

The Language of Food and Intercultural Exchanges and Relationships

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The article discusses the role of food as an instrument of identity and a channel of contact through cultures. This is discussed drawing from three cases of Italian food culture hybridization spanning from the early 20th century to the first decade of the 2000s: the role of Italian food in Italian-American identity as depicted in Leonardo Coviello's work, the meeting of Southern and Northern food cultures following the Italian internal migrations in the 50s and 60s, the food practices of international migrants in the context of the global flows of people and commodities in present day Italy. In this regard, food plays an essential role in the rebuilding of a familiar context in which migrants can feel temporarily "at home". At the same time, food is an important form of communication and contact between different cultures and social contexts. In this process of exchange both migrants' and hosts' food habits and diets are modified as they incorporate elements and ingredients from each other, making boundaries more porous.

Keywords: ethnicity, family, food, Italy, migration

Introduction

The Travels of Food

Cuisine, through analysis of the forms that it takes and the rules which regulate it, can be considered a language, a form of communication, and a powerful means of self-representation. It is not only an instrument of cultural identity but also, and especially, the first channel through which contact is made with other cultures, given that, at least at first glance, eating the food of others seems easier than understanding their language (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2011). For these reasons, food, more than speech and prior to it, mediates between different cultures, opening culinary systems to cross-fertilization, blending, and inclusion (Montanari, 2002). The great diffusion of culinary texts in contemporary western societies, allow us to gain insights about the cultural specificity of taste, historical changes in our culinary value judgments, and the impact of culinary globalization. They show the multiple entwinements between the local and the global, and how transgressions of culinary prescriptions test our national sensibilities. The explicit connection between food, identities, and globalization has been clearly drawn by cultural critic Fabio Parasecoli: "Examining travelers' behaviors can shed a revealing light on the role of food in constituting and reinforcing personal and shared identities, a factor that acquires particular relevance at a time of globalization and swift technological changes" (2008, p. 128). These culinary texts tell a fascinating story about the role food plays in contemporary global societies. Taste, both in its figurative usage as a gauge of artistic value and in its literal meaning connected to the appreciation

and evaluation of food and drink, is commonly regarded as a personal and highly subjective attribute. And yet taste informs our private and public lives in many demarcating and defining ways: “Taste creates group solidarity, whether the group in question is a world civilization, a nation-state, a class, a caste, an ethnic group, or a family” (Flammang, 2009, p. 170). In her seminal work *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy*, Carolyn Korsmeyer (2007) points out that of all the senses, taste requires the most intimate connection with the object of perception, as what is to be tasted must enter the mouth. This, however, does not imply a “natural” connection: “If tastes were simply natural, they should not vary any more than does binocular vision. But food practices and attendant taste preferences exhibit strikingly different patterns in different societies” (Henderson, 2011, p. 149). Much of the importance and valuation of food is cognitive: It has a symbolic function that extends beyond even the most sophisticated savoring. Beyond any personal preferences and class distinctions, taste is culturally specific. The tasting body is socially embedded and tastes are relational. Signs of good taste and refined manners in one culture might be signs of bad taste and poor judgment in another.

Food in Movement

Food culture constantly changes, and it is obviously involved in globalization, which causes a rapid and large movement of people with their food habits, and of goods which spread far beyond the countries of their original production and use. Migration affects dietary culture by having both immigrants and natives experience new ingredients and flavours. It creates cross-influences which alter the eating habits of natives and immigrants by changing the tastes of each.

Besides its importance for the assertion of identity, food is also a means of cultural exchange. It was one of the earliest forms of contact among civilizations, social groups, and individuals. Such contact entailed the bracketing off, even if only temporarily, of one’s own cultural categories and trust in the Other—in the person preparing and serving unfamiliar food. We may accordingly say that cuisine is the most accessible threshold of a culture, the one easiest to cross (La Cecla, 1997; 2002).

Culinary exchange does not jeopardize identity because there is no identity without otherness, knowledge, and debate with the Other, debating that takes place through learning and exchanging elements of the respective cultures. A cultural system is as robust as it is open to the outside and engages in exchange, cross-reference, and hybridization. It is the fear of others that confines people within their habits, preventing their knowledge of diversity, and causing them to reject what is not customary.

Diet is one of the elements of social life most sensitive to changes in the surrounding context. Migration has always produced innovations and transformations in indigenous food traditions. Suffice it to consider the spread of tomatoes, potatoes, tea, and coffee in the dietary habits of Europeans to understand the transformations that have occurred through trade and the movement of people and things.

In what follows, three examples will be provided of changes in dietary habits in migratory contexts. The first example concerns the transformation of Italian emigrants to America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The second briefly discusses Italian immigration from the south to the north of the country after World War II. The third raises issues concerning the first and second generations of foreign immigrants into Italy in recent decades.

Leonardo Coviello: The Birth of the Italo-American

Leonardo Coviello was born in Avigliano in 1887 and emigrated with his family to New York in 1896 (Covello, 1958; 1967). Renowned for his diaries as well as his studies on education, Leonard

Covello—Americanization changed his surname by removing the ‘i’ to make it easier to pronounce—ably recounted through the eyes of an Italian migrant child, cultural and social differences, and the process of integration into the New World. Leonard attended a school established by a Protestant philanthropic association. The school was known as the “Soup School” because at noon it provided a meal, which was one of the main reasons why it was chosen by immigrants for their children. The prime purpose of the school was the Americanization of new immigrants through the intensive teaching of English, hygiene, discipline, and love, and respect for the new homeland.

In his autobiography, Leonardo Coviello describes how at the Soup School he first encountered the abundance of food in America; a highly significant experience for an immigrant of the late 1800s and early 1900s who came from extreme poverty and severe shortages of foodstuffs. The encounter with the school meals also meant an encounter with difference: “At noontime a bowl of soup was served to us with some white, soft bread that made better spitballs than eating in comparison with the substantial and solid homemade bread to which I was accustomed” (Covello, 1958, p. 78).

In Coviello’s experience, the American public school devalued and stigmatized the education and rules of behaviour that young immigrants had learned in their families. It developed a sense of inferiority in them and a collective rejection of their ethnic origins (in Leonardo’s case his Italianness). Identified with ethnicity was the permanent social and cultural subordination that characterized the immigrant parents and the older generation. Broken English and un-American forms of behaviour distinguished and separated the parents from Americans (Covello, 1967).

The strategy adopted to manage the conflict between traditional family values and “American” ones was very often that of sharply dividing the world of the school from that of the home, the street, friends etc.. Whilst this separation strategy enabled the adolescent to survive in two dimensions—the private one of the family and the public one of the outside world—in later years, characterized by the consolidation of a strong and large community of Italo-Americans, Coviello and other young Italo-Americans became aware of the importance of their cultural and ethnic roots and the transmission of the Italian language to new generations. Only educational and cultural activities that developed these aspects would overcome of the sense of inferiority typical of young Italo-Americans. They would reconcile the private familial sphere and the public institutional sphere, and thus make real and substantial integration into American society possible. This awareness gave rise to a different value placed on Italian things, products, and customs.

There was a general change of feeling towards everything that was Italian—our attitude to food, for example. We had always been ashamed of our Italian bread filled with salami, cheese and sausage. We kept it hidden and even ate it before arriving at school, to avoid being laughed at by our friends of the “white bread and ham” caste. Now we began to delve into the past in search of our heritage. When we did not take food from home, we went to an Italian restaurant. It became common among us not to simply say “I’m hungry” but “boys, what wouldn’t I give for a plate of macaroni!” (Covello, 1958, p. 70).

The centrality of food practices and table rituals in Italo-American ethnicity emerges clearly not only from Leonardo Coviello’s autobiography but also from numerous films and Italo-American. Italo-American ethnic cuisine is not so much a survival from the culture of the country of origin as the result of the selective incorporation of food resources and cultural meanings into the immigrant community. Italo-American cuisine is the result of a hybridization and blending of tradition and Americanness. It is neither Italian nor American cuisine; is a product born in America from the encounter between two traditionalist cultures. It is considered

Italian cuisine in the United States, but it would never be considered such in Italy.

There was a propensity to use the food discourse as a metaphor for the collective self, particularly in regard to morality, domesticity, and respectability, in order to articulate the difference between us and many others, and even narrate an ancestral story of the group (Cinotto, 2002, p. 722).

The representations of domestic life produced by Italian immigrants were apparently intended to express a distance from, and a challenge against, American family habits, behavior, and values. But in reality they were much closer to the values of the American white and Protestant middle class than Coviello and others imagined (Cinotto, 2004). For Italo-Americans the symbol *par excellence* of their adherence to the Italian model of family cohesion was gathering around the table for dinner and Sunday lunch. In fact, this practice did not differ greatly from the behaviour of the middle-class white Americans who sat down at the table together on Sundays to eat turkey.

Food practices and rituals were used by immigrants to construct the ideological representation of the Italian family by idealizing their ethnic origins. Ethnic food produced an appearance of traditionalism, and the rituals related to the sharing of food were of considerable importance in shaping the concepts of family and domesticity of Italo-Americans, for whom the ritual and ceremonial conviviality of baptisms, marriages, and funerals, etc. played a central role in strengthening ties of kinship, friendship, and neighbourhood.

In America, compulsory education and paid employment outside the family's control rapidly removed sons and daughters from the family sphere which, in Italy, had been simultaneously the locus of socialization, production, and consumption. These domains soon separated in America. This loss of significance and completeness of the domestic sphere led to the attribution of a symbolic and ritual meaning to a form of invented tradition which required also young people to respect certain traditional behaviours. The Italo-American invention of an Italian domesticity and its rituals was in some way a response to the presence of modern American values perceived as dangerous for the stability of the immigrant community (Sollors, 1991).

The younger generation of Italo-Americans accepted the practice of convivial family gatherings because they were distinct from the world of work, school, and peers, and therefore did not conflict with other areas of their daily lives.

Food was a central code in the collective self-representation of Italians as the only people to have a complete moral sense of the family. During an interview with Coviello, an elderly immigrant woman said that she was delighted when she saw her children and grandchildren eating good and natural Italian food and being brought up in the good Italian tradition. "Being American is a fine thing, and not being able to speak Italian is not so bad, but I know only one right way to raise a family, and it is the Italian way." (Cinotto, 2002, p.740)

In the 1920s and 1930s, Italian-American cuisine underwent a process of institutionalization whereby it no longer consisted only of pasta, tomatoes and olive oil but also more expensive products consumed in Italy only on feast days, such as sausages, meat, and fish, etc.. Thus an image of prestige and success was acquired by immigrants who ate every day what their fellow-countrymen in Italy enjoyed only on feast days. As Cinotto correctly points out,

patterns of life and social interaction in immigrant communities. ...played an extremely important part in defining an absolutely American food model very but on which immigrants constructed an important part of their new identity as Italians. ...thus born were symbolic dishes like spaghetti and meatballs...(Cinotto, 2002, p. 733).

The importance given to Italian food, and the rituals connected with eating together, had major gender implications. Immigrant women were the main producers of the emerging ethnic domesticity. A successful Italo-American family had to be able to offer and organize banquets on the ritual occasions that required them. As they did so, their behaviour often resembled that of the white American middle class. This generated an integration process apparently based on difference, but in reality on an Italianness constructed in America and not in conflict with American culture (Cinotto, 2001).

The historian Bevilacqua has studied changes in the eating habits of return immigrants (Bevilacqua, 1993). He notes that they adopt eating behaviours different from those of their fellow-countrymen who remained in Italy: the “Americans” eat meat every day. The use of a nutritious and expensive food like meat marks a difference with respect to the past to which the migrants have returned. In this way, the return Americans signal their distance from the food shortages, poverty, and hunger that characterized the pre-migration period; and they also signals to the community their improved economic and social success compared with those who remained in Italy.

Food and Internal Migration in Italy

Eating habits are challenged by, and vary with, the context and situations in which people live. This is because they reconcile traditions with the changes made necessary by the new environment, or by external constraints that force people to change their eating habits as well. Consider, for example, the recipes revisited during the period of autarky in fascist Italy, the surrogate foods consumed during wars, the creativity of housewives able to create meals with the few ingredients available (Flandrin & Montanari, 1997). To illustrate how changes come about in eating habits through migration, now considered is the phenomenon of Italian internal migration from the South to the cities and factories of the North-West of the country during the second post-war period.

This example will show how bidirectional changes in eating habits come about. Migrants, in fact, are both the subject and object of dietary change. The first migrants after World War II from the South of Italy to the industrial cities of the North experienced an outright culture shock which was compounded by the precariousness of housing and work in the northern cities. Overcrowding and a different form of work organization were traumatic changes for the southern immigrants, who came mainly from rural areas where the timing and pace of work were regulated by the seasonality of crops and the weather, and where life was beset by extreme poverty and misery (Filippa, 2003, p. 141).

We know about the precarious housing conditions—not only in the southern villages left behind by the migrants but also in the cities of the north to which they moved—that characterized the first years of migration, the prejudices of the native population towards people often likened to and treated as animals, and the dehumanization of the Other typical of these contexts and processes. The precarious living conditions in an entirely new urban industrial context, whose rules of behaviour had to be learned, the expectations of the world of work and organization of the factories so different from the agricultural world left behind, caused profound malaise in the newcomers, and often created incomprehension, exclusion, and marginalization.

In a context of profound psychophysical distress, food could recall, though not restore except to a very limited and partial extent, the characteristics typical of the places left behind. Remembering odours and flavours of the places of origin became the way to construct and describe the difference between the world that the migrants had been forced to leave (rural, healthy, natural, although very poor) and the gray and unhealthy

world of the industrial cities in which they were forced to live. New odours and new tastes marked the differences between northerners and southerners, as well as the cadence of speech and dialects. On long train journeys, well documented by Italian realist films and documentaries of the period, in compartments saturated with colours, smells and dialects, large amounts of food and spices were brought to the north to make the new world less inhospitable and less stranger.

The presence of a large number of southern immigrants in the cities of north-western Italy produced changes in the cuisine of the North by introducing the habit of using foodstuffs that were virtually unknown, or at any rate rarely used previously, thereby producing changes in the eating habits of the indigenous population as well. An initial rejection of southernness—mostly associated with the odours that foods and people emitted—just as today odours cause distrust and difference with respect to non-EU immigrants—gradually gave way to acceptance of the Other. This came about first through the introduction into northern dietary habits of certain ingredients of the immigrants' cuisine, and then led to their recognition as persons.

Thanks to the spread in the shops and markets of northern Italy of typically southern products and ingredients, and interactions and encounters between them, the eating habits of Lombardy and Piedmont began to change. Pasta initially accompanied soup and rice, and then largely replaced them; and olive oil did likewise with butter and lard. Tomato sauce became the condiment most widely used in the country. Symmetrically apparent were changes in the dietary habits of immigrants from southern Italy; changes that altered not only eating patterns but also everyday routines. The pace of life and work dictated by the factories, which was profoundly different from that of agricultural work, especially as regards the shift system, also imposed different eating schedules and mealtimes. Some foods become too heavy and spicy for those who had to work at certain times at a certain pace.

The change in the tastes of migrants proceeds in parallel with the change in the indigenous culture, influencing it and being influenced by it in turn. Obviously, not everyone is receptive to the food of the Other. They may feel threatened by it and insist that indigenous food is the "original", rejecting any type of hybridization or blending. On the one hand those who feel threatened in their ethnic, cultural, and social identity will try to prevent its contamination with odours and tastes, as well as interpersonal relationships with others. On the other hand, for the southern immigrants adopting northern dietary customs was also a way to distance themselves from the system of life and relations of their villages of origin, a way to express a mental, cultural, and social, as well as geographical, distance from the world left behind.

Rejecting the eating habits of one's own culture is often a rejection of other important aspects of the cultural system of the home country reminiscent of hunger, suffering, misery, and all the other reasons why it was decided to emigrate. Obviously, only some migrants reject what they have left; many remain strongly attached to their country of origin. Migration has separated them from emotions, bonds of friendship and kinship. Their nostalgia is fuelled, and at the same time assuaged, by flavours and odours from the distant homeland. In second-generation migrants, the bond with the homeland greatly weakens, and the desire to be assimilated with the natives often forcefully arises. For the second generation, especially in the case of internal migration—which does not involve the ethnic or national variable—where there are marked somatic differences, the desire to be similar to friends, the peer group, colleagues, etc., grows ever stronger; and, as we have seen with the example of Italo-Americans, identity-building strategies are enacted. These strategies differ according to the area and sphere in which interaction takes place. In the family, it is southernness that is

extolled, but with friends and classmates, it is being Milanese or Torinese, in order not to be identified and labelled as a *terrone* (southern clodhopper).

The influx into Italy of foreign migrants since the 1970s has attenuated the differences between northerners and southerners and made them less conflictual. Attention and social tensions have shifted to the recent immigrants, who often come from distant countries, speak other languages, and have claims and demands that are new in Italy—which has rapidly changed from being a country of migrants (internal and external) to a host country for immigrants. The next section will discuss some of these changes in terms of food (Neresini & Rettore, 2008).

Contemporary Migrations and Dietary Habits

As the above examples have illustrated, food gives salience to belongings, differences, and ethnic origin. It evidences the transition from one community to another, and it makes visible differences that are not only ethnic and geographical but also social. In every culture and society, the food of the wealthy is different from the food of the poor; the food of those who work outside the home is different from the food of those who can devote time to its preparation. The differences are not always clear-cut: The boundaries may be permeable and allow infiltration and hybridization. In some cases, however, they may create rigid distinctions. They may construct impassable barriers that separate the edible from the inedible, the pure from the impure, the civil from the barbaric, becoming elements which define the identity of the person, the alien and the native, Ego and Alter.

Is the idea that we are what we eat still tenable in the contemporary context characterized by increasingly intense and rapid flows and movements which assume a global dimension, and which challenge the stability of borders?

Food has often been used to attract the attention of others, to gain appreciation, to foster relationships, and to penetrate the everyday habits of the natives, gradually changing the common space and rendering it hybrid (Gabaccia, 1998). As said, food may represent a privileged domain of nostalgia for the world left behind and communitarian closure, an occasion for remembrance and exclusive celebration. Food may be the most banal and at the same time most persistent manifestation of a difference, a reaction to difficulties of integration, discrimination and hostility; or it may be a stout bulwark which allows the individual to remain separate, different, diverse, and unstandardized (Gunew, 2004).

Contemporary migration differs from previous forms because it comes about in a context of increasing globalization characterized by more economical and rapid movements, of people and goods, and cheaper and more diffused forms of communication which, when compared with those at the beginning of the twentieth century, are incredibly more frequent.

The fact of being part of a global system of consumption, in which the movement of goods, ideas, images, lifestyles is becoming ever less constrained by the boundaries of the nation state, means that widely available in the main Western countries of immigration are goods and information that come directly from the migrants' countries of birth (Colombo, Navarini, & Semi, 2008, p. 84).

The question is whether this greater ease of communication, exchange, and movement of goods and people can reduce the nostalgia and suffering due to migration. Today, immigrants can now easily purchase in the shops of Italian towns ingredients and products of their traditional cuisines, often those of a different continent. The open-air markets sell fruit and vegetables unknown in Italy until a few years ago, and Islamic

butchers are to be found in numerous districts of cities like Milan with a large presence of Muslim immigrants. In this regard we may ask how immigrants and their children behave. Do they continue to eat according to the customs and traditions of their countries of origin or do they consume foods typical of Italian cuisine? Or do they mix the different traditions according to the context and situation?

As pointed out by Bourdieu (1972), food forges one of the strongest links with the social group. As part of a set of internalized practices transformed into habitus, it becomes a second skin difficult to modify. Although this suggests that immigrants maintain their traditional dietary and culinary habits, data from various studies conducted on first- and second-generation immigrants seem to show a more complex situation (Leonini, 2005; Leonini & Rebughini, 2012).

A first difference in regard to food is apparent between the generations, and in particular between immigrant parents and the second generation that has grown up, if not been born, in Italy. In fact, whilst for most of the parents the culinary habits of their countries of origin continue to be the main referents in the preparation of both everyday food and, all the more so, food for holidays, anniversaries, etc.. For the children, everyday food is what their fellow Italians eat, and only in celebrations and family rituals do they consume ethnic food. There are immigrant families in which “Italian food” is prepared for the children during the week because ethnic food is rejected as too spicy, over-seasoned, and heavy. The habituation to Italian food acquired in school canteens and at meeting places (parish clubs, etc.) certainly gives rise to different dietary practices among the younger generation. The food prepared for the children differs from that of the parents, who in the evening eat dishes which, though adapted, hark back to the traditional cuisine of their origins, while pasta, steaks, and chips are prepared for the children. However, also the parents modify and adapt traditional food to the needs of everyday life in Italy. Just as Italo-Americans developed a cuisine that was neither Italian nor American, and just as migrants from southern Italy adapted their diets to the organization of factory work, so the immigrants of contemporary globalized capitalism make changes in order that food can be prepared more rapidly and often be more calorific and of better quality, thereby demonstrating, at least in diet, their better living conditions and deliverance from poverty.

As for the Italo-Americans described by Coviello, also for contemporary immigrants festive and celebratory meals are of particular importance. They are occasions for remembrance of home, means to elaborate and appease their nostalgia. Relatives and friends and fellow-countrymen are often invited, and the preparation and consumption of the meal takes a considerable amount of time—time that is entirely lacking during weekdays taken up by often long and arduous work schedules.

The children, who are accustomed to Italian food in their everyday routines, consent to eat celebratory ethnic food only on special occasions, often finding it too spicy, too heavy, and too different from that of their friends. The food defined as Italian by these children is certainly not that of the regional tradition, or the elaborate and refined cuisine seen on television. Rather, it is a sort of simplified and rapid menu consisting of pasta or rice, steak, sliced meats, a few vegetables and fruits. This simplified and standardized idea of Italian cuisine is very different from the one that Slow Food and Eataly disseminate among the global elites. Eating out with friends often means going to McDonald’s or a pizzeria, as it does for many Italians of the same age.

Mothers have an important role in this transformation. “Far from being a bastion defending and reproducing culinary traditions, mothers seem to favour the change (Appadurai, 1988). They accustom children from an early age to the flavours, textures, aesthetics, and combinations of Italian cuisine...The mothers often

appear to assume that children born and raised in Italy are unable to tolerate the heavy spice-rich dishes which satisfy the tastes of the parents, and that it is their task to expand the domestic diet in order to ensure the children's well-being...preventing them from being marginalized and feeling excluded" (Colombo, Navarini, & Semi, 2008, p. 86) by their Italian peers.

Conclusion

This brief article has analysed three examples related to external and internal migration in the 20th century and the first decade of the 2000s—and therefore in diverse historical periods characterized by different economic and social situations and profoundly changed geopolitical balances—in order to show that diet can be an important factor in social differentiation and exclusion, as well as integration and assimilation. To be stressed is that there are close similarities among Italians who emigrated to America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the southerners who moved to the industrial cities of north-western Italy in the economic boom years of the 50s and early 60s of the last century, and the immigrants who came to Italy in the last years of the 20th century and the early 2000s.

This highlights the close connection between culture and food as the protagonist of the encounter between different cultures. A product is defined as edible food because it is culturally constructed and becomes an element of cultural identity.

During the migration process, the absence of cultural features in the country to which migrants have moved induces them to search for products, artifacts, foodstuffs, objects, music, films, and other cultural products that fulfil their need to rebuild a familiar context in which they can feel temporarily "at home"—or at least less alienated and excluded from the surrounding society. Food is one of the most important factors in this regard because of the evocativeness of its odours, colours, flavours, and its presentation and texture. It is a multisensory experience that evokes places, people, and situations in the world left behind. Food thus helps to make abandonment of the homeland, the family, and so on, less painful and more acceptable.

At the same time, as described in the three examples, food is an important form of communication and contact between different cultures and social contexts. Food is the simplest language with which we can interact with and relate to others. It is not just necessary for biological survival; it is a highly symbolic cultural product at every stage of its lifecycle: harvesting, production, preparation, presentation, sharing, and consumption involve social relations and the attribution of social meanings.

As we have seen, food contributes substantially to the contact between cultures—which change its preparation and its meanings, given that food itself is a product of social relations and interactions between persons and cultures. There ensues a process whereby the foods of both the former and the latter are hybridized and transformed. Diet is the object and subject of cultural changes and relations among individuals undergoing constant change. The encounter between different eating habits, between different cuisines, means that the diets of both migrants and hosts are modified as they incorporate elements and ingredients from each other. This is almost never a conscious process; rather, it occurs slowly and gradually, making the boundaries between Ego and Alter porous, and generating a minimum of mutual understanding, even in cases of rejection and closure towards the foreigner. It is in the cultural-symbolic dimension that globalization processes are more likely to emerge and reveal themselves. On the one hand, we are witnessing the spread of a global culture in which two products related to diet—Coca Cola and McDonald's hamburgers—have become universal symbols. On the other hand, cultural elements related to food, but also to music, film, medicine, etc., penetrate the Western

world also thanks to migrants. Consequently, one cannot speak of a one-directional process of standardization to Western values, meanings, and culture, but rather of a two-way relationship between different worlds and cultures. Moreover, even in Italy the valorization of local dishes and traditions, and the consumption of zero-kilometre food, are processes that arise from the fear of being absorbed into a global culture based on economic rationality, the saving of time and money, and the standardization of tastes and flavours. Local and global features, but also the recognition of cultural diversity and specificity, are essential for understanding the complex and diversified world in which we live.

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