consumer demand for artisanal foods and authentic culinary experiences, the interviewees work to cultivate a customer base by educating diners about the cultural identity of the food.

American customers today look for the Italian experience as a whole. The fact that we are a small family-run restaurant allows us to offer the warm and welcoming atmosphere that recalls the image of the Italian family and tradition (respondent 10).

All of the interviewees acknowledged that they sell live entertainment rather than just a meal. Interviewee 6, for instance, said that they use an open kitchen as part of the culinary show, and organize culinary tours in Italy for their most loyal clients. Interviewee 5 encourages customers to talk to the chef, and learn about the background behind the recipe and its preparation.

From the data gathered, we can conclude that Italian restaurants in America cater to their customers' expectations, but at the same time educate them about Italian culinary traditions.

Selection of food products

The emergence of the Italian ethnic food sector in America has gone hand in hand with a concomitant rise in the importation of Italian food products, a boon for this sector of the Italian economy.

One of two reasons for this trend emerged in the interviews. As voiced by one of the older interviewees, some restaurateurs do not trust Italian American food products, because in the past there was little regulation or enforcement of the industry, and certainly no forms of quality certification for ethnic foods.

The second reason is that Italian imports are perceived as authentic and of superior quality. In fact, Italian businesses have moved to certify the quality of their food products in order to be more competitive against globalized supply chains. They have also stressed Italy as a brand, marketing the country's image and identity, emphasizing a strong relationship between culture and quality.

The restaurateurs interviewed indicated that they import directly from Italian businesses, or from U.S. distributors of imported Italian products. In fact, eight out of ten interviewees said that they import ingredients from Italy, and also buy from American distributors who buy the basic ingredients directly in Italy. Of course, not all products used in the restaurants are imported. Fresh fruit and vegetables, or fresh meat, fish and poultry are obviously purchased locally.

As interviewee 3 said,

My suppliers are Italians, regarding food imported, but there are other ingredients, especially the fresh ones that I buy here in America, from Italian and American producers who produce and sell their product directly to the United States. We are talking about quality products, made with materials taken from Italy

Italian Sounding perception

This assumption sheds light on the Italian Sounding problem, which has developed mostly in the US and is affecting the Italian food market. Although basically, almost all the informants did not know the definition of the phenomenon, they recognized that imitation of Italian food products is all over in America and that is why they demand to their vendors a Certificate of Origin. However, only 2 respondents, more aware of the others, tried to analyze the problem from a wider perspective.

Imitation of Italian products is a real problem, but I blame us in the first place because we Italians are not able to exploit our full potential. Even though we are trying to change and try to get involved in new quality business realities, Americans are not waiting for us. They know more than we do how to make money with our potential and then sell it at a lower price. Of course, it is a problem of consumer awareness, but the fault is also ours because we don't know how to handle our resources or we realize it when it's too late (Respondent 3).

The data collected showed a lack of knowledge regarding a sensitive topic like the Italian Sounding one. On the other side, it opens up a discussion on the future of the Made in Italy brand and the possibility to turn the problem into a solution, by investing in Italian recourses.

I blame Italy fist because it does not know how to protect its treasure and does not facilitate the export. America does not expect Italy. We have to invest and invest in young people with competitive ideas. (Respondent 6).

For this study, we chose restaurants with Italian owners and chefs, who see this fact as a strong selling point for their business, as they can advertise authentic Italian cooking and a true to life Italian dining experience. While most of them were not aware of the economic magnitude of “Italian sounding” phenomenon described in chapter four of this study, they knew that imitation Italian food products are sold throughout America, and in fact, demand certificates of origin from their suppliers.

Discussion

The results of the study suggest that ethnic restaurants offer a prime setting for observing the manifestation of ethnicity in public spaces and the dynamics related to the process of culinary negotiation in contemporary America. This study started from the assumption that authenticity is a non-objective category, and considered some modifications that have inevitably come about. Italian restaurateurs have resisted full assimilation into the American pattern, and their businesses appear to be quite representative of a distinctive ethnic tradition.

While using symbols of a stereotyped Italy to meet the expectations of non-ethnic customers, they maintain their traditions by buying fresh in-season ingredients from certificated vendors and preparing home-style dishes. On the other hand, well-educated consumers, willing to pay for more authentic Italian food, help these businesses to maintain their market niche.

The success of the restaurateurs interviewed reflects their ability to adapt to the expectations of the host culture while maintaining Italian culinary tradition. The use of practices to promote Italian culinary experiences, such as designing the restaurant floor plan so that customers can see the cooks at work in the kitchen, or inviting diners to speak with the chef about the history of the dishes he prepares, generates inclusion and educates customers. Moreover, attention to serving high quality food often imported from Italy and characterized by certification of origin has been important in countering the Italian sounding problem and offers an avenue for future success for Italian ethnic restaurants.

Italian restaurants in America offer a prime example of the recreation of tradition with traces of innovation. Customers interested in ethnic food and a more local, traditional, artisanal and organic culinary experience find in these restaurants authentic, traditional, healthy dishes, as well as more innovative offerings to meet the demand for multicultural or experimental dining experiences.

Conclusion

Food has always been one of the most important cultural signifiers in the definition of human identity. Since earliest times, food has symbolically marked the transition from nature to culture, playing a leading role in the formation of a sense of belonging to specific cultural dimensions and practices.

Far from being just mere nourishment, food is a universal cultural expression, a fundamental element in our definition of ourselves, through our identity as belonging to a group, and our identity as distinct from other groups. Food provides the base of one's identity, constructed through the incorporation of internal and external meanings that can never be completely defined (Parasecoli 2014, 418).

Even though foodways are an ever-changing element of ethnic construction, they also have their own internal stability. Members of minority ethnic groups use the parameters of foodways as a way to identify themselves as part of their group, distinct from the dominant culture. At the same time, in the dynamic and fluid process of discovery of identity through food, these same members of ethnic minorities can negotiate external factors and in doing so transform their cultures and society and those of others, thus fostering the process of integration.

This project was born out of the need to apply a multi-disciplinary approach, links with sociological, humanistic, historical, and foodways related studies, to examine the multifaceted relationship between food and identity. In particular, it explored the history and current status of the Italian-American food culture, and posits possible future trends in the evolution of multicultural identities in the postmodern era.

The first Italian immigrants compensated for the loss of their homeland by recreating an individual space of memory, composed of embodied experiences and rooted practices of self-representation. Involving all five senses, the consolation and comfort brought by home-cooked Italian food helped ease the pain of separation, and the sense of belonging it conveyed helped them deal with the challenges that migration brought.

Furthermore, ethnic entrepreneurs who ran local markets, traditional food stores and ethnic restaurants used food as a marker of inclusiveness; the interactions that occurred in the collective space of their businesses reinforced the sense of belonging to the same communities of origin, and promoted "mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion" (La Barbera, 9) that sustained the preservation of the group.

This process of collective identification also laid the foundation for the formation of a sense of nationhood among Italian immigrants. In this context, cooking techniques, traditional food habits, commercial exchanges, and ethnic food production and consumption helped to create a collective ecosystem, which has become the emblem of the cultural capital of the Italian immigrants in America.

But “in multicultural societies, identities adjust one to another and are gradually modified” (La Barbera, 3). This process of negotiation and adaptation supported both by conflict of values between the culture of origin and host community, and intergenerational changes, has gradually generated new forms of mediated culinary traditions. Italian immigrants and the following Italian-American generations were influenced by many external factors that promoted a change of identity through a gradual transformation of their condition of being in between their homeland and their new country. Families used the value of food to foster a relationship across generations marked by dissimilar values and goals. Many Italian-American autobiographers have illustrated the importance of their culinary cultural heritage and the cultural compromises that took place among the different generations.

On the other hand, homemakers and entrepreneurs gradually began including new ingredients, adopting alternative cooking techniques and embracing modern ways of food production and marketing. In doing so, they opened their culinary system to that of the dominant American culture, while maintaining a degree of continuity with their cultural heritage.

In this sense, food and foodways can be seen as the strongest elements of negotiation and adaptation among cultures. From the perspective of communication studies, food presents a culinary identity that can be experienced immediately, without any mediation. Consequently, food as such goes beyond culinary learning and allows direct recognition of the chain of meanings intimately related to one’s identity (Stajcic, 14).

Moreover, the food and foodways of different cultures are among the first characteristics of identity that meet each other, and they can have a fundamental role in enriching the cultures. Food has the potential to promote integration among different ethnicities because it fosters the incorporation of others, by spreading the culture of taste.

In the case of the Italian immigration process, the spread of Italian ethnic restaurants has been efficacious in facilitating moments of intercultural dialogue between the Italian community and the dominant culture. Italian restaurants have influenced the American culinary landscape and in turn have embraced elements of American cuisine, in doing so becoming distinctive public displays of ethnicity as well as an integral part of the American dining culture.

Over time, Italian ethnic restaurants before and Italian-American restaurants after have transformed their “foreign food” into a recognizable ethnic culinary experience, one in which cultural traditions concerning food have been adapted to achieve social acceptance. In meeting the culinary expectations of Americans, Italian restaurants in America have challenged their own authenticity and have transformed Italian culture in American by creating “shared symbols of diversity” (Lu & Gary, 549). Subsequently, by incorporating both past and present ethnic culinary features, the construction of these mediated identities has given birth to the invention of a recognizable Italian-American culinary culture.

The phenomenon of the invention of cultural traditions highlights the idea that identities are always subjected to social and historical circumstances and that they can be conceptualized only in relation with the alterity. In this sense, identities need to be viewed as “dialogic relationships” in which the sense of identification “is constantly constructed in the process of defining difference” (Koc & Welsh, 2) and distinct cultures influence each other in a continual process. However, while many of the traditions we recognize as authentic are quite recent inventions, the dialectic interaction between past and present cannot be separated from personally and collectively embodied experiences.

This was seen in the case studies. Both contemporary Italian-American generations and modern Italian restaurants in America perform and sell Italian ethnicity in the United States, continually making adjustments to accommodate to the values of the dominant country and to negotiate a space between two different cultures. At the same time, participants of both case studies keep using a set of symbols to diminish the spatial and temporal ethnic distance between the Italian American identity and the Italian one and establish continuity with the past. In this modern perspective, the internal and rooted characteristics of today’s invented cultures are recognizable not in the recreation of original models but in the incorporation of cultural meanings and beliefs behind food practices, which validate the continuity with a specific cultural heritage.

The purpose of this study was to collect information about the historical development of Italian food in America, in order to gain a deeper understanding of how Italian foodways changed during and following the years of Italian migration to the U.S., and imagine future trends within the contemporary culturally diverse world.

The current economic crises, as well as new consumer attitudes, are driving new alternatives, strategies and innovative paths of development in food production and consumption. In the globalized era, the spread of a standardized, uniform and homogenized food industry has provoked discussion about how culinary cultures can be preserved. Fortunately, increasing

consumer demand for traditional flavor and authentic culinary experiences has promoted a new interest in local, fresh, and genuine food together with the emergence of new forms of experience economy⁴⁹.

What is more, restaurants specialized in Italian cuisine in America have started to incorporate more authentic Italian ingredients into their recipes, and supermarkets have started selling imported authentic Italian food (Anderson, 2001, 9) which is also key to defending ethnic entrepreneurship from unfair competition from producers of *Italian sounding* products.

The trend for more authentic Italian ingredients responds not only to an economic demand but also to a desire to open up to a more multicultural palate in the globalised world, where the acceptance of the other passes through experiencing the food of the other. Food and foodways are central features of human societies. By cooking together, tasting each others' food and mixing ethnic flavors, we can promote both cultural diversity and the appreciation and acceptance of other cultures.

⁴⁹ In the article "Welcome to the Experience Economy" (1998), Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore define the experience economy as an advanced business economy where memory and emotions, rather than goods and services, become the products of the experience as a value added within the business process.

Appendix

Italian-American Interviews: Case Study I

Respondent 1

Where are you from, how old are you and which Italian American Generation are you?

I'm originally from North Carolina; I'm 62 years old. My maternal grandparents were born in ABRUZZO, and my father was born in PUGLIA.

Tell me something about your root?

Both of the families came to a better life. At the time they were still pretty poor but, at least my father and his parents didn't come here during the first wave of immigration but later, when it was much more difficult to get into the US. I didn't grow up with my grandparents, and my father wanted us to speak English and being Americans and have success in this country

Do you keep in touch with your relatives in Italy or do you keep in touch with Italy in any way? Have you ever been to Italy? Have you travelled to the area where your family came from? What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about Italy?

I go to Italy pretty often, but I have never been in the villages where my families grew up. I should do that soon or later. So no, I'm not in touch with any relatives. I'm sure my father was, but I don't know them

What language do you speak at home? Do you speak Italian or there are any situations when you can speak Italian, if yes who touch you Italian?

I speak a bit of Italian but honestly but parents or my grandparents didn't teach me the language. My grandparents were speaking a broken English while my father, as I said, he wanted to speak English at home. He wanted us to speak English with our grandparents so that they could learn the language

So are you proud of your heritage?

Although I didn't learn Italian at home and I grew up as an American, I'm very proud to be Italian and very proud of my roots

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about Italian food?

Well, honestly food is probably the strongest connection I have with my heritage and my past as well. My father was such a good cook, and he was always cooking Italian dishes. So when I think about Italian food, I think about my father in the first place and all the memories linked to him and my family

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about Italian food?

My father's tomato sauce. My father had his vegetable garden

Do you feel more Italian or American?

As I said I grew up as an American, but I'm proud of my roots

Do you have any tradition that you practice at home with your family related to food?

Well nowadays my children are grown up and it is more difficult to keep alive some traditions but from time to time we try to do that, especially during holidays or Christmas and Ester. We still try to cook the same recipes that my father was used to cook, so the Italian ones

Do you know Sunday Dinner tradition? Did you perform still performing it?

Oh yes, what a mess! When I was a kid I remember that the whole family was used to be together, speaking in Italian or dialect and making a lot of noise and eating and drinking for hours. I remember my grandmother yelling CHE CASINO or MADRE MIA or E LA VETE D'OGNE IJURNE. And you never knew until the end of dinner,

which could actually knock the door. We were always expecting other relatives other Italian friends and so on. Nowadays most of the time it is just my husband and me so it is more difficult to keep alive that beautiful tradition

Do you cook Italian food, do you know Italian recipes? What does the Italian food mean for you?

I do, not always but I do. My sister, who was born in Italy, she is used doing that every day

Do you think you eat the real/authentic Italian food at Italian restaurants here? Can you recognize if the food that they serve is the real one or not?

I'm able to distinguish between Italian food and Italian American food because at least in term of food I grew up as an Italian. When I was a kid I was sure everybody was used to eat the same food I was eating, but then I realized the reality outside was different than my reality. I go pretty often to Italia restaurants (we were eating in an Italian restaurant that day)

Are there Italian shops here around? Do you buy Italian food in Italian grocery stores?

Yes there are, and I buy it, and I try to replicate my father's recipes. Unfortunately, he didn't leave anything written

Do you think Italian food represent a healthy way of eating?

Absolutely because it is light and fresh.

Respondent 2

Where are you from, how old are you and which Italian American Generation are you?

I'm from Connecticut; I would prefer not to say my age. Lt's just say I'm over 60.

Tell me something about your root?

My grandparents were born in Italy, NAPLES and I do know why they came. They came for a better life. They went to NY first, in Ellis Island.

Do you keep in touch with your relatives in Italy or do you keep in touch with Italy in any way? Have you ever been to Italy? Have you travelled to the area where your family came from?

I go to Italy every year, and I have been in the area where my grandparents were born, so NAPOLI but not really to the village where they were probably born. I don't have any relatives over there However I know pretty well few families in Italy they adopt me, and their kids call me ZIA and I go every Sunday to their home for the SUNDAY PRANZO with them, and everything we do is Italian

What language do you speak at home? Do you speak Italian or there are any situations when you can speak Italian, if yes who touch you Italian?

I do speak Italian a bit, but I learnt it at school because to be honest I never had the chance to meet my grandparents. They already came back to Italy, and I didn't have the chance to grew up with them and meet, on the other side, my father speak Italian but he was born in America, and he was used to speaking in English to me

Looking back at your childhood, what do you remember about your Italian culture? What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about Italy?

Well, my father was a wonderful cook, and he was always cooking Italian food. I still remember the delicious Lasagna he made for us during Sunday Dinner. I'm talking about Italian tradition recipes. The first that comes to my mind when I think about Italy? Well, I guess my father tomato sauce with meatballs, sausages, sandwiches all the stuff my father were used to eat to us.

Are you proud of your ethnicity?

Yes, totally

Do you know Sunday Dinner tradition? Did you perform still performing it? What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about Italian food? Do you have any tradition that you practice at home with your family related to food?

We used to go every Sunday for dinner at my parent' house and also during holidays too, nowadays is sad but we do that only during holidays. You know, my father was used to say to us. Look at me when I cook (he didn't leave any recipes written) because when you will grow up, and I won't be here anymore you will regret the fact that you don't

remember this. And he was right. But we were supposed to mix with the other ethnic groups we were supposed to grow up as Americans, and we probably lost part of our cultural and personal heritage for good

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about Italian food?

Very good and the Italian food reminds me my past as well, but nowadays it is really difficult to keep the tradition alive. One of my sisters, for instance, she married an Italian husband and so my niece and they keep this king of Italian tradition alive but the others the married Americans and they don't do that at all, only during Christmas or Ester

Do you feel more Italian or American?

I feel... I don't know. Probably American but in my hurt, I feel Italian. But every time I go to Italy I realize a bit more than we are not Italians. I mean we love the culture we still keep alive some traditions but our habits and values Americans. I do have Italian American friends who grew up in a very Italian environment, and they eat Italian food every day. I don't eat Italian food every day, unless I'm in Italy, of course- I love all the ethnic food plus what we eat, often, it is a mix between Italian and American food. But for holidays and Sunday, we eat Italian food, definitely

Do you cook Italian food, do you know Italian recipes? What does the Italian food mean for you?

I don't do that by myself. Not that much at least because you know nowadays we are always running out of time plus I don't have children, so I don't spend so much time in the Kitchen. But my sister does, she still cool Italian recipes from our family and my brother too.

Do you think you eat the real/authentic Italian food at Italian restaurants here? Can you recognize if the food that they serve the real one or not?

Well, to be honest, you can find a lot of good Italian restaurant which tries to be as much authentic as they can, but the way you eat Italian food in Italy is not like here. I don't know if it is because of the water or the ingredients, but it is not the same. Think about the Italian Mozzarella. When you eat MOZZARELLA here is not the same (also in the restaurant) like MOZZARELLA DI BUFFALO. Here is not tender is like gum. But at least Italian restaurants they try to do their best, and some of the dishes are delicious. But if you want Italian food don't go to Italian American restaurants Italian American restaurants (but even Italian ones) they take advantage from the fact that we love Italy and also they have to adapt the cuisine to American clients When I look at Italian food in Italian restaurants, I'm used to saying "Look this is similar to our father one, or maybe this is not even close to our father dishes".

Are there Italian shops here around? Do you buy Italian food in Italian grocery stores?

Sometimes but only during holidays to be honest and of course when I'm in Italy

Do you think Italian food represent a healthy way of eating?

Yes sure. I eat Pasta every day in Italy, but I don't gain weight because most depend on the way how you cook and the fresh ingredients and so on. In Italy, you are years ahead than us regarding organic and fresh and good food. Here when you go to restaurants, clients expect you to bring a huge PIATTO DI PASTA. When I'm in Italy, my friends always let me see home many tomatoes I should put on pasta. Here they overdose with portions. One just portion of pasta. We eat pasta and maybe salad we are not used to different courses and that what most of the Americans do when they go to Italian restaurants. They order for just one course, and they expect that to be big.

Respondent 3

Where are you from, how old are you and which Italian American Generation are you?

I'm from New Jersey. I'm 51. My family came from Naples, and I'm 3 Italian American generation

Tell me something about your root?

Sure both of my grandparents, from my both of my parents' side, they were Italian and some of my uncles as well. My mother's mother she barely talked English. She was living with many Italian in the same neighborhood, and they were also all somehow relatives. So we were all together all the time I was with Italians all the time. I grew up in a very Italian environment. We grew up with Italian traditions, the meal, the food and the family time was very important for us so we were used to spending time with my grandmother and the cousins and so on cooking, eating and drinking all the time.

Do you keep in touch with your relatives in Italy or do you keep in touch with Italy in any way? Have you ever been to Italy? Have you travelled to the area where your family came from?

Yes, I went the first time with my parents when I was 15 years old. And you know, I'm going to be divorced in October, but I can tell you that my husband is Italian American as well and as soon as this entire divorce situation will get to an end, I will come back to Italy and visit his family. I'm attached to them, as well because a big part of his family is still living in Rome. From my side of the Family, sure I have been to Naples, but by the time I went there, they were all already gone. There is no one left anymore

What language do you speak at home? Do you speak Italian or there are any situations when you can speak Italian, if yes who touch you Italian?

I do speak a bit Italian, but I don't have a lot of chance to practice the language now, but in general, I met few Italian Americans here, thanks to the Italian American Society and we share a lot about our heritage, sometimes even the language. We are best friends, and we share a lot of stories. I lived two years in Rome with my husband and his family

Looking back at your childhood, what do you remember about your Italian culture? What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about Italy?

As I told you, I grew up in an Italian environment, and I remember after school being with my mother and my grandmother, you know NONNA, cooking PASTA or FETTUCINI with chickpeas or TAGLIATELLE. My grandmother when we were making homemade pasta used to say: NO, FAI COSÌ, FAI COSÌ and she would keep saving until you were able to roll the pasta in the way she wanted.

So are you proud of your heritage?

We are very proud of our Italian heritage, all my family, not just me and we always talk about Italy

Do you feel more Italian or American?

Probably more Italian because I grew up in an Italian environment. The only point is the language. I never learnt Italian properly thanks to my family because first of all my grandmother was speaking more dialect than Italian and then my parents they want the children to be American to speak a good English to have a good education and success in life, here.

Do you know Sunday Dinner tradition? Did you perform or still performing it? What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about Italian food? Do you have any tradition that you practice at home with your family related to food?

When we talk about Sunday Dinner, I laugh because you would never know how many people you could find out to the door waiting to join you for the meal, like ten people every Sunday Dinner. We had so much fun Yes, I do. In fact, next month I will be in New Jersey with the whole family just cooking, drinking and eating Italian stuff. I already know that. Plus I do a lot of Italian baking recipes at Christmas. I make a tree with cookies. Maybe you can find some American dish as well, but I still cook Italian food and do Sunday Dinner like I did when I was a kid although today is more difficult before we are all in different cities or some of us already gone. When we have the chance to stay all together, we all always have a proper Italian meal. That's what put us together, and we just spend the day drinking and eating, like for hours as you do, in Italy. We have a proper PRANZO. And those Sunday Dinners and celebrations with the whole family and the traditional Italian cook (we follow the grandmother or parents recipes) they make me feel I'm still with them. Of course can be that we have some American food but we try to follow the tradition.

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about Italian food?

Delicious. My other cousin in NY has an Italian restaurant. He named the restaurant SOFIA after her daughter. You know, Sofia is an Italian name, and they cook in a very traditional way.

Do you cook Italian food, do you know Italian recipes? What does the Italian food mean for you?

I do, and I use my family recipes, and sometimes my cousin calls me asking if I remember how my mum or grandmother was cooking that specific recipe. It's memory for me, but it is still part of my lifestyle

Do you think you eat the real/authentic Italian food at Italian restaurants here? Can you recognize if the food that they serve is the real one or not?

In this area, people are very well educated, and they travelled a lot, and they are pretty aware of what is Italian or not. So they look for an authentic restaurant. Most of the Italian restaurants here make homemade food, and thus they serve the real Italian food. And I'm able to recognize the difference between an Italian American and an Italian restaurant. Plus, somehow people diet change. We don't use to eat as we ate in the past. We look for more organic

food. We have a huge problem here related to obesity, so we are trying to change. Maybe the American client still expects a large portion of food, but at least they want to experience properly the Italian cuisine.

Are there Italian shops here around? Do you buy Italian food in Italian grocery stores?

We do, the whole family, we go to Italian grocery shops, and then we come back, and we cook like crazy. There is his store called MOZZARELLA, and they cook homemade Italian food, and it is always so crowd that sometimes he can't even get inside because of the people waiting for the food. When my brother comes to visit in me in Florida he brings with him an empty suitcase just to put all the food he can buy

Respondent 4

Where are you from, how old are you and which Italian American Generation are you?

OK, I'm originally from New York City; I'm 81 years old and have three children who live abroad, in America or Europe. My father and mother were born here, but my Grandfather and grandmother were born in Italy. My grandmother, named CASOLA, was born in Naples (Chiaia), while my grandfather was born in Sorrento. On my father side, his parents were born in Sicily. But I grow up just with one grandfather. The others were already dead

Tell me something about your root?

On my father side, he had a boat, and he went to Naples where he had a coffee shop, and from there he moved to NY and where he met my grandmother who was sent from Stromboli to NY to be married to somebody else (Someone who didn't know). And he saw her coming off the boat, and he followed her, and he talked to the family and asked to marry her, and they had ten children. On my mother side, her father came from Sorrento. They had a perfect life in Italy, exporting oil and olives, but because he wasn't the first son, he got nothing, so he came to U.S, got the money together and then he asked to her wife the kids they had at that time. My grandmother was wealthy; she was the daughter of the Mayor and she lived very well. She had a tutor, she was very well educated (She spoke French), but the point was: or you marry a rich family, or you go to the convent. She went to the convent in the first place but then she realized wasn't for her and started screaming to hell, saying I want to get married. So the nuns sent her back home so she got married to my grandfather and then she followed him in the US, once he got the money together. So yes, my grandmother, as the daughter of a mayor, she lived a very nice life when she was in Italy, but then his father made few mistakes with finances and did very no-honorable things and then he committed a suicide

Do you keep in touch with your relatives in Italy or do you keep in touch with Italy in any way?

Sure and we also have a son who is living there, so every year we go there. They have three children who speak English fluently and Italian of course. He married this Italian woman from Sicily who met in NY. They married here, but she wanted to have kids, and she wanted to raise the kids in Italy, so they moved in Sardegna and later in Vicenza. She is a doctor he is teaching English. What she said to my son when she turned 40 was: if you want children my biological the clock is running out of time.

Have you ever been to Italy? Have you travelled to the area where your family comes from?

Yes, I walked the street of Chiaia to see what was like and I went to Lipari and Stromboli too. My parents were telling us stories about the cities their parents were born but as I told I grow up just with one grandparent so I don't know relatives in Italy, on either side of the family. But the last time I went to Sorrento, and I have been there several times, I asked about the CASOLA family, casola we said in English. My grandmother's name was NOCERINO (Casola is the name she took from her husband). So, I asked about the Casola family, and they said the family is still there but I didn't have enough time to look up, but I will do next time. So far, I don't know much about them.

What language do you speak at home? Do you speak Italian or there are any situations when you can speak Italian, if yes who touch you Italian?

I speak some Italian, POSSO PARLARE UN POCO ITALIANO, but I'm much better in French. I worked as French professor I had a PhD. My son, the one who lives in Italy he speaks perfect Italian. But I lived in France and but children speak French. They never touch Italian in the school I was attending, so I was never able to study it formally. *Is interesting the fact that you have Italian origins but you got a PhD in French language and culture* True, but I started to go back to my roots and heritage when I was already a grownup. Let's face it most times those who came in that first generation knew they were never going to see their parents or their family anymore. If anything they might send the packet through. They might. They might write a letter down again but. To get back to it, to go back to Italy chances were very rare that they would ever go back and they knew that once they left that was

it, they were in a new life and a new culture. So they need to get part of America somehow and keep going with their life and somehow forget their habits. That why for instance they didn't teach me Italian.

So are you proud of your heritage? Looking back on your childhood, what do you remember about Italian culture?

We are very proud of being Italians having had Italian influence in our lives. And we admire Italian culture. I never went to Italy the first time when I reached my majority. But, from what I remembered and I heard from my family, always good things you know and Always things that were admirable. I know stories and idea of Italy from my family, especially from my grandfather who was a free thinker

Do you feel more Italian or American?

I can say readily that I'm American with two cultural heritages and that it's France and Italy

Do you have any tradition that you practice at home with your family related to food?

Sure, Yes. Christmas Eve is the major holiday as you know. We used to do in my family 13 fish during Christmas Eve, not seven as the Italian tradition says, you know. And I remember that tradition, and we held it right through my life as well. My mother, for example, carried the tradition forward and when she passed away, I took it over, and I have done it before. And now then my children are taking t over, but they don't follow it going to follow it as strictly as we do. So when I go to them for Christmas Eve, and they are the ones who are supposed to cook, they still have some fish but nothing like what we did. And even meat which is a sin to us on Christmas Eve even meat is presented at the table. But the Italian American friends of my generation they still maintain that traditions. I remember for example, specifically, the different kinds of pizza that were made among families coming from different regions. They made one kind. My family made another kind and so on. A lot of Italian people exchanging somehow there recipes and we were getting close to their regional traditions as well. But it was very casual because I used to it at home always and we usually follow those traditions. But I used to eat those kinds of meals that were typical of the time, like PASTA E FAGIOLI, stuff like that that you won't probably find at restaurant easily.

Do you know Sunday Dinner tradition? Did you perform still performing it?

We did. We had a Sunday dinner it was always in the late afternoon, and it stretched on for a while, especially on holidays. And we always had pasta as a traditional dish during those events and meatballs. And I'd be following that, and it wasn't just my family and me but like all the relatives around my father was the oldest son in his family, and so, during Sunday Dinners his family came to our house. That's was the tradition on holidays. So we always had a lot of families around. And my mother was a great cook. And so she always prepared wonderful dishes all the time. A lot of Italian food and people we had pretty much an Italian cuisine during my growing up.

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about Italian food?

TOMATO: it always has to be tomato based. I love Things with tomatoes. And so that's the first thing that comes to mind. Oh, I love to have a dish of Pasta with heavy tomato sauce and meat sauce to make it not like they do in Italy today. We like a lot of sauce. So we have a lot of sauce meatballs here and there.

Do you cook Italian food, do you know Italian recipes? What does the Italian food mean for you?

Yes, I cook Italian food, most of the time and of course there is a meaning beyond. I think there is a tradition that we recognize that you know clearly, and it probably is even enunciated in the course of the meal because it makes you talk about that, somehow like remember we used to have polpo, or do stuff like that.

It's interesting because my wife is Italian American, but her family comes to another region of Italy, so we mixed food at home. My wife, for example, has Sicilian roots and when she cooks meatballs in the Sicilian style, with juice, raisins and pinoli. That's OK. I love them. But my grandmother, on my mother side, never cooked like that because she was from Naples. But my mother introduced as well a bit of Sicilian style in her recipes as well as the Neapolitan one and that how the tradition is for me, and kids love it. That's one of the traditions even today.

Do you think you eat the real Italian food at Italian restaurants here? Can you recognize if the food that they serve is the real one or not?

Well, it's Americanized you know for the most part. There are a few places where some dishes are Italian you know, and you go to Italy, and you find the same sort of thing. It's more a compromise. But I would not make the comparison between Chinese food eaten in China and the one made in America because you can see here that is nothing like Chinese food. On the other side, Italian food in America maybe is not the real one, but they are. You can see the likes and the compromise between Italian food and American style. Well, that's the point.

I can see differences between Italian and Italian-American restaurants, I guess so. I think in America we kind of overdue in America Italian food, that you don't find in Italy

Are there Italian shops here around? Do you buy Italian food in Italian grocery stores?

We always called Italian American groceries because they are never really authentic. Maybe mozzarella, that one yes, Oh no wait, we take them from Italy, but at least olive oils and sauces and stuff like that, yes definitely. Nowadays, with the import-export it's easier to find Italian quality food, as well

Do you think Italian food represent a healthy way of eating?

Sure, the Mediterranean diet- We always overdo in America we don't have portion controls. You can see it from my stomach. But I love it. I would never give up. Sorry

Respondent 5

Where are you from, how old are you and which Italian American Generation are you?

I'm originally from New York; I'm 75 years old, both 2 and 3 generation from BASILICATA (not too far from Marche) and CALABRIA

Tell me something about your root?

I Went to Basilicata about ten years ago. I wanted to see the places where my family was born. I met only one grandparent because the others were already dead. So when my mother's mother he told me about Basilicata, how beautiful was. She was coming from a very wealthy family, talking in a very good way about Italy. So when I had the chance to go to Basilicata the first time, I cried because it remembered me. She was my first and old reference to ITALIA when I was a child. When I was walking around the kitchen table, she was used to telling me: Repeat after me: Milk-LATTE, bread, PANE. She never came back to Italy, so she wanted me to keep her memories alive. She did not come with my grandfather in the first place. She arrived late. He was a great man, but she didn't want to leave her mother in Italy. Plus a lot of her brothers went to Argentina, so she didn't want to go to America. But after a while, my grandfather said: Or you come or that it, her mother convinced her to go and then she reached her Thus, when she came to NY, She was really upset. She was living in Italian Harlem (East Harlem) living on the 5th Floor, with children and family living all together like animals. Btw, my grandfather was one of the men who built the Empire state building. He was amazing in that job. They were very fine people; they loved opera. He also joined the Masons and for an Italian wasn't that easy. My father didn't talk too much about Italy, I heard few stories but not that much while my grandmother's mother came every Sunday She stopped over with food. And my parents met each other in NY. My mother and his brother they had a shop business there, and once my father's father stopped by and see my mother ask her brother who was that girl. And the day after he came back with my father and he introduced him to my mother, and that's how they met But my mother's family, they were Americanized. They wanted to be because they could see that there was a lot of prejudice against Italians at that time. I remember that my mother told me once that they were going to the church to attend the Mass, and she tried to set upstairs but when the nun saw she was taking the steps she told her, "Where are you going, you can't go upstairs, you have to be in the basement." My mother's father used to say that they had to speak to my grandmother in English otherwise she would never learn and never able to face society My grandmother before dying, (my mother's mother) when she first had the chance to come back in Italy she didn't want. At the beginning she said. FIGLIA MIA, I can't effort a ship trip back to Italy, and when my mother said Mum, we can fly, she replied, yes but I have no one left there.

Do you keep in touch with your relatives in Italy or do you keep in touch with Italy in any way?

As my husband said, we have a son who is living in Italy with his Italian wife, so every year we go there, in Vicenza.

Have you ever been to Italy? Have you travelled to the area where your family came from? What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about Italy?

I have been to Italy several times, and I went where my family was born. But you know, I went to Italy the first time when I was already 42 years old, all I knew was southern Italy culture. That's was my only frame of reference. A memory I have about Italy is that, when I first when to the north of Italy, I realized how different was everything according to what I knew. Imagine that I went there in Christmas time, and it was full of food markets and Christmas traditions and I looked for STRUFFOLI, but I didn't find them there, only once I reached Naples.

What language do you speak at home? Do you speak Italian or there are any situations when you can speak Italian, if yes who touch you Italian?

My grandmother taught me a bit of Italian as well, but I remember only a few words, probably dialect. But I'm practicing Italian culture with this organization. Every year we choose a region, and we learn as much as we can about it

So are you proud of your heritage?

I'm proud. My first husband, before Joseph was American but even with him I was keeping alive the Italian traditions, especially the food one

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about Italian food? Do you have any tradition that you practice at home with your family related to food?

Yes, well although my mother she was a real American and she wanted to be American, when she died she told me. Please, keep alive our traditions, keep alive my recipes. So every year, during Ester I prepared STRUFFOLI and homemade bread, and I send it to my sons who are now living all over the world.

Do you feel more Italian or American?

I feel more American because my family wanted to be so Americans that they lost a lot of traditions, but at least regarding food, we still keep alive these traditions and recipes. So I'm Italian regarding cuisine. I'm American first, but I love my heritage.

Do you know Sunday Dinner tradition? Did you perform still performing it?

We had that tradition, and we still have, but today is just the two of us because when I was a kid my family was here, but today my sons are living out of the country or far always from us, so it's difficult to keep performing Italian Sunday Dinner. But sometimes my American friends ask me to invite them to a Sunday Dinner when they want to eat food I said to my kids, you have to keep doing Ester bread once I will die. I'm afraid that my heritage is going to die with me, although my children who don't live in Italy they are bringing their kids to Italy as well, to show them their grandparents' traditions.

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about Italian food?

My mother LASAGNA

Do you cook Italian food, do you know Italian recipes? What does the Italian food mean for you?

Yes, both of us, me and my husband. It's part of us, and we are addicted to Italian food. The power of Italian food is that it's all about conversation, socialization. You eat for hours around a table, and you spent time with family and friend in a very nice atmosphere. It makes you feel at home. Everything is familiar around the table

Do you think you eat the real/authentic Italian food at Italian restaurants here? Can you recognize if the food that they serve is the real one or not?

Well, it's Italian in term of what you think Italian is. Especially if you are American, you don't get the difference between the Italian and the Italian American food.

Are there Italian shops here around? Do you buy Italian food in Italian grocery stores?

Yes, and we buy Italian food there as well, but not the prepared one. You have to try the Casco's BUFFALO MOZZARELLA

Do you think Italian food represent a healthy way of eating?

I think you can make it healthy. In Italy, they eat pasta two times a day, and nobody is fat. They control portions and right now especially are more in organic food. The main problem, in Italy and here as well it's that the organic food is really expensive. My mother used to eat meat maybe 2 times a week, in this country we are eating meat every day. You should see what kids eat at school, Only junk food. Plus nowadays nobody has time to eat so they eat fast food. Ready food

Respondent 6

Where are you from, how old are you and which Italian American Generation are you?

I'm originally from Ohio; I'm 67 years old. My paternal great-grandparents were born in Italy. My maternal grandparents came from Basilicata, and my maternal great-grandfather family came from Molise, in Molise, Torella del Sannio, and my father's families from his father side were born in Agnone, in Molise

Tell me something about your root?

We don't know for sure. We have some ideas. My great paternal grandfather moved in the first place in the US but then he went back. He didn't do well, so he came back to Italy. He came to America probably for the Colorado silver rush, (expansionist period of silver mining activity in the U.S. state of Colorado in the late 19th century.). On my mother side, my great-grandfather came here and stayed. But my mother used to say that they were really poor,

so poor, so my grandfather moved here and then asked my grandmother and her sister to reach in America and his brother, as well. That's what I know

Do you keep in touch with your relatives in Italy or do you keep in touch with Italy in any way?

I keep in touch a lot because I teach Italian, but I also have cousins in Sorrento from my paternal side. We lived for about ten months in Sorrento, and while I was there, I met cousins that I have never known. Cousins that live in Giffoni Valle Piana, in Campania. Those are Cousins from my mother side, and I'm in still in touch with them but few years before I met cousins from my father side. There aren't so many lefts, but I'm still in contact with them as well. And that's was my motivation to keep in touch with my heritage and learning Italian because my family never touch me

Have you ever been to Italy? Have you travelled to the area where your family came from? What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about Italy?

As I said I have been in Italy a lot of time and I often travelled to the area where my family came from.

What language do you speak at home? Do you speak Italian or there are any situations when you can speak Italian, if yes who touch you Italian?

I speak English and Italian at home. I don't have kids, so I didn't teach Italian to them, of course, and I learnt Italian by myself for the same motivation I mentioned above. I teach Italian in high school and to grownups as well, and some of them are Italian Americans who want to learn the language of their heritage others just Americans who love Italy and the language, and they want somehow get close to the culture

So are you proud of your heritage?

There are no other nationalities I would rather be, and my father was born in this country, but he lived in Italy for nine years. He grew up in Italy, and he instilled that culture and this tremendous love for Italy in all of us. I always had been very proud to be Italian.

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about Italian food?

It's curious that my grandparents never talked properly about their life in Italy. They almost never talked about Italy. On the other side, my father talked about Italy all the time, and I guess because he spent a very nice time there. When I was trying to talk to grandparents about Italy, the only thing she kept saying it was that they were really poor, so poor and she never said anything about it, except that she didn't want to go back, But my father, who went to school in Naples, Italy, yes, always. He went to art school, and he studies jewellers design and sculpture and piano he was really into that culture. He went to the conservatory in San Pietro a Majella. The point is that the whole family came back to Italy because my grandfather was sick at that time and in that period the medicine in Europe was much better, so they suggested them to go to Italy. My grandfather died in Italy and he was buried there. After that, my grandmother and the children came back to U.S but my father staid because he was still attending school in Italy. He stayed until he was seventeen. But in that period they knew the war was due to start, so the American ambassador in NAPOLI called all the American students and told them they had to make a choice. Or decided to be Italian citizenships and stayed there or come back to U.S. So in few hours my father's life completely changed but he remained attached. And he had nothing but good things to say about Italy especially because his life was very different from my grandparents' life.

Do you feel more Italian or American?

Right know, whit what is going on in this country, I'm humiliated to be an American. Humiliated to be represented by someone who is so ignorant and nationalistic and arrogant as Donald TRUMP. So at this moment, I don't even like to say I'm American because this America has nothing in common with my values. He is destroying here. So, well, right now, I'm much more proud of my Italian identity then the American one, but to go back to your question, regarding identity, I'm somehow in between. I feel American because I live here but when I go to Italy, I become Italian. I don't want to speak English, I don't want to eat American dish not either talk about America.

Do you have any tradition that you practice at home with your family related to food?

When I was still growing up, and my mother was still alive, everything was related to food. Everything was about Italian food, and until I properly grew up and started to visit other family or going to school, I realized that the way I was eating wasn't the way of the average of the Americans was used to eating. I was really surprised to realize that the way how my school friend used to eat wasn't like mine at all. Plus, if I think about food, of course during holidays and celebrations everything was about food. During Christmas Eve, for example, my family was cooking a lot of Italian food. Today the situation changed. When my father died a lot of things changed. My father, who was the one who was really into Italian traditions and culture when he died took with him all of that. My mother, on the other side, didn't want to do traditional recipes anymore but my husband who he is Irish but loves Italian culture and

its food, he cooks for Christmas Eve Italian dishes and so within our family we still perform Italian traditions. He cooks mostly Italian food and not Italian American, just to be clear and we had PROSECCO. When we were in Italy, he learnt how to cook properly Italian food. Our food is linked to Italian culture. (He is the one who cooks because I'm not a good at all, but I know what I want to eat)

Do you know Sunday Dinner tradition? Did you perform - still performing it?

Oh yes, the huge meal altogether, It is a tradition that Italian Americans kept alive for a while. My grandparents did that every Sunday. At that time, I didn't think too much about that because that it was the normal way of living. My mother would cook a PRIMO and a SECONDO, and I never knew until the first time I went to Italy that that's was the reason why she did it. That was the real Italian style not just my family style. And my grandfather and I were used to playing CARTE, you know like BRISCOLA, SCOPA. All the time, really all the time. And I have very strong memories of families' weddings here as well; I remember tables full of Italian food. And with my uncles, who were born in Italy as well, I was used to playing MORRA. And even if they weren't speaking Italian during Sunday Dinner they were calling the dishes with their Italian names. I loved it I loved that moment with all my family.

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about Italian food?

Delicious, absolutely delicious. I never get tired of Italian food. My husband and I, we agree out of all the cuisine, that we will never get tired of Italian food. And what I eat Italian food, well, it means that my tradition is still alive. It's like being linked to your past through food. It's a memory of my family I don't have any more, and anytime I go out with Italian American friends, food is always a good excuse to talk about how we grew up. Especially because they grew up on the east coast, so they have different regional traditions. For me, food is much more than just food. It is the whole life. Is the company, is the taste, is the smell, is the nostalgia.

Do you cook Italian food, do you know Italian recipes? What does the Italian food mean for you?

My husband does, I'm the one who eats. I avoid the kitchen. He cooks a lot of Italian recipes that he had discovered, but he also cooked the recipes that he learnt from my mother or aunt or grandmother. So he helps me to keep alive those families traditions

Do you think you eat the real/authentic Italian food at Italian restaurants here? Can you recognize if the food that they serve is the real one or not?

I'm able to distinguish between Italian food and Italian American food. We eat authentic Italian food. When I go to a hypothetical Italian restaurant here in the US, I always look at the menu, the ingredients, and the taste, of course. You know, the Italian American food is always heavier. It's always a combination of meat and something else together while the Italian food is not. But you can see the differences from the way how food is prepared and served as well

Are there Italian shops here around? Do you buy Italian food in Italian grocery stores?

Yes, there are, and I buy it. I can get as much Italian food as I got when I was younger, and I was living in the north, but we do get cheese, PROSCIUTTO. We do bring spices from Italy when we travel. Plus we buy PASTA, and we also make pasta. Homemade pasta

Do you think Italian food represent a healthy way of eating?

Absolutely. And in fact when we go to Italy my husband lose his weight, and it's not because he doesn't eat but because we eat fresh food all the time. You do not have to be on a diet in Italy; you don't worry about that.

Respondent 7

Where are you from, how old are you and which Italian American Generation are you?

I'm originally from State of Rhode Island. I'm 79 years old. My family comes from CALABRIA and CAMPANIA

Tell me something about your root?

My maternal grandfather was the illegitimate child of a nun and a priest. I was able to find the logs (records) in Ellis Island for all of my grandparents except for him. But he was a great man. A great man. Both sides of the family were relatively poor. Here in U.S., they were living in the second floor, full of people, cold water and so on, no really good living conditions but when they were still alive my father and I were used to visiting them every Sunday, and you know what, we were used to wearing suits as a sign of respect. Today in this society we became so informal, but my grandfather taught me the respect, especially for old people. I raised my children according to what my grandfather taught me.

Do you keep in touch with your relatives in Italy or do you keep in touch with Italy in any way?

No really. When my mother was still alive (they made a couple of trips in Italy with my father) she made contact, but she never gave me the information.

Have you ever been to Italy? Have you travelled to the area where your family came from? What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about Italy?

Yes, I went back where they lived in Italy, especially in REGGIO CALABRIA, something like 10 years ago, but I didn't know the specific village. When I think about Italy, I always remember those places. I remember the first time we went there I told my wife, look at that vegetable garden; oh my God, it is totally like my grandfather one.

What language do you speak at home? Do you speak Italian or there are any situations when you can speak Italian, if yes who touch you Italian?

Listen to me: For those of us who were the second generation, we spent a lot of time with grandparents, and they wanted us, the grandchildren, to be Americans because life was easier here, then in Italy. They didn't speak Italian to us, so we don't know it unless we studied the language one we grew up. Plus they couldn't speak Italian properly, so what I know are just a few words which are dialects. So I do remember some words, but that's so far in the past.

So are you proud of your heritage?

Very much

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about Italian food? Do you have any tradition that you practice at home with your family related to food?

Well, the best memories I have are related to Sundays and holidays or celebrations. During Christmas, my grandmother house was a mess, a madhouse. During holidays as well. She had ten children plus all the relatives who were living in the same street. A beautiful mess. I grew up in a neighborhood which was ethnic and only when I became an adult I realized that no everybody here ate Italian food. By the time I went to school, I looked around, and I understood that everything wasn't like that. Plus, I attended a Catholic school where 80% of the students were Irish, and they were eating stuff I didn't even know. And I was wondering, where is the PASTA and why it takes less than four hours to finish your dinner with your family. When I go to Italian restaurants nowadays, I still expect to be there for at least 4 hours.

Do you feel more Italian or American?

American, I'm proud of my roots, but probably American

Do you know Sunday Dinner tradition? Did you perform still performing it?

Yes, I do, and we did, but nowadays it's more difficult to keep those kinds of traditions alive. I have three children, and they all live in the other American States, so you do Sunday Dinner bit the whole family just once in a while, but when I was little, for sure. And we were Italian food. I still remember my grandfather talking about just American celebrations like Thanksgiving; he was you used to say. What's this fucking turkey stuff, by the way. But when my children were kids we had Sunday Dinners. Every Sunday and with Italian food

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about Italian food?

Just, oh my god! No words. When we talk about Italian food, I always remember my maternal father. (Illegitimate one). My family from both of the side they were living in the same little Italy, and we were spending a lot of time together. And my maternal grandfather used to cultivate his garden: vegetables, tomatoes, flowers, all the stuff he was used to cultivating when he was in Italy. We had six different type of fruit trees, and at the age of five, he asked me to help him to collect the grapes and got me to do the grapes press (pressing grapes).

Do you cook Italian food, do you know Italian recipes? What does the Italian food mean for you?

I do cook Italian food and, again, if I think about Italian food I think about my childhood and my grandfather. You know what, I told you my father used to make wine. We were pretty young when he died (I was around 10) and he was used to intimidating his grandchildren saying: If you are not a good boy today, no wine for you. And wine, he was used to saying, makes you stronger. And I did the same with my kids. I mean, just a sip when they were that young, but I think is part of the heritage. Yes, young lady, you are bringing tears to my eyes now :) Food is a big memory for me. Especially OSSOBUCO and I was used to eat that when I was young. When my grandmother was used to put bins in the water to get dry, I knew she was going to cook Ossobuco. The meal of my past and present is PROSCIUTTO CRUDO, CAPRESE salad and a good fresh slice of bread and of course, a good bottle of wine. If you served that to me, I'm fine. I'm happy, simple stuff, good stuff. And food is also a family gathering. One of my best memory ever is about once when I was in Italy, and I was in Siena, and I was sitting in this table outside in the sun, with my wife, and we had olives, cheese and we were there killing two bottles of fucking good wine.

Do you think you eat the real/authentic Italian food at Italian restaurants here? Can you recognize if the food that they serve is the real one or not?

I know what they are serving I do understand when the dish is not Italian, and even from the menu, I can understand if it's Italian or Italian American or a fake. Plus I have always been interested in the Italian food which wasn't part of the southern tradition, so basically my heritage. Plus, you know, I was an accountant before, and I had to invite clients for dinner, and I was used to going to different Italian restaurants and choose a different kind of dishes, especially from the North Italian cuisine just to understand the difference and how many diverse types of food you have in Italy. The cooks maybe came from different Italian regions, or they were trained to be specialized in a specific dish from a specific area of Italy. Plus sometimes we are even talking about the same dish but prepared differently. I do love that. It gives you the insight of who you are, what your identity is. I do watch the shows about Chef Cosimo Battaglia, from Calabria and he always cooks different dishes from different Italian regions. You know there is an Italian restaurant here, and I'm used to going there. Once, I was with a client, and he saw a dish in the table close to us, and he asked the owner that he wanted that dish but wasn't on the menu, and the owner said: Look, I'm sorry, that dish is just for regular client like Richard, so basically for family So, yes, I do know what I'm talking about in term of real Italian food

Are there Italian shops here around? Do you buy Italian food in Italian grocery stores?

There are few here around but not that much like up North, but yes, and I look like the small one who looks so authentic because they remind me my childhood. Like when with my grandfather we were used to going to this Italian meat shop, and you could see all the animals' dead and the pigs hanging in the store. So gross for a kid. I was frisking out. But now it makes me smile. I do like these Italian open markets as well because everything is fresh

Respondent 8

Where are you from, how old are you and which Italian American Generation are you?

I'm from NY, and I'm (AROUND 67 – Not sure), and I'm 3 Italian American generation

Tell me something about your root?

My parents were born here in U.S. while my grandparents were born in Italy. My father's family was born in CALABRIA while my mother's family comes from FOGGIA, PUGLIA. They born came here to work. They were pretty poor, all of them. My grandparents once in U.S they keep cultivating a vegetable garden with Tomatoes and so on. They were farmers in Italy; they wanted to had their garden in America is well and cultivate what they were cultivating when they were still living in Italy

Do you keep in touch with your relatives in Italy or do you keep in touch with Italy in any way? Have you ever been to Italy? Have you travelled to the area where your family came from?

We have been to Italy, and we lived in Italy as well, and we also went to see where our grandparents were born, you know, the PAESE and we have friends there but know real connects regarding relatives

What language do you speak at home? Do you speak Italian or there are any situations when you can speak Italian, if yes who touch you Italian?

Sì, IN PASSATO NOI PARLARE BENE MA ORA NON-HO POSSIBILITÀ DI PARLARE MOLTO.

Where do you come from by the way? Oh, Marche region SI MANGIA BENE. We haven't learnt Italian thanks to our families in general because they weren't speaking the proper Italian but the dialects of their region. We learnt Italian in Italy when we lived there

Looking back at your childhood, what do you remember about your Italian culture? What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about Italy?

We both were living close to our grandparents' house so we were spending time with there and we remember the grandmothers were great cooks. They were speaking a very bad English, but they were amazing cooks, and that was the of how they communicated with us, somehow and my father made a very good wine

So are you proud of your heritage?

We are very proud of our Italian heritage, and that's why we also joined the Italian American Society. I was one of the founders

Do you feel more Italian or American?

Americans

Do you know Sunday Dinner tradition? Did you still perform it? What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about Italian food? Do you have any tradition that you practice at home with your family related to food?

When we talk about Sunday Dinner, first of all, I remember my grandparents and my family in general when I was a kid. But yes we have a strong attachment to Italy especially because our son is living in Tuscany. And we have 5 children and grandchildren as well, and because we are both Italian American we always wanted to keep alive the tradition and to pass the tradition to our children and grandchildren although nowadays is more difficult because they all live in different part of the country or out of U.S., For instance, all my children speak a bit of Italian. Of course, they don't have The same roots we had. They belong to another generation, but it seems that they started to appreciate their heritage and they know bringing their kids to Italy as well and make them aware of their family stories

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about Italian food?

Pasta

Do you feel more Italian or American

We, we are Americans we have Italian roots we love our heritage, but we are Americans

Do you cook Italian food, do you know Italian recipes? What does the Italian food mean for you?

We do, and our children do too. We keep alive some traditional recipes as our grandmothers were used to cook, for example, LASAGNA with meatballs and the Italian food is my soul is my past and my present as well.

Do you think you eat the real/authentic Italian food at Italian restaurants here? Can you recognize if the food that they serve is the real one or not?

We go to Italian restaurants pretty often, and yes we can recognize if they are authentic or not especially because we normally go to Italian restaurants where they cook homemade PASTA and BRUSCHETTA. Of course, you can find Italian restaurant which is actually Italian American and their cuisine is based on the American taste. They use a lot of sauces, and the dishes are super big. Too much tomato sauce. They cook what the Americans expect them to cook and it's not the Italian one. PIZZA MARGHERITA with a lot of tomato on the top, not Italian at all.

Are there Italian shops here around? Do you buy Italian food in Italian grocery stores?

We do, and there are few, and they cook homemade stuff as well. But we don't buy the prepared food we cook at home.

Do you think Italian food represent a healthy way of eating?

Absolutely. Fresh and genuine. Ok CI VEDIAMO PRESTO

Respondent 9

Where are you from, how old are you and which Italian American Generation are you?

I'm originally from State of NY (Brooklyn). I'm SESSANTADUE years old. My family came from Calabria I guess PARENTI and from Sicily, SICILIA somewhere in MARSALA neighborhood

Tell me something about your root?

I guess for economic opportunities.

Do you keep in touch with your relatives in Italy or do you keep in touch with Italy in any way?

No, no that I know. I think we still have relatives, but I have never been in contact with them. My cousin, on the other side, he has been in contact with my mother's family, and for my father's family they tried to reestablish the connections decades ago, actually, but I don't know them

Have you ever been to Italy? Have you travelled to the area where your family came from? What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about Italy?

Yes, several times but never where my family grew up, honestly.

What language do you speak at home? Do you speak Italian or there are any situations when you can speak Italian, if yes who touch you Italian?

I can order a menu in Italian ;) but I'm a bit deaf, so it is complicated for me, especially in another language. Plus I only knew my grandmother from my father's side. The others died when I was pretty young, or I wasn't already

born. My mother and father spoke Italian, but they didn't speak Italian to us. Plus, regarding memories, as well, I don't have vivid memories of my parents or my grandmother talking about that. My parents were Americanized and my grandmother she could barely speak English, and she was speaking a broken Italian somehow as well because she was speaking dialect at that time. I recently started to investigate about my family because I didn't know anything about that

So are you proud of your heritage?

Yes, absolutely. I joined the Italian American society because it is an opportunity being with people that are interested in their past and them like Italian culture. I'm trying to reinforce my heritage. Especially because in the US there was always a prejudice against Italian. You know all MAFIA. But we are becoming more aware of that and more proud.

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about Italian food? Do you have any tradition that you practice at home with your family related to food?

I do remember Sunday Dinner with my family, but that changed as well, over time. We were used to cooking a mixture of Italian and American food during those celebrations.

Do you feel more Italian or American?

I'm proud of my Italian heritage but American, yes. I grew up as an American. My parents wanted to be Americans

Do you know Sunday Dinner tradition? Did you still perform it?

During Sundays Dinner with my family and my grandmother, we were having a different kind of mixed Italian food. But I still remember RAVIOLI with tomatoes sauce or MANICOTTI something like that. Other time we would have homemade Italian bread.

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about Italian food?

Well is the atmosphere related to food. The family connection, you know. You know, wasn't just good food, was the celebration of all the families. We were all pretty close, and the food was a way to stay together. Nice way to grow up. I do remember that somehow the food I was eating at home was the difference from the one my American friends were eating with their families, but as I said our food was a mixed, so I wasn't shocked. Not that much, btw.

Do you cook Italian food, do you know Italian recipes? What does the Italian food mean for you?

I don't remember properly the Italian recipes they used to cook, but I do remember that my father cooked the best meatballs I have ever tried in my whole life. My wife wasn't an Italian American but I remember that were we going to Italian restaurants or Italian American restaurants were judging the meatballs according to my father recipe.

Do you think you eat the real/authentic Italian food at Italian restaurants here? Can you recognize if the food that they serve the real one or not?

A lot depends on where you go. We spent a lot of time in Italy, and we can more or less recognize if the food we are eating the real Italian one. There are a few Italian restaurants down here that they do a very good job regarding producing food which is similar to what we ate were we were kids, or we were in Italy. But it depends on the restaurants, of course. We like to say we have to look far and wild to find an Italian dish that can be compared to an Italian dish in Italy. Plus is not just food, is the atmosphere you find in the restaurant. The kind of environment that reminds you Italy. But a lot of Americans still get confused about what it is a really good Italian food and what is not. We have friends who they like whatever pasta the restaurants serve to them, as long as is covered by reading sauce. You don't find that attitude among Italian Americans or in Italy. Just a story, a few years ago we were in Lucca and I and my wife were in this restaurant in a table close to another Italian couple. And we their pasta and in that dish the tomato sauce was light, was measured, moderated as it should be. When they brought the same dish to my wife, it was much heavier regarding tomato sauce, and my wife said oh god no, it's too much. You know, they assumed that just because we were Americans, we wanted a dish of pasta covered by Sauce. But, that's real, that's what Americans want. Not me. That's not Italian food.

Are there Italian shops here around? Do you buy Italian food in Italian grocery stores?

Yes, I do buy Italian food in Italian shop. There is one called Neapolitan delicatessen or something like that, and I buy olive oil or balsamic vinegar or even wine. They also sell prepared food for people to take away but we do cook at home we don't buy prepared food we do enjoy to prepare it at home. My wife, even if she is not Italian American, she loved experimenting food especially Italian food

Do you think Italian food represent a healthy way of eating?

Yes, especially over there where all the food seems to be fresh. Here we eat differently. It's healthy as long as you don't overdo. We do overdo here a lot.

Respondent 10

Where are you from, how old are you and which Italian American Generation are you?

I'm originally from Rhode Island. I'm 79. My family came from BARGA in Tuscany, province of Lucca. Very lovely

Tell me something about your root?

My father was born here. His father came here at the turn of the 29th century. I never found out why they Y moved here. I supposed for a better life. He came here with two brothers. 2 of them settled in Rhode Island, one in California. My grandparents were very well educated not like the average of the Italians of that time. They were both musicians. In Italy, their parents had landlords they had a lot of olive trees. My uncles as well, he was a painter and another a superintended in a factory, and so all the components of my family were somehow professionals when they came, and they managed to find a good job while the other Italians were working mainly in constructions. The only thing that was available if you were unskilled. Plus most of them came from the South. I know because I grew up in a very ethnic neighborhood and my friends know my parents and grandparents pretty well.

Do you keep in touch with your relatives in Italy or do you keep in touch with Italy in any way? Have you ever been to Italy? Have you travelled to the area where your family came from?

I have relatives in Italy. I lived in Barga for six months back to 1981. I took a sabbatical and went over there. At that time there was something like 19 people with the surname TURICCHI. And it was strange for me because I grew up here surrounded by a lot of Italian or Italian Americans but I didn't know anybody named like that. I went back to BARGA last year, and you know what, there was just one left. All the young people left. They went to college, and then they found a job outside the village. And the only TURICCHI lady left is now 93 years old. The story is going to die with her. However, when I went to BARGA for six months, I lived with some of my relatives. It was a wonderful experience, but now they are all gone. It's sad.

What language do you speak at home? Do you speak Italian or there are any situations when you can speak Italian, if yes who touch you Italian?

Well not really or not that well. When I was there, I was communicating with my broken Italian, and some translators were helping me because most of the family couldn't speak Italian. By the time I left Italy, after six months, I could have a sort of conversation with them. You know. OGNI GIORNO 5 PAROLE. But I didn't have the chance to keep practicing my Italian, and when I recently came back, I had someone who could speak Italian properly and was helping me.

Looking back at your childhood, what do you remember about your Italian culture? What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about Italy?

I remember holidays mostly or ceremonies where there were always a lot of people, a lot of food and wine and music of course. My aunt was playing the piano and my uncle singing. My relatives were all there. Big family meal, you know We were eating Italian food. I grew up with Italian food. Prince Spaghetti -...oh and Wednesday is Prince Maccheroni day. Trust me, you can check on Google or the radio. but we had a lot of ethnic food, like BACCALA or PASTA few times in a week

So are you proud of your heritage?

I think so. I grew up in many Italian families. But you know, I didn't think a lot about ethnicity at that time because my parents wanted me to speak English and be American. I went to a school where there weren't a lot of Italian (private school only boys). Maybe we were 3. And my grandparents at that time were living in NY, not with me. We were visiting them, of course, but I didn't spend so much time with them. They were able to speak very good English. My grandfather's brother he was the president of Italian son of America, the association and he run an Italian school, as well. See, everybody but me. But I went to a school where I didn't belong to any Italian organizations and so on. Even in college, there were only a few Italians. Most of the people over there were Irish or English, so my ethnicity was never an issue. Then a moved to Texas to teach at the university and over there no don't have ethnic groups. Just people from Texas. There wasn't such thing as Italian, Greek etc. I came back to my ethnicity in Naples. Here is pretty strong the feeling. We have 500 members in our society and I was the president before as well.

I wanted to connect with other Italians, and in this organization, I felt very included, and for the first time in my American life, I felt I could share my past with someone who experienced the same. We have similarities and food for sure helps a lot to connect. I'm very sad that my children live in Texas and they can't have that.

Do you feel more Italian or American?

Much more American. I wouldn't identify myself as Italian, but I'm proud of the culture. I also touch Italian music at university, like VIVALDI, I do love the Italian culture, but yes, my answer is American because my parents knew that too be successful here; you have to be educated and act like an American.

Do you know Sunday Dinner tradition? Did you perform it? What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about Italian food? Do you have any tradition that you practice at home with your family related to food?

Especially, my father, he was pretty Americanized because he went to school here and his influence on me it was related to the possibility to get a good education and find my place here in the US. So we had Sunday Dinner my father especially had Sunday Dinner, and the parents wanted them to perform Italian traditions at home more than my parents expected from us, as their children.

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about Italian food?

I think red sauce, because I make a wonderful homemade red sauce. I was used to cultivating the vegetable garden and grew tomatoes and made tomatoes sauce and freeze it for the rest of the year. Here we buy the tomatoes, and it is not the same Food is my first connection with my heritage and reminds me when I was a kid. It called Nostalgia food. Even if I don't have my mother's recipes anymore or my grandparents I still trying to cool like them.

Do you cook Italian food, do you know Italian recipes? What does the Italian food mean for you?

I don't know if my father remembered proper recipes, but he remembered having a certain thing like sausages that her mother made in a particular way. MACCHERONI in a fried sauce it was something that he was used to eating when he was a kid, and he keeps cooking for us as well. It was the Italian food he remembered from his childhood. BTW, I do cook Italian food. At least the food it always been part of my lifestyle. Italian food is my diet, and it was even in Texas. My kids all love pasta and so even when I grow up, and I left my family I kept cooking Italian food for my family and me.

Do you think you eat the real/authentic Italian food at Italian restaurants here? Can you recognize if the food that they serve is the real one or not?

My kids like to go to Italian restaurants, so we eat Italian food at home, and we go to restaurants as well. You want to smell the food and see it and touch it. We do love the atmosphere, not just the good food I can tell you if the food in restaurants is the real one or not. When I go to a restaurant here, I want to get to know the Owner and the cooks. I know pretty well this restaurant form ABRUZZO, called Mino restaurant, Mino RISTORANTE. They are two brothers, and he is very authentic, and they make their own pasta and you know they have a guitar, I mean the strings and the press the pasta with the strings like in the Italian tradition. This is real Italian, and we look for places like that, very authentic and I want to get to know the Italians over there. There are a couple of restaurants where the owner is not Italian but the cook it is, or maybe he has been trained in Italy, and they are really good as well. So I look for food that I will expect to find in Italy. We go back to Italy every two years. Here there are a lot of Italian restaurants. Once DIVIETO, it's only two weeks old and I went there, and the menu is very Italian. I can tell if it's similar to the Italian one or not. On the other side, if you want bad Italian food go to Hotels or country club. Maybe people think they are eating Italian food over there but not at all, but they are running a business which is not just related to food. But here around you can find a lot of Italian restaurants. We are very fortunate here. We also have three organizations here related to Italy (and they pay fees to be members) The area is very well educated, and they travel a lot, and they are pretty aware of what is Italian or not. You know it a good play for Italian restaurants because although Florida wasn't the more famous Italian destination during the mass immigration and now all the people who live up to the north they are moving here to enjoy the sun and their retirement, and they have money to spend

Are there Italian shops here around? Do you buy Italian food in Italian grocery stores?

Yes, totally a love them

Do you think Italian food represent a healthy way of eating?

For sure. Organic, fresh, high quality food

Appendix

Italian Restaurant Interviews: Case Study II

Respondent 1

Da dove vieni, Quanti anni hai? In quale parte dell'Italia sei nato e/o cresciuto? Perché hai deciso di trasferirti in Florida e perché proprio a Naples?

Sono nato a Catania, in Sicilia e ho 37 anni (38 a novembre), Mi sono trasferito in Florida nel 2002.

Prima di trasferirti a Naples lavoravi già nel business della ristorazione? Se sì, come è cambiata la gestione manageriale e il rapporto con la clientela?

Prima lavoravo nel settore della ristorazione a Catania, precisamente per la catena dell'hotel Excelsior. Mi hanno suggerito di andare fuori un anno per imparare l'inglese perché volevano farmi crescere. Così mi hanno fatto fare il colloquio per lavorare come cameriere nei ristoranti Italiani a Disney World ad Orlando e sono partito per la Florida. Quando il contratto è scaduto non è stato facile tornare nella nostra realtà e quindi ho deciso di rimanere in America. Inizialmente sono andato in California, poi Messico per imparare lo spagnolo, poi ho lavorato come cameriere nelle navi da Crociera e alla fine, tramite il ristorante per cui lavoravo, mi hanno mandato a Miami e a Naples, lavorando sempre nel settore della ristorazione. Ho cominciato come cameriere oggi sono socio della compagnia (diversi ristoranti BICE in Italia)

Come è cambiata la gestione manageriale e il rapporto con la clientela?

Lavorando all'Excelsior a Catania ero già abituato ad una clientela internazionale più che ad un'atmosfera domestica, quindi il cambiamento del rapporto, soprattutto con la clientela, non è stato drastico

Cerchi di adattare la tua cucina ai gusti di una clientela americana?

A mio avviso, è l'Americano oggi ad essere cambiato. Non siamo solo noi che ci siamo adattati. Oggi l'Americano conosce abbastanza bene la cucina italiana. E' stato in posti che prima era impossibile per lui raggiungere e ha assaggiato piatti tipici di paesini che prima non poteva assolutamente conoscere. La loro cultura culinaria e quindi la loro educazione culinaria è cambiata rispetto a 20/30 anni fa, quando erano molto più ignoranti. Oggi, al contrario, ci troviamo quasi a disagio quando ci dicono che quel piatto della situazione non è definibile come "autentico piatto Italiano". L'arancino siciliano prima lo conoscevano solo al sud Italia, poi al Nord ed ora anche in America e, se hanno viaggiato, sanno anche dirti quale sia il posto migliore dove comprarlo. Gli Americani, negli ultimi anni, hanno cominciato a viaggiare di più, soprattutto non solo per vedere monumenti ma per fare esperienze turistiche da foodies della situazione. Ho colleghi a Taormina che lavorano molto con la clientela americana, proponendo scuole di cucina ed esperienze pratiche (come si fa la pasta, come si compra il pesce al mercato). Gli americani oggi cercano questo tipo di esperienze perché amano l'Italia e vogliono "viverla" direttamente.

Cosa cercano i clienti Americani quando vengono nel tuo ristorante?

Cercano un'esperienza e non solo una degustazione culinaria fine a se stessa. L'Americano cerca l'esperienza dell'Italianità, va per un'esperienza italiana. La differenza tra l'Italiano e l'americano è che l'Italiano va al ristorante prettamente per mangiare, mentre l'Americano vuole portare gli amici in quel posto e sentirsi in Italia, perché ama il nostro paese. In più deve essere collegato con buon cibo e buon vino. Tutta l'esperienza deve funzionare perché se il mangiare è buono, ma il servizio o l'ambiente non è curato, non torneranno mai. In Italia se il mangiare è molto buono, anche se il servizio è scadente o l'atmosfera non è bellissima o il design non è curato, alla fine magari ci torno lo stesso. Loro pagano per godere a 360° dell'esperienza dell'Italia.

Quanto del cibo che cucini è composto da ingredienti che possono essere considerati 100% italiani? I tuoi fornitori sono Italiani o Americani ?

E' molto più facile oggi, anche in Florida, importare prodotti dall'Italia. Ma tanti prodotti, soprattutto freschi come la stracciatella o la burrata sono già qui. Ci sono tanti imprenditori Italiani che producono in loco. E' molto più

facile per noi comprarla dal produttore italiano qui a Miami che esportarla e spesso è anche più buono. In più, lo stesso produttore Italiano in Florida usa prodotti presi dall'Italia. Quindi non solo è facile importare, ma per prodotti con breve scadenza è facile e sicuramente più intelligente acquistarli in loco. Io compro per esempio la stracciatella da un produttore italiano che vive a Miami e che a sua volta usa latte esclusivamente italiano, per fare un esempio. Parliamo sicuramente di cibo di qualità, e di qualità italiana, per intenderci

Siete un ristorante a carattere regionale o italiano?

Nasciamo con un carattere regionale, anche perché gli italiani sono legati alla propria terra e alla propria tradizione regionale, ma cerchiamo di offrire un menù abbastanza variegato, per quanto fisso perché legato ad una tradizione anche storica. Bice è una catena di ristoranti che in Italia ha radici antiche

Quali sono i piatti più richiesti dalla clientela americana?

In termini di percentuali di vendita, la pasta rimane sicuramente il primo piatto, che è anche quello della tradizione e non per forza il cibo ricercato. In più la nostra pasta è fatta in casa ogni mattina quindi si vende bene come prodotto. In più abbiamo creato un menù che soddisfa un po' tutti, da pollo al pesce, antipasti particolari ecc ecc. Il piatto tradizionale classico va sempre di moda e piace sempre ed identifica bene il piatto made in Italy

Perché secondo voi gli americani sono così attratti dal cibo italiano e dall'esperienza domestica ad esso correlata?

Quando vivevo a Catania c'erano parole del dialetto siciliano (dialetto dei nonni) che io non conoscevo e ho sentito per la prima volta solo qui in America. E mi ricordo che chiedevo a mio madre, ma come è possibile che qui conoscono un dialetto siciliano che io non capisco. E lei rispondeva dicendo, sai quello è il dialetto antico, quello che parlava tua nonna e che oggi non si usa più, ma che magari durante la migrazione i siciliani hanno portato in America ed ora è diventato parte del retaggio culturale e si è cristallizzato. (anche perché non soggetto a nuove modifiche istantanee). Questo per dire che, come nel caso della lingua anche nel mangiare in Italia c'è stata un'evoluzione. La cucina come la lingua si evolve velocemente, è sempre in movimento e va avanti.

Qui in America, in qualche modo è successo lo stesso rispetto al passato, ma se parliamo soprattutto di cucina etnica all'estero, che è per natura abbastanza conservativa, il processo va molto più al lento. Questo per dire che l'Americano è attratto dalla cucina della tradizione che è il simbolo dell'Italianità e molto più difficilmente si apre al cambiamento. Anche perché questo cambiamento non appartiene alla sua storia, ma è parte della storia moderna dell'Italia, quindi cerca ancora quel prodotto della tradizione e quella esperienza più tradizionale.

Allo stesso tempo, però, c'è da dire che ultimamente con i mezzi di informazione e l'invasione dei nuovi italiani in America, l'evoluzione della cucina italiana nel tempo è più percepibile. Quindi anche noi ci siamo un po' adattati. Pensa solo al fatto che Ristorante BICE è un ristorante che è nato nel 1926 e ha avuto sempre quel menù e così è stato importato in America ma ora ci stiamo aprendo anche a questa ventata di interesse verso l'innovazione. Il menù fisso funziona bene perché presenta tutti i piatti che sono riconoscibili nell'immaginario Americano del cibo italiano, ma la clientela comincia a richiedere anche l'innovazione. Vuole sperimentare ed essere al passo con i tempi

Che ne pensi del cibo "italoamericano" che "sfrutta" il carattere italiano ma di italiano ha molto poco, non tanto su un discorso di qualità dei prodotti, ma di autenticità delle ricette?

Noi Italiani tendiamo a criticarli, giustamente, ma io sinceramente li ringrazio, perché in qualche modo è grazie a questi italoamericani, che il nome ITALIANO all'estero è sempre stato al top. E se oggi i ristoranti italiani in America sono sempre i più ricercati, è anche grazie a loro. Anche se c'è da vergognarsi di fronte alle Fettucine Alfredo, che io stesso mi vergogno di presentare nel mio menù, quando lavoravo al ristorante della Disney il più venduto era proprio il piatto Fettucine Alfredo e lì era il ristorante etnico più gettonato e con più clienti. E gli Americani quando venivano a mangiare da noi, poi mi dicevano che volevano andare in Italia a scoprire il piatto vero italiano del nostro paese. Dobbiamo ringraziarli di non averci fatto dimenticare.

Quanto utilizzi la lingua italiana nel menù e quanto giochi con la tua italianità nel rapporto con i clienti? Che tipo di codici rituali e simboli utilizzate nel ristorante per marcare la vostra tradizione etnica

Il 90 % del personale è Italiano quindi fra di noi parliamo in Italiano e paradossalmente anche l'Americano deve imparare quei 4 termini perché è sempre coinvolto in un ambiente italiano, anche linguisticamente parlando. Nella descrizione del menù sono molto attento, inserisco molte parole in Italiano e sto attento che siano scritte correttamente. Anche alle virgole. Odio vedere nei ristoranti italoamericani che il menù non rispetta la grammatica, anche alimentare, italiana. Ossobucco, con 2 c invece che 1 è un errore tipico da ristorante italoamericano. Sicuramente utilizziamo dei simboli estetici e diamo molta importanza al design e all'atmosfera, cercando di ricreare il più possibile l'idea di Italianità. Non abbiamo bandiere perché è illegale esporle senza quella Americana accanto, ma lavoriamo molto sulla simbologia che c'è dietro il concetto Italia

Siete a conoscenza del fenomeno dell'Italian Sounding (molto diffuso in America)? Se sì cosa ne pensate?

La colpa la do sempre all'Italia che non sa tutt'ora proteggere le sue ricchezze e questo non ha facilitato l'esportazione, quindi l'Americano che vuole quel prodotto e che capisce che quel prodotto funziona, se lo crea lui. Se non riesco a comprarlo perché l'Italia mi rende la vita difficile, vengo a Las Vegas. L'America non aspetta l'Italia. In Italia compriamo i succhi d'arancia dalla Spagna quando abbiamo i contadini siciliani con arance uniche al mondo. Ancora non abbiamo capito che è necessario investire sulle nostre risorse. Anche oggi si inizia ad avere una maggiore consapevolezza. Sappiamo qual è il problema, prima non avevamo consapevolezza nemmeno di quello. Quando ero piccolo il vino del vicino di casa era homemade ma non riusciva ad imbottigliarlo per venderlo all'estero, quindi si consumava nel quartiere. Oggi questi vigneti stanno diventando delle aziende e oggi è aumentato tanto l'esportazione del vino regionale. Ci sono vini siciliani che anni fa non avevo mai visto. I presupposti per ritornare a galla ci sono (i finanziamenti pure se non se li mangiano loro) bisogna investire e investire sui giovani. Qui sono diventato manager giovanissimi in Italia starei ancora a fare il cameriere. Ma io volevo diventare un imprenditore e oggi do lavoro a 150 persone e sono orgoglioso anche di dare una mano agli Italiani che oggi vengono a fare business in America.

Respondent 2

Da dove vieni, Quanti anni hai? In quale parte dell'Italia sei nato e-o cresciuto? Perché hai deciso di trasferirti in Florida e perché proprio a Naples?

Storia lunga. Comunque io sono nato a Potenza, in Basilicata e ho fatto la scuola alberghiera a Pesaro, nelle Marche e ho lavorato in Italia e ho fatto molte stagioni in Europa. Mi sono sposato 20 anni fa con una domenicana e per stare più vicino a casa sua, abbiamo deciso di trasferirci 20 anni fa in America. Avevo amici in Florida e ho prima iniziato a lavorare come cuoco con loro e poi ho aperto la mia attività

Prima di trasferirti a Naples lavoravi già nel business della ristorazione? Se sì, come è cambiata la gestione manageriale e il rapporto con la clientela?

Si ho sempre lavorato nel settore della ristorazione ed avevo già esperienza con clienti internazionale

Cerchi di adattare la tua cucina ai gusti di una clientela americana? Siete un ristorante a carattere regionale o italiano? Secondo voi gli Americani sono diventati più consapevoli di ciò che sia il cibo italiano e ciò che non lo sia?

Io ho la fortuna di essere nato in Basilicata dove la cucina è per metà pugliese per metà campana e quindi faccio le sfogliatelle ed altre cose delle diverse tradizioni regionali, cose che qui gli italoamericani non sanno fare e non conoscono nemmeno (pastiera, casatiello) I clienti di oggi non sono i clienti di 15 anni fa. Il food networks, i programmi televisivi di cucina e la possibilità di viaggiare molto di più rispetto al passato hanno permesso di rendere i consumatori americani più consapevoli. Molti di loro capiscono abbastanza la cucina italiana anche se ovviamente non posso generalizzare e molti rimangono legati alla cultura italoamericana e continuano ad associare la cucina italiana a quella cucina falsificata Io faccio la lasagna, le crespelle, la piadina (che non conoscevano qua), le sfogliatelle che non sanno nemmeno pronunciare. Ora i clienti più fedeli vogliono provare gusti nuovi, sono aperti a sperimentare, ma con i clienti meno fedeli non sempre è facile, non sempre riescono ad apprezzare la novità che è per noi tradizione. Io cerco di mantenermi fedele alla tradizione. L'unica cosa italoamericana che tengo è il chicken parmesan poi mi trovo a trattare con clienti che non sanno cosa sia la focaccia di olive fatta in casa, non si fidano e vanno qui accanto da "Domino's" a comprarsi la pizza Io faccio piatti semplici che mi permettono di rimanere legato alla mia tradizione culinaria. Qui non c'è la scuola alberghiera. Qui se vuoi formarti devi pagare un sacco di dollari e non imparano niente, per altro, imparano l'estetica il marketing che sta dietro il cibo

Il vostro personale è Italiano o Americano?

E' a conduzione familiare quindi la base è italiana.

Cosa cercano i clienti Americani quando vengono nel tuo ristorante?

I clienti fedeli vogliono provare le novità e sono aperti ad esempio alla piadina perché è leggera e possono testare l'autenticità del gusto. Vogliono cibi freschi, fatti in casa e leggeri. Quelli più generali, leggono caffè ITALIA ed entrano chiedendo la pizza (che io non faccio) e se provi ad offrire piadina o pane alle olive se ne vanno.

Quanto del cibo che cucini è composto da ingredienti che possono essere considerati 100% italiani? I tuoi fornitori sono Italiani o Americani ?

I miei fornitori sono Americani ma hanno i loro canali in Italia. La mia lasagna e i suoi ingredienti sono genuini, italiani autentici

Quali sono i piatti più richiesti dalla clientela americana?

Lasagne e piatti più famosi, ma alcuni sono anche aperti a sperimentare. Quelli più abituali e consapevoli sono anche interessati a chiedere. Io faccio la pasta e fagioli con salsiccia e pancetta come la faceva mia nonna e loro vogliono sapere la storia e se ci pensi questi sono piatti poveri della tradizione italiana eppure lo apprezzano, provano a rifarla. Però parliamo di una clientela fedele, non la media. Poi qua parliamo anche di una clientela americana che è anziana e nella loro testa hanno la tradizione delle nonne. Noi al ristorante in Italia non mangiamo quasi più la pasta con i fagioli, ma questa è la memoria che hanno

Perché secondo voi gli americani sono così attratti dal cibo italiano?

Perché amano l'Italia in primis e l'idea del cibo italiano. Poi alcuni sono più consapevoli, alcuni non capiscono un cavolo però sono attratti dall'Italianità, solo che qui spesso è falsificata, ovviamente quindi non sanno di cosa parlano

Che ne pensi del cibo "italoamericano" che "sfrutta" il carattere italiano ma di italiano ha molto poco, non tanto su un discorso di qualità dei prodotti, ma di autenticità delle ricette?

Nessuno del personale che sta nel ristorante italoamericano si è formato a scuola, come l'alberghiero per noi. Hanno studiato marketing o l'estetica del piatto ma non sanno cos'è la vera cucina italiana. Mangiano il fegato alla veneziana con l'olio balsamico. Un litro di panna nella pasta amatriciana. Porzioni pesanti, salse incredibili. Si inventano di tutto. Così hanno imparato e hanno falsificato la ricetta. Usano il bacon al posto del guanciale. Distruggono tutto, non conoscono la tradizione, la loro tradizione è italoamericana che non è quella italiana e non vogliono nemmeno pagare uno chef italiano perché il mercato funziona comunque. Qui ci sono tanti ristoranti italiani ma pochi sono gli italiani che fanno gli chef e che vendono prodotti effettivamente italiani. Quindi almeno qui in Florida è ancora forte la cultura italoamericana che gioca sulla simbologia italiana e se non sei un cliente che ha viaggiato e si è educato, associ sempre quel cibo all'Italia e quando vai in un ristorante italiano qui, fai fatica ad adattarti ed ad apprezzare i gusti all'inizio perché sei abituato ad altri sapori, ad altre porzioni ecc ecc

Quanto utilizzi la lingua italiana nel menù e quanto giochi con la tua italianità nel rapporto con i clienti? Che tipo di codici rituali e simboli utilizzate nel ristorante per marcare la vostra tradizione etnica

Sì utilizzo la simbologia italiana. Ho dei quadri fatti da clienti Italiani. Questo ero partigiano. Insomma mi hanno fatto questi quadri con l'immagine di roma, di portofino ecc ecc e questo agli americani piace. Fa marketing perché lo hanno inculcato nell'immaginario culturale, se vogliamo stereotipato. Io e mia moglie parliamo italiano con i nostri figli siamo legati alla tradizione italiana e vogliamo educare il consumatore americano. I miei piatti sono tutti in Italiano poi ovviamente le descrizioni sono in inglese

Siete a conoscenza del fenomeno dell'Italian Sounding (molto diffuso in America)? Se sì cosa ne pensate?

Sì. come concetto sì, lo vedo anche con alcuni fornitori. Non è il discorso di essere o non essere italiano è che provano a venderti prodotti non italiani come se lo fossero e te li fanno pagare come italiani

Respondent 3

Da dove vieni, quanti anni hai? In quale parte dell'Italia sei nato e-o cresciuto? Perché hai deciso di trasferirti in Florida e perché proprio a Naples?

Sono nato in Sicilia ho 38 e vivo in Florida da ormai una decina di anni. Ho vissuto in diverse città della Florida prima di trasferirmi qui. Mi sono trasferito perché non vedevo un futuro in Italia. Dopo anni lavorando come cameriere, quando ho chiesto se potevo avere un aumento o un avanzamento di carriera, mi hanno risposto che dovevo aspettare che il mio collega, un uomo di mezza età, andasse in pensione. Quell'uomo oggi lavora ancora lì, nella stessa posizione, mentre io qui, nel mentre, sono diventato socio del ristorante. Naples è una città ricca e per

ricchi turisti Americani che vengono per godersi il sole o americani ormai in pensione, quindi funziona bene se vuoi aprire un ristorante.

Prima di trasferirti a Naples lavoravi già nel business della ristorazione? Se sì, come è cambiata la gestione manageriale e il rapporto con la clientela?

Anche prima lavoravo nel settore della ristorazione. Mi sono diplomato all'Alberghiero e in generale sono sempre rimasto vicino questo settore lavorativo. Ho lavorato anche in realtà più internazionali, quindi trovarmi di fronte ad una clientela straniera non è stato uno shock.

Cerchi di adattare la tua cucina ai gusti di una clientela americana?

Il cliente Americano è sicuramente diverso dal cliente italiano, ma oggi, in generale, abbiamo tutti una maggiore consapevolezza in merito al cibo e alla sua qualità, nonché tradizione. Almeno per l'americano che viene a mangiare da noi, la cultura italiana tradizionale e non falsata non è più un tabù, come in passato. In più tutti questi programmi come Master Chef e altri programmi di cucina hanno dato forma ad una nuova educazione culinaria di massa, soprattutto nel settore del Food & Beverage. Gli americani oggi hanno anche iniziato a comprare libri sul cibo, ricettari e ad autoformarsi ed aggiornarsi. Quindi conoscono bene il prodotto. Chiaramente, poi, ci sono delle differenze culturali e storiche che non si possono negare, soprattutto su un discorso di imprenditoria e quindi economico. Di conseguenza, magari non parli di piatti che presenterei a mio nonna, (che comunque appartiene ad un'altra cultura alimentare diversa dalla mia) ma sicuramente non è più necessario creare una copia di autenticità, perché quello di cui vogliono fare esperienza è proprio l'Italia, così come. Noi la adattiamo semplicemente alla loro visione del mondo e ai ricordi e alle immagini, anche stereotipate, che hanno dell'Italia, ma non c'è falsificazione. In fondo anche in Italia il cibo si è rinnovato e così i gusti dei clienti, che chiedono sempre nuovi saperi, pur nel rispetto della tradizione

Cosa cercano i clienti Americani quando vengono nel tuo ristorante?

Cercano l'Italia, pagano per vivere quel pezzo di Italianità, che è storicamente fatta da un'imprenditoria familiare, un ambiente accogliente e rustico, una lingua che è diversa dalla loro ma suona affascinante e ovviamente un gusto che è quello del food Made in Italy che è sempre stato il nostro cavallo di battaglia. L'aspetto etnico deve risaltare in tutte le sue forme (visive, gustative, sonore) perché mangiare per loro non è più solo ingerire del buon cibo ma vivere un pezzo di Italia e di storia e cultura italiana, a tavola.

Quanto del cibo che cucini è composto da ingredienti che possono essere considerati 100% italiani? I tuoi fornitori sono Italiani o Americani ?

Dipende da cosa si intende. I miei fornitori sono Italiani, per quanto riguarda il prodotto che importo, ma ci sono alimenti che acquisto qui in America, da produttori italiani che producono e vendono il loro prodotto direttamente negli Stati Uniti. E sono sicuramente prodotti di qualità, fatti anche con materiali presi dall'Italia. Prima l'esportazione del cibo italiano era limitata soprattutto alla parte più nord /est d'America, ma oggi è molto facile anche in Florida trovare canali di importazione o comprare cibo da produttori Italiani che vivono qui. Per qui sì, cerchiamo di usare prodotti italiani. Poi ovvio, se fai la pizza con la nutella e la nutella è prodotta in Canada, è ovvio che non posso dire di comprare il prodotto in Italia o dall'imprenditore etnico italiano a km zero

Siete un ristorante a carattere regionale o italiano?

In teoria il nome stesso dice tutto, ma cerchiamo di offrire una varietà di piatti che va dal nord al sud. Sarebbe troppo limitante fossilizzarsi su un'unica cucina regionale all'estero perché nell'immaginario del cliente Americano non è così automatico associare ogni piatto ad una precisa regione e perché i piatti tradizionali classici sono quelli che hanno fatto del cibo italiano in America un successo. Pizza margherita e Pasta al ragù non moriranno mai. Per cui la base regionale c'è ma si offre un po' di tutto. Nel nostro menù c'è il risotto alla milanese ma offriamo anche l'arancino come antipasto. Oppure abbiamo rigatoni alla siciliana che invece di essere con il pomodoro sono con caponata e ricotta siciliana o pappardelle al ragù che sono più del nord Italiana o orecchiette pugliesi ecc ecc

Quali sono i piatti più richiesti dalla clientela americana?

Come già detto pasta o pizza, pomodoro, sono i fondamenti della cucina italiana. Gli americani amano quell'idea romantica dell'Italia tradizionale. In più sono piatti di base su cui poter inventare altre ricette e storie

Perché secondo voi gli americani sono così attratti dal cibo italiano e dall'esperienza domestica ad esso correlata?

Beh, chiaramente ci sono dei caratteri che permangono e che non si possono cambiare e che sono tipici della loro cultura Italoamericana o della nostra vecchia tradizione ma che è quella che permane nell'immaginario del cliente Americano e che fa vendere. L'Italia non è una catena di Mc Donald, l'Italia è famiglia, è buon cibo della tradizione

è domesticità. In più il cliente americano, per quanto consapevole, ha ancora le sue necessità culturali. Per fare un esempio, in Italia oggi c'è questa nuova tendenza gourmet. Abbiamo iniziato ad offrire questi piatti più minuti, più ricercati, se vogliamo più gustosi. In America non lo apprezzano. Sono abituati a piatti più abbondanti e non riescono ad entrare nel concetto del cibo per "palato fine" o da degustazione presentato in piccole porzioni. Se vuoi vendere ad un cliente Americano, devi dare la porzione giusta. Qui l'abbondanza ancora la fa da padrona.

Per cui noi presentiamo sempre piatti tradizionali, che sono in qualche modo riconoscibili per il cliente. Allo stesso tempo, però, devi essere al passo con i tempi e le nuove tendenze, quindi offriamo tradizione ma con un carattere un po' più vivace, più moderno, più colorato. Presentiamo la tradizione nell'innovazione e al livello di marketing funziona.

Che ne pensi del cibo "italoamericano" che "sfrutta" il carattere italiano ma di italiano ha molto poco, non tanto su un discorso di qualità dei prodotti, ma di autenticità delle ricette...?

Beh, se guardi i loro menù, magari ti senti male, ma li rispetto su un discorso imprenditoriale perché non c'è un ristorante italiano autentico che abbia fatto il boom tanto quanto i ristoranti italoamericani. Oggi ci sono catene di ristoranti italoamericani quotate in borsa come Olive Garden. I ristoranti italiani non sono riusciti a diventare imprenditori di tale successo come gli Italo americani, anche se hanno una lunga tradizione imprenditoriale in Italia. Non hanno avuto o non hanno la possibilità (molti sono anche a produzione domestica). Non sono mai riusciti a fare il salto. Puoi criticare il loro menù, sicuramente, ma come imprenditore li ammiro se guardo i loro numeri

Quanto utilizzi la lingua italiana nel menù e quanto giochi con la tua italianità nel rapporto con i clienti? Che tipo di codici rituali e simboli utilizzate nel ristorante per marcare la vostra tradizione etnica

Al di là del fatto che il personale stesso è per buona parte italiano, ho curato personalmente il design. Cafè Milano presenta una decorazione rustica tipica da paesino perché è quello che attira. L'Italia nasce con la sua tradizione di famiglia e domesticità e l'Americano ama quello, quindi quando viene ama "sentirsi" in Italia. Vogliono sentire parole del menù pronunciate in Italiano, vogliono se vogliamo anche sentire parlare in Italiano, anche se non capiscono. Anche il menù presenta tantissime parole italiane.

Siete a conoscenza del fenomeno dell'Italian Sounding (molto diffuso in America)? Se sì cosa ne pensate?

E' un bel problema ma la colpa è in primis nostra che non sfruttiamo nel giusto modo il nostro potenziale. Anche se stiamo cercando di cambiare e di provare ad investire su nuove realtà imprenditoriali di qualità, siamo ancora anni luce lontani dall'America. E qui non ci aspettano mica. Loro più di noi sanno come far soldi con il nostro potenziale e poi lo rivendono ad un prezzo più economico (ovviamente) e quindi è un problema di consapevolezza del consumatore ma anche nostro, ma non sappiamo veramente gestire le nostre risorse o ce ne accorgiamo quando è troppo tardi

Respondent 4

Da dove vieni, Quanti anni hai? In quale parte dell'Italia sei nato e/o cresciuto? Perché hai deciso di trasferirti in Florida e perché proprio a Naples?

Sono cresciuto a Firenze, in Toscana e sono in America da ormai 20 anni. A Firenze, ormai 34 anni fa, ho conosciuto mia moglie, che è Americana, e dopo qualche anno siamo tornati insieme nella sua terra.

Prima di trasferirti a Naples lavoravi già nel business della ristorazione? Se sì, come è cambiata la gestione manageriale e il rapporto con la clientela?

Diciamo che non lavoravo proprio nel campo della ristorazione ma sicuramente nel settore dell'alimentazione. Ho lavorato per diversi anni come produttore di formaggi, salumi, olio. Ho lavorato anche per diverse grandi aziende, soprattutto nel modenese. In Italia facevo il rappresentante per cui i miei clienti erano tutti italiani. Non ero abituato ad avere un rapporto con la clientela internazionale e all'inizio non è stato facile capire cosa desideravano, come la pensavano ecc ecc

Cerchi di adattare la tua cucina ai gusti di una clientela americana?

Il fatto è che io ho la mia cultura culinaria che è quella italiana, mi sono formato con quelle basi lì ed è difficile per me abbandonarle per mero business. Ovviamente la clientela non è etnica e quindi non culturalmente abituata ai piatti della tradizione italiana nel vero senso della parola, ma vanno educati a riscoprire quei gusti. Quindi semmai sono loro che si adattano alla mia cucina. Questa è la cucina con cui son cresciuto. Questo so fare.

Siete un ristorante a carattere regionale o italiano? Secondo voi gli Americani sono diventati più consapevoli di ciò che sia il cibo italiano e ciò che non lo sia?

Dico solo che quando sono venuto qui, 20 anni fa, la situazione era diversa. Anche gli italoamericani che ho conosciuto, molti di loro non erano neanche mai andati in Italia. La loro cultura era tutta americana, compresa quella culinaria perché quella italoamericana è chiaramente qualcosa di diverso da quella italiana. I primi anni non potevi nemmeno trovare una mozzarella fresca in Florida, ora sicuramente la situazione è un po' cambiata. Per quanto riguarda la mia cucina, posso dirti che in linea generale la mia formazione è legata alla cucina toscana ma non sono limitato a quella regione, cerco di variare e di offrire una cucina anche innovativa. Inserendo comunque sempre un pizzico di tradizione. Rispetto al cliente americano, posso dire che i nostri clienti abituarini sicuramente sono persone che hanno viaggiato che si sono voluti educare e che pagano per avere un prodotto autentico. Quando vengono qui non si aspettano di mangiare il piatto unico, ma sono felici di passare dall'antipasto al primo al secondo fino al dessert. Assaggiare un po' di tutto senza buttare tutto in un unico piatto. Poi in generale la situazione non è sempre così. Qui la cucina italoamericana la fa da padrona quindi è difficile portarli ad assaggiare piatti particolari che nella cucina italoamericana, che è standardizzata ovunque, non troverai mai.

Il vostro personale è Italiano o Americano?

Mia moglie è americana ma ha vissuto in Italia, ha appreso la nostra cultura quindi, essendo un ristorante a conduzione familiare, potrei rispondere prettamente Italiano

Cosa cercano i clienti Americani quando vengono nel tuo ristorante?

Noi lavoriamo con un cliente alla volta, tanto che non facciamo mai pubblicità, Nel mio locale ci saranno massimo 50 posti a sedere. (15 tavoli con le sedie al bar). Lavoriamo molto sul concetto della fidelizzazione del singolo cliente. Magari all'inizio sono scettici, ma se apprezzano la tua cucina, poi imparano a fidarsi di te e tornano perché si sentono a casa, in un ambiente familiare, protetto, domestico, in cui possono per altro mangiare veri piatti italiani. È una trattoria toscana vecchio stile dove lavorano moglie e marito.

Quanto del cibo che cucini è composto da ingredienti che possono essere considerati 100% italiani? I tuoi fornitori sono Italiani o Americani ?

La mia cucina è italiana completamente sia come ingredienti e prodotti sia come ricette. Probabilmente io vado un po' controcorrente qui in America perché spesso si guarda al mero profitto quindi è più facile offrire quello che c'è già sul mercato ed è conosciuto, ma da chef non posso rinnegare la mia formazione e la mia passione. Per me il cibo è sacro. Semmai faccio lo sforzo di educare il cliente. Ci vuole un po' di più ma alla fine apprezza l'autenticità che mangia.

Perché secondo voi gli americani sono così attratti dal cibo italiano?

Perché amano l'Italia. Non sempre ciò che credono di conoscere corrisponde a realtà ma è anche nostro compito educarli a ciò che è la vera cucina italiana

Che ne pensi del cibo "italoamericano" che "sfrutta" il carattere italiano ma di italiano ha molto poco, non tanto su un discorso di qualità dei prodotti, ma di autenticità delle ricette?

Penso che non sia cibo italiano, è cibo standardizzato tutto uguale e che usa i simboli italiani per vendere un piatto che non è assolutamente quello italiano, ma penso che questo discorso oggi è applicabilissimo anche in Italia, dove soprattutto nei posti più turistici i ristoranti sono pieni di stranieri che non solo appunto non sono cresciuti con la cultura italiana ma non si sono nemmeno formati, come chef, all'interno della cucina italiana, per cui quello che vendono è uno schifo fatto apposta per turisti e per fare soldi. Purtroppo anche in Italia sta diventando difficile trovare posti dove mangiare del buon cibo italiano autentico e lo dice pure mia moglie che è Americana, pensa tu.

Quanto utilizzi la lingua italiana nel menù e quanto giochi con la tua italianità nel rapporto con i clienti? Che tipo di codici rituali e simboli utilizzate nel ristorante per marcare la vostra tradizione etnica

I piatti sono tutti scritti in Italiano con descrizioni in inglese. Al livello di design, fuori c'è il simbolo del giglio fiorentino e dentro abbiamo quadri di artisti italiani ma sono artistici quindi non è tanto un simbolo folcloristico.

Siete a conoscenza del fenomeno dell'Italian Sounding (molto diffuso in America)? Se sì cosa ne pensate?

Non conosco la parola, ma conosco il concetto e sono sicuro che l'educazione del cliente americano posso aiutare ad arginare il problema anche perché non è un limite solo per noi, ma anche per il consumatore che compra e che paga un prezzo elevato per un prodotto che è una falsificazione.

Respondent 5

Da dove vieni, Quanti anni hai? In quale parte dell'Italia sei nato e-o cresciuto? Perché hai deciso di trasferirti in Florida e perché proprio a Naples?

Sono nato in America da genitori Italiani, (circa 38 anni) ma subito dopo tutta la famiglia è tornata in Sicilia, dove ho vissuto fino all'età di 25 anni per poi ritornare qui in America, dove mio fratello per altro viveva già. Ho vissuto per diversi anni in altri Stati e sono poi arrivato in Florida per raggiungere mio fratello

Prima di trasferirti a Naples lavoravi già nel business della ristorazione? Se sì, come è cambiata la gestione manageriale e il rapporto con la clientela?

Ho sempre lavorato nella ristorazione, se non come chef sin da subito, sicuramente come cameriere e simili per poi arrivare ad aprire il mio ristorante. In realtà quando sono arrivato in America non avevo un soldo e non parlavo una parola di inglese. Ho lavorato per diversi anni come cameriere in un ristorante italoamericano ma poco a poco mi son reso conto che volevo essere io padrone di me stesso e delle mie scelte e che quella cucina non rispettava assolutamente quelli che erano i miei studi (alberghiero), quella che era stata la mia esperienza in Italia e quelli che erano i ricordi culinari di mia nonna e della mia terra. Sicuramente all'inizio è stato abbastanza uno shock trovarsi in un mondo culinario che non sentivo come mio, con clienti con gusti molto differenti da quelli dei siciliani o in generale degli Italiani

Cerchi di adattare la tua cucina ai gusti di una clientela americana? Siete un ristorante a carattere regionale o italiano?

La nostra cucina è sia siciliana che italiana in senso più generale, poi ci sono cose che non faccio. Tipo le lasagne. Sul discorso dell' "adattare" chiaramente c'è innovazione all'interno della tradizione, la cucina è sperimentazione è passione, poi per forza devi tener conto anche della volontà del cliente perché devi fidelizzarlo altrimenti non tornerà più. Per cui ci sono anche piatti che magari sono adattati più ai loro gusti (vedi PAPPARDELLE ALFREDO) ma la mia filosofia di chef si basa su due parole fondamentali: semplicità e freschezza. Se riesci a servire un piatto semplice ma con ingredienti freschi, di qualità ed organici, come facciamo noi e in Italia, allora hai vinto.

Il vostro personale è Italiano o Americano

Prettamente Americano, visto che anche mia moglie, che lavora qui è americana, ma la cucina è italiana

Cosa cercano i clienti Americani quando vengono nel tuo ristorante?

Cercano il buon cibo anche, l'atmosfera familiare ed accogliente, la semplicità e la freschezza dei piatti e l'esperienza unica che possono avere solo in un ristorante in cui possono avere un rapporto diretto con il cuoco, si sentono a casa loro e in qualche modo in Italia

Quanto del cibo che cucini è composto da ingredienti che possono essere considerati 100% italiani? I tuoi fornitori sono Italiani o Americani ?

Alcuni sono italiani, ma ovviamente non tutti, Non si possono prendere prodotti freschi dall'Italia e ci sono fornitori Americani che lavorano nel settore da anni e che hanno i loro contatti in Italia e che sono molto bravi. Poi sta a te scegliere sempre prodotti freschi e biologici. Quello è il mio credo

Quali sono i piatti più richiesti dalla clientela americana?

Posso dire che ci sono clienti più abitudinari che si fidano del mio consiglio per cui sono più aperti a provare nuovi sapori, come ad esempio la trippa cucinata come faceva mia nonna, altri no perché il cliente americano è un consumatore abitudinario. Conosco coppie che vanno nello stesso ristorante ogni settimana da 10 anni ed ordinano sempre lo stesso piatto

Perché secondo voi gli americani sono così attratti dal cibo italiano e dall'esperienza domestica ad esso correlata? Secondo voi gli Americani sono diventati più consapevoli di ciò che sia il cibo italiano e ciò che non lo sia?

Gli Americani amano l'Italia e amano l'esperienza della domesticità perché è quella che hanno trovato viaggiando in Italia o guardando film e programmi di cucina o seguendo stereotipo italiano che hanno fatto proprio, ma in fondo è vero. Ho provato per un periodo ad aprire una serie di ristoranti con anche 100 posti a sedere, ma mi sono reso conto che non era possibile mantenere quel senso di calore, quell'atmosfera più autentica e soprattutto quel rapporto più diretto con il cliente. Non faceva per me e quindi ho preferito tornare ad una realtà più piccola ma che mi permette di lavorare in modo più autentico e stabilire un rapporto più familiare con i miei clienti. Tornano da me per il buon cibo e per questo ambiente caldo ed accogliente. Si sentono a casa, si sentono al sicuro, si fidano di noi

Che ne pensi del cibo “italoamericano” che “sfrutta” il carattere italiano ma di italiano ha molto poco, non tanto su un discorso di qualità dei prodotti, ma di autenticità delle ricette?

Non è cibo Italiano, sicuramente. Ho lavorato per anni in un ristorante italoamericano e posso dirti che non c'è nulla di italiano autentico in quello che mangiano. Dalle mega porzioni che servono agli ingredienti che utilizzano per fare un determinato sugo fino alla vera e propria falsificazione del piatto. Però la cultura italoamericana qui la fa la padrona perché ha una tradizione lunga un secolo. E' nata con i primi immigrati italiani e da lì è rimasta per lungo tempo punto di riferimento della cucina italiana nell'immaginario dell'Americano medio che magari non ha viaggiato e non ha visto ed assaporato in prima persona la vera cucina italiana. Quello dei ristoranti italiani qui è un mercato relativamente nuovo rispetto a quello italoamericano e il fatto che alcune catene di ristoranti italoamericani siano addirittura quotate in borsa mentre la maggior parte dei ristoranti italiani è di dimensioni piccole e a carattere domestico dipende sia dal fatto che non puoi competere con il mercato della ristorazione italoamericana che è qui da molti più anni di te e ha educato per lungo tempo il cliente americano al qual sapore e sia perché molti ristoranti italiani, soprattutto di successo, hanno scelto di mantenersi piccoli e unici ed è quello che li distingue, in fondo

Quanto utilizzi la lingua italiana nel menù e quanto giochi con la tua italianità nel rapporto con i clienti? Che tipo di codici rituali e simboli utilizzate nel ristorante per marcare la vostra tradizione etnica?

Il mio menù è in italiano e in inglese, il ristorante si chiama Gusto e ci sono elementi che richiamano l'Italia. Ora, in realtà siamo un po' in fase di ristrutturazione e stavamo pensando di aggiungere qualche altro simbolo di italianità. In fondo, che ci piaccia o no, questo è ciò che attira la clientela la prima volta. E' puro marketing

Siete a conoscenza del fenomeno dell'Italian Sounding (molto diffuso in America)? Se sì cosa ne pensate?

Non conosco il nome ma sicuramente conosco il concetto. Dovremmo seriamente agire per limitare il problema e per mantenere il nome dei prodotti italiani al top

Respondent 6

Da dove vieni, Quanti anni hai? In quale parte dell'Italia sei nato e-o cresciuto? Perché hai deciso di trasferirti in Florida e perché proprio a Naples?

Sono nato a Lucera in Provincia di Foggia ma ho fatto gli studi alberghieri in Abruzzo. Quindi ho passato metà della mia adolescenza in Abruzzo. Ho lasciato l'Italia che avevo 25 anni e oggi ne ho 43, quindi sono in America da un po' di tempo. Ho vissuto 10 anni a Boston ma a causa di un incidente sul ghiaccio ho impiegato un anno per riuscire a camminare di nuovo quindi, dopo questa brutta vicenda ho deciso di spostarmi in un posto più caldo (senza ghiaccio per capirci). Bisognava scegliere tra tornare in Italia o trovare un altro posto qui, ma poiché mio fratello viveva a Bonita Spring, praticamente attaccata a Naples, allora ho optato per questa scelta.

Prima di trasferirti a Naples lavoravi già nel business della ristorazione? Se sì, come è cambiata la gestione manageriale e il rapporto con la clientela?

Ho cominciato a lavorare a 16 anni in Italia come cameriere poi ho avuto un ristorante fino all'età di 21 anni. Ma volevo andare in America (anche se mio padre non voleva) quindi tre anni dopo ho fatto le valigie e sono arrivato qui. In Italia ho avuto diverse esperienze nel settore, anche in città turistiche come Firenze, ma ti dirò che la maggior parte della clientela era italiana, quindi sì, sicuramente ero abituato ad una clientela molto più etnica e locale che internazionale. Una volta in America, sicuramente è stata una grande sfida. Sono venuto la primissima volta nel '93, appena finiti gli studi alberghieri, quando per altro non parlavo una parola di inglese. Sono rimasto 5 mesi, poi in quegli anni il militare era ancora obbligatorio quindi sono ritornato un anno in Italia, ma sapevo che volevo tornare in America. Per cui, nel '98 sono ritornato e ho cominciato a lavorare in un ristorante italoamericano. Era un buon lavoro che mi permetteva di sopravvivere ma pian piano mi sono reso conto che tutto quello che avevo imparato in Italia, tutta quella che era stata la mia esperienza in cucina e nel mondo della ristorazione, in qualche modo lì non aveva valore. Anche gli altri ristoranti italiani al tempo non facevano cucina italiana. Magari sfruttavano molto l'immaginario italiano per vendere ed attrarre clienti, ma la cucina non aveva assolutamente le basi italiane

Cerchi di adattare la tua cucina ai gusti di una clientela americana? Siete un ristorante a carattere regionale o italiano?

Quando io parlo di cucina italiana parlo sempre delle basi, non del piatto compiuto. Per quanto riguarda la tua domanda, vorrei fare una premessa. Inizialmente, io e mia moglie, italiana anche lei, abbiamo aperto un TAKE OUT (piatti cucinati pronti per essere portati via). Inizialmente prima del take out avevamo un ristorante che era frequentato da lavoratori. Praticamente era come una catena di montaggio. Sfamavi 100 lavoratori al giorno che venivano e prendevano il cibo da mangiare in quei 20 minuti di pausa, quindi nulla a che vedere con ciò a cui siamo abituati noi in Italia. Di media, se si parla di ristorante, si va lì, ci si siede e ci si rimane per ore. Insomma non è

parte della nostra cultura. Per cui, questo concetto di fabbrica del cibo ci stava logorando e per goderci un po' di più la vita abbiamo deciso di aprire questo take out. (aperto solo in determinate ore). Quello che è successo nel giro di poco tempo, però, è che la gente che veniva a prendere le cose o a mangiare quel piatto velocemente, iniziò a chiederci se potevano tornare anche la sera a mangiare. Praticamente nel giro di 12 ore ci siamo ritrovati a comprare sedie e tavoli perché non avevamo abbastanza spazio per tutti.. Per cui dopo 11 mesi siamo diventati ristorante a tutti gli effetti e avevamo la parola ITALIAN. Ora, la cosa strana è che la gente continuava a chiederci: "ma come voi siete un ristorante italiano e non avete sausage and peppers or chicken parmesan?"...Questo per dire che associavano la cucina italiana a quella italoamericana. Non erano proprio in grado di vedere la differenza. Ora, quello che offriamo noi è una cucina italiana (più o meno regionale), sicuramente ripensata per questo contesto culturale qui, ma le basi e gli ingredienti biologici sono obbligatoriamente di tradizione italiana (se non proprio prodotti importati dall'Italia). Ora voglio precisare che noi giochiamo molto con l'innovazione ma spieghiamo sempre le nostre scelte al cliente. Ad esempio nel nostro menù puoi trovare la pasta all'amatriciana che però non corrisponde esattamente a quella tradizionale di Amatrice ma non è la pasta che troveresti al ristorante italo-americano. Mettiamo la nostra firma su piatti tradizionali della cucina italiana. Ad ES nella Bolognese usiamo la bistecca di vitello e non il maiale. Non abbiamo microonde o friggitrice e cerchiamo di abbassare le calorie che serviamo quindi il piatto è più semplice e leggero di quello tipico della tradizione. Ora tecnicamente non dovremmo chiamarla bolognese perché non c'è quella parte del maiale ma tutti gli altri ingredienti sono olio extravergine di oliva italiano, cipolle italiane ecc ecc l'alloro, il pomodoro, il vino rosso. La leggerezza, con piatti più semplici e meno pesanti ci permettono di restituire un sapore più autentico e meno falsificato dalle salse e dai grassi. Noi siamo gli unici produttori certificati biologici in Florida. La nostra semolina arriva dalla Puglia. La nostra pasta è fatta esclusivamente da farina di grano duro e uova. Non aggiungiamo acqua e anche la semolina che ha bisogno di essere idratata la riassorbe durante la cottura (non mettiamo acqua) Noi non facciamo queste porzioni immense cerchiamo di educare il cliente ad assaggiare più piatti e più sapori. Nei ristoranti italoamericani trovi solo la porzione unica di mega pasta, oppure la pasta con la carne insieme. Qui il menù e anche il servizio al livello di portate è proprio quello italiano. Non posso negare che inizialmente il nostro ristorante era vuoto perché la cucina a cui erano e in qualche modo sono ancora abituati è quella italoamericana; però io sono italiano, e anche se ho deciso di venire qui e posso criticare l'Italia sotto tanti punti di vista, non posso però negare chi sono io come persona e come chef. Per cui quando io sento altri chef italiani che solo per marketing ti mettono nel sito la tarantella folcloristica, che suona e si adattano completamente alle esigenze del consumatore, hanno fallito come chef italiani secondo me

Il vostro personale è Italiano o Americano?

Prettamente Italiano, ma perché è a conduzione familiare

Cosa cercano i clienti Americani quando vengono nel tuo ristorante?

E' stato difficile all'inizio ma ora i clienti, almeno quelli più fedeli, hanno capito la differenza ed apprezzano la nostra cucina perché capiscono che la base è autentica e l'ambiente domestico del ristorante permette un rapporto più unico con il cliente. Qui possono mangiare italiano senza essere in Italia, Almeno al livello di concetto, di qualità degli ingredienti, di attenzione alle calorie. Altra cosa, noi cerchiamo di educare il nostro cliente anche in altri modi. Due mesi all'anno torniamo in Italia e portiamo in tour con noi i nostri clienti, ma non a vedere i monumenti ma al mercato del pesce al mercato della frutta e della verdura così che possano capire cosa cerchiamo di trasmettere nel nostro ristorante. È un turismo esperienziale volto a educare il consumatore. Puntiamo alla rivalutazione della cucina italiana perché qui è vista ancora come la cucina portata 150 anni fa dai primi italiani immigrati.

Quanto del cibo che cucini è composto da ingredienti che possono essere considerati 100% italiani? I tuoi fornitori sono Italiani o Americani ?

Gli ingredienti di base sono italiani e la preparazione è italiana (così come le dosi e le calorie) poi c'è innovazione ma non è cibo italoamericano

Quali sono i piatti più richiesti dalla clientela americana?

Mangiano un po' di tutto, ma sono clienti di un certo livello che conoscono un po' l'Italia e capiscono che cosa mangiano rispetto a 20 anni fa per cui prendono l'antipasto e i dolci e più portate ecc ecc. In più sono clienti fedeli quindi si fidano di noi. Poi la maggioranza è più abitudinaria. Va in un ristorante e mangia sempre le stesse cose. Quando vanno in uno specifico ristorante, vanno lì ed ordinano sempre lo stesso piatto. Anche io mi sono ritrovato a vivere queste esperienze per cui se tu hai 10 vini diversi e non li vendi sempre tutti, però hai degli clienti che sono abituati a quello e tu glieli togli perché sono in 5 a berli, quelli non tornano più. Hai perso un cliente. E' una sfida continua. ho provato a proporre il coniglio e questi mi rispondevano oh no povero Bunny però si cerca di offrire delle alternative per educarli pian piano. Noi facciamo la guancia di Bue che serviamo solo con la forchetta, senza coltello e ora hanno iniziato ad apprezzarla. Almeno i nostri clienti sono avventurosi, poi la maggioranza ragiona sul discorso: se non mi piace ho buttato dei soldi quindi meglio andare sul sicuro

Perché secondo voi gli americani sono così attratti dal cibo italiano e dall'esperienza domestica ad esso correlata? Secondo voi gli Americani sono diventati più consapevoli di ciò che sia il cibo italiano e ciò che non lo sia?

Sicuramente il cliente americano è diventato più consapevole. E' difficile generalizzare, ma parlando della mia clientela (abbiamo non più di 30 posti a sedere) posso dire che sicuramente sono diventati più consapevoli. In fondo ti posso dire che i nostri prezzi sono un pelino più alti degli altri, ma proprio perché spendono i clienti lo fanno perché sanno che tipo di esperienza culinaria possono vivere qui. Chi viene qua si sente a casa, l'ambiente è piccolo, domestico e abbiamo la cucina aperta dove veramente vedono quello che prepariamo, quindi è interessante perché vivono anche l'esperienza della preparazione. Qui rimangono a cenare anche 3 ore e siamo gli unici a non servire lo scontrino al tavolo quindi anche prima di andar via c'è la chiacchierata finale con il cliente. Vengono da noi per rilassarsi e per stare in famiglia.

Che ne pensi del cibo "italoamericano" che "sfrutta" il carattere italiano ma di italiano ha molto poco, non tanto su un discorso di qualità dei prodotti, ma di autenticità delle ricette?

Quando lavoravo nel ristorante italoamericana questi offrivano la matriciana con i piselli o la carbonara con i funghi, insomma nulla a che vedere con la tradizione italiana e nemmeno con l'innovazione della cucina tradizionale perché parliamo di ingredienti che insieme non si sposano poi chissà quanto bene. Sono miscugli di salse pesanti e grasse che però piacciono proprio per quello. Pensa anche al famoso chicken parmigiano. Sicuramente non ha nulla a che vedere con la cucina italiana. Nei ristoranti italo americani i menù sono fotocopie, ovunque vai trovi sempre le stesse cose, gli stessi ingredienti le stesse preparazioni. In più questi lì si mangiano 250 grammi di pasta alla volta più la salsa

Quanto utilizzi la lingua italiana nel menù e quanto giochi con la tua italianità nel rapporto con i clienti? Che tipo di codici rituali e simboli utilizzate nel ristorante per marcare la vostra tradizione etnica

Nel nostro ristorante non c'è nulla che dice che noi siamo Italiani, può sembrare strano ma è così. Come dicevo inizialmente gli americani associavano il nostro ristorante italiano al piatto italoamericano e in realtà la parola italiano non giocava a nostro vantaggio su questo perché poi la clientela associava quel nome al piatto italoamericano che noi non avevamo e non volevamo. Per cui abbiamo iniziato un dialogo diverso per cercare di educare il cliente attraverso una forma di educazione diversa da quella classica. Mediamente si usano simboli italiani per marcare il carattere etnico in modo folcloristico, ma noi abbiamo cercato di avvicinare il consumatore direttamente al piatto senza preconcetti. Poi il menù è scritto tutto in Italiano (salvo traduzione), quindi quando il cliente viene nel locale non capisce subito che si trova in un ristorante italiano, ma quando legge il menù, ci chiede..."aspettate un attimo, ma questo è italiano, ma allora il vostro ristorante che impronta ha? Che cucina fate, perché dall'estetica non si capisce?". E noi rispondiamo: siamo italiani. Ma visto che c'è un concetto diverso della cucina italiana qui, per non essere confusi con i ristoranti italoamericani, che sono i primi ad utilizzare simboli e codici dell'Italianità, abbiamo fatto questa scelta di educare ed incuriosire il cliente a partire solo dal menù e quindi dal piatto. Per quanto riguarda la nostra cucina, noi facciamo brodo vegetale come si vede, la salsa come si deve ma ora abbiamo iniziato a cucinare prodotti sotto vuoto. Addirittura abbiamo il brodo vegetale sottovuoto che ha dei sapori completamente diversi da quello tradizionale ma che è innovazione di un piatto che trova comunque le sue radici in Italia. Anche i mobili sono quelli che potresti avere a casa tua

Siete a conoscenza del fenomeno dell'Italian Sounding (molto diffuso in America)? Se sì cosa ne pensate?

In realtà no, ma non mi sorprende perché tutti qui giocano sui simboli o sui prodotti italiani per mero business

Respondent 7

Da dove vieni, Quanti anni hai? In quale parte dell'Italia sei nato e o cresciuto? Perché hai deciso di trasferirti in Florida e perché proprio a Naples?

I left Italy when I was 13 years old and my brother Massimo (Chef/ Owner) left Italy when he was 17 years old. Although we have spent most of our lives outside of Italy, our parents made sure that we never lost our roots. They also made sure that we spoke Italian and not dialect. We traveled and continue to travel to Italy every year to visit family. I am 53 years old. We were born in Pescara (Regione di Abruzzo). As I mentioned before, I left Italy when I was 13 years old, so I was raised outside of Italy. My dad was an electric engineer and moved to the U.S. because of a job opportunity. Without getting in too many details, my brother and I moved to Florida (Naples) because of a business- opportunity.

Prima di trasferirti a Naples lavoravi già nel business della ristorazione? Se sì, come è cambiata la gestione manageriale e il rapporto con la clientela?

My brother and I, have been involved in the Golf business, never in the restaurant business. However, our family in Italy has always been involved with food and we have been around food and restaurants. Our family made wine as well as cheeses, cold cuts, etc (for own consumption). At the same time, my brother Massimo was a private Chef for many years. This is our first restaurant and it is a family owned business. We have been in the business for just over a year and already have been recognized by a Lifestyle Magazine (called Cigars and Spirits), top 10 Best "Old School" Pizzerias in the United States. Interesting, we are not just a pizzeria, we are a full service restaurant (including a full Bar). We also offer fish dishes, meats, homemade pasta, great appetizers, etc. Our guests are mostly Americans, but when we have a truly Italian guests, they enjoy our food and feel like they were at home.

Siete un ristorante a carattere regionale o italiano?

We serve Italian food not just from our region, but from all Italy.

Cerchi di adattare la tua cucina ai gusti di una clientela americana?

I want to start by saying that we serve at our restaurant "authentic" Italian food. We do not modify our dishes in order to please the American guest. Our food is authentic Italian, this is how we actually differentiate our restaurant from our competition, including "Italian- American" restaurants. We do not serve "Chicken Parmigiana", or Spaghetti with Meatballs, or Fettucine Alfredo, etc. That is "Italian-American" food, not Italian. Almost 100% of our ingredients are GMO free, just like it is in Italy and that makes a big difference. We serve a Neapolitan style pizza (Pizza Napoletana), only one size (about 11" in size) and it is not sliced (We do not slice our Pizza, period). Our pizzas can not be modified or customized, which Americans usually expect to do when they order a pizza. Many Italian restaurant serve baskets of bread and butter. Which is something Americans are custom to and they don't expect to pay. As you know, in Italy you can find bread and butter, but it is called "Pane e Coperto" and you pay for it. We instead serve "Grissini". We serve homemade bread, only when they order a homemade pasta. As you can see, we actually don't do any changes or adjust our dishes or ways of doing business to accommodate the American culture. Although, there has been some guests not happy with our way of doing business, the majority are embracing what we do. The reviews we receive on the internet speak for themselves. As a matter of fact, our clientele is turning out to be more local Americans than foreigners.

Qual è il piatto più richiesto?

The majority are looking for the typical "American-Italian" food. Some leave, when they see that we do not offer pizza with pineapple, or fettucine "Alfredo", they are expecting bread and butter, etc. However, those that stay and dine in, they absolutely love our food and service. They order mostly pasta and pizza. Those guests that had the opportunity to travel to Italy appreciate more the dishes that we offer and are more open minded to try new dishes. Those guests that never been out of the U.S.A. are less open to try new dishes and foods. Unfortunately, the Americans think that the "Italian-American" food they eat in the U.S. is actually "real" Italian. As we all know, they are way off or far from the truth. Nevertheless, there is a progress... today you can see in grocery stores more imported Italian brands and items. This has been increasing in the last 15 years.

Quanto del cibo che cucini è composto da ingredienti che possono essere considerati 100% italiani? I tuoi fornitori sono Italiani o Americani ?

We order Produce (Vegetables, fruits, etc) all from local vendors 6 days a week. All is fresh, nothing is frozen. All the crustaceans (clams, mussels, etc) and fish are all bought from local fishermen (nothing is farm raised, all is wild caught). Our Cheeses (Gorgonzola, Parmigiano Reggiano, Provolone, Scamorza, etc), cold cuts (Prosciutto, Salumi, etc) are all imported from Italy. Our ingredients for our homemade "Gelato" (Powder milk, natural flavors, etc) are all brought from Italy. Our Coffee is also from Italy. Our coffee machine is also Italian (LaCimbali). Also, 90% of our wines are Italian. We get all our imported products from U.S. distributors or importers. Some of these distributors are Italians.

Che ne pensi del cibo "italoamericano" che "sfrutta" il carattere italiano ma di italiano ha molto poco, non tanto su un discorso di qualità dei prodotti, ma di autenticità delle ricette?

Our dishes are totally authentic. In regards to the "Italian-American" food, I don't like it too much. It is not my taste... Even with all the years I have been living in the U.S.A., I have never got used to it.

Cosa cercano i clienti Americani quando vengono nel tuo ristorante? Perché secondo voi gli americani sono così attratti dal cibo italiano?

We always make sure that the guests know that we are "real" Italians (born in Italy). The reason? very simple... it is all "pre-conception". A guest rather eat a "sushi" made from a real Japanese than any other nationality. Not because, somebody with a different nationality can't make sushi, but because the impression is that somebody that is native to the food that you are eating, probably knows better. Is just a pre-conception!

Quanto utilizzi la lingua italiana nel menù e quanto giochi con la tua italianità nel rapporto con i clienti? Che

tipo di codici rituali e simboli utilizzate nel ristorante per marcare la vostra tradizione etnica. My brother and I, we always take a few minutes to speak to our guests, not only to find out if they like the food and service, but also to educate them about the dish they are eating as well as in the real Italian cuisine. During working hours, my brother and I, always communicate in Italian and not in English. This is in front of employees and guests.

Dishes in our menu are written in Italian and in English. Using the Italian language is very important from a marketing standpoint and also because it represents our country and our roots. All our decorations are items from the family. We use "old" bottles of wine, big bottles, baskets from the family, to other items such as Olive oil dispensers (made of copper), high quality paintings "al Oleo" from places in Italy, etc. We do not use flags, or pictures from the family, or pictures of Italian soccer players, etc. That is used by most "Italian-Americans" or "want to be" Italians restaurants. We want to be different and original. We play a mix of Italian music as well. Some from Andrea Bocelli, Zucchero, Laura Pausini, Ramazzotti, Renato Carosone, Il volo to Italian American singers such as Sinatra, Dean Martin, etc.

Quanto utilizzi la lingua italiana nel menù e quanto giochi con la tua italianità nel rapporto con i clienti? Che tipo di codici rituali e simboli utilizzate nel ristorante per marcare la vostra tradizione etnica

No, absolutely not. The Americans do not have a good understanding of actual Italian food. One of our objectives, aside of the business, is to educate the locals about the real Italian food and to give them an Italian experience.

Siete a conoscenza del fenomeno dell'Italian Sounding (molto diffuso in America)? Se sì cosa ne pensate?

Yes, I am aware. Those are all imitations... that is the reason why we import our products from Italy through our distributors. We do not buy imitations, we buy all "originals". We demand from our vendors a Certificate of Origin. The quality of the ingredients and products we used is high quality. We do not believe in taking "short cuts". For example, our pizzas are made with flour double "00" (farina Doppio Zero) imported from Italy. San Marzano tomatoes, mozzarella "Fior di Latte", we use "lievito Madre" e acqua minerale per fare la pizza. No "short cuts" and all authentic. We use Prosciutto di Parma, Parmigiano Reggiano, acciughe Italiani, etc. We do not support the "Italian Sounding" business. Unfortunately, these products give a bad reputation to our Italian brands. A bad reputation from a Quality and flavor prospective.

Respondent 8

Da dove vieni, Quanti anni hai? In quale parte dell'Italia sei nato e-o cresciuto? Perché hai deciso di trasferirti in Florida e perché proprio a Naples?

Sono cresciuta a Vicenza anche se sono nata negli Stati Uniti perché al tempo la mia famiglia era qui. Ho 37 anni e fino ai 21 anni ho vissuto in Veneto. Quando ero piccola volevo diventare una ballerina. Ho lavorato parecchio per essere accettata dalla Scala di Milano, ma in cuor mio sapevo che volevo seguire le orme di mio padre, anche lui chef. Quando sono venuta in America ho aiutato mio padre a gestire il suo ristorante Lombardi's nel Maryland. A 21 anni sono andata a Los Angeles e sono rimasta per una 15ina di anni finché un anno fa mi sono trasferita in Florida dove si trovava la mia famiglia perché facevo fatica a star loro vicino da Los Angeles (contando che stavano invecchiando)

Prima di trasferirti a Naples lavoravi già nel business della ristorazione? Se sì, come è cambiata la gestione manageriale e il rapporto con la clientela?

Lavoravo nella ristorazione e catering prima di aprire il mio ristorante ed ero già abituata ad una clientela internazionale

Cerchi di adattare la tua cucina ai gusti di una clientela americana? Siete un ristorante a carattere regionale o italiano?

La nostra cucina è abbastanza regionale (regione veneto) anche se ci sono piatti tipici della tradizione italiana più generale. Non credo che la mia cucina si adatti al consumatore americano o comunque non troppo visto che i clienti oggi sono più interessati a sperimentare nuovi sapori. La nostra cucina è totalmente vicina alla tradizione italiana. Io sono nata e cresciuta in Italia e mi sono formata con quel riferimento culturale lì. Poi chiaramente ci sono piccole differenze che rispondono alle esigenze di un cliente che non è italiano e quindi non è culturalmente cresciuto con quelle abitudini. Ad esempio il fatto che si serva l'Insalata prima del pasto principale. Nel mio menù non ho pasta e proteine assieme a meno che non sia nella salsa, però, se me lo chiedono lo faccio e mi capita. (tipo spaghetti meatballs)

Il vostro personale è Italiano o Americano?

Sia Italiano che Americano

Cosa cercano i clienti Americani quando vengono nel tuo ristorante?

Cercano il buon cibo anche se qui in Florida, è vero che sono tutti benestanti, magari hanno viaggiato, ma io ho vissuto in altri Stati e la Florida non è tra quelli più culturalmente elevati e quindi è difficile dire che magari vogliono il cibo italiano autentico perché lo conoscono e sanno riconoscerlo. Poi chiaramente è difficile generalizzare.

Quanto del cibo che cucini è composto da ingredienti che possono essere considerati 100% italiani? I tuoi fornitori sono Italiani o Americani ?

Alcuni sono italiani, ma ovviamente non tutti, Non si possono prendere prodotti freschi dall'Italia come le verdure, mentre il prosciutto di Parma il parmigiano reggiano ecc ecc sono tutti italiani.

Quali sono i piatti più richiesti dalla clientela americana?

Diciamo che si lasciano abbastanza guidare. Possono rimanere legati allo stereotipo classico ma sono anche interessati a provare nuovi sapori. Ho avuto il coniglio nel menù della settimana scorsa ed è andato molto bene. Per quanto riguarda le specialità regionali, di caratteristica ho il fegato alla veneziana che è molto richiesto. Poi viene da se che molti dei clienti sono anziani quindi in generale sono abituati a questo tipo di piatti, magari non alla versione veneziana, ma al fegato sì. Parliamo di persone che sicuramente sono legate non solo alla tradizione culinaria del loro paese ma anche della loro generazione (vedi fegato) quindi il menù viene pensato anche in base al target generazionale che si ha davanti e che è più conservatore nei piatti, almeno al livello di base. Cucino il fegato ma ovviamente inserisco le caratteristiche della mia terra e della mia regione. Per cui è chiaro che, essendo così conservatori nella selezione dei piatti di base, è possibile che vadano in un ristorante italiano nuovo e non apprezzino quel tipo di cibo perché magari troppo innovativo o con piatti che loro non riconoscono come propri della loro dieta di sempre (si parla sempre di ingredienti di base e non di come vengono poi speziati ecc ecc)

Perché secondo voi gli americani sono così attratti dal cibo italiano e dall'esperienza domestica ad esso correlata?

Gli Americani amano l'Italia e il cibo italiano che è un caposaldo della nostra tradizione ed economia poi come dicevo a voler fare delle stime, la metà dei clienti sa quello che mangia e lo apprezza l'altra metà non distingue tra un cibo italiano ed uno italoamericano quindi vengono per l'esperienza italiana sicuramente ma non so quanto ne siano effettivamente consapevoli

Che ne pensi del cibo "italoamericano" che "sfrutta" il carattere italiano ma di italiano ha molto poco, non tanto su un discorso di qualità dei prodotti, ma di autenticità delle ricette?

Ma non so neanche cosa sia un cibo italoamericano. Poi ovvio siamo in America non possiamo pensare che sia sbagliato per partito preso. Capisco il discorso del cibo italiano americanizzato, non lo riconosco come italiano ma fa parte della cultura americana, molto più di quella italiana tradizionale. Poi per carità, io ho mangiato in ristoranti Americani qui e a volte sono meglio di quelli Italiani. Dipende sempre dalla professionalità e dalla singola situazione in tutto il mondo. Poi che sfruttino in qualche modo le simbologie dell'Italia, quello sicuro. Vedo anche che tanta gente Italiana è arrivata qui nel dopoguerra e a quel tempo il cibo italiano era un cibo povero con queste salse rosse. Secondo me è stato anche l'Italiano che ha portato questa maldicenza sulla cucina. Arrivati qui c'era più abbondanza, potevano aumentare le dosi, aggiungere più salse e quindi in realtà parte degli immigrati italiani hanno influenzato profondamente la cucina italiana e hanno dato vita alla cucina italoamericana come viene riconosciuta oggi. L'Americano non se lo è inventato, viene dall'Italiano. Oggi stiamo tornando ad un discorso più tradizionale perché la situazione storico-economica ce lo permette. Con l'apertura delle dogane, l'avanzamento tecnologico è molto più facile procurarsi cibi che siano più simili alla cucina italiana rispetto ad una volta. C'è più consapevolezza. L'informazione si è divulgata ed è più aperta. La gente ricerca prodotti più autentici se deve pagare, poi altre cose sono rimaste le stesse perché la cultura Americana è quella dominante, è quella di riferimento.

Quanto utilizzi la lingua italiana nel menù e quanto giochi con la tua italianità nel rapporto con i clienti? Che tipo di codici rituali e simboli utilizzate nel ristorante per marcare la vostra tradizione etnica?

Il mio menù è in italiano e in inglese, il ristorante si chiama Palladio e fa riferimento ad Andrea Palladio e ovviamente abbiamo quadri che rappresentano le opere di Andrea Palladio e che quindi richiamo al concetto dell'Italia e della sua cultura attraverso questo tema.

Siete a conoscenza del fenomeno dell'Italian Sounding (molto diffuso in America)? Se sì cosa ne pensate?

Non conosco bene il termine ma è un grande problema sicuramente.

Respondent 9

Da dove vieni, Quanti anni hai? In quale parte dell'Italia sei nato e-o cresciuto? Perché hai deciso di trasferirti in Florida e perché proprio a Naples?

Sono nato a Rieti nel 1953, quindi ho 73 anni. Sono nato a Rieti ma cresciuto a Colle di Tora. Sono cresciuto in Italia ma sono arrivato in America quando avevo fondamentalmente 39 anni. Mi sono trasferito in America per amore. Ho conosciuto questa ragazza americana a Roma e dopo un paio d'anni ci siamo sposati, ma subito dopo mi ha chiesto di trasferirmi in America perché doveva accudire la madre. Quindi non mi sono trasferito per motivi di lavoro, anzi. Io il lavoro in Italia ce l'avevo e mi piaceva pure, in più non avrei mai pensato nella mia vita che un giorno mi sarei ritrovato a vivere in America e invece l'amore mi ha fregato.

Prima di trasferirti a Naples lavoravi già nel business della ristorazione? Se sì, come è cambiata la gestione manageriale e il rapporto con la clientela?

Ho fatto la scuola alberghiera, poi mi sono laureato come ingegnere, ma in generale ho sempre lavorato nel settore della ristorazione, anche in Italia. Iniziando prima come cameriere ad Ostia e poi a Roma e lì, essendo una città turistica mi ritrovavo sempre a relazionarmi con una clientela non Italiana quindi ho dovuto imparare l'inglese e di conseguenza lo conoscevo anche prima di trasferirmi negli Stati Uniti. A scuola ho studiato francese e tedesco, prima funzionava così, invece l'inglese l'ho imparato parlando con le persone, con i clienti stranieri in Italia e piano piano è diventato più facile. Chiaramente una volta conosciuta mia moglie la lingua è migliorata. Ho lavorato per diversi anni in questo albergo a Roma, prima come cameriere, poi come assistente poi come maître de salle e poi come manager, tanto che aprivo altri ristoranti per loro. Guadagnavo molto bene

Cerchi di adattare la tua cucina ai gusti di una clientela americana? Siete un ristorante a carattere regionale o italiano?

Questo ristorante è mio sì. Quando mi sono trasferito la prima volta nella mia testa associavo l'America solo con New York, quindi come un paese avanzato. Quando invece mi sono trasferito da Roma a Cleveland ho trovato questo paesino che in realtà era molto più indietro rispetto a Roma, soprattutto nel mangiare e nel settore della ristorazione in generale. Mi ricordo che parlando con il mio ex capo, in uno dei ristoranti più famosi del posto, dopo un po' feci notare questo paradosso. "una nazione tanto avanzata eppure non sa cucinare, non sa apprezzare il cibo fresco, organico, non ha una cultura del cibo ma lo usa solo come mero nutrimento fine a se stesso" – "Lui si arrabiò rispondendo questa è l'America non l'Italia ma in qualche modo fece di quella conversazione una lezione". Sai per noi il mangiare è un'arte è una tradizione culturale loro si aspettano queste porzioni immense senza gusto e senza creatività. Basta che sia abbondante. Dopo quella conversazione iniziò a fare degli investimenti che furono molto apprezzati e che permisero al ristorante di crescere anche perché la clientela che aveva era una clientela che viaggiava e conosceva il prodotto italiano ed etnico in generale". La loro cucina non solo non era italiana o europea ma non era nemmeno americana, non so cosa fosse. Immagina che fui io a suggerirgli di cucinare in un open space, per far vedere al cliente la qualità dei prodotti, per far assaporare gli odori. Io volevo cucinare davanti alle persone. E questa strategia di marketing che al tempo non era così diffusa in America ha trasformato il loro ristorante in un business di successo. Altra cosa non erano capaci di associare e consigliare il giusto vino per il giusto piatto. Per questo dico che erano molto arretrati rispetto a noi. Successivamente ho comprato questo ristorante. Volevo un ristorante open space, open content un po' sulla scia della nuova tendenza italiana che al tempo qui era una cosa rara. Tornando al nostro discorso, sono venuto in Florida per vacanza e mi sono innamorato di Naples che mi ricordava in qualche modo la mia terra, anche solo per il mare e per caso ho visto che vendevano un locale e ho deciso di fare questo investimento. Mi ricordo di aver firmato il contratto di acquisto il giorno stesso. Mia moglie stava per ammazzarmi. Però la passione nel lavoro è importante è ciò che ti dà la spinta ad investire sulle tue idee e sui tuoi sogni e a crescere professionalmente. Quando ho aperto l'attività il carattere della cucina era di stampo più regionale romano perché quella era la mia formazione anche se conoscevo bene anche i caratteri della cucina francese a (che è anche base della cucina italiana, in qualche modo). Le ricette e le specialità erano fondamentalmente romane (saltimbocca ecc ecc) poi chiaramente crescendo come clientela ho iniziato ad introdurre piatti più generali di tutta la cucina italiana e soprattutto ho portato la cucina italiana a Naples. Ora ci sono tanti ristoranti italiani ma 30 anni fa non era così.

Il vostro personale è Italiano o Americano?

Sia Italiano che Americano, se posso cerco di assumere personale italiano sia per aiutare i miei conterranei sia per mantenere viva la componente etnica del mio business. Anche se con gli italiani ho avuto qualche problema in passato. Non erano molto professionali e volevano fare quello che volevano. Io credo un po' per invidia, della serie: Io lo so fare meglio di te!. E questo mi dispiace perché io questi ragazzi li ho portati dall'Italia e ho investito su di loro

Cosa cercano i clienti Americani quando vengono nel tuo ristorante?

Cercano il buon cibo. Sanno che l'Italia ha una tradizione culinaria forte, amano il nostro paese sia per la sua cultura sia per la storia sia per l'arte e cercano questo, l'Italia o almeno quello che loro credono sia l'Italia e la cucina italiana

Quanto del cibo che cucini è composto da ingredienti che possono essere considerati 100% italiani? I tuoi fornitori sono Italiani o Americani ?

Assolutamente sì. I miei fornitori sono Italiani in Italia. Io non uso nemmeno fornitori italiani che vivono qui ed importano dall'Italia perché non mi fido. Da chef io voglio sapere da dove proviene tutto il cibo che compro (soprattutto oggi che siamo tutti allergici). Poi ovvio certi prodotti li compri in America ma perché sono freschi o perché è inevitabile ma si deve sempre comprare cibi di qualità. Poi il discorso che il piatto possa essere ripensato per un cliente che è americano non significa che i prodotti debbano essere scadenti. Posso inserire delle novità ma la tradizione di base deve essere quella e la qualità del prodotto e degli ingredienti deve essere rispettata

Quali sono i piatti più richiesti dalla clientela americana?

Soprattutto quando ho aperto ho dovuto scendere a compromessi con il cliente americano, soprattutto il primo cliente americano che non conosceva ancora bene la cucina italiana ed europea, che non aveva ancora viaggiato che non era assolutamente educato a questo tipo di cucina, però ho cercato sempre di rimanere fedele alla tradizione, pur adattando un po' il piatto alle esigenze della clientela. Oggi apprezzano di più la tradizione e pagano anche bene per averla. Io posso aver riadattato un minimo ma non ho mai perso la mia autenticità, perché fa parte di me, della mia formazione. Quindi sì rispetto a prima sono più consapevoli e posso dirlo con sicurezza perché i miei clienti sono tutti Americani. Poi il discorso di dove il mondo della ristorazione stia andando al livello di business, è tutta un'altra storia. La concorrenza, etnica o non etnica guarda spesso al mero profitto e riporta la clientela 100 anni indietro rispetto al percorso educativo/culinario che hanno fatto

Perché secondo voi gli americani sono così attratti dal cibo italiano e dall'esperienza domestica ad esso correlata?

L'americano ama l'Italia e ama la sua tradizione. Noi siamo bravi nel settore del cibo e loro lo sanno e vogliono godere del nostro cibo in più hanno l'immagine dell'Italia antica fatta di famiglia e cercano questa esperienza quando vanno in un ristorante italiano ed è importante offrire questa atmosfera di italianità. Noi siamo ambasciatori dell'Italianità all'estero e dobbiamo fare un buon lavoro perché venga apprezzata e riconosciuta nel modo più autentico possibile. Tanto che quando i clienti mangiano la nostra pasta fatta in casa, poi tornano a chiederti dove possono comprarla. E io rispondo sempre, la trovi solo qua

Che ne pensi del cibo "italoamericano" che "sfrutta" il carattere italiano ma di italiano ha molto poco, non tanto su un discorso di qualità dei prodotti, ma di autenticità delle ricette ?

Gli Americani sono culturalmente abituati a queste catene di ristoranti e al cibo industriale. Vanno al supermercato e si comprano queste porzioni immense di tutto. Sicuramente sono diventati molto più consapevoli rispetto al passato in materia di cibo di qualità e importanza di cibo organico e fresco e di sostenibilità, ma non sono arrivati ai nostri livelli. Per esempio non vanno quasi mai nei mercati all'aperto. Non hanno rispetto verso il cibo perché il loro cibo non ha sapore, non ha odore, non ha colore, Molti ristoranti italoamericani ad esempio hanno nel menù l'ossobuco ma non usano il vitello, ma il maiale. Non sanno assolutamente cucinare la pasta al dente

Quanto utilizzi la lingua italiana nel menù e quanto giochi con la tua italianità nel rapporto con i clienti? Che tipo di codici rituali e simboli utilizzate nel ristorante per marcare la vostra tradizione etnica?

Nel menù la prima parola è in Italiano, seguita poi da una traduzione in inglese, ovviamente. Al livello di design e arredamento ci sono pitture e quadri tutti italiani. Utilizzo stoviglie e pezzi d'arredamento al top ma sicuramente cerco di rendere il mio ristorante accogliente e caloroso. Ma comunque questo business sta morendo da 10-15 anni. Ormai si guarda molto al business al lusso e quindi posso dirti che cercano la domesticità ma vogliono anche la comodità e il lusso. Questo per generalizzare, poi ovviamente chi viene da me, viene da me perché mi conosce, perché sa che sono Italiano. Se dovessi aprire un altro ristorante non lo farei più così. C'è maggiore consapevolezza ma il business è più forte della passione e dell'educazione e devi per forza adattarti

Siete a conoscenza del fenomeno dell'Italian Sounding (molto diffuso in America)? Se sì cosa ne pensate?

Quello che so è che in molti usano simboli e nomi italiani perché l'Italia, soprattutto nel cibo, all'estero si vende e in molti sfruttano il nostro marchio, il nostro nome, solo per vendere, perché poi il prodotto non è Italiano. Ma lo vedo anche dai fornitori. In molti hanno prodotti Italiani ed italoamericani e cercano di fregarti, di venderti l' "Italo-americano" facendolo poi pagare come se fosse Italiano ma io sono in grado di riconoscere se un prodotto è fresco, se la mozzarella di bufala sa di mozzarella di bufala o no. Per altro spesso queste persone non sono nemmeno

italiane o si sono formate in Italia. Vengono dall'Est Europa e simili ma non hanno la nostra stessa educazione culturale in termini di cibo. Ma sicuramente riconoscono il profitto che possono farne, quello sì.

Respondent 10

Da dove vieni, Quanti anni hai? In quale parte dell'Italia sei nato e-o cresciuto? Perché hai deciso di trasferirti in Florida e perché proprio a Naples?

Sono nata a Lanciano in Abruzzo e cresciuta a Vasto e ho 37 anni. Sono venuta la prima volta in America quando ero più piccola e poi sono tornata. Parte della mia famiglia, come ad esempio mio fratello e le mie sorelle, vivevano già qui e avevano la loro attività già avviata sempre nel settore della ristorazione. Mi sono trasferita a Naples per caso. Nel 2010 sono venuta in vacanza a trovare i miei fratelli e per caso ho visto un annuncio di una locandina che vendeva questo posto (ex ristorante), quindi sono andata e mi sono innamorata del posto e l'ho comprato e l'ho trasformato nel mio ristorante.

Prima di trasferirti a Naples lavoravi già nel business della ristorazione? Se sì, come è cambiata la gestione manageriale e il rapporto con la clientela?

Prima lavoravo nel settore immobiliare ma la mia famiglia si è sempre divisa tra il mondo immobiliare e quello della ristorazione quindi avevo una formazione di base. Quando ero piccola mio padre aveva una trattoria in Italia e poi ci siamo trasferiti tutti in New Jersey per un po', dove ha continuato a lavorare nello stesso settore quindi sin da bambina ho avuto modo di interfacciarmi con questo mondo e anche con una clientela non etnica. Magari per mio padre è stato più complesso all'inizio perché proveniva da un ambiente più etnico e locale ma io sono cresciuta anche in America quindi non è stato uno shock così grande trovarmi a lavorare con gente americana o a servire clienti Americani. Successivamente ci siamo trasferiti in Florida dove i miei fratelli hanno diversi ristoranti.

Cerchi di adattare la tua cucina ai gusti di una clientela americana? Siete un ristorante a carattere regionale o italiano?

E' questo che ci distingue dagli altri. Naples è una zona turistica, soprattutto turisti americani e ci sono tanti ristoranti, anche Italiani e quindi c'è una certa concorrenza. Ma noi ci distinguiamo per il tipo di cucina regionale che offriamo. La cuoca è mia madre, che è nata e cresciuta, anche professionalmente, in Abruzzo quindi riproponiamo molte ricette che sono tipiche della nostra zona. La nostra cucina è abruzzese anche se offriamo un po' di tutto in più è tutto fatto in casa, homemade, dalla pasta ai sughi. Quindi i clienti sono attratti da questa genuinità e dalle specialità abruzzesi. Poi ovviamente offriamo un menù variegato che va dal pollo alla parmigiana alle melanzane alla parmigiana che non sono esclusive Abruzzesi e che sono un po' più americanizzate. Diciamo che noi li cuciniamo secondo i nostri standard ma non sono piatti tipici della tradizione Italiana, tantomeno Abruzzese. Sono pensati anche per questo tipo di pubblico; un po' è inevitabile.

Il vostro personale è Italiano o Americano?

È prettamente Italiano e se non è Italiano cerchiamo di assumere personale che abbia un accento più simile al nostro, quindi ad esempio personale ispanico, proprio per un discorso di marketing. Il cliente apprezza sentire parlare in Italiano o che comunque il personale stesso in qualche modo è un personale etnico e che quindi rende l'esperienza della cena più autentica, più vicina a quella che potrebbero avere in Italia. Sentire parlare di cibo italiano in inglese ma con un accento esotico, funziona bene al livello di marketing.

Cosa cercano i clienti Americani quando vengono nel tuo ristorante?

Credo che siano sicuramente attratti dal cibo e dal buon cibo ma che cerchino anche l'esperienza italiana, quella più familiare, più vicina all'immaginario che hanno dell'Italia. Non a caso siamo un ristorante molto piccolo e a conduzione familiare e questo in qualche modo gioca a nostro vantaggio perché ci permette di offrire quell'ambiente caldo ed accogliente che richiama l'immagine della famiglia e della tradizione Italiana. Sembra quasi di stare in casa di qualcuno. Sicuramente rispetto al passato sono molto più consapevoli di cosa rappresenti la cultura italiana, non solo al livello di cibo, ma proprio di esperienza della tradizione.

Quanto del cibo che cucini è composto da ingredienti che possono essere considerati 100% italiani? I tuoi fornitori sono Italiani o Americani ?

Lavoriamo con fornitori che vengono da Miami e che quindi hanno tantissimi prodotti, dalle mozzarelle alle burrate ecc ecc. I fornitori sono sia italiani che americani ma i prodotti come i latticini sono tutti italiani. Ovviamente altri prodotti, soprattutto quelli freschi sono più difficili da esportare, quindi anche il nostro pesce non lo prendiamo dall'Italia, ma cerchiamo comunque di comprare sempre prodotti il più possibile organici, freschi e simili ai prodotti italiani.

Quali sono i piatti più richiesti dalla clientela americana?

Sicuramente sono legati al piatto tradizionale che conoscono ma oggi rispetto al passato sono più propensi a sperimentare e quindi il fatto che la nostra cucina offra delle specialità regionali in realtà funziona bene. Se vengono qui sentono la differenza tra il prodotto fatto in casa del vero ristorante italiano e quello che non lo è in altri ristoranti italoamericani. Quindi sì, è sicuramente più consapevole, più aperto a sperimentare, poi purtroppo si aspetta ancora questi piatti enormi unici e anche quella fascia più europea rimane delusa se non porti il piattone di pasta che in Italia divideresti con un altro. Non sono abituati ad assaggiare il cibo in più portate ma a mangiare un unico grande piatto e su quello devi accontentarli per forza. Comunque ora che iniziamo ad essere più conosciuti, abbiamo iniziato ad inserire nuove esperienze di cucina. Ad esempio questa tavolata grande, in stile agriturismo, in cui si porta un po' di tutto e tutti assaggiano diversi prodotti (il menù lo decidiamo noi)- E' un modo per offrire un'esperienza più autentica e per dare loro la possibilità di fare esperienza della tradizione italiana a 360 gradi, non solo nel gusto ma anche nella preparazione dei cibi, nei modi in cui viene servito e condiviso.

Perché secondo voi gli americani sono così attratti dal cibo italiano e dall'esperienza domestica ad esso correlata?

La nostra clientela bene o male conosce la cucina Italiana, apprezza la nostra cucina e vuole quella. In parallelo c'è la nuova clientela che magari è attratta dal cibo italiano ma non è mai stata in Italia o semplicemente non è culturalmente educata agli standard e alle caratteristiche della cucina italiana, che provano a sperimentare con noi. Sicuramente bisogna un minimo andare incontro alle loro aspettative, ma mediamente imparano a capire la differenza tra il vero cibo italiano e quello italoamericano e quindi tendono a tornare.

Che ne pensi del cibo "italoamericano" che "sfrutta" il carattere italiano ma di italiano ha molto poco, non tanto su un discorso di qualità dei prodotti, ma di autenticità delle ricette ?

Purtroppo ho avuto esperienza diretta di ristoranti italoamericani. La differenza tra noi e loro è immane. Non c'è proprio paragone. Anche al livello di preparazione dei piatti. Per esempio mettono formaggi nel pesce, panna nel pollo, cose che uno in Italia darebbe da mangiare al cane.

Quanto utilizzi la lingua italiana nel menù e quanto giochi con la tua italianità nel rapporto con i clienti? Che tipo di codici rituali e simboli utilizzate nel ristorante per marcare la vostra tradizione etnica

E' interessante la domanda perché lavoriamo molto su questo aspetto qui. Come dicevo prima per il cliente americano è importante anche l'accento e quindi la stessa atmosfera e l'estetica del ristorante deve richiamare la cultura e la tradizione italiana, che comunque loro apprezzano. Abbiamo una specie di portico in pietra e un muro in pietra. Le stesse finestre sono in qualche modo dipinte. Da fuori c'è questo richiamo al mattone che richiama ad un ambiente rustico, mentre dentro sono riproposti degli acquerelli che ricordano la zona balneare abruzzese e in generale i nostri panorami. Anche nel menù i nomi sono tutti in Italiano, poi ovviamente le spiegazioni sono in inglese (abbiamo un menù di 5 pagine, forse un po' troppo lungo ma almeno possiamo giocare sul doppio binario linguistico che comunque è importante per il cliente.

Siete a conoscenza del fenomeno dell'Italian Sounding (molto diffuso in America)? Se sì cosa ne pensate?

Non conosco il nome ma il problema della contraffazione sicuro, per altro visibilissimo nei supermercati per chi è nato e cresciuto in Italia e ha una cultura anche dei marchi e dei prodotti che si vendono lì. Non devi essere un addetto ai lavori per notarlo.

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