Food and Foodways in Italy from 1861 to the Present

Emanuela Scarpellini
FOOD AND FOODWAYS IN ITALY FROM 1861 TO THE PRESENT
Worlds of Consumption

Published in association with the German Historical Institute, Washington, DC

Series Editors: HARTMUT BERGHOFF and UWE SPIEKERMANN

*Worlds of Consumption* is a peer-reviewed venue for the history of consumption and consumerism in the modern era, especially the twentieth century, with a particular focus on comparative and transnational studies. It aims to make research available in English from an increasingly internationalized and inter-disciplinary field. The history of consumption offers a vital link among diverse fields of history and other social sciences because modern societies are consumer societies whose political, cultural, social, and economic structures and practices are bound up with the history of consumption. *Worlds of Consumption* highlights and explores these linkages, which deserve wide attention, since they shape who we are as individuals and societies.

Published by Palgrave Macmillan:

*Decoding Modern Consumer Societies*
Edited by Hartmut Berghoff and Uwe Spiekerman

*The Development of Consumer Credit in Global Perspective: Business, Regulation, and Culture*
Edited by Jan Logemann

*The Rise of Marketing and Market Research*
Edited by Hartmut Berghoff, Philip Scranton, and Uwe Spiekermann

*Globalizing Beauty: Consumerism and Body Aesthetics in the Twentieth Century*
Edited by Hartmut Berghoff and Thomas Kühne

*The Science of Beauty: Culture and Cosmetics in Modern Germany, 1750–1930*
By Annelie Ramsbrock

*Berlin’s Black Market, 1939–1950*
By Malte Zierenberg

*Food and Foodways in Italy from 1861 to the Present*
By Emanuela Scarpellini
FOOD AND FOODWAYS IN ITALY FROM 1861 TO THE PRESENT

Emanuela Scarpellini

Translated by Noor Giovanni Mazhar
For Paolo, with love
Contents

Preface ix

1 The Luxury of the Aristocracy
   (Or the Building of the Unitary State, 1861–1880) 1

2 Nature and Culture in the Peasant World
   (Or the Zenith and Crisis of Liberalism, 1881–1900) 27

3 Eating in the City
   (Or Industrial Development, 1901–1914) 53

4 Homemade Meals
   (Or Fascism and the Two World Wars, 1915–1949) 81

5 The Great Transformation
   (Or Economic Growth in the Postwar Period, 1950–1973) 109

6 Cuisine in the Age of Globalization
   (Or the Affluent Society, 1974–1993) 141

7 Eating in the Twenty-First Century
   (Or the Time of Complexity, since 1994) 171

Epilogue 205

Tables 209

Notes 221

Index 249
There is a myth about the origin of fire among the indigenous Kayapó, who live in Brazil south of the Amazon River and refuse to accept the way of life of the “whites.” A young boy named Botoque, trapped on top of a cliff while unsuccessfully attempting to seize Ara’s eggs, was saved—to his great surprise—by a jaguar, who was passing that way and took him on his back to his lair. There, for the first time, Botoque saw a fire burning and ate roast meat (his companions did not know about fire and only ate raw meat). The jaguar decided to adopt the young man, despite the opposition of his wife, who was Kayapó, and he taught Botoque how to defend himself using a bow and arrow. One day when the jaguar was out hunting, Botoque killed his stepmother with an arrow and ran away frightened. He returned to his village, showed his companions his new weapon and had them taste the roast meat he had brought with him. Everyone began to want the fire. So they went to the jaguar’s lair while he was away, stole the fire and the meat for roasting, and returned to their village. Now they could warm themselves, have light during the night, and eat cooked meat. When the jaguar returned and found out what had happened, he got terribly angry, but he was too late. Since that time, he has harbored an infinite hatred toward everyone, above all human beings, and he only eats raw meat. But in his eyes there still shines the fire’s reflection.¹

In connection with this myth, Claude Lévi-Strauss has concluded that cooking indicates a passage from nature to culture. Cooking meat is accompanied by a different way of life and the discovery of arms; it marks a people’s entry into “civilization.” The Kayapó became “men” (just as the jaguar went back to being an “animal”). Human culture originated from an act of courage, cunning, and betrayal.

The role of cooking and the significance of eating do not just concern the culture of an ethnic group of a few thousand people struggling to survive. Food matters to all of us. But if consuming food is a universal experience, we do not eat the same things, or in the same ways, or in the same places. It could be said that, to a certain extent, everything converges in the act of eating—the agricultural, industrial, and commercial conditions of a given place; traditional customs and religious beliefs; differences in social and economic background, gender, and age; taste preferences and culinary art; geographical characteristics, cultural identity, public policies, and more.
By carefully observing a meal, we could explain everything, or almost, about a certain population.

That is how this book came into being. It recounts the history and the geography of the Italians from 1861, when Italy first became a nation-state, to the present, and always from the perspective of what and how they have eaten. *Food and Foodways in Italy* is based on some meals that really took place, reconstructed on the basis of a variety of sources, making use not only of history but also of literature, art, print and broadcast media, and oral accounts to explain what lay behind (and in) those meals. It also considers changes in the domestic sites of food, that is, in kitchens and dining rooms, whose forms and usages changed in relation to the many broader cultural and technological transformations that occurred over the past century and a half. This book is not a history of nutrition but rather a history of the Italians through their food, a central feature of material culture.

A rich picture emerges, in which we can see how the act of eating synthesizes all manner of factors borne of complicated historical developments. Such historical processes gave rise to forms we continually repeat, often no longer understanding their remote meanings, as when we clink our glasses in making a toast (recalling a time when people drank fraternally from a single cup). Or we set the table in accordance with social rules developed in aristocratic settings, or eat foods that originated in distant lands (we eat and we travel). Even the simple act of kissing can embody such a history. (It probably derives from a mother passing chewed food to her child, “kiss-feeding,” still practiced in some ethnic groups.) In the same way, food embodies discoveries from chemistry, innovations from the food industry, evolving nutritional precepts, and our culturally contingent ideas about health, beauty, and hygiene. A complete microcosm.

In this microcosm, there are universal elements, typically Western ones, and absolutely local characteristics. Italy thus appears in a particular light in this book. It is extraordinary how a simple act that we (hopefully) perform every day is able to encapsulate a sense of identity much more complex than what appears on the surface. The history of Italian food and foodways shows Italians in a different light, revealing some of their hidden or unknown sides. It is a history that does not always comport with more conventional accounts of great political and economic events. Instead, it shows us how material culture combines tradition and innovation every day. It explains why the culture of food is so important in Italy and its highly distinct regions. Finally, it suggests why the Italian culinary tradition has recently garnered so much international attention and has been able to propose a specific nutritional model.

To achieve these ambitious goals, this book frequently lets the direct voices of consumers be heard. Not just the producers, authorities, and recognized experts matter. Those who buy, prepare, and eat the food are central to the story. Eating is an experience common to all of us. The flames of the fire are reflected in our eyes too.
I would like to express particular thanks to Enrico Decleva, who has fol-
lowed and read this work with his usual care and attention. I am very grateful
to him for this, for always being ready to help and for his expertise. I am
equally grateful to the NIAS (Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in
the Humanities and Social Sciences), where I was able to undertake a signifi-
cant part of the research and drafting of this present work. In that stimulating
environment, I had valuable exchanges of ideas with scholars from many
countries. Among these, I would like to mention Ruth Oldenziel, Johan
Schot, Mikael Hard, and the members of the research group European “Ways
of Life” in the American Century: Mediating Consumption and Technology in
the Twentieth Century.

As with all books that are the result of several years’ work, very
many research centers, libraries, archives, scholars (such as Philip Scranton
and Roger Horowitz), young researchers (like those who helped to
gather oral accounts), conferences, and workshops (in Stanford, Leiden,
Sofia, Trondheim, Florence, Paris, Sigtuna, Cologne, Lisbon, Ljubljana,
Maastricht, Hong Kong, and Milan) have made this work possible. I cannot
mention them all by name, but I am grateful to each and every one.

Finally, I would also like to thank Noor Giovanni Mazhar for bringing the
Italian into English and the German Historical Institute in Washington, DC,
in particular Hartmut Berghoff, Uwe Spiekermann, and Mark Stoneman, for
their generous support of this translation.
Chapter 1

The Luxury of the Aristocracy

(Or the Building of the Unitary State, 1861–1880)

It had always been important to the prince that the first dinner at Donnafugata have a solemn character. Children under fifteen years of age were excluded from the table, French wines were served, there was punch in the Roman style before the roast, and the servants were in powder and breeches.

The Sicilian Prince of Salina had invited local notables and friends to join him for that special evening, ever mindful, however, not to make the country folk feel awkward. And so he decided to forego elegant black-tie attire and instead wear a lounge suit to receive his guests in the sumptuous grand hall frescoed with portraits of his ancestors. Only a landowner bursting onto the scene wearing a tailcoat—moreover a rather poorly made one—upset his composure, but just momentarily. The prince also made a change to the beginning of the meal. Instead of starting with soup, he had decided to offer his guests a surprise. Summoned to the table, they were able to admire a towering macaroni pie presented by the waiters on a huge silver dish. It was met with expressions of joy, which were swiftly quelled by the refined prince. But the dish was truly marvelous.

The outer burnished gold and the fragrance of sugar and cinnamon it emitted were just the prelude to the feeling of delight that was released from the inside when the knife broke the crust. First, there erupted steam full of aromas; then one could see the small chicken livers, the small hard-boiled eggs, and the thin slices of ham, chicken and truffles entangled in the oily, very hot mass of short macaroni, whose precious chamois color came from the meat extract.¹

What can better describe the Italy that had just been united—its culture and society, the great plans and the even greater obstacles—than this
sumptuous Sicilian dinner, drawn from Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa’s *The Leopard*. The meal is the synthesis of a pyramidal society in which wealth and power are in the hands of a few people, a society tied to the past, but pushed by the winds of history toward the future.

The author knew well the aristocratic environment that he was describing (the protagonist is based on one of his forefathers). We can see this in the very detailed, vivid description of the dining hall—from the portraits of the noble ancestors hanging on the walls (a constant reminder of social differentiation) to the elaborate clothing etiquette, which causes the prince so much discomfort, and the ritual call to the table with the spectacular entrance of the waiters carrying silver trays full of a fantastic macaroni pie (a majestic affirmation of abundance, the height of waste, in an age when most of the population lived in poverty). Nothing escapes this very attentive writer, who spent his whole life traveling and incessantly reading (above all European literature in the original language, apart from Russian, and so much so that when he was only twenty his young cousins called him “the monster”). He used to say that literature was like a forest; one must know all about it, not just the big trees, but also the flowers and the undergrowth.

So, in his description, the main part does not deal with the actual meal, which is to a certain extent the dramatic climax of the passage, but with the phases of the preparation, the social occasion, the protocol for correct behavior. Eating, he seems to be telling us, is a complex ritual that reflects, and perhaps also defines, the characteristics of a given historical environment (in this case, of the Sicilian aristocracy in the second half of the nineteenth century).

Certainly, from his description there also emerges political disquiet. Nor could it be otherwise. The twenty years following national unification were a period of political and institutional upheaval. The new elite that had come to power found itself facing an enormous task, literally to build a new country. Money, laws, public order, transport, poverty, illiteracy, brigands—wherever the important Piedmontese figures of the Historical Right looked they only saw problems. They addressed them with efficient, decisive policies. They extended the laws of Piedmont to the whole country; invested in infrastructure; added Veneto (1866) and Rome (1870), making the latter the capital (1870); and applied a very rigorous fiscal policy (including the unpopular grist tax), which in 1876 led to a balanced budget. Subsequently, the government fell and was replaced by the other liberal faction led by Agostino Depretis, the Historical Left, the “party of expenditure,” which loosened fiscal constraints, modestly expanded the electorate, and co-opted many figures of the old ruling class with an unscrupulous policy of forming opportunistic alliances in order to retain power and weaken the opposition (perhaps also including the relatives of the prince in *The Leopard*). But what concerns us here is that power remained in the hands of a small, entrenched social class that was determined to defend the new state, which was threatened on many sides—by the Pope and the Catholics, who did not recognize its legitimacy; by the supposedly revanchist plans of dethroned monarchies; and by the turbulent peasant masses stirred up by the anarchists in the North and
the brigands in the South (and by hunger everywhere). It was this elite that imposed its social and cultural norms on public life and at the table, thereby imprinting itself on the new state.

**A World of Rules**

The prince of *The Leopard* was the perfect archetype of this elite, the absolute protagonist. He was the one who decided on the type of dinner, who to invite, and the menu. His only concessions to the rigors of protocol (an afternoon suit or the macaroni pie instead of the potage) were made in order to spare the guests from embarrassment—a further demonstration of his gentility and refinement. He dictated the timing and blocked any unseemly behavior with just a glance. He was the custodian of the rules. Through etiquette and knowledge of the appropriate rules even for so simple an occasion as a private dinner, he reaffirmed his superiority over his table companions.

But where did his power over others—which the imaginary prince of Salinas shared with the real aristocrats in Italy after national unification—come from?

There is a simple answer. It came from the position of political and economic preeminence that the nobility held on the social scale. Although the aristocracy had entered a phase of relative decline in terms of the number of families (fewer than ten thousand) and wealth (by then inferior to that of the upper bourgeoisie), it tenaciously continued to constitute a social reference point. Its culture, knowledge, and cosmopolitan lifestyle always set standards, and whoever did not adapt accordingly ran the risk of not being accepted “in society” or of appearing to be an upstart (as happened to the ambitious Don Calogero in the novel). That is why the prince was the real arbiter of the situation.

Therefore, the first characteristic of Italian society suggested in this Sicilian scene is clearly hierarchy—a hierarchy that had the aristocracy firmly ensconced at the top, but challenged by a bourgeoisie (entrepreneurial, financial, and commercial) as politically and economically aggressive and determined as it was hesitant in social terms (but not for much longer). The other social classes were essentially excluded. In the novel, the “outsiders” who were invited, like the priest and the organist (probably from the petite bourgeoisie and the middle class), silently savored their good fortune to be participating in such a meal. Peasants and urban workers simply did not appear. Hierarchy and inclusion–exclusion seem to explain the structure of this social occasion. This is no surprise, of course. If anything, it represents an element of continuity. A couple of centuries earlier, the hierarchy at table was so marked that it expressed itself in different seating for the various guests (thrones, tall chairs, stools) and even in different food served according to rank. Therefore, if anything, it is noteworthy that the hierarchy tended to become more implicit, vaguer, perhaps manifesting itself symbolically, for example, in the place of honor at the table, but it persisted.

But why is the question of style in emphasizing social differences so important? One could answer that the prince’s style and tastes imposed themselves
on everyone not because he was powerful, but that he was powerful because he displayed the requisite style and tastes. The aristocracy’s cultural expertise was the real mark of its superiority, the way of distinguishing social differences or—as Pierre Bourdieu would suggest—the way of producing habitus. In fact, a young aristocrat’s social origin and the complementary instruction he received made it possible for him to distinguish “naturally” what was appropriate or less so in every social context, giving him the feeling of possessing social and cultural legitimacy. In theory, these rules could also have been learned by others, with adequate instruction, but that was not the same thing. The gradual familiarization with certain values and symbolic goods (classical music at home, original paintings on the walls, tables laid in accordance with the rules) permitted the almost unconscious internalization of norms, which were often only implicit. It was as if the knowledge (and wealth) accumulated by preceding generations were transmitted through familiar everyday practices. This gave the aristocrat an incomparable self-assurance and nonchalance when moving in society—even with respect to someone who tried to learn these rules in a rational and institutionalized way. It is here that the real strategy of social distinction resides.5 That is why Don Calogero had his work cut out in appearing—in accordance with the rules—in tails for the invitation in the evening. Despite the appropriate apparel and the cost of the material, he failed miserably in the cut. It was not a garment sewn in the aristocratic city, but a vulgar imitation (he had not understood that one cannot save when it comes to certain symbolic elements). The prince, by contrast, could even break the rules because he understood “naturally” what was appropriate in every situation. One can therefore see the difference between an authentic connoisseur, able to spot immediately refined music, art, or food, and an upstart (a teacher, a scholar of art, a gourmet) who explicitly needs the rules in order to be able to find his way in a certain world—and often he does not succeed even then.6

The idea of distinction, therefore, shows the social reality behind this dinner; it explains how the aristocracy managed to maintain social distance despite its incipient crisis. The complicated rules of the game—some followed rigidly, others broken, but always with nonchalant elegance—constituted a complex language, which ostentatiously excluded those who did not belong to the privileged class. In fact, it could be said that this very set of rules, which, not by chance, underwent a tightening up in this period, was a response to social transformation. The new bourgeoisie, which had become rich on the crest of the industrial and commercial revolutions, was kept at a distance and in a state of social inferiority thanks to these strategies of distinction. In whichever way we interpret the meal depicted in The Leopard, one thing is certain. A social clash was underway.

Not surprisingly, there was an incredible diffusion of books about etiquette and good manners in the recently unified country. In fact, it was an established literary genre, which had its most illustrious antecedent in the sixteenth-century Libro del Cortegiano (Book of the Courtier), by Baldassare Castiglione, the real international bestseller of its age. But the success of

Food and Foodways in Italy
these books at the end of the nineteenth century bore witness to what was at stake. La gente per bene (Respectable People) by the Marquise Colombi (alias Maria Antonietta Torriani, whose husband founded the Milanese newspaper Corriere della Sera) went through twenty-seven editions between 1877 and 1901. Just as well known was Saper vivere (Knowing How to Live) by Matilde Serao (the driving force of Neapolitan intellectual life, together with her husband Edoardo Scarfoglio, with whom she founded another newspaper, Il Mattino). It appeared in 1900 and was reprinted in 1901, 1905, and at various times after the war. Mention should also be made of Melchiorre Gioia's more earnest Nuovo Galateo (The New Etiquette), reprinted at the end of the nineteenth century, many decades after the author's death.

But on what principles were these rules of etiquette based? How did an aristocratic meal actually take place? To answer these questions we can turn to various accounts (which, however, pay more attention to the great official meals rather than the everyday ones). Or we can look at some of the many paintings that portray banquets, such as the impressive one by Giuseppe De Nittis in Naples around 1863, Il pranzo del vescovo (The Bishop’s Lunch). Here one can see a lavishly prepared table with nine elegant table companions intent on drinking and conversing amiably (four men and four women, alternatingly seated, with the bishop at the center of the table). Three waiters are serving them. A spotless white tablecloth covers the long table and provides a contrast with the dark clothing of the banqueters and walls of the room. On the tablecloth are many glasses, goblets, plates, decanters, flowers, and so on. But, in order to immerse ourselves better in the atmosphere, we can also try plunging into the past.

PREPARING THE SCENE

Fontanellato (Parma), March 29, 1880

It is a day like any other in the Sanvitale castle. Situated less than twenty kilometers from Parma, for the preceding two decades the site of a prosperous and independent duchy and of a luxurious palace, it stands majestic and solitary in the middle of the village, the very tangible symbol of the power of its owners. Within the imposing square structure, surrounded by a moat filled with spring water, we pass through lavishly furnished, majestic frescoed halls. Apparently there is no one around. We can only hear the distant cries of children playing. At this hour, Count Alberto must be fully occupied in his favorite pastime, observing the life of the village without being seen thanks to an “optical room” with prisms capable of projecting images of the underlying square. We can take advantage of this room to look for what interests us: the places concerned with food.

Here we are! Actually, we wanted to go to the kitchen, but it’s obvious that this is the right place: the dining hall (or rather the salle à manger). In fact, in the higher social strata it was important that there should not be any contamination between the place where the food was prepared (with all its smells and the equipment necessary for the cooking and preparation of
the dishes—entrusted to the servants, often female) and the place, completely aseptic, where it was consumed. A fundamental rule in the organization of the domestic space, as has already been noted by Bourdieu in his ethnographic studies on the Kabyle peoples, is separation—in this case, a social separation.\textsuperscript{12} In this castle, the kitchen is not even adjacent to the dining hall, which is instead a floor higher (the noble floor) between two larger halls.

Let’s have a look around. In the center of the rectangular room there is a table, which has been laid, with various chairs around it. There are three tall display cabinets, full of ceramics, along one of the long walls. In front, there is an imposing fireplace with a hood above it bearing the family coat of arms and the motto \textit{Virtus ubique refulgit} (virtue shines everywhere). On the two shorter sides of the room there are enormous marine still-life paintings. The ceiling is frescoed with heraldic symbolism. This place, where the family gathers for its meals around the hearth, seems to us to be one of the oldest in the house, but it is not. What we have in front of us is a modern cultural space. As Daniel Roche recalls, until the Middle Ages seats had an essentially honorary function (thrones). It is from the time of the Renaissance that the modern chair appears, gradually brought closer to the table (almost together with the spread of furniture such as sideboards to contain the growing number of objects used in the meal).\textsuperscript{13} Generally the furniture was moved about and adapted to the different needs of the day. The idea of transforming a multifunctional space into one specialized in the consumption of food arrived relatively late and was first adopted in aristocratic homes, subsequently becoming increasingly important as a status symbol of the affluent nineteenth-century bourgeoisie. Roy Strong points out how, throughout Europe, architects gave free rein to their inventiveness in order to create not only dining rooms, but also rooms for breakfast or for official meals, and how much attention they paid to guests’ “public” transition from the entrance of the house to the dining room. Here they followed another fundamental separation in the creation of modern family life: private–public.\textsuperscript{14}

It is certainly not by chance that it is precisely in this room that heraldic emblems are depicted. They are of various types, representing the related families. Dominating all of them is that of the Sanvitale on the hood above the fireplace. It is a white shield with a red band surmounted by a crown, usually flanked by a couple of gryphons, but which here has become the base of a luxuriant tree whose ramifications envelop the whole ceiling, incorporating the names and heraldic coats of arms of the other noble families. The message is clear. It is here, in a place of conviviality and sociability, that family memories are perpetuated and social ties reaffirmed. Naturally, everything around us bespeaks wealth and luxury (but also, undeniably, good taste), as in the case of the three tall seventeenth-century display cabinets in dark wood, finely worked, in the lower parts with doors and closed drawers as well as in the higher racks, which display vividly colored refined ceramics. We can recognize famous products of various periods, Italian, like those of Giorgio Rossetti and the white set with the Sanvitale coat of arms (produced quite nearby), or from Germany (Göggingen) and the United Kingdom (Enoch Wood),
The Luxury of the Aristocracy

bearing witness to the sophisticated cosmopolitan tastes of the owners of the house. And let’s not forget the paintings on the walls by Felice Boselli, a famous late seventeenth-century master of the still-life genre. In the first one, against a dark background of ancient ruins, there is a basket overflowing with every type of fish, whole or already cut, so brimming that many pieces have fallen haphazardly on the underlying table or even the floor, where a small cat eats them with relish, while doves and other birds are on nearby trees and two puzzled dogs survey the scene. The second painting depicts a harmonious collection of small and large silver-colored fish, alternating with vegetables of all colors, together with baskets, jugs, demijohns, saucepans, and white serviettes—a bucolic scene, without (live) animals except for a cat (including that creature was a habit of the painter, who signed his work by painting a cat, *fēles* in Latin, like his name in that language, *Fēlix*). Not only the real food, but also its very detailed and artistically transfigured representation is part of this aristocratic dining space.15

What attracts our attention, however, is the table. It is covered with a spotlessly white damask linen tablecloth, which has delicate embellishments and prominently displays the family’s embroidered coat of arms and initials, F. S. V. (Under the tablecloth, there is probably a thick cloth, not so much to protect the table, as we would imagine today, but to muffle any possible noise.) The table is laid for six people and each place setting has plates, a table napkin (also with embroidered initials), silver coasters, four crystal glasses of different sizes, a small crystal carafe of water for each person, and an array of silver. There are cutlery knives for meat and fish, forks for the different courses, soup spoons, small spatula-shaped spoons for the ice creams and cakes, and so on (the household silver was the jewel in the crown of eighteenth-century nobility). The big white plates are decorated, in the upper part, with the usual coat of arms and initials, which stand out, with their vivid green and red colors, against the background of white ceramic. These plates are shaped like a priest’s hat, with a very deep central part and a wide flat rim all around, so they are suitable both for liquid and solid dishes.

Some flowers have been arranged in the center of the table in a wide, low silver vase. Other flowers are scattered here and there (but the etiquette books advised both avoiding flowers that were too fragrant, like magnolias, and choosing refined flowers, albeit perhaps not to the extent of displaying a black tulip, which in the 1600s caused the financial ruin of many Dutch merchants during the tulip mania [*tulpenwoede*]). We also see three large crystal glasses full of water, presumably to wash one’s fingers delicately at the end of the meal, two sauce boats, a salt and pepper holder in hand-worked ceramic, and an olive oil and vinegar holder in the same style.

In a way, the most interesting objects here are the cutlery, which has a long history. The Romans, for example, used to eat with their hands (Ovid advised taking the food delicately using one’s fingertips), even if the spoon was already known for various uses. Yet it has always been the knife that has had an overriding function at the table, not least because it performed two essential functions, cutting the food and skewering the pieces to be brought
to the mouth, perhaps while one helped oneself with a piece of bread in the other hand. The knife was a personal object of great symbolic and real value, and everyone always took it with him for every eventuality: self-defense, hunting, meals. We have said everyone, but it is better to say every man because a knife signified virility and command; it was clearly associated with the idea of power and violence (at the table, if necessary, it was the men who cut the food for the women). According to a myth of the Jukun people in Sudan, a girl who had found a small knife in the woods fell ill when she got home, and then the soothsayer explained that she had to take care of it, so the girl planted the knife in a mound of earth and the soothsayer poured some beer on top of it. “Do as I have done,” he told her. The girl and her mother did so and every year fed the small knife. Using the knife they then made some magic masks, which they used against the men who mistreated women. In fact, they killed these men. Fearing for their lives, the men gathered and decided to take the masks away from the women. Since then women are not allowed to see the sacred masks and it is the men who dance masked.16 Apart from some details (do small knives eat?), the myth illustrates well the magic power that emanates from the knife and the importance of its possession in terms of power.

But even if the written record portrays possession of a knife as an almost exclusively male attribute, things were probably different. We have scattered pieces of evidence referring to feminine knives, generally smaller and with precious handles, objects that women kept “secretly.” There is a documented example of the “knives of love.” It was the custom in various parts of Central and Southern Italy that engaged couples exchanged valuable clasp knives as pledges of their love, decorated with hearts, doves, garlands, or entire love phrases etched on the blades—not only from a woman to a man, as we might imagine, but also from a man to a woman. In the latter case, the knife was smaller (a four-inch blade instead of the twelve to sixteen inches of the male blade), at times without a spring (which limited its use), and easier to hide.17

And what about forks? They simply did not exist. They would have been useless in this system. We know that they appeared for the first time in Venice in the tenth century, then in the Renaissance courts, and finally throughout Europe starting in the eighteenth century—very late therefore. But if we look at the table in front of us (and also more modern meals), we can see that the fork is king. The number of forks for each place setting informs us that they are to be used for every course and more frequently than knives and spoons. What happened? What does the transition from knife to fork indicate? An initial answer is linked to containing potential violence in what was supposed to be a convivial setting. It is not by chance that modern knives are less sharp, are rounded at the end, and are smaller than those used for self-defense. They are more tools than weapons (countries like China and Japan have opted for an even more radical solution, namely a complete ban on knives at the table in favor of only using chopsticks).18
from the great European courts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a way of increasing social control over drives such as aggressiveness and sexuality. Everything that could be traced back to the body (one’s own and others’) was rejected as uncivilized. It was as if an invisible wall had been created between bodies, which led to regarding as repugnant and shameful the sight of common physical functions such as touching food with one’s hands, having sexual relations, or relieving oneself. Naturally, these functions could not disappear, but increasingly they were carried out in private, far from the public gaze, or they were transformed and channeled into specific outlets (in the case of violence, according to Elias, sport). Thus, the silver forks we see on the table, technically not very useful instruments, represent the culmination of civilizing mediation. (And they are silver not only because they are status symbols—sovereigns also had them in gold—but because silver does not leave a bad taste in the mouth.)

In any case, all the rules of good manners are based on detachment from the corporeal thanks to “cleanliness” (“a naturally rough man, a semi-barbarian, improves his manners, becomes civilized, becomes refined under the influence of social customs, like metal loses rust after it has been cleaned”), as Melchiorre Gioia reminds us in his list of all the main rules to be followed in a meal:

1. Do not break the bread with your teeth, as the peasants do, but use your hands or a knife;
2. Do not blow on the soup, if it is too hot, as the contact between the breath and the soup could be badly interpreted by others, who assume it is accompanied by drops of saliva;
3. Do not touch any food except with a knife or fork, as the use of paws is the exclusive right of animals;
4. Do not sniff at the food on the fork…
5. Do not take such big mouthfuls that your cheeks swell while you are chewing and it seems as if you are playing the hornpipe or blowing on a fire. It is even more unbecoming if this act, which deforms the face, is performed by women;
6. Do not eat in too much of a hurry…
7. Eat with your mouth closed and chew your food without making any noise;
8. Do not crush bones and kernels with your teeth, which produces a kind of repugnance and fear in those present;
9. Do not suck on a bone to extract the marrow…
10. Do not dip bread or meat in the saltcellar;
11. Take the salt with the end of a knife, not with your fork or spoon, which you have already put in your mouth twenty times…
19. Do not pick your teeth with a knife or fork, a nauseating and distressing action for an observer; eating with your knife is even worse, you risk cutting your mouth;
20. Do not clean your teeth in front of respectable people as it seems too familiar; nor should you keep a toothpick in your mouth like a bird making its nest.22

Social distance is caused not only by wealth but also by the rules of civilization, which acquire a value of moral superiority. Essentially, the evolution of material culture we have observed on the table and in the dining hall is subject to the combined action of two forces—social refinement and the construction of domesticity.23 But let us return to our room. Thanks to the warm light coming through the windows everything is shining, the crystal, the silver, and the china. It is a wonderful sight. Undoubtedly there is a studied pursuit of theatricality in the way the table and the room present themselves, an ostentation of magnificence. And yet the service is Russian style.

Something that our guests certainly knew but that we instead might not notice is, in fact, the table service. From the end of the 1600s, a new style of culinary culture, a lighter and “natural” cuisine (compared to the sophisticated one of the Italian Renaissance tradition) had emanated from Paris to the rest of Europe. In the nineteenth century, the aristocracy spoke fluent French, went to the theater to see comédies boulevardières (light French comedies), read French novels, dressed following Parisian fashion (except for the men who looked to London), and ate in accordance with the dictates of French cuisine (also spread by the first “intellectual gastronomes,” such as Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin). The Parisian norms included a way of serving the food, naturally called “in the French style.” The soups and dishes had to be placed on the table in soup tureens or large trays, in perfect symmetry, before the arrival of the dining companions. The guests served themselves or with the help of waiters (it was a kind of grand buffet). At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the famous chef Marie-Antoine de Carême (responsible for codifying the classic haute cuisine in various books) had taken these preparations to extremes, creating incredible compositions made of lard or sugar (going so far as to prepare, between courses, ruins of classical temples, mosques, and Oriental pagodas). The dining table had become a work of art. It was a spectacular sight, but there were a few drawbacks. There was never enough room, above all for meals with many guests (and generally the very abundant food was only partly consumed). Moreover, it was never possible to taste the food when it was really hot (in fact, meals of this type could even last hours). So, when in 1810 in Clichy, a Russian prince served his important guests in a completely different way (nothing had been put on the table in advance, except for the decorative elements, and the waiters quickly served the already prepared individual courses, one after the other, directly from the kitchen), “service Russian style” enjoyed an immediate success and spread quickly.24 In other words, choreographic and baroque ostentation gave way to practicality, rapidity, and (relative) moderation—a sign of the times.

We find a similar development in meal times. With the Industrial Revolution, it became necessary to measure time more and more precisely because of the sharp division between working time (in the office or factory) and “free”
The Luxury of the Aristocracy

The day acquired new rhythms, as did the new Russian-style meals. No one, not even aristocrats, could by then live without taking into account the time (measured by increasingly precise mechanical clocks), as Melchiorre Gioja punctiliously stressed: “The savage man is the only one in the human species who does not have definite meal times. Subject, like the beasts, only to the needs of nature, he eats, like them, when hunger orders him to do so and waits for a new order before eating again. This does not happen in the civilized condition.”

To eat at fixed times is synonymous with civilization; to measure time means dominating it. The old custom (from about the fifteenth century) was to consume two main meals a day. One got up very early, at about six in the morning, and had a small breakfast, that is, a hot drink and something baked; lunch was mid-morning, between ten and eleven; and dinner at about five in the afternoon (one went to sleep early, not later than ten). With time, new work requirements gradually pushed lunchtime back, even into the late afternoon; a shift compensated by a more substantial breakfast. The result was that the real dinner disappeared, being replaced by a late lunch. Hence, there arose a confusion in the terms, which persists to the present. It should be noted that while this was happening in Italy and France, in the United Kingdom there was a different solution to the need to delay the main meal. Breakfast, instead of being at ten, was at about eight in the morning (in effect before work), and halfway through the day there was lunch.

In any case, as it’s five o’clock in the afternoon in Fontanellato, the noises we hear seem to be announcing an imminent meal. We have just enough time to take a last look at the splendid way in which the table has been laid and to notice that all the individual place settings are perfectly equal. This arrangement is novel for two reasons. First, it indicates a desire for uniformity and seriality, uncommon in the past (when plates, goblets, and glasses were often different in shape and color), in deference to a sense of homogeneity, which appears to be characteristic of the modern spirit—and perhaps also of a democratic one. Second, it evinces a strong impetus toward individualism (for the above-mentioned reasons) because taking food from a common dish had been the norm for centuries, just like drinking from a single chalice that was passed from mouth to mouth as a sign of friendship (a distant reminder of those practices is the toast, when for an instant the individual drinks come into contact once again in a sublimated version of drinking from the same glass). But, just a moment. A stentorian voice is announcing, “Dinner is served!”

An Aristocratic Dinner

The door opens and in comes a distinguished gentleman wearing dark livery with embroidered hems. It’s Augusto Feldmann, the chamberlain, a descendant of a dynasty of Swiss chefs. Behind him are two servants, also wearing dark livery, but in a more modest style. They stand on either side of the door, while Feldmann is in front of them, close to the table. Now the dining
companions enter the room: the first one is Count Alberto Sanvitale, who we recognize immediately. He is wearing black tails, that is a long jacket with coattails, and an equally black tie, which stands out against the white shirt and stiff collar. A white handkerchief emerges from his breast pocket (as a sign of seriousness, men had long ago given up frills and colors). Sanvitale is arm in arm with a distinguished lady of a certain age (a guest, perhaps a relative?), who is wearing a long blue draped dress with the skirt raised at the back (it is a half crinoline, a rigid structure worn under a skirt to swell and raise it—now fashion only requires it to be at the back, but twenty or thirty years earlier it had been an enormous circle, which swelled the whole skirt symmetrically, which was not very comfortable!). The dress has a low neckline with white lace, the same as that decorating the ends of her sleeves. We notice that the lady is wearing a small hat resembling a floral composition, various rings, as well as a necklace and pearl earrings. Behind these two is a younger couple (he is also in a dark suit, and she is wearing a beige dress embroidered with small roses as well as a matching small hat). They are followed, respectfully, in single file, by two of Alberto’s children (accompanied by a maidservant who, however, immediately steps aside), Albertina and Giovanni, respectively ten and eight (the youngest child, Guglielma, is not admitted to this dinner and has already eaten in the kitchen with the governess).

A nobleman living at that time would have understood everything and declared that this was a semi-ceremonial dinner. But why? we might ask. It's simple, the nobleman would reply. It is true that the master of the house is wearing smart tails, but with a black tie (not a white one, which would be suitable for a grand dinner)—and I may add that if it had been summer he would probably have worn a dinner jacket with a white waistcoat. The lady's dress does not have a train, and she has a neckline that is not low and shaped like a shawl; furthermore her jewels are costly but not extremely expensive (if it were an important evening, her dress would be different, very elegant, with a low neckline and glittering with jewels). Moreover she is not wearing long gloves (which can be worn at the table, once they have been opened and lowered to cover her wrists). The same holds good for the guests (but just a moment: the young woman must never have as daring a neckline as the ladies!). As for the children, they could never be admitted to an official dinner, which is only for adults. Not to mention the table: the silver and the glassware are all right, but there should be more glasses and silver objects; the centerpiece should be more ornate, next to each guest there should be an elegant handwritten menu attached to a small silver stand; the servants should be wearing their livery for great occasions, and then . . . That’s enough, we understand. Such a complex code is a language that deliberately aims at exclusivity. Therefore, let’s accept what has been said (but dismiss our mentor) in order to observe better what is happening.

The count invites the lady to sit in the center, while he sits on her left, and then he indicates where the other guests should sit, the young man in front of the lady, the young woman in front of him. The children, under the watchful eye of their governess, sit at the end of the table on the left. Two
other servants arrive from the kitchen carrying two bottles of wine. They show them to the master who sips the wine: “Trebbiano bianco, my lord!” After his nod of assent, they pour the wine for all the adults (and water for the children). Then the chamberlain comes forward, and immediately two waiters enter with steaming plates. They begin serving the guests, starting with the lady. It is soup (this one called “soup with meat purée”), as was the custom. 30

While the guests eat and talk about the quality of the wine from the next grape harvest, we can observe the seating arrangement. It gives us food for thought. We had gained an impression of “democracy” from the uniformity of the place settings, but clearly we were wrong. The real message here is still hierarchy, marked by the “places of honor” reserved for the master of the house and, if he is married, his wife, traditionally at the center of the table opposite each other (sitting at the head of the table was more an Anglo-Saxon custom) and flanked by the most important guests (the most eminent man on the wife’s right, the highest-ranking lady on the husband’s right, the second most important man on the wife’s left, and so on). Approaching the table, as we have seen, also follows precise rules. Like in a procession, the master of the house is the first to enter arm in arm with the most illustrious lady, followed by the various guests, in man-woman couples, in a hierarchically decreasing order, ending with the lady of the house arm in arm with the most important male guest. If a priest had been invited, he would immediately have become the guest of honor, sitting on the right of the lady of the house (who, however, could not enter the room arm in arm with him). 31 And so on. Establishing the rank of the guests and according them a hierarchically corresponding place in the rite of the meal is the first step in reaffirming the social order.

Meanwhile, the guests have finished their soup. The waiters remove the plates and a new course arrives, hors d’oeuvre of tuna belly steak (but don’t the hors d’oeuvre usually come before the first course?). The fish is eaten delicately with the appropriate knife and fork in a studied slowness, to a certain extent to show that one appreciates the food, but also that one is consuming it with moderation (perhaps because of the then fashionable proverb, “The man who eats succulent food / digs his grave with his teeth”). 32

Now the waiters enter with a wonderful dish, Modenese pig’s trotter with lentil purée. On a large silver tray, we can see the steaming pig’s trotter resting on a dark velvet bed of lentils and surrounded by a multicolored frame of small vegetables. The heavy tray, borne by a waiter with a felt cloth so that he won’t burn his hands, is shown to the dining companions and then placed on a small serving table to cut the portions, which are served on white china plates with initials (a traditional Italian dinner set envisaged the use of two complete “kitchen” sets, and a “sideboard” set for the dessert). 33 The dinner and the conversation flow in a lively manner, helped by the sparkling Lambrusco poured by the waiters. (“Have you heard that the battleship Italia is almost finished? It will be a wonderful sight, a ship worthy of its name, with twenty-six boilers and twelve thousand horsepower . . .” — “You’re right, very
beautiful, but who knows if Prime Minister Cairoli will be there long enough to launch her. If there are new elections, the Right...—“My dear sirs, don’t you realize that politics bores the ladies? Instead, is there any news about the next season at the Regio Theater? I really hope they go back to Verdi! I remember, as if it were yesterday, the evening of *Aida* a few years ago. The Maestro was in the theater—how moving!”

Between battleships and operas, we have arrived at the next dish, scrambled eggs with ham. Something light to finish a dinner worthy of the name, but it’s not over yet. Eat the eggs in a hurry, everything is ready for the triumphal entry of what appears to be the main dish, garnished roast beef accompanied by endive as a salad. The roast beef is really wonderful. Enormous, steaming, well cooked, it would be enough for at least ten people. The waiters cut the meat and pour the Piedmontese Barolo (“the king of wines and the wine of kings”), and the dinner moves toward its conclusion with a tantalizing sweet (cream puffs shaped like lettuce), followed by the dessert—fruit—and to drink, Malvasia dei Colli di Parma. But the sweet was not for every day; it was prepared on Thursdays, Sundays, and holy days of obligation.34

Satisfied with the food, the dining companions get up. The master of the house walks arm in arm with the elderly lady and a small procession forms once again to leave the room (the children are the last; they have been quiet and good the whole time). We notice that the ladies go into a small room to drink tea or coffee, while the men head toward a smoking room to drink, smoke (of course), and (at last) discuss politics in peace. In the dining room remain the servants, who clear the table and clean everywhere. The last to leave is the chamberlain Feldmann, after making sure that everything is in order.

Now we are alone. The meal has certainly impressed us because of the variety, quantity, and quality of its dishes, but it poses many questions too. To begin with, on what criteria was the succession of courses based? And then, how should we interpret the choices of food and their preparation and presentation?

In order to answer the first question we must again turn to an aristocratic expert, who, pleased to demonstrate his superiority in this regard, will explain that—obviously—we must go back to the sanctioned tradition of the nineteenth century. For a normal meal (the official ones even had twice as many courses), that tradition usually envisaged the following eight courses:

1. *hors-d’œuvre froids* (cold hors-d’oeuvre, not obligatory);
2. *potages* (soup, almost invariably with broth);
3. *hors-d’œuvres chauds* (hot hors-d’oeuvre, not obligatory);
4. *relevés* (a light dish, generally fish, in Italy often replaced by or combined with the hors-d’oeuvre, as at the Sanvitale dinner);
5. *entrées* (the first important dish, generally meat such as boiled beef, game, or poultry);
6. *rôts* (the most important course, roast meat such as beef, veal, lamb, or turkey, not “working-class” meat such as pork, mutton, or rabbit, which were considered inappropriate) accompanied by fresh salad or cooked vegetables;

7. *entremets* (intermezzos, that is, light closing dishes, generally consisting of eggs or vegetable pies, sometimes served between the *entrées* and the *rôts*, as in the dinner we have just witnessed); and

8. *desserts*: *fromages, gateaux, fruits* (several closing dishes: cheeses, cakes, and fruit).35

The Sanvitale dinner closely followed this arrangement: soup broth, fish hors-d’oeuvres, meat entrée (pig’s trotter), intermezzo of eggs, main meat course (roast beef), and, finally, sweets. It therefore appears to have been in line with the canons of the period. It should be borne in mind that it was the main meal because at eleven in the morning, for breakfast, “only” two dishes had been served: “gnocchi with truffles” and “Lamb alla cacciatora.”

If, generally, respect for the rules is culturally important—and takes on a particular significance in the social context of the nobility—what can we say about the food consumed? One thing made a strong impression on us during the dinner—the constant presence of meat, practically from the beginning to the end.

After due consideration, we should not be surprised. Meat has very important cultural and symbolic value, and strong ambivalence attaches to it almost everywhere and in every period. On the one hand, it is mysterious and dangerous, so much so that it is surrounded by taboos and rules because of its link with the act of killing and its allusion to cannibalism. Almost every culture has fundamental myths that refer to the prohibition of killing or eating certain totem animals. This is partly because it was thought that there was no distinction between all living creatures (totem or *odoodeman* in the language of the Ojibwa Indians, for example, means “of his kinship”), and also because men and animals could be interchangeably transformed—and one would not want to eat one’s own doppelgänger (animal alter ego).36 Among other things, one of the hypotheses about the etymology of the name “Italia” traces the term back to a Calabrian population, which had a bovine totem (a calf or perhaps a bull). Participants of the ancient Greco-Roman banquets used to remember the sacrifice of a victim, represented symbolically by an ox, first offered to the gods and then divided among those who were present. In fact, it was said that Prometheus himself had established the division of the sacred banquet between the gods, who received the everlasting smoke, and mortal men, who were destined to have the perishable meat.37 And it is well known that many religions have rigid rules and prohibitions regarding meat. Jews and Muslims may not eat pork (limiting themselves, respectively, to *kosher* and *halal* foods), Hindus may not eat cows, and Christians are expected to practice abstinence during Lent.38 Moreover, meat should be consumed with special precautions (in one of the fundamental books of the Torah and the Bible, *Deuteronomy*, it is laid down: “Only beware of this, that thou eat not
the blood, for the blood is for the soul: and therefore thou must not eat the soul with the flesh”).

On the other hand, meat is of central importance in the human diet and so is the most sought after and valuable food. Not for nothing did Lévi-Strauss see it as central to understanding the “culinary triangle,” namely, the evolution from nature to culture in which raw food represents nature, putrid food the natural transformation of the elements, and cooked food (above all cooked meat) their cultural transformation (cooking is therefore tantamount to manipulating nature for one’s own needs and is the first cultural act). But there is more. For Lévi-Strauss, the method of cooking meat also had significance. The two fundamental variants are roasting (food burnt directly on the flame, cooked externally, an example of *exo-cuisine* linked to men and food eaten with strangers) and boiling (food cooked thanks to the mediation of water and a saucepan, cooked internally, an example of *endo-cuisine* linked to women and food eaten at home). It is no coincidence that in the recent Western tradition roasted food is considered superior. This would explain the preponderance of meat on the abundant aristocratic menu we have seen and also the role of the roast as the main dish. Let us also remember that the ancient ritualistic thinkers of the Sanskrit tradition, in their meditations (“the vast forests”), viewed the concept of cooking as a fundamental principle. The sacrificial fire of the Brahmins was like the sun that cooks everything, *lokapakri*, the “cooking of the world.”

The central importance of meat can also be explained from the point of view of cultural materialism, as noted by the scholar Marvin Harris. The incredible variety of human behaviors as regards food embodies functional adaptations to environmental challenges. Thus, practical or economic considerations could explain everything. If the final aim is reproductive efficiency or the development of the species—for human beings, just like for animals—then why, asks Harris, should we be surprised if the strongest and most capable people (or the most powerful and most fortunate—we can add what we like) exploit to the utmost the best sources of proteins, vitamins, and minerals available in their environment?

Finally, there are specifically social factors. Exactly as happened for the structure of the dinner, we can assume that historically there developed a hierarchy of foods (and their preparation) linked in some way to the social order. The reasons in this case would entail tradition and the evolution of taste, but also the local availability of ingredients, the market (and therefore the prices—see Table 1 at the end of the book), as well as historical-environmental factors. We can conclude that there is some truth in all of these explanations and, as often happens, they reinforce each other.

To return to the aristocratic dinner, it is worth noting that we have seen different types of meat cooked in particular ways, but if we had visited another region, even nearby, things would have been different. The variety of the recipes was extraordinary. Even the names of the cuts of meat were different. Only beef fillet had the same name almost everywhere, but roast beef was called *lombo* in Bari and Rome, *lombata* in Florence, Genoa, and Verona,
biffo in Naples, trinca in Palermo and Reggio Calabria, lonza in Turin, lai sottile in Venice, and controfiletto in Parma. The nearby cut of rump was another example. Its main variations were colarda (Apulia and Campania), fetta (Emilia), melino or mela (Tuscany), cassa del belin (Liguria), scannello (Lombardy: Mantua), scamone (Lombardy: Milan; Veneto: Verona), sotto codata (Sicily), culatello (Emilia: Parma), a codata (Calabria), pezza (Latium), sottofiletto (Veneto: Treviso), sottofiletto spesso (Piedmont), taglio di nombolo (Veneto: Venice), straculo (Veneto: Vicenza). Needless to say, every place had its own ideas about which dishes could be prepared with which cut of meat, how the dish should be cooked, what side dishes there should be, and so forth. Even the apparently most common and uniform dish, roast meat, had many variations—in the fat used to flavor it (butter, lard, or olive oil), in the lardons used to keep it tender (thin slices of lard, bacon, or ham of various types), and in the herbs used. In Monferrato, it was cooked with anchovies; in the Langhe, with a hazelnut sauce; in some regions, it was first marinated; in others, water, broth, or wine (arrosto morto or “dead roast”) was added at the end of the cooking. Alternatively, it was enveloped in dough or covered with a layer of salt or transformed into a stuffed meat roll. Nor was there agreement about where it should be cooked. On the spit, in the oven, in a saucepan, in clay pots, on the grill, under ashes? The situation for “roast” was similar. In most of Central and Southern Italy, the term almost never implied the use of beef, but rather (even for the richest tables) lamb, kid, poultry, or game—with the myriad of consequent further variations, of course.

Apart from the presence of meat, with all that it entails, the other striking aspect of the dinner at Fontanellato was the intoxication of all the senses. One was impressed by the opulence of the preparation, and also by the careful combination of colors—the very white tablecloth, the cutlery and crystal glassware glinting in the light of the sunset, and the intense hues of the hot food (from the burnished meat to the rose-colored fish, from the splendid shades of the vegetables to the golden eggs: a symphony of colors). It should be borne in mind that colors had a precise significance. Gold and white, for example, were the most refined (“white food,” based on milk and almonds, was a superior delicacy). The dinner was also a wonderful experience for the sense of smell, with strong and penetrating aromas to stimulate the appetite—as it certainly was for the taste buds (unfortunately, something we can only imagine). Taste mattered a great deal. After all, as Bourdieu reminds us, tasting food represents the archetype of all the forms of taste because it is on the basis of this experience, deeply rooted in our bodies and learned very early in childhood, that the oppositions of bitter–sweet, tasty–insipid, vulgar–refined, which accompany us throughout our lives, are constructed. We cannot say anything about the sense of touch (bearing in mind the absolute ban on touching the food), but we have been able to observe that in general the food seems tender (well-cooked meat, vegetables cut in small pieces, scrambled eggs, and so on). The “soft” was preferred to the “hard.” And the sense of hearing? In the end, that was also satisfied thanks to convivial conversation,
always conducted in a low voice. Moreover, in official dinners there would have been music.

Above all, we are left with a feeling of awe for the quantity and variety of foods (many of them only partly consumed). Certainly, the bounty is nothing like the *potlatch* of the Kwakiutl Indians described by Ruth Benedict, whose main chiefs did not hesitate to obliterate, with studied indifference, most of their possessions to show publicly the extent of their wealth. (After one of these “contests of prestige” with Fast Runner, who had thrown precious ceremonial copper sheets onto the flames, destroyed four canoes, and killed three slaves, Throw Away and his clan could only flee and fight their enemies, finding death.) Nonetheless, the Kwakiutl and our aristocratic Italian were informed by the same idea, namely, that real wealth lies in social prestige, not in the mere accumulation of material goods.

But just a minute, someone is coming back! We have just enough time to make ourselves scarce. It is Feldmann, who, after having made sure yet again that everything in the room is in order, goes to a drawer in the sideboard and takes out an envelope with thin white sheets of fine Fabriano paper. At the table, in refined and flowing handwriting, he records the details of the meal, listing all the courses and concluding with the date and his signature. As always, he then puts everything back in the drawer, where, luckily for us, it will be preserved for very many years. After a final satisfied glance, he leaves the room, closing the door behind him—the end of a day like all the others in the Sanvitale castle.

**LOCAL AND GLOBAL, QUANTITY AND QUALITY**

Just how lavish was this dinner? How different was it from that consumed by other Italians? To answer this question, we have to imagine the preceding scene as set at the heart of a poor and backward Italy, often lacking essential services. To clarify the situation, we are talking about a country of approximately 28 million inhabitants according to the 1881 census (22 million in 1861) with a very low per capita income ($1,467 in 1881, compared to more than $2,000 in France and Germany and $3,500 in the wealthy United Kingdom the same year) and scattered across more than 8,250 municipal districts (more than today). For most of the population, food accounted for more than half their income (reaching to over 80 percent for the peasants). What remained of their incomes was divided among the other unavoidable expenses, that is, housing and a minimum of clothing. Let’s consider the price of meat, which we have seen was the distinctive mark of an aristocratic dinner. The statistics inform us that meat consumption in the 1870s was about 15 kilograms per capita (of which only a third was beef), with great regional variations, as against the 127 kilograms of wheat and 70 kilograms of the less valued cereals (corn, paddy, and rye). Thus, grains—together with potatoes, legumes, and little else—constituted the basis of the daily meal for most Italians. Even as late as the 1880s, almost five thousand municipal districts reported that meat consumption in their territories was scarce and restricted
to the more affluent. Regarding regional variations in meat consumption, the data for 1876–79 reveal a peak of 29 kilograms per capita in Latium (because of the very high consumption in Rome); 12 to 13 kilograms in Piedmont, Liguria, Emilia, Tuscany, and Sardinia; 11 kilograms in Lombardy and Veneto; 8.5 kilograms in Umbria, the Marches, and Southern Italy; 7 kilograms in Sicily; and only 4.7 kilograms in the Southern Adriatic zone.\footnote{48} In this context, the presence of meat on the tables of the nobles conveyed a strong social message. It was a sign of the luxury that distinguished the aristocracy. In the closing decades of the nineteenth century, when an upper-level civil servant earned a gross annual income of 4,000 to 5,000 lire, the noble Piedmontese Pallavicino-Mossi family used to spend 20,000 lire just on their Torinese castle—4,000 for the building itself, 5,700 for the servants, 2,300 for the horses and carriages (also important symbols, especially if they prominently displayed the family coat of arms), and 8,000 for the kitchen and wine cellar.\footnote{49} So much for narratives claiming the aristocracy was losing its political and economic power to the ambitious bourgeoisie!

In passing, it could be interesting to compare the dietary habits of the Italian nobility with those of the nobles of other countries. Obviously, this is not easy because of the great variety of cases and the difficulty in finding documentation. But, leaving aside the Northern European countries (whose consumption of meat, since Roman times, was so high as to make a striking contrast with the Mediterranean consumers of bread), a useful case is that of the noble Cervera family in Southern Spain at the beginning of the nineteenth century.\footnote{50} Many similarities emerge: first, a strong and continuous consumption of meat, and of the most select cuts (apart from local products such as vegetables and olive oil); second, the presence of some exotic and often costly products, such as citrus fruits, rice, and cod as well as chocolate, sugar, and various spices. Finally, a constant level of consumption, unaffected by price changes (the relevant study considers above all chocolate). In effect, with due regard for all the necessary caveats, we could speak of an international circulation of dietary models among the aristocratic elites as a distinctive demarcation from the other social classes.

Therefore, we can say that the nobility’s dinner clearly distinguished itself—in terms of quantity and quality of food—from that of the other classes. At the same time, scholars such as Jack Goody, a specialist on Africa, as well as scholars with expertise on ancient civilizations (Egypt, Mesopotamia, ancient China, and medieval Islam) have observed that quantity and quality are neither synonymous nor interchangeable. Let’s clarify this point. In societies with a relatively simple or barely stratified social structure, the differences are generally quantitative: the type of food consumed is more or less the same for everyone, but the elites consume more of it (more meat, for example, and of a better cut). Often, the reason is simply that there is not much variety available, but there is still the food’s symbolic value. Food has a unifying quality; it can reinforce ties within a social group (most clearly in public redistribution ceremonies). In complex and stratified modern societies, most of the population has access to a sufficient or even abundant quantity of food.
Thus, elites there choose a different strategy. The accent is not so much on the quantity of food (at least beyond a certain measure), but on its quality and distinctiveness—foods considered more select and refined, exotic products from far-away places, rare and expensive foods, but also dietary combinations, luxurious ways of serving a meal, the creation of rigid rules of etiquette, and so on. Indulging in an excess of food can even become a sign of greed and vulgarity (and is left to the lower classes). In this way, food assumes the value of social separation. For Stephen Mennell, it is a transition that happened at different times in Europe, but generally in the 1600s and 1700s, marking the beginning of high-quality cooking. Jack Goody is even more explicit and contrasts the two systems for marking social distinction by focusing on basse cuisine and haute cuisine.

In other words, the nobles’ meal symbolically represents the vertical social separation in a highly stratified society, which has developed codes of distinction based on rules and variations in the quantity and quality of the foods consumed.

But the social and cultural aspects of the dinner we saw do not exhaust all that it can tell us about Italy at that time. There’s more. To start with, we arrived on a day that, by chance, was neither a Friday, nor in the period preceding Easter, nor an important feast day. Otherwise the meal would have been different. In fact, the dinner we witnessed can also tell us much about the significance and weight of religion. Naturally, the religious symbolism linked to eating is complex, but there is one pressing question here. How should the lavish and abundant dinners of the nobles be assessed from a religious—particularly a Catholic—point of view? To what extent were they legitimate? Didn’t such eating amount to a sin, specifically that of gluttony?

The origins of the seven deadly sins are very old. They can be traced back to the Mithraic and hermetic doctrines of the Hellenistic period, which denied the concept of a god who had created everything, including evil. Instead, evil resided in the spirits who dwelt in the seven mobile stars rotating around the earth and continually tempting man. The doctrine of the deadly sins, taken up again and reworked by Christian thinkers such as Augustine and Gregory the Great, gave rise to a specific hierarchy among the spiritual vices with pride as the worst, followed in turn by avarice, lust, wrath, gluttony, envy, and sloth. The concept of the seven deadly sins, from which all the others derive, was well present in the minds of the faithful thanks also to its iconographic success. Representations of these sins’ terrible consequences were widespread and frightening, as in the paintings of Pieter Bruegel the Elder. The one on gluttony presents a monstrous universe of half-naked men and women, half-dressed animals, extraordinary hybrids (heads with hands, men-fish, and men-beasts) intent on drinking and eating avidly and untidily on a bridge, near a strange building (perhaps an inn), from which a giant emerges. In the distance are smoking buildings, boats, men drowning in the river, a great furnace, and a windmill with a human face endlessly gulping down food. This disturbing picture unequivocally suggests that the sin of gluttony induces, in people, a degradation that equates them with animals...
and is linked to the other cardinal sins, starting with lust. How can one escape from this hell?

The aristocracy of the past did it in two ways. First, there was moderation (or temperance). The sin of gluttony, according to the attitude of the time, only occurred when one ate too much—in terms of quantity and quality—in relation to one’s means, when one thought only of food, when one experienced unrestrained pleasure, and so on. Therefore, the moderation at the dinner we witnessed also had the function of controlling excesses. Naturally, the idea of “measure” and “moderation” is a highly variable cultural notion and hence should be viewed in historical context. What to us seemed a lavish meal would have been “normal” for an aristocratic family of the time. In fact, it was much more modest than the typical meal of the preceding centuries. Second, dinners were adapted to the liturgical calendar and, more specifically, to the rules of the Church, which prescribed abstaining from eating meat on Fridays and mandated fasting during Lent and on particular days (for example, on the eves of feast days). On the Sanvitale’s table, the foods varied because of the seasons and the creativity of the chamberlain Feldmann (who certainly went along with the tastes of the master of the house), but also in accordance with the phases of the liturgical year. The latter meant abstaining from meat on Fridays (but not always, to tell the truth), lavish dinners on Sundays and important religious feast days, light and meager during Lent, once again lavish for Carnival, and so on—always attending to the rules of moderation and taste. The significance of the alternation between eating abundantly and meagerly should not be underestimated because the days with dietary restrictions were over a third of the total. Furthermore, since the Lutheran Reformation’s elimination of precise rules about fasting in Northern Europe, this abundant–meager alternation constituted one of the distinguishing elements between Catholics and Protestants. The precept of eating meagerly envisaged the exclusion of all meat and fats derived, in particular, from land animals. Fish was allowed and, according to some interpretations, some birds such as wild ducks and coots. Thus, religious practice was so deeply inscribed in the rules of social behavior of the elite of liberal Italy as to constitute not only a moral and spiritual reference point but also a practical one applicable to everyday routine.

But let’s return for a moment to the dinner of tuna, soup, stuffed pig’s trotter, roast beef, vegetables, Lambrusco, and Barolo. There is a question we modern consumers—perhaps worried about the quality of our food, its origins, and excessively long production chains—have had in mind from the start. Is this meal really a local product, natural and wholesome, the result of agriculture and local trade? Or, in more general terms, when the nobles of Fontanellato—and all the other Italian aristocrats—took part in the ritual of a meal, were they displaying their belonging to a specific local community (with its customs, products, and traditions) or to a vaster international and cosmopolitan culture instead?

To a certain extent, we already know the answer. We have seen how French culture influenced the procedure of the meal, its structure, and its
glossary. (It was also certainly directly present on important occasions with some of its products, such as high-quality wines and champagne, or other refined products). We can undoubtedly state that the dinner confirmed the cosmopolitan character of the Italian aristocracy of the time, an elite that felt itself to be an integral part of international high society. But if the syntax of the meal (the rules) were French and cosmopolitan, the lexica (the products) were mainly local—or, at most, regional. Diverse elements coexisted without any problems and together made up the final language (as often happens in the kitchen, and sometimes in life). Therefore, the nobles from Fontanellato could enjoy local products and recipes, including different types of pasta (passatelli, anolini, macaroni, lasagna), as well as risotto, ham (culatello and prosciutto), mortadella, cracklings, eggs, polenta, not to mention boiled meat, stuffed pig’s trotter, poultry, and many other things. It should be borne in mind that, without the slightest fear of violating any noble canons, the aristocratic meal also included “poor” and peasant foods.55

But we have to be careful. What exactly do we mean by “local” and “wholesome”? Something that grows nearby and has always been present in the area instead of coming from far away? Strictly speaking, then, there is almost nothing “local.” Perhaps there is nothing in human history that has traveled so much, from one end of the earth to the other, and as early as ancient times, as food. Wheat derives from a wild graminaceous plant (einkorn) present ten thousand years ago in Mesopotamia, the same place from which barley originated; citrus fruits and rice originate from Southeast Asia (via the Arabs) and eggplants from India (via Spain and Sicily), the last taking a path like that of many spices (which themselves were originally from Indonesia) and later followed by cane sugar; peaches traveled from China (through Persia), like tea; spinach also came from Persia, yet again via the Arabs; coffee originated in the plateaus of Ethiopia and was introduced in Europe by the Arabs with the name qahwah; corn was brought from Central America by Christopher Columbus; from the Mexico of the Aztecs we have received cocoa (xocoatl) and the tomato (tomatl); and also from America potatoes, beans, peppers, tobacco, and more; bananas originated in Southeast Asia, but spread throughout Africa (and from there reached Europe and America)…56 It’s a long list.

If we wanted to draw a map showing the main movements of food, we would have to begin with the oldest, following humanity’s first great dietary revolution, the beginning of agriculture about ten thousand years ago (with the spread of the main cereal cultures and the domestication of various animal species). Then we would have to create macro-regions of internal movements (often coinciding with the great empires of antiquity). A second period of intense trade occurred with the Roman Empire, which moved great quantities of goods, foods, and animals throughout its length and breadth (Europe, the Mediterranean, and Africa) and laid some of the foundations of the Western culinary civilization. Then we would have to consider the great medieval trade between Asia and Europe. If silk arrived from China by land, spices traveled by sea from the Far East and India, through Arabia, to Europe thanks to
enterprising (Venetian and above all Arab) merchants. Another fundamental piece of the overall picture fell into place thanks to the Columbian exchange between Europe and the Americas after 1492. As mentioned above, Europe imported products such as potatoes, tomatoes, corn, and chocolate (not to mention fruits like pineapples, avocados, and papayas, as well as peanuts) and exported even more: wheat, citrus fruits, olives, grapes, sugar, lettuce, cabbages, and various vegetables (and above all animals like cattle, sheep, and pigs). The consequences of this exchange were enormous and permitted the conquerors to exercise a spectacular demographic expansion on both sides of the Atlantic, albeit at the cost of a drastic reduction in the indigenous population (due above all to smallpox pandemics) and the radical transformation of the Amerindian ecosystem.57 Finally, with subsequent colonial conquests trade became very intense throughout the world (America, Africa, Asia, and Oceania). By now our map is so full of colored lines, representing trade routes, as to seem not so much a map as a complicated fractal.

This does not mean we cannot speak of local products. The quality and variety of indigenous animal and plant species, climatic conditions, and the geographic characteristics and cultural traditions of place created unique, often unrepeatable environments. These environments, however, were not static. Instead they evolved, albeit over long periods of time, to accept and transform external elements. In some cases, the new products replaced others. In Italy, the potato replaced chestnuts as a cheap staple in the mountains and likewise turnips on the plains. As well, the American turkey replaced the peacock (and other wild birds), leaving traditional recipes virtually unchanged.58 In some cases, there was an adaptation to the culinary norms of the place. Corn was never eaten as grains but ground into flour (following the example of wheat) and cooked as polenta; for a long time, tomatoes were not eaten raw but crushed and cooked (like other vegetables) to obtain a sauce. At other times, products were modified to adapt them to local tastes. For example, the slightly bitter artichoke is an improved version of the thistle-like cardoon, obtained via grafts in the 1500s between the Middle East and Italy and a long process of selective breeding. Today’s sweet fennel, very different from the old variety, comes from the same period. Our tender and sweet orange-colored carrots were obtained by Dutch farmers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, starting from wild carrots, which were small, hard, violet, and white.

Basically, it takes time for a product to be accepted in a given environment (if it is technically possible and if it is suitable for the culture of the place). In time, it becomes part of the local tradition and comes to be seen as part of the “language” of the place. Traditions thrive on encounters and exchanges; they are never completely closed, but this does not mean that they are any less significant as sources of identity and belonging. We belong to historically constructed places, or rather, to their cultural narrations.

So what can we conclude (seeing that all this traveling has made us feel giddy)? We can say that the Italian aristocracy elegantly combined its cosmopolitan aspirations with its belonging to a particular place, the international with the regional or—more accurately in an Italian context—the local.
This upper-class propensity for local traditions is also indirectly confirmed by the cookbooks of the time. What by then was a centuries-old recognized literary genre experienced great growth in the Renaissance, at the height of the Italian culinary tradition derived from the Middle Ages, with Bartolomeo Scappi’s monumental *Opera*. This work described a well-defined cuisine characterized by a mixture of flavors, an appreciation of sweet and sour, an extensive use of vegetables, an urban outlook, influences from popular cuisine, and heterogeneous contributions from different parts of Italy. The book described an “anthological” cuisine, according to Alberto Capatti and Massimo Montanari, that did not want to impose a single model but instead thrived on the wealth of its many voices. A great deal could be said about cookbooks as a literary genre, in which, for a long time, authorship carried little weight because it was a matter of relating collective traditions, which often grew over time and cut across gender and class lines. The history of cookery has often been written based on these manuals (initially they were used above all by professional cooks in palaces and later in hotels and restaurants).  

In the seventeenth century, as we have seen, the so-called French gastronomic revolution brought a breath of fresh air everywhere because of its search for more natural and wholesome flavors, without many spices, well defined and not mixed, not to mention all the associated social customs we have seen. Its success was certainly due to a multiplicity of cultural and political factors, and in particular to the power of the monarchy at Versailles to spread a new material lifestyle throughout Europe. Meanwhile, Italian cuisine (like the whole country) withdrew into itself, finding expression in almost exclusively urban and regional cookbooks for two centuries. But, in the long run, this withdrawal had a positive side. It reinforced local ties to an extraordinary degree and eventually constituted a distinctive feature of Italian cuisine.  

Still, something was beginning to change. The Risorgimento and the birth of the Kingdom of Italy had brought a wave of nationalism, which was reflected in all aspects of the country’s social and cultural life. In the political sphere, there was a growing clash with France for colonial supremacy in the Mediterranean, which culminated in 1881 in the “insult” of the French occupation of Tunisia, a prize that both Agostino Depretis’s and Benedetto Cairoli’s governments had sought. Against this background, newspapers abounded in patriotism; there was a call for a national theater to oppose “decadent” French drama; and, in the literary field, Edmondo De Amicis was beginning to write his novel *Cuore* to arouse patriotic feeling.  

It is not surprising that in this context, a few years later, there appeared a work like that by Pellegrino Artusi, a merchant from Forlimpopoli, who was interested in literature and was a patriot (in his youth he had belonged to Giuseppe Mazzini’s patriotic liberation movement, Young Italy). His 1891 book *La scienza in cucina e l’arte di mangiar bene* (Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well), the result of his travels throughout Italy (above all in Emilia and Tuscany), became a best seller and was the first recognized book of the new Italian cuisine. (The manuscript had been rejected by various publishers, and Artusi had had to pay for its publication out of his
own pocket, but it went through dozens of editions and sold thousands of copies.) Its success lay in its respect for gastronomic plurality and in its ability to combine haute cuisine with more popular dishes, addressing a broad bourgeois-aristocratic public with a clear message of appreciation for national traditions. “Italian cuisine,” wrote Artusi, “can rival the French, and in some points surpass it.” Elsewhere, in illustrating the “sauce à la Maître d’Hotel,” the author commented, “Listen to what a pompous name for a mere trifle! And yet the French have assumed the right in this and in other things to lay down the law; the custom has prevailed and one must perforce submit to it.” As for mashed potatoes, “By now in Italy if one does not speak barbarian, particularly as regards fashion and cookery, no one understands you; therefore in order to be understood I must call this side dish not mashed potatoes... but a purée of... or even more barbarously mâchées potatoes.”

The book grew from edition to edition, reaching a total of 790 recipes thanks to the contributions of readers who sent their suggestions. (In fact, almost all of these contributions came from women, like the person who explained how to prepare “pizza a libretti,” the “beautiful and very kind lady Adele,” who revealed her secrets for a delicate pie, or the lady from Conegliano in the Veneto region, who pointed out the importance of small puerperal biscuits for recovering from the strain of childbirth.)

If Artusi contributed to codifying the new Italian cuisine, Bettino Ricasoli was behind the international success of Chianti wine, which also became a symbol of national rebirth. The Florentine Baron, also a protagonist in Italian politics (premier in 1861 and 1866), “created” the famous wine by starting with the old vines on his estates at Brolio near Siena. His aim was to create an Italian wine of superior quality that could compete against French wines on the international market. In 1872, after three decades of study and experimentation, he established a formula that envisaged as a base the local Sangiovese, whose strong and characteristic flavor was sweetened by the presence of Camaiolo and lightened by some Malvasia. The result was an excellent wine, which received numerous prizes, even in Paris, and was promoted with great tenacity by the baron, who supervised all stages of production and national and international distribution. Chianti became a brand name, we could say, which combined commercial success and national pride, as was evident in the promoter’s intentions.

Despite these developments, high French cuisine held its ground in the great hotels and restaurants, which looked with admiration at the example of the partnership between César Ritz and Auguste Escoffier. The former was the founder of very luxurious hotels based on comfort and modernity (starting with the Savoy in London, always full during the horse racing season). The latter was the creator of a new international cuisine—with very elaborate dishes and many sauces—prepared by teams of specialized cooks. The same thing happened in the most exclusive aristocratic circles and even at the table of the king of Italy. Many looked to the king’s table for a signal, which did not arrive until around 1909–10, when King Victor Emanuel III insisted on a menu that was written in Italian and contained more typically national dishes
(and above all wines). So a third component, the national one, gradually grafted itself onto the regional–cosmopolitan axis, which had characterized the aristocratic diet for some two centuries. In this situation, the cosmopolitan (French) element was slowly replaced by the national one—even if this national element did not reference a single, specific model like in France, where it derived from the incredibly strong political-cultural center of Paris and the court at Versailles. Instead, in Italy, the idea of nation was decentralized, urban, strongly imbued with past traditions, and very closely linked to the local territory.

We can therefore reach an important conclusion. The convivial customs of the Italian aristocracy in the two decades following the attainment of national unity belonged to a privileged world of material culture, which was undergoing transformation but was still strongly linked to practices whose legitimacy was deeply rooted in the preceding centuries, underlining the unique and unreplicable role of the dominant class. Thus, it was normal for the aristocratic Sanvitale family to understand their position of dominance as part of a continuity that reached back many centuries, at least as far as the Middle Ages. And it was normal to think of the Renaissance as a turning point, when a court culture with new cultural and aesthetic canons had taken shape. This new material culture, as Richard Goldthwaite suggests, was based on an aesthetic sensibility produced by the encounter between the medieval religious artistic tradition and sixteenth-century urban civilization. That was when the nobility developed a special concern for secular art and architecture, but also for interior design and equipment for eating (dinner services with plates, glasses, and napkins for every dining companion; ceramics; and cutlery, above all the fork, which was used in a way still unknown in Northern Europe). Everything had to combine refinement and domesticity, aesthetics and wealth. With all its local variants, this culture of material goods spread and became a recognizable sign everywhere in Italy. In this way, the world of material goods and its practices, including the convivial ones, became an essential component of the life of Italian nobles for centuries and was definitively a breeding ground for a common identity (an “imagined community” if you will), on which the process of the creation of a national culture grafted itself.

At the table, as in the country at large, identity was the result of an old, polycentric cultural tradition, which the centralizing ambitions of the new state did not succeed in suppressing, thus laying the foundations for that combination of institutional weakness and local vitality that still distinguishes Italy today.
Chapter 2

Nature and Culture in the Peasant World

(Or the Zenith and Crisis of Liberalism, 1881–1900)

The traveler who passed by Lake Biviere di Lentini, which lay there like a piece of dead sea, and by the parched stubble of the Plain of Catania, and the evergreen orange trees of Francofonte, and the gray corks of Resecone, and the deserted grazing lands of Passaneto and Passinatello, if he asked, “Whose is all this?” to dispel the boredom of the long dusty road, under the sky, hazy from the heat, at the hour when the bells of the cart sound sadly in the immense countryside, and the mules let their heads and tails dangle, and the carter sings his sad song in order not to let himself be overcome by the sleep of malaria, would hear the answer: “Mazzarò’s.” And passing near a farm the size of a village, with grain stores that seem to be churches, and hens in flocks crouched in the shadow of the well, and women who put their hands over their eyes to see who was passing by: “And here?” “Mazzarò’s.” And he walked and walked, while the malaria weighed on his eyes, and he was suddenly shaken by the barking of a dog, passing through an endless vineyard, which widened on the hill and on the plain, still, as if the dust weighed on it, and the keeper of the vineyard lying face down on a gun, near the valley, lifted his sleepy head, and opened an eye to see who it was: “Mazzarò’s.” Then came an olive grove thick as a forest, where the grass never appeared and the harvest lasted until March. They were Mazzarò’s olive trees. And in the evening, when the sun was setting as red as fire, and the countryside was veiled with sadness, one came across the long rows of Mazzaròn’s plows, returning slowly from the fallow land, and the oxen, which were slowly crossing the ford with their snouts in the dark water; and one could see in the distant pastures of Canziria, on the barren slope, the immense whitish marks of Mazzarò’s herds; and one could hear the shepherd’s whistle echoing in the gorges,
and the cowbell that alternatingly resounded, and the solitary song lost in
the valley. “It’s all Mazzarò’s.” It seemed that even the setting sun belonged
to Mazzarò, and the buzzing cicadas, and the birds that were going, with a
short flight behind the cloths, to curl up, and the hiss of the horned owl in the
woods. It seemed that Mazzarò was stretched out as big as the land, and that
one was walking on his belly. Instead he was a little man, said the carter,
who you would not give a penny to see; and the only fat he had was on his
belly, and no one knew how he filled it because he never ate more than two
cents’ worth of bread; and yes, he was as rich as a pig, but that man had a
head like a diamond.

In fact, with his head like a diamond, he had accumulated all those things.
Whereas he used to come from morning to night to dig, prune, and harvest,
in the sun, rain, and wind, without shoes, and without even a tattered coat,
everyone remembered having kicked his backside—those who now addressed
him as “Excellency” and spoke to him cap in hand. Nor because of this had
he become proud, now that all the notables of the village were his debtors.
He said that excellency meant poor devil and bad payer; and he still wore
a cap, only it was in black silk—that was his only sign of greatness, and
most recently he had got to the point of wearing a felt hat, because it cost
less than the silk cap. His possessions extended as far as the eye could see, and
he was far-sighted—everywhere, right and left, in front and behind, on the
mountain and on the plain. Over five thousand mouths, not counting the
birds and animals of the earth, ate on his land, and without counting his
mouth, which ate least of all, and he was content with two cents’ worth of
bread and a piece of cheese, hurriedly gulped down, while standing, in a
corner of the grain store as big as a church, in the midst of the dust from
the wheat, which was not visible, while the peasants were unloading sacks, or
behind a haystack, when the wind swept the frozen countryside at the time
of sowing, or with his head inside a basket, in the hot days of harvest. He
did not drink wine, did not smoke, did not use tobacco, but his gardens
along the river certainly did produce tobacco, with the leaves as wide and
high as a child, those that were sold at 95 liras. He did not have the vices of
gambling or women. He had only had one woman to take care of, his mother,
who had even cost him 12 tari, when he had had to have her brought to the
cemetery....

At harvest time, Mazzarò’s reapers seemed like an army of soldiers.
In order to support all these people, with a biscuit in the morning, and
bread and bitter orange for lunch, and an afternoon snack, and lasagna
in the evening, handfuls of money were needed, and the lasagna was dished
out in chests as wide as tubs. Therefore, now, when he went on horseback
behind the rows of his reapers, with his whip in hand, he did not lose sight
of any of them, and was careful to repeat, “Let’s get down to it, boys!”
He was always having to reach into his pockets for money, all year round,
and the king grabbed so much for just the land that Mazzarò ended up
with a fever, every time.... And how many vexations had Mazzarò to
endure! The sharecroppers who came to complain about the bad harvest,
debtors who sent their women in procession pulling their hair and beat-
ing their breasts to implore him to not put them out on the road, taking
the mule or donkey so they had nothing to eat. “Do you see what I eat?,”
he replied. “Bread and onions! And yes, I have packed warehouses, and
I am the master of all this stuff.” And if they asked him for a handful
of broad beans, from all that stuff, he would say: “What? You think I’ve stolen them? Don’t you know how much it costs to sow, hoe, and harvest them?” And if they asked him for a penny, he replied that he didn’t have one. . . .

There was only one thing he regretted—that he was beginning to grow old and that he would have to leave the land where it was. This was an injustice of God, that after he had worn out his life to buy some things, when he came to have them, and he wanted more, he would have to leave it all behind! And he would sit for hours on his basket, with his chin in his hands, looking at his vineyards, whose greenery spread beneath his eyes, and the swaying fields of wheat like a sea, and the olive groves, which veiled the mountain like a fog. And if a half-naked boy passed before him, bent under a weight like a tired donkey, he would throw his stick between his legs, out of envy, and would mutter, “Look who has a long life ahead of him! This fellow who has nothing!”

So when they told him that it was time to leave his things, to think of his soul, he came out into the yard like a madman, staggering, and with his stick he started killing his ducks and turkeys, and screamed, “My things, come with me!”

Giovanni Verga’s dramatic short story presents a set of contrasts. The poverty of people, on the one hand, and luxuriant nature, on the other; unceasing labor that produces great wealth confronted by—as compensation for that effort—only poverty and despair. Everything is dominated by poverty, a poverty that ends up becoming a way of life and forging values and behaviors that never change, not even when there is a drastic change in a person’s social condition. Mazzarò is condemned by his own culture to live “like a poor man.” He is the extreme example—the former peasant who, fearful of losing what he has accumulated, does not consume anything, instead continuing to live like, and worse than, the others. Certainly, it is also a story about human greed (another of the cardinal sins), but the author seems to be suggesting that a great deal can be explained by social and cultural conditions.

The story grasps a fundamental aspect of the peasant diet—the absence rather than the presence of food because the dramatic conditions of life for most of the rural population were the dominant element in centuries of Italian history.

Everything in Italian peasant culture up to the end of the 1800s and beyond speaks to us of this atavistic hunger and of the central role of food. Eating and drinking are always positive in the regional and local proverbs: “You never grow old at the table” (Tuscany, A tavola non si invecchia); “Eating is not a sin” (Naples, ‘O magnà nun è peccato); “Meat and fish make you grow” (Sicily, Carni e pisci la vita ti crisci); “Salted codfish in the Vicenza style is good in the evening and in the morning” (Vicenza, Bacalà a la visentina, bon de sera e de matina); “Any suffering or pain is alleviated by bread and wine” (Sicily, Ogni pena e ogni dogghia pani e vinu la cunnmogghia); “On a full stomach you can reason better” (Genoa, Co-a pansa pinn-a se raxonn-a meggio). Furthermore, eating and drinking are the best ways of sealing an agreement: “Well done or badly done, after the contract, one
drinks,” according to the people of Veneto (Fato o ben o mal, dopo ‘l contrato se beve el bocal). And if you have a good breakfast early in the morning in Milan, you can even “enchant the fog” (incantar la nebbia). It is as wonderful to have food as it is sad not to have it. “If you go to bed without having dined you toss and turn all night” (Tuscany, Chi va a letto senza cena tutta notte si dimena), a condition worsened by fleas in Sicily, where, “If you go to bed on an empty stomach, you feel the fleas” (Cu’si curca dijunu tutti li pulici li senti), and expressed ascetically in Milan—“Go to bed with the Madonna” (Anda in lecc con la Madonna).

In popular folklore, redemption was unattainable, except for fleeting transgressions during holidays like the Carnival, or it was projected onto a utopian plane—the Land of Cockaigne or Plenty, a place with all the pleasures and full freedom, but above all a place of lavish and abundant food, with no need to work. The Land of Cockaigne was a medieval tradition present in nearly all European literatures and first documented in an eleventh-century fable from Picardy. (In Italy it was present from Giovanni Boccaccio, under the name of Bengodi, all the way to modern works like those of Alessandro Manzoni, not to mention Matilde Serao’s ironic book.) It is also to be found in famous iconographic representations, often as the tree of Cockaigne (Bruegel the Elder, Goya). In general, these representations depict some characteristics typical of the peasant world turned upside down. It is always a holiday; it is always spring (specifically May); nature is very generous and offers food that grows naturally in the soil or falls from heaven, already cooked, into people’s mouths. But there are also some universal features present in almost all known mythologies—the men are always young (aged thirty) and happy, harmony reigns everywhere, and there are no laws—so that it is not difficult to see traces of the old myths of the Golden Age.

The Banda of Central Africa tell how one day Tere asked the supreme being Ivoro to return to the barren Earth, bringing with him all the good things of Heaven. Tere’s wish was granted and a big drum was prepared. It contained seeds, animals, plants, and also a man and a woman. The big drum was to be lowered to the Earth with a very long rope, and Tere would bang it loudly to signal its arrival. The drum began its slow descent, but a millipede attached to the rope fell on the drum, making a noise which crossed the clouds and reached Ivoro, who, thinking it was Tere’s signal, cut the rope. The drum crashed and turned over. All the seeds and plants were scattered everywhere; the birds flew away, the animals ran away in every direction. Tere tried in vain to stop them. When the drum reached the ground, there were only a few animals and seeds, and they are the ones which are in the villages today, tamed and cultivated. There were also the human beings, but everything else was scattered in the woods and became wild and uncultivated. It has been like that ever since.

Whether the Golden Age or the biblical Earthly Paradise was lost because of sins and human transgressions or because of a rather imprudent millipede, it was humankind’s destiny to have to work in order to eat. Or at least
this was the destiny of the poor and the peasants. Peasant fables (French, like those studied by Robert Darnton, but also Italian) often tell unjust and terrifying stories—innocent children devoured by wolves and ogres, poor people struck by terrible misfortunes, young people in the midst of evil men, and more. This apparent amorality represents a kind of social interpretation. In this world of fables, molded by hard daily life (with food always of central importance), misfortune falls indifferently on the good and the evil. Virtue is not rewarded, and vice is not punished. Destiny is random. The only weapon peasants have to defend themselves from the world and from the abuses of the powerful is cunning.6 This is the same cunning that Bertoldo, from Giuseppe Cesare Croce’s seventeenth-century novel, uses to gratify a king and queen who were not very wise, but above all to avoid being struck, soaked with a bucket of water, beaten with something, and put in a sack. He ultimately uses his cunning to save his life. But as soon as Bertoldo begins living at court and eating “refined and delicate food” instead of “common food and wild fruits,” he becomes seriously ill. He asks in vain to be given beans with onions and turnips to recover, but he dies. The lesson: Cunning is useful for survival, but not for changing one’s social status, which is embodied in food. The list of “sententious proverbs” Bertoldo leaves as his testament begins with a clear warning: “Whoever is used to turnips should avoid pies.”7

POVERTY AND THE ECOSYSTEM

In effect, these cultural representations reflected reality. Throughout the liberal period, that is, in the half-century from national unification to the First World War, the condition of the peasants remained tragic. Agricultural workers formed the backbone of the country, constituting 70 percent of the active population in 1861 and still 62 percent in 1901.8 Agriculture was highly diversified, both as regards investments and contracts. In some areas, especially on the plains of Lombardy, very high yields were already guaranteed, thanks to the use of nitrogen and chemical fertilizers as well as the spread of adequate scientific knowledge and later also agricultural machinery. In the hilly areas of the North, the cultivation of wheat and corn was flanked by that of grapes, fruit, and mulberries (for the ever-present silkworm), in what was also an intensive agricultural system. The hills and plains of the Center and the South generally had mixed forms of cultivation, which were organized differently. For example, sharecropping contracts were common in Tuscany, whereas there were large estates, often due to deforestation, with extensive farming in the South. In the mountain areas, which were much poorer, there were usually small, highly subdivided farms. This was true for the Apennines and even more so for the Alpine areas, which together constituted a third of the country’s cultivated surface area. The image of general backwardness and scant productivity in Italian agriculture is no longer considered valid. On the contrary, farming adapted itself well in many places
to the complex morphology of the country and its historical-social stratifications (even if there remained serious problems, for example, those related to the presence of vast malarial swamps). The overriding problem in Italian agriculture was the high labor supply, always a characteristic of this national labor market, which helped to maintain very low agricultural wages or insisted on the cultivation of absolutely unsuitable land, thereby also fueling emigration. In other words, there were too many mouths to feed on the land that was available. Consequently, incomes linked to agriculture varied greatly, depending on one’s position in the productive process, the type of agricultural contract that governed it, and the geographical and geological area involved. Many of those who worked in agriculture lived constantly on the edge of subsistence, as the recollections of the peasants themselves later highlighted with dramatic insistence—“In those days everyone was suffering, in the countryside there was infinite poverty…” This state of affairs was confirmed by a succession of agricultural surveys following the attainment of national unity, starting with the famous one by Senator Stefano Jacini, the right-wing politician who recalled the peasants’ centuries-old poverty this way:

The cultivators of the soil, sometimes poorly, sometimes badly nourished and housed, exposed to many diseases, certainly led a material existence quite inferior compared to the current one, but neither they themselves nor others thought that their condition could be better. So they never uttered a complaint. The bird born in a poor valley is unfortunate, the poorest laborers and peasants used to say, referring to themselves, but with a certain ascetic resignation.

Jacini’s views were echoed in the equally resolute writings of another senator and historian, Pasquale Villari, who in his *Lettere meridionali* (Southern Letters), spoke out against the intolerable situation in the South, which had led to the flourishing of criminal organizations, which controlled the territory. As Villari wrote as early as 1878, “the Camorra, bandits, and the mafia are the logical, natural, inevitable consequence of certain social conditions. Unless those conditions are changed, it is useless to hope to be able to destroy those evils.” The overall situation was effectively encapsulated by a Neapolitan peasant. “Italy may be beautiful,” he told Villari one day, “but one can’t live here.”

In this picture, however, there was a “before” and “after.” The watershed was around 1880, when the great agricultural crisis began. It was on an international scale and had a devastating effect on agricultural wages. It also reduced the availability of basic foods, and condemned large sections of the peasant population to undernourishment. In fact, the daily calorie intake in Italy between 1880 and 1900 fell by about 20 percent compared to the preceding twenty years.

So, what were their lives like? And, of particular interest to us, what was their diet? Let’s begin by considering some general data. During the 1880s, an Italian, on average, consumed a great quantity of cereals in a year (110
kilograms of wheat, 33 kilograms of corn, 11 kilograms of rice, and 4 kilograms of rye), a lot of produce (among which stood out “poor” foods like potatoes and legumes, but also fresh fruit, nuts, and tomatoes and lettuces); barely 17 kilograms of meat (of which only 6 kilograms was beef); very little fish, less than 4 kilograms, including fresh and conserved; a fair amount of eggs and dairy products, as well as oil; and less than 3 kilograms of sugar and 0.5 kilograms of coffee, but consoling him- or herself with 96 liters of wine. In fact, the average Italian spent 64 percent of his or her income on food alone, much less than for housing (13 percent) and clothing (9 percent).\textsuperscript{15} The average diet, therefore, was meagre. Cereals constituted the mainstay, animal proteins were of secondary importance, and “exotic” refined products such as coffee and even sugar were a luxury for the few. A modest quantity of nuts and of fresh and dried fruits and vegetables only partly enhanced this diet. And the peasants?  

Great statistical surveys like the censuses cannot give us precise answers. Nevertheless, we do have some family budget studies that can help us. An early survey, carried out between 1872 and 1878 in 488 municipalities throughout Italy, offers some interesting clues, although it does not accurately distinguish between the social categories, but instead only refers to rich and poor families (meaning, in the language of the time, aristocrats and the bourgeoisie, on the one hand, and the working class and especially peasants, on the other hand). The first clue is confirmation of meat consumption as a social marker. In every region, most of the affluent families ate meat (above all beef, but also pork in Veneto and the Emilia–Marches–Umbria region, as well as mutton in Latium and Tuscany). (See Table 2.)\textsuperscript{16} In the poor families, by contrast, meat was only eaten by a quarter of the sample, with the lowest consumption in the southern regions and the highest in Piedmont and Tuscany (for beef). The second clue concerns another elitist food, white bread (made with wheat flour), which was present in 100 percent of the well-to-do families, but much less so among the poor (with lower consumption in Central-Southern Italy, apart from Piedmont, and the lowest consumption in Lombardy with 17 percent). But then what did the peasants eat? The answer is simple: polenta and corn bread in all the poor families of the North and in the Abruzzo and Campania regions, a little less in Tuscany and Latium (73 percent, often as focaccia), and very little in the South, where, on the other hand, a meal could be supplemented with vegetables and fruit. In other words, wheat for the rich and corn (or vegetables) for the poor. Not for nothing was the consumption of even pasta a privilege (it was eaten by 63 percent of the rich and 15 percent of the destitute in Campania and Abruzzo).  

The poor ate what they could find, depending on where they lived: rice in the North, potatoes everywhere (except in Veneto and the islands of Sicily and Sardinia), a few less prized cereals such as barley (in Basilicata, Calabria, and Apulia), rye, and millet, as well as chestnuts in the mountainous areas and a few dairy products in the Center and North (but also acorns and snails there). And to drink? In this case, too, wine was a social marker. It was present in all the wealthy families, whereas only about 60 percent of the poor could
afford it, and then often as diluted “thin” wine. The heaviest wine drinkers were in Central and Southern Italy, and a noteworthy percentage of families drank “only water”—as many as 49 percent in Lombardy and as few as 28 percent in the Islands. These data call into question many common assumptions of the time, for example, about the supposedly high and widespread consumption of wine among the lower classes. (Whereas its consumption was more an urban phenomenon with regional connotations; it was much more present in the upper classes—well expressed by the Milanese proverb, “He who knows Latin praises water and drinks wine.”) In fact, these data show that food sketches a scene in which, first, we find social demarcations, according to which certain foods typified the upper classes (meat, white bread, and even wine) and others the lower classes (corn and polenta, potatoes, and chestnuts). Second, there were also historically created environmental differences (the mountains versus the plains, town versus country, and among the different regions).

A second survey of the peasant class, conducted in 1878–79, shows that food accounted for the lion’s share of peasant earnings everywhere—on average, 70 percent among employees (field workers, stablemen, day laborers, casual workers, peasants, wage earners, cowherds, agricultural workers) and just a little less among tenant farmers (65 percent), farmers (63 percent), and actual owners (62 percent). That is to say, the situation was not idyllic for any of the peasantry (and it is disconcerting to see that in some cases food expenses exceeded 99 percent of family incomes, as in a family of sharecroppers in the hills of Perugia or another in the hills near Arezzo). In large measure, this situation was confirmed in 1893–95 for the sharecroppers of Treviso, who had an average expenditure of 76 percent of their income just for food. And yet again in 1903–6, when half of the 147 Apulian farmer families surveyed spent more on food than they earned, even with an austere standard of living.

All this points to a highly varied Italy, in which poverty was widespread and scattered everywhere, without clear regional or North–South distinctions. Let’s consider “rich” Lombardy, perhaps the area with the greatest dietary disparities. To the north of its flourishing capital city, Milan, there was a very poor mountainous area of smallholdings, and to the south there was a fertile productive plain, albeit where agricultural agreements among large-scale cultivators condemned the peasants to poverty as terrible as north of Milan. On the other hand, in many areas of the South, meals seemed more varied and balanced thanks above all to the presence of fruits and vegetables. The situation was relatively good in Central Italy (above all in Emilia–Romagna and Tuscany), and in some parts of Piedmont. In any case, peasant diets appeared rather monotonous everywhere throughout the year, with only some elements changing seasonally. Diets were generally more varied in summer than in winter and changed because of the contrast between a normal weekday meal and that of feast days, the only occasions when there was abundance, or for special circumstances like illness or even magic-religious rites. Like that of Agnone, in Molise, when a special meal was offered to the “godparents of
the rose” that is to those who used to bring children with hernias out of the church, invoking their cure by making them go around the split branch of a rose tree three times. As if that were not enough, the unfortunate peasants also had to feed the deceased. Almost everywhere, following an old tradition, there were “meals of the dead” because the departed were expected to return to their homes to eat and rest immediately after their demise or on the days they were remembered. In Sardinia, they used to return on August 1 to enjoy a well-laid-out meal (but without knives and forks, because those could be dangerous). In other cases, it was the living who ate for the dead. The Arbëreshë, ethnic Albanians in Southern Italy, celebrated a week-long rite called Ndie Zot, during which the children knocked on doors to collect offerings and the families prepared special foods such as wheat rolls with a cross on them. In Northern Italy, there was the widespread custom of the “bread of the dead,” sweet and spicy biscuits eaten to remember the deceased.

In light of all this, one might be tempted to think that this situation was common to virtually all European peasants. But it was not. If we look at neighboring countries, the situation in Italy appears particularly precarious because of its combination of vast areas that were mountainous or unsuitable for agriculture and that were also experiencing high demographic pressure. A comparison with France is telling. As has been highlighted by the brilliant scholar Eugen Weber, the overall situation in France had greatly improved in the last decades of the nineteenth century, even if the memory of hunger was still alive and the basis of the peasants’ diet was still soup, rye bread, potatoes, chestnuts, and, for the more fortunate, pork and wine. There were also great variations within the same region. In the Saône-et-Loire department of Burgundy, for example, there were the well-to-do vine growers of Mâconnais, extremely poor farmers in the hills near Autun, and the rich cattle breeders of Charollais. Nevertheless, the data show that for almost everyone there was a clear change between the Revolution, when the problem had been that of mere subsistence, and the second half of the 1800s, when public opinion was able to turn its attention to the conditions of health and hygiene. Perhaps the difference with Italy, apart from varying geographical conditions, was partly due to a sort of equilibrium, which had been achieved through the centuries, between resources and population, and, within the peasant family, between work and consumption, so as to ensure an adequate survival and, in fact, lay the economic foundations for future development. Additionally, we should not forget that the idea of a peasant identity tied to the earth lay at the center of the French state’s self-representation and served as a powerful symbolic element in the construction of even contemporary French identity. In fact, France not only possessed improved material conditions, but the world of the countryside was markedly present in national debates and politics. In contrast to Italy, there was no need for an agricultural survey to “discover” the situation of the peasants.

Despite the foregoing remarks, the last word about the social value of food has not been said. It is therefore also important to take into account some elements of change in order to avoid falling into the ethnographic trap
of considering the old diet (with all its values and related meanings) as a closed world that was frozen in time, perhaps poor but mythical, far from the currents, including the violent ones, of history. What we have noticed, instead, is that some foods (meat, bread) retain their symbolic significance over time, whereas the status of others varies. Let’s look at game. It was considered a noble food par excellence, partly because it was linked to hunting (an aristocratic privilege), partly because much of the prey consisted of fowl (pigeons, woodcocks, pheasants, thrushes, larks, ducks) and therefore was associated via antonomasia with loftiness and superiority. Game was classified as dark meat (*carni nere*), which was seen as more refined than red meat and, therefore, unsuitable for the general population. Well, transformations in the ecosystem linked to the advance of urbanization and industrialization steadily reduced the role of game. The complexity of its preparation and cooking increasingly limited its consumption. Finally, a diminishing appreciation for strong, marked flavors, in favor of lighter, more delicate ones, made game practically disappear from the tables of the illustrious, in fact, from all tables. This fate was shared by another food still very widespread at the end of the nineteenth century, even in the kitchens of the less well-off: freshwater fish. Linked with the presence of a system of (unpolluted) rivers, streams, irrigation ditches, and lakes, it was part of a landscape in which water was abundant and easily accessible—so much so that, in order to satisfy the demand for fish related to liturgical regulations, fish farming, with a sizeable production, had also developed. Yet in this case too, freshwater fish eventually disappeared, together with frogs and small crustaceans, supplanted by the more abundant and better appreciated saltwater fish. But perhaps the most sensational case is another one.

The Azande of Southern Sudan, as the anthropologist Evans Pritchard explains, were frightened of becoming victims to witchcraft and evil men. In the simplest cases, they turned to the divination of termites. The Azande used to offer the termites two types of leaves to eat, and they drew conclusions based on the termites’ choice. But for the really serious cases, like illnesses, death, or accusations of adultery, there was only one remedy, the *benge*. The *benge* was a very powerful oracle, which was purposely poisoned and in death revealed the most obscure secrets. The *benge* was a chicken. It was taken to the forest and questioned in front of the whole community by a specially appointed person, who then gave the chicken some poison. If the chicken survived, suspicions were allayed, but if instead it died, the presence of witchcraft was confirmed. To be on the safe side, the rite was repeated several times, and therefore required a lot of time (and a lot of chickens). But it was considered the most sacred and trustworthy custom.25

Chicken has perhaps never enjoyed so much prestige in Italy; however, at the end of the nineteenth century, it was undoubtedly considered suitable for the richest of tables. It was an integral part of the most refined menus, precisely because it permitted the right rotation of dark meat, white meat, and red meat. The cookbooks of the time suggested recipes with costly ingredients (fruit and vegetables, rich seasoning, even truffles) and cooking mainly
on a spit or by roasting. Nor did one speak of “chicken” as such. Instead, it was understood on the basis of its breed, weight, age, and even plumage. In the above survey about food between 1872 and 1878, it was no coincidence that chicken appeared with good percentages in rich families, but practically never in poor ones (only in 5 percent of those in Veneto and 4 percent of those in Emilia, the Marches, and Umbria—lower percentages than for the consumption of other types of meat). The fate of chicken was therefore different from that of game and freshwater fish. It was intensively bred, and the resulting drop in prices, combined with the many ways in which it could be prepared and its delicate taste, brought it to everyone’s table. From an aristocratic bird it was progressively transformed into a plebeian one (and it disappeared from the most sophisticated meals and the most elegant restaurants).

All this reminds us that the peasants lived in highly anthropic environments. The progressive withdrawal of natural habitats and wild species was indicative of a sort of compression of food networks, that is, of the different food chains in the ecosystem. The effects of this process are still being discussed. In fact, ecological studies suggest that by lengthening food chains and making them more complex, they undergo major fluctuations and tend to become destabilized. A high number of interconnections within the network, namely points at which the different species come into contact (usually by being eaten), represents a factor of destabilization (in practice, man’s actions tend to provoke serious disruptions). But the effects of these transformations are still not perfectly clear and it could be that the ability of many species to adapt, including that of man, could in some way confer stability on these new structures. In any case, extensive exploitation of the land (deforestation to cultivate new crops, progressive erosion of the soil) and other transformations to extend humankind’s food base, processes in which our peasants also actively participated, have long-term consequences.

A Peasant Meal

Montasso di Robilante (Cuneo), circa 1898

There isn’t very much in this small hamlet in the Piedmontese hills: four houses and some peasant shacks known as ciabot. This strip of land in the extreme northwest of the country is highly representative of the small and very small peasant farms, widespread above all in mountainous areas and in the foothills, where there has always been great poverty (and the only way out in many cases will be emigration). The peasants who live there spend most of their time working in the fields or in the huts called casot. Every family has one. It is basically a workplace, but it is also an important place for social life and meals. That is why we are here, inside a casot. It is a very simple construction whose ceiling is made of intertwined branches on which chestnuts have been placed to dry. There is a fire burning directly on the floor (there is no fireplace), and on top of it there is a large pot incessantly boiling.
The rising smoke will dry the chestnuts. Naturally, on that fire one also cooks food, which a young woman is preparing with the help of an older woman (probably her mother). They are both wearing long dark skirts, buttoned blouses, the inevitable large aprons, and headscarves. Now and again a little worm (gianin) falls from the chestnuts directly into the pot, but no one takes any notice. Leaning against the walls are tools of various shapes (rakes, pitchforks, hoes, spades, wooden sticks), cylindrical wooden containers (the mine), and vessels for water and milk. Various utensils are hanging on nails in the walls; we can see hammers, iron combs, and wicker baskets. On the floor, there are sacks (probably of chestnuts or flour), securely closed wooden crates containing apples and other dried products, little piles of hay, small wooden logs more or less stacked, and a lopsided three-legged stool with a pot on top of it. In the kitchen part, so to speak, there is a small shelf with two jugs on it, an enameled container from which emerge some fresh herbs, a small mortar and pestle, and behind these objects a row of small sealed glass jars (perhaps conserves or jams). After all, there aren’t many ways of preserving food apart from drying it or covering it with salt or putting it in vinegar or alcohol. Underneath there are ladles and carving forks, all different, as well as saucepans and frying pans worn by use. Everything is thrown together without much order (probably not a priority in this context). On one side of the casot is a plank-bed with two chairs. There is also a chest for making and storing bread. We can see dishes, glasses, and small cups carefully aligned on a piece of lace in the upper part of it. In fact, there is much more, and there isn’t a free bit of space in this small building, but the dim light, the smoke, and the general blackening of everything prevents us from seeing properly. So this is the peasant kitchen we were looking for—seeing as only one family in the village has a real kitchen, and all the other families cook and live in a casot.28

We have arrived at the Giordanengo house at eight in the morning because this is when the polenta is prepared. The staple of peasant diets, polenta consists of cornmeal (they call it meliga here), water, and salt. This family owns a small wood (where they gather chestnuts) and two cows (which give a bit of milk), but they have to buy meliga in the village. Here we are. The water (taken from a nearby shallow well) is boiling away in the large pot, and the cook pours in the meal with a broad sweep of her left hand, while with her right hand she vigorously stirs the contents of the pot with a wooden ladle to prevent lumps from forming. The slow cooking process begins with continuous clockwise stirring; as the contents thicken, stirring becomes more and more tiring, and the two women take turns. After a while, they add more water and flour, a little at a time, always continuing to stir. Now in the ciabot it is quite hot and there is plenty of smoke. And the polenta turns and turns...

This image is alive in the memory of all the peasants because it was repeated 365 days a year in many regions and was precisely recorded in many proverbs. In Genoa, it is said, “For whoever makes do, any meal is good, even polenta” (Chi se contenta, qualunque pasto o l’e bon, anche a polenta),
whereas the Milanese recall the tiring preparation, “It takes elbow grease to make polenta” (A fa la polenta ghe voeur ’oli de gombed), and in Romagna they suggest eating it with milk, as the cats would like it, “Polenta with milk is also appreciated by cats” (Polenta int e’ lat la fa bon neca e’ gat). There are also less romantic sayings about the consequences of eating this food: “Whoever drinks water after eating polenta, lifts his leg and the polenta comes out” (Chi dopo la polenta beve acqua, alza la gamba e la polenta scappa), or in the more explicit Roman dialect, “Polenta swells the stomach and loosens the backside” (La pulenta panza abbotta e culo allenta).29 But let’s go back to the pot because maybe it’s ready. After almost an hour, the polenta is cooked. The cook bangs on the sides of the pot and then removes it from the fire and quickly and decisively pours it on a wooden board on the table, amid dense clouds of smoke. Now it must cool a little. Then it can be sliced with a thread. In fact, it is a thick polenta, which can be eaten by itself or in place of bread (whereas in the richer areas of the plain it would be softer and more liquid because it is seen as a side dish there). This polenta will last all day.

Now the two women are working next to the containers called mine, in which there is also wheat. In order to earn this grain, the father goes to villages like Castelletto Stura with a cart and, with the help of some of his children, gathers the sheaves left in the field. What has been gathered is shared with the owner, and in twelve days quite a few mine can be filled with wheat (each one containing eighteen kilograms). This wheat can be sold, to get some cash, and some of it is kept for the big family. It is precious.

In the meanwhile, time is passing and the two women are beginning to prepare the midday lunch. To water in a large pot they add a few pieces of vegetables, a few drops of seasoning, some herbs, which only they know about, and they let everything boil (and the gianin continue to fall...). Suddenly, the casot door opens and the smoke goes outwards with a small noise. Here she is. Anna Lucia, called Lüsiota, has come in. She is a lively girl of eight, but she already helps the family. She got up very early this morning and, after a breakfast of chestnuts, she took the cows to pasture. She is wearing a coarse woolen dress of two or three colors and clogs, and her eyes are bright. Now she is here, followed by her sisters, and she is very hungry! But the peasants’ rules are no less rigid than those of the aristocrats. No one eats before the master of the house, and the children can only wait (the meal times are rather flexible, depending on the work). Finally, the father arrives (he had gone to the village in his cart to buy some oil for the lamps and a bit of salt). He enters the casot with two of his older children (“puff”; the smoke makes a noise every time someone opens the door; the peasants used to say that the casot was like the stove of the house). He utters only a few words and sits at the table. The two women serve him a bowl of soup and a slice of polenta, and then they prepare the same thing for the older children. They serve, clean, and eat at the same time—they never sit at the table. In fact, in the small building, it is only the father who eats seated at the table. The children run outside with their bowls in their hands
 (“puff, puff”) and eat on the grass in turns because there are only a few plates.

Finally, it is Lüsiota’s turn. She takes her bowl and (“puff”) runs outside, where there is a small bench nearby. Despite her hunger, she tries to eat slowly; they have taught her that is what one does with polenta (especially polenta and milk, which is eaten in the evening, in the main meal, and Lüsiota likes it very much). She doesn’t put all the polenta in her bowl, but holds it in her hand and dips a mouthful at a time in the soup to make the polenta last longer.30 Even the rich used to eat like this, as Caterina, another inhabitant of the area, later recalled:

At Peveragno, the Mandragole sisters—two old ladies, who were certainly not poor and had a lot of land, I remember them as if I were seeing them now—didn’t use to put the polenta on their plates; they used to hold it in one hand and they held an anchovy in the other hand. They used to eat a mouthful of polenta and then lick the anchovy. When the polenta was finished, the anchovy was still intact. The people were very careful. Even the few rich people in the village didn’t waste anything; they tended to make more and more money, and save a hundred liras. Today the poorest person in Peveragno is richer than the rich people of that time.31

For our eight-year-old Lüsiota, tagliatelle with water or milk were also good. (The peasants preferred boiling things to make a soup—it was more profitable because one used everything. “We used to eat tagliatelle with lentils and barley. They used to make a dark broth, and it was so good that the pot was always empty,” as Carabin, for example, remembers).32 One never thought of meat (it was rarely eaten, only twice a year, for Christmas and Easter).33 And then some peasants used to say that eating meat was a sin; if a hen died, they would throw it away so as not to get used to the taste.34 Other peasants used to exchange fat old hens for young ones from the poult- terer because they weren’t used to eating them; they only wanted hens for the eggs.35 It has always been like that, repeated her mother; we almost lead the same lives as our grandparents (’N po pres cuma la vita dei nostri vei).36 But Lüsiota has other things on her mind. It seems that the cavié from the Valle Maira are about to arrive looking for hair. They buy the hair that remains in combs, and they also want long plaits. They pay well for the latter—hard cash or enough fabric to make a dress (Tanti capelli tanta stoffa, o soldi o la vesta).37 In those days, the girls used to throw their hair back, and when it was cut, they were left with just a small crown of hair, so that combing it inwards their napes would not be visible. This time it is Lüsiota’s turn, and perhaps her mother will take the cloth so that she will be able to sew a dress of coarse wool for the holiday, and go around like the beautiful girls of the village, the matote . . . And then Lüsiota would soon also spin hemp, in the evening in the barn. This hemp was planted by the peasants, who then gathered it and put it in cold water to decompose. Then they beat it with a bundle of sticks and combed it with an iron comb. Every evening, at least seven or eight women
did this spinning in the barn, around an oil lamp, but girls like Lüsiota still spun the cucie, the scraps of cloth, in order to learn. Soon she would join the women, and perhaps prepare herself a beautiful fardel, a trousseau, to find a husband.

Lüsiota liked those evenings in the barn, especially when stories were told. There were stories that went from barn to barn and seemed to have the specific purpose of frightening children. Like the very long one about Petit Minin, born by magic together with many little brothers and sisters from an apron full of lentils, and the only one not to have been swept into the hay by a degenerate mother. Petit Minin, after having taken food to his father in the fields, is captured on his way home by a wizard, who pretends to help him but, in fact, locks him in a pigsty and tells his wife, “When he’s nice and fat we’ll eat him.” The wife, taking pity on the little boy, gives him a nail and tells him to hold it out, instead of his finger, for the wizard.

Every evening the wizard goes to the pigsty and Petit Minin holds out the nail. “Ah, you’re still thin” (Ah, ses ‘ncu sec), says the wizard, and the days pass. One unfortunate evening, Petit Minin makes a mistake, and instead of the nail holds out his finger. “Oh, you’re already fat. Let’s quickly prepare the big pot, and we’ll eat him” (Preparuma mac fitu la cudera e lu mangioma). And so Petit Minin was eaten boiled and came to a bad end.38

Or the story of the woman who one day is cooking a little sparrow her husband had brought her, but it was so good that, one mouthful after another, she ate it all:

“Oh, what have I done. Now the man will come home and the pot is empty.” There was a beautiful chubby baby in the cradle. “Well, I'll kill him, put him in the pot, and when the man comes home I'll tell him that it's the sparrow.” In a great hurry, she kills the baby and cooks it.

The man returns and she serves him the baby instead of the sparrow. “Oh, it’s very good,” says the man, who eats and throws the little bones on the floor. This man and this woman also had a little girl, and she was gathering all her little brother’s bones and piling them up.

As the man finished eating, a voice came from the bones, “My mother has killed me, my father has eaten me, my little sister has collected my little bones, [and] I have become a beautiful little angel.”39

To Lüsiota, it could certainly have seemed as if she were living in a world that had never changed, a world that lived in accordance with the (inexorable) laws of nature, isolated and inward-looking. Far from the railways, which were progressively spreading through the country, bringing goods and new ideas; far from modernization supported by expansionary public expenditures; far from the concerns of the new ruling class, that of the Left, which since 1876, with Agostino Depretis and Francesco Crispi, had cultivated colonial ambitions in Ethiopia, which had ended badly with the defeat of a great
power at Adua in 1896. But also far from the first attempts at the democratization of the country, with a limited expansion of the electorate and the spread of primary education. What instead the peasant world felt only too well were the harsh effects of the great agricultural crisis, and above all the repercussions of the government’s fiscal policy. Perhaps the little girl’s father still remembered the “tax on hunger”—the grist tax, a heavy and unpopular tax, which had weighed on the poorest people from 1869 to 1884, giving rise to many peasant riots. The governments of the Left had removed it, only to introduce, subsequently, a protectionist excise duty on wheat in 1887, which it increased in 1888 and 1894 to stimulate national production (resulting in a general increase in bread prices). The tariff war with France (which was motivated by political considerations no less than by economic ones) had had serious consequences, above all for the agricultural exports of the South. Let alone the strongly regressive nature of the fiscal system. Throughout the half century from the attainment of national unity until the first decade of the twentieth century, 51 percent of revenues came from consumption taxes (many on widely used products such as flour, rice, sugar, and alcohol), 13 percent from taxes on trade, and only 36 percent from direct taxes (moreover, one of the highest percentages ever recorded in Italy’s history!).

In other words, if Lüsiota’s family can’t afford meat, and often not bread either, it is not only the fault of an immutable destiny, or of an evil child-eating wizard always ready to pounce. In this very year of 1898, perhaps at this exact moment, almost everywhere in Italy there are popular revolts caused by the price of bread. There are deaths in Palermo, Apulia, Emilia, and Tuscany. The government recalls forty thousand reservists to crush the riots, which culminate in Milan, where in May the army, commanded by General Bava Beccaris, fires cannons at the crowd, producing hundreds of victims. It is the first stage of a very harsh repression, which is supposed to be an authoritarian response to the social question, but which is destined to fail. The little girl, however, does not know anything about these things; her only concern is that she has finished her polenta and soup. But she doesn’t hesitate for a second, thinking of the pasture to which she must return. She gets up from the bench and runs into the casot—“puff,” and she disappears. We are left gazing at the closed door of this modest casot, within whose confined space there are so many interwoven stories. We remain outside in the cold, finally turning toward the surrounding scenery, where the hills, covered by dense crops and punctuated by small buildings, gradually slope toward the plain, as we lose sight of them in a blue mist on the horizon.

Hierarchies and Geography

The word focus for the ancient Romans did not so much indicate fire, which was instead ignis, but rather the hearth, and by extension the home and the family itself. This meaning survives in the Italian cognate focolare, a familiar word (assuming we know Italian) that helped us to recognize in the casot fire the place where the family gathered. In peasant families, it was almost always
an open fire; certainly, in less extreme cases than the one we have seen, the fire was in a fireplace in the kitchen (or at times in ovens). Technical progress had permitted moving the fire from the center of the room to a side wall: The brick or stone fireplace against the wall is a thirteenth-century Italian invention, which brought great advantages (less smoke, more control over the open flame, better use of space). In almost any peasant home we entered, we would have seen it lit—simple, low, less imposing than an aristocratic one, often with a step or a seat for more efficient use, and surrounded by a plethora of special tools, such as andirons, pokers, tongs, bellows, brushes, and small shovels. The fire was of fundamental importance both for preparing meals and for heating. But there were also drawbacks. Often inadequate construction (a short or narrow chimney, a small chimney pot unprotected from the wind, lack of attention to the opening of the hearth) led to a poor forced draft and continuous smoke (a proverb uselessly warned, “A fireplace that produces a lot of smoke is a shame” [A camin che fuma gran disdoro]). But even when it worked well, the fireplace lost most of its heat in the smoke. The differences in heat between those sitting directly in front of it and those farther away or off to one side were substantial and thus marked social differences, with the humblest sitting in the coldest places.

With regard to hierarchies, we noticed in the meal we have just seen how the peasant women used to eat standing, unlike the men. This custom, even if one cannot generalize, is very frequent in the accounts of the peasant women:

While eating in the kitchen, none of us women were seated at the table. At the table there were the menservants, my mother-in-law’s man, and the children. My mother-in-law, my sister-in-law, and I, after we had served them, we used to take the polenta or what there was to eat, and we used to eat standing up. We women never sat down at the table. We also had to finish when the men had finished. No, no. The women never sat at the table.41

This was an extreme manifestation of the division of labor between the sexes, which envisaged women committed to looking after the house, preparing the meals, bringing up the children, and doing a series of rural jobs considered less important. The men, by contrast, were in the fields, doing the heavier and more remunerative work.42 A woman’s work was considered of less social and economic value, and therefore she was entitled to quantitatively and qualitatively inferior food. Nor could she sit at the table with the men because that would have appeared to sanction a kind of equality. (Sharing the same table had always had a strong class significance; the upper classes never sat with the lower ones.) On the other hand, the idea of physical strength was associated with the concept of virility, and by extension with the necessity of adequate and robust nourishment, also bearing in mind the strenuous nature of agricultural work. Signs of class division and exclusion overlaid those of gender, while the scarcity of resources made the imposition of a hierarchy even more pressing. This scarcity also helps to explain the different behaviors in the various social classes. Recall, for instance, the women at the aristocratic meal, who
Food and Foodways in Italy

were fully entitled to sit at the table. But in that instance, apart from there not being any problems of having to share scarce resources, these women laid claim to high social and often cultural status. Their time had social value and was not to be wasted in activities of scant merit; if anything, it should be spent transmitting their cultural heritage to the children. For the same reason, the preparation of food and even serving at table in the upper classes—often associated with grand meals and receptions—were male prerogatives, that is, of professional staff. In the bourgeoisie and the lower classes, family cooking was instead always a woman’s task (because it had little value and was not public).

But, as we were saying, one should not overgeneralize. Even if the trend appears clear (“women had a more difficult life than men, they had to work at home and in the country”; “the truth is that women had to endure a great deal”), we also have different accounts from other geographical areas, or even from the same zones, that testify to a decidedly stronger female influence in the family. Were these isolated cases? Particular situations? From the field of business history, various studies about women’s participation in the economic life of society highlight a common characteristic: Women are not always absent—they are merely “invisible.” For example, they often participate informally in a company’s management. They are the wives of entrepreneurs, hidden financiers, and advisors, but they do not appear in official documents or occupy important positions or sign contracts. They are invisible—except when they take the situation in hand out of necessity and demonstrate full competence. A similar mechanism was probably also at work in peasant families. Only the men appeared on the social scene, made decisions, and occupied the highest positions, but at times, behind the scenes, things were different. (“Women did not appear, but they commanded.”)

Moreover, women knew about herbs and foods, and they handed down this knowledge to the next generation of women. Theirs were daily practices, orally transmitted, that reveal a female culture that perpetuated itself with different forms and in different ways from those of the (mainly male) “official” institutions. Passed from generation to generation, their practices were, in a way, women’s “writings.” Incidentally, the literary work that established Italian cuisine, by Pellegrino Artusi, is significant from this point of view. The author was a gastronome and a man of letters, but he was absolutely incapable of cooking, a task left to the faithful Marietta Sabatini, helped by the cook Francesco Ruffili. They were the ones who prepared, cut, cooked, and tasted the dishes under his watchful and expert eye. In fact, Pellegrino Artus recognized his debt to them in his book. And in his will he left five thousand lire, some household goods, and a gold watch with a long chain to Marietta, and three thousand lire and a gold watch to Francesco; moreover, he left them both his lucrative author’s royalties. Knowing what to do in a family kitchen continued to be, above all, a female heritage. This knowledge included the idea, present since ancient times, that diet and health were indissolubly linked. In villages far from hospitals and doctors, women not only saw to everyday well-being by preparing meals, they also administered cures for wounds, common ailments, and viper bites, not to mention their role as
midwives. All this knowledge was destined to disappear with the emergence of modern medicine. In fact, it was Francesco Crispi’s health reform of 1888 which created the figures of the municipal doctor and the midwife, paid for by the municipalities, for the poorest members of the community, even though they were often viewed with mistrust:

For toothache, my grandmother used to make us rinse our mouths with elderberry wine. Or they [i.e., the healers] used to put two or three spoonfuls of cream in a little pot with a little vinegar. With this well-heated stuff in a piece of canvas, we used to make a compress for our cheek; the blood used to spread so much, it alleviated the sharp pain. There were women, the healers, who treated people. They used to cure or treat blood, poison, and splinters in the eye. Perhaps a man felt his blood burning; he had pneumonia. And there was a woman, Maria, who cured him. They also cured viper poison.48

As well as hierarchy, the other feature which struck us in the peasant meal we witnessed was the fundamental role of cereals, that is, of bread and its substitutes. The desire for bread was of central importance, symbolically and materially, throughout peasant civilization. But it was not easy to satisfy. In the meal in the Piedmontese casot, it was replaced by two elements: chestnuts (typical of mountainous areas) and above all corn (sometimes called “Turkish wheat,” suggesting something foreign, not Christian). The success of American corn throughout the country can be explained by its high yield and the consequent lowering of prices, which made it available even to the poorest people. In short, it acquired such a central role in the lives of the peasants as to recall the place of honor it enjoyed in its distant lands of origin. The Mayas and various other Mesoamerican civilizations venerated corn because the gods had fashioned mankind out of it, after first having failed, with clay, which had yielded soft and shapeless creatures that water caused to fall to pieces, and then with wood, from which rigid puppets without a memory emerged. The gods had finally succeeded in making men from corn, at least according to the sacred Guatemalan book, the Popol Vuh.49 But this new resource often had a dramatic consequence—pellagra, a disease that resulted in skin lesions, diarrhea, and dementia (leading to death within four or five years). There was a vain attempt to exorcise it by avoiding saying the sickness’s name, instead using an almost poetic term, “illness of the rose” (which was matched by another emergency of the time, syphilis, called the “French disease”).50 Known since 1745, pellagra had spread throughout Europe and the Southern United States—there was no remedy. Many thought it was an infectious disease. In Italy, in particular, the physician and criminologist Cesare Lombroso’s theory—that it derived from eating corn that had gone bad—was widely believed to be true. The mystery was increased by the fact that in the zones of origin in Mexico, where a lot of corn had been eaten for centuries, this disease had a low incidence. It would be an American doctor of Hungarian extraction, Joseph Goldberger, who unveiled the mystery in 1914 (a little too late, however, for our peasants): A diet based on corn resulted in a serious deficiency of vitamin B (and specifically niacin and
tryptophan) because this is present in a form that cannot be assimilated by human beings. The differences can be explained by the fact that the Maya and Aztecs used to soak the corn in limewater before eating it, namely, in an alkaline solution that made the niacin digestible and utilizable, thus avoiding imbalances. For decades, the disease was a scourge comparable to the beriberi that afflicted impoverished Chinese peasants who only ate rice. There are also those who maintain that pellagra was linked to the vampire myths of Eastern Europe. Victims of the illness avoided the sun because they were hypersensitive to light, covered in sores, pale, sleepless, and very aggressive. In other words, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (published in 1897, but inspired by eighteenth-century folklore legends) might have been derived from accounts of the unfortunate destiny of pellagra victims.51

If corn was widespread throughout Italy, apart from the most southern areas (Basilicata, Calabria, Apulia, and the Islands), there was, to some extent, a different geographical distribution for another American bread substitute, the potato. In fact, it was present almost everywhere, above all in the North, but in decidedly smaller quantities, and perhaps presented itself as a complementary rather than a substitutive food (unlike what happened throughout Northern Europe, where instead it represented the staple of the peasant diet). Fortunately, the potato was a more complete and calorific food, and it was also rich in vitamin C (to combat scurvy). Above all, it was easy and safe to grow (seeing that the tubers grow under the soil) and to conserve, and it had an excellent yield. A family of four needed half an acre of land to cultivate potatoes, three times less than what was necessary for wheat. Two economists have recently tried to measure econometrically the historical role of the potato, estimating that its introduction explains the 25-to-26-percent population increase in Europe between 1700 and 1900 and that it contributed even more to urbanization (27 to 34 percent).52 It is not surprising that there is an abundance of portraits of “potato-eaters,” most famously the one by Van Gogh, who painted a family of peasants in a poor kitchen, the signs of exertion on their faces.53 But there is no lack of dramatic episodes for the potato either, like the failed harvest of 1845–46 in Ireland (where potatoes were the main food), caused by the devastating parasite “potato blight,” which resulted in at least a million deaths and emigration on a massive scale.54

And what about bread? If white bread, derived from soft wheat flour (*Triticum aestivum*), was a privilege of the well-to-do and of some agricultural enclaves, many peasants ate black bread, made from a mixture of wheat, barley, corn, rye, and oats (or, at best, bread made of durum wheat flour, which was particularly suitable for the climate of the South, often lacking for water). In the South there was a common saying, “Bread and children, a hundred mixtures” (*Pane e figli, cento miscugli*).55 Moreover, the bread was often hard because it was stored, sometimes even for months, in order to avoid the trouble and expense of baking. There was *panrozzo* or “rough bread,” black and flattened, which the Apulian peasants softened in water and salt, as described by Pasquale Villari.56 There was a kind of bread from the area
around Macerata that one poured acqua cotta on, that is, water with oil, salt, onion, and herbs; or Calabrian lentil bread, so black that when it was baked it seemed to be made of earth and wood. Elsewhere there was Tuscan chestnut bread, called “wooden bread,” often eaten only with water—the wine of the clouds, as the proverb notes with resignation, “Wooden bread and wine of the clouds, and whoever wants to moan, let him moan” (Pan di legno e vin di nugoli, e chi vuol mugolar mugoli). Wheat bread, summoned in vain by another proverb—“Wheat bread, jump into my hand” (Pan di grano, saltami in mano)—was a rare luxury. There were an infinite number of variations, depending on many factors. In the North, the bread tended to be small and crisp or large and very leavened (being mainly a luxury food). In Central and Southern Italy, there were mainly large compact loaves, suitable for cutting in slices and to last a long time. Everywhere the combinations varied in accordance with the availability of ingredients and local tastes. The result was that there were hundreds of different varieties.

Where can we start? In the South there were the durum wheat donuts of Basilicata, the Calabrian pitta, a kind of focaccia, and the small tasty corn loaves of Abruzzo and Molise. Old flavors were recalled by spelt bread from the Marches and by spicy pan caciato (cheese bread) and pan nociato (bread with nuts) from Umbria. There were various well-known Apulian variants—the calzone (yes, a kind of folded-over pizza), the bread of Laterza, and above all the bread of Altamura. Even more popular products were to be found in Campania: pane cafone (literally “oafish bread,” with coarse flour, as one can well imagine), pane con ciccioli (bread with greaves) from Sorrento, and naturally pizza—as well as the Roman white pizza and the ciriola (a small loaf from Latium). On the Italian islands, they prepared the civraxiu and the hard pistoccu for the Sardinian shepherds; there was the cuciddatu or donut from Catania and beer bread in Sicily (where the stale crumbs were used in a thousand different fillings). Further north, there were two regions that presented a great variety of breads, of which the most common were the unsalted bread of Tuscany (also used in many recipes such as ribollita [Tuscan soup] and panata [bread soup]) and, across the Apennines, two from Ferrara, crescentina and gnocco fritto emiliano (fried Emilian dumpling), not to mention the flat unleavened bread in Romagna called piadina romagnola. There was also a lot of variety in the great northern regions. In Piedmont there was the soft and oblong biova and also grissini stirati (stretched bread sticks); Lombardy was known for its ciabatta and the michetta vuota Milanese (Milanese roll); Veneto had its own rosetta veneziana (Venetian rose-shaped roll) and pan biscotto (hard biscuit-like bread, excellent to keep in reserve). And let’s not forget the biga servolana (twin rolls) from Trieste, the dark rye bread from Aosta (micoula) and Alto Adige (bina), not to mention two other popular varieties of flat bread, the focaccia from Recco with soft cheese and the fugassa from Genoa.

Few things can convey better than this tasty list the range of creative imagination and adaptive capacity in the face of the multiplicity of local peculiarities and diverse regions that characterized, and still characterize, Italy.
There was only one problem. Many could not enjoy this great regional variety. The poverty following the great agricultural crisis created a flood—a real diaspora—of peasants forced to find new places to live very far away. Between 1876 and 1915, 14 million people left Italy for the Americas or Northern Europe to seek their fortune (or perhaps it would be better to say they were seeking bread). In the first phase of the great emigration, between 1876 and 1900, the protagonists were mainly peasants from regions in the North—Veneto, especially, as well as Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Piedmont. They were families like Lüsioita’s, which could not make ends meet. The next phase, from 1900 to 1913, witnessed the highest levels of Italian emigration, mainly from the southern regions—Sicily, Campania, and Calabria. (With the beginning of industrialization in the North, the peasants there actually found an unexpected opportunity to work in factories.)

But what were the emigrants’ voyages of hope like? Let’s imagine that we are following an entire family from Veneto—because statistically it was the region that had the most emigrants and because recent historiography has shown that it was not at all true that only men left Italy. We can see the family going on foot or in a cart to the nearest city, from where they take the train, in third class, to reach Milan and then Genoa. Here they are on the quay of the Ligurian port—as can be seen in so many photographs of the time—bending down to check their trunks and big bundles to be taken on board, the women with their hair tied back and wearing long aprons, the men with tight jackets and berets. Now they are on the very crowded deck of a ship bound for America (always third class, of course), together with many men who are queuing with a metal bowl in their hands, while some passengers look around, some women walk wrapped in their shawls, and a little boy in the forefront surveys the scene with curiosity. Here they are at last, after a long voyage, at Ellis Island in New York. All the emigrants are on their feet, with their bundles, talking among themselves and waiting for medical check-ups and for their papers to be checked. They are certainly wondering what awaits them, while they observe the sea shimmering in the sunlight and the Statue of Liberty’s profile against the light. They will probably be met and welcomed by people from the network of friends and relations who preceded them and who will help them to get settled in those first difficult days, perhaps in New York’s Little Italy.

With their modest luggage, they also carry the memory of their country of origin, including the memory of its food—aromas, tastes, and kitchen routines, even if only polenta is involved, or, at best, baccalà (salted cod-fish). This memory will always be with them in their roles as consumers, as producers, and as sellers (for many of them, their first job will be peddling fruit and vegetables, or helping in a shop or in one of the many bars and restaurants opened by their countrymen). As Mary Douglas has remarked, sharing the same food customs indicates inclusion or exclusion, who is a part of the community and who is outside it. Eating the food of one’s own country, preserving and handing down recipes, meeting one’s fellow countrymen, and eating the same dishes on holidays mark important moments in
the emigrant’s construction of his or her identity. As Douglas also reminds us, however, one’s diet is at one and the same time a question of boundaries and boundary crossings.\(^65\) The family itself will discover in time that food can be an area of exchange, namely, of integration in the host country’s culture, and the family will begin to make new combinations of dishes, mix ingredients in new ways, and discover different dishes and tastes (as well as eat much more). It will also discover that food can become an area of discord and rifts, perhaps when the children—more integrated, masters of the English language, and “miraculously” taller and more robust than their parents thanks to a rich diet—come to refuse the family’s food and customs, or only accept them in the family context. Finally, the family will discover, even more surprisingly, that it is the propagator in its new country of the dominant image of “typical Italian” cuisine, mixed, multiregional, and nonexistent in Italy. Nonetheless, they strongly identified with it because it was linked with the stereotype, both positive and negative, of the country of sun, the sea, bel canto, and happy living (but not of work and commitment).\(^66\)

**The Mediterranean Diet and Cultural Symbolisms**

Besides making us hungry, all this talk of bread raises two questions. The first concerns the Mediterranean diet, which today is considered fashionable and, by many, ideal. Bearing in mind the poor diet of the peasants, how accurate is this image? The Mediterranean diet is essentially based on the wheat–wine–olive oil triad and on a high consumption of vegetables, pasta, and fresh fish (and a little meat). But we have seen that the diets of our southern peasants were far from this ideal. Wheat was often replaced by corn or inferior cereals; the consumption of wine was limited; and the use of olive oil was not so widespread, usually being replaced by cheaper fats (like lard). The same holds true for pasta and fresh fish (eaten only on the coasts, whereas inland it was eaten dried). A lot of fruit and vegetables were consumed instead, as many proverbs indicate. For instance, the people of Basilicata recalled, “Onions are the worker’s casciocavallo [a gourd-shaped cheese]” (La cippod’ iè lu casciavadd’ r’ lu fatiant’), and “Sweet and spicy peppers are the peasant’s meal” (Lu paprini’ e lu pupon’ iè lu pran’r’ lu cafon’). For their part, the Piedmontese offered the comforting words, “In spring all the herbs of the field are good to make a soup” (A la prima, tut lon c’a buta fora testa a va bin a fe’ d’ennestra). But there are dangers there too. As the Sicilians observed, “Raw lettuce and a naked woman lead a man to his grave” (Lattuca cruda e fimmina nuda portanu l’omu ’n sepurtura).\(^67\)

The attention paid in the United States to the Mediterranean diet stems, as is well known, from a pioneering study by a doctor from Minnesota, Ancel Keys, already known for having devised K rations for the American troops during the Second World War. In 1958, he began a wide-ranging comparative dietary study of seven countries (Italy, Greece, Yugoslavia, the Netherlands, Japan, Finland, and the United States), whose results appeared to be incontrovertible. The Mediterranean diet (he studied that of the peasants of Pioppi
Food and Foodways in Italy

in the Cilento area of Campania) provided a higher level of protection against arterial blockages and therefore against heart attacks. The Japanese diet, based mainly on fish, rice, and vegetables, came in a distant second place. By contrast, Finland and the United States had the worst dietary habits. An abundance of saturated fats, too many calories, and too much meat led to an incidence of cardiovascular diseases that was ten times higher than for those on a Mediterranean diet. A brilliant man, often a guest of the media, and a renowned scholar (and the originator of the Body Mass Index or BMI), Ancel Keys presented his results in successful books like *Eat Well & Stay Well*, disseminating in America the idea of a Mediterranean cuisine that was healthy and tasty at the same time. He also put his theories into practice, living in Cilento for decades, until he died at the age of one hundred.

But how can one explain Keys’s success? It is rooted in deep cultural perceptions of the Mediterranean in American and Northern European culture. Perhaps as early as the seventeenth century, and even more so with the Industrial Revolution, a modern, industrialized North came to be contrasted with a backward, premodern South. However, the latter was also the cradle of European civilization and the place of uncontaminated nature—not by chance was it the destination of the traditional grand tour undertaken by cultured (and rich) Europeans. The South and the Mediterranean are “imaginative geographies,” as Edward Said has stated. They are at odds with the new civilization and its many advances, but at the same time they embody nostalgia for what has been lost—uncorrupted nature, primeval culture. It is an ambivalent attitude, according to Iain Chambers, which oscillates between positive and negative poles, but which nevertheless sees the Mediterranean world as “different,” as a distant universe. The proposal for a Mediterranean diet projects a desire for well-being on this ahistorical world, a desire opposed to frenetic modern civilization and in contact with the ancient rhythms of nature—it proposes a different quality of life. Moreover, in a way, it anticipates current concerns with diet, slimness, and well-being. Certainly, it has to be said that historically the peasants did not follow such a diet; at most they desired it. If anything, it was the upper class which followed it. But, as Vito Teti suggests, the term “diet” itself, in the Greek and Roman tradition, meant more than just a list of foods. It encompassed lifestyle, a link to locality and region, concern for one’s health, care in preparing food, and places and ways to express conviviality—in other words, all that we associate with the Mediterranean diet. Therefore, we can talk of a historical model, albeit within wider cultural coordinates.

The second question suggested by all this talk of bread is even more fundamental: Why was there such strong desire for white wheat bread when there were alternative cereals? Was it a matter of taste? Was it safer and more profitable as a crop? We already know that corn offered a higher yield (as did potatoes). Rye and barley were also robust and widespread plants (above all barley, adaptable to all climates), not to mention the many other species of cereals that we would encounter going back in time. But they all gave precedence to wheat, which today is still the most widely cultivated cereal in
Italy. In order to answer our question, we must once again think about the long journeys that food takes and the maps it draws. For wheat, this journey begins, once again, in the Mediterranean—the eastern Mediterranean, to be exact, where the white flour extracted from wheat was very suitable for making soft leavened bread (as wheat easily traps the fermentation gases) or thin and immaculately white types of unleavened bread, the symbol of purity itself (consisting only of wheat and water, without salt or yeast, like the Jewish matzo). This flour was unlike that obtained from other cereals, which was darker, less versatile, and less workable. The predilection for wheat developed in the eastern Mediterranean, stresses Martin Jones, passed to the Romans and from them to all parts of their Empire. Christianity superimposed itself on this tradition, making white bread, derived from wheat, its preferred symbol, in fact the consecrated host, the body of God.\(^\text{71}\) The word host derived from the Latin *hostire*, meaning to strike, and referred to the sacrifices of lambs and sheep made to the gods, which later become the bread offered to God. The ancient geography that traditionally contrasted the North of the meat-eating barbarians with the bread-eating Romanized South changed radically. White bread spread northward with Christianity (and reached the Americas centuries later). If anything, there arose a new dichotomy between West and East, with the former represented by Christian white wheat bread and Eastern Europe by the paganism of black rye.\(^\text{72}\) Thus, the extensive cultivation of wheat in Italy in the nineteenth century and the peasants’ desire to eat white bread had deep cultural roots. White bread possessed undeniable symbolic and religious value (and consequently was also a status symbol and an economic investment). Not by chance is wheat the most widespread crop in the world today, and, if we want to introduce another map, it substantially coincides with the world of Western influence, in contrast with the Eastern world’s rice.\(^\text{73}\)

In other words, transitory historical facts, environmental changes, and cultural practices intermingled in a dynamic picture, in which complex food networks formed the points of reference within which Italian peasants built their lives.
Chapter 3

Eating in the City

(Or Industrial Development, 1901–1914)

The pizza falls under the broad category of foodstuffs costing a centesimo, and constituting the breakfast or lunch of very many of the Neapolitan people. During the night, the pizzaiuolo [pizza maker], who has a shop, makes a large number of these round schiacciate [flat breads]—with a thick dough, which gets burnt, but not cooked—full of almost raw tomatoes, garlic, pepper, oregano. These pizzas, divided into so many pieces sold at a centesimo, are entrusted to a boy, who goes and sells them on some street corner, on top of a stall, and stays there almost all day with these pieces of pizza, which freeze in the cold, turn yellow in the sun, and are eaten by flies. There are also slices that cost two centesimi for the children who go to school; when the supply of pizzas is used up, the pizzaiuolo makes some more, late into the night.

There are also, for the nighttime, the boys who carry a large convex tin shield on their heads with these slices of pizza. And these boys go through the alleys and give a special shout, saying they have pizzas with tomatoes and garlic, with mozzarella [mozzarella], and with salted anchovies. Poor women sitting on the lowest steps buy some and eat dinner, that is, lunch, with this centesimo of pizza.

For one soldo [=five centesimi], there is quite a varied choice for the Neapolitan people’s lunch. From the fried food vendor, one can have a paper bag with some little fish called fragaglia and which are from the bottom of the fishmonger’s basket. From the same vendor, one can have four or five panzarotti for a soldo—small fritters in which there is a piece of artichoke, when people are tired of them, or a little core of cabbage, or a tiny fragment of anchovy. For a soldo, an old woman gives out nine boiled chestnuts, with their outermost peel removed and floating in a reddish juice. It is in this brodo (broth) that the Neapolitan people dip their bread and eat chestnuts like a second dish. For a soldo, another old woman, who drags behind her a boiling pot in a cart, provides two ears of boiled corn. From the innkeeper, for a soldo, one can buy a portion of scapece; this is made with zucchini
or eggplants fried in oil and then seasoned with vinegar, pepper, oregano, cheese, and tomatoes. It is on the street, uncovered in a large deep pot, in which it stays as thick as a conserve and from which it is cut with a spoon. The Neapolitan people bring their piece of bread, they divide it into two parts, and the innkeeper pours the scapece over it. From the innkeeper, as always for a soldo, one can buy the spiritosa; this is made with slices of yellow parsnips, cooked in water and then put in a strong sauce of vinegar, pepper, oregano, and peppers. The innkeeper stands at the door and shouts, “Fragrant, fragrant, spiritosa!” [Addorosa, addorosa, ‘a spiritosa!] Naturally, all this stuff is seasoned in the most spicy way so as to satisfy the most hardened Southern palate.

As soon as they have two soldi, the Neapolitan people buy a plate of macaroni, cooked and seasoned. All the streets in the working-class quarters have one of those inns that put their boilers in the open air, where the macaroni is always boiling, the saucepans where the tomato sauce is boiling, the mountains of grated cheese, a spicy cheese from Crotone.

In the first place, this apparatus is very picturesque, and some painters have portrayed it, and they have made it clean and almost elegant with an innkeeper who seems like one of Watteau’s shepherd boys. And in a collection of Neapolitan photographs, which the English buy, next to the monaca di casa [housebound wife], the laduncolo di fazzoletti [petty thief of handkerchiefs], the famiglia di pidocchiosi [louse-ridden family], there is also the banco del maccaronaro [macaroni-maker’s bench]. This macaroni is sold in small platefuls for two or three soldi; and the Neapolitan people briefly call them “a two” and “a three” (nu doie and nu tre) after their prices. A portion is small and the buyer argues with the innkeeper because he wants a little more sauce, a little more cheese, and a little more macaroni.

For two soldi, one can buy a piece of octopus boiled in seawater and seasoned with very strong peppers; this is prepared by women in the street with a small fire and a small pot. With two soldi of maruzze, one can have some snails, broth, and also a biscuit soaked in the broth. For two soldi, the innkeeper takes from a big frying pan—in which scraps of pork fat, pieces of lamb offal, spring onions, and fragments of cuttlefish are all being fried together—a big spoonful of this mixture and deposits it on the buyer’s bread, being careful that the hot brown grease doesn’t end up on the floor, that it all goes on the bread because the buyer attaches importance to this.

As soon as they have three soldi a day for lunch, the good Neapolitan people, who are full of nostalgia for the family, no longer go to the innkeeper to buy cooked foodstuffs; they eat at home, whether on the floor, on the doorstep of their shanties, or on a worn-out chair.

For four soldi, one can prepare various types of salads—with greenish raw tomatoes and onions, or with cooked potatoes and beets, or turnips, or fresh cucumber.

The people who are well-off, those who can spend eight soldi a day, eat big platefuls of vegetable soup, endive, cabbage leaves, chicory, or all of these ingredients together, the so-called minestra maritata [soup mix]. But there
are different types of soup—at the right time of the year with yellow pumpkin and lots of pepper, or green beans and tomatoes, or with potatoes cooked in tomatoes.

But for the most part they buy a paper bag of [cooked] macaroni, a blackish pasta of all sizes and thicknesses, the remnants, what are left at the bottom of a packet of pasta, and which are appropriately called monnezzaglia [rubbish]; and they eat them with tomatoes and cheese.

The Neapolitan populace loves fruit, but never spends more than a soldo at a time. In Naples, a soldo will buy six small, worm-eaten pears, but their meagerness doesn’t matter; or half a kilo of figs, a bit wilted by the sun; or ten to twelve of those little yellow prunes, which seem to have a fever; or a bunch of black grapes or a little yellow melon, damaged, slightly rotten; from the melon vendor, one can have two slices of the red ones, those that have turned out badly, that is, whitish.

The Neapolitan populace also has another craving: the spassiatempo [pastime], that is, melon seeds, broad beans, and chickpeas cooked in the oven. For a soldo, one can nibble for half a day; one’s tongue stings and one’s stomach swells, as if one had eaten.

Their greatest craving is soffritto [sautéed]—some squeezed scraps of pork cooked with oil, tomatoes, and red pepper that form a red pile, beautiful to behold, which can be cut into slices. They cost five soldi. In the mouth, it seems like dynamite.

Questionnaire:
Roast meat? — The Neapolitan populace never eats it.
Meat stew? — Sometimes, on Sundays or important holidays, but pork or lamb.
Meat broth? — The Neapolitan populace does not know it.
Wine? — On Sundays, sometimes asprino at four soldi a liter or maraniello at five soldi: this tinges the tablecloth blue.
Water! — Always, and bad.¹

Il ventre di Napoli (The Belly of Naples) is the title of a denunciatory book that Matilde Serao wrote over a twenty-year period to tell the government, whichever it happened to be, about the reality of a city far from the views of an enchanting gulf with the cluster pines and the blue sky, so dear to the tourists and the well-to-do. And here there suddenly appeared human beings who lived, or survived, on the margins of society, but at the same time constituted one of that society’s most vital components—street sellers of all types, like macaroni sellers, bakers, shopkeepers, small-scale craftsmen, casual workers, evildoers, innkeepers, housewives, loafers, the (simply) poor, prostitutes (“with their skirts attached on their stomachs, their slippers with high heels, their red ankle socks, and their cheeks loaded with rouge,” in their eyes “a deadly pride”),² and still others. Life in the city. This description is enough to grasp the social stratification, the economic distinctions,
the hierarchies of “luxury,” and the widespread tastes. But it was an evolving reality.

**The Urban Horizon**

The new Italian State, having embarked on rapid industrialization and experiencing strong demographic expansion, wanted to be a “modern” nation. It could no longer tolerate the run-down circumstances that seemed to be slowing down its development. After all, it was already the age of the “second industrial revolution” (coming after the one that brought the first heavy industrial plants and textile factories), which exploited electricity and chemistry instead of just iron and coal. Thus came laws on the redevelopment of Naples and, under the Giolitti governments, various special interventions in favor of the South that were concerned with hygienic and social conditions, as well as economic and political ones. The results were often ambiguous.

But let’s return to Matilde Serao. Her effective culinary portrayal of city life reminds us of two things. The first is that there is a big difference between the poor in the countryside and the poor in the city. This difference lies in self-consumption, namely the ability of the former to produce at least part of their food themselves, whereas those living in the city must instead buy everything. And it is not just a question of food, but of all the services that permit one to consume it, starting from the fuel to cook it (wood, coal, gas) and the water to wash and boil it. In other words, the city dweller can only eat, cook, and wash their food with the help of a complex network of infrastructure.

Let’s consider water, for example. It’s a service provided by the municipalities, but not without some difficulties. In a painstaking inquiry of 1885 about the hygiene and health conditions of the Italian Kingdom, it was found that only 6,700 municipalities, with over 22 million inhabitants, had sufficient water. However, 880 of them had water of mediocre quality and 350 had bad water; another 1,500 municipalities declared that they did not have enough water. Furthermore, the water varied in terms of its origin and quality. It came primarily from springs in Liguria, Latium, Abruzzi, Basilicata, Calabria, Sicily, and Sardinia; from wells in Piedmont, Lombardy, and Emilia; from cisterns in Tuscany, the Marches, Emilia, Campania, Apulia, and Sicily; running water in Veneto and near the hills of Lombardy, Piedmont, Liguria, and Tuscany; and, finally, from the great northern lakes for those living nearby. Almost 40 percent of the municipalities in Italy had to transport water over greater or lesser distances, utilizing wooden or metal tubes or pipes enclosed in clay or brickwork, but in almost 500 municipalities the water simply passed through open canals. Thus it was common in the cities and in the countryside at that time to find an acquaiolo or water vendor (with measuring cups, glasses of various sizes, amphoras, and jars for the water), who was ready to pour the paying customer some of the precious liquid very carefully.3
Concerns about improving the service, above all after several serious cholera epidemics between 1884 and 1887, led to greater control by local administrations and to the widespread construction and improvement of the water system. The most interesting example was Naples, where a feasibility study was undertaken to reactivate one of the most imposing ancient Roman aqueducts, which had supplied the cities of Cuma and Neapolis and had brought water to the legions stationed at Miseno. Felice Abate, an engineer and architect from Campania, studied the best routes to channel the waters from the Urciuoli springs at Irpinia; and, after some delays, the work was entrusted to an English-financed company. The result was excellent. In only four years, the aqueduct of Serino, with its sixty kilometers of walled pipes and twenty kilometers of iron tubes, not counting the network of canals, was able to provide Naples’s more than five hundred thousand inhabitants with abundant supplies of fresh water for twenty-five centesimi per cubic meter. Starting in 1885, this work, with a few minor adjustments, kept the city of Naples supplied for many years. Further government measures in 1887 favored granting loans to other municipalities, too, for the construction of pipes and above all for putting their sewers in order, whose condition was particularly serious. In 1885, the authorities found that 6,404 municipalities out of 8,258 did not have any sewage system at all; moreover, in many of those with a sewage system (4,922), all or most of the dwellings did not have latrines (above all in the South, on the Islands, and in Veneto). But the problems remained, above all in the smaller municipalities. In any case, the effort to create water and sanitation infrastructure is perhaps not well known, but in terms of technical content and its impact on the country, it can, at least in part, be likened to the enormous work done on railway construction (from the 2,000 kilometers at the time of Italian unification in 1861 to about 16,000 kilometers of state-owned railways in 1905–6, with an average rate of growth of more than 350 kilometers per year between 1861 and 1900, never again equalled, not even by the construction of the country’s modern motorways). And it was by rail that many goods reached the cities. Moreover, after 1903, the municipalities increasingly committed themselves to providing gas and electricity, too. It was a sign of the times, but also a specific political decision. The transfer of responsibility for services to the municipalities became an important point in the program of the new forces disrupting the political landscape. This applied above all to the socialists, who considered it a fundamental point to guarantee a better life for the working class, to combat private speculation, and perhaps to lay the foundations for a different state (the “socialism of water and gas”). Catholics were also involved in this process. Although not actively participating in political life, because of the Papal non expedit, Catholics were becoming increasingly involved in the administrative life of the municipalities (which met with Prime Minister Giolitti’s approval).

We therefore must imagine our city dweller, perhaps with a paper bag of macaroni in hand (whose contents, strangely enough, have just been drained from a big pot of boiling water) as situated at the center of a very complex
network of services—interregional, if not national, in scale—whose implement-
ment represents one of liberal Italy’s most important achievements.

A second aspect that strikes us is that “eating out” was not at all syn-
onymous with luxury. On the contrary, it was precisely the poorest people
who used to eat something in the street, not being able to afford even a
home-cooked meal. In the city, unlike the rural areas, where food prepared
at home was the norm, ready-cooked food (including the cost of the prepa-
rating) could be cheaper—certainly, it was not chosen to save time like today!
Restaurants were divided into categories—first, second, and third. The last
often cooked scraps and leftovers from the superior restaurants. In the city,
there were a lot of food stores, bazaars, and small shops (where the poor
could buy small quantities of food, generally on credit), as well as high-level
trattorias (the kind Pellegrino Artusi used to frequent, making note of the
recipes), and luxury restaurants (often attached to big hotels).

There were all sorts of street sellers, too. We can almost see them mov-
ing through the streets (thanks to the photograph archives). In Naples again,
in a public square, we see a donut seller with two big baskets shouting the
virtues of his wares. In an alley, a man and a woman sitting on chairs have
difficulty shading themselves under two sheets from the scorching sun while
they busy themselves with a big pot of corn on the cob and vegetables, which
is on a kind of portable brazier (in fact, a homemade pushcart). Around the
corner, in a beautiful wide space full of shops, we see a solitary woman—
wearing a long skirt, a blouse, and a headscarf—sitting in front of a big
basket. She is selling *rococò*, small Christmas donuts with almonds, spices,
and oranges. A bit further on, next to a small crowd of curious people, there is
the inevitable macaroni seller, observing with satisfaction three clients behind
his pots with his product in their hands.9

Strangely enough we don’t see a pizza maker. Perhaps he’s simply miss-
ing in the photographs that have come down to us, perhaps because he was
considered less typical. After all, he sold a variant of the round flat type of
bread made with flour and water that was present in so many areas and cul-
tures (the Arab *pita*, the Indian *tandoori nan*, the Turkish *lahmacun*, etc.).10
The absence of a pizza maker reminds us how partial our historical mem-
ory is and how much it is based on predetermined choices (in this case, on
what was considered more picturesque and therefore interesting enough to
be photographed).

But let’s go back to considering Italy as a whole. A census as early as
1884 indicated the “official” presence (that is, subject to the authority of the
police) of 77,394 trattorias, restaurants, inns, taverns, and kitchens; 65,785
cafes, beer halls, wine shops, wine bars, and *canovè* (a kind of small shop);
as well as 24,293 liquor distilleries and other places mainly dealing in spir-
its and liquors (especially the strong and cheap brandy called *acquavite*).
And the trend was toward growth.11 Needless to say, the majority of these
establishments were concentrated in the cities and were almost always open
(some of these catering places, like the refreshment bars in the big railway
stations, were open day and night).12 Thanks to this wide selection and the
generous opening times imposed by the rhythms of the city, mealtimes were very flexible.

Who, then, were the poor urban consumers who ate at these establishments? Social stratification in the cities was particularly complex and included representatives from all classes of the social pyramid at the beginning of the last century. At the lowest level, apart from the vast and heterogeneous group of the destitute, the unemployed, and casual workers, there were the particularly important professional groups of craftsmen and small shopkeepers, as well as of the relatively new category of factory workers—at least 3.5 million in 1901, and their number was rapidly increasing. These factory workers were concentrated in the northern geographical area of Lombardy—Piedmont—Liguria, which was clearly becoming the country’s “industrial triangle.” The workers were already making their mark in social and cultural terms, so let’s leave the poorest districts of Naples and go to the industrial part of Milan to observe a working-class meal at close quarters.

**A Working-Class Meal**

**Milan, December 1911**

It’s late. She had hoped to finish all her errands quickly, but as usual there is so much confusion everywhere. The trams are slow, bicycles and pedestrians are always in the way, and then there are the trucks . . . Here is the capital of the new industrial development, a city rapidly expanding beyond its old walls to accommodate the masses of workers seeking employment in the big engineering factories. Everyone seems agitated, but it doesn’t matter because it’s a beautiful day for Benvenuta Mariani. She has just made a delivery to a new client, an embroidered tablecloth, and has earned twenty-five lire (as much as the whole family earns in five days). So she has decided to prepare a special meal. She has bought the necessary ingredients and now she is quickly climbing the stairs and entering her home. She puts her shopping bag on the kitchen table.  

While the girl is putting the shopping away in the pantry, we can have a look around. We find ourselves in a square room of about twenty square meters, the floor is tiled with *graniglia* or grit (that is, cement mixed with gravel), and in the middle of the room is a table with four chairs. On one side of the room is a long, tall sideboard, probably for food and all the kitchen utensils; on another side is a lower wooden piece of furniture and a kind of small divan (which perhaps becomes Benvenuta’s bed). Right next to it is a door leading to another room, a bedroom (we can see a large wooden bed with a dark blanket touching the floor, a chest of drawers, and maybe a small bed too—it is certainly her parents’ bedroom). The dominant colors are decidedly dark; it has been some time since the walls were painted or the furniture varnished, but everything is clean and fairly tidy. There is an obvious desire to make this small space pleasant and hospitable. Hanging on the walls are various ornaments and small pictures, including a charcoal drawing of a married couple with a serious expression (the owners of the apartment?).
But what interests us most in this room is the stove, which dominates the right-hand side of the kitchen. It has been built with fire-resistant materials and is rectangular. In front, it has two big metal doors, and a smaller one at the bottom on the left. On top, a thick cast iron surface covers it completely, with a series of concentric circles on one side, where there is now a large pot; there is a burner on the other side with a metal container full of water on it. From a hole in a corner of the stove emerges a big whitish tube, which goes up to the ceiling, turns right, boldly crosses the room, and disappears in the opposite corner of the ceiling (toward the vent, or perhaps simply toward the street).

The stove represents a significant improvement in household comfort compared to the fireplace. The enclosed fire loses less heat, does not smell or make smoke (which is channeled out through the long tube), and is safer (even if it scatters a bit of dust around, from what we can see). Moreover, heat emanates from it more evenly, and it is more economical. A further advantage is the type of fuel it uses. True, one could burn almost everything of any shape in the fireplace, whereas the stove needs small pieces, whether of wood or coal (the latter is easier to light, lasts longer, burns uniformly, and can be found fairly easily and cheaply in the city). Benvenuta is approaching the stove now—she opens the upper left door and puts in some pieces of coal, which she has taken from a nearby sack. She very carefully arranges the embers with a long poker. She quickly closes the upper stove door, opens the smaller lower one and removes, with a small shovel, quite a bit of ash (which has obviously fallen from the embers). Then she goes to the sink near the window (a big double basin sink made of concrete and pebbles, with a side working surface) and begins to prepare dinner.

While she is busy, we are tempted to open the other stove door to see what’s in there—but that would be inappropriate so let’s leave it alone. There’s probably nothing there; it’s a small space where one can keep food hot. Stoves of this type are old, widespread throughout Europe since at least the 1500s, having first emerged in the mountainous northern regions. Generally, they were made of fire-resistant materials and their exterior was covered with majolica or another type of ceramic, and in time had become majestic and decorative objects (at least in the houses of the rich). A subsequent variation was the adoption of a cast iron internal combustion chamber, by means of which heating not only took place through radiation, but through internal pipes that pushed the hot air upwards (in practice, it took less time to heat a room). In light of their usefulness, many stoves were later only made of cast iron. In the nineteenth century, integrated cooker-stoves, so to speak, began to appear. They had upper metallic burners, on which one could place saucepans (even directly on the fire, by removing some cast iron covers). One could also find a constant reserve of hot water and keep the plates warm in appropriate spaces.

The disadvantages were more cultural. For centuries and millennia, the flames of an open fire had accompanied humanity on dark evenings. The vital and crackling flames had left their mark on the imagination. They had
provided the background for conversations and stories and they were part of the familiar world of objects. Now the fire had disappeared from view, become enclosed. With a typical technological mechanism, the functioning of the process was hidden from view, occurring inside opaque apparatuses, farther and farther from the user’s understanding, entrusted to the knowledge of “experts.” The stove spread slowly because, as Roche notes, it entailed a different way of life and of conceiving comfort, and it revolutionized habits and hierarchies (the latter were signaled by each person’s degree of proximity to the fireplace). In many Northern European countries, the stove vividly represented the center of the home, as can be seen from the story told by Heinrich Zimmer, and taken up again by Mircea Eliade, of the Rabbi Eisik of Cracow. Rabbi Eisik went to Prague to find a treasure he had seen in a dream. However, his plan was hindered by a guard, who for his part had dreamed of finding a treasure in the house of a Rabbi Eisik in Cracow, but who had not believed the dream. Anyway, the Rabbi returned home and found the treasure behind his stove. The moral of the story: We have to dig in the truest, deepest part of ourselves—represented specifically by the stove, the heart of the house—in order to find what we are looking for, even if we often need to go far away and experience new things in order to understand this truth.

Back in the Mariani house, the heat spreads fairly well—even if not for our modern tastes. It can be adjusted (by adding coal to the stove and limiting the forced draft), and the light does not come from glittering and irregular tongues of fire in the fireplace or from candles, but instead from gas lamps, in an equally uniform and adjustable way. Benvenuta knows that many nearby houses have already got electricity, supplied by the engineer Giuseppe Colombo’s Edison Company, but it’s still expensive, which is why the family prefers to keep the gas for lighting (supplied by a private monopolist, the French company Union des Gaz). Its light is beautiful, and then there are still gas street lights. Benvenuta enjoys watching the lampedée on their tall ladders, lighting the gas burners of the street lights. On the other hand, she has the benefit of washing the food she has bought under a wonderful jet of running water. This is really convenient and hygienic, as they have taught her at school. It’s different from the old days, when her mother had to get the water for the household from the public fountains or the nearby well (as the poorest factory workers still do). The girl carefully washes the vegetables, and the water runs into the metal tubes, toward the sewers (perhaps Benvenuta doesn’t know, and is probably not interested, but these are also complex engineering works, continually re-adapted and enlarged to keep up with the rapid pace of urban growth, pari passu with the aqueducts).

Here we are, and everything is ready for the barley soup. The girl prepares sautéed vegetables with a tiny piece of butter; she adds herbs and seasoning (salt, pepper, nutmeg, celery), a handful of carrots, and a drop of milk. Then she adds some water that has already been heated and a Maggi cube (meat broth is good, but too dear) as well as 150 grams of barley, and she puts the lid on the pot. The barley takes a bit of time to cook. Benvenuta is seventeen and is good at embroidery, but she would like to find other
work. (And why not a good husband?) That’s why she has enrolled in the home economics course started some years ago by the Società Umanitaria (Humanitarian Society), an institutional point of reference for working-class Milan. That is where she has learned the characteristics of foods, how to prepare meals, and also norms of hygiene and education, as well as the best way to organize her time and money (“The first basis of domestic economy is an exact and rational division of the expenses in relation to income and the family’s needs,” as her teacher Edvige Salvi always says). The house should always be clean and tidy, healthy and tasty food is of fundamental importance for the family, and a woman has to be positive and inspiring for everyone (the teacher underlines all this with a proverb from Friuli: “Three things drive people away from the house, a smoke-filled kitchen, badly cooked polenta, an enraged woman”). As she has almost finished the course, the girl wants to show how much she has learned, by carefully following the knowledge she has gained and preparing an excellent little low-cost meal (exactly 0.44 lira per head or 1.76 lire for the whole family).

In the meantime, Benvenuta has carefully washed the potatoes, which will be a side dish, and has put them in a small pot of salted water on the stove. Then she will season them with a little oil, parsley, and the rest of the sautéed vegetables. Nothing is ever thrown away, and then having a lot of vegetables and herbs gives everything an aroma (and costs little or nothing).

Here we are at the preparation of the second course, the main dish. The girl carefully opens the packet of thick yellow paper, from which emerge many small pieces of meat. It is 350 grams of pork, of different cuts, suitable for frying—a dish her father likes very much, even more than fried cod. The butcher has been kind; now the meat has to be cleaned, because it’s very fat, and then covered with a little flour. She will fry it at the last moment. (Usually in her family they use lard, which is cheaper than butter and is just as good.) Benvenuta covers all the little pieces with flour, then she rushes to the pots. She stirs and checks the soup, then the potatoes. They’re not ready yet. Then she covers the meat with a cloth, and lays out the ingredients for her “secret dish,” the final surprise: three eggs, a bit of sugar, a small glass of wine, a pinch of vanilla. What can it be? Now the girl lays the table. She spreads out a checkered table cloth; she adds the plates, napkins, and cutlery (of iron, the kind that always has to be well dried to prevent rusting). She puts the bread on the table, fills the water jug, and from under the sink gets a flask of Barbera. (There’ll be trouble if there’s no wine on the table! She hardly drinks, and neither do her mother and her little brothers, but her father, woe betide her if there isn’t any wine! At school they have told her that it’s not good, but all the workers are like that, it’s normal, many drink heavily at the inn—her father also goes there quite often, to the Cooperative Inn.)

Just in time! There’s some noise on the stairs, the rest of the family is coming home: her father has come back from the gas pipeline by bicycle; her mother, who is in service with a wealthy family living in one of the beautiful houses of the downtown Magenta quarter, has been to pick up her youngest
child from a friend’s house. All of them, on coming in, comment happily about the dinner which is almost ready. They all go to the common bathroom, on the landing, in turns. Then her father changes his working clothes and washes with the water in the basin in the bedroom. Her mother is busy taking care of the younger child—but at last, they are all at the table. Or rather, her father and the little one are sitting at the table; her mother gets up to help Benvenuta, but the girl doesn’t want her to: “Today, you sit down, you’ve worked so hard, this evening I’ll do everything.” And she starts pouring the steaming soup, starting with her father who is at the head of the table. After having quickly drunk a glass of wine, he immediately begins eating and talking about his job.

At the gasworks, at the Bovisa quarter, it was hard work also today. But the worst of it is that they’ve given us a new supervisor, who doesn’t understand anything about the work (el capiss nient), but he wants to give orders—he’s got money and, you know, una ciav d’or la derva tüt I port [a golden key opens all the doors]. And what about us? We just have to get on with our work . . . Padrun cumandà, caval el trota (When the master commands, the horse immediately responds). And when there are problems, they call us to put things right, it’s convenient for them, it’s like tirà föra I castegn del fôgh cum la scianfà del gatt (pulling someone’s chestnuts out of the fire with a cat’s paw).

In the meantime Benvenuta has got up to prepare the second course. She puts some fat in the frying pan, together with an onion and a bit of wine, and adds the floured pork, which starts frying and sending out a wonderful aroma. She stirs and stirs the small pieces of meat, until they become a beautiful golden color. As soon as they’re ready, she takes the hot frying pan to the table, puts it on a tile, with a few small pieces of lemon and the potato salad. “Oh how lovely . . . how good . . .” is the general comment. The father serves himself first, taking a nice portion of the fried dish after having cleaned his plate with a piece of bread. The mother serves the child, then it’s Benvenuta’s turn, and finally the mother herself. They all eat with gusto, drinking water or, in the case of the father, wine; he has several helpings, while the mother and the girl eat less. The kitchen is now hot and full of aromas, everyone eats and talks loudly, they often laugh uproariously, and in a short time everything disappears, the pork, the bread, and the vegetables. And as usual the father starts talking about politics.

“This new war, in Tripolitania [Libya], is ruinous. With all the problems we’ve got! But in the factory they say it’s all a show to please the nationalists, that Giolitti wants to come to an agreement with the Socialists, with Turati. He understands that the Socialists count! And my friend Ambroeus says that soon he’ll give everyone the vote, tuec i òmen (to all men).” “Wait and see if the Socialists don’t give women the vote,” the mother intervenes. “That’s all we need, women voting, go on, go on, go to hell!” While the discussion becomes heated, Benvenuta begins preparing her secret dish. She thoroughly beats the egg yolks with the sugar, leaving very little albumen, then she heats the mixture in a double boiler, continually stirring, and adds the wine and
the vanilla. The gold colored froth swells and then sets into a soft, perfumed cream, which the girl quickly pours into the cups and serves: “Here’s my zabaglione!” “Oh, this is wonderful, Benvenuta! Like the seiu (rich gentlemen)! Your future husband will be a lucky man!,” her father laughs with great satisfaction. “And perhaps you’ve already got a boyfriend,” adds her father, making Benvenuta blush. “If so, we’ll find out, because l’amur, la fiama e la tuss se fan cugnuss (love, fire, and a cough are soon recognized!). But to hell with everything, this is the way one should eat and drink. Mangia beve e cass acce la vag (Eat, drink, shit, and let things take their course),” the master of the house peremptorily concludes.

The father has now gone to bed, and the mother is putting the little one in bed. Benvenuta has cleared the table, put the plates back in the sideboard, and filled the stove for the night; now she is finishing washing and drying the frying pans. It’s been a wonderful day. The lady was happy with her embroidery and perhaps will give her some more work; dinner was a success, and tomorrow she’ll tell her classmates and her home economics teacher all about it. If things continue like this, she’ll really find a good job and perhaps a good husband. As she watches the soap suds slowly disappear down the tubes, perhaps she thinks that by now she is ready to face the world out there.

Eating, Living, Dying

How important is it to eat good food and enough of it? This might seem a rather rhetorical question (if not completely senseless) because there is total agreement that eating is important. But at times the most trivial questions bring out deeply rooted clichés. A retrospective glance at the general living conditions of the Italian and European populations shows that, at least starting from the nineteenth century, there has been a marked improvement in all the parameters, starting with longevity and health, and a sharp drop in mortality rates. These factors, together with technological progress and economic wealth, make up a characteristic model of advanced modern societies compared to those of past centuries. But what factors have contributed particularly decisively to this epoch-making change? In 1953, the United Nations commissioned a study on this subject in order to learn how to help less-developed countries. The result was a well-defined list of factors, in the following order: (1) state hygienic and health provisions; (2) advances in medicine; (3) better personal hygiene; (4) higher incomes and standards of living; to which, in 1973, was added a further point because things did not quite add up, namely, (5) “natural” causes, including less aggressive pathogens (the lower incidence of many infectious diseases and of the terrible epidemics of the past, the reasons for which were still not quite clear).20

Relating these findings to the daily lives of the workers we just saw means that their improved well-being depended, above all, on the reforms that the unitary state had undertaken in the field of public health (general cleaning of the streets and the cities, the construction of aqueducts, sewers, and
health infrastructure). Second, the workers’ well-being depended on the fact that they could also enjoy good health care—thanks to medical progress—dispensed through municipal doctors and hospitals. A third factor was the attention paid to personal hygiene (the result of a new urban culture of cleanliness and of the practical possibility of having water with which to clean oneself, one’s clothes, and one’s home). Finally, incomes increased, which permitted a better and more abundant diet, and a life with greater comforts (heating, lighting, adequate clothing, technological objects, etc.)—leaving aside for the moment the unpredictable dynamics of “natural causes.”

Nevertheless, a British scholar, Thomas McKeown, after having carefully studied the data concerning the nineteenth-century English population, has cast doubt on these findings. He maintains that although the great state-driven health reforms had a profound effect on workers’ physical well-being, especially with the general improvement in hygienic conditions, this change was gradual. By contrast, the mortality rate fell rapidly, and in this, according to McKeown, the contribution of medicine was minimal until at least the mid-1900s, when the massive use of new medicines such as antibiotics really had an enormous impact on public health. In fact, it should be borne in mind that as late as the end of the nineteenth century, there were no effective cures against the main infectious diseases, which were the primary causes of death (like tuberculosis). And yet instances of these diseases had declined rapidly. Why? The main explanation, by exclusion, was that the drop was essentially due to improvements in nutrition. Better and more varied diets made people more resistant to diseases, triggering a virtuous cycle of scant infection, which drastically slowed the spread of epidemics. This picture was completed by the increased hygiene made possible by the state’s public health reforms. Eating well, drinking clean water, and giving wholesome milk to small children were the most effective prescriptions for rapidly changing people’s lives (and even for making them grow taller). Eating adequately not only meant living better but also fewer occurrences of falling ill and dying.

The significance of these findings is clear. From a historical point of view, a greater effort by the liberal state to improve worker and peasant diets—before investing enormous sums in the infrastructure—would have yielded quicker, more effective results. (Perhaps Benvenuta made an excellent decision by investing some of her savings in that family dinner.)

McKeown’s conclusions have been influential, but also heavily criticized. Subsequent studies have shown, in effect, that one cannot generalize. Rather than a single main cause, it is more accurate to refer to interrelated, mutually influencing causes. Moreover, social, cultural, and other factors played major roles. Diseases had different effects, depending on geographical area, state, social class, gender, individual community, profession or occupation, and even religion (and there were also references to “biopolitics”). Regarding the Italian situation, for example, it is possible to detect some of the phenomena indicated by McKeown, even if they occurred later, in particular, the decline in mortality, especially vis-à-vis infectious diseases, as well as the beginning of public health works (from the end of the nineteenth century).
What appears more ambiguous was the per capita increase in dietary consumption, which was limited to certain social sectors, was negatively affected by the agrarian crisis in the last two decades of the 1800s, and only showed appreciable improvements in the first decade of the 1900s (Table 3). Nevertheless, great local variations and a dearth of more specific data do not permit final judgment.

In any case, arguments linking food to declining mortality have the merit of recalling the fundamental role that nutrition plays in historical evolution. They also underline how decisions relating to a population’s general well-being and to the concomitant investment priorities in public health (more hospitals or more food for the poor, more highways or more school canteens) are always cultural and political, even if they are wrapped in technical terms.

But let’s leave aside these considerations for a moment and return to the Mariani household’s dinner. We have already seen the role of bread, soups, and boiled food in general in the working-class diet, but here is something new—fried food. This type of cooking can also be considered characteristic of the less well-off classes for the simple reason that, with some batter consisting of a little flour and water, and a little fat, one can make poor quality foods (offal, small fish, vegetables) crisp and tasty. Or, by adding a little sugar or honey (and possibly some currants or pieces of fruit), one can quickly prepare any kind of pancake, a cheap sweet always present on holidays and at working-class fairs. (In Rome, they used to say, “Saint Joseph the fryer put the oil in the spoon” [San Giuseppe frittellaro, metti l’ojo ner cucchiaro].) But what fat was used? On the whole, the most widespread in Italy was olive oil, but it was expensive and used above all in the South. Vegetable oils were not a valid alternative at that time because they were unsuitable for frying or had an unpleasant taste. In the North, the traditional alternative to olive oil was butter; but it was also costly, which is why lard was often used instead.

No less typical than fried food for the lower classes was pork. The pig, from the point of view of the human diet, is a unique animal. It is prolific, adapts to all climates, is absolutely omnivorous, and can increase its body weight fivefold in its first six months of life. Thus, it is not surprising that it was so widespread in Italy and that its derivatives were sold at moderate prices, even if there were other “barely noble” types of meat on working-class tables: lamb, widely eaten, in particular, in the sheep-rearing areas of Central Italy, perhaps roasted piping hot; goat and kid, above all in the mountainous areas and in Sicily and Sardinia; but also horse meat in particular areas (near Verona, Apulia, Emilia, Massa and Carrara, Pesaro and Urbino); and even donkey, slaughtered in old age and therefore used in stews cooked for a long time.
The other possibility for the urban working class to consume cheap animal proteins was to eat preserved meat or fish (smoked or cured). The presence of these preparations was common in working-class diets at the end of the 1800s and the beginning of the 1900s. In the typical meal of a worker from Central-Northern Italy, there would have been at least 350 grams a week of preserved meat or fish, which would have shrunk to 100 grams for a southern worker.27

From North to South, there was every type of cured meat, especially, but not only, of pork. In Valle d’Aosta, they prepared mocetta with leg of ibex; in Piedmont there were Bra sausages and small Cacciatorc salami; in Lombardy they indulged their whims with bresaola (from Valtellina), coppa (from Mantua), and Milan and Varzi salami; whereas in Liguria they prepared the traditional mostadelia. Further east, there was speck from Trentino, and Veneto offered soppressa and various preparations based on goose, also in Friuli–Venezia Giulia together with the highly appreciated San Daniele ham. In Central Italy, one entered the paradise of salamis. First of all, in Emilia Romagna, there was coppa (from Piacenza), the cotechino of Modena (cooked pork sausage), the culatello of Zibello, Bologna mortadella, Parma ham, and salami from Felino; then in Tuscany there was finocchiona, lard from Colonnata, Tuscan ham (also made from boar), cinta from Siena (cured meats of a typical Italian breed of pig, like the black ones from Abruzzo, the red ones, those from Caserta, Calabria, and the Maremma, and still others that were destined to disappear with industrialization). Other popular cured meats included barbozza from Umbria, coppa di testa from the Marches, porchetta from Latium, and the old sheep salami of the transhumant shepherds from Abruzzo. Cured meat could also be found in the South—the capocollo from Apulia, the borzillo from Basilicata, the hams from Campania, the Calabrian soppressata, the Sicilian cured meats of Monti Nebrodi, and the Sardinian mustela.28

Besides the cured meats (as widespread as today), there were also—as mentioned above—many types of preserved fish (unlike today), such as mullet in Sardinia, trout in Friuli and Trentino, and eel and other freshwater fish from lagoons and rivers.29 Especially popular was cod, salted (baccalà) or dehydrated (sometimes also called stoccafisso, from the old German Stockfish, stick fish). It was a fish which for centuries had greatly benefited the Scandinavian countries, whose fishing boat crews cleaned it and immediately covered it with salt in barrels in summer, whereas in winter they left it to dry in the open air. A visitor to the Norwegian coasts would have seen the cod, on wooden lattices as far as the eye could see, exposed to the icy winds and the pale rays of the northern sun.30 This fish also reminds us of the weight of technology in daily life. In the absence of refrigeration plants, there were only two options. One could eat foods preserved in salt, vinegar, alcohol, or by smoking (only in winter could one make food last a little longer by keeping it in containers in the open air or under layers of straw). Or one could buy and eat everything the same day (which explains the role and the number of food shops in every city).
And what about wine? It was rarely missing from working-class tables, as we have seen. The fact that it was not of high quality like the one drunk in the banquets of the well-to-do does not mean that it did not possess an equally strong cultural significance. After all, in ancient times, the whole of the Mediterranean had been identified as the area of wine, in contrast with other regions (for example, those of Northern Europe), where beer prevailed. The Ancient Greeks used to raise their chalices of wine, the first time in honor of Dionysus, the Graces, and the Hours; a second time in honor of Aphrodite and once again Dionysus; whereas the third time should have been avoided because it was for Hubris (excess) and Atē (derangement). The civilization of wine was linked to rules and moderation; only the barbarians fell into excesses and bestiality.31 Through the Romans, the appreciation of wine reached Christianity, which sacralized it as the Blood of Christ. Furthermore, added to this heritage as a cultural marker were its widespread availability throughout the Italian peninsula, its valuable supply of calories in frequently inadequate diets, and its links with sociability. In fact, all the investigations into working-class diets agree that wine was consumed by adult male workers mainly outside the home, on holidays or their eves, in the worst taverns, inns, and “taverns of Trani.” However, it was often adulterated, as many popular proverbs warned: in Rome, “Don’t look for good wine in the first inn you come across” (A la prima osteria nun cercà er bon vino); in Lombardy, “Cheap wine leads a man to the hospital” (El vin a bon mercia el menna l’omm a l’ospedaa); in Veneto, “The three sins that one cannot save oneself from: robbing on behalf of others, falling in love with old women, getting drunk on cheap wine” (I tre pecà che no xe salva: robar par i altri, inamorarse de done vecie, imbriagarse de vin picolo); and in Naples, “I mix fennel with wine” (Ccu fenocchio me ce accocchio), meaning “I cheat others,” from the custom of making people eat fennel before drinking wine in order to disguise its taste.32 Moreover, wine was consumed by men, which marked the sociality of gender (as we have also seen in our dinner).

So what does the Italian working-class dinner we just saw have to tell us? It speaks to the difficult conditions of most workers, who had to work an average of ten hours a day, as is confirmed by investigations from the period. The family budget of a worker in Pescia (Tuscany), of a sulfur miner in Lercara (Sicily), and of a pickaxe sulfur mine worker in Riesi (Sicily), just to take a few examples, all had very high expenditures for food, especially for cereals (which constituted up to 55 percent of the diet of the pickaxer from Riesi).33 A group of families of bricklayers and unskilled workers showed notable differences in income (ranging from four hundred lire to over one thousand, testifying to the complex professional stratification of this work, vividly illustrated in Vasco Pratolini’s historical novel Metello), but the average family spent some 74 percent of its income on food in 1895.34 Nor were the workers in the Crocetta quarter of Turin better off. According to the investigation conducted for a year by Gina Lombroso (Cesare Lombroso’s daughter, an interesting figure—intellectual, doctor, researcher on the feminine condition, and on various social and anthropological subjects), 73 percent of the budget
went for food here as well (40 percent on cereals, 6 percent on meat, 8 percent on fermented drinks). Another detailed investigation promoted by the Ministry of the Interior in 1885 confirmed this overall picture, but introduced another variable. The data concerned the male adult worker’s daily diet in twenty-two industrial and artisan businesses. Apart from pointing out the regional differences we know about, this investigation suggested that there were “working-class aristocracies” in some factories and trade associations. Thus, whereas the circumstances of workers in the modern Rossi Woolen Mill in Schio (near Vicenza) were relatively satisfactory, as were those of Bolognese craftsmen, they nonetheless represented a stark contrast to the poor daily diet of workers in textile plants north of Milan or of brick makers in the study, not to mention the marked seasonal variations (Table 4). By the early 1900s, the situation had not improved for the vast majority of workers, as other studies showed, including one in 1914 on fifty-one households in Milan, which concluded that only two families had an adequate diet, four were at the limit, and all the others were below it. In other words, contemporary rhetoric in books and newspapers about the Italian worker—whether peasant or factory worker—as frugal and virtuous in his or her eating habits was a bitter distortion of the reality of poverty.

What is noteworthy in these data is that only a restricted segment of workers could be said to have benefited from an improved diet (and as general consumers) in the period up to the First World War. Only this narrow group experienced a trend that was very evident instead for the “mother of all the working-classes,” the English one, as is documented, for example, for Manchester between 1820 and 1870—an improvement due both to increases in real incomes as well as to progress in trade and in the distribution of food thanks to the development of the railways. Various studies on the conditions of English workers were conducted at the time, especially following the famous denunciation by Friedrich Engels, which also described the daily diet of various categories of workers—the more affluent able to afford meat, bacon, and cheese every day; the intermediate segments who could afford a similar diet two or three times a week, supplementing with bread and potatoes; the lowest levels, for whom meat was a rarity or disappeared completely, replaced by bread, cheese, porridge, and potatoes; and finally, the most unfortunate, the Irish, who ate only potatoes. But there were people who were even worse off, the unemployed, who ate whatever they could find (or steal), like potato peels and vegetable scraps.

If in the United Kingdom the “two nations” (the poor and the rich), stigmatized by Benjamin Disraeli in his novel *Sybil, or the Two Nations* (1845), were nonetheless starting to draw closer, the same could not yet be said about Italy, not even in the advanced city of Turin at the beginning of the 1900s. Here we find better conditions in the new engineering and automobile factories (Fiat was established in 1899), with notable concentrations of qualified workers. But the situation was very different in other sectors, like the textile and clothing industries, fragmented in thousands of small businesses and employing mainly minors and women. This division suggests a second
important consideration, which brings us back to the working-class dinner we just witnessed. Working-class hierarchies were based not only on the type of work, sector, or factory size but clearly also on gender- and age-based distinctions. Women and minors (considered such if under fifteen) earned much less, even only half or one-third of the adult male salary. (In the textile industry in Turin in 1900, a woman could earn one lira a day, a minor thirty to forty centesimi, and a man—often more qualified—some two or two and a half lire.) Moreover, their situation was not simple even within the family. From the few data we gleaned on the subject (which evidently did not possess much cultural significance for scholars at the time), it appears that many women workers, or in any case those belonging to working-class families, were malnourished at times. In the above-mentioned investigation of Milanese families, thirty-one of the fifty-three women examined were below the weight considered adequate for an adult female worker (fifty-five kilograms), and of these, fifteen were below fifty kilograms. Moreover, these data were corroborated by medical maternity records. Surviving data on the physical condition, and therefore the daily diet, of working minors (eighteen thousand in 1901) are even more uncertain, but the number of heartfelt accusations suggests a truly difficult situation.

Therefore, if the working-class family is similar to the peasant one in certain respects (the role of women, the low income, and the general condition of poverty), it is different in other ways. Suffice it to mention the vast network of food distribution; the presence, and increasing professionalism, of many categories of workers responsible for preparing food; the low level of self-consumption; the decreased reliance on the surrounding territory for provisions; the cultural effects of urbanization (like the closeness to, and the example of, the dietary habits of other classes and social groups); the presence of a working-class elite able to steadily improve its diet; the higher number of domestic technical innovations; and, finally, an important demographic difference with all the attendant consequences for the division of food—working-class families were smaller than peasant ones because of the typical problems associated with life in the city as well as the influences of urban culture more generally. In the above-mentioned investigation of fifty-one Milanese families, fourteen had no children, fourteen had one child, nine had two children (like the Mariani family), eight had three children, and only six had more than three. (“The concept that it is better to limit procreation, that having children requires too many sacrifices, has already reached the bourgeoisie and made inroads in the working class,” concluded the disconcerted researcher.)

And what about sociability and the rules of the meal, which were so important in the code of upper-class repasts? What can the meal in the Mariani household tell us? Here we find a clear emphasis on the quantity of the food, its substance, and its capacity to give immediate satisfaction and satiate (once again we encounter the quantity–quality contrast). Furthermore, as Bourdieu has suggested, eating in abundance is linked with a conception of virility understood as physical strength, as opposed to the rarefied form and beauty
of the upper classes. After all, the way one eats is linked with one’s body concept, which every social class creates for itself. For workers, a strong and powerful body, even if not beautiful and sophisticated, is a positive value. Similarly, it is important to them to get full and immediate satisfaction from food, to live well and generously, which is why fatty, tasty, and appetizing foods are preferred. According to a study referenced by Barthes, this is the reason why preference is given to sweet foods like chocolate, soft and creamy foodstuffs, and strong aromas—they all give immediate satisfaction (the opposite of the upper classes, who appreciate bitter foods with irregular consistencies and delicate aromas). Etiquette, good manners, and the subdivision of the courses do not count here. They are all empty formalities. Eating and drinking with others are the foundation of working-class sociability, inside and outside the home; doing so is part and parcel of the morality of work. As the people of Veneto insist, “The man who is afraid of eating is afraid of working” (L’omo che gh’à paura de magnar, gh’à paura de lavorar).

A Rational Cuisine

The Na, an ethnic group of thirty thousand people living in Yongning amidst the mountains of Northwest China near the Tibetan plateau, believe that everything began with Abaodgu. Not that this spirit created everything, but that he established the rules and gave meaning to things. For example, Abaodgu fixed an age for every living being, and he decided that men would visit women in order to unite with them (and not the other way round, as women were too impetuous). It is Abaodgu who puts a fetus in women’s abdomens five months before they are “irrigated” by a man and Abaodgu feeds the fetus during the pregnancy. (It seems that he had first tried to put the fetus into men’s calves, but had stopped that because it created problems for men when they went into the hills to gather wood.) In other words, everything started with Abaodgu because this god had given meaning and a sense of measure to everything and established an inspiring principle for every action.

The wisdom of Abaodgu was probably not available in fin-de-siècle Italy, but some inspiring principles guided general behavior, nonetheless. We might well ask ourselves if there are great narrative structures, systems of thought, or simply general principles that direct our thoughts and actions in a given historical moment. In a country being rapidly transformed by industrialization (the growth and spread of factories, urbanization that swelled the cities, large and small, new technologies changing work and daily life, and railways reducing physical and psychological distances), “progress” and “rationalization” were perhaps the watchwords that best epitomized that particular historical moment.

Diets did not elude these paradigms. Food began to appear as a measurable element, which could be rationalized and improved for production. Already in the past, there had been widespread acknowledgment of the link between food and health (the Ancient Greeks, as Foucault recalls, maintained that it
was precisely from the principles developed for a balanced diet that medicine arose). There was also the idea that eating or fasting according to certain systems was integral to a person’s moral elevation (thus the rigid rules of medieval monks). But things began changing as the rules came to be dictated by science, and scientists were becoming the acknowledged experts of food and nutrition. At the same time, modern states needed healthy citizens, capable soldiers, strong workers, and prolific women in order to function. Results came in the form of interventions in the fields of hygiene and health mentioned above, but also in the increasing attention paid to a diet guaranteeing complete physical efficiency. Eating began to be viewed in scientific terms, as the foods people ate became their “diet.”

As early as about 1840, some German scientists began dividing the dietary components of food into proteins, fats, and carbohydrates, and they began to calculate the appropriate daily rations that people needed. In the same period, the chemist Justus Liebig developed the first quantitative measurements of these components, establishing a relation between nutrition and physical work (as well as inventing and launching a meat extract that enjoyed enormous commercial success). The next step was taken by Max Rubner who, around 1880, utilized some thermodynamic concepts. According to Rubner, the various nutritional components amounted to the same thing; what counted was their contribution in terms of “calories” (and therefore their potential for transformation into physical work). Basically, food was fuel for the “human machine.” But a final piece of the puzzle was still missing. Since different diets containing the same number of calories could have disastrous effects on human health (as was demonstrated by pellagra), it was also necessary to have some essential amino-acids, subsequently identified as “vitamins” by Casimir Funk in 1912. Later dietary studies even moved from chemical physiology to a new sector called biochemistry, discovering other fundamental components (such as minerals), and shifting from Germany to the United Kingdom and the United States.

Italy, too, soon discovered the appeal and usefulness of the new science of nutrition. Social scientists, philanthropists, and politicians understood how important diet was for improving the conditions of the lives of the poorest classes and, at the same time, for guaranteeing the necessary quality of “human capital” for the new unified state. Quite a few of the investigations into poverty promoted in liberal Italy were concerned with these two aims. And there were references to this subject even in the works of racist scientists like Alfredo Niceforo. In his book Italiani del nord e italiani del sud (Northern and Southern Italians), he maintained that in Italy there were, on the one hand, the “dark Mediterranean people” and, on the other hand, the northern “Aryans.” He claimed that the two groups differed physically, psychologically, and in the shapes of their skulls (dolichocephalic versus brachycephalic). In his mind, however, these differences were nonetheless linked—whether as cause or effect was unclear—to regional differences in diet, with diets in the North being higher in protein and much richer than those in the South.
In effect, Niceforo ended up indirectly admitting the importance of socio-economic and environmental conditions, which contradicted his own theories about predetermined races.\textsuperscript{51}

In fact, governments had already tried to deal with dietary and food-distribution problems, if not for civilians, certainly for the military. Supplying the army had been a long-standing, seemingly insoluble problem since the days of the Savoy army and its irregular supply of “ammunition bread” before 1861. Military rations were inadequate, and if bread had improved with national unity, the same could not be said for meat (it used to be called “upright meat” as it was very hard; where possible, canned meat was preferred). Investigations and accounts show that the situation changed very slowly because good intentions were generally not put into practice. Difficulties persisted until the First World War, when it was necessary to resort to large-scale requisitions (thereby displeasing the civilian population). If anything, it is worth bearing in mind the contrast between the frugality of the infantryman’s rations and the abundance of the officers’ meals—further confirmation of the class distinctions markedly present in the army, like in Italian society at large.\textsuperscript{52}

A more difficult issue was the diet of workers, especially considering their economic role in the national industries. But how and to what extent could it be improved? Many contemporary scholars considered the matter, starting with figures such as Pietro Albertoni, a physiologist at the University of Bologna, but also a very committed politician, with the radicals, who maintained the importance of utilizing the new scientific discoveries for humanitarian and social ends.\textsuperscript{53} One of his many students, Angelo Pugliese, the author of some studies we have already referenced, also tried to delineate scientifically a suitable diet for the workers, which had to be very nutritious (considering their heavy physical work) and inexpensive. Subdividing foods into “nutritious units,” he advised, for the “working-class diet,” a varied rotation of foods and suggested replacing costly beef with rabbit or with eggs and cheese (fish had too much waste). He also recommended eating vegetables (preferably cooked, for hygienic reasons) and a little fruit (fresh, cooked, or in sugar preserves) as well as cereals (above all wheat in “coarse bread”), chestnuts, potatoes, and rice; he also advocated consuming few fats (essentially condiments, which, however, had to be carefully “retrieved,” after cooking, from frying pans and cutlery, not washed away); finally, everything was to be accompanied by a lot of fresh, clean water (“good drinkable water is the best drink; in fact, it should be the only drink”), and little or no wine (“the worker must learn that alcohol, beyond a certain limit, is a poison that ruins his health, turns him into a brute, makes him beget degenerate children, and often leads him to the lunatic asylum”).\textsuperscript{54}

Pugliese wrote with the food prepared in the family in mind, but perhaps also with an eye on the industrial canteens, which had already entered the public discourse in Italy. Canteens were places for eating at work, perhaps following the British example of Robert Owen’s model village at New Lanark or the Kantinen attached to German factories.\textsuperscript{55} Eating collectively was not
Food and Foodways in Italy

anything new. It had been happening for centuries in monasteries, hospitals, prisons, schools, and many public and private institutions.56 But here it was a question of applying scientific principles to the working-class meal, in order to make it an integral part of industrial discipline. In Italy at the beginning of the twentieth century, there were very few large-scale industrial operations to feed workers. The earliest were probably Allesandro Rossi’s big textile factories in Schio, near Vicenza, and Crespi d’Adda in Lombardy (between 1860 and 1880), the establishment of which were to be considered forms of paternalism. In many other places, the workers simply brought food from home, or (usually women) prepared something very simple on the spot, or received an extremely frugal meal from the employer, who might instead provide the equipment so that the workers could do it themselves. Only in the period between the two World Wars did the real company canteens emerge. Before then, in some cases, there were attempts to make up for the lack of company canteens with “people’s economic kitchens,” which were widely promoted by physicians, philanthropists, and workers’ associations (like the one attached to the Casa per gli emigranti (Emigrants’ House), near the Milan railway station, or the various establishments promoted by the physician Luigi Pagliani). But on the whole, improvements in the popular diet were more theoretical than anything else at the time.

A simpler and quicker approach was instead to “educate” women—through conferences, manuals, or household management courses like those Benvenuta Mariani attended. For example, in 1912 the Società Umanitaria offered free holiday courses for all the women in the various Milanese working-class districts because experience alone was no longer enough to guide a family—“science, good taste and perfect education are necessary to turn a woman into a perfect housewife.” The ultimate aim was to disseminate “a rational cuisine” because it “can improve a worker’s family economically, physically, intellectually, and morally.”57 That is why science had become paradigmatic in every field and for all the classes.

But why were these developments so important at the time? Why so much emphasis on so-called rational cuisine? Taken together, the courses on household management, the first industrial canteens, the investigations into working-class diets, and the development of nutritionism indicate precisely this important cultural change in Italy at the beginning of the twentieth century—the pervasive role that science and a new kind of expert had assumed in every field and among all the social strata. It was the institutional experts who dictated the rules, also in dietary matters, instead of the traditional authorities (civil or religious). These experts changed how food was viewed, making people see it as a sum of quantifiable elements and with precise dietary properties. They were also responsible for suggesting calorie counting, establishing rations and standards, and designating foods as healthy or otherwise. And their knowledge, increasingly necessary for the functioning of a state that wanted to be “modern,” had to be taught and disseminated by every means. These “experts” (the nutritionists, but the same was true of scientists, doctors, psychiatrists, engineers, professors, and all those who
produced "discursive fields," as Foucault would say) not only became depo-
sitories of the knowledge that legitimized the functioning of society, they were,
in fact, custodians of the new means through which power was exercised.
However, the process was not so unilateral, nor just top–down; there were
various nuances of partial acceptance, adaptation, and also rejection of this
knowledge—for example, by consumers, sages among the people, patients,
the demented, self-taught mechanics, and students. But by then the trend
was clear. Food (its content, the ways in which it was prepared and consumed,
how it was talked about, the system of evaluation) reflected these profound
changes.

Finally, there is another oddity worth noting. In this phase, it might seem
as if public discussion about food was concerned only with the lower classes.
In fact, there was another phenomenon that linked politics and diet, words
and food—the political banquet. Its cousin, the convivial banquet was very
common in Italy and Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century.
The military, artists, cultural associations, professional people, confraternities,
trade unions, bibliographers, clerical workers, sports clubs—almost everyone
liked to meet and eat together. (It was the belle époque, after all.) Elegantly
written menus with splendid illustrations, sometimes even by famous artists,
still tell us about the role of these events in the social life of those times.
But the political banquets were a bit different because they were outside the
scope of private reunions between friends and colleagues, and they invaded
the political arena. Having become popular in post-Revolutionary France
as meeting-places for the opposition, they had a truly unforeseen develop-
ment, seeing that it was the prohibition of one of these banquets by King
Louis Philippe in 1848 that triggered the revolt that toppled the monarchy
and led to the Second Republic. In Italy, similar ambitions were not being
nurtured, but it was very common for a committee of supporters to hold
a banquet for its candidate, to which it would also invite local authorities,
officers, journalists, magistrates, and citizens. Sometimes these events were
relatively simple meals with many guests, but more often than not, in typical
Italian fashion, they were sumptuous and exclusive affairs (obviously very dif-
ferent from workers’ canteens). Giovanni Giolitti, for example, often made
use of these—generally pre- or post-electoral—convivial occasions to make
important speeches. After all, what could go better with the spectacle of food
than a feast of words?

**Innovation and the Beginnings of the Food Industry**

The impact of scientific knowledge also had a profound effect in the field of
food production. During the fifty years between the attainment of national
unity and the First World War, where did the food eaten by Italian families
come from? Half came directly from agriculture, but the other half, or slightly
less, came from the food industry. On the whole, the country’s agriculture
maintained a fairly traditional structure, even if the situation had slightly
improved at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1911, for example,
a great quantity of cereals was produced (above all wheat, over 4.5 million metric tons, worth 1,231 million lire), as well as wine (43,000 metric tons, with a higher market value than wheat, namely 1,725 million lire), vegetables (563 million lire), fruit (426 million lire, plus another 95 million lire worth of citrus fruits), oil (309 million lire), not counting legumes, industrial products, and forest products. And then there was the livestock, which yielded meat (worth 1,207 million lire, of which 509 million was beef and 386 million was pork), milk (610 million lire), and also eggs—as well as products from hunting and fishing that yielded smaller sums.60

But these data are not sufficient to draw a map of the food available in Italy. In fact, the country’s own agricultural production could not satisfy the population’s needs. In particular, wheat quantities were inadequate, which is why between 1901 and 1910, on average, 1,125,000 metric tons were imported annually, as well as 219,000 metric tons of corn, 72,000 metric tons of oily seeds and fruits, more than 55,000 head of cattle, and some select foods like coffee (20,000 metric tons) and sugar (13,000 metric tons). However, in the same period, exports included 139,000 metric tons of wine, 338,000 metric tons of citrus fruits, 89,000 metric tons of other fruits, 104,000 metric tons of legumes and vegetables, 56,000 metric tons of rice, and 18,000 metric tons of cheese. In other words, some basic products were imported for the vast majority of the population (wheat, corn, meat), as well as some colonial luxury goods, whereas select agricultural products were exported. In effect, these data confirm a picture of actual food availability of “poor” products, together with niches of luxury, while many fine national products like wine, citrus fruits, fruit, and vegetables (the basis of the “Mediterranean diet”!) were in part exported.61

The role that this imposing agricultural sector played in families’ food consumption was important; it has been calculated that 31 percent of the family budget in 1911 was spent on agricultural products. To this have to be added 2 percent for tobacco and 27 percent for goods from the food industry. (The remaining consumer goods came from other sources, like the textile, clothing, leather, and service industries.)62 What, then, did the food industry of the time offer?

Despite having lost percentage points in the industrial panorama (above all, in favor of vigorous sectors like mechanical engineering and chemistry), the processed food sector was still the largest, comprising 35 percent of Italy’s industrial production in 1911 (it had been 47 percent in 1891), even if the value added was relatively low, 854 million lire, that is, 17.5 percent (because the food industry used a lot of agricultural raw materials, adding little value of its own—unlike, for example, mechanical engineering).63 The food sector was vast, albeit largely comprising a myriad of small and micro-businesses, with few workers, semi-artisanal plants, and dealing with almost all the sectors. Only very few parts of the food sector could be characterized as truly industrial—parts of the milling industry (the broadest sector, together with the preparation of bread and pasta) as well as the great sugar oligopolies (Eridania, Società ligure lombarda), which had grown thanks to the protectionist tariffs that made their products almost luxury goods in Italy.
Occupying the middle ground were various ground-breaking firms, often those looking to the foreign market as an alternative to the restricted internal one: those belonging to the pioneer of preserves Francesco Cirio, creator of a vast food empire comprising mills, dairy plants, a preserves business, and much more; various wine enterprises, from the producers of Tuscan Chianti to those of the Piedmontese and Lombard Vermouths (Martini & Rossi, Cinzano, Campari) and sparkling wines (Gancia, Contratto, Bosca); the producers of oil (like the Tuscan Bertolli and the Ligurian Escoffier), of pasta (Buitoni, Barilla, De Cecco, Agnesi), of cakes and chocolate (Lazzaroni, Venchi, Talmone, Perugina), and also of cheeses (Locatelli, Invernizzi, Cademartori; Galbani, Polenghi). These names began to circulate thanks to the first forms of advertising (essentially through magazines and newspapers), although this advertising was still on a very limited scale. The food industry of the period was small and local with little mechanization; there was not a real gap in quality and quantity between industrial and artisan products, but rather a continuum.

Transformations in agricultural and food production were linked not only to the growing mechanization and the mass production of foods in Italy. As noted above, science and technology played an important role here, too, in the launch of new products and techniques on the market and in the cultural promotion of their adoption. The most sensational case was that of the Liebig meat extract, a very popular product in Italy in the early twentieth century. In fact it was not a totally original invention. Others had already tried with “biscuits,” bars, or other forms of preserved meat (not to mention the cooks who had always boiled meat for a long time to obtain condensed gelatin that could yield an excellent broth in a few minutes). But all industrial attempts had failed, until Justus Liebig—a chemist who was already famous in Germany and Europe in the mid-1850s—exploited his credibility as a scientist to launch a meat extract, which was put on the market in 1865. In his books he had stressed the importance of meat in the diet, arguing that its nutritious ingredients were essential for muscular development. At the same time, he had underlined the benefits of his procedure for obtaining a concentrate that preserved intact all the properties of the fresh product. Liebig used his fame to intervene in discussions everywhere, writing in scientific journals, taking part in debates, even utilizing the new forms of propaganda and enlisting famous cooks to write cookbooks that extolled the virtues of his extract. The product was very successful in Europe, the United States, and South America (he produced 479,000 kilograms of it in 1870). Italy was no exception. There it gradually met with the favor of cooks, social scientists, and housewives, assisted by an enormous advertising campaign. In fact, the meat extract was soon imitated by entrepreneurs like the Swiss Julius Maggi (the son of an Italian immigrant), who proposed soups in powder and small cubes of broth extract (namely, bouillon cubes).

But why did Liebig succeed where others had failed with more or less similar products? The answer lay in his ability to link science and the market to show what great practical applications chemical studies could bring to daily life. Scientific knowledge propagated by experts had altered perceptions of
the product. Initially just a meat substitute of scant value, the extract had achieved the status of a novelty that symbolized the scientifically correct diet. The consequences of these close linkages among scientific knowledge, food production, and marketing were to be enormous throughout the twentieth century.

Two other important innovations influenced the Italian food industry of the time, in this case, not new products but new processes. The person responsible for the first innovation was a self-taught French cook from Champagne, who as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century had tested, on a semi-industrial scale, a new method for conserving food in sealed containers. Nicolas Appert completely filled glass bottles with a particular food, closed them carefully, and then boiled them for hours. The result was that the food did not spoil, and it maintained the same taste for weeks and months. (Pasteur had yet to demonstrate that heat destroyed the microbes.) The military was interested in this project, and Appert wrote a book about his method. Shortly afterwards, the Englishman Peter Durand (perhaps in contact with Appert) perfected the technique, using iron and tin cans instead of fragile glass containers. It was the beginning of a very rapid development that led to the mechanization of production and a vast dissemination of canned products among the military and sailors, whereas initially they had been seen as luxury products or strange novelties. There were also pioneers in Italy who took an interest in the new process (already widespread at the family or artisan level), like the Lancia Brothers of Turin, who supplied canned beef to the soldiers in the 1855 war of the Crimea and in the Second Italian War of Independence (1859), or the indefatigable Francesco Cirio, who put peas and tomatoes in cans and also studied the process for meat. However, it was the Milanese grocery store owner Pietro Sada who systematically canned boiled beef in 1881, albeit in small quantities and for clients who did not much appreciate it. The First World War was the turning point for Sada’s increasing production to such an extent that his son Gino was able to establish a proper business in Monza (Simmenthal). In the meantime, as early as the first decade of the twentieth century, the Appert method advanced the tomato sauce industry, which now possessed the best method for preserving and exporting its products to Great Britain, the United States, Argentina, and continental European countries. (These goods came from Campania and the areas around Piacenza and Parma, with Parma at the forefront on account of its production plants.)

The second innovation was in principle not anything new because it had existed for centuries—refrigeration. Freezing or at least cooling had been practiced since Roman times with snow and ice brought down from high ground and conserved for as long as possible in appropriate places, neviere or ghiacciaie, that is, ice houses. Situated in natural caves or underground chambers covered with bricks and then straw, leaves, and earth, they preserved large quantities of ice for long periods of time (perhaps with the help of salt). They used the ice a bit at a time and replaced it as soon as possible. From the Alps, the Apennines, and even the Etna and Vesuvius volcanoes, the snow
was transported on the backs of mules in winter and even beyond, if possible, to satisfy urban needs, which included the preservation of various foods (especially fish), the production of butter and milk derivatives, ice creams, and other perishable goods, as well as medical treatments. A thick crowd of *ghiacciaioli* (ice sellers) then distributed it everywhere, and not always with mules and carts. A photograph from 1930 shows a female ice seller no longer very young, standing still and looking a little tired on a mountainous path in Malandrone, in the Pistoia Apennines, carrying a wicker basket full of ice on her head. This old system was put under increasing pressure by the new industry of ice produced by mechanical refrigeration (thanks to the compression of a refrigerant gas, such as ammonia). The production of ice was no longer tied to cold and mountainous places, transport costs could be lowered, and consumers showed their appreciation of “artificial ice,” also for hygienic reasons. Soon, railway wagons and then ships able to transport frozen goods were produced, opening new frontiers for long-distance imports, for the food industry, and food conservation. There was the famous voyage of the steamship *Le Frigorifique* in 1876 from Le Havre to Buenos Aires, and the return journey with a big cargo of frozen meat. But it was a long process in Italy, also because even if artificial ice was successful on the market, the same did not hold true for frozen foods, starting with the most important of all, meat, not least because of inadequate structures to preserve the food across the entire length of the supply chains linking producers to consumers (today we would refer to “cold chains”).

Therefore, the food industry, too, tells us of a distinctive Italy and of the presence of both the old and the new. But it should be borne in mind that the changes were not always immediately perceived by the end consumers. For example, the products canned with the Appert method were not sold directly to consumers in individual cans, but packed in large cans or *botte*. Shopkeepers bought these and sold their loose contents, leaving customers with the impression that they were buying a fresh product. As for canned or frozen meat, it was only available in institutional settings such as military and factory canteens or school and hospital cafeterias, meaning it was obligatory in a way and by no means appreciated by those who ate it. In fact, the first experiments with meat had been disastrous because, among other reasons, those handling it lacked specific knowledge of the new products. Apparently, the first time soldiers tasted canned corned beef, they dubbed it “monkey meat.” It was not easy to get people to accept industrialized changes to food, which were often not requested in the first place and which had to contend with the value of tradition as a legitimizing factor. Nevertheless, through love or force, a new wind would soon sweep many of these positions away.
a gastronomic synthesis of Italy

Italy has always been, in the past, a tasty dish for foreigners. Today we [Italians] can savor it; however, wanting to try and experience the taste and the aroma of all its vegetable plots, its pasture lands, and its gardens, we cannot be served all its regional dishes at once.

I therefore propose this gastronomic synthesis of Italy.

A square room with a blue ceiling, whose four walls consist of enormous Futurist paintings on glass representing: a Depero Alpine scene—a Dottori scene of a plain with lakes and hills in the background—a Balla volcanic scene—a Prampolini scene of a southern sea enlivened by small islands. The guests, before eating, dye their hands with Mytilene blue.

At the beginning of the meal, the first wall is illuminated from the back, so making the geometric features of the white and brown mountains and of the green pines stand out. The temperature in the room is set to spring freshness.

The first dish is served, “Alpine Dream”—small egg-shaped pieces of ice enveloped in a chestnut paste and served on thick slices of apple dotted with walnuts and soaked in Freisa wine.

The lighting behind the first wall is switched off and that behind the second wall comes on—the emerald green of the fields and the red color of the farms shine, as the latter fuse with the round earth of the hills and with the metallic blue of the lakes. The temperature in the room increases.

“Civilized rurality” [Agreste civilizzato]—a cake of white boiled rice on which have been placed broad and tender rose leaves, boned frog meat, and very ripe cherries. While the guests eat, the waiters rapidly pass the warm scent of geraniums under their nostrils.
The lighting behind the second wall is switched off, and that behind the third wall comes on—the atmospheric dynamism of red-hot Vesuvius. In the room, the temperature is summery.

“Hint of the South” [Suggestione del Sud]—a big fennel in which radishes and deboned olives have been placed. It is brought to the table enveloped in thin slices of roasted suckling lamb and immersed in wine from Capri.

The lighting behind the third wall is switched off and that behind the last wall comes on—the splendor of the gleaming small islets in the seething foam of the sea. The temperature in the room is very high.

“Colonial Instinct” [Istinto coloniale]—a huge gray mullet stuffed with dates, bananas, slices of orange, crabs, oysters, and carob is served floating in a liter of Marsala. An intense scent of carnations, gorse, and locust tree is sprayed in the air.

Once the meal is over, the lighting comes on behind all four walls, and ice cream mixed with pineapple, pears, and blueberries is served.

Formula of a futurist aeropainter
FILLÌA.¹

A meal, a work of art, a political program. It is difficult to characterize this Futurist provocation. When on December 28, 1930, Marinetti and Fillìa (aka Luigi Colombo) published the “Manifesto della cucina futurista” (Manifesto of Futurist Cooking) in the Turin newspaper Gazzetta del Popolo, proclaiming the abolition of “old-fashioned” pasta and extolling highly imaginative Futurist dishes, many people thought it was simply the umpteenth provocation by the fifty-four-year-old artist, who was already the recipient of Fascism’s main honors. But they were wrong. The Futurists tenaciously pursued this project, conceiving and realizing (“performing” would be more appropriate) Futurist meals and “aerobanquets.” After all, they sought a form of “total art” (very similar to performance art in our own time), in which the beneficiaries (the dinner guests) actively participated in the performance and tried new visual, gustatory, and olfactory experiences.² After the artistic experience, after the meal, in fact, both art and the bodies of the beneficiaries themselves had changed—art and life had fused. The same applies to the proposed “synthesis of Italy” in the form of a meal, which also leaves itself open to an interesting political interpretation. One immediately notices the nationalist exaltation of the country from a culinary point of view (Italy itself, in fact, is the food) and the ostentatious reference to colonial successes. But it is also possible to see the criticism of a nation still regarded as too bourgeois and tied to the heritage of the past (symbolized by pasta). In the same way, the country is represented as anything but homogeneous and perfectly united under the regime’s banners, but as at the most a “synthesis” of landscapes, perfumes, colors, tastes, even irreconcilable temperatures (except perhaps for the dessert . . .).
Still, this kind of interest in cuisine represents an enigma. The regime had never shown any interest in food; all its warlike rhetoric about the Italian, perhaps of peasant stock, who had to be healthy, strong, frugal, virtuous, courageous, parsimonious, and so on, was not at all in tune with concern about cuisine. The Fascist Party leaders did not want to be photographed at meal times, and Mussolini himself was not a great eater, on principle and because of stomach problems. Moreover, the mass of the population, struggling with basic dietary needs, certainly could not be involved in these artistic (and costly) experiments. After moderate economic recovery in the early 1920s, food grew more expensive for consumers because of the regime’s policies (like the Quota 90 revaluation of the lira), not to mention the impact of the 1929 Wall Street crash. It certainly did not seem to be the best moment for talking about cuisine in such terms.

And yet it seemed as if a sort of frenzy had been unleashed. In 1931, the Touring Club Italiano published the first *Guida gastronomica d’Italia*. A veritable atlas of specialties and gastronomic destinations for all of Italy’s regions, this guidebook aspired to match regional dishes with the characteristics of local cultures and landscapes. In 1935, the journalist and writer Paolo Monelli wrote *Il ghiottone errante* (The Wandering Glutton), a very successful, half-serious account—abounding with literary references—of his travels throughout Italy with his friend, the illustrator Novello (rigorously frugal and teetotal). Various other writers also contributed to this vein of gastronomic literature (Chino Ermacora, Angelo Manaresi, and Giovanni Mariotti). In December 1929, the first issue of what was to become the Bible of culinary magazines appeared, *La cucina italiana* (Italian Cuisine). Edited by Umberto Notari (with the help of his wife Delia), it differed from the typical format of cookery magazines. Published daily in a large format, it hosted articles about culture, poetry, stories, book reviews, and recipes, including by famous figures of the cultural and gastronomic world (like the poetess Ada Negri or her namesake Ada Boni, the authoress of the successful 1929 recipe book *Il talismano della felicità* [The Talisman of Happiness]). There were also articles that addressed savings in the kitchen, hygiene, and the scientific aspects of preserving and preparing food. The aim, according to the editor himself, was to combine cuisine and the intellect. In 1932, the publication was transferred from Milan to Rome, where it increasingly aligned itself with the regime’s directives. In 1934, it transformed into a lavish and modern monthly, which is still in business today.

So how can all this enthusiasm for food and cuisine on the part of cultural and artistic figures at such a time be explained?

Perhaps the reason is linked precisely to that moment. In a time of crisis and when the country was withdrawing into itself and within its borders, “high culture” looked around for a truly representative “cultural model” of Italy. What could represent the culture of the country, its historical continuity and local differentiations, its creative traditions, its identity understood as an everyday living practice, and the historical symbols that gave Italy meaning?
An answer was found in the country’s dietary and culinary traditions, namely in one of the most characteristic forms of material culture. In a period of doubts and transformations, the traditions tied to food seemed to embody the truest, most authentic Italy and its deep values, which were flowing continuously beneath the tumultuous currents of daily life. The cultural significance of cuisine that established itself in the 1930s was tied to the “discovery” of food as an identity model.

But let’s take a step back to inspect the context in which this all happened.

**Wars, Fascism, and Beyond**

We have already noticed how at times the great political watersheds that generally structure and divide historical periods do not have immediate repercussions on everyday life. Consumers experience different watersheds and effects (as with the agrarian crisis of 1880). This was the case in the period following the First World War. We can say that, from the point of view of a consumer of the time (above all as regards food), there was a single long period of crisis, punctuated by ups and downs. It began with the First World War, which was followed by a weak recovery in the 1920s and a new decline in the 1930s, culminating in the dramatic collapse of the Second World War, followed by a “long postwar period” of rationing and dietary difficulties for at least another five years. In effect, a dietary regression of some thirty-five to forty years kept Italy far from European criteria for a long time and consolidated the notion in its inhabitants that poverty and poor nutrition were an inevitable destiny, thereby reinforcing the “virtuousness” of the traditional behaviors of saving, frugality, moderation.

Everything began with the outbreak of the European war in the summer of 1914, even before Italy joined the fighting. During the period of neutrality, the government took some precautionary measures—a ban on exporting goods and raw materials of fundamental importance for the country, the regulation of bread production (only the less coveted “coarse bread” could be made), and the call-up of an enormous number of soldiers. The situation was nevertheless difficult because wheat imports had grown irregular due to the naval war and British requisitions. There were not enough provisions in the country. Even so, a paradoxical situation arose. As military rations were more abundant and rich in meat, millions of soldiers, former peasants, suddenly improved their diet and “discovered” meat. But where was all this food going to come from? In view of the already low consumption levels, the first forms of state regulation of civilian consumption proved decidedly inadequate. The next step was the slaughter of an enormous number of animals or their requisitioning (they were kept in terrible conditions, as they followed the troops, and were slaughtered ‘on the spot as needed). The consequent depletion of animal stock was serious, leading, in turn, to a decline in the production of milk, cheese, and other dairy products. With Italy’s entry into the war in 1915, it was able to receive help from allied countries, which prevented the situation from degenerating further thanks to continuous supplies.
of frozen meat and other basic foodstuffs (as well as coal). In this situation, it was the civilians, namely families, who suffered the greatest hardships, despite the price controls set up in 1916, above all because of rising inflation. Riots against the “high cost of living” punctuated the whole period of the war and lasted until 1919–20 (in 1919, with the end of the conflict, some price controls were temporarily reintroduced under pressure from the crowd). But not even the soldiers could be left undisturbed. Some experts controversially wrote that Italian military rations were a useless “luxury” (even if they were below three thousand calories per day and less than those of the other Allied armies). After the defeat of Caporetto in 1917 and its dramatic consequences in economic, military, and dietary terms, the Italian military’s rations were also drastically reduced. Finally, it was the General Commission on Food Consumption, created in 1917 (under the direction first of Luigi Canepa and then of the industrialist Silvio Crespi), which tried to reorganize the situation by imposing controls on prices and severe purchasing restrictions in every area, starting with food rationing (even if with varying effects in different parts of the country). The situation finally began to improve as early as the final year of the war, even if the population continued to suffer the hardships of the black market and of the many frauds and forms of corruption practiced by shopkeepers and officials (only partly discovered and punished after the conflict).

Even if the difficulties were not terribly dramatic on the home front (apart from the lethal “Spanish” influenza of 1918–20), the Great War represents a turning point for a variety of reasons. The state had become an active player, albeit by degrees. The liberal governments began to move only reluctantly, opting for a policy of price controls and supervision of the food market, a task mainly performed locally by the prefects, but this solution proved to be inadequate. Only when the situation worsened was direct and centralized administration introduced; appropriate bodies were set up and courageous decisions taken, albeit often too late. Nevertheless, this model of intervention became a fundamental legacy for the following period. As regards industrial production, the war stimulated the expansion of both existing and new sectors (mechanical engineering, chemistry); in the field of food, it initiated, for example, the refrigeration industry, increasing depots, refrigeration systems, and the construction of refrigeration machines (produced by the Pignone Foundry in Florence and the Gaetano Barbieri factory near Bologna). Therefore, the war caused a technological leap. Lastly, there were the consumers. Systematically ignored by the authorities, they made their voices heard through strikes and protests, albeit mainly without any results. Nonetheless, through these actions, they had begun to establish themselves as actors in the public arena. The forms of spontaneous or organized dissent represented a first step toward a different perception of their role, toward a prepolitical position, so to speak, which proposed anew a “moral economy” based on social justice and not on the market (and which often bordered on or merged into ideological commitment—as demonstrated by the subsequent Red Biennium). Furthermore, the war had,
as has been said, the indirect effect, for many of improving their traditionally very poor diet, and they had no intention of giving up this improvement (as is borne out by the dietary progress of the 1920s, moderate but centered on products like wheat and meat). This factor also impacted postwar consumer demands.

In this context, it is not surprising that the Fascist regime’s first important propaganda initiative was the Battle for Wheat, which the state launched already in 1925. The reasons were clearly economic (to limit the imports of wheat, which had a notably negative effect on Italy’s balance of payments) and part of the ongoing effort to improve agricultural productivity, but the methods were totally new. In contrast to its liberal predecessor, the Fascist state promoted the campaign through propaganda aimed directly at producers (the small farmers) and consumers alike. The campaign’s rhetoric was both traditionalist and patriotic. The first posters referenced respect for bread as a gift from God, or they showed military helmets overflowing with sheaves of wheat, while Mussolini appeared in Luce cinema newsreels, swaggeringly naked to the waist, urging the crowd to break the country’s dependence on the “demo-plutocracies” (the United States and United Kingdom) and initiating work in the fields (but monetary rewards were also envisaged: the Italians had to be encouraged a little . . . ).

Technically, there was increased production, above all after the land reclamation in Latium and the Maremma, but the real crux of this campaign was gaining the consent of the farmers, after a long period of disinterest shown by the liberals, precisely when the country’s productive axis was definitively shifting toward industry.

This was the prelude to what a decade later would be food autarchy.

A MEAL DURING FASCISM

Rome, Prenestino-Labicano district, late 1930s

Two sisters laugh and run, holding hands, on the sidewalk of Via Casilina, a street that follows the old Roman route from Porta Maggiore toward the outskirts. In a way, this street is a mirror of Fascist Rome, which on the one hand extols the monuments and the magnificence of the Roman Empire, and on the other hand wants to convey the image of a modern capital, with the new Eur district, but also the working-class suburbs, which gathered the poor expelled from the center or the new arrivals from outside Rome who were perhaps seeking work as civil servants. The young sisters enter a house, still laughing, and run around the kitchen (and we follow them in). Here their mother looks at them lovingly, while she is busy near the stove, putting coal under the burners, checking the saucepan. There’s soup again today, like almost every day, for lunch and dinner, and she has to try and make it tasty and different each time. She has managed to prepare some broth with a few pieces of second quality meat, which together with some vegetables and onions will do very nicely. Then she will prepare some broccoli in the
frying pan, and with the bread just taken out of the oven everyone will be happy.

While the mother stirs the broth and Rosa has taken little Anna by the hand (these are the names of the two little girls), we can look more closely at where we have ended up. The house is rather old, but quite tidy. From the street one comes straight into the kitchen, while at the back there are three bedrooms, a storage closet, and a bathroom, the last-mentioned on the terrace. The kitchen is simple. It has not changed much since the end of the nineteenth century. Apart from the burners, heated by coal, there is a sink and a cupboard with a shelf and the doors below, undoubtedly containing provisions and kitchen utensils. The tablecloth, napkins, and clothes—everything is very clean (even if doing the laundry is hard work because everything has to be washed by hand in cold water after it has been left to soak in soap or ash). On the walls, there are some hooks from which frying pans hang; in the middle of the room, there is a big table with some chairs. On the table, there is a shopping bag, from which there emerges a yellow paper pack of long pasta (but it’s not for today, perhaps Sunday), and there is also a small packet of sugar. Probably, like every day, the mother has been shopping at the market, going from stall to stall to check all the prices before buying anything. She buys only a few things because everything has to be consumed immediately; there is no way to preserve the food except during winter on the window ledge outside (rich families, by contrast, have iceboxes, a small piece of furniture in which, in the upper part, columns of ice purchased from the ice dealer are placed to keep fruit, milk, and meat cool for a while). Sometimes the mother also goes to the shops—the baker’s and the delicatessen—but always only to buy essentials. After all, even having the money, there isn’t that much food around, so one has to make do with what there is. It’s a heavy responsibility thinking about her husband and the four children who have to grow. So she tries at least on Sunday to give them a little meat, perhaps a bit of cutlet, a portion of ham (coated in breadcrumbs with broccoli, so that it’s more filling) or the luganega type of sausages, those very thin little ones—she gives one to each child, with the potatoes, and it’s like a holiday. Once in a while, for a snack, there’s also some salami with salted anchovies, flavored with oil and vinegar, but it’s rare. (At the market, there’s only fish on Fridays, and it’s expensive; and the meat mainly consists of offal—heart, spleen, lungs, or tripe—that needs cooking.)

On religious holidays, then, it’s a real feast day. Above all, the children are counting the days till Christmas. On Christmas Eve, they have spaghetti with tuna and then fried apple and artichoke; in the evening they go to Mass, and then on Christmas Day there’s everything—stracciatella (broth with beaten eggs, semolina, and Parmesan cheese), spring lamb cacciatore, and fettuccine—the fettuccine is really good! Because so many relatives come to eat, lots of filo dough is made in the morning by hand, and it all disappears! “Easter Lunch” is also wonderful. All the food is laid out on the table (spring lamb offal with artichokes, ricotta pizza, or boiled eggs, pizza cresciuta [a semi-sweet leavened cake], a big donut, and so many other wonderful things),
and one waits for the priest to come and give his blessing—“otherwise one couldn’t eat anything, that was Easter.”\(^{12}\) Subsequently, on some occasions the sisters would make up for the absence of the priest by using a little of that holy water they always kept in the house—after all, “it’s always holy water!” On the other hand, if someone was ill and needed a better diet, then he or she would receive a beaten egg and a more nourishing cutlet, whereas the others “would have less” (meaning soup).

At that moment, when the mother is stirring the broth, the father also comes home, from the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, and in an instant they are all sitting at the table, the parents and their four children. The soup is served and they start eating. As the parents talk, their concern comes through. These are difficult times, but they hope that things will continue like they are and at least not get worse; in other words, they just want to get by (“if you’re not king, don’t make any new laws, and leave the world as it is,” *si nun sei re, nun fa’ legge nova e lassa er monno come se trova*). But children are one’s joy. It is beautiful to see them, and, in the end, even the anxiety disappears before the children’s wonderful laughter.

Seeing the whole family together, we cannot help thinking with sadness about what awaits them in a few years’ time. The Second World War will be an even more terrible trial for the populace than the First World War was. In Rome, speculation will immediately make the prices of foodstuffs go up, in fact, as soon as war is announced, and, from 1940, the rationing of oils and fats will begin, followed by that of pasta and rice. The mother will have to get used to ration cards, precious gray cards with a certain number of coupons to tear off to obtain an inadequate ration. And then there will be the limitations on ice cream (to save on milk and sugar), cookies, and cakes (because it will be necessary to produce crackers for the soldiers), not to mention meat and fish, so that there will only be a few chickens that the family itself raises. Those with sufficient means will supplement their diets through the black market (“whoever had money, always found a way out”).\(^{13}\)

Rationing will begin on practically everything in 1941, starting with bread, the food that will come to symbolize the change. It will no longer be good and crisp, like earlier, but hard, sticky, and dark because of the use of whatever kind of flour—if there even is any bread. So the mother will have to make do with soup and few condiments (with no oil and little salt) and, as a second course, fried onions. Many will even eat broad bean peels or boiled carobs, bran fritters and *pancotto* (pieces of bread, boiled and seasoned with oil and salt); all will use their ingenuity to survive.\(^{14}\) The coffee will be made with barley, chicory, and even lupins toasted at home (“very bitter”).\(^{15}\) As the saying goes, necessity is not bound by any laws (*necessità nun cià legge*).

But worse will come. The hope that Rome will not be bombed because of the Pope’s presence will come to naught, when, beginning in 1943, the city is subjected to heavy bombing. This is the point at which the parents of our family will decide to take the children away. They will go to the village in Romagna where the mother comes from, also because she is expecting her last
daughter. They probably won’t eat more there (“the war was everywhere”). But at least they will be safe. And the very little Antonietta will be able to grow (even if her mother will not have milk to feed her and will give her bits of chewed bread crumbs with onion instead). And then the children will be spared the scenes before their father’s eyes in Rome—people crammed in the few available air-raid shelters and in caves and cellars, or perhaps desperate like their friends in the Prenestino quarter with twelve small children, who during the air raids will line up in the corridor, with the eldest daughter bringing wet towels so they will not breathe in the lime from the rubble, while they all pray, “St. Anthony save us!” Above all, going to the country will spare the children the sight, on leaving the air-raid shelter, of the dead, the wounded, and “mothers crying, as they [hold] in their arms their bloodstained children, things one can never forget,” if a bomb falls nearby. The nightmare will seem unending. But one day the war will end, and then everyone will rejoice, welcoming the small trucks carrying the Americans (the new saints throwing out the old ones, as they say, *li Santi novi caccieno li vecchi*). The Americans will distribute canned Dutch cheese, canned meat (“they waged war but they had everything”), and especially bread, whiter than anyone has ever seen (“it was a real surprise”), “this white bread they threw at us, which you could not stop eating because it was exceptionally good.” The sacrifices will continue for some years after the war, but now, at least, the children will have a future.

But the smell of the broccoli brings us back to the present, to our meal before the war. It has a wonderful aroma, not too strong; it smells of fresh vegetables, of fragrant spices, of cooking in the frying pan. The meal is also pleasing to look at; the chiaroscuro green of the vegetables contrasts with the thin yellow-brown of the breadcrumbs that irregularly coats them. On the plates, the broccoli pieces seem like small flowering logs covered by a golden veil. They are compact and crisp, and, judging by how they are eaten, we would like to be able to taste them ourselves. It is absolutely true that with their knowledge of foods and herbs, many women knew how to produce excellent dishes using the simplest and most modest ingredients.

Here are Rosa and Anna, eating their broccoli with gusto; they will soon be joined by Antonietta, and the three sisters will live a long life together, full of surprises and profound transformations—economic, social, political, and also dietary. But the enjoyment of this moment and the importance that this experience holds for them will perhaps be unrepeatable. This food, even if extremely modest, is precious and has a special taste. The affluence that will come later, making everything available and abundant, will change their relationship to food; like the two faces of Janus, it will give them a great deal, but it will also take something away. Many years later, sitting around a table and recalling the past, they will conclude:

—You paid the rent, you ate, and that was that. [Today]...we can say we feel like ladies.

—Certainly!
—Even too much!
—Yes, yes, yes!
—Now there’s no imagination about anything, because before you had to wait
for Christmas to buy a chicken. Now that the chicken is always there... I say
so many times, now that we all have full bellies, there’s no imagination about
anything, neither about stew, nor about chicken, not about anything...

And the three sisters laugh merrily, now as in the past.

**Colonial Cuisine**

Probably the young Roman sisters had never eaten exotic fruits like dates and
bananas (as in the Futurist recipe), nor anything like the colonial cake (*torta
delle colonie*), a soft sponge cake soaked in a sweet and fragrant liqueur like
Alchermes—red like the color of cochineal—and filled with sliced bananas,
walnuts, and whipped cream. But this was another important aspect of the
cuisine in this period because it represents the rich, sweet, and exotic facet at
variance with the frugal, simple, self-sufficient one that delineated Fascism’s
dietary universe. In fact, one cannot fully grasp the spirit of the time if one
focuses only on self-sufficiency and privation, forgetting the promise of the
rich, “sweet” dietary future that the colonies were supposed to ensure. There
was a tension reflected in the contrast between the Italy of the time, poor
and austere, forced to espouse self-sufficiency, and the Italy of the future,
rich, powerful, and outward-looking thanks to its empire. The privations of
the time could be seen by contemporaries as a precondition for the wealth
of tomorrow. Thus, perhaps, can the disproportionate role of the colonies in
people’s imaginations at the time be explained.

In the dietary field, there were many specialties that in some way recalled
Africa, sometimes simply because of a slightly dark color (above all cookies,
cakes, Assab licorice, *africannette* sponge fingers, liqueurs, different brands of
cocoa, and so on)—all associated with luxury and pleasure. There were even
more advertisements recalling the colonies, and for the most varied products.
There were two products, in particular, for which advertisers emphasized an
African connection—bananas and coffee. The former were to be found in
many advertising and propaganda photographs as the “food of the gods”
being offered to the Italian colonizers, or in Luce documentary reels showing
the steps from their being gathered to their shipment from Somalia (presum-
ably to Italy). Coffee, a very important product in the Italian diet, originally
came from Ethiopia. The local Oromi people had a high regard for this cul-
tivation. According to a legend, unlike the plants that arise thanks to the
rain, the coffee plant had divine origins. At the time when the god Waqa still
walked the earth, a man had dared to challenge him because he did not want
to die. “I will let you live for three hundred years, up to the fifth genera-
tion of your grandchildren. Then you will die,” Waqa told him. But the man
wanted to live forever, like the god, so he jumped on a horse and fled as far
as possible, while Waqa cursed him. At sunset, he reached a group of men
who had just finished digging a grave. “Who is it for?” he asked. “We think
it’s for you, that’s what Waqa told us.” Then the man got off his horse and
immediately died, and was buried in the grave. However, after five days Waqa
remembered the man and took pity on him. He went to the grave and cried
on the corpse and from his tears there sprang the coffee plant. That is why
coffee must precede all the rites and is like a medicine—it arose from Waqa’s
tears.  

In fact, images from the Fascist period seem more interested in the
commercial possibilities of the various products than in their mythical and
religious side. A 1937 newsreel “Cronache dell’Impero” (News from the
Empire) showed the Ethiopian plateau between Hara and Awash, famous
for its coffee, with well-dressed indigenous people in traditional garb, eagerly
gathering the coffee berries, hulling them in stumps, and packing and weigh-
ing the product—the whole sequence accompanied by lively rhythmic music,
and preceded and concluded by beautiful scenery (with no trace of Waqa).  

In any case, once it had reached Italy, coffee clearly maintained its African
characteristics in the eyes of consumers, thanks to brands of coffee and pack-
aging with exotic names, not to mention cafés and coffee roasting shops
with objects and furnishings in an African style. Everything reminded con-
sumers that coffee was a colonial product. (After all, exotic foodstuffs and
fruits, together with coarse leather and cotton, formed the nucleus of colonial
exports to Italy. Still, they only amounted to 2.6 percent of Italy’s total trade
in 1936, whereas 31 percent of this trade comprised the export of products
from Italy to the colonies, above all mechanical and industrial goods.)  

Where did this image of Africa come from? It is necessary to go back at
least as far as the final decades of the nineteenth century to the first Italian
colonial expeditions and their journalistic accounts. It is also necessary to con-
sider the work of missionaries, scientists, and even the political-commercial
“tours” that brought Africans to Europe, “exhibiting” them to a curious
and astounded public. In Italy, the first instance was at the 1884 Turin
General Exhibition, at which an African village was recreated.  

By the end of the century, tourist expeditions for notables of the period were also
highly fashionable. On adventurous railways or luxurious ships, they trav-
elled throughout the Mediterranean region, even making it to Africa. The
adventurous fascination of sea voyages was still at its height during the Fas-
cist era, when in 1931 the Rex was launched, the pride of the navy and
one of the fastest, most opulent ships in the world. It was known, among
other things, for its extremely refined menus (in sharp contrast to the jour-
neys of the poor on the regime’s working-class trains, who brought food
from home).  

Superships like the Italian Rex, the German Bremen, the
French Normandie, and the British Queen Mary—all competing for the Blue
Riband—represented a state’s strength and pride.

To return to the image of Africa, even Liebig’s meat extract played a part
with its small, but ubiquitous advertising illustrations (flanked since 1934 by
“The 4 Musketeers” of Perugina-Buitoni). The Liebig illustrations portrayed
peoples and countries, especially those exotic and distant, which made up a varied universe of different races and customs, and which suggested a sort of ideal hierarchy between the culturally and technologically “backward” populations and the advanced Westerners, a well-ordered atlas of populations, so to speak. A 1910 illustration dealing with the colonial powers also depicted the Italian possessions. On the sides there were two medallions with natives, an Eritrean man and a Somali woman; in the center there was a view of the landscape of Assab on the Red Sea and in the forefront, in a white uniform, holding a rifle, next to the national flag, there was an Italian soldier. (In the corner was the inevitable small white can with the words “Liebig real meat extract.”) Flavor and imagination worked hand in hand, with the presence of exotic foods in Italy contributing to a map of colonial power in Italian minds.

But what was the real situation in the Italian colonies, both in the “old” ones (Eritrea, Somalia, and Libya, conquered between 1884 and 1912) and in the more recently conquered Ethiopia (occupied in 1935–36)? In the photographs for official propaganda and in others, one can see some recurring stereotypes. These included the intrepid Italian soldier (portrayed in war-like poses, alone or in a group), the allure of exotic places (with infinite photographs of landscapes, camels, deserts, and palm trees), local color (markets, huts, traditional garments), the lure of African women (ranging from the “Hottentot Venus”—Basarwa Saartjie Baartman, exhibited half-naked in equestrian traveling shows throughout Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century—to faccetta nera, little black face, of the Fascist song). Images of meal times or of drinking coffee showed a more relaxed attitude, but at the same time a marked detachment of the Italians from the local populations. One photograph shows three naval officers (and a civilian) in the forefront, sitting at a table in a café in an Italian colony in the 1930s. They are stretched out comfortably on wicker easy chairs, wearing immaculate uniforms, drinking coffee served in fine white porcelain cups and a silver container, and liqueurs poured in small glasses. Some are smoking, looking distractedly at the photographer, while behind them the light filters through the bamboo curtains in the elegant white hall with a wooden ceiling. Animals’ horns are hanging on the walls, while an African waiter in a uniform stands near the entrance carefully observing the customers. The division of roles is very clear. There is an even more explicit photograph dating from a few decades earlier, which shows two explorers with an indigenous inhabitant. The Italians are sitting near a folding camp table in the midst of banana trees; one of them is dressed all in white and is also wearing a white helmet. The other is wearing a colored suit and a broad white hat with a wide brim. On the small table, covered by a white tablecloth, there is a bottle of wine, a glass carafe, and two glasses. The native is respectfully standing to one side of the table. The three men are looking at each other, perhaps talking. But that table, which displays Western symbols and modes of eating, embodies the difference that exists between the two worlds—between the comfortably seated conquerors and the reverently standing conquered,
between the “good manners” on display with the tablecloth and glasses in the middle of the forest and the behavior of the half-naked African, between the cleanliness represented by the obsessive color white and the “dirt” symbolized by strong African colors; between the “civilization” that brings its products, even dietary ones, and “nature,” that is, the “savage” environment all around them. That table marks the dividing line.

Private memoirs convey a similar attitude of curiosity, a desire for rapport, together with an awareness of the distance and differences between these two worlds, as can be seen, for example, in the letters written to her family in Bologna by Pia Maria Pezzoli, the wife of a high-ranking official in East Africa:

Addi Caièh, January 20, 1937

None of the “rubbish” I eat and drink does me any harm, and I always digest everything very well. Perhaps it’s also the climate which makes the local foods particularly acceptable, in fact if the natives eat like this, there must be a reason. The lowlanders nourish themselves exclusively or virtually with milk, because with the very high temperatures zighini could not be digested! However, when we aren’t invited by the natives, we never fail to eat in the European style.32

“Eating in the European style” was possible by taking advantage of the military facilities. (“As far as the mess is concerned, we have joined the Colonel Commander of the garrison and we eat extremely well. Pies of legumes, rice and semolina puddings, purees and crème caramel. Sometimes there’s also fresh fruit, namely bananas, which the chiefs of the lowland districts bring us.”)33 Alternatively, one could instruct local people and try in every way to preserve one’s dietary identity:

Enda Selassiè, October 14, 1937

This is the last straw—perhaps I’ve already written to Ida about it—that semblance of a cook is ill and for about a week I’m the cook!!!!!!! One can’t stay in the kitchen because of all the smoke; all the pots and pans are in poor condition; the recipes in the book Ida sent me refer to unknown ingredients like fior di latte cheese, beef marrow, and lemon, and to nonexistent objects, like molds, an oven, heat-resistant china... However, with the cry of long live eggs, salad, and canned food, we go on all the same, and I’m making a name for myself with risotto alla Milanese, the real pièce de resistance of my cuisine (not to say the only one!).34

At the same time, however, there was an ambivalent attitude that did not exclude paying attention to, and having a certain respect for, the habits and rites linked with the table manners of the local populations:

Enda Selassiè, February 17, 1938

I always think that if you were here, you would like these people and they would amuse you a great deal, so wise and so childish at one and the same
time. Perhaps their hygiene would please you a little less, but it’s all a question of getting used to it! For example, you never offer an important person food without having first tasted it, perhaps taking it with your fingers from the plate. And taking something from your mouth to offer it to someone is a sign of particular affection, which done with inferiors carries a lot of weight, as, for example, offering the manservant the wine that’s left in your glass when you leave the table. But one has to be careful not to show the slightest preferences because jealousy is very marked. I have already had two or three small incidents, in which I have been reproached because “the lady’s heart has changed,” or “the lady doesn’t look at her son any more” . . .

As Jack Goody has pointed out more generally for colonization in Africa, it was a dialogue between the deaf. The same food was eaten on official occasions, and the basic norms of correct behavior were learned in order to be able to socialize, but there was no real reciprocity. The colonized and the colonizers maintained their own foods and their respective identities (as had happened, in fact, much earlier to the most famous explorer, Christopher Columbus, who could not bear “American” food because it could make one ill and even “change one’s body”). The Ethiopians kept alive the tradition of their cuisine, perhaps the most sophisticated in Africa, which boasted numerous and varied dishes in accordance with the diverse ethnic groups. Their cuisine included a dense and tasty stew, called wät, flat bread in the shape of focaccia, and various types of roast meat and dishes flavored with the very spicy berberì. There was also a series of dietary celebrations of great importance in the life of the community (royal banquets, banquets for funerals and the commemoration of the dead) and a complex system of hierarchies and social stratifications that regulated every aspect of eating, so that for every rank and trade there was a clearly defined place at the banquet, a specific piece of food, and an explicit order in which people were served. Offering a particular mouthful or serving to one person before serving another was a way for those of high rank to publically acknowledge a person’s role in the social hierarchy. Meanwhile, servants and other social inferiors waited outside and ate only their superiors’ leftovers. Every dish and, above all, every piece of the animal had a particular social significance. Even within the family, it was necessary to subdivide a chicken into twelve precise parts, without breaking the bones, each piece being for a particular member of the family—the best part was for the oldest male member of the family, whereas women got the rump or the skin. And the same hierarchy applied to the drinks, whether it was a question of precious mead or simply barley beer. Therefore, the mode of eating and the food itself embodied social structure, and there was no room for external influences. For their part, the Italians were even less willing to penetrate the Ethiopians’ complex dietary strategies, limiting themselves to a certain curiosity and a condescending attitude toward their seemingly bizarre customs. In other words, the picture would be of a refined lady who happily cooked risotto alla Milanese in the heart of Africa, instead of a cook who would probably have served something similar, but, on returning home, he would have expected tradition to be respected by eating in the appropriate
Homemade Meals

way a dish prepared by his wife (or in any case certainly by the women of
the house, equally bound in the dietary hierarchies, as they showed in song,
“In Paradise, the Madonna does not eat bread with water and pepper, but
chickens with ripe berberì”).

In observing these images of encounters, of mutual curiosity and detach-
ment, we are reminded that throughout Europe, the Mediterranean, and
parts of North Africa, the situation would have been different a thousand
years earlier—identities more fluid, less rigidly encased in religious and ide-
ological frameworks, less subject to the inflexible geographical boundaries
subsequently established by the nation-states; the people would have been
more used to living in a melting pot of ethnic groups, religions, different
languages in the many ports and markets of antiquity, and more inclined to
change radically their own identities. The distance separating the protagonists
of the images we have seen has grown rather than diminished in the course of
the centuries, and rigid frontiers have been raised in our minds, even before
assuming physical form.

Food Autarchy

Despite colonial fantasies, the dietary reality revealed by family budgets
between the two wars tells a story of restrained consumption and contin-
ui ty in the choices made. In general, per capita income fell in the first half of
the 1930s, then it climbed rapidly until the outbreak of war (3,000 dollars in
1928, 2,900 in 1934, and 3,500 in 1939), while the population of 40 million
in 1928 reached almost 44 million on the eve of the war.

Social chasms continued to weigh heavily even within the same sectors.
A 1935 investigation in Cagliari of a group of bourgeois families from artisan
to well-off showed a wide average divergence in daily caloric intake (2,345
for the craftsmen and 3,498 for the well-to-do), largely due to differing meat
consumption patterns. The artisans consumed less than half the animal pro-
teins that the prosperous families did, one-third the animal fats, but far more
vegetable fats; they also had less alcohol, 125 calories from wine as against
218. The situation was no different among peasant families, which contin-
ued to spend, on average, more than two-thirds of their income on food.
In 1934, a tenant farmer or a day laborer employed in flower farming in the
Western Ligurian Riviera spent 67 percent of his earnings on food, compared
to the 52 percent spent by an owner-cultivator. This figure was 71 percent for
a Tuscan in the Valdarno in 1933, a little more than for his counterparts in
Umbria, Latium, or the Marches (68 percent); whereas in Sardinia, in 1935,
shepherds and tenant farmers had to spend even more than 75 percent (the
owner-cultivators spent around 65 percent).

Yet these investigations also reveal inconsistent data, making it difficult
to establish a direct correlation between income and consumption, as also
between income and calorie intake. In fact, such inconsistencies can be
explained in large measure by considering the geographic and cultural vari-
ables. For example, the peasant families of the Po Valley had the highest
consumption of cereals (75 percent of the daily ration), closely followed by the Sicilians (74 percent); by contrast, in the far north region of Alto-Adige, they ate little bread and pasta (42 percent), but consumed a lot of potatoes and legumes (33 percent), as well as milk (20 percent). The consumption of meat, on the other hand, like that of oil and coffee, was low everywhere (each accounting for 5 percent at most). These various combinations amounted to a quantitatively and qualitatively better diet in the lower Po Valley, in Alto-Adige, and in the southern Capitanata-Murgia zone of Bari, whereas the central areas of Umbria, the Marches, and Latium were at the bottom of the scale. A similar picture presented itself in 1937 for the workers in the main cities. Their calorie intake in descending order was Genoa, Turin, Milan, Venice, Cagliari, Palermo, and Naples, with a higher consumption of fats in the North and of carbohydrates in the South—even if, on the whole, the differences were not as marked (from a maximum of 3,300 calories to a minimum of 2,800). Essentially, therefore, the dietary situation of families between the wars was affected by differences in income, the availability of certain foods, the type of work family members did, and their geographical location, not to mention local cultural traditions—and Fascist policies, of course.

In fact, the rhetoric of nationalism, the main instrument used by the regime to build consensus among the Italians, also passed through the country’s cuisine. Italianness, colonialism, praise of “natural” national virtues like parsimony and moderation (unlike the British, “a people of the five meals”), gender divisions, the cult of the family, even racism—everything emerged at the table. Yes, but how could these policies be imposed and how could people be made to accept the demanding crisis of the time with all its privations? In theory, it was easy. It was enough just to repeat in stentorian tones and with a warlike pose the slogans coined by Fascist propaganda (“To live dangerously,” “All the goals will be reached,” “Italy for the Italians,” “We will move forward,” “To believe, to obey, to fight,” “We are not the last of yesterday, but the first of tomorrow,” “We will hit them hard . . .”) and to conclude with the war-cry eja eja alalà. In practice, however, things were a little more complicated.

From a somewhat longer-term perspective, the overall picture is fairly clear. The moderate increase in consumption among the urban classes, which began under Giolitti in the decade before the First World War and resumed soon after in the early 1920s, fostered a demand for foodstuffs that the national industries were unable to satisfy, thus increasing food imports. Fascism found itself confronted by two alternatives—to give free rein to consumer demand or to contain it and encourage investment instead. It chose the latter. Demand was dampened and what Francesco Chiapparino and Renato Covino describe as “an equilibrium of low consumption” was restored by the revaluation of the lira in 1926, a blanket reduction in salaries, and tariff policy (which favored the domestic production of goods such as wheat and sugar and ultimately led to the policy of self-sufficiency), not to mention the impact
of the 1929 crisis. Only some sectors of the middle class maintained their consumption level in this period (even if there was a certain general growth precisely on the eve of the Second World War, as stated above). At the same time the Italian food industry experienced a phase of continuity, if not of stagnation, compared to the liberal period, composed as it was by a mass of small businesses, a few protected large-scale sectors, and a limited, very dynamic sector that targeted the restricted luxury and export markets. Not by chance was it precisely in this sector that there were the most interesting cases, as in the field of bakeries and sugar confections (Angelo Motta with his Christmas panettone, Riccardo Gualino’s ambitious attempt to create a big confectionery industry, the development of Buitoni-Perugina) or in that of wines and liqueurs. A case in point was Cinzano, which established itself at an international level thanks in part to the use of an artistic advertisement entrusted in 1925 to the Futurist Fortunato Depero. This artist designed hundreds of splendid posters—like the one in which a stylized man is walking under geometric drops of rain with an overturned umbrella, whose handle is a drinking straw. “If only rain were Campari bitter,” explains the caption. Depero also created the distinctive small bottle that still characterizes the brand today.

Deflation, economic crisis, and self-sufficiency had lasting effects on the country. In collective memory, the years of Fascism, also before the war, were dominated by the presence of low-quality substitutes, crimson Ethiopian hibiscus tea instead of English tea, for example, and chicory replacing coffee. (In an advertising poster of the time, a young couple, dressed in a surprisingly modern way, is picnicking in the mountains. They are both relaxing on a white cloth against the background of stylized mountains, and he, in white trousers and an orange sweater, observes her, in a white, tight-fitting dress, while she pours with a theatrical gesture a thin stream of a dark steaming liquid from a coffee pot into a small cup: “Caffeol, the best substitute for coffee—Sons of Luzio Crastan, Pontedera.”) In other cases, many products were simply absent from Italians’ tables because they were not available or too expensive. The propaganda deceptively compensated for these missing products by extolling parsimony and saving, almost a background leitmotiv throughout the twenty-year Fascist period—“Gluttony kills more than the sword,” “If you eat too much, you are robbing the country” (as in a poster where a soldier who is standing up severely puts his hand on the shoulder of a civilian who is eating at a sumptuous table). Finally, in the darkest periods of the war the blame for shortages and missing products was placed squarely on the shoulders of domestic and foreign enemies. The family home and its cuisine had to serve as the epitome of virtue.

The final phase of this policy vis-à-vis production entailed establishing increasing state control over the distribution system. Price interventions, above all in the form of price controls on basic necessities managed by the administrative authorities, were certainly no novelty, and the regime used them on several occasions, going so far as to fix the prices of specific foods.
From 1936, there was an official Supervisory Committee on prices, which arose directly from the Fascist Party. In fact, the aim was to prevent the reduction in salaries from redounding to the advantage of commercial interests and to avert discontent over the high cost of living (with results that were actually not particularly satisfactory). Moreover, the desire for control and centralization had already given rise to a regulation that was destined to last, the 1926 law establishing the municipal license that anyone who wished to open a shop henceforth required. The aim was to rationalize the commercial system and perhaps accentuate political control over shopkeepers (whose number increased from 1.14 million in 1921 to 1.6 million in 1938).49

The regime’s other plan of action concerned demand, namely consumption. In order to convince consumers to buy Italian products, there was an attempt to produce a congruent message both formally and culturally. On the formal plane, to make it recognizable and unequivocal, there was the linguistic campaign to Italianize all foreign terms. Thus, in the dietary field, restaurants and cafés replaced their foreign names with Italian ones (perhaps Impero, meaning Empire, or Adua, after the name of a colonial battle, etc.), the menu was rigorously changed to lista (list), marrons glacés became simply castagne candite (candied chestnuts), the flan was transformed into pasticcio (pie), the tea-rooms became sale da tè, the sandwich was replaced by tramezzino, and the barman became a mescitore (mixer), even if some of the more fanciful translations proposed by the Futurists—quisibeve for bar, peralzarsi for dessert, polilibita for cocktail, pranzoalsole for picnic, poliglia for puree, and so on—did not really catch on.50 Language had to be unambiguous.

At the same time, attention was paid to the cultural content of the message. “Italian food” was extolled because it came from a long historical tradition, it was linked to a local area, it was simple and natural, and it was healthy and dietetically correct (as many experts rushed to confirm in writing). Culture and nature were blended to create the perfect meal. By this point, in fact, Italians already consumed products that were mainly national, and they were already perfectly convinced of the quality of their cuisine (or rather, of their regional cuisines). What more could be done? Using statistical data, two products were identified as plentiful in the country, but consumed relatively little, namely rice and fish. Consequently, big propaganda campaigns were launched with slogans and posters (“Eat rice—rice is health”), pamphlets with appetizing recipes, expert advice (which assured the reader that eating fish “developed the intelligence”). These campaigns were helped by the affordability of the products (rice cost less than pasta, and fish much less than meat). The lavish effort that went into the campaigns yielded different long-term results. The history of these results can help us answer some important questions and evaluate the real effects of Fascist food policies. Who were the campaigns aimed at? Were propaganda and advertising sufficient to sell products? What factors really influenced consumption?
Homemade Meals

Gender and Price

First of all, there was the issue of gender. All of the regime’s campaigns (autarchy, the Battle for Wheat, calls for parsimony, propaganda about rice and fish, etc.) had a primary audience in mind—women. Certainly, there were also the farmers and the male consumers, but these campaigns were predominantly aimed at the people who would actually decide what to buy, prepare, and cook every day. This simple observation, as Victoria De Grazia has noted, transformed the dietary issue into a political fact, as it was the first time in Italy that women were officially called on to play an expressly national role in peacetime, that is, to support the economy and the regime’s policies through their public roles as women (unlike the First World War, when large-scale female work and participation had been seen as a temporary substitute for the male role).51 Fascist policies were deeply contradictory with regard to the role of women, at one and the same time promoting some aspects of modernity useful for national development while also watching over extremely traditional social models. Women had to support the campaigns launched by Fascism, participate in paramilitary organizations, take part in sports, and become educated, but at the same time see themselves primarily in domestic and family roles, maintain decorum, limit work outside the home (there were legally sanctioned career limitations), refrain from active participation in politics, and so on. One also has to take into account the cosmopolitan models that were reaching Italy through a lot of advertising and the very popular Hollywood films (with their Italian imitations). Fascist propaganda hastened to link these images to the “woman in crisis,” contrasting them with traditional ideals strongly rooted in rural Catholic culture. The propaganda positively labeled such a female as “woman-mother.” The contrast was obvious. At least, it was in the abstract.52

If we look at the visual culture of the time, in fact, images of women differ greatly from such ideological ideals. Consider advertising. Gino Boccasile, an illustrator whose political commitment was not only to the Fascist regime but also to the reconstituted Italian Social Republic of Salò, depicted buxom and seductive women who were advertising liqueurs or reaping sheaves of wheat in colorful posters. For example, in a 1936 poster, there was a bottle of Ramazzotti bitter with soda and a glass in the foreground, while in the background there were two female figures. One was a healthy, smiling Italian explorer, wearing a helmet and a tight-fitting skirt and blouse; near her stood a shorter African woman, naked from the waist up, holding a tray with the liqueur. At the same time, Dudovich was presenting images of elegant and sophisticated women (who, even when they were preparing broth with Liebig’s Sapis extract in 1922—the “height of economy”—were depicted moving gracefully, one with a broad green scarf falling on a red dress, for example). Mario Sironi depicted women with geometric and statuesque features, whereas Fortunato Depero designed futuristic silhouettes of an uncertain gender.53 A feminine image exclusively imprisoned in the stylistic and cultural cliché of the “Fascist woman” was more a propaganda claim
(often taken for granted in retrospect) than a faithful picture of the various models of femininity circulating during the interwar period.

In any case, it was at this woman, or at these women, that the self-sufficiency campaign was directed. They were the ones who were supposed to use Italian products exclusively, save on everything (substituting ready-made products and services with their labor), invent tasty recipes in the face of scarce ingredients, and find economical substitutes for everything. Some assistance came from the flourishing self-help literature, like recipe books or household handbooks. For example, Italo Gherzi’s household handbook published by Hoepli had a solution for everything. Bread was too expensive? One could save by substituting one-fifth of the required flour with powdered potatoes, even if there was much more work involved and the leavening took place in three phases and lasted thirteen hours (there was no mention of the taste). Asparagus was expensive when it was out of season? No need to worry as those left over could be preserved for a year by putting them in a wooden vase in alternating layers with bran and salt. Artichokes were cheap, but hard and indigestible? They could easily be grown at home by wrapping the small plant in a cloth and some straw; the artichokes would be white and tender like the most sought-after vegetables. Spinach was too expensive at the market? In the fields, one could gather young nettles which, if well washed and cooked in a saucepan, would be just as tasty and nourishing (there was no mention of allergic reactions while gathering them). 54 An older work that once again became fashionable was Olindo Guerrini’s L’arte di utilizzare gli avanzi della mensa (The Art of Using Table Leftovers), which explained how to reuse everything. Stale bread could be heated up, soaked in coffee or milk, crushed for use in a stuffed food, and sautéed to make crostini (croutons); meat could be cut into small pieces and then boiled, fried, or combined with omelets and sauces; fish was to end up mainly in sauces and fillings; vegetables were recycled with various sauces, in caponate (cooked seasoned salads), creams, croquettes, puffs, and mousses; and practically everything ended up in broths and soups. 55

But the authors of these books were mainly women writing for other women (another interesting novelty—it was the women who established themselves as authoritative figures in this sector for the first time). Lidia Morelli, for example, was very popular thanks to her encyclopedic Nuovo ricettario domestico (New Family Recipe Book) and the books about household management in which she proposed a kind of synthesis of Italian parsimony and modernism (perhaps inspired by American models). 56 But the most famous of these authors was undoubtedly Amalia Moretti Foggia, also known as Petronilla. From Mantua, she was a journalist with the Domenica del Corriere magazine and also a doctor (only the third female doctor in Italy). In a relaxed and witty tone, she gave advice for decades about cooking and life, which was subsequently published in a single volume.

And so, here’s the little book.

It’s for you...
For you, who have been condemned (poor girls!) to work that was not appropriate to your femininity but who have (what luck!) suddenly moved on to the sweet reality of a longed-for dream, to the reality, that is, of a little house that is all yours and totally enveloped in the love of the man you love so much, for you, in other words, who may be well versed in Latin or bookkeeping... but know virtually nothing about cooking!

For those of you who, like me, although not having a large monthly check from your husbands, would all the same like to prepare good and varied, but also economical food in order to be able, on the sly (without your husband knowing it!), to satisfy some of your adored children’s whims.”

The idea among some fringes of the regime to promote a kind of controlled development that was limited, for example, to the industrial and technical sectors, while avoiding repercussions in the cultural and social spheres, would prove to be an illusion, as tensions and contradictions regarding the role of women demonstrated—tensions and contradictions both within Fascism itself and outside the party-controlled state (such as consumer culture and American cinema).

Let’s now consider the economic aspects of Fascist food policies and imagine that an “average” woman goes to the market. Still thinking about the regime’s propaganda, she does her shopping and goes home. Has she bought rice or fish? The answer—statistically speaking—is no. Why? To answer this question we must go back to the other question we asked ourselves earlier: Which factors influence consumption? They were both long-term and short-term. Simon Kuznets has effectively demonstrated that modern economic development, and so consumption too, is not only linked with an increase in per capita income, an essential prerequisite, but is also influenced by sociocultural factors—urbanization, which increases the tendency to consume goods, social stratification, which sees the growth of the middle class, and technological development, taken to mean the introduction of new technologies in a specific society. Everything, we could add, within a precise, historically determined cultural framework, which structures the values shared by the population. In the short term, then, the determining factors are price levels and advertising or propaganda, which tries to promote a product or brand by linking it to a value that is widely considered positive (such as wealth, health, or patriotism). Moreover, price levels depend on a multiplicity of variables linked to the market, public policies, and fluctuations in supply and demand, but also the distorting effects of monopolies or markets with asymmetric information, as Joseph Stiglitz would say.

The problem of prices merits further consideration. During the preceding period of Giolitti’s premiership, prices had remained fairly stable, with a slight tendency to increase uniformly distributed across the food sector. However, starting in the Fascist period, there began a phenomenon typical of the modern economy, namely different price trends among the various products, and even greater differentiation between wholesale and retail prices. In a relatively simple food market, the price of a particular food is essentially
linked with that of the agricultural product of which it consists. By contrast, in a more sophisticated market, the product becomes the object of many services before it reaches the end consumer (transport, health checks, packaging, cleaning, storage, etc.), so the final price can differ greatly from the wholesale one. Whereas during Giolitti’s premiership both indices were quite similar (0.8 percent average annual increase for wholesale prices and 0.4 percent for retail prices between 1890 and 1913), in the Fascist period there was a big drop in wholesale prices (2.3 percent as an annual average between 1920 and 1939), compared to the relative stability of retail prices (0.4 percent annually)—unlike what would happen after the war in the Republic, when there would be stable wholesale prices and strongly increasing retail prices (Table 5). All this permits us to draw an initial conclusion about Fascist food policy. The fall in agricultural prices (apart from wheat) was quite consistently reflected in wholesale prices, but it never reached the end consumers. In effect, families did not have any real advantages in terms of prices (on the contrary, some basic foodstuffs such as bread, pasta, and rice even became a little more expensive).\textsuperscript{61}

To recapitulate and to return to the initial question, if in Fascist Italy there were environmental factors favorable to consumption in general (like urbanization and the expansion of the middle class with a strong tendency to consume products), if it was an established fact that the short-term factors were favorable too (starting with prices), and, finally, given the regime’s persistent propaganda efforts, why didn’t our woman at the market buy rice or fish?

Rice was traditionally grown in the Po Valley and eaten in Northern Italy, in Piedmont, Lombardy, and Veneto, above all the varieties known as Arborio, Carnaroli, Volano, Roma, and later Vialone nano. For centuries this crop had been the result of hard work entrusted to women rice weeders, always bending down and in water up to their knees, singing to pass the time and lend the right rhythm to their work. If they had known, according to widespread Southeast Asian mythologies, that the Jade Emperor had created rice not long like an elephant’s tail, as requested by the larger animals, but small and short like a lizard’s tail, as suggested by the small animals to avoid waste, they would have cursed him.\textsuperscript{62} Perhaps we cannot talk about an Italy of rice and an Italy of pasta, but the regional distinctions were marked. Therefore, the production of rice, generally the high-quality variety, was to a great extent exported. In 1920, an Italian ate an average of 13.5 kilograms of unpolished rice, in 1930 only 11 kilograms, and the price had only a limited effect, since the prices of pasta and rice had more or less always been the same (in fact, pasta cost more than rice did after 1925, 3 lire per kilogram as against 2.80 for rice; in 1939: 3.30 lire against 2.60).\textsuperscript{63} In an absolutely characteristic way, the promotion of rice was accompanied by the creation of an appropriate institution, the National Rice Body (\textit{Ente nazionale risi}), created in 1931 with the task of increasing production and encouraging its consumption (with pamphlets, other publications, and initiatives like the convoy of vans that toured the South to explain the dietary, health-giving, economic,
Homemade Meals

103

and patriotic virtues of rice to consumers there). The result of this effort was that rice consumption oscillated, with slight increases, apart from a decided increase during the war years (1940–43), peaking at 17.6 kilograms per capita in 1941. But once the difficult years had passed, rice consumption fell—as early as 1948—to a stable level below 10 kilograms with a tendency to fall further (today it is about 4 to 5 kilograms per head, with rice consumption double this figure in Northwest Italy). How can one explain this trend in the country of risotto? Simply put, rice in its various manifestations remained mainly localized where it had originated and where it was traditionally eaten. A factor that has perhaps limited the expansion of rice consumption was the recollection of the First World War, when riso di guerra (wartime rice)—poor in quality and badly cooked—was used in soldiers’ rations and for the civilian population on a massive scale. 1917 and 1918 represent the absolute peak of rice consumption in Italian history, 20 and 26 kilograms per head respectively. In effect, for many Italians there had been a sort of negative imprinting, which associated this food with wartime privations.

Actually the regime’s action did not have any effect. Also because rice had to face strong competition from pasta. We earlier spoke of an Italy of pasta coexisting with an Italy of rice, but, in fact, the Italy of pasta lived side by side with an Italy of pasta and rice. Pasta probably originated in China. In 2005, in Lajia in Northwest China, a terra-cotta bowl containing long strands of boiled millet pasta—spaghetti!—was discovered in a late Neolithic site from about four thousand years ago.64 However, different forms of fresh pasta were also widespread during very ancient periods of the Mediterranean basin. After all, pasta consisting of ground cereals boiled for a few minutes is even simpler and quicker to prepare than bread cooked on a live flame. In Italy, pasta had two different origins. The first is the fresh, thin puff pastry—already used a great deal by the Romans (lagana), present in the twentieth century in various mixtures with eggs (tagliolini, tagliatelle, maltagliati, pappardelle, and, of course, lasagne), as well as in the medieval variant of the stuffed torta or pie (from which derive the smaller versions, tortelli, tortellini, ravioli, anolini, and cappelletti)—widespread above all in Northern Italy (Emilia-Romagna, Lombardy, Piedmont). The second forerunner of modern-day pasta was the long, filament-like durum wheat pasta, which perhaps originated in Arab Sicily in the twelfth century (itryah). It spread quickly thanks to its being dry (dehydrated in the sun) and therefore longer lasting and easy to transport.65 This type of pasta became very successful in the Maritime Republic of Genoa (the first large-scale production of short pasta, such as pastine, gnocchetti, stortini, conchiglie, and penne) and then in Naples, where it found an ideal climate for its further spread (above all long pasta, like vermicelli, spaghetti, bucatini, mezzani, zite, linguine, and fettuccine).66 There were numerous variations in shape, thickness, and even cooking time (in the South it was eaten less cooked than in the North), and combinations with different condiments made pasta a real dietary universe. There was, for example, Piedmontese agnolotti with white truffles, Ligurian trenette with pesto, pumpkin tortelli from Mantua, canederli of stale bread from
Trent, **bigoli** with duck from Veneto, lasagna and tortellini from Bologna, Tuscan pappardelle with hare sauce, spaghetti with black truffles from Norcia in Umbria, **vincigrassi** from the Marches, semolina gnocchi in the Roman style, **maccaroni alla chitarra** from Abruzzo, **orecchiette** with turnip tops from Apulia, Calabrian **rascatieddi** and **minuich** from Lucania, **creoli** from Molise, Sicilian **pasta alla norma** with aubergines, Sardinian spaghetti with fish eggs, and, finally, Neapolitan spaghetti, vermicelli, and macaroni. A triumph of tastes and colors! Against such competition, rice had little chance of achieving success.

And what about fish? In this case, too, a campaign linked to an institutional solution was considered. Only in this case the problem was thought to be linked to distribution since consumption was concentrated along the coasts and in the South (where the price of many fish products was very low, sometimes even lower than that of bread). Thus, in 1935 a big fish market was set up in Milan near the railway station (2,600 square meters under a roof and another 2,000 in the open), followed shortly afterwards by other similar markets in inland cities, to join those already existing in coastal cities. (The foremost was that of Naples, transferred to the rationalist building conceived in 1930 by the architect Luigi Cosenza, an interesting white construction with an enormous cement vault with large glass panels, as well as a modern basement with refrigerating rooms and storerooms.) Consequently, the consumption of fish began to increase, from 3 to 4 kilograms per capita between 1900 and 1920 to 6 kilograms in the 1930s. This increase was above all in fresh fish. The consumption of dried fish remained stable, while the first attempts to sell frozen fish—both local and North European—on a large scale began, most notably with the Roman company Genepesca. The sale of frozen fish continued to grow slowly but steadily throughout the twentieth century, apart from the war years. The current consumption is 23 kilograms per capita.

How should we interpret the divergent quantitative trends in fish and rice consumption? First and foremost, they confirm how consumers—primarily women—were not at all passive in the face of Fascism’s policies but carried out their own strategies of “resistance” and made autonomous choices. As well, cultural diversity always played a key role.

So the consumption of both rice and fish began to expand thanks to propaganda and low prices, but rice consumption stopped growing when prices rose, perceived, as it was, as foreign to the gastronomic habits of Central and Southern Italy (which continued to prefer pasta). By contrast, fish consumption continued to grow, if slowly, as an alternative to meat. Its still inhibited growth was not, in fact, due to any cultural refusal (as dried or salted fish was eaten in many places, and freshwater fish was commonly eaten near rivers and lakes) but was linked instead to the technical problem of transporting a particularly perishable product and keeping it fresh.

Therefore, Fascist Italy appears to have been a highly contradictory country. On the one hand, it seemed to be oriented toward decidedly modern developments (economic, structural, and urban); on the other hand, it was
tied strongly to the traditions and cultural and social legacies of the distant past. There was no compromise or amalgamation between the modern and the traditional, but rather a juxtapositioning or a mosaic—as the Futurists had also noted. At the same time as the young Roman sisters were eating their meal in the Prenestino quarter, Carlo Levi, confined because of his anti-Fascism to a small village in Basilicata, noted,

“But this is a village of gentlemen!” I thought while I was waiting for dinner in the widow’s house. The fire was lit under the saucepan, because the good woman had thought that I would be tired after my journey and that I needed something hot. Usually they don’t light a fire in the evening, not even in the houses of the rich, where the morning’s leftovers would be sufficient, a bit of bread and cheese, a few olives, and the usual dried figs. As for the poor, they only eat bread, year-round, sometimes with a carefully crushed raw tomato, or with a bit of garlic and oil, or with a Spanish pepper, the kind that burns a diavolesco or little devil. “This is a village of gentlemen!”

The worst was yet to come. The worst was the war, by then about to be unleashed and to overwhelm the whole country, with its strong passions—or resignation, as Carlo Levi observed in Basilicata:

The gentlemen were all Party members, even those few, like Doctor Milillo, who had different views, simply because the Party was the Government, it was the State, it was Power, and they naturally felt as if they were participating in this power. None of the peasants, for the opposite reason, were Party members, as after all they would not have been members of any other political party which could, by chance, have existed. They were not Fascists, as they would not have been Liberals or Socialists or anything else, because they were not concerned with these things, they belonged to another world, and these things did not mean anything to them. What did they have to do with the Government, Power, the State? The State, whatever it was, consisted of “those people in Rome,” and those people in Rome, one knew, did not want people to lead normal lives. There was hail, landslides, drought, malaria, and there was the State. They were inevitable evils, they had always existed and they always would. They make us kill our goats, they take away our furniture, and now they are sending us to war. Never mind!

WARTIME CUISINE

The Lemba people of Zimbabwe tell the myth of the most powerful musical artifact ever created, the *Ngoma Lungundu*, a voice that thunders, a drum that is the voice of God. This holy and mysterious instrument, which could only be played by King Mwali and his high priest, had great powers. With its booming voice, it could accomplish miracles, and in battle it knocked down enemies. No one was even allowed to look at it. It was in Mwali’s palace in a large city on top of a mountain, whose entrance was defended by fearsome lions and snakes with heads at both ends of their bodies. But when it was necessary, for example, when there was drought, the Lemba people
prayed and sent requests to the King for help, until the booming voice of *Ngoma Lungundu* was heard throughout the earth. Then the Lemba knew that the King had heard them and that soon it would rain. One day Mwali got angry with some men who were arguing and, with the voice of the mystical drum, he killed them. But as the arguments continued, the King decided to leave them. He went underground and became the lord of the ancestral spirits. To this day, when the earth trembles, the Lemba know that it is Mwali walking.70

In Italy, in 1941, there were certainly many people who would have gladly received a reassuring message, a sign of protection and help (whether booming or not), in order to escape from an increasingly difficult situation. In a short time, the war revealed the country’s unpreparedness, not only militarily but also organizationally and logistically, as well as in terms of the availability of domestic supplies. The first problem was the sharp rise in inflation to an unprecedented level. If, during the First World War, between 1915 and 1918, the average rate of inflation for retail prices had been 26 percent, in the Second World War it was much worse, reaching 99 percent between 1942 and 1947, an awesome level, which shook the market and with which salaries and earnings could not keep up.71 The regime intervened with a policy of rationing, through cards and coupons, but it did not succeed in ensuring an adequate and varied diet for the populace, also because the producers tried to circumvent laws on the obligatory accumulation of goods in order to sell those goods at higher prices on the black market. Government attempts to control this illegal trade were weak and ineffective, and often very tolerant, even officially, almost seeing the black market as a necessary form of supplementation. There was a growing lack of foodstuffs, even basic ones. There were acute shortages of almost everything—salt, oil, butter, milk, sugar, beef, colonial bananas, coffee.

Once again, women were called upon to remedy the situation. A new batch of wartime manuals (with Petronilla always at the forefront) explained with style how to remedy even the most difficult situations. One could prepare an excellent broth without meat by boiling a bone for a long time together with various herbs and onion skin (to give the broth the right color); spinach stalks could be transformed into thin string beans; the vegetables one had needed to be completely consumed (including leaves and peel, perhaps prepared separately); one could make a kind of butter substitute by cooking veal fat with a little milk, oil, vegetables, and the crust of toasted bread; and one could even concoct a chocolate pudding by completely soaking bread in milk and sugar until it became a sort of dough, which was then baked and sprinkled with bread crumbs.72 Another initiative was the “war garden.” Every available space was transformed into a small patch of cultivated land—gardens, balconies, terraces, flowerbeds, even bathtubs (and those who had more space were advised to raise small animals, like chickens and rabbits). Photographs of the time present curious views of tiny privately maintained gardens full of vegetables and protected by thick hedges, or of people working with hoes near the national monument known as Vittoriano in downtown
In fact, this initiative was not original to the Fascists because it had already been tried during the First World War and its effects supplemented agricultural produce only minimally.

On top of all this, not only were women called upon to take charge of managing the household impact of this ongoing crisis but often to pay a particularly high price in dietary terms. A 1942 study by the Milan Institute of Hygiene began to note how the daily dietary requirements (as calculated by scientists) for Italian male workers was markedly lower than that considered necessary in other countries (Japan being the only exception), some 200 to 300 calories less per day thanks to the virtuous parsimony of the Italian people. However, doubt crept into the scientists’ report:

Therefore people speak of the frugality of the Italian people...

That this presumed frugality is then really to be attributed to a lesser requirement of the organism, linked to climatic conditions, the endocrine-metabolic constitution of the race, different capacities of assimilation, life and work habits etc., or to scant economic possibilities, still has not been properly ascertained.

If this was the situation with regard to men, the study observed that there was total uncertainty as to women’s “minimum requirements” because of the absence of relevant research. There was, however, an important observation. After having followed a group of women in a rehabilitation center (casa di redenzione) in the first half of 1942, it was found that the initial diet of 1,500 to 1,600 calories under the new rationing system had resulted in the young women losing between one and two kilograms every two months. The study concluded that even frugal Italian women could not go on indefinitely under such a poor dietary regime.

In 1943, things got worse by the day, until they reached their most serious point in the last years of the war, 1944 and 1945. Getting enough food to survive became a recurring obsession. In vain, the propaganda made every effort to keep up appearances, as in the footage shot by the Luce film company about the conflict and the lives of the people. One of these film clips depicted the daily lives of the evacuees who had fled from the dangers of urban centers and taken refuge in a small village in the Aosta Valley. Watching this footage is almost like seeing families on holiday, with children playing, men busy doing odd jobs, women sewing and cooking (with plenty of food and bread on the table), everything in the healthy climate of a valley covered in greenery and sunshine. The public’s perception of the gulf between propaganda and reality, together with the sufferings of the war, contributed in no small measure, apart from everything else, to making even the less politicized part of the population view the regime in negative terms.

The alliance with Germany negatively impacted the daily lives of Italians in other ways too. If Italy had been greatly helped by the Allies with continuous supplies of food and other goods during the First World War, in the Second World War this help was not forthcoming. On the contrary, there was an increasing transfer of manpower (workers and later also deportees) from
Italy to Germany. Italian Fascism had a great deal in common with German Nazism in terms of consumption (even if with different degrees of wealth)—a policy of austerity to finance industrial investment and rearmament; the promotion of citizens’ “collective” consumption (group tours, summer camps, vacations by the sea, etc.); a certain tolerance with regard to xenophilous consumer models (namely American) because of their popularity; and above all else the promise of a better, more prosperous future thanks to today’s sacrifices.\textsuperscript{76}

Eventually, the Second World War also came to an end. But what is striking is that the state of emergency regarding even basic foodstuffs continued for several years. The hope that the end of hostilities would mean an end to privation soon proved to be vain. In 1946, the reports from local authorities about supplies were not very different from those of the Fascist era:

Perhaps it would be appropriate not to talk about a black market any more as it is on such a large scale and is conducted by various operators so brazenly and openly as to have completely absorbed the legal market. And how could it be otherwise when the ration coupons only provide 200 grams of bread, a little milk, and 50 grams of butter? And in a way the black market has been a blessing, which up to now has enabled our people to live, modestly it’s true, by satisfying their most basic needs.\textsuperscript{77}

The situation did not return to normal until around 1950. Then the new decade presented a completely different geopolitical scenario, dominated by the clash between the two new superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. Here was a new world, one in which Italy had already found its political place in the Atlantic Alliance (NATO) and its economic place in a liberalized international market, a market in which individual consumption, not austerity, could become the incentive and driving force of growth. The immediate past was simply a period to be forgotten, not only because of the war and the dictatorship but also because of the failure of autarchy, low consumption, contrived propaganda campaigns, slogans instead of facts, and the attempt to make a culturally diverse country politically and gastronomically uniform, homogeneous, and disciplined.
Chapter 5

The Great Transformation

(Or Economic Growth in the Postwar Period, 1950–1973)

The worker Arturo Massolari was doing the night shift, the one that finishes at six. It was a long way to get home. When the weather was good he went by bicycle, but in the rainy winter months he took the streetcar. He got home between a quarter to seven and seven, namely a little before or a little after the ringing of his wife Elide’s alarm clock.

Often the two noises, the ringing of the alarm clock and his footsteps as he came in, overlapped in Elide’s mind, reaching her in the depths of her slumber, the solid sleep in the early morning, which she tried to stretch out for a few more seconds...

Their was a story like many others in Italy during the 1950s and 1960s. Arturo and Elide were a young couple living in a small apartment. Their future was filled with big dreams and their present with hard work. He was on night shifts, and she worked in a factory during the day, so they didn’t see much of each other. Sometimes, her husband woke her with a cup of coffee in bed, just before she got dressed and rushed out the door to catch the streetcar to work. Arturo then went to bed, getting up just before Elide returned from her day’s work, carrying the groceries she had bought in the shops on the way home. Only in the evening did the couple finally get a chance to be with each other. They prepared the evening meal, and food for work, and at last they sat down to a table with everything properly laid out.

Then came the moment of sadness, which they both felt as they had so little time together, and they almost couldn’t bring their spoons to their mouths because of the desire to stay there holding hands.
There is everything in Italo Calvino’s evocative story, all of postwar Italy. It is the portrait of a country that is still poor, dominated by a sense of sacrifice and by a work ethic, but involved in great changes. There is the reference to the factory, for both spouses, and therefore to two wages, to remind us of the country’s sudden increase in income and population in the twenty-five years after the end of the Second World War. Between 1950 and 1973, the GDP rose by 5 percent per annum, and per capita income tripled, from 3,500 to 10,600 dollars, bringing it close to the European average. There is the image of a young married couple living alone, reflecting deep demographic changes, the great immigration toward the cities of the North and the beginning of the baby boom (1.7 million Italians had moved from the countryside to the cities and the population had grown to 54 million by 1971, with an average life expectancy of over seventy-two). There is the cultural reference to an exclusively urban reality: the small apartment on the outskirts (not far from a gasometer) and the factory as the points of reference in their existence, and around them a city to be crossed quickly by bicycle or by streetcar, a city that evokes the symbols of work, but also those of consumption (the busy shops in the evening lights).

Consumption is present in many ways in the story: the apartment, her clothes (which underline her femininity and simple elegance: skirt, garter belt, heels, coat) and his (a practical waterproof parka), the furniture and the consumer goods, the shopping bag, the shopping linked with mobility (the means of transport). But there is no doubt that the consumer goods in the forefront are the food items. They mark time no less than the relentless rhythm of the factory. They permit some of the few shared acts of the day. Like the coffee. Taken thoughtfully to Elide while she is still in bed asleep or prepared for consumption in the kitchen by the husband as soon as he has returned home, it symbolically represents the moment of the spouses’ reunion. And in the evening, drinking coffee is the last act performed as a couple, before the inevitable separation.

Then there is the evening meal, which represents the cornerstone of their life in common. Partly prepared together, with everything put on the table (for convenience, but also to break the continuous rhythm of activity inside and outside the home), it represents the moment of relaxation and release of tension, where, not by chance, there emerge feelings of tenderness and regret for the little time they have together. Whereas we note that the other meals, although also prepared at home, are subject to the requirements of working life, being transformed, for him, into a nocturnal snack to take along (and a lunch ready for the next day) and, for her, a lunch to be eaten in the factory.

Was the life of Italians in this time like Calvino portrayed it? Certainly the writer admirably summarizes, in an effective literary sketch, a reality that he
saw, or perhaps imagined, unfolding right in front of him. But—to express it in the words of another great literary figure, Horace—there are more things in heaven and on earth than can be dreamed about by philosophy.

**Between the Old and the New**

The postwar period was long and difficult. At the same time, it was accompanied by fundamental decisions that shaped the life of the country for many decades, like the 1946 referendum in favor of the Republic, the choice of the Atlantic Alliance in the new climate of the Cold War, and integration into the Western market (which culminated with participation in the fledgling forerunner of the European Economic Community in 1957). From a political point of view, after the years of the good intentions following the war and the unitary coalitions, from 1948 the crushing victory of the Christian Democrats had ushered in the era of centrisim, in which that party completely dominated the political scene. The Christian Democrats were certain of the impossibility of an expansion of the Right because the Italian Social Movement was the heir of discredited Fascism, or of the Left because of the ties of the Italian Communist Party and the Italian Socialist Party with the apparent enemy in Moscow.

Whatever the long-term strategic plan of the Christian Democratic leaders Alcide De Gasperi and Amintore Fanfani was, Italy’s society and economy were rapidly gaining steam in the second half of the 1950s. In the North, factories were working at full capacity and cities were expanding. The manufacturing and service sectors were overwhelming the agricultural sector, and investments were growing together with exports (there were those who spoke of export-led growth). Even domestic consumption was beginning to increase, albeit not everywhere.

The starting point of this new phase was ideally captured by a large-scale parliamentary inquiry, carried out between 1951 and 1953, into poverty in Italy. The researchers had hypothetically divided the population into two categories, “average” families (represented above all by clerical workers and the working class) and poor ones, on the basis of overcrowding, types of housing, and diet (specifically, their consumption of bread, sugar, meat, and wine) and expenses for clothing (footwear). The study produced almost three thousand files of documents, and, for the first time—a sign of the times—a documentary made by the Luce Institute. The so-called average worker’s family, comprising a husband and wife with two children and an elderly relative, lived in a three- or four-room house (one of the rooms was a kitchen), had a good diet (among other things 520 grams of meat per day, 240 grams of sugar, and almost 2 liters of wine). The ideal-typical poor family lived in a cave, basement, or hovel with five people in a single room—kitchen, living room, and bedroom all in the same space—and ate much less (150 grams of meat, 125 grams of sugar, and just over half a pint of wine, a survival diet). The inquiry also considered the difference in cigarette consumption—190 lire in the average family, equivalent to 20 cigarettes and a box of matches; 16 lire
in the poor family, or two cigarettes without matches. The poor amounted to 870,000 families, namely 11.8 percent of the population. But the most striking fact was their geographical distribution. Throughout the northern regions and in some of the central ones, there were very low levels of poverty (the lowest rates were in Piedmont with 0.3 percent, Emilia-Romagna with 1.2 percent, and Lombardy with 1.4 percent). In Latium the figure rose to 10 percent, but in the South the percentages were even higher, ranging from 23 percent in Sardinia and Campania to 33 percent in Basilicata and 38 percent in Calabria. In effect, throughout the southern regions almost a quarter or even a third of the population lived in poverty.\(^3\)

The Luce documentary optimistically concluded its dramatic presentation of the “two Italies”—that of the workers and that of the poor—by showing an assembly line that was churning out modern cars and trains, which passed by at high speed (accompanied by almost triumphal music):

It is a question of...preventing poverty from becoming resignation, a habit, a destiny... The new Parliament, in the data and in the conclusions of the study, will find a basis and a stimulus for the necessary legislative measures to ensure that everyone has a job and to create an adequate social welfare system for everyone. The means exist, and they must be used at all costs for the future of the new generations, which are the future of our civilization.\(^4\)

Against this background, what happened in 1952 is not surprising. The monarchist shipowner Achille Lauro, also the owner of newspapers and the president of the Naples football club, not only printed thousands of posters during his triumphal campaign to become mayor of Naples but distributed gift packs to potential voters containing macaroni, peeled tomatoes, and oil, as well as odd shoes and single halves of halved banknotes (the other half, after the vote!). He received 117,000 preferences, winning fifty-three constituencies out of eighty with his right-wing coalition.\(^5\)

Other sources confirmed the existence of big gaps between the rich and the poor, between the different kinds of workers, and so on. In an investigation into family budgets conducted in 1953–54 by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), it was found that the average expenditure on food, drinks, and tobacco was 48 percent of income, with differences of over 5 percentage points between North and South. The variations in food expenditures among the social and occupational categories were marked. Of course, another important differentiating factor was the size of the family unit. In the same social class, 2,315 calories per person were consumed by a family of five as compared to 3,638 per person for a couple without anyone else to feed.\(^6\) A study conducted by Fiat on its personnel from 1940 to 1957 also proved significant. If in 1940 the Turinese workers spent 60 percent of their wages to feed themselves, this percentage had fallen to 47 percent in 1957, whereas the corresponding figures for clerical staff in the same period were 49 percent
and 40 percent. It should also be borne in mind that, according to the same source, Fiat workers in Naples earned decidedly lower wages and continued to spend 58 percent of their income on food. Moreover, these workers consumed fewer calories than their counterparts in Turin did, and two-thirds of their diet consisted of poor foods like bread and soups, which made up less than half of the diets of the Fiat workers in Turin.7

Therefore, at least a part of the country was changing. And, surprisingly, many inhabitants of the “poor” South did not put their trust in the new parliament’s securing legislative measures to ensure work and social welfare for all. Instead, they took matters into their own hands and, from the late 1950s, migrated to the North in search of the “Italian dream.” This migration triggered one of the most profound social and economic upheavals that the country had ever experienced, with an unprecedented mixing of the old and the new.

The transformations were so rapid and deep as to affect everyone. They were described by journalists like Giorgio Bocca, who observed that the new Italy was becoming rich, impatient, and lacking in politeness and civic-mindedness. The changes were bitterly recorded in the novels of writers like Lucio Mastronardi and Luciano Bianciardi. The changes were communicated to the public at large by writer-journalists who had become famous on the radio, such as Guido Piovene (with his description of his journey through the country from 1953 to 1956), and on television, such as Mario Soldati (who “discovered”—together with the television spectators—first the cuisine of the Po Valley and then the world of wine, the ostensible expression of an ancient soul, which continued to exist on the margins of modernity).8 These journalistic and television inquiries were flanked by polls and the first market surveys by companies like Doxa, Misura, and later Demoskopea—like the one in 1956 that asked Italians whether they were happy or unhappy. It turned out that women were more unhappy than men (19 percent as against 15 percent) and it was confirmed that pecuniary circumstances made all the difference (52 percent of the well-to-do were happy, 46 percent of the middle class, and 17 percent of the poor).9

The cooking magazine with the best reputation, *La cucina Italiana*, which, after the war, had resumed publication in Milan in 1952 under the supervision of the Gosetti sisters, and which maintained quite a traditionalist approach suitable for a bourgeois public, also took a look at what was happening. In 1958 (the same year that Calvino wrote his story about Arturo and Elide), the magazine published a series of interviews of Italian families, to discover how things were changing. Another article, entitled “La donna d’oggi” (Today’s Woman), unequivocally stated that the role of women had changed forever, whether they worked outside the home or remained at home: “even while staying in the home, one cannot escape from the requirements of modern life. There is progress, there is an evolution, which even the woman who is most attached to tradition cannot ignore; and modern economic life is based on new foundations to which one must adapt oneself.”10 This ambivalent
message of modernity and tradition was repeated in the magazine’s advertisements. One of them presented the silhouette of a smiling young woman, well coiffed, wearing a dark skirt, a white blouse, high heels, and an apron, who is examining the most up-to-date Pan saucepans with heat-insulated handles. A Coca Cola advertisement showed a photograph of a young people’s party in a beautiful house with lots of balloons and festoons. One of the couples is in the forefront; he is wearing a jacket and tie, she has a long dress, and they are both very well groomed and smiling, holding a small bottle of Coca Cola, which they are drinking with a straw—“Coca Cola, symbol of good taste.”

Similarly, the rules of etiquette at the table—a sign of culture and social identity—still seemed to hold sway. They were conveyed in women’s magazines by figures like Donna Letizia (the pseudonym of the journalist Colette Rosselli), who popularized the old rules of good manners:

The lady of the house should have the oldest and most important guest on her right; on her left there should be the man who is next in terms of age and importance. The other guests will be alternated with the ladies (the least important the farthest from the host and hostess). The host will have the oldest and most important lady on his right, on his left the next lady in order of importance or age.

But there must have been some doubts, if the need was felt to illustrate the place settings with diagrams and drawings, including as to how the table should be laid. (“The cutlery always has to be put to the sides of the plate in the order in which it will be used . . .”)

And new problems began to arise. How should one behave if a guest arrives when the radio or the television is on? “The appliance should immediately be switched off unless the guest has been invited or has come over precisely because of the program.” And if the maid also wants to watch television? “It may happen, in exceptional circumstances, that she may be allowed to watch a program. In that case, she will remain apart from the others.”

And apart from the traditional lunches and dinners, there was a lot of advice about how to serve buffets and cocktails, the novelty of the moment, and how to prepare a perfect Dry Martini, Manhattan, Montecarlo, White Lady, Kiss-Me-Quick, or Zanzibar. After all, “American” lifestyles were all the rage everywhere.

Those were the years when Fellini’s famous film La dolce vita was released. It seemed to epitomize the unrestrained euphoria that was sweeping across a conservative Italy dazzled by consumerism and films from the Cinecittà studios. Only slightly earlier had there been the famous comedy actor Totò, gorging himself and filling his pockets with spaghetti in Miseria e nobiltà (Poverty and Nobility), and at that time there was Pasolini’s La ricotta (Ricotta Cheese). The film tells of a poor, unemployed man who finds work as an extra in a film about the Passion of Christ, and who has the opportunity for the first time in his life to eat whatever he wants, till he bursts. In the final scene, in which he plays the part of the Good Thief at the side of Jesus, he dies of indigestion on the cross.
A Meal during the Economic Miracle

Turin, Mirafiori Nord district, 1967

Of all the markets she has seen in her life, none is like Porta Palazzo. Here there is everything one could want—meat, fish, fruit, and vegetables—and one can save. The stalls inside and outside the imposing grey building of steel and glass are full of goods of all shapes and colors. Chatter and shouts fuse with dull thuds and shrill whistles. The air is full of a characteristic mixture of smells (food, flowers, dust, spices, coffee, and who knows what else). All kinds of people are milling about in the narrow spaces between the stalls. She likes it here, also because there are goods from the South on sale, and she finds some vegetables that she, as a good woman from the region of Apulia, knows how to cook well. Yes, because Celestina comes from Bitonto and has been in Turin for a few years. And how many things have happened in this short time!17

Celestina would have liked to have gone there today, too, but she just can’t make it. Perhaps she’ll go on Saturday. For the things she needs immediately, she has gone to the small shops near her home, to the bakery and the greengrocer, after having put away the bicycle she uses to go to work every day. She travels miles on her bike! And she has to be careful because many roads are not in good condition; there are stones and cracks in which the wheel can easily slip and then that’s the end. Also, the road where she lives is not paved. Now she has to be even more careful because she is no longer just a young wife but a future mother. And who knows what the future will be like for her family, her son (or daughter). Will it be better? Will it be different? With these thoughts in mind, she climbs the stairs of her building.

Celestina’s home is in a new building, in the Mirafiori district. It is one of the very many examples of residential real estate of medium-low quality that have sprung up like mushrooms because of the massive exodus to Turin since the late 1950s. In 1959, when Celestina arrived, 46,760 other migrants came too—a flood, even greater in some years, which has overwhelmed and changed the urban fabric. In about a decade, Turin would double the number of its inhabitants. The urban outskirts, above all around Fiat, the mother of all factories (sixty-five thousand workers and revenues equivalent to 14 percent of state revenues), have rapidly been covered by housing, while the belt of municipal districts around the city has thickened, becoming full of gigantic dormitory quarters for the new workers.18 But the encounter between the two communities, between the Turinese and the southern migrants, has not been easy. Celestina knows what it was like. Like all the migrants, she came to the North with the Treno del sole (Train of the Sun), following a trail of acquaintances and going to stay with her elder sister, who was already married and had been living in Turin for the last few years. But settling in a small family later was decidedly precarious in a decrepit military building known as the Casermette (literally, “little barracks”), previously used to provide accommodation for Istrian refugees and now illegally occupied by the latest arrivals. There she lived in “rooms” fashioned out of wooden dividers, with the water
and bathrooms in common. But she quickly found work. Everywhere “there were small ‘Help Wanted’ signs...” Celestina first found employment in a shirt factory, then in a larger factory, and finally with Fiat (where she will work, even if she doesn’t know it yet, until her retirement).

Finding acceptable housing was much harder. After three years at the Casermette, she met a young man from Avellino, became engaged to him, and got married six months later—but she couldn’t find a home. She always remembered the things they had said to her, “Naples, Naples, Naples... As soon as they heard that we were [Southerners], they wouldn’t give us [a place].” For some time, Celestina had gone back to stay with her sister, who had finally found accommodation in public housing in the Vallette district, close to the Fiat factory. Then the newlyweds had an idea. They bought a complete set of house furnishings from a furniture maker (living room, bedroom, kitchen), and he helped them find a house to rent. “Strength is good, but ingenuity is better” (A l’è buna la forsa ma mej l’ingegn), as they say in Turin.

So Celestina finds herself in a rented home, small perhaps, but a “nice little place, well furnished.” From the doorway you enter, on one side, the bedroom and the bathroom; from the other side you go into the dinette linked to a small kitchen. The latter is a novelty. The traditional kitchen has shrunk into a narrow, but perfectly equipped space. We can see, next to the white ceramic sink, the new gas stove with its exhaust hood, and nearby some small modern cupboards; in the dinette (or living room as Celestina prefers to call it), there is a nice table with some chairs, a sideboard, and finally a big refrigerator (the last thing to arrive, just before the washing machine), which wouldn’t fit in the small kitchen anyway. Since she’s had the fridge, things have changed. She can go farther to do the shopping, looking for better prices, above all for meat, which can be kept in the refrigerator tray. (When it comes to saving, it’s “a blessed household electrical appliance!”)

While we have been looking around, Celestina has gone ahead with preparing the meal because she has little time. The water is boiling, and on the table in the dinette there is a plate of orecchiette, small ear-shaped pasta typical of Apulia, which her aunt, who also lives in Turin, has made. From the aroma and the sizzling, it’s easy to guess what’s in the other saucepan: sautéed turnip greens, already boiled, with chili pepper. In a second she puts the orecchiette into the saucepan, and in the meantime she hurriedly lays the table. This is her daily routine for midday lunch—almost always pasta, but of different types, usually made with packaged pasta and not fresh or loose, as in the South (“in Turin there’s been more progress”), and with various toppings, above all vegetables like Savoy cabbage and cauliflower or tomatoes and meat balls. Sometimes she also makes vegetable minestrone—everything always well seasoned. And in winter they eat legumes. She usually makes a lot of pasta, so if there’s some leftover, the dinner is half done; she just needs to add a plate of salad and a bit of ham, if there is any. She cooks meat now and again—at first only on Sunday, now perhaps a little more often because they are becoming better off. She cooks the meat in a stew with sauce, as they
do in the South. If she can, she also gladly cooks fish, when she goes to the Porta Palazzo market or when the fish seller passes with his handcart. Then she buys everything—octopus, sardines, squid, red mullet, and mussels. She is good at cooking them in a sauce, fried, in a stew, or grilled. The people of Apulia love fish.

Meanwhile, her husband has arrived. He had gone to get a little wine, and here he is with a bottle in his hand. But he drinks little wine, and Celestina none at all. What they drink a lot of is tap water. His wife puts the pasta into the boiling water and it is soon ready. Lunch can begin. At the table, the two young people talk about their relatives, those who have remained in the South and those who are by now in the North, and about their fellow Apulians, who they meet with now and again. On those occasions, Celestina prepares her specialties—baked pasta, parmigiana (a dish with eggplants) or stuffed pizza, namely calzone, with onions or with spicy spaghetti—really good. Celestina also knows some Turinese people, but she doesn’t see them often. They say that the Southerners do strange things, for example, that they grow basil in their bathtubs. She has never seen these things and she grows basil in pots on the balcony . . . but they say such things. Still at the table, her husband starts on his favorite subject, sports. He is a fan of the Juventus soccer team and always goes to their matches. When he comes home he has lost his voice. Sometimes he also talks about the factory, seeing that he works for Fiat too, and about politics and the workers’ party (the Communists). But Celestina doesn’t know much about these things, and she doesn’t discuss them. She is always thinking about a home. Will they be able to buy their own, perhaps with a mortgage? Owning one’s home gives one a sense of security. They do have one good thing now; they recently got a car. Very useful! With the car they go back to their village for their vacation in August. And sometimes they even allow themselves a treat and eat out on Sunday; they go to Trana in Val Chisone, where there is a good, inexpensive inn, and so they enjoy the *agnolotti* (small, semicircular ravioli) and roast meat. They don’t have any other treats, apart perhaps for an ice cream for her and a beer for him. They are beginning to be better off. At times it seems to Celestina as if she has become a little Piedmontese. Without realizing it, she sometimes speaks with the accent of the place where she is living, and sometimes she can’t remember certain words or phrases in the dialect of Apulia (but there are other things she will always remember, like *strascinate e cime de repa*, typical home-made pasta with turnip greens). In any case, one thing is certain, as far as food goes. It will always be prepared as they do in Apulia. She follows the traditional recipes, those she learned from her mother or that relatives have suggested to her. (“I did it like this. If you want to prepare something good, follow this recipe.”)²⁴ There are no magazines or cookbooks, only tradition. Celestina’s experience, in fact, reminds us that the thread of memory, strained or broken through contact with different social or cultural situations, remains intact in the kitchen. Food is a form of materialized, concrete memory, retraced every day through gastronomic practices.²⁵ And it is a form
of material culture that passes, above all, through women, who spin this red thread, linked with the past, something strong and continuous, like the written word.

But back to the meal. The pasta is almost finished, and Celestina brings to the table two well seasoned fried tomatoes and a few slices of salami. Foodwise, she has had to adapt herself to certain things in Turin. A lot of ingredients aren’t available, and the way of eating is different, but the Turinese have also changed. The shopkeepers are selling more and more Southern products, and the people have slowly learned many recipes from the South. There has been an exchange. In any case, what is important, as far as she is concerned, is to live “always with respect and not waste” and to think of the future sensibly. (For example, she never buys anything in the shops on credit. She only pays cash, preferring to go without otherwise). Continuing like this, it will be possible to buy a house in which to raise the children, who will come, and she will also have a better life because things are changing for women, too.—“We were beginning to have a little emancipation and things were improving. And how things were improving!”

They finish lunch in a hurry. There’s no more time just to sit there. The table has to be cleared—her husband helps her—and they have to get back to work. He is the first to leave, while she finishes the dishes and looks out of the window. Beyond the reinforced buildings, she can see the greenery of the surrounding countryside. And suddenly she recalls her childhood in Apulia. She remembers her father, who was a peasant—he was very poor and had a handcart to go and sell his produce in the square. She remembers the small goat and its milk, a few rabbits and some chickens and their eggs because that was what they ate. They used to go and get water from the fountain in pitchers. “We lived as best as we could, children without underwear... No clothes... we really lived with very little,” she sighs. For a moment she closes her eyes and sees herself there, in the middle of a field. “Where I lived it was all countryside. My childhood was like a dream. The grass and the flowers were so high that they were taller than me! As a little girl, I used to run in the middle of this greenery, which I still dream about.”

She wouldn’t go back now, but when she thinks about her past, she is moved, remembering how wonderful it was.

The Kitchen, or the Small Modern World

It often happens that the spaces and objects of daily life record with detailed precision the atmosphere of the times. Let’s consider the kitchen. The first fact that strikes us in the descriptions of these rooms in the 1950s and 1960s is that they refer to different physical spaces than we encountered earlier. On the one hand, these new arrangements are the result of the tenacity so typical of human spatial structures, which, as reflections of the cultural traditions of a given historical period, tend to persist over time; on the other hand, however, the refashioned spaces signal important changes to the arrangements of the past. We have seen the typically aristocratic combination of the main
dining room, intermediate rooms, and kitchen for the servants; the peasants’ poor multifunctional room; the workers’ simple kitchen with a large table in the middle; and the large furnished kitchen of the interwar years. To these were added a new type of space, the mini kitchen linked with a dinette (or the small eat-in kitchen). It was the result of rapid urbanization in Italian society, which drove people to accept small houses on the outskirts or rough-and-ready modifications to historical houses (often split up to make a profit). Less space was available to families, and the kitchen was the first victim. It was compressed into a tiny room, leaving just enough space for a table or even so small that it could only hold the basic equipment. The meal was consumed in the adjoining room, the dinette.

Spatial compression was not the only change, nor perhaps the most important. As we have seen, one of the elements characteristic of this period was the arrival, on a grand scale, of electrical household appliances. In other words, the presence of technology was of central significance. In 1958, the refrigerator, the first of these appliances to enter Italian homes, was present in only 6 percent of households. In 1966, it was present in 60 percent of households (the same as for the beloved television), a much greater distribution than washing machines and vacuum cleaners had reached (32 percent and 16 percent, respectively). By way of comparison, cars were at 31 percent and motorcycles at 14 percent. Less than ten years later, refrigerators and televisions would be in almost every home. A first observation to be made, therefore, is that the “technological revolution” of the Italians first affected their homes and only subsequently how they got around.

But that is not all. Even if the kitchen had always played a fundamental role in the life of the home, it had nonetheless been seen, particularly in the middle and upper classes, as a service environment, modest, for women, children, or servants, removed from the refinement of those rooms for social gatherings (foyers, living rooms, and small drawing rooms), work and reading (studies and libraries), or conjugal intimacy (bedrooms). The kitchen had simple and functional furnishings, nothing more. There was at that time a new appreciation of this room, partly because of the arrival of electrical household appliances, but perhaps also because of a new unitary conception of the home, no longer subdivided between zones of social “entertaining,” cared for and luxurious, and the simple and spartan “private” areas. The return to the private dimension, which characterized the postwar period after the rhetoric and failure of the dominant public dimension under Fascism, together with new attention paid to certain aspects of material culture, explain the sudden visibility that this room assumed.

In fact, appreciation of the importance of kitchen design had begun in Northern Europe and the United States many years earlier. The first milestone was the famous Frankfurt Kitchen, designed by the Austrian Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky in the 1920s in the context of a social, rational, and technological architecture project. The main household electrical appliances were quite common in Northern European and German homes as early as the interwar years, whereby the United States effectively competed with the
European appliances thanks to highly regarded brands, first and foremost Frigidaire. In fact, the origins of that historic company can be traced back to 1916, when the engineer Alfred Mellowes constructed the first refrigerator by linking an electric cooling system to a wooden container. Subsequently acquired by the colossus General Motors, the company distinguished itself for its technical innovations and commercial offerings. Between 1919 and 1929, it sold more than a million appliances and on the eve of the war it owned the biggest refrigerator factory in the world, in Dayton, Ohio, with more than twenty thousand employees. With the spread of household electrical appliances, there also developed a new idea of the domestic space, which, after the Second World War, resulted in the idea of the assembled or modular kitchen, able to integrate functionally and aesthetically an economical stove, a refrigerator, a sink, low and tall cabinets, a work surface, and even the latest arrival, the dishwasher. This was the so-called American Kitchen, the same one triumphantly presented by Frigidaire in Paris in 1957, and immediately dubbed the “kitchen for the year 2000.”

Italian architects had also paid attention to these developments. Interesting kitchens were proposed in Giò Ponti’s magazine Domus as early as the 1930s and 1940s. After the war, these rooms were presented with innovations, such as the kitchen separated from the office by a movable unit made up of compartments, which was presented at the Milan Triennale Design Museum in 1951 by Vittorio Borachia; Ico and Luisa Parisi’s 1956 dinette, separated from the kitchen by a glass partition above the sink; the Castiglioni brothers’ dining room with its dissonant elements (modern table and chairs, furniture on castors, unreachable shelves, walls “decorated” with metallic ladders and fragments of ancient Roman stilts); and, finally, Vico Magistretti’s 1965 proposals for a living room–dining room–kitchen in a small mass-produced apartment. At the same time, there was closer collaboration between designers and producers of midrange and upmarket household electrical appliances, which culminated in creative projects like Joe Colombo’s Monoblocco for Boffi (an elegant cube of polished and varnished wood on castors containing burners, an oven, a spit, a grill, a refrigerator, places to keep plates and saucepans, drawers, cutting boards, trays, and a space for cookbooks). Or there was Makio Hasuike’s Uniblocco, a compact version of an American kitchen, of limited dimensions (from 1 to 2.7 meters) which contained absolutely everything: on top, a sink and big work surface; below, a fridge, an oven, a water heater, drawers, cabinets, and, on request, a small dishwasher. When closed, both kitchens concealed their functions, resembling instead pieces of modern furniture.

Incidentally, this period was a golden moment for Italian design, which proposed modern lines not only for expensive durable goods like cars, but also for smaller everyday objects like chairs and small kitchen appliances. As had happened with kitchen furniture, the new “Italian style” brought added value to the ordinary domestic scene—art. To enjoy art, one no longer needed to visit a museum, wander among city monuments, enter a church, or infiltrate a vernissage. Art and industry had joined
forces in the realm of everyday home life, producing a stream of new and reconceptualized products that benefited the home aesthetically, including sewing machines (Visetta, or Marco Zanuso's Borletti), moka pots (Bialetti), espresso machines (Pavoni, designed by Giò Ponti), cutlery (designed by Caccia Dominioni for Alessi, by Giò Ponti in nickel silver for Krupp, or again by the Castiglionis), an electric tea-pot (Zerowatt), and pressure cookers in durable stainless steel (Lagostina). (Outside the home, but in another familiar space, there were bar accessories designed by Sottsass for Alessi.) And there were many utensils in a new material that was about to invade everyone’s home thanks to research by the Nobel Prizewinner Giulio Natta, plastic, advanced above all by the Kartell and Guzzini firms (boxes, carafes, drinking glasses, buckets, funnels, brushes, and brooms; and later chairs, tables, and other small pieces of furniture, too, as well as food trolleys, lamps, and furnishing accessories).37

If such objects were often affordable by themselves, the stylish kitchens on offer were decidedly too expensive, at least for the majority of consumers. But there was no reason to worry. Small and large manufacturers, craftsmen, and handymen all adapted the layout of the American kitchen (which in any case was too big and had different dimensions from European kitchens). Moreover, they put the new Italian style within financial reach of a wider public. Magazines also got involved, detailing how a newlywed couple could create a modern or small kitchen itself (just as Celestina had done). Perhaps one that followed ergonomics’ “rule of the triangle,” that is, with the three main operative points (refrigerator, sink, and stove) separated by the proper distance (a minimum of ninety centimeters between any two of them, with the triangle linking all three no longer than six meters).

Whether large or small, one thing was certain. The kitchen, which had always been the Cinderella of the home (with the best pieces of furniture reserved for living rooms and bedrooms), had become the queen instead. Basic furnishing did not cost less than two hundred thousand lire. It had become—and would remain—the most expensive room of the home.38 The high cost of the furniture and furnishings (about half the total cost) compared to that of the household electrical appliances was noteworthy because the price of the former was not to be affected by the economies of large-scale production for many years to come (whereas a refrigerator, which cost an average of fifty thousand lire in 1960, came down to thirty thousand lire by 1970).39 Not surprisingly, new names entered the kitchen furnishing market, like Renzo Salvareani and Rino Snaidero.

How was this silent, but rapid revolution possible? Household electrical appliances are expensive, but in the long term they enable one to save time and money (they are time-saving, according to Gary Becker’s definition, as against time-consuming appliances like the contemporaneous television).40 The refrigerator reduces waste, it makes food last longer, and it enables one to have a more varied and richer diet of fresh foodstuffs. The economical stove with an oven improves and diversifies the cooking and reduces the time necessary to do it. Both, like the contemporary washing machine, permit one
to improve results in the “family productive unit,” to borrow a term from family economics, by avoiding the acquisition of more goods and services from outside the home.

If the urge to acquire the latest technological innovations available on the market is an undoubtedly strong cultural component in modern societies, manufacturers have certainly played an active role too. Popular illustrated magazines from the time were full of advertisements for the brands that would become household names within a short span of time (reinforced by articles from experts explaining the advantages of the new technologies)—Ignis, Zoppas, Breda, Ariston, Indesit, Fargas, Osva, Siltal, Fiat, CGE, but also foreign brands like the famous Frigidaire (which for many years in Italy gave its name to the refrigerator in general), Westinghouse, Kelvinator, Philco, Singer (the former Domowatt), and Bosch. This list in itself tells us many things. There were different types of actors: large companies that plunged into the sector for a certain amount of time (generally under license from foreign brands); firms that diversified in a promising sector (like the Smalteria e Metallurgica Veneta [Enamel and Metallurgy Factory of Veneto] of the Westen family, formerly a manufacturer of dishes and utensils for industrial use); foreign companies that exported their latest models (even if these were often produced by third parties in Italy); and small semi-artisan workshops, which proliferated with products at very competitive prices. The names of those who owned the companies became symbols of the industrial boom of the period, as the owners transformed themselves into the real protagonists of the major household appliances sector: Giovanni Borghi (Ignis), Romeo Scarioni (of Siltal, the first refrigerator manufacturer in Italy), Lino Zanussi, Enzo Fumagalli, Riccardo Zoppas, Aristide Merloni, and Pilade Riello. Their names stood for small companies and large, old and new, innovative and capable of adapting to foreign markets, wildly unregulated and brilliantly creative—reflecting the Italian industrial system more generally. The figures speak for themselves. The production of refrigerators, for example, rose sharply from 200,000 units in 1956 to over 5 million in 1970, when Italy became the main European producer—compared to 2.7 million washing machines and 3.8 million stoves in 1970, aided by the strong decrease in prices (Table 6). For twenty years, the sector grew vigorously, responding to demand in the newly expanding Italian market, whose customers wanted their “first” refrigerator at a limited price, and capturing the low end of the European market. Problems for many would come later, in the 1970s, with the increase in production costs and above all the need to evolve toward a mature market, which called for more prestigious products guaranteed by a brand. The selection process would be rigorous.

But in the period under consideration, the so-called white revolution pervaded Italian kitchens (white being the conventional color of appliances). What were the consequences for families and particularly for women? Contemporary and subsequent accounts leave no doubt that domestic work became lighter and less strenuous. Having a refrigerator, as has been said, meant shopping less frequently and producing less waste. A modern
The Great Transformation

123

economical stove enabled one to cook better and more quickly. An electric blender permitted one to cut and mix ingredients more quickly than was possible with a knife or a semicircular chopping knife. A toaster produced toasted bread in a few minutes, table clothes and dish cloths could be washed with much less trouble in a washing machine, the floor could be cleaned and polished with a vacuum cleaner and floor polisher, not to mention how much running water, gas, and electricity had simplified virtually all work in the kitchen. After some initial doubts, the innovations had been rapidly accepted, as borne out by the figures. So women were finally more free. Or were they? Contrary to what many had envisaged, the incursion of domestic technology did not lead to an increase in work outside the home. After all, Italy was and still is one of the European countries with a relatively low level of female participation in the labor force, less than 50 percent even now. But domestic technology did not give Italian women any more free time either, insofar as it transformed them into efficient and scrupulous housewives concerned with keeping the house neat, shining, and very clean. Ruth Schwartz Cowan raised the issue some thirty years ago for the United States, the first country to experience domestic mechanization. She found that the time devoted to housework there had not fallen but, in fact, risen—from 52 hours per week at the beginning of the 1900s to 56 hours in the 1960s; it only began its fall to below 50 hours weekly after 1987. How can one explain this? The fact of the matter was that the new technological kitchen did not affect the gendered division of household roles, while it raised expectations about standards in the house. The 1950s and the 1960s were a period in which the cultural construction of a new ideal of domesticity was of central importance. Everything seemed to revolve around the image of a happy family living in a modern house surrounded by every comfort and convenience. It was the so-called American Dream, or at least its European and Italian translation. A Saturday Evening Post cover in 1959 captured this cultural motif very well with its portrayal of a young couple embracing under a tree. They are dreaming of the future and see against the background of the star-filled sky the outline of a beautiful house with a swimming pool, two cars, modern desks, a maid, two children, two dogs, a television, a refrigerator, a stove, a washing machine, a toaster, a blender, an electric iron, a coffee maker...

Objects are always at the center of identity construction, and this is above all true for young housewives, who are often the protagonists of the public narrative that advertisers were trying to create. A modern kitchen full of household electrical appliances, clean, efficient, and always in order, was a status symbol, a sign of respectability, and a confirmation of modernity, also because we have seen that what was once a service space, hidden from the eyes of strangers, had increasingly become a place to be displayed with pride. The growing size of the middle class (which, as early as 1961, represented one-third of the social body in Italy), together with the improvements gained by skilled workers, meant that this model of respectability spread very widely throughout society. It was not a question of substituting the work previously done by servants with that carried out by the lady of the house with
electrical appliances. At least in the case of Italy, the data show a sharp drop in the number of domestic workers from the Fascist period (630,000 in 1936) to the early postwar years (380,000 in 1951), followed by further decreases. In other words, the contraction happened before the spread of household electrical appliances. Technology alleviated the strenuousness of work, which however required more time and greater competence. If anything we can add another interesting cultural element, suggested by Joel Mokyr, namely that the growing commitment to domesticity was tied to the scientific revolutions that had occurred. The authorities’ crusade in favor of public health—with the consequent fight against (material and moral) dirt, the bacteriological discoveries that explained how terrible diseases were caused by microscopic bacteria, which flourished in precarious hygienic conditions, and finally the spread of nutritionism, which closely linked diet with health—had a singular consequence: It placed an enormous responsibility on the shoulders of the modern housewife–mother. It was not only a question of having a beautiful, well appointed, and respectable house but also of ensuring perfect cleanliness in every corner to avoid diseases, disinfecting every utensil and surface, and worrying about the best diet for each family member.\(^45\) The modern, clean house not only signified respectability and social ascent, it was also the shield that a woman constructed to defend the health and well-being of the family members. In other words, the image of the beaming housewife in a lot of advertisements of the time—certain that not even the rain would soil her beautiful floors polished with Solex wax, that nothing would wash better than her Candy washing machine, and that nothing could disinfect like Ava laundry detergent—in many ways encapsulated the values of the time. Furthermore, by taming technology, by welcoming it into the sanctuary of the home, trivializing it through daily use, it was perhaps the housewife—rather than the husband who used technology outside the home, at work—who was the key figure in the spread of technology into our daily lives.

**The Consumer Boom and the Food Industry**

If one looks at a graph of food consumption in the twentieth century, one is struck by the clear watershed of the 1950s. There is a before and an after. The former is represented by a low, relatively continuous line until the Second World War (which in the daily experience of consumers simply meant a scant and unvaried diet), whereas the latter is represented by a sudden and continuous rise throughout the second half of the century (which meant a new diet, rich, varied, and with a high protein content). Pasta, milk, cheese, eggs, oil, butter, seasoning, fruit, fresh vegetables, wine, and finally coffee (this last item at three times its prewar levels)—the consumption of everything went up sharply (the only exceptions were some poor foods like legumes, unrefined rice, and lard). The year 1968 was memorable for so many reasons: student-worker protests, the war in Vietnam, the Prague Spring, the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, the first French hydrogen bomb, and then the death of Padre Pio, the engineer Giorgio
Rosa’s declaration of independence for his so-called Republic of Rose Island off the Rimini coast, the first interracial kiss on television in *Star Trek*, and the inception of the Catholic daily newspaper *Avvenire*. Last but not least, the average Italian broke through the historical threshold of three thousand calories per day.

Two foods were emblematic of this new wealth. The first was meat. In the context of its symbolic significance and the continuous utterances of experts who recommended it for the health of adults and children alike, the amount of meat on Italian tables doubled. The increase was particularly pronounced for the most valued meat, beef, whose per capita consumption reached 25 kilograms per capita in 1970, although the consumption of chicken also went up a great deal.\(^{46}\) The centuries-old markers of differences between the meals of the rich and those of the poor seemed to crumble within a few years.

The other emblematic food was sugar. Its average annual consumption was about two kilograms per capita from Italian unification in 1861 until Italy’s entry in the First World War in 1915; sugar consumption rose to seven or eight kilograms per capita during the Fascist era, and then sharply in the postwar years—twelve kilograms per capita in 1950, twenty in 1960, and twenty-eight in 1970. The consumption revolution was a sweet revolution.

But how can one explain this incredible trend? Scholars have provided many explanations. Some use biology. Human beings love things that taste sweet (perhaps because it is linked with precious sources of energy), just as they do not like a bitter taste (because it is associated with potential poisons), and this is particularly true for children and the young, while it declines with age. Therefore, it is understandable that, once economic obstacles are eliminated and in the absence of other restraints, sugar consumption should increase.\(^{47}\) A second hypothesis is sociological. In the classification of foods, sweet things play a dual role. On the one hand, they are one of the foods that make up an ordinary meal (they are consumed as tarts, small cakes, ice cream, fruit, etc.). On the other hand, they are also “nonfoods” in the sense that they are eaten outside meals, and often they are the objects of other kinds of social interactions (one brings them when one goes to see friends, or one gives them as a gift). So, ultimately, one eats a lot of sweet things.\(^{48}\) A third explanation draws on morality and the relationship between sweet things and the sin of gluttony, in particular for products such as chocolate, which is often culturally associated with transgression and sensuality, from which it supposedly derives its ambiguous and irresistible attraction.\(^{49}\) Of course, there is also a commercial aspect to the increasing consumption of sweet things. As Sidney Mintz recalls, the production and sale of sugar already played a primary economic role in the colonial empires, which exploited slaves for the sugar plantations and, by every available means, maintained its use—“intensively” among all the social classes and “extensively” in all possible foods—in the rich countries (obviously starting with Great Britain).\(^{50}\) Is it really so surprising that the consumption of sweet things exploded as soon as incomes rose? That parents were less strict with the children of the postwar baby boom? That adults indulged themselves in dietary pleasures after so many privations? That
advertisers reinforced such tendencies by unleashing imaginative and cheerful advertisements?

Hence, from North to South people everywhere celebrated with thousands of different regional cookies, pastries, cakes, and other such treats. Some were widespread in many areas, with different names and variations, like amaretti cookies (originating in the Renaissance), anise cookies (called anici), mostaccioli cookies, ossa dei morti (literally “bones of the dead,” cookies prepared for All Souls’ Day), sanguinacci (sweet blood puddings with chocolate), and the more than two hundred types of frittelle (or doughnut) made for Carnival. In Sicily, with its rich tradition of sweet treats, there were cannoli, cassate, and paste di mandorle (almond cakes); while in Sardinia one could enjoy galletinas (a kind of cookie) and meligheddas (small, round jam-filled cakes). In the South, one also found Calabrian chinulille (a sweet ravioli-like pastry), calzoncelli (chocolate and almond-filled cookies) from Lucania, and taralli (a savory cracker-like food) from Apulia. Then there were the sweet fiadoni (large, sweet oven-baked ravioli) from Abruzzo and Molise, the pan pepato (a heavy spiced fruitcake for Christmas) from Umbria, and the ciambella strozzosa (a savory donut made at Easter) from the Marches. And, of course, there were the Neapolitan specialities like pastiera (a cake with ricotta cheese and candied fruit) and rum baba (called babà) or, moving northward, the maritazzi (currant buns) of Latium, panforte (a Siennese medieval spicy fruitcake), castagnaccio (chestnut cake), and ricciarelli (cookies made with ground almonds and egg white) of Tuscany, as well as the torta Barozzi (a “black” chocolate pastry) and rice cake of Emilia-Romagna. Certainly the northeastern regions of Italy were not to be undervalued in this regard, with pane con l’uva (cake with raisins) and pandoro veronese (a traditional Christmas sweet yeast bread) in Veneto, presnitz (round puff pastry with a rich filling) from Trieste, as well as sweet canederli (dumplings made with leftover bread) and strudel from Trentino Alto Adige. In the Liguria region, one could find biscotti del Lagaccio (named after a quarter of Genoa) and castagnole (another kind of Carnival doughnut), or in Lombardy, there were popular cakes like the colomba (the dove-shaped Easter cake) and the world famous Christmas panettone. Then there was the creamy Montebianco chestnut cake of the Valle d’Aosta, followed, lastly, by the Piedmont region’s baci di dama (“lady’s kisses”: two soft round cookies with chocolate between them), krumiri (cookies from Casale Monferrato), savoiardi (sponge fingers), and torte Gianduia (cakes made with the best chocolate and local hazelnuts).51

All this talk of sweet treats brings up a second important element. Sugar consumption was linked not only to homemade or small-scale production but to the confectionery industry, which actually appropriated several of the products just mentioned. In fact, this phenomenon was part of a more general process that had begun during the Fascist era, the more favorable growth of the industrial sector relative to that of the agricultural sector. Consumers were using fewer and fewer self-produced foods (fruit and vegetables from their own gardens, yard animals, etc.) and semiprocessed foods
(primarily flour). Instead, they were using more and more processed or ready-made foods (packaged fruit and vegetables, butchered meat, bread, pasta, and...cakes). As early as 1951, 16 percent of all consumer goods on the market came directly from agriculture, while processed goods from the food industry accounted for more than 33 percent of products on the market. In effect, agricultural growth could not keep pace with the other sector’s growth, or rather, it specialized in those crops most necessary to improve people’s diets: citrus, other fresh fruits, and tomatoes (with annual growth rates in production between 1950 and 1970 of 5 to 6 percent), whereas Fascism’s benchmark crop, wheat, showed a small decline (1 percent). The whole of the livestock sector did very well: beef (2.5 percent between 1950 and 1970), pork, fish, derived products (eggs, milk), and a real boom in poultry (13 percent) that partly satisfied strong consumer demand (but the agricultural food sector was still in deficit).\textsuperscript{52} Finally, it is not surprising that retail price inflation (3.5 percent annually between 1950 and 1970) was much higher than the corresponding wholesale figure (1.1 percent).

Thus, the rapid industrial expansion characteristic of this period was also reflected in the food industry. This sector was highly fragmented (in 1971 there were 45,000 businesses with 400,000 employees), with some segments producing more than half of all food products: cheeses and butter, bread, wine, olive oil, fresh milk, dairy products like yogurt, preserved milk, pasta. There were not many truly big companies in the industrial food sector in 1974. Only the following had revenues of more than 100 billion lire (circa 150 million dollars) each: Alivar, Galbani, Star, Industrie Buitoni Perugina, Eridania, Ferrero, Carapelli, Motta, and Italiana Olii e Risi. There were also some multinationals, in particular, Unilever, Nestlé, Grace (which controlled Barilla from 1971 to 1979), Winefood, Coca-Cola, and Plasmon-Heinz (in other words, one Anglo-Dutch, three American, and two Swiss companies). The impact of all foreign firms in the industrial food sector was estimated at about 9 percent of total revenues in the 1960s and 1970s.\textsuperscript{53} If anything, the distinctive trait of the sector was the presence of a large state-owned entity, SME (Società Meridionale di Elettricità), which from 1968 acquired shares in businesses like Cirio, Star, Mellin, Motta, Alemagna, and above all Alivar (acquired from Montedison with brands like Pavesi, Pai, Bertolli, De Rica and other distribution and catering firms—the last forming the basis of the future Autogrill, the largest catering company for travelers on highways, in airports, and in railway stations). SME was the group with by far the highest revenues (630 billion lire in 1974, as against the 177 billion lire by the second group, Galbani). Thus, SME constituted a potentially significant pole in terms of concentration of resources, meaning it could shape the sector’s future.\textsuperscript{54} Naturally, this state intervention should be seen in the context of the general political climate, which had witnessed a decline in Christian Democratic centrism in favor of a coalition of the Christian Democrats with the Left starting in 1963, a shift due as much to political and party factors (following the Italian Socialist Party’s break with Moscow because of the 1956 Hungarian uprising) as to economic factors. The political system
intended to play a primary role in the management of the economy, removing it partly from the vested interests (poteri forti) of private economic entities, and starting a program of national economic planning. A central focus of the planning documents was direct control over various economic sectors via state participation in them, and the food industry was an integral player in the economy, also because it was expanding so much.

In fact, consumer spending on food in these years saw a turning point. It underwent marked diversification, which affected fresh products (where the cost of meat played a big role), goods from small-scale agricultural-artisanal operations (like bread), and genuine industrial processes. If we look at production quantities, we can see that the group that grew the most between 1960 and 1974 was certainly that of industrial products, and for a specific reason. The average price increases in this sector were much lower (94 percent) than for the other two groups (145 to 146 percent). Here, therefore, was the first reason for the increased impact of the food industry: the low cost (in relative terms) that it was able to offer as a result of its savings from large-scale purchases and the methods of mass production.

A second reason for the widespread success of the processed food industry was its ability to advance new products in response to social and cultural developments. More specifically, it knew how to respond to changes in the rhythms and ways of preparing and eating meals generated by rapid urbanization, the exodus from the countryside, and the increasing number of women working outside the home. The anthropologist Carole Counihan studied how in Bosa, in the province of Oristano, making bread in the home was abandoned within a very short span of time, between 1960 and 1967. The Sardinian women, almost at once, stopped collectively kneading and baking bread (a practice that they had repeated from home to home every ten to fifteen days) because the men no longer grew the wheat. Now the women began to buy their bread. And their workload decreased (in order to prepare the bread, they used to work from three in the morning until four in the afternoon), the product consumed became more varied, and there was a change in social relations, that is, more individual freedom, inasmuch as there was less mutual dependence among the women and a weakening of the social control that had been constantly reinforced by this collective ritual. As for the confectionery and treats industry, there were the ready-made and packaged snacks for children, the packaged portions of ice cream made by Motta and Algida (Cornettos) to eat on the go, sweets and chocolate in small packages, spreads (Nutella Ferrero came out in 1964), and cookies of all types and for all tastes. (It should be borne in mind, incidentally, that in Italy cookies are eaten above all at breakfast and sometimes for snacks, whereas in Northern Europe and Great Britain they are mainly served with afternoon tea, coffee, or as a snack far from mealtimes.) Other products included natural and sweetened yogurts (presented as healthy and almost therapeutic), fruit juices, and sweet carbonated drinks. The last were not exactly a novelty, seeing that San Pellegrino orangeade had been produced since 1932, but they did very well in bars and cafés thanks to a new image of modernity and convenience.
underlined by the design of the small bottles (the sinuous one of Coca Cola and San Pellegrino’s “small club”). Pavesi enjoyed the same kind of success, when, in 1954, it offered packaged potato chips and crackers (specifically the novelty of “soda crackers” thanks to an agreement with Nabisco). The company exploited an image of practicality, hygiene, and convenience, as a 1956 poster explained:

A great innovation: 6 sealed packets in each box. The crackers are always fresh and crunchy, even after the box has been opened. They do not crumble. They are untouched by hands. They are protected from dust, humidity, and strange smells. Pavesi soda crackers: one box—6 packets—48 crackers—100 lire.59

New products did not just emerge in the confectionary and treats industry. There was another series of innovations in the field of food preparation. In those years, there appeared Gradina (Unilever) vegetable margarine and seed oils for frying (the first was Chiari & Forti’s Topazio), which played havoc with the traditional division between the southern regions using oil, the central ones employing oil and lard, and the northern ones preferring butter.60 There was an increase, in quality and quantity, of freeze-dried products (like Knorr soups), the cubes for broths (by brands such as Star, Lombardi, Liebig), cans of peeled tomatoes and ready-made tomato puree for sauce (Cirio, De Rica), custards (Elah), instant jelly powder (Ideal), ingredients for pizza (Catarì), and, for the first time, frozen foods for domestic use (starting with some vegetables and Findus-brand fish).61 These were half-ready or intermediate products that sped up traditional methods of preparation and presented themselves as an aid to women who lacked sufficient time or know-how. The food that came to symbolize this new category of products was called the bistecca, a neologism derived from “beefsteak.” The bistecca was a slice of beef or veal that fried quickly, taking the place of time-consuming and complicated boiled, stewed, braised, or roasted meat in everyday meals. But the market was also invaded by many already-cooked products, canned or in packets, ready to be put on the table (like the Cuoco Mio brand), perhaps with a quick salad and garnished with mayonnaise (ready-made, of course by Calvè). Towering over all of them was Simmenthal meat in gelatine, the rapid and economical transposition of a food long considered the most nutritious. The success of this canned product was due not only to its persistent advertising by one of the most famous television comedians, Walter Chiari, but also to the positive opinion of experts, who underlined its many virtues—always available, quick to prepare, cheap (one would also save on energy costs), and guaranteed by modern techniques in terms of hygiene, quality, and taste.62

This brings us to the third reason behind the food industry’s increased impact, the importance it gave to communications, to publicizing new products and convincing people to buy them. If the advertisements for household electrical appliances appeared mainly in popular and women’s magazines, those for this industrial sector targeted the entire population, and they did so
Food and Foodways in Italy

on television. Since 1954, television had invaded the homes of Italian families, broadcasting enormously popular programs like Il Musichiere (The Musician) and Lascia o raddoppia? (Double Your Money) and offering, since 1957, the very popular advertising vehicle, Carosello (Carousel). It was precisely during this last program, in the entr’actes, that a veritable army of cartoon characters cheerfully extolled the virtues of new products—Topo Gigio and Lancelotto for Pavesi, the urchins Toto and Tota for Motta, Joe Condor and his giant friend for Ferrero, the small Tacabanda orchestra for Doria, Miguel and Merendero for Talmone, Gioele’s animals for Colussi, Cocco Bill for Moreno Eldorado, the Piedmontese pirate Salomone for Fabbri, the adventurous Joe Galassia for Coca Cola, the master Bombardone for San Pellegrino, Tweety Pie and Sylvester for De Rica, and an unlikely Sicilian traffic policeman for Lombardi. These animated figures were flanked by flesh-and-blood characters, like the muscular man of Plasmon, the actor Ugo Tognazzi with monologs for Nestlé chocolate, Lia Zoppelli and Enrico Viariusio in entertaining theatrical sketches for Alemagna, the comic duo Cochi and Renato for Besana, the tenor Claudio Villa for Arrigoni, the singers Minnie Minoprio for Dufour and Rita Pavone and Patty Pravo for Algida, the “cowboy” Giorgio Gaber for Camillino Eldorado, and, finally, the “prince of laughter” Totò for Star’s concentrated bouillon cubes. It was a new world speaking a different language, one quicker and more effective, full of slogans and catchy jingles. With its face and voice entrusted to singers, actors, and television heroes, and counting on colored and basic graphics, it left aside art to turn advertising into a science (or at least a technique). Advertising agencies like the Italian Armando Testa and the branches of large foreign companies like J. Walter Thompson, McCann-Erickson, and Young & Rubicam became the new mediators between producers and the consumers, launching well-known and lesser known brands alike and exploring potential new markets. One such market, for example, involved young consumers and products like ice creams and carbonated drinks. There was also the one involving children, not to mention that for babies, whose caregivers could buy things like homogenized baby food, biscuits, small pasta, and condensed milk from multinational companies like Gerber, Nestlé, and Plasmon. After all, it was the time of the baby boom. In this context of expanding production, growing markets, and increasing consumption, companies paid special attention to the packaging of their products, which was supposed to be able to communicate the entire philosophy of a brand through a color or a logo.

Finally, there was a fourth reason for the rapid growth of the manufacturing segment of the food industry, this one linked to distribution. Italy, the country of workshops, small factories, and small shops, had always had high distribution costs compared to the European average. Furthermore, most producers were unable to sell their goods beyond a local, at most regional, scale. It was clear, however, that the food industry needed to develop more efficient and less costly distribution channels. The answer came in 1957 with the opening of the first supermarket in Italy by Supermarkets Italiani (the precursor of today’s Esselunga), a creation of the American IBEC (International
Basic Economy Corporation). The traditional landscape of rows of small shops in which customers were served one at a time by shopkeepers, while haggling over prices and perhaps asking for credit, was about to change. The retail revolution, which had mushroomed in the United States between the wars, had come to Italy. It had already reached various other European countries, thanks to cooperatives and private businesses. By 1957, Germany had already had supermarkets for some years in Duisberg, Cologne, and Essen, while in Great Britain Sainsbury had opened its first self-service store in Croydon in 1950 and Tesco its first in a former movie theater in Maldon in 1956. Supermarkets were the ideal solution for overcoming the food industry’s limited ability to distribute its products on more than a local or regional scale. They could sell large quantities of products in a short period of time; they relied mainly on brand names (because of the self-service); they preferred packaged products to loose ones, especially in the case of perishable foods, including, for example, sliced cheese, ham, and salami; they only used fixed prices; they presented many products in a single space (including the “new” and the “exotic” ones which came from far away); finally, they embodied, in their modern and rational spaces, a new philosophy of consumption, a vision of limitless bounty for all. Despite the difficulties supermarkets encountered in establishing themselves in the Italian commercial world because of political and corporate resistance, they soon became a reference point for mainly urban consumers—if not on account of their limited numbers, certainly for what they represented, a retail revolution, which accompanied the one in food consumption. It was, however, still only the beginning (the real development would take place in the 1980s). In fact, in 1971 there were six hundred supermarkets in Italy, which accounted for only 4 percent of total food sales; the rest occurred through a very dense network of retail shops (over 512,000) and itinerant trade. But there was no doubt that an important new model was emerging in food distribution whose role in the twentieth-century revolution in food consumption should not be underestimated.

We have spoken of producers, advertising mediators, and distributors, but what about the consumers? Were they, or rather, were women—the primary intended targets, after all—merely passive figures in this story, easily influenced and manipulated by the strategies being adopted? Absolutely not. The attitude of the women consumers to the novelties was active, dynamic, and selective. They viewed electrical household appliances and the new food products differently. The former were desired and accepted much more rapidly, after some initial resistance, both because they represented a status symbol and because they sped up and simplified the traditional tasks in the home while improving results. A modern kitchen, a refrigerator, and various small electrical appliances like the mixer and the pressure cooker enabled one to prepare the usual meal in less time and with less trouble. They affected how food was prepared, but they did not cast any doubt on the expertise of the woman preparing it. They were, as economists would say, innovations in process. It was different for the new products, which underwent a much more
Food and Foodways in Italy

selective reception. Whereas some were useful and appreciated (above all the “intermediate” ones like bouillon cubes, margarine, dried pasta, and preserves), others encountered skepticism. Could one trust them? Were they as good as the homemade ones? Were these packaged, ready-made foods suitable for a meal? It took much more time for their full integration in the domestic routine. We can therefore draw an initial conclusion: Process innovation was accepted more easily than product innovation. Furthermore, we can make a second observation. The producers of ready-made and semi-prepared foods did their best to anticipate housewives’ possible resistance by suggesting traditional methods of preparation. Frozen fish, for example, was supposed to be cooked following complicated recipes; canned meat came with sophisticated proposals for cooking it, and dehydrated soups could be enlivened with many more traditional ingredients. The instructions on the back of these cans and packages were rich and imaginative. But women consumers understood these products as ready-made meals, which, if they chose them, then precisely for that characteristic. They used such products when time was short and something that did not involve too much trouble was needed. After all, the ready-made meals were meant to be served just as they were. On the other hand, if one had to prepare a genuinely traditional meal, one chose fresh ingredients and one took one’s time in accordance with custom. In effect, the introduction of the many new products did not create an indistinct mix of traditional and store-bought fare, or of fresh products and canned or frozen ones. Instead, it created a culinary dualism.

Science fiction films might have presented a supertechnological future, in which food would come in the form of nutritious pills; women consumers made a different choice. The new technology was welcome to help them improve and speed up their work, but it would not be permitted to destroy gastronomic customs that were fundamental to their cultural identity and the well-being of their families.

Politics and Society

It is said that during the wedding, Seh Walilanang avoided touching those foods prohibited by Islam. She prayed to Allah that all the forbidden foods should return to life. And so it was that the pork on spits coated with palm sugar, cobra sauce with rice wine, pigs’ trotters stuffed with soy cheese, the testicles of a pubescent tiger in a terrine, the hearts of small boars stewed in their own blood, the small coconut milk pâtés wrapped in banana leaves, and other salumi and game with a thousand tastes resumed their original forms. And very soon one could see, slithering and running between the tables of the banquet, cobras, sows, small pigs, tigers, piglets, and boars, all of which gave thanks to the Merciful One for their resurrection by farting heartily.

It is to be hoped that what was narrated in this old mystical-hermetic poem from Java never happened at an Italian wedding luncheon. But even if the dishes did not come back to life, many banquets were just as sumptuous.
And this reminds us of another significant point. The tables of Italians during the postwar period of economic growth do more than tell us how the country had changed economically, had industrialized, had undergone very marked urbanization, and had been through profound social transformations (culminating symbolically in the 1968 student—worker protests) and cultural changes.

We have seen how some of the fundamental norms that regulated the composition and succession of meals were directly derived from religion—the alternation between frugality and abundance, the holy days of obligation, the fasting and dietary restrictions. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, the consumption of food revealed a slow but perceptible detachment from these norms. The new wealth made the everyday table a feast. Fasting and often also the days of abstinence from meat were no longer observed very much. The feast days survived, with their background of culinary specialties, but their commercial and pleasure-seeking aspects began to eclipse their religious significance. Christmas remained the high point of the year, with its complex rituals (family reunions, local gastronomic specialties, and then all the gifts), followed by Easter (which saw the establishment of the custom of the chocolate egg). Lent and its obligations received less attention, whereas nonreligious holidays gained in popularity, like New Year’s Eve (with a big dinner rivaling that of Christmas), the Carnival, Saint Valentine’s Day for those in love, and the novelty of Mother’s Day (imported from the United States in 1956). In other words, one can see the effects of secularization.

This does not mean that there were no other sources of legitimacy regarding food or that restraints had been completely removed. There was a process, which, as we have seen, began at the end of the 1800s and which then (in the 1950s and 1960s) reached its full affirmation, spreading among the wider public—the establishment of science as an institution capable of dictating rules about proper nutrition and suggesting best practices. The precepts of nutrition (calories, nutritional values, daily requirements) were repeated in periodicals and television programs, freed from the confines of institutional food preparation in cafeterias, company canteens, schools, hospitals, and the army. The possession of knowledge about nutrition—as opposed to knowing about foods and their preparation—came to seem necessary for all consumers. Every magazine was full of articles written by “experts” (nutritionists, dietitians, doctors). And after the gastronomic excesses of the first postwar years of abundance, a new catchword began to circulate, at once full of significance, promise, and drama—dieting. Increasingly, food came to be linked with physical well-being, while eating excessively no longer bore its earlier burden of guilt for the sin of gluttony. Instead, overeating was understood in terms of its pathological consequences. The person who ate too much was not a sinner to be condemned but a patient to be cured. Medical science would take charge of the patient’s problem, removing responsibility, in large measure, from the person in question. Thus, even at the table, Italian society was becoming more secular and “medicalized.”
Another theme emerging from Celestina’s meal is mobility, a spatial mobility that matched the social mobility ensured by the sudden transformation of economic structures (which permitted many to set up their own businesses and achieve success). Those Italians who went for a drive in their first economy car discovered the freedom and fascination of traveling—on vacation, on the weekend, or for a picnic (like Celestina and her husband). Motorization had a big impact on the country and created new habits. On a long trip on one of the brand new divided highways, for instance, one might stop at an Autogrill service area. These were very modern constructions that straddled the highway and offered every service to the motorist. On the ground level was a petrol station, and above that was a bar and a large cafeteria, from where one could admire, through the glass walls, the traffic below speeding past—a real icon of modernity. The architect, Angelo Bianchetti, won an award for the Autogrill service stations, which had been inspired by the American example and had an antecedent in the Pavesi restaurant at Novara. (The first Autogrill was in Bergamo in 1955, followed in 1958 by those in Lainate and Ronco Scrivia, all in Northern Italy.) Inside these service areas, everything was modern and permeated by the Pavesi brand. In 1959, an average two-course meal, with a side dish, cheese, and Pavesi crackers and cookies cost 750 lire (1.20 dollars at the time). Aside from being known for their quality and service, the Autogrills remain in Italians’ collective consciousness as a tangible sign of the private conquest of mobility and as an example of the integration of motorization with large-scale food service. Tourism by car also meant the collective discovery of trattorias and inns scattered throughout the country, as well as of landmarks and beautiful landscapes, replacing the elitist tourism of the past, when travelers got about by train and ship. Apart from the inns, there were also small family restaurants, delicatessens, dairy shops, and groceries offering ready-made dishes. The map of public eating establishments was broad and varied.

And it was not only a question of mobility outside the city. Growing incomes permitted increasing numbers of people to enjoy a good meal outside the home. There were more and more good restaurants, above all in the cities. At times these establishments evolved from trattorias or hotel restaurants, and their presence was underlined by the first reviews in the press. With the Tuscans at the forefront, the names of good restaurants came to be famous, like Bice in Milan (the precursor of many successful Tuscan establishments), Cesarina in Bologna (famous for its stuffed hand-made pastas), the elegant Biffi of Milan, Mortola on the Riviera near the French frontier (which offered up to forty-five different appetizers), Sabatini of Florence, Sora Rosa at Tor Carbone (which specialized in artichokes and oxtail), Alla Fortuna at Comacchio (known for its fish soup), La Colomba in Venice, the old hotel restaurant Verbano at Meina, the Savona at Alba (famous for truffles), Al gatto nero of Turin (another Tuscan restaurant), and Fini of Modena. Within a few years, all of these establishments would earn a star from Michelin, the bible of gastronomic guides, which began its publication in Italy in 1956. (All the same, no restaurants in the South were indicated in the Michelin
Guide, not yet anyway.) Television played its part in promoting travel and fine dining, with programs which have already been referred to (although mention should be made of Mario Soldati’s visit to the trattoria Cantarelli of Samboseto near Parma in 1957).

In the end, it was not necessary to go to a restaurant. One could go to some of the new bars to see the social change that was taking place—as in the emblematic “Italian-style bar” designed by Ettore Sottsass, Jr., which was rooted in simple aesthetic lines (with mirrors, photographs, steel, and enamel) and clear sociocultural premises:

This new bar in Genoa has been described as “an Italian-style bar,” that is to say, a bar where people stay just for a little while. They have a coffee or an aperitif without sitting down and then they go. They gamble at Sisal [on soccer] and then they go. It is above all a bar for men and sports fans or self-assured modern girls. This type of bar is only to be found in Italy because in the bars in other countries one ponders a great deal; one takes one’s time to get drunk sitting at the bar, or one sits for hours reading the newspaper or waiting for something. The typical rhythm of the Italian-style bar has been preserved here by simple means, and, in fact, has been exaggerated with syncopated photographs of subjects from the everyday world: records and cars, beautiful women, and boxing.74

Not everyone was happy with these innovations. In the columns of La cucina italiana, the self-described “angry journalist,” Giorgio Bocca, railed against the excessive interest in cuisine shown by the press and the thousands of improvised recipe books being published. He criticized the mushrooming of downscale Italian restaurants abroad. And he lambasted the mania for eating out in order to be seen, that is, in order to display one’s increasing prosperity, as opposed to pleasing one’s own sense of taste, the kind of taste that presupposed a long process of cultivation, which these people had never experienced.75 Views like these were merely the tip of the iceberg. It was not only the many journalists and intellectuals who were critical of the changes in Italian society, as we have seen; for a long time, the world of politics remained skeptical. On the left, the Communists certainly could not embrace an unregulated approach to growth that favored individual over public consumption, cast doubt on the central importance of ideologies in the development of society, and even risked distancing workers from the fundamental struggle against capitalism by bewitching them with all the bells and whistles of American-style wealth. For their part, the Christian Democrats and the Catholic Church feared the secularization that was implicit in “consumerism,” recognizing the importance that material goods were acquiring in social and cultural life, observing a breakdown in the traditional sociocultural balance of the peasant world, and fearing a possible decline in the significance and practice of religion. But the clash between the two opposing views occurred essentially on the political and ideological plane, and concerns about the long-term consequences of the new prosperity remained in the background despite some criticism. After all, the country’s
economic growth was an important fact and could be appreciated by everyone. The Center-Left, supported by the more pragmatic wing of the Christian Democrats and by the Socialists, had, in fact, accepted the changes in society and intended to offer a political and economic response. The problem was that society at large seemed to be moving at a different speed, particularly in the 1960s. Moreover, social groups, which until then were hardly or not at all represented in governmental and party political institutions (new immigrants, women, the young—often “offspring” of the economic miracle and the revolution in consumption) chose to make their voices heard outside the traditional party scene.76 Certainly, after 1968, the entire political class was forced to take a close look at the social and cultural changes Italy had experienced. Politicians had to come to terms, even harshly, with those groups that could not identify with political parties.77 The growing social tension and economic difficulties of the early 1970s aggravated an already confrontational climate.

It should also be borne in mind that the strong economic growth and the revolution in consumption were not just Italian phenomena. In fact, their political significance makes the Italian situation analogous particularly to the German one. Germany had also emerged from the Second World War defeated and destroyed, and the ruins were not only physical but also cultural and ideological. The dictatorial regimes had promised a new order, which they had failed to achieve, plunging their populations, together with a major part of the world, into catastrophe. Assimilation into the American area of influence as a NATO member was therefore very significant. And it was above all with the concrete attainment of a decidedly superior standard of living, improved diets, and higher levels of consumption—thanks to the Italian economic miracle and the German Wirtschaftswunder—that the new democratic regimes enjoyed broad, stable consensus and legitimacy. Not by chance did Ludwig Erhard, Chancellor Adenauer’s Economics Minister (and later his successor), succeed in launching a winning political slogan in 1957, which had been inspired by the title of one of his books, “Prosperity for all” (Wohlstand für alle).78 This was the basis upon which the German people found unity (at least in West Germany, which would, in fact, use its wealth to challenge the more backward communist East Germany). Prosperity and democracy would be the new face that the reborn Germany would want to show the world, completely different from the preceding one, just as Italy wanted to do, after it emerged from Fascism, under the banner of centrism and later of the Center-Left. (If anything, for Germany this change entailed a return to prosperity to some extent, whereas for Italy it was something totally new.) The past, repressed because of the sufferings of the war and the new geopolitical world balance of power, was also buried under a mountain of food and consumer goods.

Incidentally, the histories of the two countries—gastronomically speaking—perhaps drew closer after the war than they had been before, a process that began most notably in the 1960s. If Italian ice cream had been known in Germany for decades, it was only in the period of the miracle that
cultural and commercial relations became really close and Italian products like spaghetti, pizza, and wine, perhaps sparkling wine, became very popular. And it is noteworthy that this popularity was only partly due to the presence of Italian immigrants, so-called guest workers (Gastarbeiter), and mainly to the growth of mass tourism, which brought millions of Germans on vacation to Italy. It was there that they enjoyed a cuisine that was integral to a whole way of life, which they perceived as more relaxed, cheerful, and zestful than what they knew in Germany. Tourism proved to be an effective means of spreading Italian cuisine. Spatial mobility paved the way for the spread of new cultural models, in this case into Germany.79

To return to Italian politics, it was also called upon to address dietary consumption directly—and here it was tardy too. We have seen how a complex production chain of new foods had been set in motion, but not everything came up roses. In fact, the first food adulteration scandals soon broke. In 1958, the battle-hardened news weekly *L’Espresso* published the results of an investigation of oil and butter with the disquieting title, “Donkey in the Bottle: A Detective Story about Olive Oil.”80 The article explained how some of the olive oil on sale was not even made from olives, often not even from other plant sources but instead from animal fats, frequently donkey fat. A drawing illustrated the procedure with sadistic effectiveness. There was the poor donkey torn from the fields, taken to the slaughterhouse, inserted in pieces in an enormous autoclave, from which emerged stearin (which ended up in soap) and animal oleins. The latter went to an oil mill, which removed their acidity and colored them with chlorophyll. Finally, the oleins were bottled after a little real olive oil was added, and the product was ready for sale as olive oil. Nor was butter much better insofar as its fat came from practically every type of animal, above all whales (The heading in *L’Espresso* read “Whale Spread on Bread: A Detective Story of Butter”).81 This investigative reporting created an uproar, also because it followed analogous scandals regarding dried pastas (not produced with durum wheat, but with the less costly soft wheat and some fish glue), bread (made from inferior flours and even chalk), wine (whose alcohol content was increased by adding sugars), bouillon cubes (obtained from practically everything), and, once again, oil (made this time from less valued tea seeds). The industrialist Angelo Costa, president of Assolearia (Association of Oil Producers), accused the magazine of superficiality, facile generalizations, and ignorance. There was soon a confrontation between Costa and those responsible for the reporting. Also facing off against Costa was the young journalist Eugenio Scalfari and, subsequently, experts and academics.82 And the scandals did not stop. In 1962, other adulterations were discovered in butter, meat, oil, wine, and above all cheeses (produced with industrial casein, the kind used to make umbrella handles). The fallout reached Parliament.83

The result was to draw the attention of the public to the danger of food frauds and to reinforce many consumers’ skepticism about industrially produced food. In fact, the food sector had always experienced fraud, even going
back to ancient times. In the Middle Ages, special inspectors used to go around the markets with accurate balances to weigh and check the quality of products. For flour they used the glass of water method. If some of the flour immediately sunk to the bottom of the glass, it was a sign that some heavy chalk powder had been added (and the seller was immediately arrested). However, in these prosperous postwar years, the problem was more serious because new technologies, aided by chemistry, afforded the opportunity for fraud on an alarming scale. The very rapid growth of the food industry had caught regulators unprepared. It was based on inadequate and very backward legislation (stemming partly from the nineteenth century and partly from the Fascist system), which had been more concerned with protecting the interests of producers rather than those of consumers. It was under these circumstances that the first consumer protection movements appeared in Italy, starting with the Unione nazionale consumatori (National Union of Consumers), founded in 1955 by Vincenzo Dona, a journalist and economics expert. The new association, which arose more or less together with various others in Europe, following in the footsteps of the much older one in the United States, made itself the mouthpiece of consumer fears, battling for new protective laws. Not by chance did one of the very first such laws adopted in this context specifically address, in 1960, the classification and sale of olive oil. It was followed by other laws about chemical additives and colorants and, in 1963, by legislation on the registered designation of origin for wines, that is, the Denominazione di Origine Controllata (following the French example). Between 1960 and 1965, numerous laws protecting consumers were passed, and a little later even television became aware of this new interest. In 1970, it launched the program Io compri, tu compri (I buy, you buy), hosted by the popular actress Luisa Rivelli, which was unexpectedly successful.

In other words, the regulation of industrially produced foods for the sake of consumer protection emerged as a political issue quite recently. Moreover, the initiative almost never came from within the party political system but was the result of press revelations, citizens groups, and consumer organizations—all interpreters in the public arena of consumer voices and expectations. Yet the amount of attention devoted to the prevention of food fraud decreased notably in the 1970s, also because the consumer movement had not spread throughout the whole country, in contrast with what was happening in other European nations. At the same time, this trend was a consequence of organized politics in Italy, a country whose political parties tended to “occupy” the whole of society, penetrating every sector, placing their representatives in every institution, trying, that is, to express every request—leaving little room for alternative forms of representation. The result, at least in the sector that we have been talking about, was that legislation in the following years regarding the regulation of food occurred almost entirely as a consequence of European Community laws, and then only with hesitation and delays. It was not surprising, therefore, if many consumers looked at the new, mass-produced products with suspicion.
What can we say in conclusion about these very important years? Perhaps that there had never been a comparable impetus toward standardization, driven by the arrival of new packaged products, easy and fast transportation, and new forms of distribution like supermarkets. Apart from the classic industrial triangle, which was driving Italy’s economic growth (Piedmont, Lombardy, Liguria), there was now the food industry triangle (a little different: Piedmont, Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna), joined by autonomous productive poles (Liguria for oil and pasta, Tuscany for oil and wine, Campania for pasta and conserves, Umbria for confectionery, etc.). In practice, factories, above all of the North, invaded the whole peninsula with their industrial products, ready, the same for everyone.85 These foods cost less and above all guaranteed the achievement of two long-desired objectives—delocalization (the same food became available everywhere, removing the forced link of a given area to its agricultural hinterland) and the removal of seasonal constraints (products could be preserved for use throughout the year). Now Italian cupboards contained the same packages and cans, which resembled the serial repetitions immortalized by Andy Warhol’s Pop Art (soup cans, Coca Cola bottles, and so on). And Italian refrigerators were filled with an incredible quantity and variety of products of infinite shapes and colors, not very different from Errò’s foodscapes. At the same time, tastes changed and aligned themselves with the dictates of industry (or perhaps industry understood the changes and reinforced them). What prevailed were sweet flavors, crunchy rather than soft consistencies, sparkling drinks instead of straight ones, delicate aromas rather than very marked ones, and, in general, light flavors rather than the strong, clearly defined ones that had characterized the cuisine of the past. The industrial products even suggested a new food aesthetic. There was the meat in gelatin presented as a perfect parallelepiped, tuna from the can that appeared like an elegant rose-colored disc, triangular miniportions of cheese, frozen fish that assumed the shape of plastic containers or of “sticks.” Nothing recalled the imperfect and changeable shapes of living beings; everything was crystallized in an abstract geometric perfection. Finally, the gastronomic unity of the country had been attained.

But something else happened in the same years. A small motorized army went almost everywhere to discover the country, as has been said, combining in a single experience the appreciation of art, landscape, and cuisine. Italy was being discovered at the same time in its museums and at the tables of isolated inns, or while searching for “natural” (read: nonindustrial) wines, oils, and foods from the thousands of small producers who continued to prosper. And there was much more. It has been estimated that from the early 1950s to the early 1970s, 9 million people moved in Italy, from the countryside to the cities and above all from the South to the North. In a country with fewer than 60 million inhabitants during this period, the scale of this exodus was very great indeed. It changed Italy for the foreseeable future because the migrants not only contributed to the labor force but reconstructed networks of family and friends in their new cities and towns, where they maintained the habits, cultures, and food products of the places they came from. And so there came
into being networks (commercial systems and informal ones among relatives) to send to the North the typical Southern products, not to mention the emergence of specialty food shops in the North. There was also a rapid increase in the number of northern restaurants and pizzerias that served traditional Southern cuisine. Pasta, tomato sauces, dishes based on sea fish, pizzas, large loaves of bread, and almost everything else in the highly varied cuisine of the southern regions poured northward and was well received (as can be seen in Celestina’s story). The flavors and the aromas of the Mediterranean combined successfully with those of the Po Valley and the mountains. In 1961, in a climate of great optimism, there were celebrations to mark the centenary of Italian unification (with a GDP that had gone up almost 8 percent in a year), and great meals followed—all under the banner of regional diversity. The gastronomic unity of the country had been achieved, but under the sign of diversity.

The end of this period of growth and transformation and the beginning of a new phase were symbolically marked by the year 1973, when the oil crisis struck and the long phase of economic expansion seemed to have come to an end. A film that was very successful with the public (but not with critics) represented this turning point well—Marco Ferreri’s *La grande abbuffata* (The Great Binge). The film served as a coarse metaphor about the sense of emptiness and stupidity generated by obsession with consumption. Here, an endless meal led to the deaths of all the characters. In the end, the dream of limitless abundance turned against its own protagonists.
People call me Hamburger Lady. But my real name is Giovanna Tamalo (22 years old, Libra).

People call me Hamburger Lady because once I was frying the Spinacine (spinach burgers) and my mother touched me with her arm... and I ended up with my face in the Spinacine oil.

I scalded myself and since then my face looks horrible. That’s why people call me that.¹

But Hamburger Lady didn’t care. Just as long as she could keep collecting her points on the boxes of pasta, gnocchi and tortellini, which would reward her with coffee cups, plates, china, and a host of other goodies. The more points she collected, the richer the rewards. You just had to keep collecting, even asking friends for help, and you could get the most beautiful things. All free. Hamburger Lady was happy.²

It’s strange. In the twenty years after 1973, the Italians made economic strides toward a level of material prosperity that had been almost inconceivable earlier. They attained high levels of comfort and consumption. Their per capita GDP equalled that of those European countries that had always been richer, and they saw their country develop to a point that it was able to join the exclusive group of industrial powers called the G7. At the same time, Italians witnessed the most dramatic political crisis of Republican Italy (the Mani pulite or Clean Hands corruption investigations), growing social fragmentation, and fierce criticism of a consumer society that seemed bent on destroying every ethical and cultural foundation, disfiguring people materially and morally, as happened in Aldo Nove’s story of the Hamburger Lady
a few years later. There was a direct transition from pervasive indigence to widespread affluence in Italian society, which now spoke with advertising jargon, recognized itself in the narrative presented on television, and filled its life with consumer products. The transition to a modern consumer society did not happen without some trauma, amid the praise of its many advocates and the loathing of its still more numerous detractors. Who was right?

In many Native American myths there is an emblematic figure, the trickster, often a coyote or a crow. The trickster is generally a cunning predator. In one version, Coyote creates a net of branches and bushes to capture a salmon (and it is from him that men learned to fish). In another version, he is the prey. Deceived by a rabbit, he goes into a trap and is killed by a peasant. In yet another story, the trickster, this time having taken the form of Crow, plays another role, stealing by deception a fisherman’s appetizing bait before the fish can eat it, placing himself between the predator and the prey. (The fisherman will then steal his beak and he will have to resort to all his cunning to get it back, but that’s another story.) The Okanagan of the Northwest believe that Coyote was sent to the earth by the Great Spirit to teach men how to behave. He kills the monster devourers of human beings, teaches the art of fishing, and divides the people into various tribes, each with its own language. But he also commits senseless mistakes, so many that the Great Spirit decides to come down to earth himself to complete the task, thanking Coyote for his work and dismissing him. Intelligent and mad, demigod and swindler, rule maker and rule breaker, the trickster is a mutable creature that often changes his or her appearance and gender when moving between worlds. Impossible to classify, the trickster’s distinctive feature is ambiguity.

Perhaps cultures familiar with the myths of the trickster would not be too surprised by processes that produce a given result and at the same time its opposite effect. But let’s proceed in an orderly fashion.

The 1973 oil crisis paved the way for the decade labeled that of crisis par excellence. These years were marked by worldwide economic crisis (stagflation, which combined inflation and economic stagnation, thus contradicting highly regarded economic theories), social crisis (the outbreak of terrorism with the Piazza della Loggia bombing in Brescia and the Bologna massacre at that city’s main train station), and political crisis (with the end of the Center-Left coalition between the Christian Democratic and Socialist parties, and with the gradual acceptance by the Center of the Italian Communist Party, which culminated in the short-lived “historic compromise” of 1978–79). From Right to Left, leaders like Giulio Andreotti, Aldo Moro—until his tragic end—and Enrico Berlinguer tried to master a dramatic situation. And yet this was also a period of social reform (divorce, family law, equal rights at work, abortion, not to mention the legalization of sex reassignment therapy), of building up the welfare state, and of interventions affecting institutions like universities (for greater access), prisons, and mental institutions. In effect, politics recognized the social changes that had occurred in the country. In the same period, families continued to consume more and more durable goods and food (with only a brief lull in this surprising trend in
During the 1970s, people’s consumption continued to increase and become ever more varied. This was about fresh food, dairy products, condiments, sugar, coffee, and a new marked surge in meat consumption (beef and especially pork and poultry). At the same time, sweet corn, rye, barley, and chicory, once mainstays of the poor, disappeared definitively from the diet.

This positive trend accelerated vigorously between 1984 and 1990. It was a golden moment for Italy, that of the so-called second economic miracle and of industrial districts offering the world high-quality, competitively priced products marked “Made in Italy.” These years also saw the triumph of individualism and of a new Right very different from the traditional, statist-oriented one, well embodied by the U.S. president Ronald Reagan and the principles behind his economic policy (less state, fewer taxes, deregulation, and a cautious monetary policy—Reaganomics). This Right was rooted in the new middle class, which had quickly become wealthy thanks to financial activity (and in Italy also thanks to self-employment), and which regarded the collectivistic utopias of past years with suspicion and disenchantment, while showing more interest in careers, consumption, and pleasure as identity factors. By the early 1990s, the per capita income of Italians was similar to that of the Western European average, so much so that the percentage spent on food fell rapidly. (In 1993, an average Italian family of 2.7 people spent 2.8 million lire per month total, of which only 637,000 lire, or 23 percent, went to food, whereas in 1973 food accounted for 34 percent of an Italian family’s total expenditures.) And yet it was precisely those years that witnessed the crisis of a political system that continued to repeat the same patterns and alliances (with a worn out Center-Left and the ambitious rise of the Socialist Bettino Craxi), whose members became wealthy illegally through a system of bribes based on the political-economic network, while expanding counterforces occupied those spaces left vacant (horror vacui!)—forces which were growing within the state, like the P2 Masonic lodge, and outside the state, criminal organizations like the Mafia and the Camorra, which competed with the state for control of entire territories, going so far as to openly challenge it (first the general Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa and later the judges Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino were among the many victims of this struggle).

Despite everything, therefore, the twenty years following 1973 had one thing in common—the continuous growth of real per capita income and family wealth. Politics seemed to be following a divergent path compared to that of the economy. (Perhaps this fuelled an increased sense of detachment and the idea that one could live perfectly well by oneself; politics “was not necessary.”) But how can one explain this divergence? With regard to consumption levels and the widespread presence of durable goods in homes, Italy had started from a very backward position compared to Europe—we have seen how the postwar economic miracle had only touched the upper and middle classes, moreover with a strong geographical concentration. Between 1974 and 1993, however, this wealth spread through all social strata and all
regions of the country (even if the regional and social differences remained). As Carmela D’Apice and Giuseppe Maione have suggested, consumption was precisely the secret of this ongoing economic progress. With the end of the productive thrust toward exports, typical of the economic boom, Italian industry continued to work thanks to the significant expansion of the domestic market. Thus, the Italians progressively raised their standard of living, buying cars, electrical household appliances, furniture, clothes, and better food in more abundant quantities.

In other words, if one wanted to summarize, through images, the path covered since the 1950s, then the Italy of the economic miracle could be symbolically represented by a 1959 photograph of the Autostrada del Sole (Highway of the Sun) at Lodi: A very big car (which we can imagine being driven by an important man from Milan) is exiting on the right following the signpost for “North,” whereas two solitary economy cars are heading “South”—perhaps all of the motorists going home to wholesome food. The scene is dominated by very high lampposts; all around there is nothing, only the countryside, fields, and trees in the distance. Twenty years later, the situation was very different. A 1979 photograph depicts the traffic on a freeway at night: Two packed rows of cars, trucks, and tractor-trailers of all different sizes and colors (which transfer people and goods up and down the whole peninsula) are proceeding in a line, with their headlights reflected in the wet pavement. The rows seem endless in the foggy darkness—maybe they are all going home to wholesome (perhaps) food, too. The Italian dream had become a reality for everyone.

The change represented by these two pictures was the accomplishment of a consumer revolution that transformed the face of the country, for better and for worse. This was a revolution that frightened many intellectuals of the time, like Pier Paolo Pasolini, who contrasted this new “golden age” with the ancient “age of bread.” The latter had been a time when people only consumed goods of extreme necessity. (“...And it was this, perhaps, which made their poor and precarious lives extremely necessary. While it is clear that superfluous goods make life superfluous.”) However, there were different views, like those of Italo Calvino (in his novels and short stories) and Umberto Eco (in Apocalittici e integrati [Apocalypse Postponed]). The expression that perhaps best captured the concern in the air was in a very successful book by Guy Debord. By then we were all living in a “society of the spectacle,” namely in a world where representation encompassed and irradiated the whole of reality, so that the world itself became media-like, virtual, spectacular. The mass media system was simply the superficial aspect of a new form of power, which used communication to control the social body in an unprecedented way. And television was in the front line of this operation.

Television became the real protagonist of this story above all after the liberalization of 1976, which permitted the participation of private television channels side by side with public networks. Obviously, the former were all commercial and therefore used advertising as their main source of financing,
Cuisine in the Age of Globalization

affording it space such as it had never known before. Above all Fininvest, created by Silvio Berlusconi in 1978, developed this strategy, adding another two national channels (Italia 1 in 1982 and Rete 4 in 1984) to the one it already had, Canale 5, and establishing itself as the foremost private television network operating in Italy—partly imitated by the national broadcasting corporation, RAI, itself. The new duo, television and advertising, thus strongly and continuously promoted all consumer goods. The food industry became, or rather continued to be, one of the main protagonists, and soon new formulas were being tried out. One of the most interesting was cooking on television, which had already enjoyed great success in other countries. A very famous example was the American program *The French Chef*, presented since 1963 by Julia Child, a robust and tall Californian (190 centimeters or six feet two inches), who portrayed herself as a housewife capable of preparing, in her kitchen, the best French dishes simply and methodically. In Italy the star performer was Wilma De Angelis, a singer who was the presenter of the television program *Telemenu*, conceived by Paolo Limiti for Telemontecarlo and broadcast daily starting in September 1979 for many years, later under the name *Pane, amore e fantasia* (Bread, Love, and Imagination). It was followed by other similar programs. The tone was good-natured and homey, the recipes simple and varied, the presenter pleasant, and the program soon became popular. The success it enjoyed tells us many things. To begin with Wilma De Angelis was not an expert in the field and was helped by a professional cook, but she was known and loved by the public, and that was enough (television is appearance). Next, the program was sponsored by various food companies, even if this sponsorship was not always explicitly declared (television does not reveal its mechanisms). As a third element, we can note the television public’s great interest in cooking. This was partly because of women’s new needs (little time for cooking, less knowledge about traditional female tasks, broken ties with their places and families of origin), and partly due to the new affluence, which, for the first time, permitted them to change their habits or cook costly products. (Television perceives social transformations.) We can also note that the language of these programs was extremely simple and direct, addressing a mass audience not at ease with specialized magazines or great experts, an audience that did not go to famous restaurants and perhaps did not even know many of the recipes being presented. (Television is democratic.) Finally, we observe that the TV kitchen was of a particular kind: It was a kitchen to look at, a “spoken kitchen,” as Piero Camporesi has observed, but also a kitchen you cannot touch, a kitchen that has no tastes and no aromas. This change went much deeper than the one imagined years earlier with TV dinners (quick meals to be eaten in front of the television set). It represented the triumph of the aesthetic-visual aspect—it was the kitchen-cum-show. (Television transforms sensations.)

The impact of television was enormous, bearing in mind that it was the first of the mass media in Italy to reach practically everyone, and it provoked a lot of criticism among the most prominent intellectuals of the time. For example, Pierre Bourdieu decried the self-centered and superficial nature of
information conditioned by spectacular subjects, and Jean Baudrillard spoke openly of “simulacra” and the “disappearance” of reality, replaced by its television representation. Then there was Karl Popper’s proposal to institute a sort of ethical license for those who made programs on television (too often a babysitter who took the place of absent parents).\textsuperscript{13} The role of this medium should not, however, be exaggerated, inasmuch as one should not attribute to television all the merits (or faults) of society’s profound economic and cultural transformations, which it also reflected. Apart from its undoubted manipulative force, the new medium also had many limits, due above all to an active attitude on the part of the viewers, who selected, changed, negotiated, and mixed the messages they received, and who in no way constituted a homogeneous public. There was in fact an enormous diversity in the reception of the content, depending on social class, cultural level, gender, age, geographical area, and subcultures. Nonetheless, television advertising undoubtedly voiced its messages in a new language, that is, created a world of symbols capable of representing the new, affluent society.

**A Meal in the Affluent Society**

Costabissara (Vicenza), mid-1980s

Imagined geographies. Not only history, geography is also a representation. This comes to mind in our journey toward the place we have chosen as emblematic of Italy in the 1980s. Geography is seemingly based on indisputable morphological elements; however, it is actually a historical and cultural construction. Italy, a country characterized by extreme variety from one village to another, at times after just a few miles, has, for the sake of simplification, been represented in different, more comprehensible ways. The classic depiction is the North–South divide, even if it was frequently unclear at which latitude the demarcation line should be drawn. This model identified two macro-areas: one economically developed and the other underdeveloped, one European and the other Mediterranean, one focused on work and the other enjoying life, one an exploiter and the other exploited, one that lived well and the other badly, and so on. One could make a much longer list of such stereotypes, widespread and often racist (even if the beauty of many of these pairs of terms is that at times they were inverted and interpreted in the opposite sense according to the point of view). In the 1970s, this division was no longer satisfactory because it was evident that new social and productive realities were establishing themselves. The Italy that was catching the public’s attention was that of the so-called industrial districts, that is, the economic regions that specialized in the manufacture of a certain kind of product and that were characterized by a widespread economy of small family factories and workshops. However, this Italy did not fit into the North–South dichotomy because it was developing in the central and north-eastern regions. Here, then, was the Third Italy. But soon this three-part model also proved inadequate. If we take as one the regions of Veneto, Trentino Alto Adige, and Friuli Venezia Giulia, they seem to show a distinct character. Once this zone
was called Triveneto, a name which evokes epic Risorgimento battles and equally epic poverty (as has been seen from the high level of emigration). Thus, a new term crops up, more suitable for the changed reality: the Northeast. New subdivisions, therefore, for the mental map of Italy. In more recent years, there has been a tendency to leave aside these divisions of macro areas and refer instead to the administrative regions (also a simplification). But let’s not get ahead of ourselves. Let’s return to the Northeast, also because, in the meantime, we have reached our destination.14

It is not difficult to understand, looking around, why these zones are far from the characteristics that historically marked the industrial development of the North (actually, the Northwest). Here in the Northeast, we see almost exclusively small and micro businesses, whereas in the Northwest there are small and large factories; here mechanical engineering and the more traditional sectors of high-quality “Made in Italy” products, namely, textiles, clothing, eyeglasses (lenses and frames), food, home furnishings, and paper, there mechanical engineering in all its forms (beginning with cars), the electrical and chemical sectors, and so on; here industrial development throughout the territory, there concentrations in specific areas. Here, there is an absence of dominant urban centers, there big cities structure the territory hierarchically. Not for nothing do we find ourselves in a village a few miles from Vicenza, full of small businesses, workshops, houses, warehouses, and small villas.

The place where we find ourselves is a typical example of a workshop-home, where the work space coexists with (perhaps it would be better to say occupies) the space of the family’s private life. We can see a young man coming out of the workshop in front of us. It’s Dario. He has recently finished school and has immediately started working in the family business. Now he’s going to eat in the house next door. Let’s follow him into the kitchen. We are in a nice, new and spacious room, whose furnishings indicate a certain affluence. The kitchen and living space constitute a single room; the part that is dedicated more to food preparation has two rows of cabinets and kitchen units facing each other. The latter have burners, an oven, a refrigerator, and a dishwasher. In the middle there is a table, which has been set, and some chairs. In this room we see Dario’s parents, his brother, and two other people, probably relatives, who have just arrived. In an instant (we have barely had time to get our bearings), everyone is sitting at the table and the mother is turning from the burners with the pasta ready to be served. But how has she managed so quickly? The mystery is soon resolved: Most of the food was prepared the night before. The rule is always to prepare more than is needed and to keep the extra food in the fridge (and later in the freezer). This way, one can save time because the work is always there waiting to be done, and it dictates its rhythms to all members of the family—according to Dario, at times “a little too much.”15 But perhaps it is also the memory of a primordial hunger, which one wants to drive away with this abundance (above all for the boys, whose portions are enormous: “Eat, it’s good for you!” [Magna che fà bene!]).16 While they are all eating pasta with tomato sauce and drinking water
and wine, which are never missing from the table (only later would the wine begin to disappear from midday lunch), they talk, just for a change, about work. It should be borne in mind that this was a very important moment for the firm (and the family). Having come into being in the 1930s as an artisanal activity, at the end of the 1960s it had begun to grow, becoming a small firm. Then, in the 1980s, it underwent further growth: “production was never enough, there was such a demand…” The whole family was called upon to contribute, with the help of some workers from outside the family. Dario still remembers that when he was a child, before the new factory was built in 1969, they all lived in a building where on the ground floor there was a kitchen–dining room, an office, a point of sale, and another small hall. In the basement there was the production equipment, boilers, restrooms, so forth. On the first floor there were the large dormitories where the grandfather, Dario’s father and his family, and the workers slept. Even after the beautiful house in which we find ourselves had been built, for many years they still had lunch in a corner of the workshop in the new building, where there was a burner and a big table, so as not to lose time. Always work and home, home and work. “My parents lived completely immersed in production, they only [went home] to sleep,” recalls Dario.18

However frugal and quick the present lunch, it is important to note that all family members eat at the table. The idea of having a snack standing up and skipping midday lunch will come later. Lunch is always a family ritual and to be respected. As the conversation fades—one speaks less at such times—we can hear voices from the television set.

There is no lessening of tension between Italy and the United States because of the Sigonella incident and the events following the dramatic hijacking of the Achille Lauro… Craxi confirms his hard line… The investigators inquire into the serious attack characteristic of the Mafia… A climatic emergency due to an unprecedentedly warm and dry October, the authorities have organized effective counter-measures… There is already a tight contest to win the football league championship… In America an odd Japanese video game, Super Mario Bros, which has two Italian plumbers as the heroes, is enjoying enormous success…

Voices from a distant world. By contrast, everything here seems to revolve around family, work, and the village.

Meanwhile, the family has started the second course, made up of cheese (three kinds: the inevitable local Asiago, Grana or another aged cheese, and a soft cheese such as Gorgonzola), together with some cold cuts (salami or brawn), and naturally lots of bread (which has replaced the centuries-old staple of polenta). The bread is never wasted. What is left over or unsold is toasted again to make pan biscotto (biscuit bread), which will last for months (it was also used on Venetian ships for long journeys) and can be eaten with everything, the Venetians assure us: “Everything tastes better with bread” (col pan tuto xe più bon). Therefore, we could say that the hurriedly eaten midday meal we just witnessed is made up of a course and a half.
It is different for the evening meal, which has two or three courses, with a lot of cooked seasonal vegetables (the mother, of peasant extraction, is very keen on that); and then meat, which can be chicken, rabbit, or beef, the last boiled or stewed (which can be left on the stove for hours for convenience). What is also much appreciated is guinea-fowl or pork, specifically coessin (cotechino or pork sausage) and musetto (pork snout). But never fish, which is prohibitively expensive because of transport and conservation costs. The one exception is salted cod (baccalà). For other kinds, well, “poor things, they didn’t have the money,” as the saying went (poeretti, no ghe s’era i sghei).19
It is a simple and quick cuisine, but good. (Obviously there is no trace of the proverbial cats attributed to the people of Vicenza: “The Venetians are great gentlemen, the people of Padua are highly educated, the people of Vicenza eat cats, and the people of Verona are all mad.” [Venessiani gran signorii, Padovani gran dotori, Vicentini magnagati, Veronesi tuti matii.] All the foods are rigorously local. Dishes from beyond their immediate geographical context are neither known nor eaten for the people of this place are faithful to tradition, in their cuisine as in everything.

There isn’t even time to do the shopping in these work-filled lives. They eat produce from the vegetable garden cultivated by the father, and they eat the hens’ fresh eggs. Everyone has hens and rabbits, and no one takes any notice of the smells because it’s what peasant life smells like. They buy what is lacking, perhaps when they deliver the goods they have produced, in order to save time. After all, it’s not as if they buy a lot of things. The only packaged food they buy is pasta, but they are not as concerned about the brand as people in the city because they don’t see as much advertising. They take what they find, according to the saying, “It’s good, it’s good, and that’s enough” (l’è bon, l’è bon, basta).20 And in this organizational setup of household and work, everyone gives a hand in everything. The mother works a great deal in the factory, and the father and the sons do chores in the house and know how to cook.

In point of fact, there is some fun on Sundays. At midday, when the factory is closed, Dario’s family eats out in one of the local trattorias. There aren’t any luxury restaurants and they eat local traditional dishes, but it is a form of amusement and pampering so indispensable that everyone does it, even the workers. After all, for the poorest there are few other distractions—the bar on weekend evenings for the men; a cake, such as a small sweet focaccia, before going to bed for the others.

Here, therefore, modern industrial growth open to globalization developed on top of frugal and hard-working peasant forms and habits of life. The strong sense of belonging at a local level here will engender a desire for autonomy and independence, which will soon take a political form. Furthermore, the widespread industrialization here will attract marked immigration, which will have a profound impact. And in a few decades, this region, one of the poorest areas in Italy, will transform itself into one of the richest.

Perhaps Dario is thinking about all this, about the future challenges he will have to face as the third generation in the family business (new international
markets, creative modifications of the relationship between tradition and innovation, checking the quality of work in his shop, marketing, and communications), while his mother quickly puts things into the dishwasher “Dai, andemo ostrega!” (Come on, let’s get a move on, for goodness’ sake!). Or perhaps he is only thinking about the work he has to do today.

EATING AT HOME

One of the things one immediately notices is the transformation of the kitchen. The kitchen of the 1960s was ideally the so-called American kitchen (or at least a small modern kitchen), a place characterized by technology, white, very clean and tidy, almost a laboratory for preparing food. Then things changed. As early as the 1970s, there was a revival in the use of wood for kitchen furniture instead of metal and plastic (interpreted by some as a reassuring reply to social and political tensions outside the home). Then, in the 1980s, the kitchen also changed structurally. Apart from the triangular kitchens and the fitted ones placed lengthways along a wall, there were also those structured like islands or peninsulas, where the elements were detached, clearly visible, and permitted an optimal utilization of available space. Here one could prepare food and eat together. The kitchen was no longer hidden from view and became a social space like the rest of the house, accentuating a tendency already referred to. It was the period of the big kitchen, with luxurious materials and finish, aesthetically sophisticated (perhaps the work of a well-known designer) and for the first time colored, real status symbols for homeowners and places which bore witness to the affluence that had been achieved (like Dario’s kitchen). In other words, there was a transition from the kitchen-cum-laboratory of the 1960s (which showed the fascination of science and technology in an age confident about the future, attracted to science fiction and voyages into space) to a kitchen-cum-environment (typical of an age that witnessed a return to private life and celebrated the achievement of individual wealth by ostentatiously displaying an abundance of symbolic objects for the home). The trend which had emerged in the postwar period therefore reached its high point. There was a change in one of the most important cultural divisions of the home between public spaces (those for socializing, that is, entrance halls, corridors, drawing rooms, and living rooms) and private ones (like the kitchen, bathroom, and bedrooms), which Simon Schama and Pierre Bourdieu have discussed. The kitchen made the leap and undoubtedly became a public space even in the most elegant homes. After all, it was the cultural basis itself of this division, which was being called into question (as was also happening to the one between male and female spaces). Barriers were falling, spaces were opening up, the whole house was becoming “open.” (This was also a sign of the spatial, social, and cultural mobility that was making headway in the affluent society more generally.)

Naturally, the new kitchens also included technology, but it was adopted at a slower pace. In Italian families, the dishwasher spread slowly, after an initial
boom. This was also partly because for many years the models were costly and noisy. Dario’s kitchen is a bit of an exception. As late as the 1980s, only 12 to 13 percent of homes had a dishwasher, a level that would only rise to 31 percent by 2005. In fact, consumption levels of this durable good were so low that the main producers decided it was necessary to promote a joint advertising campaign. The same fate awaited another “new” household electrical appliance, the freezer, because of consumer resistance to frozen foods as well as space constraints. There was an interesting advancement in cooking in the 1980s. Apart from the traditional gas stoves (which increasingly used methane sourced through complex supply chains that even extended as far as Siberia), there were also electric glass-ceramic cooktops, on which one could use non-stick pans (lined with Teflon patented by DuPont) or even glass pans (which were attractive but increased heat dissipation). In many ways, however, the most interesting household device was the microwave oven, which was capable of heating and cooking food in a very short time, thanks to the emission of high frequency electromagnetic waves, which move the water molecules in food, thus causing heat. Not surprisingly, this appliance’s origins lay in a completely different field, the military, and were linked to the development of radars. Such a radical innovation—a real triumph of rapid cooking and ready-made dishes—would only spread selectively in subsequent decades. In other words, in those years technological features were less marked than social and symbolic ones in the process of “re-centralizing” the kitchen.

The new affluence and sociocultural changes of the time also impacted various other characteristics of the meal—perhaps being eaten while listening to Michael Jackson’s *Thriller*. Let’s take a typical meal from 1985, when average expenditures on food accounted for 28 percent of consumer spending (down from 34 percent in 1975 and 32 percent in 1980, always decreasing, until it reached 23 percent in 1990). As has been seen, it was a rich and varied meal (with an average of 3,177 calories, a little less than the peak values of the early 1970s). Compared to fifteen years earlier, the consumption of many products was constant or showed a slight increase, but there were two categories of food that saw marked growth. The first, mentioned above, was meat—but not all types of meat. Beef consumption rose until the early 1970s, when it reached 26 kilograms per capita and then stabilized. Instead there was a great increase in pork consumption (rising from 12 to 24 kilograms per capita between 1971 and 1985), the “white” meat of chickens, turkeys, and rabbits (climbing from 18 to 27 kilograms per capita in the same time period), whereas lamb and goat’s meat remained marginal (around 1 kilogram per capita). And consumption remained higher in the North and Center than in the South or in Sardinia and Sicily, even if with fewer differences than previously. This trend is interesting because it reveals a growing desire among consumers at the time to eat different types of meat, considering the nutritional and dietary values, but also price levels, which were decidedly favorable for white meat. (To a certain extent, Italian consumers began eating meat later than in other countries and they decidedly
preferred the more expensive and superior cuts; moreover the price of beef had gone up very rapidly within a decade.) Incidentally, the country’s trade balance benefited from the increasing desirability of white meat, seeing that between 30 and 40 percent of beef and pork supplies were imported. In sum, Italians consumed more meat and in greater variety, while being careful about its cost.

The other culinary protagonists of the time were dairy products. From 1971 to 1985, there was a constant increase in the consumption of milk—available in the convenient Tetra Pak carton—and its derivatives (from 70 to 85 kilograms per capita). Within this sector, cheese consumption also increased (from 11 to 16 kilograms per capita), whereas butter consumption remained stationary at 2 kilograms per head.\(^{27}\) This trend reflected growth in the milk and dairy sector, the most important in the food industry. Of course, industrially produced cheeses from established brands were nothing new. Besides the pioneering Galbani bel paese cheese, which had an image of Italy on its packaging, there was also Galbanino with its small cheeses and cheese spreads (which also gave us Ercolino, a rubber puppet who resembled the actor Paolo Panelli), and products by Invernizzi (which in another successful gimmick Mucca Carolina [Cow Caroline] advertised), Locatelli cheeses (like the small Mio), and so on. But the growth was also due to “new” products, starting with mozzarella, first industrially produced by Galbani with Santa Lucia in 1956, followed shortly afterward by Pizzaiola Locatelli. These new cheeses were intended for mass consumption. They aimed at lightness and freshness, had a relatively delicate flavor to adapt themselves to everyone’s palette, and guaranteed a high standard of hygiene. The same happened to cream, which became the most fashionable sauce for tortellini, fettucine, farfalle, and chicken breasts—by itself or with salmon, peas, ham, or so many other things. Such changes reflected consumers’ search for novelty (and ease of preparation) in cuisine.\(^{28}\)

However, the prize for growth in this sector went to another product, yogurt. There was Yomo Granarolo yogurt for children (as suggested in a 1983 television commercial), low-fat yogurt with fruit from Danone, Kyr Parmalat as loved by teenagers on scooters (according to a 1986 television commercial), and all the others. There was even a 1987 “telepathic” advertisement for Yomo yogurt with the comedian Beppe Grillo. His face stood out against a dark background as he looked intently in silence at the spectators for twenty seconds and then with a sneer said, “Try and go out and buy something else now.” The commercial ended with the name of the product. Yogurt’s success in the 1980s was very typical, even if it was in no way a new product. On the contrary, it was one of the oldest. Perhaps already known in prehistoric times and certainly referred to in old Arab recipe books as acidic or fermented milk, it was an established tradition in the Near East. (The term derives from the Turkish yoğurt.) It was introduced into Europe in the nineteenth century by the Russian biologist Ilya Mechnikov (a 1908 Nobel Prize Winner) of the Pasteur Institute of Paris, who had succeeded in isolating some of the bacteria responsible for fermentation (in particular the
Bulgarian strain). His collaboration with Isaac Carasso led to the creation of the Danone Company in Barcelona in 1919. Thus, the spread of yogurt took place mainly on a health basis as a depurative. The situation was very different in the 1980s, when a new demand for light, low-fat, healthy foods made this product prominent again under strong pressure from the food industry, this time for its dietary value. And it was a slightly different product from the one that had always been used in Middle Eastern kitchens. There it was dense, with a marked flavor and strong acidity; it was generally used to prepare sour sauces and as a condiment. In Italy, and in the West generally, by contrast, yogurt entered dietary patterns with another function—not as an ingredient for preparing dishes but as an autonomous food to be eaten at breakfast or as a snack. Thus, it acquired the characteristics typical of these dietary intermezzos, becoming delicate, light, almost a dessert, and offered mostly in individual packages for immediate consumption. In other words, yogurt represented another example of dietary assimilation and transformation.29

Moreover, there was also French influence.30 Like in that country, higher incomes in Italy permitted the rediscovery of traditional local cheeses with strong and characteristic flavors once reserved for the desserts of the upper classes (or in their poorer iterations as a complete meal for the poor, above all in the Alpine valleys or among the shepherds of the South). And Italy has a truly rich tradition in this field. There are the semi-hard cheeses like fontina valdostana and bitto (the latter made in Lombardy, also the home of fresh mascarpone, crescenza, and spicy “blue” gorgonzola). And then there are hard cheeses such as Spressa delle Giudicarie from Trento, asiago from Veneto, malga from Friuli, the Ligurian toma cheeses from Brigasca sheep, and the famous Parmigiano Reggiano—all made to last a long time and easily transportable to markets far from their places of production. There are also many fresh cheeses like robiola from Piedmont (a veritable paradise of cheeses, including the toma, bra, and paglierina categories). Central Italy, by contrast, is the kingdom of pecorini (cheeses made from ewe’s milk) of all types: There is an abundance in Tuscany (Tuscan, Siensese, Garfagnino, and mountain pecorini, not to mention cow and sheep caciotte), Umbria (pecorino from Norcia), the Marches (pecorino from the Sibillini Mountains), Abruzzo and Molise (from Matese, Parco, and Sannio, in addition to the typical formaggella cheeses), and naturally Latium, which also has a fresh ricotta. Campania is obviously famous for its stretched-curd cheeses—mozzarella, bocconcini, provolone, and scamorze (from cow and buffalo milk). There is also burrata from Apulia, burrino and cacicavallo from Basilicata, caprino (made of goat’s milk) from Aspromonte in Calabria, Sicilian vastedda and maiorchino, and finally the acclaimed pecorini, fresa, and fiore from Sardinia.31 Italy enjoys a truly wonderful variety of traditional cheeses. (In all, some three hundred different types have been identified.) Eating them became a way of rediscovering regions and their particular characteristics. The old proverb from Milan (and the Veneto region) seemed to have come true for everyone: “The palate isn’t tired until it tastes the cow” (La bocca l’è minga stracca se la sa no de vacca).32
So far we have spoken about the kitchen and the food people consumed. Social changes in the 1970s and 1980s also influenced how people ate. Even the least shrewd of spectators could not fail to be amazed by the social mixing, the rise of the new rich, and the changes in social hierarchies. Barriers and social gulfs that had once seemed insurmountable disappeared or were diminished. The concept of “authority” (once linked simply to social or professional position) changed, becoming something that everyone had to gain personally. Moreover, women—aided by feminism—claimed a role outside the family in the workplace and in society. The first consequence of this reduced social rigidity was a less formal attitude, more relaxed and casual. Hence, even *il galateo*, that is, protocol or etiquette, “the cornerstone of seemingly insurmountable class hierarchies,” lost its cultural significance. The journalist Brunella Gasperini, a brilliant contributor throughout her life to the weekly magazine *Annabella*, declared in a 1975 book the end of galateo:

More than a book of etiquette, this could be described as a book of counter-etiquette. In fact, traditional etiquette is an anachronism today, a corroded superstructure that can no longer stand the pressures of our quick and practical times.

The word itself, *galateo*, makes one think of a sort of stereotyped choreography, a set of fixed rules, obligatory steps, ready-made phrases, and ritualized gestures devoid of any vitality or authentic meaning nowadays. The rhythm, the spirit, the contemporary circumstances under which we live call for very different things such as flexibility, candor, common sense, a critical attitude, or irony.

And yet the lovers of *galateo* for its own sake survive, and how! Out of laziness, habit, reticence, or who knows what other reasons, many of our contemporaries proudly display the remains of that beautiful little corpse that is *galateo* today—perhaps with the illusion of seeming like gentlemen while not being such in any way.33

How far from the prince of *The Leopard*, who had asserted his social supremacy through his knowledge of the social rules! Better than many other descriptions of the perceived cultural demise of etiquette, Gasperini’s illustrated the depth of the changes that were occurring. The formal rules of etiquette were replaced by common sense, spontaneity, and humor (everyone’s heritage) in the best cases, and an almost total lack of politeness in the worst. Obviously this development did not mean that differences in economic, social, and cultural capital had disappeared, simply that they now manifested themselves in diverse, more subtle ways. (Tastes and symbolic skills—which structure a social habitus—remained, but their “visibility” changed, as Bourdieu would say.) It is also true that a certain interest in galateo never disappeared completely. This is borne out by the success of *Bon Ton* (1982) by Lina Sotis, a caustic and effective journalist of the newspaper *Corriere della Sera*. Of the nouveaux riches, she wrote, “Spend a lot of time with them, [and] they will make you feel superior.”34 In some ways,
Sotis was heir to the verve of Irene Brin, a journalist at Longanesi’s prewar Omnibus and also an expert on good manners. Nor was it a coincidence that Sotis devoted one of the longest sections of her book specifically to meals. But things had changed since Gasperini published her book on “counter-etiquette.” Perhaps good manners were necessary to show off, achieve career advancement, and present oneself appropriately in certain situations, above all in the 1980s.35

In any case, to return to the impact of all this on meals, it was obvious that behavior was more relaxed, and that—because of the new rhythms of work imposed on women too—there were more informal ways of eating and drinking. Besides the cocktail parties and buffets, there were late-night spaghetti meals, frequent snacks, and quick meals. There was often a destructuring of the traditional meal (hors d’oeuvres, first and second courses, dessert) and its contraction and simplification (a main dish, two at the most). Freedom and informality influenced both the ways of eating and the structure of the meals. If the old proverb warned, “Speak as you eat,” meaning implicitly that eating was the best indication of one’s social position, then, during the period under consideration, things changed considerably—with important consequences.

**Eating Out**

The foregoing brings us to another central point, where one ate. Working, studying, and moving about in the affluent society increasingly meant having to eat out. One ate in company canteens, school cafeterias, bars, restaurants, and pizzerias. In 1988, it was estimated that about a quarter of expenditures on food was linked with eating out (a partial change for a country like Italy). In fact, for the first time, over 17 percent of people considered supper the main meal, not lunch.36 Within a heterogeneous European framework, therefore, the tendency in Italy was to eat out more. In the Mediterranean countries (starting with Spain, Italy, and France), which were characterized by high food consumption regardless of the standard of living, eating at home predominated, albeit with very high expenses for eating out. The amount of money spent on food consumption in and above all outside the home relative to incomes were below the European average in the rich countries of Central Europe. The English-speaking countries occupied an intermediate position; their consumption at home and outside the home were almost equal, with a clear effect of substitution. Finally, in the countries of Eastern Europe food consumption was reduced and concentrated in the home (Table 7). So, as regards total food consumption, Germany came before Italy, France, the United Kingdom, and Spain; in terms of percentage of extra-domestic consumption, on the other hand, Ireland preceded Spain and the United Kingdom. Income levels and different cultural traditions combined to create a varied overall picture.37

Returning to Italy, if the presence of collective catering was certainly not new, as we have seen, the widespread habit of eating in restaurants was partly a novelty—at least for a broad segment of the population. If there is a common
thread uniting all the meals described so far in this book, it is the social value for the family of that moment of conviviality when people sat down to eat. Participating in the ritual of sharing food means being part of the family or the family group. This is naturally an aspect common to many cultures, but to different extents. For example, Mary Douglas reminds us that the complexity of the social interactions associated with “eating together” is variable, as has been shown by a comparative study of different ethnic groups living in the United States. On the main holidays of the Italian families, invitations were extended predominantly to relatives. In other communities, for example, in that of the Oglala Lakota (or Sioux), invitations were generally open to members of the community, that is, they were extended on a territorial basis rather than on one of kinship. In both cases, the degree of participation (rate of acceptances) was very high since such meals afforded opportunities to talk about the culture and religious practices where they came from, and the processes of assimilation (in the case of the Italian-Americans), or about their original culture, the scant appreciation for people of mixed race, and contempt for the whites (in the case of the Oglala). In some white communities in North Carolina, occasions like religious holidays also provided opportunities for celebrations, perhaps including invitations to the neighbors, but apparently with lower rates of participation. The high degree of selectivity and the intensive level of social and cultural interrelations among the Italians can therefore explain the particular significance of the convivial hour. And precisely these characteristics suggest why—following the pressures toward a more “inclusive” socialization typical of the culture of the 1970s (when the young increasingly met to have a sandwich and a beer in “alternative” venues talking with great commitment about politics)—eating out (away from family and home) took on a particular significance. It represented for many the desire to evade rituals felt to be too restrictive and traditional, and to find new social relationships, new forms of socialization among friends, new experiences.

The most typical case was that of the young. Here, there was an especially enlightening phenomenon. Anyone walking calmly through the center of Milan in the early 1980s would have seen groups of boys and girls all dressed in the same way and certainly wearing designer clothes (Armani or Americanino jeans, Best Company sweatshirts, El Charro belts, Moncler parkas, Timberland boots). Their meeting places were bars, starting with the historic Al Panino, later replaced by Burghy in the Piazza San Babila. These young people quickly ate a sandwich, went to discos, rode motorbikes (perhaps Zündapp, Cagiva, or Enduro), listened to music, and talked among themselves (but a passerby wouldn’t have understood much: “I’m out for that bird… Let’s gobble up the sandwiches… too good… careful, the leftists are coming”). However, the puzzled passerby would have noticed how all their attention was focused on designer consumer objects, enjoyment, the pleasure of being together—none of the political passion that until a short time earlier had overwhelmed the young to such an extent that they had fought each other, and precisely in those same places. These young people
tangibly manifested the change in culture and habits that had occurred in a very short time. In other words, they represented the desire of a new generation to cast aside commitment, politics, and problems in order to enjoy life in terms of consumer goods—first and foremost those of American origin. (Not by chance did the Italian company Burghy offer fast food, including hamburgers and French fries, just like in the United States.) And certainly these young people belonged to the upper middle class, judging by the products they could afford (woe to those who wore fake designer clothes, for they would be marked as bumpkins and be excluded forever). In short, our passerby had come across the so-called paninari (that is, panini or fast food eaters), bands of young people that became well known and widely imitated (they spread to other Italian cities, even if with some variations).

Enzo Braschi, a comedian in the very popular television program Drive In on the Italia 1 channel (which presented the first veline or TV showgirls, called the “fast food” girls) impersonated a popular paninaro (there was also a film made by the Vanzina brothers called Italian Fast Food). While visiting Milan, one of the most famous pop groups of the time, the Pet Shop Boys, dedicated a song, Paninaro, to these young people which summed them up very well: “Paninaro, Paninaro, oh oh oh / Food, cars, travel, food, cars, travel, travel.” Mobility and consumption were what mattered, fashionable consumption, embodied in an iconic American city and in the products of stylish Italian design. “New York, New York, New York /.../ Armani, Armani, A-A-Armani, Versace, Cinque...”

A small revolution had taken place, and specifically under the banner of eating out, or rather, of hanging out in fast food joints, which already had a public before the Italian launch of McDonald’s. Without forgetting that sandwiches, focaccia bread, and small pizzas had been served up quickly in Italian bars for a long time. At this point a small mystery presents itself: When the American company opened its first establishments in Italy (particularly the one in Rome in 1986 on the Piazza di Spagna), why did it provoke violent protests in the newspapers, demonstrations in the streets, and the mobilization of various associations in defense of Italian food, including a Piedmontese one that was destined to become famous (Slow Food)?

In order to explain this mysterious episode, we have to take a brief step back and say something about the history of Burghy. In 1982, GS Supermarkets, publicly owned together with the SME Group, launched an initiative to create an Italian fast food chain, starting in Milan. The venues were very similar to those on the other side of the Atlantic, and the menus even more so (with Big Burghy, Cheeseburger, King Bacon, King Fish, King Cheese, King Chicken, Hamburger, chicken nuggets, fries, and fresh salads as well as banana, strawberry, and chocolate milk shakes). In 1985, with six restaurants, Burghy was sold to the Modena group Cremonini, one of the main meat producers in the country, and from here the chain spread rapidly (absorbing among others the premises of some competitors, including those of the American chain Wendy’s, and heedless of other similar rivals, like the Franco-Belgian Quick, the European pioneer in the fast food sector). Within about
ten years, the Burghy had ninety-six restaurants, mainly in Northern and Central Italy, whereas McDonald’s only had thirty-eight in approximately the same period with revenues only half those of Burghy’s, partly because of bureaucratic difficulties in obtaining licenses to open further establishments. But in 1996 the “meat king” Luigi Cremonini, at the head of the country’s main group of slaughterhouses and supplier of the Italian State Railways and the Airports of Rome, found himself exposed financially and facing one of the world’s great food giants. There was no contest. Cremonini sold about eighty of his restaurants to McDonald’s for a high price and with a contract to supply meat to all the Italian McDonald’s venues. Mario Resca, the new managing director of the American group in Italy, could thus consolidate a small empire under an Italo-American flag.41

In other words, contrary to many subsequent reconstructions, McDonald’s did not bring “American fast food” to Italy. The initiative came from an Italian group and was successful. Now let’s return to our mystery. Why was there such a strong defensive reaction against the first McDonald’s restaurants in 1986? Probably the arrival of the American company set in motion a series of developments: an anti-American ideology fueled in part by the press (with McDonald’s replacing the symbolic significance held by Coca Cola in the postwar period), a fear of corporations by small businessmen and shopkeepers facing a global giant, and a byzantine Italian bureaucracy. But there was also the beginning of a new food culture and a new regional consciousness, both of which were starting to express themselves not only privately but also in the public sphere. And then there was insufficient appreciation of the symbolic structuring of urban space, that is, of the importance of monuments and historical spaces in the Italian national identity, which project enormous cultural and symbolic value onto certain places. Opening a foreign fast food venue in one of the most beautiful squares in Rome, near Bernini’s Barcaccia and the Church of Trinità dei Monti, seemed an outright cultural provocation. The same thing happened in Milan in 1992, when McDonald’s tried to enter its prestigious galleria, “Milan’s salon” (it succeeded a few years later, by taking over Burghy’s venue there). And the story subsequently repeated itself, for example, in the Piazza dei Miracoli in Pisa. But there were no protests for the opening of its stores in “plebian” and very busy places like train stations nor when Italian companies set up similar venues in historic centers. In short, the answer to our mystery seems to have been an underestimation of symbolic urban geography as part of the country’s identity. But there was also something else going on. Fast food establishments in Italy were successful because a young upper-middle-class subculture created very different conditions, at least at the outset, from the American fast food model. The latter offered a typical national meal (hamburger, French fries, and Coca Cola) to a heterogeneous public, to families and those who had little time and didn’t want to spend too much. By contrast, fast food restaurants in Italy served as permanent meeting places for the young, who ate sitting inside, but also stationed themselves outside for hours, contrary to the very philosophy of a quick meal, eaten in a few minutes
while standing, or often taken out. Subsequently things would change, but at the time this episode represented yet another instance of the assimilation and cultural transformation of a dietary model.

Naturally not everyone liked hamburgers. Certainly not the paninari’s parents (whose kids called them sapiens or “wise ones”). By then, as with other consumer goods, there was food for youth and food for adults, each kind very different in quality, quantity, and above all style. For the adults there was still a dense network of restaurants and other eateries, although it was undergoing significant transformation. Starting from the urban areas, consumer demand drove some of the typical popular venues, like the trattorias and even the inns, wine shops, and taverns, to transform themselves into middlebrow restaurants. Their former function was taken over by other low-cost places, like the fast food venues and pizzerias, by then well established throughout Italy. For those who nostalgically remembered the years of political engagement, the 1970s, there were also the Feste dell’Unità, celebrations organized by the Italian Communist Party, preferably those in Emilia-Romagna, popular carnivals based on political discussions, dances, socializing, and varied menus with sausages, grilled meats, horseshoe-shaped salamis, wine, and many other things at low cost.

For the more sophisticated upper classes, those most directly affected by the new affluence, there were increasing numbers of haute cuisine restaurants, which drew inspiration from the latest fashion in France, nouvelle cuisine. After decades of almost maniacal attention to the perfect replication of the monument represented by Escoffier’s cuisine classique, French chefs began to cook and present dishes in a new way, which then also met with success in Italy. In effect, the dishes were minimalistic, more delicate, and lighter. Emphasizing quick cooking and crisp flavors, they were more concerned with enhancing the natural taste of the ingredients than with covering it up. The quantities served were smaller, but great attention was paid to the aesthetic preparation. In short, the established tradition was abandoned and new recipes, flavors, and combinations were attempted.42 If in France the leading figures of this new approach were Paul Bocuse, Michel Guérard, and the Troisgros brothers, in Italy the undisputed master of this new fashion was Gualtiero Marchesi. After working briefly in France, this son of hoteliers and restaurateurs returned to Milan in 1977 to open his own restaurant, which after a year attained a star in the Michelin Guide. By 1985, it obtained the sought-after three-star rating in Michelin (the first in Italy) and became a reference point for the new national restaurant industry (his riso e oro [rice and gold] became famous—risotto seasoned with saffron served on a large black plate with a gold leaf in the center). It is not difficult to understand the success of this type of restaurant. It combined an obsessive search for quality and refinement in the ingredients (well suited to demanding and sophisticated consumers), pleasure in experimenting and seeking something new (appreciated, as it was in tune with the spirit of the times), concern with aesthetics and luxury both in the presentation of the dishes and in the furnishing of the restaurants themselves (a sign of the affluence achieved), and finally new
delicate, light, and “creative” flavors (valued by people attentive to food and its changing fashions).

In short, both in the home and outside it, the way people ate and the food they consumed reflected a profoundly changed society. These changes manifested themselves equally in junk food, like the kind immortalized by the photographer Martin Parr of the Magnum Agency (little cakes with faces, highly colored lollipops, over-cooked French fries, geometrically arranged sausages), and in very refined gastronomic-artistic creations.

**THE BODY (PUTTING ON WEIGHT AND LOSING IT)**

When, in 1862, the philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach published his work *The Mystery of Sacrifice or Man Is What He Eats*, he wanted to discuss the unity of body and soul from a materialistic point of view—and perhaps also indulge in an amusing play on words, seeing that the last part of the title in German reads, *der Mensch ist, was er ißt*, and the verbs *ist* (is) and *ißt* (eats) are homophones. Undoubtedly, he had no idea that his subtitle would become an annoying catchphrase in subsequent decades, into our own times. Certainly it was not a new idea and, remaining among philosophers, the food–body link had been theorized much earlier, starting with the (vegetarian) Pythagoreans of Ancient Greece. In any case this food–body relationship could easily be inferred from daily observation, and soon the scientists added their analyses regarding not only specific individuals but the human species. Take, for instance, findings about the enormous consequences of the dietary revolution of our hunter–gatherer Paleolithic ancestors, when they became settled farmers in the Neolithic Age. Today their move from meat and vegetables to cereals is far from being seen as a linear improvement (in terms of height, disease, and so on). Instead it is understood as a consequence of climate and a sedentary lifestyle. Moreover, even the ways people ate would have changed us profoundly. The anthropologists Leslie Aiello and Peter Wheeler have asked how human beings developed such a large brain over the last two million years, bearing in mind that it is an organ requiring a very great and continuous energy intake. Their hypothesis is that there was a co-evolution that permitted an increase in the brain’s size and a parallel reduction in that of the gastrointestinal tract (which presides over a metabolic process just as costly). In other words, the use of energy foods, easy to digest, perhaps cooked or already fermented, would have permitted a saving of energy, which could then be conveyed to the brain (if only Feuerbach had known this...).43

In any case, to return to the 1980s, the food–body link was on the minds of consumers no longer worried about the scarcity of food or the absence of meat, let alone the diets of our Neolithic ancestors. Now consumers focused on being beautiful, being thin. We have seen how in the public discussion of the 1960s the diet–health link had prevailed thanks to the spread of nutritional theories. In the 1980s, a third factor was added to public discussions about the body—its aesthetic appearance. Food came to be seen as the key not only to health but also to beauty. And that beauty ideal entailed a youthful
body, healthy, attractive, and thin. That said, identifying a diet–health–beauty nexus was one thing, but why did the aesthetic canons insist on thinness? Why was a slender body considered beautiful?45

In order to find a preliminary answer we can look at the models of beauty, above all feminine, proposed by the mass media. The clash between the thin “crisis-woman” of Hollywood films (according to Fascist propaganda) and the flourishing woman promoted by the regime in the 1930s was followed in the postwar period by a flourishing beauty, almost “rural,” which had as its main exponents actresses such as Silvana Mangano, Gina Lollobrigida, and Sophia Loren.46 Their figures reinforced a “Mediterranean” feminine image which played an important role both in Italy and internationally. It was a time in which optimism, hope, and the promise of affluence were ascendant, and the curvaceous actresses of the 1950s seemed to embody this spirit. Later doubts and uncertainty arose in the face of nonconformist actresses like Claudia Cardinale and Ornella Muti, until the new media and other stakeholders began to propose their models of femininity. Above all, fashion asserted itself from the pages of highly regarded magazines like *Vogue*, proffering thin, frequently teenage pinups, whose prototype was Twiggy (the aptly named English model who at sixteen stood 171 centimeters and weighed 41 kilograms, or just over 5 feet 7 inches and 90 pounds). In the 1970s and above all in the 1980s, aided by the overwhelming success of Italian fashion (with its fashion shows and its media and advertising presence), the supermodel became the new icon of feminine beauty, with her basically Northern European aseptic appeal and her elegant, very tall, very thin figure. The fashion model became a model for all women. She was a model, as Stephen Gundle has noted, who definitively shifted traditional attention from a woman’s “beautiful face” (and subsequently from the “beautiful legs” of the girls in the beauty contests) to the whole body.47 She was a model, finally, whose dominance the media projected at an international level (with local exceptions, naturally: in Italy, for example, with the reproposal of the buxom showgirl from the old variety shows in a sexy version on popular television programs). Therefore, precisely in the era of affluence, when the abundance of food was a reality for everyone, the thin body (for women in particular, and gradually for men too) assumed central importance in the media narrative of a “dream” of bodily perfection. However, it was a dream, as has been said, not shared by cultures in which fat is beautiful and a sign of power, strength, or fertility. Take, for example, Pacific islands like Hawaii, Tahiti, and Nauru or Central African countries like Nigeria. In the last of these, among the Annang, pubescent girls are shut in the “houses to put on weight” and prepare for marriage. And elsewhere steatopygia (a lot of fat on the buttocks) was a sign of beauty and femininity, as among the Onge of the Andaman Islands in the Indian Ocean.48

In Europe, the cultural significance of the body’s shape can be traced very far back in history. If it is true that in a not too remote past widespread poverty and food scarcity meant that fat was synonymous with wealth and power, and thus was equated with beauty, among the élites a slender figure
was appreciated, above all in young women. (One just has to visit a museum and observe the portraits from the Renaissance onward.) Moreover, for men the functional benefits of thinness had always been recognized because of men’s need to carry out military and other physical tasks. Nor should we forget the religious proscription of gluttony, which necessitated fasting or at least moderation in eating, to say nothing of the growing role played by the above-mentioned experts’ advice in the nutritional and medical fields. But there is another important aspect to be borne in mind, which we could call the “disciplining of the body.” In the time of the medieval anorexic saints, controlling passion and desire took the form of severe control over one’s own body through fasting carried to extremes in a renunciation of materialism in the name of asceticism. Perhaps this behavior also represented a rejection of the mechanisms of power and of the external world. This was an explanation put forward by Caroline Bynum for the medieval saints, but it is very similar to the diagnoses of various cases of anorexia by doctors today. The disciplining of the body continued in various forms and broke out sensationally in the nineteenth century with the adoption of a very tight corset, a harmful device of rods and laces that afforded its wearer a slender figure and a very thin waist at the cost of serious physical problems and difficulty in breathing and moving. And yet all upper-middle-class women wore one for decades. Nowadays, the socially valued slender figure is attained through diet and exercise, which represents a certain continuity with the past, inasmuch as these practices show how monitoring and disciplining our bodies (the basis of our being in the world) are not only accepted, but self-imposed, as Bryan Turner has observed. Therefore, disciplining and molding the body in accordance with the cultural rules led to a docile body and were among the main mechanisms through which power was exercised (it is not by chance that it is stronger in the case of women). Hence the unreserved condemnation of bulimia, the transgression par excellence in controlling one’s appetites.

All this is certainly interesting, but it still does not really answer our question. Because if the mass media tends to create an identification between representation and reality (a radical interpreter of modernity like Jean Baudrillard would say that representation precedes and creates reality itself), it does not mean that things actually work out like that. In fact, it is also important to consider the hard facts. In this instance, how have the weight and the height of Italians evolved over time? Since the 1970s, the most common indicator for measuring body mass has been the BMI (Body Mass Index, namely a person’s weight divided by his or her height squared) because measuring only the weight without taking into account the height could produce misleading results. For example, in Italy the average height of conscripts in 1874 was 5 feet 4 inches (162.2 centimeters), one of the lowest values in Europe; in 1996, it reached 5 feet 8 inches (174.4 centimeters) (in 2006, in Italy, the average value for men was just under 5 feet 9 inches and for women 5 feet 5 inches, or 175 and 165 centimeters respectively). If height is certainly to a great extent a genetic characteristic, it is also true that it is influenced by environmental factors. Thus, it is possible to attribute the increase in height to a
higher standard of living, a more varied diet, better health care, the absence of diseases, and so on. Not surprisingly, the period of most rapid growth in average heights in Italy was approximately between 1950 and 1960. By contrast, as the supposed physical limitations of such increases were approached in the 1990s, there was a relative slowing down, beginning in the northern regions (and evincing a trend similar to elsewhere in Europe).55

If affluence (and above all diet) influences height, this applies even more to weight. A global investigation showed that between 1980 and 2008 BMI increased steadily throughout the world every decade by 400 grams for men and 500 for women. The greatest increase was in the Nauru and Cook islands of Oceania and, among the rich countries, in the United States, with a significant increase in the percentage of obese people. And in Italy? The results may seem surprising, but the overall pattern proved to be incredibly stable in the period under consideration. The increase in Italian men’s BMI was among the lowest in high-income countries, 300 to 400 grams per square meter per decade (a level similar to that of Brunei, Switzerland, and France). Italian women’s BMI underwent a decrease of 100 to 200 grams (the only women to lose weight among the rich countries, apart from Singapore). As regards thinness, in absolute terms, Italian women are second only to Swiss women (whereas the thinnest women in the world are in East Asia). Therefore, despite 9 percent of the population being obese (a growing figure, however), the majority of Italians have a normal weight, with the remaining percentage a little overweight, above all among men. (Those who are underweight comprise only 3 to 4 percent of the population.)56 Therefore, an initial conclusion is that a basic continuity in dietary patterns, despite a greater tendency to adopt a sedentary lifestyle, permitted men to follow less closely the global trend toward an increase in weight and women to go against it.

Comparing the investigations about weight conducted in the 1960s with those from the 1990s reveals still more about Italians and their eating. The tendency to put on weight was found in particular in the lowest socioeconomic segment and among people with less education (as well as among the elderly, as is natural), with a more accentuated trend among women. In 1960, for example, the average weight of upper-middle-class women was 61 kilograms (134.5 pounds), that of women of a lower class was 63 kilograms (139 pounds). Nevertheless, it was precisely the well-to-do women who were keener on losing weight (27 percent), compared to the lower-middle-class women (20 percent) and those of the working class (22 percent). Weight was higher in Central and Southern Italy than in the North. Finally, the women who were the most dissatisfied with their weight were under twenty-five years old.57

Research carried out by ISTAT in the 1990s shows more or less the same overall picture. Obesity as indicated by BMI increases with age; it was at its height in the South (11 percent) and at its lowest in the Northwest (7 to 8 percent). It was more marked among those who have only completed primary school education (15 percent) and low among those who have a
diploma or a degree (4 to 5 percent). Finally, being underweight occurred primarily among those between eighteen and twenty-four years old with a high school education or better—and these tendencies were much more accentuated in the female population. How can one explain these trends? We have already referred to Bourdieu’s theories about how it could be a question of a different “relationship with the world.” The upper classes accept renouncing pleasures and immediate satisfactions (like those of food and to some extent the erotic ones) to invest in the future, for example, by attaining a socially valued thin body and by using family planning in accordance with a sober lifestyle recognized as typical of the bourgeoisie. By contrast, the lower classes are not prepared to give up immediate satisfactions like the pleasure of food all at once, even if it were possible. And why should they? There is little chance that their sacrifices today will be repaid tomorrow. According to this framework, there are two different ways of relating to life that consumers literally embody. Their shapes include class values, but also those of gender. Thus, there is the delicacy and thinness of normative feminine beauty compared with the normative strength and virility of the male body, and so on. To all this we can add that the long-established food practices so markedly present in Italian culture nurtured a strong interest in these subjects (in particular in the upper classes), favoring the continuation of a healthy and relatively light diet that fit in perfectly with the canons of the media.

All in all, there remains the historic transition of the majority of the Italian population, within a few decades, from a condition of barely sufficient nutrition or malnutrition (with the consequences of deformities, insufficient physical development, vitamin deficiencies, etc.) to a condition of a varied and often overabundant nutrition (with the consequences of new problems like high cholesterol, hypertension, and—in the case of obesity—cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, etc.). In short, there was a transition from the diseases of poverty to those of wealth, from the suffering thinness portrayed in Munch’s Puberty to the overflowing shapes of the women painted by Botero. Today like yesterday, our bodies convey social, cultural, and economic information about us.

**Globalization**

One cannot talk about the period from 1974 to 1993 without taking into account globalization and the enthusiasm it engendered. And one cannot talk about globalization in the early twenty-first century without calling to mind the doubts and criticisms associated with the term. On one thing the two positions agree. Both understand globalization as a process tending toward homogenization, the unprecedented circulation of goods and ideas in the world, westernization, if not exactly Americanization, and consequently a threat to indigenous cultural forms, authentic traditions, and ways of life out of sync with the new supposed uniformity of globalization. Various historians of consumption and food, like Richard Wilk and Frank Trentmann, have
long recognized that there is some, but not much truth in these conceptions of globalization. In fact, over the last twenty years, many scholars have underlined the limits, distinctions, and infinite nuances of this global process to such an extent that for some it makes more sense to talk about globalizations. Furthermore, these processes had totally different outcomes in the world. Rather than imperialistically sweeping away every preceding culinary custom, they generally led to hybrids and mixtures between the old and the new, which were at times truly original (Thai pizzas, Italian sushi, vegetable burgers, traditional meals with Coca Cola, and so on) in a process of hybridization and creolization. At other times globalization’s drives and impulses were appropriated in such a way as to be perfectly integrated in their new environments with little trace of their original “national” characteristics (pizza is a good example of a global food whose flavors and meanings change according to context). Finally there have been cases of outright rejection of “foreign” novelties and of a struggle in the name of local traditions that were rediscovered, revitalized, sometimes also a bit invented. (Symbolically, it was the opening of the first MacDonald’s in Rome that motivated and popularized the Slow Food movement in Italy and beyond.) In short, the global–local relationship proved to be more complex than had been foreseen, and at times it had a more complementary than oppositional function. And we need to keep in mind that, as we have seen in talking about aristocratic meals in the nineteenth century, “local” and “genuine” are highly relative concepts from a historical point of view. After all, food has traveled everywhere and has been copiously traded since the remote past.

In order to clarify matters, we should consider some basic points. What exactly do we mean when we talk about the globalization of food? Are we thinking about particular products? Brands that have disseminated widely throughout the world? Ways of eating? In fact, at times we mean almost all these things combined, so let’s try to make some distinctions. The oldest trading was certainly in agricultural products (raw or semi-processed). Wheat, rice, corn, barley, rye, and the like (the staple or basic foods) all spread into different areas from their original ones during various historical phases. The same happened with many kinds of animals. Later, it was above all luxury goods that traveled (spices, wine, oil, sugar, tea, chocolate, and also drugs like opium), and on which real commercial and political empires were established. Moreover, the arrival of such goods was generally welcomed. Indeed, in times of a widespread lack of variety of foods, this trade was considered an important way of expanding dietary options.

The issue of foods’ origins became important when not just anonymous foods but also brand-name products circulated. Branded goods not only stated who made them, how, and where but also displayed a commercial mark or seal, which could have clear regional or even national connotations. Since brands offered not only quality assurances and information about their producer but also symbolic value as potential status symbols (thus adding value over and above the products’ unbranded counterparts), inevitably consumers attributed marked cultural significance to these goods. As early as the
nineteenth century, various brands of French wines, (from the Bordeaux and Champagne regions, for example) and French and English liquors and spirits (cognac, whisky) were widespread in Italy. In time, the list of brand-name imports to Italy grew (English biscuits, German meat extract, canned goods from various countries, packaged chocolates and cakes, etc.). The national flag was often deliberately displayed by producers, who exploited the cultural image of the country of origin in order to sell more of their products abroad, with consequences that were generally positive, but sometimes negative. An excellent example is Coca Cola in the twentieth century. Perhaps the first global brand, it came to symbolize, with its idealized images of youthful and athletic Americans, the worldwide spread of the American way of life (there were references to “Coca-Colonization”) and as such it was, and still is, both loved and hated. In Italy, for example, Coca Cola began production in 1927 in Rome, gradually opening new plants until 1938, when it was hit by autarchic Fascist measures; it was then relaunched following the Allied landings to immediate and overwhelming success precisely because it symbolized the United States. Finally, from the 1960s onward, Coca Cola was once again opposed on political and trade union grounds (the latest sensational instance was its boycott in various cities on the occasion of the Winter Olympics in Turin in 2006). Yet its broad success in our own time is confirmed by the emergence of knockoffs that both challenge and emulate it—Mecca Cola and Qibla Cola in Europe, for instance, and Zam Zam Cola and Parsi Cola in Muslim countries (produced in Iran). Therefore, even in this case, it is better to talk of an intensification of the globalization process rather than describe it as a new phenomenon.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect is the encounter between new and different so-called ethnic cuisines. Naturally this has been a common occurrence in countries like the United States, which has received migrants from virtually everywhere in the world, and in European countries with a long colonial legacy (the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands). But then something changed in relation to the past. Together with the opening up of the financial markets, the outsourcing of production, and the explosion of new media, there developed a new discourse, namely a narrative that established the canons of generally accepted truths and essentially organized our lives in the world. This new discourse was multiculturalism. Feeling the impact of numerous political and cultural influences (not least those deriving from Cultural Studies, a field that sought to give a voice to the “others,” to subaltern groups, the colonized, women, and ethnic minorities), and benefiting from the end of polarized international relations with the fall of the USSR, a new sensitivity developed that urban dwellers could notice when they passed through streets lined with small shops selling aromatic herbs, canned ethnic foods, and ready-to-eat dishes with unusual shapes and aromas, or when they read menus with exotic and unknown dishes. They were not disturbed by this unfamiliar presence in their daily lives, but instead attracted by a desire to try and get to know different cuisines, to which they accorded the same respect as the cuisine they already knew. This interest in other gastronomies—with their
tableware, languages, flavors, rules, utensils, ways of cooking, drinks, smells, and venues—represented a cross-cultural encounter (apart from stimulating our ability to distinguish between flavors like sweet, salted, acid, bitter, and also umami, the taste of glutamate).66

In Italy, as elsewhere, this new interest was stimulated by two factors. The first was represented by more frequent travel thanks to higher standards of living. The country became much more mobile. During the 1970s and 1980s, the number of train passengers (in millions) increased from 376 to 398 million, those on ships from 26 to 41 million, those on aircraft from 23 to 35 million, while the number of cars leapt from 5 to 23 million.67 Moreover, the destinations of these travelers were often abroad, reflecting consumption patterns more focused on the individual (personal and beauty care, entertainment, culture, and traveling) than on the family, as had previously been the case (home, electrical appliances, the family car). The second factor was the unprecedented change in Italy’s migration balance. Specifically, in 1972–73 it trended slightly positive (more people entered the country than left it), overturning the centuries-old pattern of marked emigration, which had characterized Italy since the mid-nineteenth century. This change represented a small revolution, which as early as the 1980s necessitated the issuing of the first laws (and indemnities) to regularize at least a part of the clandestine flow of immigrants (above all from North Africa, followed by Asia, and Eastern Europe—especially after the first migratory “crisis,” that is, the influx from Albania in the wake of the communist regime’s 1991 collapse). The “others,” the foreigners, had arrived on the doorstep. Even if one had wanted to, one could not ignore them. In 1993, the foreigners resident in Italy were over 570,000 or about 1 percent of the population. And just as Italian immigrants to other countries had done, these immigrants brought with them their own foods and gastronomies, for their own community and also for curious guests. The first foreign restaurants in Italy were Chinese (which continue to be the majority, about 63 percent of the total), followed by other Asian ones, often opening side-by-side with grocery shops. Curiosity, the desire to discover gastronomic and cultural novelties, low prices, and informal settings coincided with the growing tendency among Italians to eat out, thus ensuring fairly good success, from the outset, for these new restaurants in Italy.

Naturally it is possible to observe how these experiences were often “not authentic,” to consider these places as mere simulations of the real thing, inaccurate adaptations to satisfy Western tastes, and even vehicles that reinforced the racial and cultural stereotypes and biases held by their customers.68 But every encounter between cultures is ambiguous and represents a kind of translation, which never completely reflects the original and is inevitably transformed by the cross-cultural contact. Eating Cantonese rice in Civitavecchia, perhaps while watching the big ferries sailing toward Sardinia, is not the same as eating it in Hong Kong while observing the chaotic traffic of boats against the backdrop of Kowloon’s skyscrapers. After all, as Clifford Geertz points out, we are all involved in an exercise of cultural hermeneutics, in which it is not only we who are scrutinizing the other people of a different
culture, but the others who are observing and interpreting us.\textsuperscript{69} And perhaps this type of relationship is well represented by fusion cuisine, which not by accident is also fashionable in Italy. It freely blends diverse ingredients and culinary styles or, in its more moderate versions, uses ingredients from various places in the local gastronomic style. Hence, one can find Cuban chicken or the same meat with chimichurri sauce, opakapaka or onaga fish with hot Oriental spices, tofu with chili and vinegar, tacos filled with Korean kimchi, prawns in peanut sauce in the Cajun style, and so on—in other words, the greatest imagination or confusion, in a combination that can be creatively original or madly chaotic.\textsuperscript{70}

All this talk of different cuisines leads to a fundamental question, which Jack Goody raised when observing that sub-Saharan Africa had not produced any cuisines that have obtained global significance (with the possible exception of Ethiopian food). Why do some countries develop a globally successful gastronomic tradition, perhaps capable of spreading, and many others do not? And why does Italy belong to the first group? A first observation that Goody makes is there is a notable difference between the cuisines of Africa (in particular precolonial sub-Saharan Africa) and those of the great societies of Eurasia. In effect, the absence of a high degree of social stratification, typical of many African peoples, was reflected in the corresponding absence of a hierarchical and formalized cuisine. In such societies, the distinction between the chiefs and the others is more in the quantity of food eaten than in the rules, the quality, and the ways of preparing and consuming it.\textsuperscript{71} According to Michael Freeman, the factors that lead to the creation of an important cuisine are clearly visible, as for example in the development of one of the culinary traditions that has been most widely disseminated in the world, that of the Chinese. Traditionally divided between the North (with goat’s meat, mutton, and spices) and the South (the kingdom of rice, fish, vegetables, and pork), and further into eight regional traditions, Chinese gastronomy began with the Sung dynasty, which restored unity to the empire in 960 C.E. A framework of growing wealth and increasing agricultural production in China led to: (1) the presence of a great variety of ingredients, some local, others imported, which converged on the rich capital (thanks to very active trade); (2) a vast potential market, not limited to royalty and the nobles, but including officials and merchants who were rich and sufficiently curious to try new things (and who therefore played an important role as consumers); (3) the development of what we could describe as a “culture of food,” in which attention was paid to the pleasure of eating, not just the ritualistic and habitual aspects of the meal, as it had been the case before.\textsuperscript{72} This case suggests that it is not enough to create a varied cuisine around a powerful court, as had often happened historically. Let’s consider another paradigmatic case, that of France. If the creation of a national cuisine in that country undisputedly occurred around the court of Versailles, it then developed extensively among the nobility and bourgeoisie, in private palaces and subsequently in public places like hotels and restaurants, giving rise to a literature and a civilization of food that was deeply entangled with such forms of high culture.
as literature, art, and music. We could say that in many cases the formation of a national cuisine was one facet of the creation of a national culture, one of the components of nation-building. It is no coincidence that in recent times we have witnessed the creation of culinary “national traditions” almost everywhere, including in postcolonial African states. The same is true even in contemporary India, a country with very ancient ethnic traditions that link food, religion, medicine, and the social division in castes in complex ways (the majority Hindu religion is not very interested in food in itself). The search is on for a “national” cuisine for the new middle class, as Arjun Appadurai has shown. And what about Italy? There, in contrast to many other countries, especially France, great regional gastronomic traditions emerged, which corresponded with the above-mentioned requirements, but Italian cuisine did not develop around any one court or capital, no single center of power and wealth. This tradition, moreover, gathers elements from both haute cuisine and from more modest customs. In other words, Italy presents an unusual case, one characterized by the combination of many different food cultures in one place (and the whole is other than the sum of the parts).

In any case, to return to globalization, it was these great gastronomies that spread throughout the world, intermingling with the local cuisines and with the contributions of other migrants and travelers. What, at the beginning of “globalization,” had seemed to offer the prospect of modernizing uniformity able to have a strong impact everywhere, has produced a very different result: complicated, full of resistance, breaks, encounters, and clashes—or even simply casual, indifferent contacts. Finally, globalization recalls a lithograph by Maurits Cornelis Escher, *Relativity*, in which various people move about in a vast architectural space linked by long stairways. It is a three-dimensional space that would be impossible in nature because gravity appears to pull from different directions in different parts of the space. There are people cohabiting this space, walking up and down the stairs, strolling about, and sitting. But because “up” and “down” are not the same for all the inhabitants of this common space, they experience it from radically different perspectives. Everyone can see the same things, but they discern different worlds.
“Any arbitrary turning along the way, and I would be elsewhere, I would be different. What are four walls, anyway? They are what they contain. The house protects the dreamer,” thought the American woman writer that Christmas evening, as she got up and looked at the lavishly laid table and her happy guests. She had come a long way to get there. She had left behind her “first” life in San Francisco, where she had been a successful writer and teacher, happy—until her husband had left her, also taking the house, and forcing her to live in a small, depressing furnished flat. Then the unexpected present from her women friends had arrived: a ten-day holiday in Tuscany, to relax and forget everything. She had thought about it for a while, but in the end she had accepted. After a few days in Italy—it still seemed incredible—that impulsive decision to buy an old villa to be renovated right there, in the heart of Tuscany, near Cortona. What madness! But it had been wonderful, everything, renovating the house, working with the Polish laborers, following the love of the youngest of these workmen, Pawel, for Chiara, the neighbors’ daughter. And there was more: learning to cook Italian style, getting to know the country, providing hospitality to her friend Patti who was expecting a baby, having a love story, even if brief, with the very handsome Marcello.

There they all are now, together, reunited, her friends, or rather her new family. There’s the woman neighbor who is observing her little boy with big glasses as he shakes the package he has just been given and her daughter who is waving garlands of flowers; there’s Patti who is embracing her newborn daughter helped by a woman friend; there are also Pawel and Chiara, the newly-weds, who are looking at each other with intimate happiness, as they offer as a present an enormous black hat to their friend;
there’s the affectionate and always helpful Signor Martini. The suffused lights on the walls, and the brighter ones of the candle holder and of the fire in the fireplace illuminate the scene—heighten the soft ochre of the painted walls, the floor-length lavish curtains, the antique furnishings of the house—and are reflected in the large wall mirror, creating a magical atmosphere. On the table covered with a red tablecloth and luxuriously laid, the half-filled wine glasses stand out, in the midst of silver pine cones and Christmas decorations, and plates still full of fruit and a tempting sweet. Around that table there is the joy of a new beginning for virtually everyone, the joy of feeling part of a family.

“Unthinkably good things can happen, even late in the game. It’s such a surprise,” thought the American writer Frances Mayes on that magic Christmas evening in Tuscany, while her new companion, coming up behind her, after having placed a bottle of exquisite wine on the table, affectionately embraced and kissed her, happy to be accompanying her in her “second” life.1

What does this very successful film, Under the Tuscan Sun, which looks at Italy (and its food) from far away, from America—following an equally successful book, among the best-sellers in the United States for two years and translated into fourteen languages—have to tell us? Such success deserves a better explanation than the usual one about starting a new life far away in an exotic place, above all considering the time when the story unfolds. The book dates from 1996 and the film from 2003, that is to say, when the “globalization” process was in full swing. But wasn’t the whole world supposed to become a “global village,” as Marshall McLuhan had predicted, without big differences or surprises, without cultural gaps or different lifestyles? Wasn’t everyone supposed to be immersed in a single current of immediate and standardizing information? Instead this story seems to have captured a different feeling, that of a growing nostalgia for a more authentic lifestyle, in touch with the earth and nature. The film reveals a longing for a life that appreciates cultural differences, artistic peculiarities, and also the cuisine of a specific place—unique, different from all the others, not standardized.

The fact is that at a certain point it began to be obvious that globalization was causing contrasting effects. If on the one hand it tended to produce uniformity and similar lifestyles throughout the planet, on the other hand it could reinforce localism, differences, and particular identities (which recognized themselves as such precisely when they came into contact with standardizing tendencies). Surprisingly, these apparently contradictory consequences of globalization were two sides of the same coin. It turned out that the local arises from the global. Hence, there was the rediscovery of a given locale in all its manifestations—landscape, art, culture, popular traditions, history, and, of course, food. In fact, an additional aspect of the relationship between food and society manifested itself unmistakably in this time. We have seen food as a response to biological necessity, as a family ritual that strengthened group ties, as a social act that displayed and reinforced status, as a rite possessing religious significance, and as a pleasure to be savored. Food was
always bound up in culture, but now it came to be seen as the material and symbolic embodiment of a given culture par excellence. It served as the simplest, most immediate point of access to knowledge of a specific area, with its history, people, and geography.

At the same time, the film captures another interesting aspect, namely that it is possible, easy, and perhaps desirable to modify our identity vis-à-vis the places we explore. The distinctive feature of modernity is not to be found in identities set in stone and constrained to specific physical spaces (if such identities ever really existed, whether for the French, the Ceylonese, or the Perugians, for example). On the contrary, modernity is characterized by identities in transit, which are molded by contact with different cultures and places, undergo continuous transformation, and are hybrid and diasporic. Sitting around the Christmas table in the old Tuscan villa are no longer Americans, Poles, and Italians (Tuscans) but people transformed by their contact with other people thanks to their conscious choices. Once this would have been described as an encounter with “the Other.” However, if such characteristics used to be negatively coded as “cultural contamination” and attributed to particular groups (immigrants, refugees, deported slaves, the colonized, minorities), now they affect almost everyone in postmodern and postcolonial societies, which define themselves through encounters and mutual relations. Edward Said, for example, has pointed out how in the imperialistic process of domination, it was not only the colonizers who influenced the material and symbolic lives of the colonized. The very mechanisms of domination impacted the culture of the occupiers too.

When did all this emerge? Naturally it is impossible to give a precise date, but if we had to indicate a symbolic moment, at least for Italy, we could say 1993. That year saw the conclusion of the political earthquake that witnessed the end or the profound transformation of the political parties (especially the Christian Democrats) that had dominated the scene in the country for almost fifty years. The catalyst was a wide-ranging investigation into bribery and corruption known as Mani pulite or Clean Hands—as well as the birth of new political parties like the Lega Lombarda (since 1984) and Forza Italia (since 1993). After all, on that Christmas table in Under the Tuscan Sun, there was, symbolically to a certain extent, a reflection of the new political constellation. There was the return to the local scale expressed by the League, the first successful territorial party in Italy, which defended regional values, supported administrative government against centralist policies, and championed a strong, local identity against the weak identity of the global market (with its corollaries of new immigration and production outsourcing). And there were also some of the values of Forza Italia, the party which capitalized on the changes in the 1980s by translating them into political symbolism, offering a menu of laissez-faire economic policies, affluence, individualism, the search for success and personal pleasure, an anti-ideological approach, and consumerism (both in terms of the quantity and quality of the available goods). Buon appetito!

But there was also a change on the economic front. The 1992–93 political crisis marked the beginning of a profound modification in income
distribution. After all, the preceding period (the economic miracle, the 1970s, and, in the midst of ups and downs, the 1980s) had been characterized by an overall growth in the incomes of all categories of workers and a tendential reduction in inequality. (In the 1970s, in fact, the poorest segments of society had experienced the biggest increases relative to their incomes.) The trend was clear. Standards of living had been improving relative to incomes for everyone, so much so that the Gini index, which measured inequalities, continued its downward trend in Italy, until 1993. Then there was a reversal. Social inequalities began to increase until they stabilized in the following decade at high levels. There were various causes ranging from globalization of the markets and neoliberal economic policies to new technologies and wage restraints (the trade union agreement regulating wage bargaining was reached in 1993), not to mention the decreasing importance of labor vis-à-vis finance in wealth creation—and all this in a new cultural climate. In short, the wind had changed direction here, too.

A MEAL IN THE COMPLEX SOCIETY

Patti (Messina), May 2011

When Barbara comes home, she can still feel the salty smell of the air and the perfume of the pine and eucalyptus trees, and in her eyes there is still the blue horizon of the sky, which disappears in the dark blue of the sea, only interrupted by the rocky outline of the Lipari Islands. She loves going for long walks with her friends. They walk in the greenery, among the olive trees and Mediterranean scrub, going toward the coast or toward the center of the village as far as the Norman cathedral. The panorama is very beautiful in this hilly area, on the slopes of the Nebrodi mountain range, which overlooks the whole of the gulf from Capo Tindari to Capo Calavà. Now and again it’s nice to take a trip to Tindari, on the headland, to the Shrine of the Black Madonna (at the beginning of September there is a wonderful celebration there), and then, on the way down, to the salt lakes of Marinello and the grotto high above the sea. It is said that the last-mentioned was once inhabited by a bewitching sorceress who attracted passing sailors with a very sweet song, but as soon as they entered the grotto she devoured them. And if someone managed to escape or did not reach the grotto, then the sorceress became so angry that she plunged her fingers into the rocks. That’s why there are so many small holes in the grotto.

It’s half past noon. Barbara puts her shopping bags on the iron kitchen table with a lava stone top, while perhaps still thinking about the stories and legends of the place. We take advantage of this brief pause to have a look around. The kitchen is very welcoming, based on a warm orange color—the walls, the checkered curtains, colored cushions on the chairs, the sink, and the two-door refrigerator, everything matching. By contrast, the kitchenette in stone with light wooden doors stands out, as do a sea-green English-style cupboard and an “ethnic” style of cupboard (that is, one inspired by an “exotic” design from Africa or India or some other faraway place). The
The kitchen–living room constitutes a single space that occupies a large part of the ground floor and faces the garden. (The bedrooms are on the first floor.) There is an interesting harmony between the furniture, which recalls nature through its materials and history through its style, and the numerous modern household electrical appliances, which fit in without seeming out of place. (Besides the fridge we can see a dishwasher, an oven, a stove, and various small devices like an orange squeezer, a blender, etc.)5 Nothing is missing. On the table there are also some very beautiful brightly colored ceramic dishes. Naturally. Right here, in this area of northeastern Sicily, a flourishing production of terracotta crockery has developed over the centuries, perhaps even introduced by the Arabs. Thanks to local deposits of clay, the creations of the pignatari (saucepan makers) have been prized throughout Sicily and beyond for centuries, so much so that people used to say “the saucepan must be from Patti to make a tasty soup” (divi essiri di Patti la pignata pi fari la minestra sapurita). Only after the Second World War did a crisis in this industry begin because of competition from aluminum saucepans and later from steel ones. But there are still many skilled craftsmen and a few large firms (including Caleca, which perhaps produced the set of plates used by this family). Looking around the kitchen–living room, we cannot help noticing the difference between this house and the first rooms we visited in this book, such as the noble one! There is no longer any trace of the dark, heavy, imposing, and bulky pieces of furniture. Here the space has not been filled. It is open and everything is softer, simpler, technological, and minimal.

While we are busy observing our surroundings, Barbara is putting away the shopping. From the plastic bags from the supermarket, she first takes the frozen products (vegetables, minestrone, French fries, mushrooms, pizzas, Findus sofficini [stuffed and savory crispy pancakes], and fish sticks), which can be prepared quickly and are always ready, hoping that they are as safe as the fresh ones. Everything goes quickly into the freezer. The only canned food she has is tuna. Then there are various name-brand products—we recognize Parmalat milk, Barilla pasta, and Mulino Bianco cookies and snacks. But there are also local products like provola cheese from Montalbano and salami from Sant’Angelo, the latter made by artisans in the Nebrodi mountains. The remaining purchases are fresh, including meat and fish, vegetables and fruit. (Doesn’t the proverb say that fruit is the best thing? “There are three good mouthfuls, figs, peaches, and melons.” [Tri sunnu li boni muccuna, ficu, pier-sichì e muluna.] ) For tomorrow she has bought the necessary ingredients to make a regional specialty, u bruciuluni or “falso magro” (from the French farcies au maigre, a big and thin veal steak covered with a mixture of ground beef and pork sausage, eggs, caciocavallo cheese, salami, and herbs, rolled up like a salami and then cut in slices and served with tomato sauce). But for today she must have something else in mind.

She does her shopping in the supermarkets that have the best prices, after she has seen the offers in the leaflets delivered to her home. Sometimes she also goes to the discount stores to try new Italian and foreign food products, but they don’t always satisfy her. Barbara and her husband Dario, a
couple in their thirties, are very careful and demanding about their food. For example, she cooks mainly with raw extra virgin olive oil, uses little salt, and avoids carbonated drinks, deep fried food, and cured meats (except for the Sant’Angelo salami—one can’t give that up!).

Now she has started to cook. She cleans and slices the eggplants she will be frying, taking a moment to fill a saucepan with water to boil the pasta. While keeping an eye on the stove, Barbara quickly lays the table for three people. The tablecloth, napkins, plates, glasses, cutlery, bread, water... and she hurries back to the stove. Now she sautés garlic and basil in oil, and adds a lot of tomato sauce and salt and pepper. She has just finished when she hears noises outside; Dario and the child have arrived. They come in and greet her warmly, beginning to chatter intently—but it’s almost time to eat. Barbara puts the pasta into the boiling water, while Dario finishes laying the table and looks after the child. Here we are. The spaghetti al dente has been drained and transferred into a tureen in a cloud of steam, and immediately it is covered with the rich red sauce and thin slices of eggplant, and then on top of everything there falls a lovely sprinkling of grated ricotta cheese and small leaves of basil. What a wonderful dish! And what an aroma!

The steaming terrine of pasta alla norma moves toward the living room area, and we follow it. Barbara first serves the child, then Dario, and finally herself. She sits down and everyone starts eating, while the television set is switched on and they watch the news. But the child protests because he wants to see another program. A negotiation ensues—first the news, and as soon as it’s finished, they will switch to cartoons.

In observing this scene, we cannot help thinking about how Italian families have changed in only a few decades. First of all, they are much smaller (an average of 2.5 members in 2007), and then they are much more varied. In order to describe them adequately, ISTAT moved from a handful of traditional definitions still being used in the 1980s (such as: couple with children, couple without children, single person, extended family, etc.) to forty-one family types. The most typical case, the couple with children, has not held an absolute majority in Italy for over twenty years. In 2007, this type comprised 39 percent of the families, whereas singles and couples without children accounted for 27 and 20 percent, respectively. And household roles have changed just as much. Consider Barbara, who has prepared the meal and served the others before thinking of herself. She accepts with satisfaction the role, which continues to represent a special link between women and food (the former as dispensers of nourishment and experts in cooking), as also most of the housework, but her statistically greater longevity also puts on her shoulders the burden of unofficial welfare, like caring for the elderly (to some extent due to the cuts to official programs). The problem is that all this comes on top of Barbara’s commitments outside the home (work, studies, and social events), creating an often unresolved conflict in terms of both time and identity. And if she becomes a grandmother, her tasks still continue, for the home, her husband, and her grandchildren. In short, the new family represents an opportunity but also a serious challenge for Italian women. At the same time,
Dario has to play his part. His role as “head of the family” has for some time been called into question, and he too has had to build a new identity for himself, in the home and outside it, more equal and based on similar interests to Barbara’s, sharing with her some aspects of taking care of the family (something which happens very obviously among younger couples). And the child? In some ways he is fortunate. He occupies an unprecedented position at the center of care and attention. (This improvement is biggest above all for little girls, once discriminated against in numerous conservative families.) He will find himself living at home much longer than previous generations did, partly because of a long period of study, but also due to difficulties entering the labor market and a modest, uncertain income, not enough to live on his own or to form a new couple.

But let’s get back to the lunch, where the conversation is starting. “How did the morning go?” “Guess who I met today—for real!” “There’s always some problem at work, it’s inevitable. When one eats there are crumbs [cu mancia fa muddici].” “Listen to the news. They’re talking about the dump at Mazzarà . . .” While the family is talking, let’s have a better look at this part of the house. The table at which they’re eating is wicker, like the chairs, with a glass top. Nearby there’s a display case and an ethnic style low cabinet, and on the wall in front there’s a flat-screen television set. Further on we see a rattan divan and armchairs with orange cushions in front of a stone fireplace. On one side there’s a “reading corner” with a console for the computer. On the walls hang paintings with Chinese or Japanese subjects. The colors are lively and stand out. It’s in this room that the family spends most of its time. Here is where we notice the natural materials and ethnic style, which harmonize with typical elements from the area (beginning with the taste in colors). Meanwhile, Barbara has finished and has got up to prepare the second course. She stir-fries some potatoes and puts slices of swordfish on the very hot grill. In an instant the fish is ready, seasoned with oil, salt, lemon, and parsley. Here it comes. The white flesh of the fish with dark stripes from the grill is served with lettuce, the smell of the sea filling the room. The child immediately goes for the fried potatoes—but no, first he must eat a bit of fish, then the potatoes. Dario helps him to cut his portion. Barbara smiles. She’s used to it. To make the child eat vegetables, she often bakes small savory pies (alternating slices of vegetables, seasoned with Parmesan, oil, and parsley); they seem like tasty crisp cakes, so he eats everything with gusto.

Here Sicilian cuisine is always present. Barbara often makes stuffed anchovies and various specialties (including cannoli di ricotta [cream horns with ricotta cheese] and cassata for holidays), which she has learned from her mother, grandmother, and mother-in-law. But she also likes to try out new recipes, from other regions too. That’s why she reads books and every week buys cooking magazines and looks for suggestions and novelties on the Internet. When she has time, she also watches television programs, particularly the Alice Channel. In effect, she cooks all of their meals; the only things she buys ready-made are rotisserie chicken and pizza. (Or they eat out, in a pizzeria or
And she always keeps an eye on the calories. As soon as she or Dario realize they are putting on weight, they immediately start a period of strict dieting, with low-fat foods rigorously weighed and a lot of fruit and vegetables, as well as more exercise (the gym for Dario, running and long walks for her).

Barbara is also careful to eat fruits and vegetables that are in season. Certainly, now there are frozen foods and various packaged products which are always available, and this is very convenient. But for so many other things she follows the seasons both at lunch and for the evening meal (the latter is usually light, with seasonal vegetables, cheeses or sometimes white meat, fish, or eggs). Likewise, in the very hot summer months, for breakfast, milk and sweet biscuits are replaced by delicious granite (water ice) prepared at home (coffee, lemon, or strawberry flavored) and served with brioches. And for the afternoon snack there is ice cream instead of tea and cookies.

In the meantime, the television news is over and the channel has been switched to the cartoons. The child watches with such rapt attention the underwater adventures of SpongeBob SquarePants and his friends Patrick the starfish and Squidward the octopus that he doesn’t even realize he’s eating the salad. Then there’s fresh fruit. The meal is drawing to a close. Barbara and Dario get up. Between the two of them, the table is cleared and everything is cleaned and quickly put away. Even the reluctant child has to get up. They have to go; they still have a long day ahead of them. After they’re gone, the television is still on, still telling stories. We see SpongeBob working at the bottom of the ocean in the fast food restaurant Krusty Krab. He is preparing the restaurant’s specialty, the Krabby Patty (a hamburger with cheese, gherkins, onions, tomatoes, lettuce, lots of ketchup and mustard, all between two slices of sesame bread in accordance with a secret formula). It’s so good as to be almost addictive among the inhabitants of the Pacific (fishes, sea snails, Texan squirrels in diving suits, crabs, and lobsters—do they also really eat hamburgers?). But here is Barbara rushing back. She laughs, switches off the television, and leaves again. She doesn’t believe we are ready for an era of universal fast food.

Between Ecology and Technology

Reflecting on the characteristics of household furniture, Walter Benjamin suggested that the prototype of the “modern” house in France came into being around 1830 under Louis Philippe d’Orléans, the bourgeois king. This was the moment of triumph of the individual man, whose existence was divided between public life (carried out in the office, where he had to deal with reality) and private life (spent at home, where he built his own private world and illusions). A house was a kind of new universe and its interior furnishings were shaped in every detail by the vibrant traces of its inhabitants. The living room, in particular, came to reflect the new private dimension, exhibiting objects from distant places and memories of the past, that is to say the cultural-economic dimension of the present and the historical evidence
that demonstrates family continuity—the necessary coordinates to be placed in the social geography of the time. The living room, writes Benjamin, was like a box in the theater of the world.8

Benjamin, in this context, does not talk about the kitchen. And how could he? In all the upper-class and aristocratic houses of France, but also in Italy and in Europe more generally at the time he was describing, the kitchen was a place of service and work, inundated with smells, refuse, food that had to be conserved, fruit and vegetables with earth still clinging to them, pieces of animals (before becoming aseptic roasts). It was a place in which “ladies and gentlemen” never entered. Only the poor, the peasants, and later the workers ate in the kitchen—a sign of the economic and cultural gulf separating them from the elites. But we have seen how in the twentieth century things changed. After the First World War, the growing economic and social position of the lower middle class spread this distinguishing marker, making the separation between kitchen (a place of work and service) and dining room (where food was eaten) a frequent occurrence. Later, during the economic miracle, this duality spread still farther, even to very small dwellings. Better than nothing, was the attitude, so these places got a small or very small kitchen (the kitchenette)—increasingly inundated by bulky new electrical appliances—and the dinette. Thus, the functional distinction was preserved. But as has been seen, since the 1980s there was a further change. No longer hidden, the kitchen rediscovered its dignity. Thus, arose kitchens open to guests, beautiful and technological, in which everyone ate together. And a further development followed, to which Barbara and Dario’s house bears witness. The historical trend of separation and distinction between the spaces linked with food was definitively reversed. On the one hand, there was the consolidation of the kitchen as a multifunctional place (where one cooked, ate, spent time); on the other hand, space constraints and above all cultural developments led to the kitchen actually being combined with the living room, giving rise to a single room—the living kitchen. It was the end of an established spatial hierarchy that reflected an equally profound social and family hierarchy. The “service” kitchen presupposed the presence of subordinate roles carried out by cooks and waiters or, more often, the housewife in different spaces from those of the “master.” But changes in the family (reduction in family size, changes in women’s domestic roles and their growing commitments outside the home, increasing housing costs, and reductions in the use of domestic staff) remolded home interiors, to follow Benjamin’s analysis for the nineteenth century. Cultural shifts linked to decreasing social differentiation of the gender roles (at least among the young and among the upper classes) did the rest, apart from the above-mentioned new appreciation of food as culture and of eating as a time of conviviality and socializing.

What consequences has all this had on kitchen styles in the twenty-first century, whether separate or combined with the living room? Partly because it opens up to the rest of the house and partly because of the social differences of contemporary society, one effect is that there is no longer a standard kitchen because this space is affected by the general organization of the home.
Extremely professional steel kitchens, which would be the envy of restaurants, happily coexist with so-called peasant kitchens in light-colored wood and brim full of accessories; colorful modular Ikea kitchens compete with do-it-yourself kitchens (a piece of grandmother’s furniture, a modern stove, a massive sideboard, a 1950s style fridge, the large table that had been in the living room, the children’s games in the corner, etc.). Kitchens which include elements drawing inspiration from nature and technology (like Barbara and Dario’s) can stylistically match others that juxtapose antique objects with modern features (as in the “striking” house of Angela, a Tuscan teacher and sculptress, interviewed by Fabio Dei, who organized her empty and minimalist kitchen around a precious antique marble sink, surrounded by tiles decorated by hand by the artist herself). The most demanding (and the richest) can also choose the minimal luxury of bulthaup b3 kitchens, which offer multifunctional walls and surfaces covered in refined leather, or a Bridge kitchen by Armani/Dada (Giorgio Armani and the Molteni Group), elegant and sophisticated in Sucupira Brazilian wood (with its golden grain) and a glass and copper finish. The kitchen is an integral part of the home and of the residential style of its inhabitants.

Another element we notice is that the cultural coordinates that characterize the home and our lives are now also perfectly expressed in the kitchen. Let’s start with the simplest aspect, the distinction we have noted several times (and almost considered sacred according to Foucault) between private and public spaces. Here we not only see the kitchen included among the spaces open to visitors, but we also observe a much more profound change. At the time of Louis Philippe, the whole house was a private space detached from the external sphere (the outside world was not admitted, at the most it was represented by a few cultural gazettes, which had arrived in the post). A century later, when Walter Benjamin was writing, the outside world was present in the form of a daily newspaper and perhaps a radio program. But in our times, things have become more complicated. The press, television, personal computers, cell phones, tablets, and other accessories always connected to the Internet have made the concept of private much more fragmented. At home we are closely linked to the outside world and find it normal to seek information on the Internet (downloading a new recipe for dinner), keep up to date (not just the news, but checking websites that compare the prices and quality of goods we want), buy things (ordering groceries online from supermarkets), exchange tips with friends (using Facebook or Twitter), and, of course, put a photograph or video of our hard-earned dinner on the Internet (perhaps on YouTube). The boundaries of the dualism between private and public have blurred.

A second dualism is between local and global. In the Sicilian house we just visited, the two sides are palpable in the local materials and colors, on the one hand (such as the stone in the kitchenette, the lava slab for a table top, the vibrant colors), paired with ethnic furniture, East Asian paintings, and furniture in rattan (robust stems of Oriental palms), on the other hand. This combination signals a cultural decision to see oneself solidly anchored
in one’s own region of Italy and at the same time introduce into one’s home objects from distant places as if they were familiar (and not foreign). The meanings of “global” and “local” are not at variance but intertwine. They are the basis on which contemporary identities are built.

A third relevant dualism is between nature and culture (stone, lava, wicker, and rattan as against iron, glass, electrical appliances, and television). In this case, too, we should not naively view each side of the dualism as structurally antithetical, that is, as primordial and universally natural, on the one hand, and human-made, on the other. In fact, both are produced by human hands and manifest specific cultural meanings. Still, the nature–culture dualism is useful for examining what is happening, also because the kitchen is typically the room with the most electrical appliances. But let’s frame our analysis with more topical terminology. Specifically, what roles do ecology and technology play in today’s kitchens?

Ecology has been receiving increasing attention since the 1970s, so much so that today we refer to green building and environmental sustainability. But what should an ecologically minded kitchen look like? We can imagine entering a bright and welcoming room, with wood as the dominant material (together with natural insulating materials such as cork, plaster, cotton, wool, and linen). Wood which comes from managed stands, probably European (like beech and maple—exotic varieties are not recommended), together with bamboo or similar materials (plants that grow very rapidly). The furniture and the floors are treated with natural oils and wax or mineral and vegetable sealer (synthetic paints are banned, also because they can cause allergies). The working surfaces and the table are of natural stone, probably from an old building, having the advantage of being durable and maintenance-free. Other furnishings are also old or used because reutilization is a fundamental way to avoid waste and environmental damage while paying tribute to the now reappraised old. But there are also some furnishings in new materials: like those made of biodegradable plastics, ecological resins (semi-transparent natural resins containing organic or recycled materials), and glass-ceramics (derived from recycled glass). And we imagine that all this will be regularly cleaned with ecologically friendly biodegradable products. Looking around we can see doors and windows with excellent seals, “transpiring” walls, and good sound insulation. Certainly there is a careful check on possible magnetic fields and the presence of radon gas. The room fully exploits natural light, also thanks to a skylight, and uses energy-efficient bulbs. The electricity and heating is self-produced in various forms (solar or wind for electricity, solar or geo-thermal for the heating). In this ecological kitchen there are also household electrical appliances, in fact the most modern and energy-efficient. For example, the refrigerator with a freezer has an energy class rating of A+, meaning it consumes half the energy of an old refrigerator and uses, as a coolant, isobutane or other hydrocarbons that do not damage the ozone layer. (Inside it we notice there are only a few things; one buys what one needs, avoiding throwing away the excess, as happens on average to 30 percent of groceries.) Also the nearby oven is class A, and the upper ceramic
stovetop has an induction cooking system (the heat is induced through the formation of a magnetic field: it is absolutely the quickest system for cooking on a stove). There is also—and this surprises us a little—a microwave oven, but it is present because the quicker cooking time means saving up to half the energy of a traditional electric oven. And underneath there is a class AAA dishwasher (another surprise), but a new model consumes little energy and uses up to seven times less water than washing by hand. The tap water, well regulated and equipped with a jet breaker, is partly purified and reused, together with rain water, to irrigate the garden (a process governed by a humidity sensor, which only dispenses what is strictly necessary). The garden itself is luxuriant, framed as it is by some fruit trees, and is divided into a part with grass and flowers for relaxation, and another for growing vegetables. The garden is always well fertilized thanks to the use of a part of the refuse (rigorously separated) as an organic fertilizer together with leaves and grass.13

In short, it is a house that is in many ways self-sufficient; its running costs are low, and it fits in harmoniously with the environment. (And its building costs are similar to those of a “traditional” building.)

And what about the supertechnological kitchen? Here we are in a room with very modern square contours in steel and glass, revealing attention to design and the presence of near-professional equipment. The three-door fridge has various gadgets (an ice and cold water dispenser); it is ventilated and has compartments with different temperatures. The oven (electric multifunction, ventilated or steam) and the stove (induction) are quite similar to those we have already seen, even if they are much bigger and hi-tech; and the same applies to the dishwasher. All the household electrical appliances are recessed and large; in many cases they are rollaway. What is most striking is the visibility of technology in these appliances: panels with displays, indicator lights connected to temperature sensors, sound indicators, mini-computers that regulate and program all the functions. On one of the surfaces, a touchscreen is ready to provide saved recipes, the number of calories in foods, and the latest news. The floor is in shiny ceramic and the illumination from the scattered white lights makes the whole room attractive. We notice a central area like an island where one cooks and eats, and above that a futuristic hood. There is also another zone next to the wall with numerous cupboards containing furnishings and foods (one can see the fridge, various rollaway refrigerated drawers, an elegant fridge-wine cellar—we can only imagine the rest). What we cannot see is that the household electrical appliances and installations do not work independently but are linked to one or more centralized systems, which can be operated by remote control or self-regulate. For example, they decide the start, programs, and duration of washing and cooking, the brightness of the lighting, and the level of heating or cooling in the house; they read the presence of products from their barcodes and indicate their possible absence; they optimize the exchange of energy and heat between the household electrical appliances; they monitor security; they are always connected with the Internet in order to acquire new information, and so forth. It is a so-called smart home, a computerized, “domotic” house. It
maximizes functionality, security, and ease of use. The only drawback of living with high technology, at least at the moment, is the high cost. Between these two extremes of the ecological and technological versions there is an infinite range of variations (and all our own kitchens). On closer inspection, however, we can see a certain convergence between the technological and the ecological homes (for example, in energy savings, concern for the environment, the use of electronics, and combining functionality with aesthetics) reflecting the common contemporary inclination to fuse ecology and technology, with particular concern, however, about the indiscriminate use of the latter.

It is important to avoid an outcome like that in Arthur C. Clarke’s story about some Tibetan monks who, for hundreds of years, have been writing, by hand, all the possible names of God—nine billion, according to their calculations and secret alphabet. One day, to speed up their mission, they decide to contact an American firm that makes electronic calculators. So the engineers produce a program capable of doing the work in a few months, despite their misgivings, which grew after discovering that for the monks this task was in effect humanity’s mission. Once all the names of God had been written down, the end of the world could begin. To avoid any criticism of their work, the two scientists involved decided to leave the monastery on horseback just before the calculator was about to print the final combination of names. But once they began their journey, they looked up at the sky and realized that, one by one, the stars were disappearing.

Too much technology can, at times, be harmful.

New Frontiers for the Food Industry

Instead of being grilled, the swordfish prepared by Barbara could have been served on some other Italian table with a different preparation, for example, cut into fillets wrapped in a vegetable leaf, then “fried” in a glucose solution at 180 degrees Celsius (just over 350 degrees Fahrenheit) and served with a “hint” of lemon (that is, an incredibly light mousse, consisting of whipped lemon juice and soya lecithin). In this case, we would be at the table of someone who subscribes to molecular gastronomy, a technique that applies scientific knowledge to the successful preparation of dishes and the enhancement of their flavors. It is undoubtedly true that if this tendency includes cooks of the highest caliber and reputation (the foremost being the father of nueva nouvelle cuisine, the Catalan Ferran Adrià, with his fanciful inventions of shapes and tastes), it enjoys a very limited following in Italian kitchens, where traditional tastes, shapes, and textures are preferred. Yet it is also true that molecular gastronomy dishes manifest the same dialectic between ecology and technology, or between tradition and innovation, that we have seen in the kitchens in this chapter.

And let’s not get into a discussion at this point about new frontiers in the field of food, which include, for example, the rapid advance of nanotechnology. Reduced to nanometric dimensions (one billionth of a
meter), the particles can have a physical and chemical behavior different from their conventional form. Thanks to these dimensions, the absorption of medicines or of energy drinks and the consistency of matter changes. Nanotechnology is already present in the field of packaging (offering lighter, stronger, water-proof, nonflammable, and durable materials), health products, and foods (to improve their quality and enrich them with vitamins) through the introduction of organic and inorganic nanomaterials. Scientific research does not stop. Nevertheless, as always happens when new frontiers open up, we still do not know much about the consequences for human health and for the environment of the absorption by swallowing or inhalation of nanoparticles (able to pass through cellular barriers). Various countries and the European Union itself have commissioned the first studies on this subject, but their findings do not appear to be conclusive. Similarly, for years experiments have been conducted to produce synthetic food, something more than just organic food containing preservatives, metallic particles, colorants, artificial flavors or other things—food completely obtained from chemical compounds. So far the results have been syrups and jellies, perfectly formulated for calories and vitamins, albeit much less satisfying in terms of taste and sensory experience. (But perhaps it’s just a question of time.) Other studies aim at the creation of in vitro meat, cultivated in the laboratory from stem cells and therefore independently of the existence of an animal. The advantages could be economic (because the costs of traditional production continue to rise), environmental (because one would avoid the pollution associated with raising livestock), healthful (because one would circumvent possible contamination in the current birth-growth-butchering cycle), ethical (animals are not killed), and democratic (responding to the increasing demand throughout the world of consumers with scant purchasing power). And soon Dutch, British, and American laboratories could be putting on the market the first products in the form of sausages and hamburgers. However, all this will involve quite a few problems regarding security and ethics—questions for the near future.

In any case, it is a problem which seems to hold little interest for the Italians, who continue to prefer fresh agricultural products and traditional goods linked with their own areas. According to a 2004 survey, about 66 percent of the industrial foods acquired by Italian consumers fall within the category of products that have undergone an initial transformation or to which only a preservative has been added, for example, pasta, cheese, wine, oil, mineral water, and so on, chosen on the basis of the brand (44 percent), price (36 percent), and expiration date (30 percent). To these can be added another 9 percent with a Protected Designation of Origin certification (DOP) and 9 percent for products with a Protected Geographical Indication (IGP), while certified organic products represent 1 percent. Only a quarter of the food products is “new” in the sense that they are ready or partially cooked (dishes to be heated up, frozen food, preserves, various types of desserts). Of these, 8 percent are complete innovations, created by industry for specific dietary and health requirements. This last category includes low-fat (light)
or fortified foods, bars and energy drinks, nutritional supplements, probiotic yogurts, and foods for specific categories of consumers (diabetics, celiac disease sufferers, small children, the elderly)—everything that the Japanese, in the 1980s, were the first to call “functional food.” And it is interesting that the two dietary groups that have shown the most rapid growth, almost a boom, are precisely the two extremes, conventional products and totally new ones. Here, too, tradition and innovation become intertwined, and consumers act a bit like Lévi-Strauss’s bricoleur. They freely and imaginatively utilize what is available to realize their aims, combining and recombining objects and meanings.

But who produces the bricoleur’s environment? In other words, what is the structure of the food industry? In simple terms, we could say that all the new foods and some of the traditional ones come from big industry, whereas most conventional foods are produced by small businesses. Here we find a typical Italian characteristic, the marked prevalence of small- and medium-sized businesses vis-à-vis the large enterprises, with all the attendant consequences for consumers, positive (high typicality, differentiation, almost artisan care) and negative (high costs, distribution difficulties). The 2001 census noted the presence of 67,000 businesses and 455,000 employees in the food sector (excluding farms and restaurants). In 2009, the revenues of these businesses totaled 120 billion euros (as a manufacturing sector it was second only to metallurgy and mechanical engineering), with exports worth 19 billion euros and imports of 15 billion (therefore with a credit balance). The main segments were dairy products at 14.4 billion euros, confectioneries at 11.5 billion, wine at 10.6 billion, salumi at 7.6 billion, and beef at 5.9 billion (Table 8). Nevertheless, in 2009, only 6,350 of these businesses could officially call themselves industrial, that is, had more than nine employees—in other words, around 10 percent. And this was happening in a phase in which the food sector was going through a growing concentration at the international level. But let’s proceed in an orderly fashion.

There are few large companies in Italy’s food sector, only three or four among the top Italian businesses. The main one, twenty-fifth in terms of revenues in Italy in 2009, is the historic brand Barilla, the market leader in pasta, ready-made sauces, and baked leavened products, bought back by the Barilla family after a period when it had belonged to the American W. R. Grace and Company. It is a successful brand, a business that operates in many countries and has significant exports despite being smaller than the big global companies. It is a typical example of what is called a “pocket-sized multinational.” Likewise, the Piedmontese firm Ferrero, fifty-second in the Italian rankings, operates successfully at the global level with numerous brands in the confectioneries sector, above all cocoa-based products (including Nutella). In sixtyieth place we find Cremonini, specializing in meats, which we previously encountered as the supplier of McDonald’s in Europe. Pasta and sauces, confectionaries, meat—the list of large national Italian food businesses is no longer than that.

These companies are flanked by a group of foreign multinationals, which dominate the European market thanks to innovative products and their own
brands, as well as to their acquisition of many Italian firms, including some historic ones. This foreign ownership of Italian companies can partly be traced back to the episode of SME, the large state-controlled food group. In the 1980s, it was restructured into various sectors (preserves, ice creams and frozen foods, confectioneries, distribution, and catering) in order to become more competitive. But times were changing. The group was no longer seen as playing a central role in political strategies. Thus, the accumulated losses of various businesses and liberalizing pressures reinforced the idea of selling to private interests. At this point, there was the symbolic episode of CIR, Carlo De Benedetti’s group, which—after having acquired Buitoni in February 1985—stepped forward to buy all of SME’s food businesses from the public holding company IRI (Institute for Industrial Reconstruction). However, this move provoked political and economic clashes; rival groups entered the fray (including one comprising Barilla, Ferrero, and Fininvest) and the IRI–Buitoni agreement was declared invalid. Subsequently, there was a complex series of newspaper controversies, personal attacks and, since 2000, legal proceedings, which continued for years. From this point of view, too, the history of SME represents a significant piece of Italy’s recent history. (Even justice enters the world of food!) In any case, after the courts’ essential confirmation of the decisions adopted, SME was sold piecemeal in 1993 to Barilla (Pavesi and other brands), Ferrero (confectionery businesses), while the agricultural and food activities went to Cragnotti (however, the CIRIO group would end up in difficulties within a decade), and many brands were acquired by multinationals like the Anglo-Dutch Unilever (Bertolli) and the Swiss Nestlé (confectioneries, ice creams, frozen foods—the group would later also buy Buitoni-Perugina as well as San Pellegrino with its drinks and mineral water). In effect, the SME privatization produced mixed results. It reinforced some dynamic food businesses; it favored financial speculations; and it ceded some historic brands to big international operators. Moreover, the last outcome was only the first step in a process that would see the growing importance of mega-groups in the Italian and global markets. Among these are some of the top agricultural and food groups in the world, Nestlé, PepsiCo, Coca Cola, Unilever, Monteléz, and Kraft, as well as the French group Lactalis, which owns Invernizzi, Locatelli, Galbani, and (since 2011) Parmalat. The last-mentioned had been at the top of the milk sector not only in Italy, but also in South America; unfortunately, in 2003 it was the victim of Callisto Tanzi’s sensational financial crash, from which it emerged scaled down.22

But let’s go back to the lunch at Patti for a moment. What did Barbara and Dario see on television while they were eating? Besides the news and cartoons, certainly a lot of advertising. Here, between speeding cars and ringing cell phones, they would have seen the following sequences: the parallel story of cod captured in the sea by Nordic fishing boats and cod as frozen fish-fingers (Findus); youngsters happily playing on the beach drinking cans of iced tea (Ferrero); young people in cartoons dancing happily in the street while drinking Fanta; confectionery that delights the family as they listen to Bobby Hebb’s song “Sunny” (Mulino Bianco Barilla); actresses who talk about the properties of yogurt containing “bifidus actiregularis” (Danone);
a melodious song that recalls 125 years of our lives and of Coca Cola; and a young woman recounting her dreams, visualized with motion control, while at a bar with a Campari soda. All this reminds us of one of large-scale industry’s strengths—its ability to advertise extensively. And it is almost certainly television advertising (which in Italy accounts for over half of advertising expenditures: in January and February 2011, 731 million euros out of a total of 1,227 million, with 276 million for the press). Such commercials are a constant presence because the food and drinks sector invests the most in this area. (In the same two-month period, food commercials cost 168 million euros, and drinks and alcoholic beverages 47 million; together this made 215 million euros, which was followed by the automobile industry at 157 million and telecommunications at 108 million.)

There is another element that favors the big companies—large-scale retail trade. Starting with its expansion in the 1980s, commercial food distribution really changed. First, supermarkets increased in number and diversified. There was a consolidation of historic companies and the emergence of new ones from the world of associations, like purchasing groups, including Conad, and consumer cooperatives, like Coop Italia. Coop Italia in particular was the result of complex restructurings, which, starting from the 1960s, transformed the old consumers’ cooperatives into modern supermarkets and from the 1970s favored the rationalization and fusion of various organizations. In 2009, Coop Italia was the largest Italian retail group in terms of revenues, ahead of Conad, Esselunga, Pam, and Finiper. Second, also in Italy new options established themselves, like the big hypermarkets, low-cost superstores that sell groceries, like supermarkets, and all manner of nonfood items, like department stores, following the model of what Carrefour had done in Paris in 1963. There were also the discount stores, above all the hard discount version originated by the German Aldi and introduced in Italy by Lidl, which ensured very low prices thanks to a reduced assortment and rigorous control of production. These innovations led to the gradual retreat of traditional commercial structures. In 1996 for the first time, organized food distribution (hypermarkets, supermarkets, hard discount stores, and mini-marts) gained, by a whisker, a 50-percent share of the food market, which was otherwise served by traditional shops, street vendors, and so on. The share of organized food distribution grew to 70 percent by 2009, with supermarkets having the lion’s share.

However, it has to be borne in mind that what we said about the limited scale of the food industry is even more applicable here, amplified by shopkeepers’ resistance and restrictive legislation (based on a 1926 law, which instituted municipal licenses for retail businesses, and a 1971 measure, which granted planning and regulatory functions to municipal administrations and regions), at least until the liberalizations provided for in 1998 by the Bersani Law. It is therefore not surprising that Coop Italia is only forty-seventh in the world rankings of major retailers (with the giant Walmart in first place, ahead of Carrefour, Metro, and Tesco) and that only five Italian companies are among the top 250 retailers.
We therefore have to imagine a dense distribution network extending over the whole country since the 1980s like a gigantic and irregular spider’s web, in some points denser and in others more sparse, absorbing great stocks of Italian and foreign food production and moving them throughout its ramifications, aiming at a rapid turnover of goods (on average two thousand to three thousand articles per store annually). Profits are made by selling large quantities of goods, which are offered at competitive prices. There are two important consequences. First, there is a further delocalization of the place of sale in relation to the place of production—a delocalization, it is worth noting, which is generally welcomed by consumers, who can increase and vary their diet with products from other Italian regions, famous international brands, and exotic goods—and at times also things they could otherwise find from a nearby source, but which come from distant places simply because they cost less. Second, such organizations cannot sell products from small artisan businesses, except to a limited extent, because doing so would run counter to their economies of scale. Thus, they rely on large companies to supply the goods they sell, goods, moreover, which are often known through advertising and openly requested by consumers. The upshot of all this is that choices by the big distribution companies carry more and more weight in defining the range of products available to a family like Barbara’s, whereas previously the initiative was in the hands of the production industries. Markets change.

And now we finally come to the world of medium, small, and micro-businesses, which characterize Italy’s food scene from the North to the South in their variety and in their close ties to local areas, artisan know-how, and old or revived traditions. The incredible diversity of these businesses makes it almost impossible to describe them in detail, but it would be wrong to think of their being randomly and chaotically scattered in various parts of the peninsula. On the contrary, in many cases their spacial organization follows a complex geographic, social, and economic logic—the famous districts (which we have already encountered while visiting Dario’s family). Theorized by Alfred Marshall as early as the end of the nineteenth century, the industrial districts manifest more than territorial productive specialization; they imply a form of integration between businesses (at times also a horizontal division of labor) and a continuous interaction of the entire community, generally through small production firms. Very many food businesses operate within these districts, officially recognized by a 1991 law. In 2011, ISTAT identified seven regional districts in which food was the main industry (in Emilia-Romagna, Lombardy, Piedmont, and Trentino-Alto Adige).

But if we go into detail, the picture is highly varied and there are hundreds of territorial manufacturing systems (some scholars prefer to call them “clusters,” following Michael Porter’s definition). Let’s look at a few examples. If we wanted to buy tomato sauce and pasta, where could we go? An excellent choice would be the district of Nocera Inferiore–Gragnano. A spectacular area between Mount Vesuvius, the Sarno Mountains, and the Lattari Hills, it includes sixteen municipal administrations in the province of Salerno and four in the province of Naples. In 2009, there were 606 businesses with
a total of 7,500 employees. Some operations were large but over 90 percent were small or very small family-run firms, often dependent on the large ones. Further, it is a district with a very long historical tradition. Or maybe we like good fish. In this case, we could go to the Mediterranean industrial fish district in Sicily, between Trapani and Palermo, which specializes in fishing and fish farming, with over 1,000 employees. And if we prefer crustaceans and mollusks? Then there is the small fish district of Polesine in the province of Rovigo. Do we want typical products like pecorino (ewe’s milk cheese), extra virgin olive oil, soppressata, perhaps with some Aglianico wine? Then we should go to the Vulture district, near Potenza, which has 600 businesses and over 2,000 employees. If we like prosciutto, we cannot ignore the district of Parma (where there are 500 businesses, including firms of international repute, micro-businesses, companies in other food branches and in plant design, not to mention universities and research centers concerned with agriculture and food) and perhaps also the smaller one of San Daniele in Friuli. Do we love fruit and vegetables? Then there is the district of Metapontino on the Ionian coastal strip of Matera in a fertile and well-irrigated zone. And if we also want a good Piedmontese wine, there are the excellent ones produced by about 250 businesses in the Canelli–Santo Stefano Belbo District of Alcoholic Beverages (Moscato, Barolo, Barbera, Barbaresco, Dolcetto, Arneis)—one of the richest districts. Finally, we cannot forego a good coffee, which obviously comes from the district of Trieste (which contains the entire coffee production chain).30

In talking about districts, we have also encountered those concerned with wine, and it would be appropriate to dwell a little longer on this subject. Wine, we know, has always been important for Italians’ tables, whether in the home or elsewhere. Within this context, however, a change is occurring; the wine produced and consumed is increasingly of high quality. Brand-name wines comprise 60 percent of production in Italy, and the country leads the world in the number of wines with a registered designation, 504, of which 330 are DOC (Controlled Designation of Origin), 56 DOCG (Controlled and Guaranteed Designation of Origin), namely with even higher controls and quality, and 118 IGT (Typical Geographical Indication). In other words, the traditional tendency of producers to aim at quantity for a so-called table wine, which reflected the habits of Italians in the past, has given way to a search for quality and specificity. The protagonists of this change have been the small regional businesses (for once, none of the great listed international wine groups is Italian).31 Wine has increasingly become a status symbol, to be consumed in smaller quantities, often between meals. Also from the point of view of wine consumption, Italy has changed. Let’s listen to the journalist Lina Sotis:

Once upon a time the aficionados were very interested in [wine] and all the others knew that with fish it’s better to serve a white wine and with meat it’s better to have a red one. . . . Now someone who only knows this is not even accepted in a kindergarten. To be able to enter a nursery everyone has to know, apart
from the fact that wine is not only a divine nectar but culture, that red wines go perfectly with fish and that a real connoisseur almost always chooses that color. Every ambitious young man knows that among the things to be learnt, apart from a discrete familiarity with English, is a certain amount of knowledge about wine, which is to be flaunted with the assurance of an international master...

In past decades the first stage for a new billionaire was a palace in a city, a villa in the countryside, and a vessel on the sea. Almost all the new euro landowners have by now understood that owning all three things does not have the same effect as a single item [of a different kind]. Today the magic phrase of someone who has made it is, “This is the wine from my vineyards.” It has the same effect as having an aristocratic wife in the 1960s did.32

In this situation, one is greatly spoiled for choice. In Sicily (one of the most famous areas for wine since Roman times because of Mamertino), they produce a lot of white wine, like the one of Alcamo, or highly valued red ones, like Cerasuolo di Vittoria, and various sweet wines (Malvasia, Moscato, and Marsala, the last produced by the English as early as the end of the eighteenth century). The Sardinian wines which are highly valued include the white Vermentino di Gallura and the red Cannonau and Carignano del Sulcis. On a smaller scale, but no less interesting is the wine production in Calabria (with the red Cirò made from Gaglioppo grapes) and in Basilicata (with the red Aglianico del Vulture). Apulia is historically a high producing wine area, often of red blending wine, but also of products like Castel del Monte and the strong Primitivo di Manduria. Campania, too, boasts a long tradition (the most famous wine of antiquity, Falerno, comes from this region), and today it produces excellent wines in the province of Avellino (Fiano, Greco di Tufo, Taurasi). The prevalently mountainous areas of Molise produce Biferno, Molise, and those of Abruzzo Montepulciano d’Abruzzo, while for centuries the white wines of Latium (those of Castelli Romani, Marino, and Montefalcone) have been prized. The next three regions of Central Italy are a joy for the connoisseur: There are the red wines of Montefalco Sagrantino and Torgiano from Umbria as well as the different types of white Verdicchio from the Marches. And then there is the queen of wine areas—Tuscany. Here the vines like Sangiovese, Tuscan Trebbiano, Vermentino, and Vernaccia have given us some of the most famous wines: Chianti, Brunello di Montalcino, Morellino di Scansano, and Vernaccia di San Gimignano, as well as the very fashionable Super Tuscans (highly acclaimed wines which combine local and nonlocal varieties of vines) such as Sassicaia. Also in Central Italy, Emilia-Romagna offers excellent, widely consumed wines such as Lambrusco, Sangiovese di Romagna, and the red and white varieties produced on the hills, perhaps by cooperative wineries. Going northward, we find a composite picture. There is Veneto, the most productive region of the country, with highly prized wines, especially whites (Conigliano, Recioto, Soave) and some reds (Amarone, Bardolino). There are the provinces of Alto Adige (with the Lagrein, Riesling, and Traminer vines) and above all the Trentino and Friuli Venezia Giulia, which are making a name for themselves because of the
high quality of many of their wines (Valdadige, Casteller, and Trentino in the former and Picolit, Ramandolo, and Collio in the latter). Moving westward we come to industrialized Lombardy, which produces excellent wines in the north (Sforzato and Valtellina superiore) and in the province of Brescia (Franciacorta). Lombardy also produces widely consumed wines in the south of the Oltrepò Pavese region, part of the province of Pavia, and south of the River Po (most famously Bonarda). If we move even further west, the situation gets more interesting. On the sea, Liguria offers fragrant white wines like Cinque Terre and Pigato, while in the mountains there are the Vallée d’Aoste wines from the region of the same name. In the Northwest there is the other queen of Italian wine-producing areas, Piedmont. A very old producer of quality wines, this region has the highest number of DOCG (Controlled and Guaranteed Designation of Origin) and DOC (Controlled Designation of Origin) wines compared to the other regions, and it has an incredible variety. There are the “historic” reds like Barolo, Barbaresco, Barbera, Brachetto, Dolcetto, and Freisa; and the famous whites like Roero Arneis, Gavi, and Erbaluce di Caluso; not to mention sparkling wines and muscats, like those from Asti.33 Here is a journey which would have made Dionysus as happy as on the day of his solemn celebration of Anthesteria!

This ethnographic map of wine, together with the geography of the districts, helps explain how our shopping can contain global brands, products from big industry, artisan goods, and choice vintage wines—a unique mix of traditions, culture, and geographical distinctiveness, which almost everyone can afford.

**Food for the Rich and the Poor**

The cuneiform tablets translated by Jean Bottéro recount the fabulous banquet offered by the Assyrian King Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 B.C.E.) to celebrate, after so many conquests, the renovation of the capital of his reign, the splendid Kalhu (aka Nimrud) on the Tigris. What was served included 1,000 cattle fed on barley, 1,000 barn calves and sheep, 14,000 common sheep, 200 cattle from herds, 1,000 fattened sheep, 1,000 lambs, 500 deer, 500 gazelles, 1,000 large birds, 500 ducks, 500 chickens, 1,000 suki birds, 1,000 garibe birds, 10,000 pigeons, 10,000 doves, 10,000 small birds, 10,000 fish, 10,000 locusts (probably), 10,000 eggs, and 10,000 loaves of bread (in Mesopotamia there were over 200 different types). There were also rivers of beverages: 10,000 measures of beer (derived from the fermentation of barley) and 10,000 goatskins of wine. (Wines defined as red, white or “clear,” as well as sweet, strong, and new were widespread.) For condiments and seasoning there were dates, figs, almonds, lentils, barley, pistachios, eggplants, roses, anemones, spices of various kinds, onions, garlic, oil, milk, and many other things (not all of them clear to us). The banquet offered the best of the varied and sophisticated Mesopotamian cuisine established over hundreds of years, the most ancient in the world, conceived to serve palace and temple (as is borne out by tablets containing recipes, which can be traced
back to 1700 B.C.E., and even to older descriptions of lavish meals, such as those offered by King Sargon of Akkad around 2350 B.C.E.). In this case, Ashurnasirpal II’s banquet continued uninterrupted for ten days and satisfied the most ravenous appetite, it is written, of 69,574 guests.\textsuperscript{34}

A person living almost three thousand years later (whether Iraqi or not) would not even long for such luxuries. The times of great banquets, still lavishly prepared a century ago, have passed. People now prefer simpler meals, whether private or public. But at the beginning of the twenty-first century, even those meals can be problematic for many Italians.

If we look at the trend of per capita income in Italy since 1994, we find—apart from a small fluctuation in 2003—that it increased fairly constantly from 16,000 dollars (denominated in 1990 International Geary-Kharnis dollars), higher than the European average, to 20,100 dollars in 2007. Then the economic crisis of 2008 took its toll (with a decrease to 19,900 dollars, compared to the European average of 21,600 dollars).\textsuperscript{35} And the amount spent on food? Here we find that just as it had rapidly decreased until 1993, so it remained relatively stationary from 1994 to 2009 (Table 9). In 1994, Italians spent, on average, almost 22 percent of their budget on food and drink (the biggest expense was meat at 6 percent, followed by bread and cereals at 4 percent, and fruits and vegetables at 3 percent). In 2000, the average percentage of income spent on food and drink decreased to almost 19 percent; and in 2009 it remained about the same, that is, 461 euros out of a net monthly total of 2,442 euros in average expenditures, with meat showing a further decrease to 4 percent, and bread and cereals as well as fruits and vegetables each just above 3 percent.\textsuperscript{36} In effect, what we can observe is an almost stationary trend in expenditures on food relative to income, which showed a very slight preference for fresh products and cereals. But what happened? Why was there this weak trend in consumption in relation to income?\textsuperscript{37} Within the social groups themselves there was horizontal redistributive movement, which thus did not influence the total values, but had an impact on the groups’ internal geography, so to speak. Let’s take an example. The heterogeneous middle class seemed stable, on the whole; however, since the mid-1990s there was a pecuniary improvement among families of the self-employed, managers, and pensioners and a corresponding worsening in those of manual and clerical workers (exacerbated by the very low average annual increase in employees’ gross income of 0.6 percent between 1993 and 2008, a quarter of that between 1970 and 1993).\textsuperscript{38} If one also takes into account the high return on financial investments and the steady growth of temporary employment (flexible or precarious, depending on one’s point of view), one can understand how since 1993 social inequality once again started to increase. In effect, its course was U-shaped, bringing Italy to high levels similar to those of other Mediterranean countries and to those in the English-speaking countries and far from the more egalitarian ones of northern and continental Europe. The economic crisis that began in 2008 aggravated the situation, causing a contraction in the quantity and quality of the food bought (and increasing the debt load to meet necessary
expenses). In short, behind this aggregate data there are rich and poor tables, and different kinds of each.

Differences among tables continue despite a tendency toward rapprochement because regionality still has a strong impact on the food consumed. In 2009, almost a quarter of the family budget was spent on food in Patti (as in general on the Italian islands), much more than in Central and Northern Italy, where food costs accounted for, respectively, 19 percent and 16 to 17 percent of family budgets. Nevertheless, these percentages corresponded in absolute terms with 421 euros a month (out of a total of 1,761), the lowest amount in Italy; the highest was in the South at 484 euros. The situation in the Northeast was interesting. It was the area with the highest average monthly budget (2,773 euros), but food expenses were only a little more than the other Italian islands, confirming that there is no automatic correlation between income and food consumption, and that local cultures have an impact. But all this reminds us that the South paid a particularly high price for the global financial crisis that began in 2008, in contrast to the Center and the North, both in terms of GDP and unemployment, above all among the young (on account of which social inequality increased still more). There were also still regional typological differences, which persist despite their softening over the course of time—a lot of fish in south-central Italy, beef in the north-central part of the country, cold meats in the North, beverages in the Northwest, and so on. If we really want to find a common trend, then there is the reduction, everywhere, in meat consumption, which remains the highest expenditure just ahead of fruits and vegetables as well as breads and cereals. If we also consider increasing fish consumption and the establishment of olive oil as a condiment, we can conclude that the so-called Mediterranean diet is perhaps becoming a reality for the whole country (Table 10).

We have referred to differences in the relative cost of foods and in the kinds of food available on Italians’ tables, but we also need to consider what the poor could put on their tables. In the midst of the statistical averages, there emerge big differences in food shopping, depending on the number of family members and the age of the head of household (usually the young spend less). There are also differences depending on occupation (including entrepreneurs, professionals, and the self-employed at 525 to 530 euros a month in 2009, clerical and manual workers at 480 to 490 euros, as well as pensioners and others at 400 to 430 euros). And, perhaps surprisingly for a country which has come so far, a new food poverty has emerged. Side by side with wealth and often with waste, there is also scarcity. Certainly, malnutrition or severe deficiencies are no longer the problem, but there is a relative poverty, which can strike whoever loses his or her job, falls ill, becomes separated or divorced, or lives alone. (In 2010, according to ISTAT, 16 percent of families lived in a state of deprivation and 7 percent in a state of serious deprivation.)

Poverty is common among the growing foreign-born population in Italy (over 4.2 million people), which immediately felt the effects of the economic crisis. Thus, there are also differences among tables of the poor, whether
they turn to friends or institutions for help or renounce almost everything. A third of foreign families was in a condition of deprivation in 2011 and 13 percent could not afford a protein-based meal with meat, fish, chicken, or vegetables at least every two days (above all among Indians, Moroccans, and Tunisians). The dream of a better today has not always been achieved, as a foreign woman, married and with one child, explains:

I would like to go out a little with my family, go to the beach. I told my husband, “This year let’s take the train and go as far as Savona.” It’s these small things, nothing grand, simple things, being able to eat a pizza or have an ice cream. One could do something like this once a month, but instead we never eat anything outside the home.

But there are also other stories in today’s Italy, stories of integration and cultural discovery, which are frequently mediated at the table. The new arrivals discover new ways of living and eating (and also tasks that had been unknown because of gender); hybridizations with their original traditions arise, retracing in ever new ways the old experience of encountering the Other. Take, for instance, the Senegalese community in Italy, according to an account by Fatouma, who has been living in the province of Bergamo for the past four years:

Often during the week I cook rice with fish, called maffé, but also pasta. On Saturday and Sunday, I prepare thieboudienne instead. These days my husband doesn’t go to work and I can concentrate on cooking; it takes many hours to prepare the food. In general, I prepare it for Sunday at midday. On Sunday evening, we sometimes buy a takeaway pizza, but more often I prepare fondé or lakh.

Here I have a stove, a refrigerator and a freezer. From Senegal I brought the saucepan with my name written on it. There I had a mortar and pestle for mixing a bouillon cube, pepper, and garlic, but here I have an electric mixer. For the rest, I cook almost in the same way, even if only for two people, my husband and me. We still eat on the floor, in the living room, from a common plate and using our hands. The time for tea, or ataya, has also changed. We still prepare it after meals, but no longer on a gas cylinder, comfortably seated. Here there’s the stove and we have to stand. It’s more uncomfortable and one does it in more of a hurry—it loses some of its significance.

Or the young Abbs, who left Ngor (near Dakar) five years ago:

Now I live with Daniela, an Italian girl, and our food is a mixture. Sometimes we prepare, together, the dishes of my country, maffé and thieboudienne, at other times Italian things. It’s nice because we eat meat or fish, but cooked in the Senegalese style with rice or sauces. And we put everything in one plate. We prepare things together. I knew how to cook in Senegal, too, because I was a fisherman, and when I was on the islands with friends,
I used to cook. Not as well as a woman, but I knew how to cook. Now the Senegalese dishes turn out well. Now Daniela is also learning how to cook our dishes.

I buy everything in Via Quarenghi, in Bergamo. There are many shops where one finds absolutely everything. Maggi [cubes], vegetables, fruit juices like tamarind, fish, mint leaves, and broken rice. They are mainly run by Asians, but there a few belonging to Moroccans. If you can’t find something in one shop, go to another one and there you’ll certainly find what you’re looking for. There’s also a halal butcher, which belongs to Arabs. We buy meat there.

I always observe [Ramadan], every year. It’s difficult, but I’ve done it since I was a child. Especially on the first days it takes a lot of effort. The stomach has to get used to it a bit at a time.

Therefore stories of attachment to one’s roots, but also of open-mindedness toward new situations, stories of hybridization occurring in both directions, namely also on the part of Italians. In fact, let’s consider the increasing trend in Italy of eating outside the home. In 2009, forty-five euros a month on average were spent in bars, pastry shops, and stalls; 148 in restaurants, trattorias, and cafeterias; and 112 in dining halls (none of these expenditures are included statistically with food but rather with other goods and services). A portion of this money went to ethnic establishments. In 2010, one Italian out of three consumed ethnic food and it appears that 10 percent of eatery owners are foreign-born (thirty-eight thousand own restaurants and bars). And here we can point out a curious historical recurrence, linked over the past decade with kebab places, which are informal and cheap, always open, and serve many foreigners and Italians alike. Initially in various cities and then in 2009 throughout Lombardy, a restrictive regulation toward these ethnic eateries was issued (and subsequently extended to artisan sales in the street). It was immediately dubbed the Anti-Kebab Law. Its proponents justified it with the ostensible need to protect traditions and the propriety of city centers and to guarantee public hygiene and security. Apart from the resultant accusations of gastronomic racism and the ensuing protests, all of this is clearly reminiscent of negative reactions to McDonald’s in the 1980s. The watchwords have changed, but there is still an identity struggle revolving around gastronomic traditions. If anything, we are witnessing movement in the catering hierarchy, with kebab sandwiches taking the bottom and hamburgers moving up. (In 2011, after having introduced its McItaly restaurants with traditional Italian food and carefully selected dishes, McDonald’s Italia even offered for a limited period two haute cuisine bread rolls “designed” by Gualtiero Marchesi, the *Vivace* and the *Adagio*.)

And to think that the kebab—maybe not the one served in bread by these new establishments, but the traditional one known in the Near East in infinite variations, including the one consisting of a pile of slices of marinated lamb or mutton stacked on a giant spit and slowly roasted over an open fire
before being skillfully cut with long, sharp knives and served steaming with vegetables and condiments—would perhaps not have been out of place even at King Ashurnasirpal II’s fabulous banquet.

**Politics, New Consumers, and Global Cuisine**

Methanol wine: In 1986 the addition of a toxic alcohol to increase the strength of Barbera produced by a firm in the province of Cuneo blinded and killed many people in Northern Italy. BSE: In 1996, a serious epidemic of bovine spongiform encephalopathy, or mad cow disease, spread from Great Britain. It was probably caused by the use of infected animal feed given to herbivores. By 2001, the crisis had led to the six-year ban on Florentine steak. Millions of animals had been put down, dozens of people had been infected and died, even if the very long period of incubation of the disease makes it difficult to arrive at a precise diagnosis. Dioxin chicken: In Belgium in 1999, a high presence of dioxin was detected in chickens, in this case caused by animal meal contaminated with mineral oils. Avian influenza: On several occasions, and virulently since 2003, the H5N1 virus (transmissible to humans) killed fowl above all in Southeast Asia. Swine flu: An influenza epidemic caused by the H1N1 virus in 2009 caused alarm among consumers (although pigs had little to do with it). Escherichia coli: This bacterium caused the death of many people in Scotland in 1996 because of contaminated meat, and it reappeared in 2011 in Northern Germany. Also on the list were listeria in cheese, benzene in mineral water, salmonella in eggs, melamine-tainted milk, blue mozzarella, wheat with ochratoxin, and seed oils with hydrocarbons.

The number of food scandals since the 1980s, leaving aside simple commercial fraud, is great. Why have there been so many scares? Why so much insecurity? These are the questions consumers ask themselves, above all Italians, seeing that, in Europe, they are among the most concerned about food quality and safety, probably because of the combination of food’s central role in Italian culture and scant trust in the authorities. (According to an EU report in 2010, 83 percent of Italians worried about pollutants in their food, 80 percent were concerned about viruses in livestock, and 77 percent were troubled by possible contamination from plastic and other containers.)

Is it perhaps on account of the “globalization effect” that maybe the occurrence of age-old problems has increased in frequency because of the greater mobility of goods and people in an age of globalization? And maybe these problems are amplified by media attention? To a certain extent, yes, but there is more.

The close link between the worlds of food and science, which had begun as early as the nineteenth century with the introduction of various food conservation and processing techniques, and had grown in the early twentieth century with the nutritional sciences and the development of chemistry, reached a high point in the second half of the twentieth century. Not only the food industry (which continued to employ new techniques and materials in the transformation of food) but also agriculture (the primary sector of production) benefited from the food–science nexus. The post–World War Two
years ushered in the Green Revolution, which saw most of the world’s agricultural production increase enormously, providing food and freeing manpower for industry in the less-developed countries, reaching unimaginable productive heights and offering “new” and more standardized food products in the rich ones. Behind this revolution lay a marked mechanization of agriculture, the extensive use of inorganic fertilizers (with the help of great quantities of water), and crop protection (above all with pesticides). As regards animals, there developed intensive breeding, which required large quantities of animal feed at the lowest possible cost, and which had to ensure the quality, quantity, hygiene, and health of the animals. Hence, the growing preventive use of drugs, vaccines, and tests to avoid parasites and diseases while increasing yields.

The greater part of these improvements, for some up to 50 percent, were due to genetics, which permitted the selection of the most suitable or “best” animals. In many cases, traditional methods were used—grafting or selective breeding, for example, in order to obtain more environmentally adapted plants, which would then be spread by means of seeds. In the case of animals, selective breeding was used to arrive at better offspring. More recently, there has also been genetic manipulation, which has led, for example, to plants that can resist diseases and parasites, survive drought or intense cold, produce increased yields of better quality, yield several annual harvests, and so on. The same was true for livestock in order to respond to changing production requirements in terms of weight, shape, color, taste, nutritional qualities. (In this context, we should note that intensive fish farming has increased a great deal in recent decades.) The 1970s witnessed the inception of biotechnology, which within a decade led to the first transgenic plants (and animals), which reached the market in the 1990s (GMOs). Compared to traditional techniques of genetic improvement (grafting and selective breeding), transgenic approaches are more focused and specific because only select genes from a different species are transferred into the target species’s genome.50

All this is a logical continuation of the process of humankind’s control and modification of the natural environment, a process that can, in fact, be traced back to the beginning of human history.51 The benefits of the new products are obvious. Nevertheless, there have been many side effects, too. In the first place, the high rate of industrialization and commercialization of food production has created a wide gap between producers and consumers, perceived by consumers as a growing gulf between nature and culture. Moreover, the sophistication and extent of the manipulation has often unleashed concerns in the public about the environmental impact (reduced biodiversity, depletion of nonrenewable resources, waste, pollution, alteration of natural ecosystems) and its ethical consequences (disparities between nations, exploitation of workers in poor countries to the advantage of rich countries, disregard for the well-being of animals, and so on). The ecological footprint, namely the extent of human consumption in relation to the Earth’s bioproductive capacity, shows that in the 1970s and 1980s we exceeded the optimal level of exploitation and that we are in fact depleting the planet. (Italy’s land resources are being excessively exploited with respect to their biological
capacity for regeneration, as in virtually all the wealthy countries.) The same conclusion can be reached using other indices too, like the Genuine Progress Indicator, which, as proposed by Herman Daly and John Cobb, measures both the economic indicators usually employed to determine GDP as well as others that relate to ecology and social well-being. Thus, the entanglement of food production, on the one hand, and science and technology, on the other, appears to have exceeded a threshold beyond which costs increase more rapidly than benefits.

For the family in Patti, as for the majority of Italian consumers, no useful purpose is served by their having a detailed knowledge of all these indices and data. Instead, practical experience generates caution and sometimes anxiety with regard to industrial food—food that is abundant, varied, always available, hygienic, and low cost, but at the same time fragile, so to speak, because it is produced by an industry at times pushed to the limit, an industry globalized, standardized, and increasingly unconcerned about seasonal, environmental, and even natural limits, an industry characterized by supply chains across great distances and passing through many hands. Yet things were worse in the relatively recent past, as we have seen. Except for a fortunate elite, food was scarce, monotonous, poor in quality, subject to minimal health regulations, and rigorously seasonal. In the last decades, abundance has extended to almost everyone, but like the two-faced Janus, it has demanded a price.

When consumers are physically and culturally removed from the places where their food is produced and consequently are unable to keep an eye on it from farm to processor to retailer, as is most clearly the case in cities, what can they do? If the scientists and nutritionists—who have by now become the considered experts after a historical trajectory of nearly two centuries—do not always appear trustworthy, who can one believe?

Some villages in the Gulf of Papua, New Guinea, once had an interesting method for establishing the truth. Everything depended upon sacred poles. These poles, kept in a secret place, could be as long as nine meters (nearly thirty feet) and very heavy. When one was needed, perhaps because of a theft, the pole was carried on the shoulders of at least two men and surrounded by believers at each end. Then the pole began to sway, and, under its own force, it would point decisively toward the house of the guilty party, who would immediately confess. A European researcher, who dared to put the pole to the test around 1920, was surprised by the fact that it really succeeded in discovering the guilty, often on the first attempt. At a certain point, however, the pole got annoyed with him and began to point at him and block his path, finally ordering him to go to bed immediately (through the mouth of a porter), which the researcher hastened to do.

Perhaps twenty-first-century Italian consumers would have some difficulty going around with heavy nine-meter poles on their shoulders in order to make safe purchases. It would be better to think of something else. A first response could come from the authorities. We have seen how the governments of Republican Italy have avoided imposing specific policies on food productivity and consumption, in contrast to the Fascist period, instead
concentrating more on regulating products after they are produced, on the one hand, and promoting national products (agricultural and later industrial), on the other. In practice, moreover, governmental attention paid to the world of food has proven to favor producers over consumers. It also has to be said that food policies have been partly integrated in those of the European Community. This was the case with the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), and it has happened with the reception of EU legislative regulations safeguarding the consumer—not without difficulties for the multiplicity of actors and acknowledged experts involved in the process.\textsuperscript{56} Since 1992, there has been the very important adoption of European Community labels to protect products characteristic of specific regions, namely Protected Designation of Origin (DOP, which includes the Italian DOC and DOCG) and Protected Geographical Indication (IGP), and of a special law regulating “organic” certifications. Regulations aimed to support specific crops, discourage abuses, and create uniform rules for the circulation of goods within the European Community, thereby offering consumers a guarantee that went beyond what commercial brands could, especially after the wave of big food scandals. Subsequently, Italy offered further official certifications for food quality, including traceability, production chain quality, absence of GMOs, use of primary materials exclusively from Italy in the production process, and collective brands, albeit with consequently higher costs for producers. On the whole, the results have been positive for consumers (but even more so for producers, who have been able to exploit the distinctive character of Italian goods for international market penetration), even if at times there have been conflicts between, on the one hand, the tendency toward regulation and homogenization implicit in European Community rules and, on the other hand, the specificity of Italian culinary practices.\textsuperscript{57} The most famous instance was that of Colonnata lardo, an old form of sustenance for Tuscan marble quarrymen, which, according to EU rules, could no longer be produced in marble, but rather in non-absorbent plastic or steel containers. This measure unleashed general protests in Italy.

If the fear that spreads when there is a food crisis can be explained by the characteristics of the modern system of food production, it is also linked with a widespread cultural climate at the turn of the millennium, a mood characterized, for instance, by Ulrich Beck’s talk of a “risk society.” The loss of job security, variable family forms, ecological disasters, mad cow disease, terrorism—risk is part of our lives. In fact, it always has been, sometimes even more so than now, but in more open and visible ways. Now, however, its presence is more subtle and disguised. Thus, the family as one’s primary support group still survives, but it is less trustworthy; there is work, but it comes and goes; chemical poisons kill without our perceiving any dangerous smell or taste; acts of violence are not limited to openly fought wars but are hidden in the folds of everyday life. Beneath an apparently safe and calm surface, there exists a pervasive fundamental insecurity.\textsuperscript{58} And then the consumer-citizens organize themselves and develop their own defensive strategies.
With respect to food, for example, it is no accident that the (re)invention of ostensibly correct dietary practices (orthorexia) has increased. The number of vegetarians has grown, above all among women and youth, who have made a dietary choice that has a very long tradition behind it, reaching back to Leonardo da Vinci, the Cathar heretics, Seneca and Ovid, and even Pythagoras’s ideas about the transmigration of souls. It bears emphasizing that we are talking about vegetarianism as a choice, not as a necessity, as has so often been the case in Italy. Vegetarianism was always a minority behavior in the West, in contrast to the East. Indeed, sometimes it was considered deviant. Now, however, it is generally regarded as normal or, in fact, as an example of ultra dietary correctness. In 2010, the Italians, together with the Germans, were the most vegetarian peoples in Europe (6.7 percent, of which 0.4 percent were vegan, that is, not only did not eat fish or meat, but also refused to eat derivatives such as milk and eggs). Half chose vegetarianism (or veganism) for health reasons and slightly fewer out of respect for animals.

A second strategy is to search for information about the world of food, whether via the Internet, print media, specialized television channels like Gambero Rosso or Alice, and, of course, word of mouth. This search can also entail paying greater attention to the proposals of consumer movements, whose media visibility is growing. And often words have been transformed into actions, with initiatives to safeguard consumers’ health and economic interests in the face of contradictory impulses from producers. An important stage in this development has been the introduction of the class action or collective lawsuit in Italy in 2010. Nor is there a lack of cases in which these lawsuits assume political significance, as companies are boycotted on the basis of their nationality or because of their ethical and environmental behavior, which might entail polluting the air and the water, exploiting workers and children, genetically or chemically manipulating food, cruelty to animals, as well as statements and behaviors that are racist, sexist, homophobic, and so on. Politics discovers new arenas for agency.

Then there is diversification with regard to “where” one shops. One might choose alternative distribution channels that bring consumers and goods together via fair trade shops, farmers’ markets, and collective buying groups. Consumers also pay attention to the “path” food takes, whereby traceability and a short supply chain are considered trustworthy factors, which can also help one to save, seeing that there can otherwise be as many as eight or nine steps between producers and consumers with consequent price increases. For example, the cost of wheat is about 9 percent of the price of pasta. In general, in 2004 it was estimated that 19 percent of the final price of a product went to agriculture, 30 percent to the food industry, and 51 percent to distribution and other services. Consumers also modify their behavior out of concern for the environment. Thus, they try to avoid food waste, limit packaging materials and refuse, consume less energy in food preparation and conservation, and choose local products (preferably at “zero miles,” even if this is not always truly indicative of less pollution and opens up disturbing questions for
consumers who live in unfavorable climates). Finally, more thought is given to what remains of a meal after it has been eaten, to the waste and to the networks necessary to dispose of it.62 Perhaps some have been inspired by the art of Daniel Spoerri, who has treated tabletops as a canvas onto which he glues plates, glasses, cutlery, and leftovers, the last-mentioned crystallized like imperishable or nondisposable components.63

But what really characterizes the new consumer is a renewed interest in dietary tradition, namely foods, practices, places, and meanings. This development represents the enhancement of an attitude that has always been present but that is now understood as a response to fundamental questions. The Slow Food Movement—founded by Carlo Petrini, with its emphasis on food as the final product of a long process imbued with cultural, geographic, and even ethical meanings—situates itself within this cultural matrix, which it has in part shaped.64 It is not by chance that the movement has not limited its activities to supporting traditional foods (“presidia”), organizing events and exhibits (Terra Madre, Salone del Gusto, and others), and creating financial and logistical support to help many small and micro producers gain access to the market. It is also active in the cultural field with its own publishing house and, since 2004, with the University of Gastronomic Sciences at Bra, and it promotes policies to foster sustainable agriculture in many countries.

This narrative is closely intertwined with another important question: when and why has Italian cuisine, to which Italians and emigrants have always been so attached, become a global cuisine? When did it become a phenomenon that can stand side by side with the great traditions of the French, the Chinese, the Japanese, and others?

The answer lies largely in the history we have surveyed in the course of this book because Italian cuisine comprises elements that have acquired a particular transnational cultural significance precisely in our own time (that is, over the last two or three decades). Let’s recall some of them. The first is Italian cuisine’s association with the idea of well-being and health, which takes us back to Ancel Keys’s studies and the so-called Mediterranean Diet, a way of responding to our health needs with a harmonious and holistic approach that entails not only medicines but also caring for the body’s appearance, physical exercise, spiritual well-being, and, of course, the right diet. Certainly, there is also the aspect of cultural trends, on account of which Italian food is associated with a positive image of knowing how to appreciate the pleasures of life, probably in the wake of the success of fashion, so that it has become an integral part of the habits of an international clientele.

The second element in the rise of Italian cuisine to international popularity is the extraordinary variety of its products due to the diverse gastronomic traditions that have evolved over time in a context of localism, which distinguishes Italian society. Thus, Italian cuisine has been able to offer an enormous variety of products, which can even be appreciated by palates used to different tastes. The third element is the commingling of high and low cuisine in Italy. We have seen that if many culinary practices are linked with the upper classes, many others—perhaps even more—have far more modest
origins, which in no way hindered their successful integration into prevailing uses. The result has been an emphasis on simplicity, genuineness, repeatability, and low cost. It is easy to make (and even easier to eat) a good plate of pasta, a savory pizza, or tutti-frutti gelato. They have flavors that are immediately recognizable. They enhance simple basic ingredients and are inexpensive. All these characteristics facilitated the international diffusion of Italian cuisine.

The final element brings us back to the earlier discussion about food fears. After all, Italian cuisine seems to respond to the concern linked with our contemporary food (or perhaps our contemporary way of life?), by offering food with strong ties to a given area and its history. Further, not only does it not cause nature and culture to clash but it harmonizes them. And it seems to have maintained, more than others, a physical and cultural proximity between producer and the consumer. Put differently, perhaps this cuisine has not forgotten Aristotle’s words that “nature does not do anything useless” and can therefore respond to the deep cultural needs of our times. It is no accident that one can see how, amid a thousand changes, the tradition of the Sunday lunch survives in Italy. A 2008 survey showed how, on Sunday, more than half of Italian families regularly eat at home, and only traditional, specifically prepared dishes (hors d’oeuvres of cold meats, pasta or different types of stuffed pasta, a variety of roast meat with potatoes and vegetables, and a dessert). This meal offers a way to forcefully reaffirm family, social, and territorial ties as well as counter widespread anxieties.

In this way, one can perhaps explain the appeal of Italian food, which has driven various companies in the world to exploit the metabrand of Italianness in order to sell typically Italian products. In the United States, for example, it has been done for coffee and cappuccino by Starbucks and others. And there are the thousands of Italian restaurants there, which can be found almost everywhere, including not only countless pizzerias but also big chains like Olive Garden, Carrabba’s Italian Grill, Romano’s Macaroni Grill, Bertucci’s, and Buca di Beppe.

And perhaps we are all getting used to living in a hybrid reality. A visitor to an art gallery (who is naturally a gourmet) would certainly be thrilled to recognize everyday dishes in a painting by Tom Wesselmann and fabulous sweets in a sculpture by Claes Oldenburg. This visitor would be a little perplexed by James Rosenquist’s three-panel juxtaposition of a Ford, a woman, and pasta, the first two grayish and the latter in vibrant color. Giovanni Anselmo’s eating sculpture would be even more perplexing—a lettuce sandwiched between two blocks of granite held together by a copper wire, but only for as long as the lettuce doesn’t wilt and allow the smaller block to fall. Our visitor might then be enraptured by the sight of a big pile of colored candies by Félix González-Torres and the fruit peels sewn together by Zoe Leonard, finally ending up satisfied in front of a large photograph by Andreas Gursky of a huge imaginary supermarket. At the end of the visit, our visitor could reasonably conclude that all expressions of art in their diverse languages and territorial origins can provide an authentic experience. Thus, on leaving the
art gallery, he could enter, with the same curiosity, restaurants offering cuisine from various other countries and try to apprehend in each of their different languages, so to speak, a profound message of history and culture. In this way, too, we learn to live in our world.67

But what do the kitchens and meals we have encountered on our journey in this book teach us? Ultimately, they show us a country that sees a vibrant social and cultural life—embodied in its food and foodways—as a primary expression of its identity. Our travels reveal a country which recognizes itself in a regionally and culturally diverse mosaic, in which every village, city, and region has its own distinct profile, which has been molded and remolded over the centuries. They also show a country that has never recognized itself in a single center, as has often occurred in countries whose cuisines were shaped by the court, temple, or palace. Instead it has constructed itself in a frequently difficult dialog between socioeconomically and regionally distinct realities. After all, as we have seen, the apparent weakness of Italy’s national institutions, which have never facilitated genuine homogenization on the basis of a few national traits, not even during the Fascist dictatorship, is also the reason for the vitality of Italy’s social and cultural life. In fact, identity arises from cultural encounters, from the traces of the different peoples who have lived in the same places, each leaving some mark. Identity is open, fluid, and inclusive (even when the contrary seems true). And it manifests itself in culturally polycentric institutions and practices that adapt well to the challenges of complex societies, as Elinor Ostrom suggests.68 Like its cuisine, and perhaps increasingly in the future, Italian national identity is multifaceted.

And the future? How will Italians eat (and live) in the coming years? Perhaps a little of their tomorrow is already present on their tables and etched in our environment. In any case, changes will stem from the choices, conscious or not, that they make today. The scrolls of time that inexorably connect us to the past also accompany us into the future.
Epilogue

Scenario One

May 2049

He went out, as he did every day at that time of the year, to eat something. Outside the office the situation was the same as usual, and precisely because of this it could be unpredictable. In that space halfway between the luxurious center and the enormous slums that surrounded this city, like almost all Italian cities, one never knew what to expect. Usually there was a police patrol in the midst of the anonymous buildings of the quarter, but at times it all seemed abandoned to decay and gangs. Today is a good day, he thought, looking round. For an instant, a strange word came to him in a flash, but he couldn’t remember it.

The air he breathed was torrid, and bad smells emanated from the street. He quickly turned the corner and walked past flashing billboards, before arriving in the square. Here was the place where he ate almost every day, a stall in the open air with small tables and benches, and protected by a big yellowish metal and plastic umbrella, the latter, in truth, of little use since the grayish pall of the polluted sky always blocked the sun. His colleagues didn’t like this place. They stayed in the office to eat in clean, air-conditioned rooms, but he preferred to immerse himself in the city, to be among the people, when he could. Besides, he was sick of always eating the same stuff, packaged, hygienic, safe, and too much of it synthetic. Here, in the square, he could indulge his whims. “Give me some of that pizza with all those things on top. And I want some dim sums—what are they made of? Never mind, they look good. Give me ten, mixed. And the usual Cyber Cola.” In an instant, his hands were holding a plastic plate with a slice of steaming pizza, a square paper bag, and a metal container, and he looked for a seat. It was incredible, but he almost always found one there—no mean feat with all the overcrowding everywhere. But perhaps, he mused, this was a borderline place that the rich did not come to and the poor steered clear of too. But no, there was one of them now. One could recognize such people immediately. Many were elderly and went around with a metal shopping cart, the old kind. And they lived like that, disconnected from the organized virtual space, isolated in their own world. Theirs were autonomous lives, some people said, but they were really zombies. The pizza was so hot that he almost couldn’t eat it. He took the metal container and pressed its surface to activate the cooling mechanism, before drinking the contents. The Cyber Cola was a luxury (given the
price) he couldn’t do without. It was always as if he were tasting it for the first time. The incredibly soft and velvety consistency of the froth from hyper-frozen microcrystals provided an incredible sense of freshness. Perhaps it was the nanotechnology. Or the pressure. Who knows?

Ragnarök. That was the word that had been on the tip of his tongue. Why would he remember such a strange and difficult word...? Perhaps he had come across it with one of his avatars in a virtual tour or perhaps in Final Fantasy 53. The pizza was good, and he finished it in an instant. And the dim sum. Some were round and crisp, some soft and white, and others shaped like small colored sticks. Flavorful, with an indefinable taste, and submerged in sauce. Synthetic but tasty. And then some more Cyber Cola. Ah, how delicious! There, for a moment, he seemed to forget everything, the wars over water, the new diseases, the violence in the city, the technoanomie—all the problems of that eve of 2050, even that acrid smell that often affected the throat (they said it was harmless, but who could believe it).

Ragnarök. Now he remembered. It was a very old story, a myth of the northern peoples, with powerful gods who defended the world from all manner of monsters—giant wolves, sea serpents, and fire demons. In the end, they all faced off in a terrible final battle—a scene worthy of the best film. The strange thing was that neither the good nor the bad won. They fought against each other fiercely, and in the end they all died, the generous gods, like Odin and Thor, and the evil demons, like Loki and Fenris. The whole world was covered in flames. Yet a few managed to save themselves, some of the gods, and a man and a woman hidden in a cave.

Time to go back to work. He set off with the taste of the pizza and Cyber Cola still in his mouth, thinking about the story of Ragnarök. Who knows, he wondered, if one day we won’t end up the same way.

**Scenario Two**

May 2049

He went out, as he did every day at that time of the year, to eat something. It was a particularly pleasant day. The sky was blue, the sun was shining, and off and on a light sea breeze blew. He was fortunate with his job. Thanks to the global networks, he could do it where he liked, and in spring he liked to go to that remote little village on the western coast of Sardinia. He walked through the narrow little streets, unhurriedly, toward the sea. At the last turn, he found himself facing the spectacle of the little white island in the middle of the blue sea, the remains of an ancient building clearly visible on it, and small fishing boats in the water. A big white seagull crossed the sky with a screech. The man smelled the intense perfume of the surrounding vegetation, of the palm trees, flowering agaves, and herbs. Marvelous!

He went to the restaurant he had been going to for years, choosing to enter via the beach. His espadrilles sank lightly into the hot white sand, while the gentle wind made his clothes flutter slightly. After a few steps he reached the open terrace, on which the tables were set, and he sat down at
“his” table without waiting for an invitation. Immediately the affable manager came up to him, smiling: “Buongiorno! How’s it going? Good? Listen, we’ve got a specialty today. Leave it to me, I’ll bring you something good. The usual to drink?” “Sure, thanks, the usual.” A chilled bottle of white wine, Vermentino di Gallura, appeared almost immediately, and he drank a few sips from his glass. The wine was excellent, as always. It was almost unbelievable how everything seemed to have remained unchanged for decades, if not centuries—everything as it had once been, the beach, the food, the wine. Not that there wasn’t any technology, of course. Technology was everywhere, but it was not as visible and invasive as it had once been. Above all, everything had been studied in order to safeguard the environment, biodiversity, the existence of all life forms. He remembered well how, not many decades earlier, pollution and decay had seemed inexorable, as had the disappearance of many natural resources (some actually did disappear), while “development” and “ecology” appeared to be antithetical concepts. Then came the turning point. Certainly, a great deal had been due to the Great Crisis, which had suddenly made everyone understand the gravity of the situation. The interests of a few could not take precedence over everyone else’s rights. And so, under pressure from the people, who were organized in grassroots movements, economic development and technology took a different direction.

The flow of his thoughts was interrupted by the arrival of the hors d’oeuvres—thin slices of gray mullet roe, seasoned with a little olive oil, and served with very fresh seafood. There were shells of different shapes and colors—clams, mussels, date mussels, and sea snails—garnished with thick slices of lemon and small greenish-orange camone tomatoes. A wonder to behold. He began eating, savoring everything slowly. On the eve of 2050, despite all the problems yet to tackle, tradition and modernity had come into balance, as this place confirmed—which reminded him of something, but at that moment it escaped him.

Meanwhile the main dish had arrived, a Sardinian specialty, is culorgionis, or handmade flour and semolina ravioli with a potato, goat cheese, garlic, and mint filling, which were topped with tomato sauce and a sprinkling of pecorino (ewe’s milk cheese). It was a simple dish of the local tradition, a small gastronomic masterpiece. And all the ingredients were strictly organic. If the hors d’oeuvres had contained the flavors of the sea, with the first course he returned to the land, old sheep rearing, cereals, the pungent smells of vegetable gardens. That was what this place reminded him of, an enchanted garden of perfumes and tastes. He had read about one somewhere on his device, a garden like this. It was the garden of the Hesperides, a wonderful place to the west of the known world, where the Nymphs of the evening guarded the tree that bore the golden fruit. They watched over it with the help of Ladon, the dragon with a hundred heads. The very beautiful and wise Nymphs made the trees, flowers, and fruits of every type grow in great quantities, and they took care of all the animals. Their garden, pleasing to the gods, was an enchantment of colors and perfumes. Certainly, reality was
very different, but he liked to imagine that this little corner of the earth had something of that magic, of that harmony of shapes, colors, smells, and tastes. Once he finished eating, he got up to go for a short walk by the sea. He set off with the taste of the food still in his mouth. This nation, he found himself thinking, had never been that enchanted garden for many of its inhabitants. But perhaps it had something of that harmony. After all, according to some people, Hesperia, namely the land of the sunset, was the name the Ancient Greeks gave to Italy.
## Tables

### Table 1  Average retail prices of food, 1861–2010 (prices in 2010 euros, food in kilograms except where otherwise noted)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Bread</th>
<th>Pasta</th>
<th>Rice</th>
<th>Potatoes</th>
<th>Beef</th>
<th>Pork</th>
<th>Salumi</th>
<th>Eggs *</th>
<th>Milk</th>
<th>Butter</th>
<th>Lard</th>
<th>Olive oil *</th>
<th>Wine *</th>
<th>Coffee</th>
<th>Sugar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1861–1870</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>5.77</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>11.31</td>
<td>7.78</td>
<td>6.28</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>9.94</td>
<td>6.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871–1880</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>6.32</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>11.76</td>
<td>7.80</td>
<td>5.52</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>13.23</td>
<td>5.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881–1890</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>5.39</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>9.74</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>11.83</td>
<td>8.05</td>
<td>5.63</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>14.13</td>
<td>6.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891–1900</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>5.66</td>
<td>6.35</td>
<td>10.17</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>11.48</td>
<td>7.10</td>
<td>5.55</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>17.22</td>
<td>6.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901–1910</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>5.76</td>
<td>7.05</td>
<td>11.20</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>11.61</td>
<td>7.03</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>13.36</td>
<td>5.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911–1920</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>8.21</td>
<td>6.04</td>
<td>16.07</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>13.48</td>
<td>8.90</td>
<td>7.33</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>15.78</td>
<td>5.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921–1930</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>10.53</td>
<td>9.54</td>
<td>17.35</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>16.06</td>
<td>8.63</td>
<td>7.55</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>24.02</td>
<td>5.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931–1940</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>10.11</td>
<td>8.79</td>
<td>15.62</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>12.93</td>
<td>7.66</td>
<td>6.24</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>29.71</td>
<td>6.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941–1950</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>12.98</td>
<td>12.58</td>
<td>22.24</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>20.30</td>
<td>12.84</td>
<td>9.60</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>20.51</td>
<td>5.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951–1960</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>15.89</td>
<td>13.48</td>
<td>20.86</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>16.63</td>
<td>6.66</td>
<td>8.03</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>28.22</td>
<td>3.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961–1970</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>16.83</td>
<td>15.01</td>
<td>17.58</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>14.42</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>7.25</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>21.25</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971–1980</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>18.64</td>
<td>15.10</td>
<td>18.47</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>12.82</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>20.56</td>
<td>1.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981–1990</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>16.37</td>
<td>11.71</td>
<td>18.88</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>9.47</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>4.96</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>15.43</td>
<td>1.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991–2000</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>14.33</td>
<td>10.09</td>
<td>19.05</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>8.62</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>5.16</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>12.84</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001–2010</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>14.57</td>
<td>9.44</td>
<td>17.92</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>7.99</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>10.28</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a* | Price per egg.

*b* | Price per liter of olive oil.

*c* | Price per liter of wine.

*Source: ISTAT (Italian National Institute of Statistics), Serie storiche 150 anni (Rome, 2011).*
Table 2  Food consumption in poor and rich Italian families, 1872–1878

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Piedmont</th>
<th>Lombardy</th>
<th>Veneto</th>
<th>Emilia, The Marches, Umbria</th>
<th>Liguria, Tuscany, Rome</th>
<th>Abruzzi, Molise, Terra di Lavoro, Campania</th>
<th>Basilicata, Calabria, Apulia</th>
<th>Sicily, Sardinia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Polenta</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cornbread</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheat bread</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasta</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chestnuts</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulses and fruit</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potatoes</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acorns</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barley</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millet</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rye</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beef</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutton</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pork</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poultry</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frogs and snails</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salami</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dairy products</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light wine</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wine</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beer</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water (by itself)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liqueurs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polenta/cornbread</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheat bread</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasta</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chestnuts</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulses and fruit</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potatoes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acorns</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barley</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millet</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rye</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beef</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>97</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutton</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pork</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poultry</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frogs and snails</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salumi</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dairy products</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light wine</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wine</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beer</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water (by itself)</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liqueurs</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Terra di Lavoro was an old administrative unit comprising an area now divided between Latium, Campania, and Molise.*

*Aggregate of polenta and cornbread.*

*Aggregate of beef, mutton, and pork.*

*Aggregate of beef and mutton.*

### Table 3  Average annual per capita consumption of food, 1861–2009 (in kilograms, unless otherwise noted)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cereals</th>
<th></th>
<th>Fruits and vegetables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wheat</td>
<td>Com</td>
<td>Fresh legumes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paddy rice</td>
<td>Barley and rye</td>
<td>Dried legumes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861–1870</td>
<td>127.7</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871–1880</td>
<td>127.9</td>
<td>50.4</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881–1890</td>
<td>110.0</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891–1900</td>
<td>109.9</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901–1910</td>
<td>146.9</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>34.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911–1920</td>
<td>154.9</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>25.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921–1930</td>
<td>180.3</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931–1940</td>
<td>165.4</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>38.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941–1950</td>
<td>139.1</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>34.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951–1960</td>
<td>159.3</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>38.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961–1970</td>
<td>166.2</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>44.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971–1980</td>
<td>173.7</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>41.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981–1990</td>
<td>158.1</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>42.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991–2000</td>
<td>147.7</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>40.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001–2009</td>
<td>148.1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>39.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:

- Dried fruit consumption is not recorded for the period 1901–1910.
- Data for 1971–1980 is estimated using trends from previous years.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Meat</th>
<th>Fish</th>
<th>Eggs and Dairy</th>
<th>Oils and Fats</th>
<th>Sugar, coffee, etc.</th>
<th>Alcoholic beverages&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Daily calories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beef</td>
<td>Pork</td>
<td>Mutton and chevon</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Fresh</td>
<td>Dried and preserved</td>
<td>Eggs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861–1870</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871–1880</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881–1900</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891–1900</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901–1910</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911–1920</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921–1930</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931–1940</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941–1950</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951–1960</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961–1970</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971–1980</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981–1990</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991–2000</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001–2009</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>Aggregate of fresh and dried legumes.
<sup>b</sup>Aggregate of fresh and dried or otherwise preserved fish.
<sup>c</sup>Alcoholic beverages in liters.

Table 4  Workers’ Weekly Diets in 1885 (in kilograms unless otherwise noted)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Bread</th>
<th>Corn flour</th>
<th>Pasta</th>
<th>Rice</th>
<th>Vegetables</th>
<th>Fresh meat</th>
<th>Salted meat</th>
<th>Fish</th>
<th>Milk</th>
<th>Cheese</th>
<th>Wine^a</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cantoni wool mill</td>
<td>Gallarate (Varesse)</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vernazzi fabrics silk</td>
<td>Milan</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candiani bricks</td>
<td>Milan</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printing works</td>
<td>Mondovi (Mantova)</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silvera beer house</td>
<td>Chiavenna</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>average</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vernetti</td>
<td>Gallarate (Varesse)</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rossi wool mill</td>
<td>Schio (Vicenza)</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narizzano and Gherzi tannery</td>
<td>Genoa</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>average 1.00</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craftmen of the plains</td>
<td>Bologna</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>little</td>
<td>little</td>
<td>little</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gallotti kiln</td>
<td>Bologna</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>little</td>
<td>little</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Match factory</td>
<td>S. Giovanni Valdarno</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>little</td>
<td>little</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bocci wool mill</td>
<td>Bibbiena (Arezzo)</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>little</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cini paper mill at La Lima</td>
<td>S. Marcello (Pistoia)</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil mill</td>
<td>Bari</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patriarca foundry</td>
<td>Catania</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refining sulfurs</td>
<td>Catania</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>little</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>little</td>
<td>little</td>
<td>little</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mines of Monteponi</td>
<td>Iglesias (Cagliari)</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^aWine in liters.

Source: S. Somogyi, “Cento anni di bilanci familiari in Italia (1857–1956),” in Annali (Milan, 1959), 147 (with reference to the ministerial investigation about the hygiene and health conditions in the municipal administrations of the Italian Kingdom in 1885).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wholesale</td>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>Wholesale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General price index</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flour</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bread</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasta</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potatoes</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butter</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beef</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pork</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wine</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6  Production of electrical household appliances in Italy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Refrigerators</th>
<th></th>
<th>Freezers</th>
<th></th>
<th>Stoves(^a)</th>
<th></th>
<th>Dishwashers</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number (thousands)</td>
<td>Value (lira)</td>
<td>Number (thousands)</td>
<td>Value (lira)</td>
<td>Number (thousands)</td>
<td>Value (lira)</td>
<td>Number (thousands)</td>
<td>Value (lira)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>67,350</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>65,000</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>67,288</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>59,581</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>977</td>
<td>50,295</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>1,528</td>
<td>46,990</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>150,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>1,768</td>
<td>42,726</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>110,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>2,187</td>
<td>40,504</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>2,176</td>
<td>37,314</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>2,608</td>
<td>34,258</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>90,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>2,807</td>
<td>31,136</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>2,617</td>
<td>19,803</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>76,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>3,205</td>
<td>30,889</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>3,311</td>
<td>19,635</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>4,387</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>48,000</td>
<td>3,641</td>
<td>19,190</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>5,002</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>4,212</td>
<td>20,405</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>58,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>5,247</td>
<td>31,288</td>
<td>472</td>
<td>48,270</td>
<td>3,824</td>
<td>24,272</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>64,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>5,257</td>
<td>33,437</td>
<td>803</td>
<td>52,550</td>
<td>3,500</td>
<td>24,950</td>
<td>493</td>
<td>67,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>5,424</td>
<td>34,027</td>
<td>907</td>
<td>52,850</td>
<td>3,821</td>
<td>25,550</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>70,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>5,307</td>
<td>38,406</td>
<td>1,106</td>
<td>53,100</td>
<td>3,706</td>
<td>29,720</td>
<td>596</td>
<td>72,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>5,204</td>
<td>58,385</td>
<td>1,503</td>
<td>73,500</td>
<td>3,831</td>
<td>38,780</td>
<td>612</td>
<td>83,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>4,953</td>
<td>59,089</td>
<td>1,629</td>
<td>75,370</td>
<td>3,607</td>
<td>40,330</td>
<td>528</td>
<td>85,600</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\)Electric, gas, and dual fuel.

Source: V. Balloni, Origini, sviluppo e maturità dell'industria degli elettrodomestici (Bologna, 1978), 225-27.
Table 7 European food consumption inside and outside the home in 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Consumption inside the home</th>
<th>Consumption outside the home</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>millions of euros</td>
<td>percent</td>
<td>millions of euros</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>149,570</td>
<td>70.1</td>
<td>63,940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>135,131</td>
<td>65.6</td>
<td>70,705</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>147,832</td>
<td>74.2</td>
<td>51,333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>94,163</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>85,085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>86,326</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>90,846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>29,809</td>
<td>61.8</td>
<td>18,429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>37,518</td>
<td>90.1</td>
<td>4,117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holland</td>
<td>30,975</td>
<td>72.4</td>
<td>11,429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>23,429</td>
<td>72.3</td>
<td>8,997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>16,498</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>11,973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>18,140</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td>9,881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>17,747</td>
<td>73.2</td>
<td>6,482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>20,894</td>
<td>91.3</td>
<td>1,988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>8,135</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>9,996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>11,581</td>
<td>68.3</td>
<td>5,369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>12,115</td>
<td>71.6</td>
<td>4,809</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>11,157</td>
<td>75.3</td>
<td>3,665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>8,766</td>
<td>83.4</td>
<td>1,744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>6,406</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>2,136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>4,681</td>
<td>91.9</td>
<td>412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>3,515</td>
<td>74.4</td>
<td>1,211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>3,086</td>
<td>73.0</td>
<td>1,744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>1,946</td>
<td>65.7</td>
<td>1,016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>2,061</td>
<td>84.8</td>
<td>371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>1,313</td>
<td>60.7</td>
<td>851</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>1,561</td>
<td>83.6</td>
<td>306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malta</td>
<td>684</td>
<td>67.3</td>
<td>332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU-27</td>
<td>882,038</td>
<td>65.3</td>
<td>468,381</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*aPortugal figures are for 2007.*

*bIreland figures are for 2008.*

*cSlovakia figures are for 2008.*

*dBulgaria figures are for 2005.*

*e"EU-27" denotes “European Union” and the number of member states at the time.

*Source: FIPE (Italian Federation of Bars and Restaurants), L’Europa al ristorante (February 2011), 21.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dairy</td>
<td>14,200</td>
<td>14,350</td>
<td>14,500</td>
<td>14,425</td>
<td>14,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confectionery</td>
<td>10,146</td>
<td>10,813</td>
<td>11,290</td>
<td>11,528</td>
<td>12,051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wine</td>
<td>10,700</td>
<td>10,900</td>
<td>10,900</td>
<td>10,600</td>
<td>10,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salumi</td>
<td>7,370</td>
<td>7,554</td>
<td>7,578</td>
<td>7,601</td>
<td>7,928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meat</td>
<td>4,950</td>
<td>6,050</td>
<td>6,500</td>
<td>5,700</td>
<td>6,650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beef</td>
<td>5,800</td>
<td>5,920</td>
<td>5,900</td>
<td>5,900</td>
<td>5,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poultry</td>
<td>3,900</td>
<td>5,300</td>
<td>5,300</td>
<td>5,320</td>
<td>5,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasta</td>
<td>3,519</td>
<td>3,730</td>
<td>4,600</td>
<td>4,444</td>
<td>4,303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olive and seed oils</td>
<td>4,200</td>
<td>4,300</td>
<td>4,200</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>4,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frozen foods</td>
<td>3,948</td>
<td>3,980</td>
<td>4,040</td>
<td>4,061</td>
<td>4,126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canned vegetables</td>
<td>3,220</td>
<td>3,413</td>
<td>3,700</td>
<td>3,700</td>
<td>3,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant, dietetic, and nutritional supplements</td>
<td>2,600</td>
<td>2,690</td>
<td>2,800</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>3,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milling</td>
<td>2,392</td>
<td>3,168</td>
<td>3,636</td>
<td>2,560</td>
<td>2,590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beer</td>
<td>2,450</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>2,450</td>
<td>2,400</td>
<td>2,550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee</td>
<td>2,200</td>
<td>2,300</td>
<td>2,350</td>
<td>2,400</td>
<td>2,440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mineral waters</td>
<td>2,200</td>
<td>2,300</td>
<td>2,300</td>
<td>2,200</td>
<td>2,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carbonated beverages</td>
<td>1,750</td>
<td>1,780</td>
<td>1,800</td>
<td>1,800</td>
<td>1,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish</td>
<td>1,223</td>
<td>1,256</td>
<td>1,306</td>
<td>1,387</td>
<td>1,420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit juices and processed fruit products</td>
<td>1,060</td>
<td>1,090</td>
<td>1,086</td>
<td>1,064</td>
<td>1,053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>870</td>
<td>910</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>1,050</td>
<td>1,030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distilled spirits</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freeze-dried produce</td>
<td>850</td>
<td>890</td>
<td>940</td>
<td>970</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial bread</td>
<td>501</td>
<td>594</td>
<td>631</td>
<td>631</td>
<td>651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar</td>
<td>1,100</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bread substitutes</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>17,570</td>
<td>15,229</td>
<td>18,981</td>
<td>21,264</td>
<td>22,644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>110,000</td>
<td>113,000</td>
<td>120,000</td>
<td>120,000</td>
<td>124,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9  Percentages of food and nonfood consumption in Italy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Food consumption (percent)</th>
<th>Nonfood consumption (percent)</th>
<th>Total expenditures (millions of euros)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1861–1870</td>
<td>64.1</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871–1880</td>
<td>65.2</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881–1890</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891–1900</td>
<td>62.3</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901–1910</td>
<td>62.4</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911–1920</td>
<td>62.1</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921–1930</td>
<td>58.7</td>
<td>41.3</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931–1940</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td>47.9</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941–1950</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>50.3</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951–1960</td>
<td>44.7</td>
<td>55.3</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961–1970</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971–1980</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>65.4</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>69.3</td>
<td>519.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td>606.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>69.9</td>
<td>655.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>70.9</td>
<td>731.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>71.9</td>
<td>852.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>73.1</td>
<td>932.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>74.5</td>
<td>997.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>75.6</td>
<td>1,083.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>76.9</td>
<td>1,210.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>76.5</td>
<td>1,311.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>1,431.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>77.6</td>
<td>1,475.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>1,452.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>78.3</td>
<td>1,591.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>78.5</td>
<td>1,661.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>78.9</td>
<td>1,729.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>80.2</td>
<td>2,024.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>80.6</td>
<td>2,076.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>80.9</td>
<td>2,088.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>81.4</td>
<td>2,177.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>81.1</td>
<td>2,178.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>80.6</td>
<td>2,197.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>80.5</td>
<td>2,307.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>81.0</td>
<td>2,381.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>81.0</td>
<td>2,397.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>81.0</td>
<td>2,460.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>81.2</td>
<td>2,480.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>80.9</td>
<td>2,484.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>81.1</td>
<td>2,441.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10  Average monthly expenditures on food in Italy by region, 1981–2009 (percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bread and cereals</th>
<th>Meat</th>
<th>Fish</th>
<th>Oil and fats</th>
<th>Milk, cheese, eggs</th>
<th>Potatoes, fruit, vegetables</th>
<th>Sugar, coffee, tea, etc.</th>
<th>Beverages</th>
<th>Total (euros)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Northwest</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981–1990</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991–2000</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001–2009</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>458</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Northeast</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981–1990</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991–2000</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001–2009</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Center</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981–1990</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991–2000</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001–2009</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>South</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981–1990</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991–2000</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001–2009</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Italy as a whole</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981–1990</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991–2000</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001–2009</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>452</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: ISTAT, Serie storiche 150 anni, 2011.*
NOTES

PREFACE


CHAPTER 1

6. Ibid., 68–72.
7. Marchesa Colombi [= M. A. Torriani], *La gente per bene* (1877; Milan, 1893).
8. Gibus [= M. Serao], *Saper vivere (norme di buona creanza)* (Naples, 1900).
11. The castle of the Sanvitale family, ceded to the municipal district by the last descendant in 1948, is today a museum open to the public. It is possible to visit many rooms (including the dining hall described here, with its furnishings). For more on the castle, see M. Dall’Acqua and M. Calidoni, eds., *Fontanellato: Corte di pianura* (Fontanellato, 2004).
15. On Italian still-life paintings, see A. Appiano, *Bello da mangiare: Il cibo come forma simbolica nell’arte* (Rome, 2001), 102–5. Adjacent to the dining hall in the Sanvitale castle is the “billiard room,” where there are two other still-life paintings by Felice Boselli, these depicting meat (and therefore a profusion of quartered animals, heads lined up, dead game, and so on).


22. Ibid., 95–97.


26. Ibid., 79.


29. Regarding the etiquette for the various types of meals, see Gibus [M. Serao], *Saper vivere*, 74–82. The following details about the dinner are taken from the cited books on good manners by Gioja, Serao, and Colombi. Some particulars of the table that could not be reconstructed from the furnishings kept in the castle of Fontanellato are taken from paintings of the period. For the clothes, see also R. Levi Pisetzky, *Il costume e la moda nella società italiana* (Turin, 1995).

30. The menu described is in Razzetti, *Parma a tavola*, 62. See also Giulio Fano’s private collection of Sanvitale menus.

31. Marquise Colombi [M. A. Torriani], *La gente per bene*, 144–45.


35. L. Cerini di Castegnate, *Il gentiluomo in cucina* (Milan, 2002), 35–42. Examples of more complex menus can be found, for example, in G. Vialardi, *Trattato di cucina* (Turin, 1854); they envisaged twenty courses plus the fruit (another seven dishes), accompanied by a vast selection of vermouths and dry wines for the initial courses, red wines for the strong dishes, and finally both sparkling and sweet wines for the dessert. See also Benporat, *Storia della gastronomia italiana*, 385–88. Regarding the French menu and its transformations over time, see J.-L. Flandrin, *Arranging the Meal: A History of Table Service in France* (2002; Berkeley, 2007).


38. Regarding Jewish cuisine in Italy and its characteristics (including the widespread use of duck instead of pork), see A. Toaff, *Mangiare alla giudia: La cucina ebraica in Italia dal Rinascimento all’eta moderna* (Bologna,
On the characteristics of halal food, see M. N. Riaz and M. M. Chaudry, *Halal Food Production* (Boca Raton, 2003).

42. C. Malamoud, *Cuocere il mondo: Rito e pensiero nell’India antica* (Milan, 1994).


62. Ibid., 199, 259, and 473.

63. On this point, see the observations of Z. Ciuffoletti, “Cultura e tradizione alimentare tra Ottocento e Novecento,” in *Desinari nostrani: Storia dell’alimentazione a Firenze e in Toscana*, ed. Z. Ciuffoletti and G. Pinto (Florence, 2005), 171–85. See also J. Dickie, *Con gusto: Storia degli italiani a tavola* (Rome, 2007).


65. See the various examples of menus from the royal House of Savoy in M. Campiverdi, ed., *Arte e storia a tavola: Due secoli di menu* (Rome, 2003), 163–77.


**Chapter 2**


3. Ibid., 126.


13. Ibid., 204.
16. S. Somogyi, “Cento anni di bilanci familiari in Italia (1857–1956),” in *Annali* (Milan, 1959), 140. The surveys of subsequent years, such as G. Montemartini’s on the peasants in Apulia from 1905 to 1907, also confirm a dramatic situation, with about half the families having expenses exceeding their incomes; see Somogyi, 156–69.
19. Ibid., 153.
20. Ibid., 156–64.
28. This section has been reconstructed above all thanks to oral history testimony; it is based on over 500 accounts collected by Nuto Revelli in the 1970s from Piedmontese peasants. In particular, the entire description of the place, the meal, and the details of family history—apart from different indications—are taken from the account of Anna Lucia Giordanengo, called Lusiota, a peasant born in 1891 (collected by Nuto Revelli on June 21, 1970), in Revelli, *Il mondo dei vinti*, 1:83–85. Other details of the casot description have been added thanks to exhibitions about peasant life by institutions like the Ethnographic Museum of the Province of Cuneo at Rocca de’ Baldi.
31. Caterina Toselli, called Nuia, class of 1890, ibid., 35.
37. Ibid., 84.
39. Ibid., 184.
42. Regarding the situation in the modern period until the first half of the nineteenth century, see R. Sarti, *Vita di casa: abitare, mangiare, vestire nell’Europa moderna* (Rome, 1999), esp. chap. 5.
44. Quotations from Maria Abello, class of 1897, and Adele, class of 1898, respectively, in Revelli, *L’anello forte*, 215 and 124.
51. J. S. Hampf and W. S. Hampf III, “Pellagra and the Origin of a Myth: Evidence from European Literature and Folklore,” *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 90 (November 1997): 636–39. It should be noted that in Italy many sufferers of the disease ended up in insane asylums (see P. Soricelli, “Per una storia sociale dell’alimentazione: Dalla polenta ai crackers,” in *Storia d’Italia: Annali*, vol. 13, *L’alimentazione*, 469–73). There is a lack of reliable estimates of the incidence of the disease in Italy. The official sources indicate as many as 4,000 cases reported every year as late as the first decade of the twentieth century, with an incidence of 11.7 for every 100,000 inhabitants. See Istituto centrale di statistica, *Sommario*, 41.
Notes to Chapter 3

58. Z. Ciuffoletti and G. Pinto, eds., *Desinari nostrani: Storia dell’alimentazione a Firenze e in Toscana* (Florence, 2005), 197–98.
60. V. Bordo and A. Surrusca, eds., *L’Italia del pane* (Bra, 2002); this book describes 208 different types of bread.
62. A. Harlingue, *Emigranti che lasciano l’Italia*, ca. 1900 (photograph), Archivi Alinari, Florence (hereafter: Alinari), RVA-S-004088-0008. This and the images cited below from the same archive can be seen at http://www.alinariarchives.it.
63. *Un gruppo di emigranti che affolla il ponte di una nave*, ca. 1900 (photograph), Alinari, INT-F-031292-0000.
64. A. Harlingue, *Emigranti a Ellis Island, New York; sullo sfondo si intravede la Statua della Liberta*, 1900 (photograph), Alinari, RVAS-000161-0004.
72. Ibid., 351.
73. Ibid., 367–68. In the Philippines, for example, it is possible to trace an interesting evolution concerning the consumption of rice, perceived for a long time as an elitist food full of magical connotations, up to its transformation, at the end of the nineteenth century, into a mass consumption product, which gradually lost its central dietary importance. See F. V. Aguilar, Jr., *Rice in the Filipino Diet and Culture*, Discussion Paper Series No. 2005–15, Philippine Institute for Development Studies, July 2005.

Chapter 3

2. Ibid., 102.


7. Primarily because of the loss of the Papal States to the newly united Kingdom of Italy, Pius IX called upon Italian Catholics not to participate in parliamentary elections. This stance was captured in the slogan, “*Non expedit*—neither as electors, nor as elected.”


9. *Venditore di frittelle a Napoli*, ca. 1900 (photograph), Alinari, ACAF-011657-0000; *Venditori ambulanti di pannocchie e ortaggi a Napoli*, ca. 1890 (photograph), Alinari, ACA-F-11654A-0000; *Venditrice di roccocre, tipico dolce napoletano*, ca. 1900 (photograph), Alinari, ACA-F-011654-0000; G. Brogi, *Maccheronai di Napoli fotografato insieme ad un gruppo di ragazzi*, 1879–1910 (photograph), Alinari, BGA-F-010458-0000.


13. The description of this meal is based on documents in the Historical Archives of the Società Umanitaria of Milan, especially those pertaining to the School of Home Economics (relationships and school programs; recipes, including the one described here; running costs; etc.); the files on the inquiries about the working-class diet; the “Social Museum”; and the dietary situation during the First World War. The description of the house is based on documents about a working-class quarter of Milan; see also *Quando l’Umanitaria era in via Solari: 1906: Il primo quartiere operaio* (Milan, 2006).


16. See the description of this meal, including the various dishes, the quantities, and the relative costs in the Società Umanitaria Historical Archive, b. 342/4: School of Domestic Economics in Milan and beyond, f. School of Domestic Economics/collection of reports, registers, etc., itemized list of the tenth week, dated Thursday, May 25.

17. Società Umanitaria Historical Archive, b. 342/4, Register of the Domestic Education High School Course, November 3 to December 30, 1911.


19. Ibid.

32. F. Cunsolo, *La gastronomia nei proverbi* (Milan, 1970), 44, 47, and 49. The adulteration of food was a very common problem at that time, from the addition of extraneous substances to flour and bread (above all alum) and the dilution of milk, not to mention old and badly preserved foods or fraud regarding weights and measures.
34. Ibid., 154–55 (investigation by A. Minozzi, 1896).
42. Ibid., 47.


54. Società Umanitaria Historical Archive, b. 342/4, School of Domestic Economics in Milan and beyond, f. School of Domestic Economics/collection of reports, registers, etc., *Nozioni di alimentazione popolare* [A. Pugliese, 1916], 20.


56. Growing attention was also being paid to school meals because the pupils would be the workers and citizens of tomorrow, as can be seen in the writings of Maria Montessori and other scholars; for a practical example, see Società Umanitaria Historical Archive, b. 344/6, Istruzione: case dei bambini, 1915.

57. Società Umanitaria Historical Archive, b. 342/4, School of Domestic Economics in Milan and beyond, f. Domestic Education Course 1912, Holiday course in economics and domestic education, April–July 1912 (see also ibid., section Società Umanitaria Historical Archive, b. 342/4, School of Domestic Economics in Milan and beyond, f. School of Domestic Economics/Collection of reports, registers, 1915, undated report [March 31, 1916]).


59. See the selection of historical menus in M. Campiverdi, ed., *Arte e storia a tavola: Due secoli di menu* (Rome, 2003); a copious collection of “Liste di
vivande” (List of foods) can be seen at the Civica raccolta stampe Bertarelli Archive in Milan.


63. Novità e conferme, xxxvii.

64. F. Chiapparino and R. Covino, Consumi e industria alimentare in Italia dall’Unità a oggi (Perugia, 2002), 31–80; Scarpellini, Material Nation, 56–66.


67. B. Avesani, F. Zanini, Quando il freddo era una risorsa: La produzione e il commercio di ghiaccio naturale a Cerro Veronese e in Lessinia (Bosco Chiesanuova, 1990).

68. Una ghiacciaiola di Malandrone, sull’Appennino Pistoiese, ca. 1930 (photograph), Alinari, ACA-F-030815-0000.


Chapter 4

1. F. T. Marinetti and Fillìa, La cucina futurista (Milan, 1932), 183–85.


8. See, for example, the didactic-propaganda documentary of the Istituto Luce, La battaglia del grano (Italy, 1925), in Archivio storico Luce, Rome (hereafter: Luce), visible, like all other sources cited from this archive, at http://www.archivioluce.com.
9. The meal is reconstructed on the basis of interviews conducted by Giuseppina Incalza in Rome in March and April 2011, following the author’s indications. In particular, the family described and the events narrated are based on the accounts of the sisters Rosa, Anna, and Antonietta D., born respectively in 1932, 1936, and 1943 (interviewed on March 17, 2011), unless otherwise stated. Further details about Rome during the Fascist period are taken from A. Portelli et al., Città di parole: Storia orale di una periferia romana (Rome, 2006); A. Clementine and F. Perego, eds., La metropoli “spontanea”: Il caso di Roma 1925–1981: sviluppo residenziale di una città dentro e fuori dal piano (Bari, 1983); and V. Vidotto, Roma contemporanea (Rome, 2001).

10. Interview with Anna Maria M., born in 1936 (March 7, 2011).
11. Interview with Carlo C., born in 1926 (March 10, 2011).
12. Interview with Antonietta D.
15. Interview with Fiammetta F., born in 1934 (March 10, 2011).
16. Interview with Anna D.
17. Interview with Anna Maria M.
18. Interview with Antonio T.
19. Ibid.
20. Interview with Grazia Di G.
21. Interview with Rosa, Anna, and Antonietta D.
22. Giornale Luce B0603, La coltivazione delle banane (Italy and Somalia, January 1935), Luce.
24. Luce newsreel entitled “Cronache dell’Impero CI003” (Harar-Baccà, 1937), Luce.
27. The menus served on the Rex are an interesting example of upscale Italian cuisine with some international additions. The lunch served on board on October 4, 1932, for example, began with mixed hors d’oeuvre (ham, sardines on toast, tuna and tomato, eggs alla zingara, green olives), then consommé, concentrated croûte au pot, Italian-style soup, Brussels sprouts puree or spaghetti with butter or tomato sauce; followed by stone bass fillets and sole supreme or beef entrecote, glazed veal rosettes, pigeon in compote or Bresse chicken on the spit with various side dishes; the cold buffet included turkey, veal loin, corned tongue, cooked ham, a quarter of lamb, roast beef, pig’s trotter, as well as salads; and then ice cream of various flavors, Rosa d’Alpi cake, Santa Chiara cream, small hazelnut cakes, fruit salads and fruit preserves, cheeses (above all Italian and French), fresh fruit, and coffee (F. Manetti, Pranzi a corte e sul Rex: Alcuni menu ritrovati [Pitigliano, 2007], on the page “Pranzo 4 ottobre 1932—Anno X”).
Notes to Chapter 4


31. Italiani a tavola nelle immagini fotografiche della Biblioteca Vallicelliana, photograph A29, anonymous, early twentieth century.

32. Letter quoted in G. Dore, Scritture di colonia: Lettere di Pia Maria Pezzoli dall’Africa orientale a Bologna (1936–1943) (Bologna, 2004), 34; zighini is a stew seasoned with berbere served on a spongy bread called injera.

33. Letter written in Addi Caièh on October 21, 1936, quoted in Dore, Scritture di colonia, 107.

34. Letter quoted in Dore, Scritture di colonia, 124–25.

35. Ibid., 130.


37. R. Earle, “‘If you eat their food...’: Diets and Bodies in Early Colonial Spanish America,” American Historical Review 115, no. 3 (June, 2010): 688–713.


40. Ibid., 5.


43. Ibid., 182–87 (the Inea investigation).

44. Ibid., 199–200 (investigation by A. Costanzo).


46. Ibid., 81–90.


50. Marinetti and Fillìa, La cucina futurista, 247–52.

53. There is a very large collection of advertising images in the Raccolta delle stampe “Achille Bertarelli” at the Museo del Castello Sforzesco di Milano; other images, including digital ones, can be seen on the website of the Massimo and Sonia Cirulli Archive, New York, http://www.cirulliarchive.org.
57. [A. Moretti Foggia], *Ricette di Petronilla* (1935; Milan, 1943), 6–7.
63. These and the following data are taken from ISTAT; see *I conti economici dell’Italia*, vol. 1, *Una sintesi delle fonti ufficiali*.
67. Genepesca (= Compagnia generale della grande pesca) was founded in Rome in 1935; it commissioned one of Roberto Rossellini’s first films, the documentary *Fantasia sottomarina*, shot in 1939 in Ladispoli.
69. Ibid., 67.
74. D. Parvis, “Studi sull’alimentazione di una collettività femminile a dieta ridotta per esigenze di guerra,” *Archivio dell’Istituto biochimico italiano*, 2, 1943, 5–6. The values referred to are taken from a 1925 study which calculated the daily calorie requirements of each nation as follows: Japan 2553, Italy 2612, Russia 2666, Germany 2770, Austria 2825, France 2973, England 2997, the United States 3308, Central America 2763 (ibid., 5).
75. On the providences of wartime, see Luce Newsreel C0401, *Aosta—La vita in un villaggio per gli sfollati*, June 24, 1944, Luce.


---

**Chapter 5**


13. [C. Rosselli], *Il saper vivere di Donna Letizia* (1960; Milan, 2007), 104. The author became famous by writing for magazines like *Grazia* and later *Gente*.


15. Ibid., 214, 148.

17. The material for the reconstruction of this meal comes from the interview with Celestina L., born in 1939, conducted by Enrico Miletto in Turin on April 12, 2011, following the author’s indications. Further elements regarding Turin in that period are taken from V. Castronovo, Torino (Rome, 1987); G. Fofi, L’immigrazione meridionale a Torino (Milan, 1964); and P. Corti and M. Sanfilippo, eds., Storia d’Italia. Annali, vol. 24, Migrazioni (Turin, 2009).


19. Celestina L., interview; all quotations in this section are taken from this interview.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.


27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. This section and the next one also draw on the interviews collected in the investigation of food and dietary habits conducted by the author in 2009 using directed interviews, oral accounts, and semi-structured questionnaires.

31. C. D’Apice, L’arcipelago dei consumi: Consumi e redditi delle famiglie in Italia dal dopoguerra ad oggi (Bari, 1981), 53, 96, 144 (the data are from studies by the Bank of Italy in 1966 and 1975). For an analysis of the spread of household electrical appliances and their cultural significance, see Scarpellini, Material Nation, 145–51.


38. For the calculation of the costs, as well as the layout and the dimensions of the kitchen described, see A. M. Bonchieri, “Il costo della casa: La cucina,” La cucina italiana, February 1957, 126–28. By way of comparison, a Fiat 500 in
1957 cost 485,000 lire and a lower-tier Fiat employ earned about 400,000 annually.

46. These and the following data are taken from ISTAT, *Sommaire di statistiche storiche*.
74. See the articles published monthly in *La cucina italiana* in 1957 as well as E. Vizzari, “Il cammino dei ristoranti verso la qualità,” *Speciale 70 anni*, special issue of *La cucina italiana* (November 1999).


82. See other interesting *L’Espresso* articles from that year such as “La truffa dell’olio” (July 6) and “Tempesta nell’ampolla” (July 13).

83. See the investigation conducted by Doxa (the most important Italian market research company) in Luzzatto Fegiz, *Il volto sconosciuto dell’Italia: Seconda serie*, 1733–1739 (food fraud); and Truzzi’s intervention in the Chamber of Deputies, on October 3, 1962, in *Atti Parlamentari, III Legislatura, Discussioni*, 33959–61.


85. Camporesi, *La terra e la luna*, 234–35. Because of the same need to safeguard traditional gastronomic values, the Accademia italiana della cucina (Italian Academy of Cuisine) was set up in 1954 by the writer Orio Vergani, who was helped by artists, entrepreneurs, and professionals, including Dino Buzzati, Arnoldo Mondadori, Giò Ponti, Dino Villani, and many others. See G. Franceschi and S. De Lorenzo, eds., *Cinquanta’anni di cultura e civiltà della tavola* (Milan, 2004).

86. Franceschi and Lorenzo, eds., *Cinquanta’anni*. 
87. For example, *La cucina italiana* published, for the centenary of Italian unity, a series of monographic guides on each Italian region, from January 1960 to September 1961.

88. “La grande abbuffata,” directed by Marco Ferreri (France and Italy, 1973).

**CHAPTER 6**

2. Ibid., 123–24.
11. There was also a film about Julia Child, starring Meryl Streep, *Julie & Julia*, directed by N. Ephron (USA, 2009).
15. Dario L., interview.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
23. This was the “Progetto Galileo” (Galileo Project), promoted by Brandt Italia, BSH, Candy, Electrolux-Zanussi, Indesit, and Reckitt Benckiser (manufacturer of the detergent Finish).
27. Ibid.
33. B. Gasperini [B. Robecchi], *Il galateo* (1975; Milan, 2010), 5.
34. L. Sotis, *Il nuovo bon ton* (2005; Milan, 2010), 158 (the first edition of *Bon Ton* was published in 1982).


46. S. Gundle, *Figure del desiderio. Storia della bellezza femminile italiana* (Rome, 2007), 236–54.

47. Gundle, *Figure del desiderio*, 402–3, 430–42.


58. ISTAT, *Obesità e sovrappeso* (Rome, 1999); Annuari Istat, various years.


63. R. Wagnleitner, Coca-Colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria After the Second World War (Chapel Hill, NC, 1994).

64. In rankings for 2008, among the 25 brands best known globally, the food ones were Coca Cola in fifth place (after Pampers, Nokia, Microsoft, and Colgate), McDonald’s eighth (preceded by Nike and Sony) and Nescafé eleventh (preceded by Adidas and IBM). See N. Hollis, The Global Brand: How to Create and Develop Lasting Brand Value in the World Market (New York, 2008), 48.


67. The sources of these and the following data are the Annuari Istat, various years.


69. C. Geertz, Antropologia interpretativa (Bologna, 1988), 192.


75. M. C. Escher, Relativity (lithograph), 1953.


15. F. Neresini, *Il nano-mondo che verrà: Verso la società nanotecnologica* (Bologna, 2011); see also the interesting specific reports about dietary nanotechnology commissioned by the British Food Standards Agency (e.g., *Assessment of the potential use of nanomaterials as food additives or food ingredients in relation to consumer safety and implication for regulatory controls*, July 2007).


18. ISTAT, 8° *Censimento generale dell’industria e dei servizi* (Rome, 2001), 53.


27. Sicca, Lo straniero nel piatto, 15.


30. Osservatorio nazionale dei distretti italiani, Distretti per settore 2011; idem, II Rapporto (Mestre, 2011).

31. Medioilbanca, Indagine sul settore vinicolo (Milan, 2011), 28–39. The main world groups in terms of revenues in 2010 were Constellation Brands (USA), Foster’s Group (Australia), Distell Group (South Africa), Vina Concha Y Toro (Chile), and Yantai Changyu Pioneer Wine (China).


37. The average monthly income decreased slightly in 2012 and then again in 2013, when it reached 2,359 euros. The amount of food expenditure was nevertheless very similar (468 euros in 2012, 461 euros in 2013). See ISTAT, I consumi delle famiglie: Anno 2013 (Rome, 2014).


42. ISTAT, *Rapporto annuale: La situazione del Paese nel 2010*, 172–75. Deprivation is indicated by at least three of the following parameters: (1) not being able to meet unexpected expenses; (2) not being able to afford an annual week’s vacation; (3) having short-term debts or being in arrears with mortgage payments or rent or bills; (4) not being able to afford an adequate meal at least every two days; (5) not being able to heat one’s home sufficiently; (6) not owning a washing machine or television or telephone or car.


45. Interview of G. Fatouma, conducted by Michela Offredi at Madone (province of Bergamo) in January 2011. *Thieboudienne* is considered the Senegalese national dish and consists of fish, rice, and tomato sauce; *maffé* is a stew of meat (lamb, beef, or chicken) and vegetables with a particular tomato and peanut sauce; *lakh* is milk fermented with millet and fresh fruit; *fondé* is similar, with curdled milk, millet, or corn. *Ataya* is tea, in fact, the three different types of tea that end the meal with a complex preparation: the first is strong and bitter (usually reserved for men), the second is sweeter (for adult women), and the third is light and flavored with mint leaves (and is for everyone, including the children).

46. Interview of D. Abbs, conducted by Michela Offredi in Bergamo in January 2011.


60. Eurispes, Rapporto Italia 2011 (sintesi), 45–46. Instead, other estimates refer to about 10% of the population being vegetarian.


64. C. Petrini, Buono, pulito e giusto: Principi di nuova gastronomia (Turin, 2005).


Index

Note: The letter “n” following the locators refers to endnote numbers.

Abate, Felice, 57
abundant–meager alternation, 21, 133
Adenauer, Hermann Joseph, 136
advertising
   art and, 97
   for canned meat, 129
   for colonial products, 90
   in cooking magazines/postwar period, 114
early, 77
for electrical appliances, 122, 123, 124
housewives as audience for, 123, 124
for Liebig’s meat extract, 91–92
for packaged foods, 129–30
“Progetto Galileo,” 151, 241n23
sugar in, 126
television, 130, 135, 144–45, 146, 186–87
women in, during Fascist regime, 99–100
for yogurt, 152
see also propaganda during Fascist regime
affluent society period, 141–69
   body concept in, 160–64
eating out in, 149, 155–60
globalization and, 164–69
income percentage spent on food in, 143, 151
kitchens in, 147, 150–51
meal description in, 146–50, 240n14
television advertising and, 144–45, 146
Africa, 90–95, 168, 169, 233n32
age
   body size and, 163
eating out and, 156–59

agriculture
   food industry and, 75–79
   food–science nexus, 196–98
gendered division of labor and, 43
   genetics and, 197
   peasant world and, 31–32, 33, 34
   vs. processed food, 127
   Slow Food Movement and, 201
Aiello, Leslie, 160
Albertoni, Pietro, 73
Aldi, 187
Alto-Adige region, 96
Americanization, 166
Andreotti, Giulio, 142
Annabella (magazine), 154
Annang people, 161
anorexia, 162
D’Apice, Carmela, 144
Appadurai, Arjun, 169
Appert, Nicolas, 78
Apulia region, 115, 116, 117
aristocracy, 1–26, 43–44
   apparel in, 1, 4, 12
   etiquette in, 3–5, 9–10, 222n29
   kitchens in, 179
   local tradition in, 14–15, 21–26
   meal description in, 11–18
   meat consumption by, 15–21
   social hierarchy in, 3–5, 10
Aristotle, 202
art, 120–21
   food in, 5, 7, 46, 202–3
   Futurism, 81–82, 97
   in Sanvitale castle, 221n15
   on seven deadly sins, 20–21
L’arte di utilizzare gli avanzi della mensa (The Art of Using Table Leftovers) (Guerrini), 100
Artusi, Pellegrino, 24–25, 44
Ashurnasirpal II, King of Assyria, 191–92
austerity, see parsimony
Autogrill service area, 134
automobiles, 117, 119, 134
Autostrada del Sole (Highway of the Sun), 144
avian influenza, 196
“l’avventura di due sposi” (Calvino), 109–11
Azande people, 36
baby boom, 110
baby food, 130
bananas, 90
Banda people, 30
banquets, 75, 133, 191–92
Futurist, 81–82
Barbara (complex society meal description), 174–78
Barilla, 185, 186
Bari region, 96
bars, 135
Barthes, Roland, 71
basse cuisine, 20
Battle for Wheat (Fascist propaganda initiative), 86
Baudrillard, Jean, 146
beauty, 160–64
Beccaris, Bava, 42
Beck, Ulrich, 199
beef, 33, 73, 76, 125, 127
in affluent society, 151–52
bistecca, 129
canned boiled, 78
corned, 79
food industry and, 185
regional consumption levels of, 193
roast beef, 14, 16–17
see also meat; meat consumption
Benedict, Ruth, 18
benge ritual, 36
Benjamin, Walter, 178–79, 180
Berlinguer, Enrico, 142
Berlusconi, Silvio, 145
Bersani Law (1998), 187
beverages
Coca Cola, 114, 158, 166, 243n64
sweet carbonated, 128–29
see also water; wine
Bianchetti, Angelo, 134
Bianciardi, Luciano, 113
bistecca (quick-cooking meat), 129
black market, 88, 106, 108
BMI (Body Mass Index), 162–63
Bocca, Giorgio, 113, 135
Boccasile, Gino, 99
Bocuse, Paul, 159
body concept, 71, 160–64
boiling, 16, 78
bombing, 88–89
Bon Ton (Sotis), 154–55
Borachia, Vittorio, 120
Boselli, Felice, 7
Botero, Fernando, 164
Bottéro, Jean, 191
Bourdieu, Pierre, 4, 70–71, 145–46, 150, 164
on separation in domestic space, 6
on tasting, 17
bourgeoisie, 3, 4, 6, 95
bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE, mad cow disease), 196
brand-name goods, 165–66, 185
global rankings of, 243n64
wine, 166, 189, 245n31
Braschi, Enzo, 157
bread
in affluent society, 148
of American military, 89
bought vs. home-baked, 128
geographical journey of, 51
in Mediterranean diet, 49–51
in peasant world, 45, 46–47
price of, 42
rationing of, 88
regional and social variations of, 47–48
regulations on production of, before WWI, 84
symbolism of, 51
“bread of the dead,” 35
breakfast, 11, 15, 128
Brin, Irene, 155
Bruegel the Elder, Pieter, 20
Buitoni, 186
Burghy, 156, 157–58
butter, 66, 137, 152
Bynum, Caroline, 162

Cairoli, Benedetto, 24
Calvino, Italo, 109–11, 144
Camporesi, Piero, 145
canned foods, 129
canning, 78, 79
canteens (collective working-class eating), 73–74, 79, 155
Capatti, Alberto, 24
Caporetto, 85
Carasso, Isaac, 153
Cardinale, Claudia, 161
Carême, Marie-Antoine de, 10
Carosello (Carousel) (television program), 130
Carrefour, 187
casot (peasant huts), 37–42
Castiglione, Baldassare, 4
Castiglioni brothers, 120
Catholicism, 20, 57, 135, 228n7
Celestina (postwar meal description), 115–18
centerpieces, 7
ceramics/pottery, 6, 7, 175
cereals, 18–19
  average yearly consumption of, 32–33
  bread and, 50–51
  during industrial development, 73
  in peasant world, 32–33, 45, 95–96
  see also wheat
Cervera family, 19
chairs/thrones/seating, 3, 6
Chambers, Iain, 50
cheese consumption, 124, 152, 153
chestnuts, 33, 38, 45
Chianti wine, 25
Chiapparino, Francesco, 96
Chiari, Walter, 129
chicken, 36–37
  in affluent society, 151
  benge ritual, 36
  consumption levels of, 125
dioxins found in, 196
  in peasant world, 40
  poultry, 17, 127
  see also meat; meat consumption
Child, Julia, 145, 240n11
children, 12, 40–42, 70
China, 103
Chinese cuisine, 167, 168
chopsticks, 222n18
Christian Democrats, 111, 127, 135–36
Christians, 15, 68
Christmas, 87, 133
Cinzano, 97
CIR group, 186
Cirio, Francesco, 77, 78
Clarke, Arthur C., 183
class, see social class
col, 60
Cobb, John, 198
Coca Cola, 158, 166
  advertising for, 114
  global ranking of, 243n64
cocktails, 114
coffee, 90–91, 92–93
  in postwar period, 110, 124
Colombi, Marquise, 5
Colombo, Joc, 120
Colombo, Luigi, 82
colonial cuisine, 90–95
colonialism, 90–95, 166
Colonnata lardo, 199
color use, 17, 81
Common Agriculture Policy (CAP), 199
Communists, 135
company mergers and acquisitions, 186
complex society period, 171–203
environmental modification in, 197–98
food industry in, 183–91
food scandals in, 196, 199
globalization in, 196
income percentage spent on food in, 192–93
kitchens in, 174–75, 179–83
local–global dualism in, 180–81
meal description in, 174–78, 244n5
political climate in, 173–74
Senegalese community and, 194–95, 246n45
Conad (purchasing group), 187
consumer knowledge/self-education, 200
consumer protection movements, 138, 239n84
consumers, 85–86
  diversification of food spending by, 128
  women, 131–32
consumption levels
  during affluent society period, 142–44, 151, 155
  average annual per capita, 1861–2009, 212–13
  average Italian, in 1880s, 32–33
  by country, 155
  factors influencing, 101
  during Fascist regime, 95, 96–97, 98, 101
  percentages of food and nonfood, in Italy, 219
  poor families, 1872–1878, 33–34, 37, 210
  postwar, 109–10, 111, 124–32
  of rice and fish, 101–5
  rich families, 1872–1878, 33–34, 37, 211
conversation, 13–14, 18, 41
convivial banquets, 75
cookbooks, 24–25, 135
  by women, 100–101
cookies, 128
cooking (as preparation technique), ix, 16, 151, 182
cooking shows, 145
Coop Italia, 187
corn, 45–46, 49
  polenta, 23, 33, 38–40
Corriere della Sera (newspaper), 154
corruption, 173
corsets, 162
Costa, Angelo, 137
Counihan, Carole, 128
Covino, Renato, 96
Cowan, Ruth Schwartz, 123
crackers, 129
Cagnotti, 186
cream, 152
Cremonini, 157–58, 185
Cremonini, Luigi, 158
Crispi, Francesco, 41, 45
Croce, Giuseppe Cesare, 31
“Cronache dell’Impero” (1937 newsreel), 91

La cucina italiana (Italian Cuisine) (magazine), 83, 113–14, 135
  cultural materialism, 16, 26
  cunning, 31
Cuore (Amicis), 24
cutlery, 7–9
dairy products, 33, 84, 152–53
  cheese, 124, 152, 153
  milk, 124, 127, 152
Daly, Herman, 198
Danone Company, 152, 153
Dario (affluent society meal description), 147–50
Dario (complex society meal description), 175–78
De Amicis, Edmondo, 24
De Angelis, Wilma, 145
De Benedetti, Carlo, 186
Debord, Guy, 144
deflation, 97
De Gasperi, Alcide, 111
De Grazia, Victoria, 99
De Nittis, Giuseppe, 5
Denominazione di Origine Controllata (wine legislation), 138
Depero, Fortunato, 97, 99
Depretis, Agostino, 2, 24, 41
depression, 70, 194, 246n42
desserts, 14, 15, 126
  packaged, 128
diet
  of average Italian, 32–33
  caloric intake, 107, 125
  of English working class, 69
  height and, 65, 162–63
  improvements during industrial development, 71–75
  improvements in, after WWI, 86
  Mediterranean, 49–51, 193, 201
  nutrition, 72–75, 124, 133, 160
  of peasants, 32–34
  scientific terms of, 72–75, 78
  as shared culture, 48–49
  variations in, by social group, 95–96
  variations in, geographic, 95–96
dieting, 133, 178
dinettes, 119, 120, 179
dining rooms
  aristocratic dining halls, 2, 5–7
  color use, 17
dinettes, 119, 120
status and, 5–6
dinner, 11, 155
dioxin chicken, 196
discount stores, 187
disease, 65, 124
  pellagra, 45–6, 226n51
dishwashers, 150–51, 216
Disraeli, Benjamin, 69
distribution, 130–31
documentary on poverty (Luce Institute), 111–12
La dolce vita (film), 114
  domestic spatial arrangement
    in postwar period, 118–19
    private–public, 6
    separated rooms, 6
domestic work, 122–24
Domus (magazine), 120
Dona, Vincenzo, 138
Douglas, Mary, 48–49, 156
Drive In (television show), 157
Dudovich, Marcello, 99
Durand, Peter, 78

Easter, 20, 87–88, 133
eating out, 135
  in affluent society period, 149, 155–60
  by country, 217
  vs. home-cooked food, 58, 155
  inexpensiveness of, 58
  in postwar period, 117
  street vendors, 53–55, 58, 195
Eat Well & Stay Well (Keys), 50
Eco, Umberto, 144
E. coli, 196
ecology, 181–83
  consumers’ environmentalism
    affecting eating habits, 200–201
  environmental modification and, 37, 197–98
  peasants’ agricultural work and, 31–32
  economic crisis, 84, 85, 96–97, 142
    of 1929, 97
    of 2008, 192, 193–94
economic miracle period, see affluent society period; complex society period
economic progress, 143–44
electrical appliances, 119–20, 121–24
  ecology and, 181–82, 183
  production of, in Italy, 216
  technology and, 182–83
  women and, 131
electricity, 61
Eliade, Mircea, 61
Elias, Norbert, 8–9
emigration, 48–49, 167
Engels, Friedrich, 69
English working class, 69
  entremets (intermezzos), 15
  entrecôte (first important dish), 14
  environment, 181–82, 183
  production of, in Italy, 216
  women and, 131
Erhard, Ludwig, 136
Escher, Maurits Cornelis, 169
Escoffier, Auguste, 25, 159
L’Espresso (news weekly), 137
Esselunga, 187
Ethiopia, 90, 92, 94
ethnic cuisines, 166–67, 195
  African, 94, 233n32
etiquette
  in affluent society, 154
  in aristocracy, 3–5, 9–10, 222n29
  in postwar period, 114
  working-class families and, 70–71
exported food, 76, 102
factory workers, 59, 115–16
canteens and, 73–74, 79
  in postwar period, 109–10
  variations in conditions for, 69–70
  see also industrial development/city eating; working class
family as social group, 156
family size, 70, 112, 176
Fanfani, Amintore, 111
Fascist Party regime era, 81–108, 111
Coca Cola and, 166
colonial cuisine in, 90–95
consumption levels during, 95, 96–97, 98, 101
food autarchy in, 86, 95–98
Futurist banquets and, 81–82
meal description in, 86–90, 232n9
price of food during, 97–105
public opinion of, 107
see also propaganda during Fascist regime
fashion, 161
fast food, 157–58
fasting, 21, 72, 133, 162
fats, 66, 96, 124, 129, 137
feast days, 20, 133
Feldmann, Augusto, 11, 14, 18
Fellini, 114
Ferreri, Marco, 140
Ferrero, 185, 186
Feste dell’Unità (celebrations), 159
Feuerbach, Ludwig, 160
Fiat factories in Turin, 112–13, 115, 116
Fiat workers study, 112–13
Fillia (Luigi Colombo), 82
Fininvest, 145
Finiper, 187
Finnish diet, 50
fire, 42–43
in stoves/industrial-development, 60–61
First World War, 84–85
fish, 36, 37, 101, 102
in affluent society, 149
Fascist campaign for, 98, 101, 104
industrial district for, 189
in Mediterranean diet, 49
moderation and, 21
in postwar period, 117, 127
preparation of, 67, 183
preserved, 67
see also meat consumption
focolare (hearth fire), 42–43
Foggia, Amalia Moretti (Petronilla), 100–101
food autarchy, 86, 95–98
food businesses, 185
food distribution, 73
in complex society, 187–88
diversification in, 200–201
during Fascist regime, 97–98
of fish, 104
industrial food districts, 146, 188–89
of refrigerated/frozen foods, 79
supermarkets and, 130–31, 139
food fraud, 79, 85, 137–38, 229n32
food industry
in complex society, 183–91
dairy in, 152–53
during Fascist regime, 98
food–science nexus, 196–98
fraud in, 85, 137–38
during industrial development, 75–79
industrial food districts, 146, 188–89
Italian revenues of, by sector, 2006–2010, 218
in postwar period, 126–32, 137–40
price of food and, 128
supermarkets and, 130–31, 139
wine, 189–91
food labeling, 199
food rationing, 85, 88, 106, 107
food scandals, 196, 199
forks, 8–9
Forza Italia party, 173
France, 10, 24, 35, 42, 178–79
Frankfurt Kitchen, 119–20
Freeman, Michael, 168
freezers, 151
production of, in Italy, 216
French Chef, The (television show), 145
French cuisine, 10, 21–22, 24, 159, 168–69
Artusi on, 25
cheese, 153
Fridays, 20, 21
Frigidaire, 120
Le Frigorifique (refrigerated steamship), 79
frozen foods, 129, 175
frying, 66
Funk, Casimir, 72
fusion cuisine, 168
Futurism, 81–82, 97
galateo (etiquette), see etiquette
gardens, 106–7, 182

gas lamps, 61
Gasperini, Brunella, 154, 155
gastronomic literature, 83, 100, 106
gastronomic synthesis, 81
GDP of Italy, 110, 141
Geertz, Clifford, 167–68
gender
decreased differentiation in roles, 179
division of labor by, 43–45, 149, 176–77
Fascist propaganda and, 99–105
hierarchy and, 43–45
see also men; women
Genepesca, 104, 234n67
General Commission on Food Consumption, 85
General Motors, 120
genetics, 197
La gente per bene (Respectable People) (Marquise Colombi), 5
Genuine Progress Indicator, 198
Germany
Italy and, during WWII, 107–8
nutrition in, 72
in postwar period, 131, 136–37
vegetarianism in, 200
Ghersi, Italo, 100
Il ghiottone errante (The Wandering Glutton) (Monelli), 83
Gini index, 174
Gioia, Melchiorre, 5, 9–10, 11
Giolitti, Giovanni, 75, 96
globalization, 164–69
in complex society, 196
effects of, 172–73
food scandals and, 196
food–science nexus and, 196–98
of Italian cuisine, 201–2
global movement of food, 22–23, 51, 165–66
gluttony, 20–21, 97
body concept and, 162
secularization and dieting and, 133
sugar and, 125
goat meat, 66, 151
Goldberger, Joseph, 45–46
Goldthwaite, Richard, 26
“good manners.” see etiquette
Goody, Jack, 19–20, 94, 168
Gosetti sisters, 113
government food regulation, 198–99
grains, see cereals; wheat
La grande abbuffata (The Great Binge) (film), 140
green building, 181
Green Revolution, 197
Grillo, Beppe, 152
grist tax, 42
Gross Domestic Product (GDP), 198
GS Supermarkets, 157
Guérard, Michel, 159
Guerrini, Olindo, 100
Guida gastronomica d’Italia (Touring Club Italiano), 83
Gundle, Stephen, 161

Hamburger Lady, 141–42
Harris, Marvin, 16
Hasuike, Makio, 120
haute cuisine, 20, 159
health
food scandals, 196
improvements in public, 64–66
Mediterranean Diet and, 193, 201
nanotechnology and, 184
science and, 124
vegetarianism and, 200
water and, 57
hearth fire, 42–43
heraldic emblems, 6
hierarchical food order, 16, 94
hierarchical social order
in affluent society, 154
of aristocracy, 3–5, 10
in Ethiopia, 94
gender and, 43–45
during industrial development, 69–70
of kitchens, 179
in peasant world, 43–45
quantity/quality of food consumption in, 19–20
seating arrangements and, 13
highway service stations, 134
Hindus, 15
holidays, 87, 133, 156
home-cooked food, 155, 217
  expense of, 58
  see also eating out
Horace, 111
bors-d’œuvres, 14
horse meat, 66
housing, 115–16
human ecological footprint, 197–98
hunger, 29–30
grist tax, 42
malnourishment, 70
hygiene, 72, 124
  improvements in, 64–65
  street vendors and, 195
IBEC (International Basic Economy Corporation), 130–31
ice cream, 128
ice houses, 78–79
identity, Italian national, 83–84, 203
identity, modernity and, 173
immigrants, 194–95
immigration, 167
  to Germany, 137
  to North region, 110, 113, 139–40
imported food, 22–23, 76
  brand-name, 166
  increase in, during Fascist regime, 96
income
  of agricultural workers, 32, 33, 34
  of factory workers, 70, 110
  increased levels of, 64–65, 110, 125, 143
  reduction in, 96, 98
  trend in per capita since 1994, 192
income percentage spent on food
  in 1880s, 18, 33, 34
  in 1934, 95–96
  in 1981–2009, 220
  since 1994, 192–93
  in 2012–2013, 245n37
  in affluent society, 143, 151
  in complex society, 192–93
  during industrial development, 68–69, 76
  by peasants, 18, 34, 95
  in postwar period, 112–13
Indian cuisine, 169
  industrialism, 143
  industrial development/city eating, 53–79
  canteens, 73–74, 79
  diet improvement during, 71–75
  factory workers, 59, 69–70, 73–74, 79
  food industry, 75–79
  income percentage spent on food, 68–69, 76
  meal description in, 59–64
  meal times in, 59
  meat in, 62–63, 66–67, 73
  public health and, 64–66
  restaurants in, 58–59
  street vendors, 53–55, 58
  water in, 56–57, 61, 73
  wine in, 62, 68, 73
  working class, 59–64, 68–69, 70–71, 73–74, 79
industrial districts, 143, 146, 188
industrial food districts, 146, 188–89
inflation, 85, 106
Internet, 180, 182–83
Io compro, tu compri (I Buy, You Buy) (television show), 138
Ireland potato famine, 46
IRI (Institute for Industrial Reconstruction), 186
“Italia” etymology, 15
“Italian” cuisine (in U.S.), 49
Italian food businesses, 185–86
Italiani del nord e italiani del sud (Northern and Southern Italians) (Niceforo), 72–73
Italian language, 98
Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), 112, 163–64, 176, 188, 246n42
Italian Social Movement, 111
Jacini, Stefano, 32
Japanese diet, 50, 185
Javanese wedding poem, 132
Jewish people, 15
Jones, Martin, 51
Jukun people, 8
  Kayapó people, ix
  kebabs, 195–96
Index

257

Keys, Ancel, 49–50, 201

kitchens
  in affluent society, 147, 150–51
  in complex society, 174–75, 179–83
  dinettes and, 119
eat-in, 119
  ecology and technology in, 181–83
during Fascist regime, 87
  living kitchens, 179
  in modern French houses, 179
  in postwar period, 116, 118–24, 131
  status and, 5–6
  on television, 145

knives, 7–9, 221n17
Kuznets, Simon, 101
Kwakiutl Indians, 18

labor force participation by women, 123
Lactalis, 186
lamb, 151
Lancia Brothers, 78
Land of Cockaigne, the, 30
lard, 66
Latium region, 96, 112
Lauro, Achille, 112
legislation, 138
Lemba people, 105–6
Lent, 20, 21, 133
Leopard, The (Lampedusa), 1–3, 4
Letizia, Donna, 114
Lettere meridionali (Southern Letters) (Villari), 32
Levi, Carlo, 105
Lévi-Strauss, Claude, ix, 15, 185
Libro del Cortegiano (The Book of the Courtier) (Castiglione), 4–5
Lidl, 187
Liebig, Justus, 72, 77, 91–92
Limitt, Paolo, 145
livestock, 76, 84, 127
  see also meat; meat consumption
living kitchens, 179
local–global dualism, 165, 180–81, 188
  see also globalization
locally-sourced food, 21–26, 98, 149, 153
  as globalization response, 172–73
local tradition, 21–26
Lollobrigida, Gina, 161

Lombroso, Cesare, 45
Lombroso, Gina, 68
longevity, 64
Loren, Sophia, 161
Louis Philippe d’Orléans, king of France, 75, 178, 180
Luce Institute, 111–12
lunch, 11, 148, 155, 202

magazines, cooking, 114
Maggi, Julius, 77
Magistretti, Vico, 120
Magnum Agency, 160
Maione, Guiseppe, 144
malnourishment, 70
Mangano, Silvana, 161
“Manifesto della cucina futurista” (Manifesto of Futurist Cooking) (Marinetti and Fillia), 82
Mani pulite (Clean Hands investigation), 173
Marchesi, Gualtiero, 159
Marches region, 96
Marinetti, 82
market surveys, 113
Marshall, Alfred, 188
Masronardi, Lucio, 113
Maya people, 45–46
Mayes, Frances, 171–72
Mazzarò story, 27–29
McDonald’s, 157–58, 185, 195, 243n64
McKeown, Thomas, 65
McLuhan, Marshall, 172
meal courses, 13–15, 62, 148–49, 155, 222n35
meal descriptions
  in affluent society, 146–50, 240n14
  in aristocracy, 11–18
  in complex society, 174–78, 244n5
  in Fascist regime, 86–90, 232n9
during industrial development, 59–64, 228n13
  peasant, 37–42, 225n28
  in postwar period, 115–18, 236n17
“meals of the dead,” 35
meal times, 10–11, 15, 39, 59, 155
meat
   abstaining from, 21, 133
   fast food, 157–58
   food–science nexus and, 197
   game, 36, 37
   genetics and, 197
   preparation of, 16–17, 36, 66, 67, 183
   price of, 18–19
   refrigeration of, 79
   religious law and, 15–16
   Simmenthal canned, 129
   for soldiers, 84
   in vitro, 184
   white, 151–52
   see also beef; chicken; fish; pork
meat consumption
   in affluent society, 149, 151
   during affluent society period, 143, 151
   after 1950s, 125
   in aristocracy, 15–21
   average yearly, 33, 125
   during Fascist regime, 84, 87, 95, 96
   during industrial development, 62–63, 66–67, 73
   in peasant world, 40
   in postwar period, 116–17, 125
   reduction in, 193
   regional variations in, 16–17, 19, 67
   by social group, 95
meat extract, 72, 77–78, 91–92
Mechnikov, Ilya, 152–53
medical care, 65
   see also health
Mediterranean diet, 49–51, 193, 201
Mellowes, Alfred, 120
men
   after-meal ritual of, 14
   BMI of, 163
   body concept of, 162, 164
   caloric requirements for, 107
   income of, in factory work, 70
   knives and, 8
   labor of, 43–44
   in peasant world, 43
   wine and, during industrial development, 68
   see also gender; women
Mennell, Stephen, 20
methanol wine, 196
   Michelin Guide, 134–35, 159
   microwaves, 151, 182
   middle class, 123, 179, 192–93
   Milan Institute of Hygiene study, 107
   military, 79
      American, 89
      meat in, 84
      microwave cooking, 151
      rations in, 73, 84–85, 103
      WWI and, 84–85
   milk consumption, 124, 127, 152
   Ministry of the Interior study, 69
   Mintz, Sidney, 125
   Miseria e nobiltà (Poverty and Nobility) (film), 114
   mobility, 110, 115, 134, 167
   moderation, 21
   Mokyr, Joel, 124
   molecular gastronomy, 183
   Monelli, Paolo, 83
      Monoblocco (kitchen design), 120
   Montanari, Massimo, 24
   Morelli, Lidia, 100
   Moro, Aldo, 142
   mortality rates, 64, 65–66
   multiculturalism, 166–67
   Munch, Edvard, 164
   Muslims, 15
   Mussolini, Benito, 83
   Muti, Ornella, 161
      The Mystery of Sacrifice or Man Is What He Eats (Feuerbach), 160
   nanotechnology, 183–84
   Na people, 71
   Naples region
      aqueduct system in, 57
      Fiat workers in, 113
      Lauro election, 112
      pasta in, 103
   national cuisine, globalization and, 168–69
   nationalism, 24, 25–26
      Fascist regime and, 82, 96
      language and, 98
   National Rice Body (Ente nazionale risi), 102–3
   national unification of Italy, 2, 24
   Native American myths, 142
Index

Natta, Giulio, 121
nature–culture dualism, 181
Nauru and Cook islands, 163
Nazism, 108
Ndie Zot rite, 35
Nestlé, 186
newsreels, 91
Niceforo, Alfredo, 72–73
North Atlanta Trade Organization (NATO), 108, 136
Northeast region, 147
North region
consumption levels in, 151
fats in, 96
immigration to, 110, 113, 139–40
pasta in, 103
poverty in, 112
rice in, 102
sweets in, 126
Northwest region, 147
Notari, Umberto, 83
Nove, Aldo, 141–42
Novello (illustrator), 83
Nuovo Galateo (The New Etiquette) (Gioia), 5
Nuovo ricettario domestico (New Family Recipe Book) (Morelli), 100
nutrition, 72–75, 124, 133, 160
see also diet; health

obesity, 163–64
Oglala Lakota people, 156
oil crisis of 1973, 140, 142
Okanagan people, 142
olive oil, 49, 66, 137
Omnibus (newspaper), 154
Onge people, 161
Opera (Scappi), 24
orecchiette pasta, 116
organic certification, 199
Oromi people, 90–91
Ostrom, Elinor, 203
Owen, Robert, 74

Pacific Island cultures, 161
packaging, 130
Pam (supermarket), 187
Pane, amore e fantasia (Bread, Love, and Imagination), 145
Paninaro (Pet Shop Boys), 157
Papua, New Guinea truth-telling poles, 198
Parisi, Ico and Luisa, 120
Parmalat, 186
Parr, Martin, 160
parsimony, 83, 84, 96, 97
Fascist propaganda and, 100
during WWII, 106–7
Pasolini, Pier Paolo, 114, 144
pasta, 116, 124
industrial districts and, 188–89
in Mediterranean diet, 49
origins and geographical history of, 103–4
Pavesi, 129, 134
peasant foods, 22
peasants, 27–51, 70, 225n16
agricultural work of, 31–32, 33, 34
bread and, 45, 46–47
cereals and, 32–33, 45, 95–96
consumption levels, 1872–1878, 33–34, 37, 210
diet of, 32–34
emigration of, 48–49
fables of, 31
feeding deceased people, 35
gender and, 43–45
health of, 44–46
hearth fires, 42–43
income percentage spent on food, 18, 34, 95
in Italy vs. neighboring countries, 35
Mazzarò story, 27–29
meal description of, 37–42
meat and, 40
potatoes and, 46
pecorini (ewe’s milk cheese), 153
pellagra (disease), 45–46, 226n51
Petrini, Carlo, 201
Petronilla (Amalia Moretti Foggia), 100–101
Pet Shop Boys, 157
Pezzoli, Pia Maria, 93–94
Piovene, Guido, 113
pizza, 47, 53, 58
see also bread
place settings, 7, 114
plastic, 121
plumbing, 56–57, 61
polenta, 23, 33, 38–40
Index

political banquets, 75
political climate
1871–1891, 2, 24
in affluent society period, 142, 143–44
after WWI, 84
Catholics and, 57, 228n7
in complex society, 199–201
postwar, 111, 135–36
Ponti, Giò, 120
Pop Art, 139
Popol Vuh (sacred Guatemalan book), 45
Popper, Karl, 146
pork, 15, 62, 63, 66–67, 127
in affluent society, 151–52
see also meat; meat consumption
Porta Palazzo market, 115
postwar period, 84, 109–40
consumption levels in, 109–10, 111, 124–32
diet and health in, 133
etiquette in, 114
food industry during, 126–32, 137–40
income percentage spent on food in, 112–13
kitchens in, 116, 118–24, 131
meal description during, 115–18
mobility in, 110, 115, 134
political climate during, 111, 135–36
potages, 14
potatoes, 46
poultry, 17, 127
see also chicken; meat
Po Valley region, 96, 102
poverty, 29, 34, 225n16
deprivation definition, 194, 246n42
diet and, 69
food choices and, 193–94
geographic distribution of, 34, 112–13
parliamentary research on, 1951–1953, 111–12
urban vs. rural, 56
see also peasants
power
of aristocracy, 3–4
body discipline and, 162
Il pranzo del vescovo (The Bishop’s Lunch) (De Nittis), 5
preparation of meat, 16–17, 36, 78
of fish, 67, 183
frying, 66
molecular gastronomy, 183
preserving, 67
preservation, 77
canning, 78, 79
during Fascist regime, 87
refrigeration, 67, 78–79
price of food, 88
average retail, 1861–2010, 209
of bread, 42
during Fascist regime, 97–105
food industry and, 128
of meat, 18–19
in postwar period, 102, 127, 128
production percentages of, 200
regional variations in, 245n39
from street vendors, 53–55, 58
white meat, 151–52
wholesale vs. retail, 102, 127, 215
during WWI, 85
Pritchard, Evans, 36
private–public space, 6
kitchens and, 119, 150, 180
modern houses in France and, 178–79
processed food, 31, 76, 126–30
average yearly consumption of, 32–33
skepticism about, 131–32, 138
produce
average yearly consumption of, 33
during industrial development, 73
in Mediterranean diet, 49
production
of dairy products during WWI, 84
see also agriculture
production–consumption dualism, 76, 197–98
globalized Italian cuisine and, 202
propaganda during Fascist regime, 97, 98–105
directed at women, 99–101
for rice sales and consumption, 98, 101–3
see also Fascist Party regime era
Protected Designation of Origin (DOP), 199
Protected Geographical Indication (IGP), 199
proverbs on food, 29–30
on bread, 47
on polenta, 38–39
on produce, 49
on wine, 68
Puberty (Munch), 164
public opinion polls and surveys, 113
Pugliese, Angelo, 73
Pythagoreans, 160
quantity/quality of food consumed, 18, 19–20, 21, 199
in haute cuisine restaurants, 159
of wine, 189
in working-class families, 70–71
Rabbi Eisik story, 61
rabbit meat, 151
race, 72–73
rail transport, 57, 79
rational cuisine, 74–75
rationing, see food rationing; military
raw food, 16
ready-made meals, 132
Reagan, Ronald, 143
recipes, oral tradition of passing on, 117–18
refined products, see processed food
refrigeration/refrigerators, 67, 78–79,
85, 116, 119, 121
Frigidaire, 120
production of, in Italy, 216
regional diversity, 139–40
affluent society and, 146–47, 151
body size and, 163–64
of bread, 47–48
of cheeses, 152, 153
of fats, 66
of income spent on food, 193
of meat consumption, 19
of meat preparation, 16–17, 67
as part of Italian cuisine’s global
popularity, 201–2
of poverty levels, 34, 112–13
of sweets, 126
of wine production, 190–91
regulation, 138, 198–99
of bread production, 84
Relativity (Escher), 169
relevés (light dish), 14
religion, 68, 133, 228n7
food laws, 15–16, 20–21
holidays, 20, 87–88
Resca, Mario, 158
restaurants, 117, 134–35, 155–59
number of, in 1884, 58–59
retail, see shops
(small/local/independently-owned);
supermarkets
Rex (ship), 91, 232n27
Ricasoli, Bettino, 25
rice, 51
Fascist campaign for, 98, 101, 102–4
in Philippines, 227n73
La ricotta (Ricotta Cheese) (film), 114
risk assessment, 199–200
riso di guerra (wartime rice), 103
Ritz, César, 25
Rivelli, Luisa, 138
roasting, 16–17
Roche, Daniel, 6, 61
Rome/Romans, 103
Rosa, Anna, and Antonietta D. (Fascist
regime meal description), 86–90,
232n9
Rosa, Giorgio, 124–25
Rossetti, Giorgio, 6
Rossi, Alessandro, 74
rôts (roast meat), 15
Rubner, Max, 72
Ruffili, Francesco, 44
“rule of the triangle” (in kitchen
design), 121
Sabatini, Marietta, 44
sacrifice, 15
Sada, Gino, 78
Sada, Pietro, 78
Said, Edward, 50, 173
salami, 67
Salvarani, Renzo, 121
Sanvitale, Alberto, 12–14
Sanvitale castle, 5–7, 221n11
Saper vivere (Knowing How to Live)
(Serao), 5
Saturday Evening Post (weekly), 123
Scalfari, Eugenio, 137
Scappi, Bartolomeo, 24
scarcity, 43–44, 193
Schama, Simon, 150
school meals, 230n56
Schüte-Lihotzky, Margarete, 119
science, 196–98
diet expertise of, 72–75, 78
food scandals and, 196
molecular gastronomy and, 183
nutrition and, 124, 133
La scienza in cucina e l’arte di mangiare bene (Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well) (Artusi), 24–25
seasonal food, 139, 178
seating arrangements, 12–13, 114
Second World War, 84, 88–89, 106–8
secularization, 133, 135
self-help literature, 100
self-sufficiency campaign, 99–100
Senegalese community in Italy, 194–95, 246n45
sensory perception, 17–18
Serao, Matilde, 5, 55, 56
seven deadly sins, 20–21
sewage systems, 57
shopping, 115
diversification in, 200–201
shops (small/local/independently-owned)
in affluent society, 158, 166
in complex society, 187, 195, 200
in Fascist regime, 98
food fraud by, 79
during industrial development, 53, 55, 58–59, 67
in postwar period, 115, 118, 130–31, 140
see also supermarkets
Sicily
pasta in, 103
sweets in, 126
Simmenthal meat, 129
Sironi, Mario, 99
Slow Food Movement, 157, 201
small business, 185, 188
smart homes, 182–83
SME (Società Meridionale di Elettricità), 127, 157, 186
snacks, 128–29
Snaidero, Rino, 121
social class
in affluent society, 154–55, 157
body size and, 163–64
domestic space organization and, 6
kitchen spaces and, 179
Mediterranean diet and, 50
quantity/quality of food consumed by, 19–20
refined food and, 31
wine and, 33–34
see also aristocracy; bourgeoisie; peasants
social crisis, 142
Socialists, 136
Soldati, Mario, 113
Sotis, Lina, 154–55, 189–90
Le sottilissime astutie di Bertoldo (Croce), 31
Sottsass, Ettore, Jr., 135
soup, 86, 100
South region
carbohydrates in, 96
consumption levels in, 151
discrimination against people from, 116
emigration from, 113
influences of, in North, 118, 139–40
poverty in, 112
sweets in, 126
Spain, 19
spices, 22–23
Spoerri, Daniel, 201
spoons, 7
Stiglitz, Joseph, 101
stoves, 60–61
electric, 151
gas, 116, 151
production of, in Italy, 216
street vendors, 53–55, 58, 195
Strong, Roy, 6
sugar, 76
consumption levels of, 125–26
Sunday lunch tradition, 202
supermarkets, 130–31, 139, 187
see also shops
(small/local/independently-owned)
Supermarkets Italiani, 130–31
supply chain length, 200
swine flu, 196
Switzerland, 163
Sybil, or the Two Nations (Disraeli), 69
symbolic significance of food, 19–20, 35–37, 51, 68
synthetic food, 184

tables
in affluent society, 148
in aristocracy, 7
in complex society, 177
during industrial development, 62
in peasant world, 39

table service
French-style, 10
Russian-style, 10–11
Tamalo, Giovanna (Hamburger Lady), 141–42
Tanzi, Callisto, 186
taste preferences, 139
tasting, 17
taxes and tariffs, 42, 96
television, 119–87
Telemenu (television show), 145
television, 119, 144–46, 186–87
advertising on, 130, 135, 144–45, 146, 186–87
consumer protection and, 138
criticism of, 145–46
etiquette about, 114
temperature of food, 10
territorial manufacturing systems, 188–89
Teti, Vito, 50
thinness, 160–64
toasting, x, 11
Tomasi di Lampedusa, Giuseppe, 2
tomato sauce, 23, 78, 188–89
torta delle colonie (colonial cake), 90
Totò, 114
Touring Club Italiano, 83
tourism, 137, 139
trade routes, 22–23, 51, 165
tradition, 149, 184–85
Accademia italiana della cucina, 239n85
of aristocratic meal courses, 14–15, 21–26
cookbooks and recipes, 24
local, 21–26

vs. modernity, 113–14
vs. processed foods, 132
recipes by, 117–18
renewed interest in, 201
traditional-innovative food industry
dualism, 184–85
travel, 167
Trentmann, Frank, 164
trickster myths, 142
Triveneto zone, 146–47
Troisgros brothers, 159
Tunisia, 24
Turin General Exhibition, 91
Turin region
Fiat workers in, 112–13, 115, 116
Italian migration to, 115
turkey, 151
Turner, Bryan, 162
Tuscany region, 171–73
Twiggy, 161

Umbria region, 96
Under the Tuscan Sun (film), 171–73
Uniblocco (kitchen design), 120
Unilever, 186
Unione nazionale consumatori (National Union of Consumers), 138
United Kingdom, 69, 72
United Nations, 64
United States
BMI in, 163
consumer protection in, 138
kitchens in, 119–20
supermarkets in, 131
United States/American diet, 50, 72
urbanization, see industrial development/city eating

Van Gogh, Vincent, 46
vegetable oil, 66
vegetarianism, 200, 247n60
Il ventre di Napoli (The Belly of Naples) (Serao), 55, 56
Verga, Giovanni, 29
Victor Emanuel III, King of Italy, 25–26
Villari, Pasquale, 32, 47
vitamins, 72
Vogue magazine, 161
war gardens, 106–7
Warhol, Andy, 139
water
  during industrial development/city
eating, 56–57, 61, 73
in postwar period, 117
wealthy people
  consumption levels among,
  1872–1878, 33–34, 37, 211
see also aristocracy; peasants
Weber, Eugen, 35
wheat, 127
  as food for rich, 33
  increased imports of, 231n61
  in Mediterranean diet, 49–51
  peasants and, 39
  price of, 200
  symbolism of, 51
Wheeler, Peter, 160
white meat, 151–52
Wilk, Richard, 164
wine, 189–91
  average daily amount consumed, by
    social group, 95
  average yearly consumption of, 33–34
  brand-name, 166, 189, 245n31
  Chianti, 25
  during industrial development, 62,
    68, 73
  industrial food districts, 189
  legislation on, 138
  methanol, 196
  in peasant world, 49
  in postwar period, 117
  social class and, 33–34
  symbolism of, 68
women
  in affluent society, 154
  after-meal ritual of, 14
  aristocratic, 12–13, 14, 43–44
  BMI of, 163, 164
  body concept of, 160–64
  bread baking by, 128
  caloric requirements for, 107
  in complex society, 176–77
  consequences of modernized
domestic work on, 122–24
  cookbooks by, 100–101
  Fascist regime’s campaigns aimed at,
    99–100, 104
  as healers, 44–45
  income of, in factory work, 70
  invisibility of, 44
  knives and, 8
  labor force participation by, 123
  labor of, 43–45
  in peasant world, 43–45
  in postwar period, 113–14
  reaction of, to food industry’s
growth, 131–32
  scientific nutritional education for, 74
  traditional recipes and, 117–18
during WWII, 106
see also gender; men
working class
  canteens for, 73–74, 79
  diet recommendations for, 73
  etiquette and, 70–71
  income percentage spent on food,
    68–69
  meal description, 59–64
  in postwar period, 111–12
  weekly diets of, in 1885, 214
see also industrial development/city
eating
W. R. Grace and Company, 185
yogurt, 152–53
youth culture in affluent society, 156–58
zighinì, 233n32
Zimmer, Heinrich, 61