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# DONNE DEL MEDITERRANEO

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DONNE E MEMORIA

a cura di Marco Marino e Giovanni Spani



Saggi e Ricerche

MMXX

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MEDITERRANEAN FOODWAYS,  
MEMORIES OF THE ANCESTRAL LAND,  
AND IDENTITY IN NARRATIVES BY AND  
ABOUT ITALIAN-AMERICAN WOMEN

Stefano Luconi

Since the 1950s in the English-speaking world, the expression Mediterranean Cuisine (a term that refers to a much larger geographical area than a single nation) has progressively turned away from its initial focus on southern French gastronomy and toward its present-day association with Italian foodways in both scholarship and conventional wisdom. This much is clear, for example, from Elizabeth David's attention to *cassoulet*, *ratatouille* and *tomates provençales* in her influential *A Book of Mediterranean Food*. Against this backdrop, the Mediterranean way of eating not only implies an allegedly healthy diet, but also points to a system of cultural values related to Italy<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, to

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. DAVID, *A Book of Mediterranean Food*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1965, pp. 102-4, 131-34 (London, Lehmann, 1950); TETI, *Il colore del cibo: Geografia, mito e realtà dell'alimentazione mediterranea*, Rome, Meltemi, 1999; MARIANI, *How Italian Food Conquered the World*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. The inclusion of French cooking within

the expatriates from this land and their progeny, Mediterranean foodways convey both a lifestyle and a means to revive their recollections of and connections to their native or ancestral country. Flavors and the palate, rather than images and the eyes, shape the memories of Italy for the immigrants and their offspring. Specifically, historian Peppino Ortoleva has remarked that Italian-Americans' passion for their forebears' cuisine has led to an ethnic revival because food is less an instrument of gastronomic «creation» than an opportunity for the «recovery and reminiscence» of the motherland<sup>2</sup>. Likewise, in a both semiautobiographical and academic piece, scholar Patrizia La Trecchia has observed that «my taste in food has become a way to maintain and sustain my sense of ethnic identity and cultural belonging, to rediscover my Italian-American heritage, to communicate information about myself to others»<sup>3</sup>.

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Mediterranean cuisine is still debated in the United States, at least at the level of popular culture. Cf., e.g., PARKER-POPE, *Confusion about Mediterranean Cuisine*, «New York Times», February 11, 2009, <https://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/02/11confusion-about-mediterranean-cuisine> (Accessed: September 12, 2019) and the related online comments.

<sup>2</sup> ORTOLEVA, *La tradizione e l'abbondanza: Riflessioni sulla cucina degli italo-americani*, «Altreitalie», 4.7 (1992), pp. 31-52: 34.

<sup>3</sup> LA TRECCHIA, *Identity in the Kitchen: Creation of Taste and Culinary Memories of an Italian-American Identity*, «Italian Americana», 30.1 (2012), pp. 44-56: 45.

Indeed, writer Helen Barolini – the daughter of Italian migrants to the United States – remarks that «*Mangiando, ricordo. [...] Food is the medium of my remembrance – of my memory of Italy*»<sup>4</sup>. She expressly points to her mother’s approach to food as an instance of how culinary tastes and practices reveal Italian-Americans’ identity and links to their ancestral land. As Barolini observes, «starting in her kitchen, my mother found her way back to her heritage, and this, I suspect, happened for many Italian-American families»<sup>5</sup>. Following in Barolini’s footsteps, scholarship has repeatedly emphasized the centrality of food to the Italian-American experience in the United States. In particular, studies have stressed that cooking, eating, and gathering at mealtime are ways to commemorate one’s ethnic roots, to express the sense of self and social status, and to negotiate one’s place both in the immigrant community and within the broader U.S. society<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> BAROLINI, *Festa: Recipes and Recollections*, New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. GIUNTA et al. (Eds.), *A Tavola: Food, Tradition and Community among Italian Americans*, Staten Island, American Italian Historical Association, 1998; CINOTTO, *The Taste of Place: Food in the Narratives of «America» and «Italy» by Italian Immigrants of New York, 1920-1950*, in BACIGALUPO et al. (Eds.), *America and the Mediterranean*, Torino, Otto, 2003, pp. 145-54; DE ANGELIS et al., *Gastronomic Miscuglio: Foodways in Italian-American Narrative*, «Italian Americana», 23.1 (2005), pp. 48-68; CINOTTO, *La cucina diaspo-*



The kitchen, where food was cooked, usually stood out as the female newcomers' realm. Mothers, wives, and sisters also did the shopping for the ingredients of the dishes they served to their family members. Women, therefore, played a key role in shaping Italian-American foodways. As Maddalena Tirabassi has remarked, they were instrumental in keeping Italian traditions alive by incorporating them into gastronomic practices<sup>7</sup>. In addition, narratives about the Italian experience in the United States in the early twentieth century are replete with detailed descriptions of women cooking Mediterranean «traditional dishes» that revitalize the memories of the native land<sup>8</sup>.

Novels, short stories, memoirs, and autobiographies offer suitable sources to highlight the inner significance and implications underlying the behavior of Italian-American women while they prepare or consume food. As the editors of *The Milk of Almonds* have suggested, «food-writing and life-writing in Italian-American culture are interconnected, for to examine our relationship to food is to examine ourselves, as well as the rela-

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*rica: il cibo come segno di identità culturale*, in CORTI et al. (Eds.), *Storia d'Italia: Annali 24: Migrazioni*, Torino, Einaudi, 2009, pp. 653-72.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. TIRABASSI, *Introduzione alla traduzione italiana*, in CONNELL et al. (Eds.), *Storia degli italoamericani*, Firenze, Le Monnier, 2019, pp. xv-xxvi: xx.

<sup>8</sup> CINOTTO, *The Italian American Table: Food, Family, and Community in New York City*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2013, p. 147.

tionship between these selves and the family, the community, and society at large»<sup>9</sup>. Against this backdrop, this short essay examines the representation of food in a sample of works by and about Italian-American women as a lens through which it is possible to analyze their memories of the ancestral land, their ethnic identity, and the latter's reshaping over time.

Italian-American women's sense of belonging usually takes shape through a metaphoric association with Mediterranean food. For instance, Maria Laurino's Italian descent evokes «the tastes and aromas» of «the sweet scent of tomato sauce simmering on the stove [...]; the paper-thin slices of prosciutto, salty and smooth on the tongue; and my own madeleine, oil-laden frying peppers, light green in color with long, curvaceous bodies that effortlessly glide down the throat»<sup>10</sup>. Likewise, in Tina De Rosa's *Paper Fish*, Carmolina, the author's fictional self, expresses her ethnic heritage by establishing a symbiotic relationship with her ancestral country's foodstuffs: «The kitchen was filled with the thick feelings of food; she walked in and the food touched her face. The soup was steam and blushed her skin. Baked apples twitched her

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<sup>9</sup> DESALVO et al., *Introduction*, in DESALVO et al. (Eds.), *The Milk of Almonds: Italian American Women Writers on Food and Culture*, New York, Feminist Press, 2002, pp. 1-14: 8.

<sup>10</sup> LAURINO, *Were You Always an Italian? Ancestors and Other Icons of Italian America*, New York, Norton, 2000, p. 24.

nose [...] apple sauce touched her skin, nose, mouth and made Carmolina feel that this room was like no other room in the world»<sup>11</sup>.

In particular, Mediterranean food becomes a topos whenever the migrants' female descendants travel to Italy in search of their national origins to revitalize the second-hand recollections of the ancestral land they inherited from their parents and grandparents. This is, for example, Maria Troia's case. Her aunt's recipes are the writer's «greatest heirloom» upon return to the United States from Sicily because they are the means by which the memory of Italy as well as Italian heritage, culture, and traditions are passed from one generation to the next<sup>12</sup>. Similarly, preparing *cuscuszu*, a Sicilian variation of the North African couscous, offers first-generation immigrant Leonarda Cicala a chance to remember her native island<sup>13</sup>.

Sticking to Mediterranean culinary practices also reveals ethnic pride despite pressures toward Americanization in the adoptive society. This is the experience of author Joe Vergara's mother. In his memoirs, Italianness and food are so strictly intertwined in the eyes of his mother that she thinks that pizzerias serving junk spaghetti and meat-

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<sup>11</sup> DE ROSA, *Paper Fish*, New York, Feminist Press, 2003, p. 14.

<sup>12</sup> TROIA, *Food, Women, and Love*, «Voices in Italian Americana», 10.1 (1999), pp. 71-77: 73.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. CICALA, *Cuscuszu in Detroit*, in SCIORRA (Ed.), *Italian Folks: Vernacular Culture in Italian-American Lives*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2011, pp. 31-48.

balls do «more damage to the Italian honor than all the combined membership of the Mafia»<sup>14</sup>. In Barolini's semi-autobiographical Bildungsroman *Umbertina*, immigrant women make fun of U.S. foodways in a display of allegiance to their Italian traditions. As one of them puts it, «These American *femmine* know nothing. My Vito comes home and says his teacher told the class they should have meat, potatoes, and a vegetable on their plates every night, all together. Like pigs eating from a trough, I tell him. In my house I have a *minestra*, a second dish, and a third dish. And beans if I want to! Madonna, that skinny American telling us what to eat!»<sup>15</sup>.

This gastronomic criticism that asserts Italians' superiority was not confined to female newcomers in the era of mass migration between the early 1880s and the mid-1920s. For instance, after moving to Los Angeles in 1992, journalist and screenwriter Chiara Barzini's mother complained that U.S. women did not know how to make dishes with garlic because they fried it. She also hated their allegedly Italian-style syncretic recipes and, with reference to veal parmesan, «would have rather killed herself than make something like that»<sup>16</sup>. On the other hand, immigrants themselves sometimes participated in the hybridization of

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<sup>14</sup> VERGARA, *Love and Pasta: A Recollection*, New York, Harper & Row, 1968, p. 47.

<sup>15</sup> BAROLINI, *Umbertina*, New York, Feminist Press, 1999, p. 69.

<sup>16</sup> BARZINI, *Terremoto*, Milano, Mondadori, 2017, pp. 227, 288.

food. For instance, the ethnic specialty of journalist Tony Barbieri's grandmother was tuna casserole, an implausible Italian dish that she prepared by baking canned fish covered in cheese and tomato sauce<sup>17</sup>.

In any case, during the decades of the mass exodus from Italy to the United States, most Italian-born women belonged to working-class families on the threshold of destitution<sup>18</sup>. Yet, the consumption of ethnic food offered them a sense of pride that both helped them offset marginalization and poverty and enabled them to reclaim their own self-respect and their kinsfolk's dignity in the face of a hostile and xenophobic environment in the adoptive country. Novelist Mario Puzo highlights this attitude in his mother's behavior during the economic crisis of the 1930s. Notwithstanding the depression and her family's being on relief, Maria Le Conti made a point of serving good food every day. Puzo writes that his family «ate better than some of the richest people in America» because «my mother would never dream of using anything but the finest imported olive oil, the best Italian cheeses»<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. ZUCCONI, *Il lato fresco del cuscino: Alla ricerca delle cose perdute*, Roma, Gedi, 2019, pp. 138-39.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. POZZETTA (Ed.), *Pane e Lavoro: The Italian-American Working Class*, Toronto, Multicultural Society of Ontario, 1980.

<sup>19</sup> PUZO, *Choosing a Dream: Italians in Hell's Kitchen*, in T. C. WHEELER (Ed.), *The Immigrant Experience: The Anguish of*

However, Italian-Americans were latecomers to the idea of an ethnic identity based on their common national ancestry and elaborated such a self-image out of pre-existing subnational self-perceptions. Pursuant to the belated achievement of political unification in their native country, Italians long retained a parochial sense of regional, provincial, or even local attachment. Immigrants from different geographical backgrounds in Italy, too, were unable to think of themselves as members of the same nationality group upon arrival in the United States<sup>20</sup>.

As a result, the preservation of ties to the ancestral land initially occurred along subnational lines. Women's foodways provide plenty of evidence. Adelia Rosasco-Soule's mother resorts to cuisine in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Florida to keep alive her family's regional identity. An immigrant from Genoa, she holds to the flavors of her hometown by preparing *pan dolce*, *pesto*, *minestrone genovese*, and *zuppa di ceci* to gratify her husband's «Genovese stomach»<sup>21</sup>. By the same token, Vergara's previously-mentioned immigrant mother from Campania turns any recipe she prepares into a Neapolitan dish: «if she started out to

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*Becoming American*, New York, Dial Press, 1971, pp. 35-49: 39.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. LOPREATO, *Italian Americans*, New York, Random House, 1970, p. 104.

<sup>21</sup> ROSASCO-SOULE, *Panhandle Memoirs*, Pensacola, West Florida Literary Federation, 1987, p. 102.

make corned beef and cabbages – a most unlikely choice – it would end up tasting like a Neapolitan specialty»<sup>22</sup>.

Regional varieties in tastes easily lead to regional pride. Celeste A. Morello's aunt extols her Neapolitan-style «tomato sauce with the consistency and flow of a gravy», as opposed to its Genoese counterpart «extremely thin, almost watery»<sup>23</sup>. Similarly, Umbertina – Barolini's fictional family matriarch – makes her husband's pizzas «with onions, or with potatoes and rosemary, or with pieces of *scamorza* cheese, or olives and anchovies – but never with tomato sauce as the Neapolitans did, for that disguised the good taste of fresh dough and turned it soggy and soft». A full-fledged Calabrian, she also refrains from following the *Abruzzesi's* recipes and does not make ravioli mixing cheese and spinach as is typical in the latter region<sup>24</sup>.

Yet, the WASP establishment and the other ethnic minorities usually failed to realize the differences among Italian immigrants from various regional milieux and pigeonholed them all under the same national minority, often in derogatory

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<sup>22</sup> VERGARA, *Love and Pasta*, p. 89.

<sup>23</sup> MORELLO, *The Philadelphia Italian Market Cookbook: The Tastes of South 9th Street*, Philadelphia, Jeffries & Manz, 1999, pp. 6, 20.

<sup>24</sup> BAROLINI, *Umbertina*, pp. 93-95.

and biased terms<sup>25</sup>. Therefore, in the face of bigotry on the grounds of their national ancestry, Italian-Americans often turned their backs on their native country in the pursuit of assimilation.

Food choices, too, reflected this attitude and the rejection of an Italian diet epitomized the longing for social inclusion and acceptance by the adoptive society. For instance, in her personal attempts at «studying to be an American», Joanna Clapps Herman's mother, who is born of immigrant Italian parents, begins to cut out American-style recipes from *Good Housekeeping* and *Woman's Day*, two magazines for U.S. female readers covering such topics as homemaking, fashion, and obviously nutrition with such specific columns featuring meal plans like «Month of Menus»<sup>26</sup>. Barolini recalls that, in the effort to avoid xenophobia, «We didn't want to be identified with the backward Italian families who lived on the North Side and did their shopping in grocery stores that smelled of strong cheese and salami»<sup>27</sup>. In her *Greener Grass*, Italian food is similarly a

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. LAGUMINA, *Wop! A Documentary History of Anti-Italian Discrimination in the United States*, Toronto, Guernica, 1999.

<sup>26</sup> HERMAN, *The Anarchist Bastard: Growing Up Italian in America*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2011, pp. 107-8. For the two magazines, cf. MCCracken, *Decoding Women's Magazines: From Mademoiselle to Ms.*, London, Macmillan, 1993, pp. 176-77, 181-82, 295.

<sup>27</sup> BAROLINI, *A Circular Journey*, «Texas Quarterly», 21.2 (1978), pp. 109-26: 111.



source of embarrassment for third-generation Stefana Pietrofesso. She wishes to «become *American*» and hopes that her schoolmates of other-than-Italian descent will not pay attention to her «sandwich made with Italian bread»<sup>28</sup>.

As in the case of criticism of U.S. cuisine by the Italian-born female immigrants mentioned earlier, the function of foodways as a mirror of identity for women longing for Americanization is not confined to the newcomers who arrived during the decades of the mass transatlantic influx and their progeny. For example, Maria Bottiglieri, a war bride who moved to the other shore of the Atlantic after marrying a U.S. soldier at the end of World War II, writes that she became «more American» because she «ate the American style»<sup>29</sup>.

However, unlike their U.S.-born offspring, immigrants were more likely to resist the lure of the Americanization process in foodways as well. Barolini's Italian-born Umbertina, for example, never yields «to the American Thanksgiving and its strange food». Refusing to purchase canned ingredients at chain stores, she also grows beans and tomatoes in her backyard to keep alive the tradition of a summer picnic that is the annual family

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<sup>28</sup> BAROLINI, *Greener Grass*, in TAMBURRI et al. (Eds.), *From the Margin: Writings in Italian Americana*, West Lafayette, Purdue University Press, 1991, pp. 39-45: 40.

<sup>29</sup> BOTTIGLIERI, *Sposa di guerra*, unpublished typescript, 1986, p. 27, Archivio Diaristico Nazionale, Pieve di Santo Stefano, Italy.

reunion with her married daughters<sup>50</sup>. Conversely, alienation from the ancestral roots characterized especially the newcomers' children. In their struggle to distance themselves from their Italian extraction to avoid discrimination, second-generation immigrants even clashed with their own parents<sup>51</sup>. According to scholar Hasia Diner, a contrast in behavior occurred between «the harmony in Italian homes in America over food» and «a deep generational chasm between immigrant parents and American children over much else in their cultural repertoire»<sup>52</sup>.

Some works do emphasize the role of cuisine as a pacifier. A short story by Rose Quiello, for example, explicitly contends that «food is a resolution to controversy»<sup>53</sup>. Nonetheless, a closer scrutiny of Italian-American women-related narratives reveals that foodways are not a conflict-free sphere. For instance, in *Vertigo*, Louise DeSalvo makes her mother's traditional dishes the symbol of an Italian identity she initially makes a point of rejecting. She stresses that «I don't like anything my mother

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<sup>50</sup> BAROLINI, *Umbertina*, p. 142.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. CHILD, *Italian or American? The Second Generation in Conflict*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1943.

<sup>52</sup> DINER, *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2001, p. 82.

<sup>53</sup> QUIELLO, *Dedicated to an Old Friend Whose Kindness I Shall Never Forget*, in BARRECA (Ed.), *Don't Tell Mama! The Penguin Book of Italian American Writing*, New York, Penguin, 2002, pp. 469-71: 471.

cooks» and adds that «for years, my mother cooked things that I believed no one should eat, things that I certainly couldn't eat, Old World things, [...] things I was ashamed to say I ate, and that I certainly couldn't invite my friends over to eat»<sup>34</sup>. As Donna R. Gabaccia has remarked, «[t]o abandon immigrant food traditions» means disavowing one's ethnic community, heritage, and ties to the ancestral land<sup>35</sup>.

DeSalvo further re-elaborates such a generational conflict over food in a subsequent volume. In *Crazy in the Kitchen* cooking becomes the battleground between her step-grandmother and mother. The former struggles to recreate an Italian-style cuisine –making, for example, a «thick-crusted, coarse-crumbed [...] peasant bread»– and the latter resorts to convenience food, such as gristly meat for hamburgers, fatty sausages that she covers with Worcestershire sauce, and bread bought at Dugan's store. In the clash over bread, the step-grandmother's version, prepared following an Italian recipe, is «a bread that my mother disdains because it is everything that my grandmother is, and everything that my mother, in 1950s suburban New Jersey, is trying very hard not to be». DeSalvo's mom also assumes that consuming U.S. bread «will change her, that eating this bread

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<sup>34</sup> DESALVO, *Vertigo*, New York, Dutton, 1996, pp. 201, 204.

<sup>35</sup> GABACCIA, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1998, p. 54.

will erase the embarrassment of a stepmother – all black dresses and headscarves»<sup>36</sup>. Likewise, Sandra Mortola Gilbert's attitude toward Mediterranean beverages and ingredients expresses the negation of her ethnic heritage. Noting that «I want to be an American / I want to have a name that ends in a Protestant consonant / instead of a Catholic vowel», she adds that «I have never [...] drunk red wine / never tasted olive oil»<sup>37</sup>.

Even when they do not reach the level of generational conflicts, foodways rise to the symbol of cultural differences and lack of understanding between the immigrants and the newcomers' progeny on an ethnic ground. For instance, hinting at her incompetence about traditional Italian recipes as the epitome for the distance from her immigrant mother-in-law's native roots, U.S.-born Bea Tusiani admits that she is unable to «understand the significance of a bread-baking ritual that carried this very poor and independent woman through the Depression and two World Wars»<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> DESALVO, *Crazy in the Kitchen: Food, Feuds, and Forgiveness in an Italian Family*, New York, Bloomsbury, 2004, pp. 9-10.

<sup>37</sup> MORTOLA GILBERT, *Adventures on the Hyphen: Poetry, Pasta, and Identity Politics*, in VIGILANTE MANNINO et al. (Eds.), *Breaking Open: Reflections on Italian American Women's Writing*, West Lafayette, Purdue University Press, 2003, pp. 137-51: 147-48.

<sup>38</sup> TUSIANI, *Con Amore: A Daughter-in-Law's Story of Growing up Italian American in Bushwick*, New York, Bordighera, 2017, p. 176.

In *Vertigo* DeSalvo disavows her ancestral heritage in a culinary perspective by celebrating anorexia. In this case, the refusal to eat food is an escape from her Italian roots<sup>39</sup>.

However, the rejection of their forebears' cuisine is not the final stage in Italian-Americans' complex behavior in the kitchen and at the dinner table. The negation of Italianness is often temporary and does not imply a definitive denial of one's ethnic heritage; rather, it is sometimes a step toward the fulfillment of an Italian identity. In the end, even DeSalvo reconciles with her Italian cuisine and heritage. Food is key to her personal journey in search of her Italian background. When she makes up her mind to «explore» her «ethnic roots», she purchases «a pasta machine» and begins to prepare macaroni, the quintessential Italian dish. Learning «how to combine the ingredients for pasta, to roll out the dough, and cut it» becomes a symbolic initiation to her Italian identity<sup>40</sup>. Similarly, feminist Susan Caperna Lloyd rejects her grandmother Carolina's seclusion in the kitchen – which is the typical plight of housewives in the patriarchal Italian-American family – and, consequently, declines to participate in cooking traditional meals. As such, her efforts to resist patriar-

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<sup>39</sup> DESALVO, *Vertigo*, pp. 200-18.

<sup>40</sup> DESALVO, *A Portrait of the Puttana as a Middle-Aged Woolf Scholar*, in BAROLINI (Ed.), *The Dream Book: An Anthology of Writings by Italian American Women*, New York, Schocken, 1985, pp. 93-99: 94.

chy by deserting the kitchen and refusing its related tasks reflect scholar Mary Jo Bona's vision of this room as a locus that, both practically and metaphorically, offers Italian-American women a space for contestation and liberation<sup>41</sup>. Nevertheless, Caperna Lloyd cannot help honoring her ethnic heritage by means of foodways. She admits that «I still hungered for the food and stories, and often, with my family, I would drop by my parents' house ten miles away to eat and recapture the past»<sup>42</sup>. By the same token, to movie director Kym Ragusa, who is Italian on her father's side and African on her mother's, the kitchen and food are respectively a setting and a means used to reconcile her diverse and often conflicting ancestries. As she puts it, «I have my own kitchen now, and it is time for me to stop being the little girl nourished and silenced by my father's cooking»<sup>43</sup>. Likewise, in Barolini's major work, unlike her own mother, Marguerite, who experiences a «feeling of alienation and [...] anxiety as to whether you are American, Italian or Italo-American», Tina –Umbertina's great-granddaughter– eventually acknowledges her Italianness. Food is again the vehicle for the expression of self-

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<sup>41</sup> BONA, *Claiming a Tradition: Italian-American Women Writers*, Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1999, p. 172.

<sup>42</sup> CAPERNA LLOYD, *No Pictures in My Grave: A Spiritual Journey in Sicily*, San Francisco, Mercury, 1992, p. 11.

<sup>43</sup> RAGUSA, *Baked Ziti*, in DESALVO et al. (Eds.), *The Milk of Almonds*, pp. 276-82: 281.

perception. Tina travels to Castagna, Umbertina's native village in Italy, in search of her ethnic roots and, after this experience, would barter an «expensive dinner at the top of the World Trade Center [...] for any number of little *trattorie* in Rome or Florence or Venice». Yet, she does not achieve a full-fledged Italian-American consciousness and does not completely recover the memory of her ancestral land until she plants rosemary in her home garden – the same herb her great-grandmother used for the pizzas and rolls of bread upon which she built up her successful grocery business after settling in the United States<sup>44</sup>.

Spatial constraints prevent this overview of foodways in narratives by and about Italian-American women from being more exhaustive or extensive. However, the essay has pointed to the transformations of their ethnic attachment over time by means of an analysis of their relations with food. Specifically, it has highlighted a trajectory that these women followed while redefining their memories of Italy and their ethnic sense of belonging. Such changes comprised an initially localistic allegiance, a subsequent elaboration of an identity based on national extraction, a later longing for assimilation within U.S. society, and an eventual re-discovery of the ancestral roots.

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<sup>44</sup> BAROLINI, *Umbertina*, pp. 16-17, 372-87, 406, 423.