

“YES TO POLENTA, NO TO COUSCOUS!:
Constructed Identities and Contested Boundaries Between Local
and Global in Northern Italy’s Gastronomic Landscape”

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: The Literature	8
A Theoretical Framework of Culinary Anthropology.....	8
The Slow Food Movement	14
The Lega Nord.....	23
Immigration Literature.....	30
Research Methodology.....	38
Chapter Two: A Local Culinary Identity.....	41
The Slow Food Headquarters.....	42
Slow Food Editore.....	45
The University of Gastronomic Sciences.....	49
Slow Food Manifestations in the Culinary Everyday.....	51
Tradition at La Cascata.....	53
Culinary Ambivalence: Global Incursions into the Local in the Langhe.....	59
Lega Nord Presence in the Slow Food Sphere.....	63
Section Conclusion.....	66
Chapter Three: A Legacy of Exclusion.....	67
A Conversation on the Train.....	68
The Legacy of Place-Based Identity Making.....	69
Porous Boundaries.....	74
Section Conclusion.....	75
Chapter Four: The Globalized Underneath.....	77
<i>Il Mondo in Una Piazza</i> /The World in a Square.....	78
Kebab Shops: Culinary (Con)fusion.....	84
Co-Ethnic Catering and a Shakedown at the Asia-Africa Store.....	88
More Lega Nord Posters: A Backdrop of Exclusion.....	91
From Porta Palazzo to Eataly.....	93
Section Conclusion.....	97
Conclusion.....	98
Bibliography.....	103

INTRODUCTION

The cherry tomatoes fell from my soiled hands and landed with a soft thud into the crate beside me. Like most mornings, when the late-August sun was well on its determined march across the blue sky, I squatted amid the vegetable plants in the dry earth of the Langhe and harvested produce. I stood up to stretch my legs and looked around. The sun began to paint golden-green swathes upon the surrounding hills in Piedmont, Italy, their rolling contours striped with vineyards and brushed with hazelnut groves. In my more immediate vicinity, a great variety of plants bore fruits and vegetables from the fertile soil. Green bean stalks snaked their way up a wire lattice. Bell peppers, sweet and colorful, abounded in a row that adjoined their spicier cousins. Perfume from several rows of basil filled the air when the breeze stirred the leaves. A massive carpet of broad leaves, rough vines, and emergent blossoms veiled bright green zucchini. Bulbous *trombetta* squash, shaped like French horns, sat several paces away from the deep purple bulbs of eggplants. Everywhere on this small farm in Northern Italy, beautiful foodstuffs emerged from the earth.



I carried my crate of *ciliequine* tomatoes up the hill to the farmhouse, where “Sarbre”¹ stirred a massive stockpot full of the bright red little gems on the stove. The simmering tomatoes were central in many of the traditional Piedmontese dishes she cooked: sauces that adorned feathery strands of handmade *tagliatelle* pasta or squished in between layers of *lasagna* or mixed with red wine to braise a whole rabbit. The ingredients she used to create her traditional Northern Italian recipes

¹ All names of my interlocutors have been changed in this thesis.

were borne from the earth just a tomato's throw from her kitchen. It was in this gastronomic milieu, on an organic farm in the province of Cuneo, that I lived and worked for a month as I gathered ethnographic data about broader tensions in the region.

In addition to its focus on food and foodways² in the area, this thesis is about immigration in Italy. From a historical standpoint, the country has recently experienced a fundamental transformation in population dynamics. Long a country that exported its citizens across the world, especially to the Western Hemisphere, Italy has become a country of large-scale immigration since the 1970s. The presence of foreign immigrants from across the globe has materialized as a problematic issue in Italy's sociopolitical landscape. As a general trend, foreign immigrants who arrive in Italy both legally and illegally are greeted by forces of economic, political, and sociocultural exclusion. As in other Western European countries, these new hostilities in an increasingly globalized Italy have drawn attention from scholars in a range of disciplines.

I fell into this boiling stew of immigration tensions in the summer of 2009, armed with theories of culinary anthropology and migration and in search of how I could understand the situation from a gastronomic perspective. I was inspired by ways in which notions of food, identity, and locality intersected to exclude immigrants. At a 2002 anti-immigration rally, for example, one protestor's sign read, "YES TO POLENTA, NO TO COUSCOUS!" in order to simultaneously promote local food traditions and disparage immigrants. Just last year in the city of Lucca, the municipal government banned any new ethnic restaurants from opening in the city center. *La Stampa*, a daily newspaper published in Turin, declared the decree akin to "a new Lombard Crusade against the Saracens."³ Traditional cuisine, it seemed, was a marker of a "pure" Italian identity rooted

² Foodways are defined as the cultural practices relating to the production and consumption of food.

³ Owen, Richard. "Italy Bans Kebabs and Foreign Food from Cities." *The Times Online*. (January 31, 2009). "Italy Bans Kebabs and Foreign Food from Cities."
http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/food_and_drink/article5622156.ece [accessed April 10, 2009]

in the local landscape, and “authentic” foodways have had tremendous implications in the processes of boundary-making that have cordoned off foreign immigrants as unequivocally “other.” In this work, I question why and in which ways food has manifested as such a powerful articulation of a local, “authentic” identity in Italy vis-à-vis the perception of an immigrant invasion. But as I problematize this culturally-constructed identity, I move beyond a simple reification of “the local” to question the very integrity of this construction itself and the boundaries that separate it from immigrant otherness.

Like Sarbre’s cooking, this project combines a number of central ingredients. To hold them together, I specifically limit my geographic scope to Northern Italy, despite the fact that tensions in regard to immigration have surfaced in all parts of the country. In the uneven historical development of the Italian regional geography, the country’s northern region is the nexus of a historical trajectory of migration. I purport that the current immigration tensions are part and parcel of a historically-rooted legacy of immigration and exclusion.

Within this geopolitically narrowed scope, two of the most important ingredients I handle in this thesis sprouted out of the North around the same time in the late 1980s: the Slow Food movement and the conservative center-right political party called the Northern League, to which I refer by its Italian name, the Lega Nord. The Slow Food movement was founded in 1989 by Carlo Petrini in Piedmont, Northern Italy. The organization was created as response to the globalization and commoditization of food in Italy—more specifically, it was Petrini’s angry reaction to a McDonald’s that opened near the Spanish Steps in Rome. From its beginning, the Slow Food movement has sought to preserve and defend ways of cooking and eating that are under threat of “contamination” by globalized foodways. The Lega Nord was also created in the late 1980s by a charismatic figurehead, a rightist politician named Umberto Bossi. Since its inception, the Lega Nord

has pressed for an autonomous Northern Italy. Anti-immigrant rhetoric is a common feature in its discourse that prescribes a “pure” Northern Italian identity.

Within the broad field of Northern Italy, I maintain that the Slow Food movement and the Lega Nord are two groups that reveal some of the culinary and cultural mechanisms through which immigrants have been excluded. Separately, the Slow Food movement and the Lega Nord have revealed their own reflexive, locally-rooted claims to an “authentic” identity in Northern Italy. Intrinsically, this identity I describe is composed of many ingredients that make it quite a mouthful—reflexivity to the global, rootedness in local territory, tradition, culinary purity, cultural authenticity, and entrenched historicity. I blend these conceptual ingredients to better understand the hegemonic local identities that have been constructed in the North. But the important issue here is that the identity claims I trace to the Slow Food movement and the Lega Nord convey a sense of *belonging* in a particular conception of local *territory*.

Although the underlying assumptions and ideologies in the Slow Food movement and the Lega Nord are strikingly different, these claims to locally-rooted identities have nevertheless produced an intersection between the notions of food, identity, and place in a way that fundamentally excludes foreign immigrants. Because these identities are constructed as a response to the perceived assault of globalization, these reflexive, locally-rooted identities are constructed by mobilizing imagined and remembered notions of tradition and locality.

Furthermore, I contend that because this imagined traditional identity has been constructed as a reaction to a significant influx of migrants from abroad, spaces of culinary contradiction have arisen within these taken-for-granted Northern Italian identities that further illustrate the ambivalence of ostensibly “pure” local identities. My culinary anthropological investigation of the immigration situation in Northern Italy provides an ideal strategy to pick apart the ways that

seemingly grounded, organic local conceptions of cultural identity mobilize to exclude the globalized identities brought to Italy by foreign immigrants.

Thus, the conceptual ingredients I marshal in this thesis point to a central issue: the ways in which “the local” has been reasserted and defended against a perception of the deleterious “global.” What I am most concerned about in this thesis are the ways in which food, place, and identity are wrapped up in the fundamental and ceaseless act of *representing* that erects a boundary between the local and the global. My exploration reveals contradictory global spaces, however, in the underneath of a hegemonic conception of an imagined, traditional, and “pure” local identity. I show that the boundary that ostensibly separates “the local” from “the global,” belonging from unbelonging, and purity from contamination is in fact *not* so solid. Instead, my research suggests that immigrants’ position in the deterritorialized underneath of “the local” allows them to *contest* this shifting yet exclusionary boundary! Grounded in my analysis of the Slow Food movement and the Lega Nord, I provide a nuanced glimpse of what happens when these groups construct a “pure” local identity that opposes immigrants.

In the first chapter, I establish a theoretical framework grounded in culinary anthropology. I then situate this thesis in three bodies of literature that present pertinent scholarly voices in the field and give important background information to my own ethnographic data analysis. I conclude Chapter One by describing in greater detail my methodology for the collection and analysis of my ethnographic data.

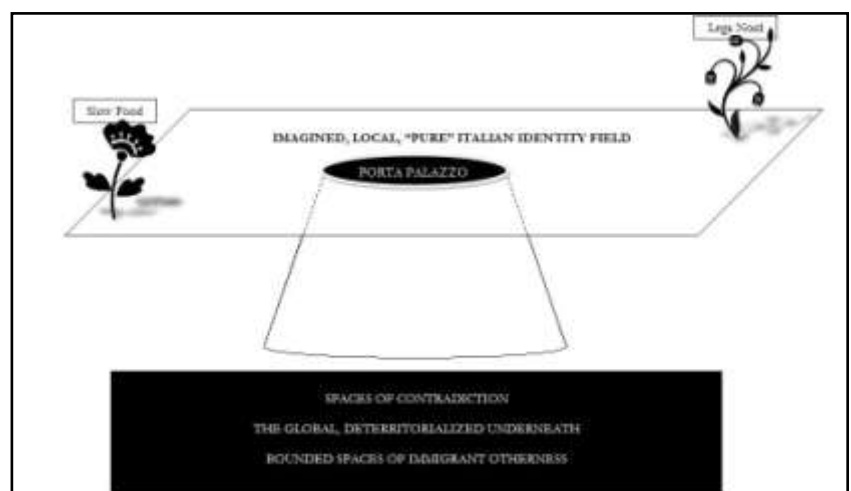
Chapters Two, Three, and Four present and analyze the data I harvested using ethnographic methods in the region of Piedmont. These chapters are organized in a way that describes a personal journey from the city of Bra via train to the city of Turin. In each of these data analysis chapters, I explore the ways that a territorially-rooted “local” identity has been imaginatively constructed in opposition to immigrants. But I also point out the crucial and contradictory ways that immigrants, in

the shadows of this hegemonic local identity, contest the boundary between belonging and unbelonging. These spaces of contradiction intensify in meaning as I move toward Turin.

In Chapter Two, I explore the ways that the Slow Food movement's professed identity that exalts local, traditional cuisine materializes in the Langhe. I argue that the Slow Food movement has catalyzed the culinary boundary-making between local and global vis-à-vis the perceived destruction of globalization in a way that has reified the everyday practice of reproducing foodways as local traditions. Ultimately, this reassertion of "the local" as an organic identity to defend against the deleterious effects of "the global" has produced a gastronomic rhetoric that seemingly excludes newcomers from participating in the local food community. Nevertheless, immigrants and their foodways have permeated this construction of the local, and I suggest that the seemingly sharp dichotomy between traditional gastronomic purity and contaminating immigrant exclusion is not actually so rigid.

Chapter Three describes a train ride from Bra to Turin, where I use an interview with a Southern Italian descendent to discuss the historical legacy of internal migration from Southern to Northern Italy. The long history of migration from South-to-North has created a deep legacy of exclusion and xenophobia in Northern Italy. This legacy, appropriated and crystallized by the Lega Nord, has created fertile ground for the current strategies of representational boundary-making that exclude foreign immigrants.

I disembark the train in Chapter Four and get to the contradictory crux of my argument in the Porta Palazzo market of Turin. In this multicultural urban space, I explore the site of the



collision between a constructed, “pure” Northern Italian identity bound to specific local territory and the equally constructed identity of the immigrant interloper who resides therein. These contradictory culinary spaces are windows into the underneath of Italian regional gastronomic hegemony. I argue that the presence of the *global* in the culinary and cultural underneath of the *local* suggests the ultimate fragility of an imagined conception of local purity that either overtly or indirectly excludes immigrants.

Figure 1 visually represents my argument in this work. I examine the ways in which a local, “pure” Italian identity has been constructed in Northern Italy. The Slow Food movement and the Lega Nord are two groups that have sprouted out of this identity plane, and they provide my sites of investigation. These groups are situated on different sides of the symbolic identity, and they take different forms, but they germinate in the same field nevertheless. In Chapter Four, my examination of the Porta Palazzo market in Turin serves as an opening in the constructed local identity field. I use the globalized immigrant space as an analytical portal to peer into the spaces of contradiction that lie underneath the traditional Italian identity field on the surface. This scrutiny of the shadows suggests that the boundary between local and global, “pure” Italianness and immigrant contamination is rather fluid.

CHAPTER ONE: THE LITERATURE

I begin my exploration of the convergence of foreign immigration to Northern Italy with a theoretical foundation in the anthropology of cuisine. Then I situate my argument among pertinent scholarly literature by engaging three categories of scholarship: arguments regarding the Slow Food movement, the Lega Nord, and immigration to Italy. I set up my own ethnographic research in a niche of relevant scholarship.

A Theoretical Framework of Culinary Anthropology

I locate the pertinent theoretical perspectives to the role of cuisine as a cultural marker of authentic identity in Northern Italy in two categories. On one hand, food is conceptualized as a culturally semiotic medium that expresses categories and boundaries. On the other hand, cuisine occupies a curious place in the social imagination, at once a construction of imagination and memory, and also a powerfully emotional, historical attachment to a place. This section shall trace the theoretical underpinnings of food's communicative qualities, as well as its role in a sense of "imagined nostalgia."

Intellectuals and chefs alike have long agreed that food is immensely communicative. In Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin's 1825 treatise on eating, *The Physiology of Taste*, he laid down what has become a common adage: "Tell me what thou eatest, and I will tell thee what thou art."⁴ Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966) provides a structuralist insight into the role of food. He states that "we can hope to discover for each specific case how the cooking of a society is a language in which it unconsciously translates its structure—or else resigns itself, still unconsciously, to revealing its

⁴ M. F. K. Fisher, *The Physiology of Taste Or Meditations on Transcendental Gastronomy* (New York: Counterpoint, 2000), 7.

contradictions.”⁵ Food, according to Mary Douglas (1972) and other anthropologists working on ethnicity and identity is an especially effective “boundary marker.” Douglas asserts that “if food is to be treated as a code, the message it encodes will be found in the pattern of social relations being expressed. The message is about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across boundaries...food categories therefore encode social events.”⁶ As I argue later, a culinary lens is a fitting way to examine this boundary-making in Northern Italy.

But a clear question arises—why food? Few would disagree that food’s salience is due to the material centrality as the nutritional source of life. But this fact interacts with lines of causality and meaning “in ways that are deeply symbolic, sensuous, psychological, and social.”⁷ The way we cook and eat has the peculiar quality of linking the minutiae of everyday lived experience to “broader cultural patterns, hegemonic structures, and political-economic processes” in ways that are simultaneously logical and illogical, conscious and unconscious.⁸ Douglas’ assertion of culinary boundary-making between social groups becomes clearer when one considers Fischer’s concept that the process of eating food crosses the border between “outside” and “inside” the body, and this “principle of incorporation” affects the very *soul* of a person, especially in communal situations. People eating similar food are regarded as trustworthy, familiar, and safe; but people eating unusual, foreign food may be viewed with feelings of distrust or suspicion.⁹ Thus, foodways are immensely communicative of sociocultural relations.

Assertions of culinary semiotics, however, are only the first step. Theories like those of Levi-Strauss and Douglas have been scrutinized and reevaluated because they generally overlook historical change as a phenomenon to be analyzed. Food is symbolic, and that is that. Indeed, cuisine

⁵ Lévi-Strauss, Claude. “The Culinary Triangle.” *Partisan Review*. 33, (1966): 595.

⁶ Douglas, Mary. “Deciphering a Meal.” *Daedalus*. No. 1, Myth, Symbol, and Culture. (Winter 1972): 61.

⁷ Jon D. Holtzman, “Food and Memory,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 35 (2006): 373.

⁸ Ibid 373

⁹ Mary Douglas, *Purity and danger an analysis of the concepts of pollution and taboo*(London: Ark Paperbacks, 1984), 7.

communicates *something*, and understanding the communicative quality of food is a necessary first analytical step to extrapolate a host of other issues. But it is also necessary to understand how foodways have come to express that “something” and what it truly means. For this, I point to the roles memory and imagination play.

The communicative quality of foodways is often argued to be inextricably associated with memory. Structuralists like Levi-Strauss and Douglas hold that the symbolic nature of gastronomy is built upon prior culinary experiences. Purported by anthropologists to be highly ritualized, the act of eating is one of the most fundamentally revealing acts in the human experience. The everyday ritual of eating “makes concrete one of the specific modes of relation between a person and the world, thus forming one of the fundamental landmarks in space-time.”¹⁰ The sensual experience of eating evokes a recollection of past time and space that is not merely cognitive but is also emotional and corporeal.¹¹ This very act of culinary remembrance destabilizes the truth; the momentary jarring of the past emphasizes the way it is recalled, memorialized, and used to construct the present reality. David Sutton’s (2001) essential thesis is that *to eat is to remember*.¹² He argues that the transitory and repetitive act of eating is a medium for the more enduring act of remembering and for the performance of cultural, ethnic, or national identity.¹³

A utilization of what Duruz would call the converse of memory—imagination¹⁴—yields arguments that describe the creative, constructive values of food. For instance, Cook and Crang (1996) dispute the fact that regional cuisine depends on historical accretion and stasis within that place, or that there is a simple or unconstructed association of foods and places. Rather, they argue, *foods make places* as symbolic, creative constructs, “being deployed in the discursive construction of

¹⁰ Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (New York: University of California P, 2002), 183.

¹¹ Holtzman, “Food and Memory” 183

¹² David E. Sutton, *Remembrance of Repasts: An Anthropology of Food and Memory (Materializing Culture)* (New York: Berg, 2001), 8.

¹³ Sutton, David. *Remembrance of Repasts: An Anthropology of Food and Memory*. (New York: Berg Press, 2001), 12.

¹⁴ Duruz, Jean. “Eating at the Borders: Culinary Journeys,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*.23 (2006): 55.

various *imaginative geographies*.”¹⁵ This reluctance to examine cuisine as a rigid cultural, territorial construct is paralleled by Arjun Appadurai’s conceptualization of ethnoscapas as mobile “landscapes for group identity.” He writes, “The task of ethnography now becomes the unraveling of a conundrum: what is the nature of locality as a lived experience in a globalized, deterritorialized world? ...[T]he beginnings of an answer to this puzzle lie in a fresh approach to the role of the imagination in social life.”¹⁶ To apply this concept to cuisine, it is valuable to consider Locher’s (2005) premise, which states that “symbolic interactionism” involves recalling the real or imagined presence of “another” in making one’s own behavioral choices.¹⁷ The concept of imagination plays a key role in this thesis, because I purport that the Slow Food movement and the Lega Nord employ imaginative strategies to construct notions of locally-rooted culinary and cultural purity to defend against the deleterious effects of globalization.

To connect the culinary theories of imagination and memory together, we once again return to the scholarship of Arjun Appadurai (1993). He states that “accretions of cultural authenticity pass metonymically” from the territory to the individual by his or her adoption of local practices and objects—food, for example—in what he calls the “subtle transference of *patina*.” The temporal and spatial authenticity ostensibly guaranteed by this transfer is actually based on an “imagined nostalgia...nostalgia without lived experience or collective historical memory,”¹⁸ which reminisces about a temporality of lost or distant times and leads to a heightened sensory experience of the present time and place.

This notion of *imagined nostalgia*, a curious conflation of imagination and memory, past and present, is one of the most pressing issues in a theoretical understanding of the current state of

¹⁵ Cook, Ian, and Crang, Philip. “The World on a Plate: Culinary Culture, Displacement, and Geographical Knowledges.” *Journal of Material Culture*. 1: (1996): 115 (emphasis added).

¹⁶ Quoted in Duruz, Jean. “Eating at the Borders: Culinary Journeys,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*. 23 (2006): 54.

¹⁷ Locher, Julie L. “Comfort Foods: An Exploratory Journey into the Social and Emotional Significance of Food,” *Food and Foodways* Vol. 13, Iss. 4 (2005): 276.

¹⁸ Appadurai, Arjun. “Consumption, Duration, and History.” *Stanford Literature Review*. 10, (1993): 14.

immigration and ethno-regional tension in Northern Italy. Deeply-held notions of time-honored, “authentic” Italian food are some of the most potent mechanisms of semiotic identity in the region, based upon a remembered, historicized ideal of Northern Italian gastronomic traditions. Those who grant themselves the privilege to define a nostalgically romanticized culinary authenticity can “inflict wounds that either appropriate cultural and personal knowledge or essentialize it,” which stifles creative growth and cultural transformation.¹⁹ Within the multicultural milieu of Northern Italy, immigrants’ culinary narratives are fundamentally at odds with notion of politico-culinary authenticity rooted in the local soil that Slow Food and the Lega Nord espouse in their own ways—leaving much leeway, in some instances, for xenophobia and exclusion.

To trace the contours of this narrative of a “pure” Italian identity, the central hypothesis of this thesis is that the Slow Food movement and the Lega Nord have each produced discourses of authentic Italian identities in their own ways. While I posit that the Slow Food movement and the Lega Nord have individually contributed to a conception of Italian purity, I also emphasize that each organization has done so in tremendously different ways on the surface. An analysis of the underlying assumptions to these narratives reveals that these claims to Italian purity fundamentally leave foreign immigrants out of the picture.

In this thesis, I ground the Slow Food movement and the Lega Nord in this theoretical framework by separating their own articulations of “pure” identity into epistemological and ontological categories.²⁰ The Slow Food movement’s conception of authentic culinary identity is fundamentally exclusive to outsiders in hidden, nuanced ways, and I analyze the movement’s fundamental assumptions ontologically: Slow Food’s ontological narrative defines what is good to eat, simultaneously declaring *how* to eat, *how* to cook it, and *how* to enjoy the food. In doing so, the

¹⁹ Meredith E. Abarca, “Authentic or Not, It’s Original,” *Food & Foodways* 12 (2004): 2.

²⁰ The categories of “epistemology” and “ontology” serve as useful heuristic devices for my purposes here. They are defined as “a theory of knowing,” and “a theory of being,” respectively.

Slow Food movement defines an authentically Italian way of being that does not include foreign immigrants. On the other hand, the Lega Nord declares an incontrovertibly “pure” Northern Italian identity that unabashedly denies foreign immigrants, which I analyze epistemologically: their categorizing discourse of power and knowledge²¹ defines who belongs in their imagined territory of Padania while simultaneously identifying and denying the immigrant Other.

Abarca cites two definitions of the notion of “authenticity” as it applies to food culture. The first suggests “possessing inherent authority,” which in this case refers to the cook: non-Italians simply do not possess the cultural knowledge to create authentic Italian food—a low-paying economic position in which immigrants frequently find themselves. The second definition applies to a cooking method that is “real, actual, genuine as opposed to imagined,” which in this case suggests that culinary deviations from a previously established gastronomic tradition arouse suspicion and exclusion.²²

This second definition is half-accurate. A “genuine” Northern Italian ethno-nationalist cuisine *is* imagined! The ramifications of this notion are clear when we return to the scholarship of Mary Douglas. In *Purity and Danger*, Douglas purports that an assertion of strict purity leads to uncomfortable contradiction if closely followed—“or it leads to hypocrisy. *That which is negated is not thereby removed.* The rest of life, which does not tidily fit the accepted categories, is still there and demands attention.”²³ To apply this theoretical lens to Italy, the nostalgic emphasis on an imagined, “authentic” local cuisine, along with a simultaneous rejection of the immigrant Other, keeps immigrants highlighted in cultural rejection. Douglas’ words are invaluable to theoretically nuance the position of cultural and culinary Italian purity on one hand, and immigrant impurity on the other.

²¹ Richard Jenkins, "Categorization: Identity, Social Process and Epistemology," *Current Sociology* 48, no. 7 (2000): 23.

²² Abarca, "Authentic or Not, It's Original," 3

²³ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 123

In a given culture it seems that some kinds of behavior or natural phenomena are recognized as utterly wrong by all the principles which govern the universe. There are different kinds of impossibilities, anomalies, bad mixings and abominations. Most of the items receive varying degrees of condemnation and avoidance. Then suddenly we find that one of the most abominable or impossible is singled out and put into a very special kind of ritual frame that marks it off from other experience. The frame ensures that the categories which the normal avoidances sustain are not threatened or affected in any way. Within the ritual frame the abomination is then handled as a source of tremendous power.²⁴

The imagined, nostalgic concepts of culinary purity and impurity create unity in experience, while concurrently acknowledging the influence of the ostensibly rejected immigrant presence. These ideas engage symbolic patterns of culture and cuisine that emphasize Italian purity and deny the cultural and culinary presence of immigrants. The previously mentioned telling, semiotic quality of gastronomic practices becomes evident once again.

To conclude, the anthropological theory I have marshaled in this framework is significant because it substantiates my use of *food* to examine the immigration situation in Northern Italy. In addition, it provides a flavorful base for the ways food and culture are engaged in the ceaseless and dialectical boundary-making between locally-rooted traditional purity and deterritorialized, global contamination. But this exclusion also opens spaces in which immigrants, as globalized “others,” can contest the boundary between local and global, as I will explore later.

The Slow Food Movement

In this thesis, I argue that the rhetoric of the Slow Food movement reveals a particularly ethno-regionalist and authentic claim to Northern Italian culinary identity. The implications of this assertion are significant in Italy’s current position as hub for foreign immigration. In this subsection, I engage pertinent scholarship in an effort to elucidate the Slow Food movement’s emphasis on a way of being that emphasizes locality, tradition, and memory. I excavate these ontological

²⁴ Ibid 125

underpinnings of the Slow Food movement's affirmation of an authentic Italian culinary identity in order to clarify how notions of cultural and culinary exclusion are embedded within an ostensibly innocuous, progressive organization. Despite its claims to cultural openness and culinary interchange, how has this social movement's emphasis on a traditional way of being—and eating—ideologically opposed the current milieu of immigration to Italy from abroad? A brief anecdote about a traditional Piedmontese dish called *bagna caôda*²⁵ is helpful to recognize the main theme of this section: that Slow Food's conception of authenticity and tradition is perceived as a product of internal, local processes.

No dish expresses the flavors and sensations of wintertime in Piedmont like *bagna caôda*, recognized by chefs and residents alike to be a quintessentially regional culinary tradition. Literally translated from Piedmontese as “hot dip,” *bagna caôda* is a pungent sauce served with a variety of raw vegetables for dipping. Finely minced garlic and briny anchovies swirl in a warm bath of extra virgin olive oil and butter, and these ingredients illustrate a long, fabled history that have transformed the final dish to be a beloved regional staple. Piedmont, a landlocked region in the Alpine foothills of northwestern Italy, has no natural contact with *accinghe*, or Mediterranean anchovies. The incorporation of these salty little fish has become something of a fable in the area. In Torino, the wizened Piedmontese gastronome named “Carlo” told me the saga of the *bagna caôda*:

The olive oil came from outside, and we have the garlic here. But the anchovies are from elsewhere. There is now a story in Piedmont of mountain farmers who traded wool goods with fisherman in Liguria for these anchovies. These men carried the anchovies across the mountains to Piedmont in barrels filled with nearly a hundred kilos of salt, which preserved the fish, but was a valuable commodity by itself. And now it's such a traditional Piedmontese dish!

And so the story of *bagna caôda* serves as a parable that demonstrates how the Slow Food movement acknowledges the incorporation of culinary influences from other places. Also, as we will see, these

²⁵ Pronounced bahn-yuh COW-duh

influences are regarded to be part and parcel of how spatially-rooted culinary traditions change over time.

A salient body of literature about Slow Food comes from within the organization itself. The founder and international president, Carlo Petrini (who has been a political and culinary writer since the 1970s), has written extensively about the Slow Food movement's position on culinary authenticity and a traditional way of eating. These writings are tremendously illustrative of the manner in which the organization conceptualizes gastronomic culture. I find Petrini's sentiments helpful because they establish a starting point to explore the movement's latent claims to an ontologically pure Italian identity.

Petrini is a charismatic propagator of the Slow Food ethos, and he is well-known across Northern Italy and in countries around the world that have a Slow Food presence. It is quite crucial to point out that the Slow Food movement is not overtly xenophobic in its messages. In fact, there is a dearth of persuasive literature from the movement itself that directly relates it to the phenomenon of immigration. But Petrini's words are illustrative of a general position within the organization. He writes, "Gastronomy turns to anthropology and sociology to improve its understanding of food systems, of the history of nutrition, and of the knowledge of food production and processing that has been handed down within *specific cultures*."²⁶ From the literature within the movement, this sentiment conceptualizes cuisine as being a component of what may be called "cultural islands," which are spatially discrete and culturally separate from one another, with their own distinct histories of culinary evolution. Each of these cultures has its own version of *bagna caôda*, its own parable of traditional gastronomic integration.

And each of these histories is perceived as intrinsically authentic and fundamentally natural. Petrini urges us to "just think of how many languages, how many dialects are dying out or have died

²⁶ Carlo Petrini and Gigi Padovani, *Slow Food Revolution A New Culture for Eating and Living* (New York: Rizzoli, 2006), 71.

out during the last few years: this is just one of the many indexes of a disappearance of identity, and it makes one fear the cultural homogenization toward which we are hurtling with such speed.”²⁷ But this notion of spatially and culturally distinct culinary cultures—a gastronomic separate-but-equal clause—is apparently in opposition to a modern understanding of globalized identities, especially within the Northern Italian context of foreign immigration.

Petrini’s arguments about Slow Food are important because they shine light upon the position that culinary culture is embedded within specific geographic contexts. His fear—and the cause to which the movement has mobilized in the last two decades—is the gastronomic homogeneity of globalization that has the potential to erase cultural specificities. Within the modern international milieu of cultural globalization, the consumption of food has become a “metaphorical reference point for the reappraisal of individual, local, and national identities.”²⁸ Carlo Petrini and the Slow Food movement perceive the ontological qualities of cooking—“repeating actions, combining ingredients, inventing variants”—as a space of shared memory and identity.²⁹ And the cultural erasure Petrini so fears has affected a series of “modes of being, ways of communicating and of self-representation” that forge a traditional identity among local people.³⁰ Petrini’s writings on Slow Food, from *within* Slow Food, thus illustrate the underlying ontological claims to cultural identity.

Petrini uses the French term *terroir* (*territorio* in Italian) to describe this cultural and territorial importance attached to authentic food rooted in a specific locale. *Terroir* encapsulates the Slow Food movement’s ontological claim to a pure way of being, an authentic gastronomical identity that is fundamentally attached to specific places in Northern Italy. Scholars posit the concept of *terroir* as a

²⁷ Ibid 221

²⁸ Alison Leitch, "Slow Food and the Politics of Pork Fat: Italian Food and European Identity," *Ethnos* 68, no. 4 (2003): 452.

²⁹ Petrini, *Slow Food Revolution*, 61

³⁰ Ibid 217

significant tenet in the Slow Food movement's fight to protect disappearing traditional foodways. I find Timothy Tomasik's 2001 translation of Michel de Certeau's theoretical framework in *Habiter, Cuisiner (Living, Cooking)* to be especially valuable to understand the idea of *terroir*, which is not an easily translated literal concept. *Terroir* refers to a *specificity of place*, a meaning that oscillates between geologic characteristics like the soil content to cultural traits.³¹ Culinarily, *terroir* conjures a specificity of place derived from its historical traditions, the uniqueness of local food cultures, and exclusive regional produce. It resides both in the land and in the cultural contexts that govern regional foodways. *Terroir*, then, also refers to the "accumulated history of the place through the human practices and social relations associated with it."³²

A close reading of works about the Slow Food movement reveals how the organization actively works to foster a gastronomic environment that is conducive to the maintenance of *terroir* and an ontological identity that emphasizes a particularly local Italian way of being. Slow Food aims to promote an atmosphere that inculcates a traditional, slow way of being in specific places.

Schneider argues that

For Slow Food the new gastronomy is...an identity-in-process, as Petrini and other movement members mobilize various roots to form new producer and consumer identities. Slow Food's primary organizational efforts are therefore devoted to creating the cultural and educational climates in which these identities can take shape.³³

This argument helps to clarify the ontological underpinnings of a pure Italian gastronomical identity, expressed in the traditions, human practices, and social relations contained within a particular place. However, scholars never consider the Slow Food movement's active promotion of Italian *terroir*, against a backdrop of immigration, a phenomenon that is dramatically changing the cultural

³¹ Timothy J. Tomasik, "Certeau a la Carte: Translating Discursive Terroir in The Practice of Everyday Life: Living and Cooking," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 100, no. 2 (Spring 2001): 523.

³² Tomasik 525

³³ Stephen Schneider, "Good, Clean, Fair: The Rhetoric of the Slow Food Movement," *College English* 70, no. 4 (March 2008): 392.

landscape of the region. When Schneider writes that “Slow Food rhetoric is less a rhetoric of protest and more a rhetoric of community organization,”³⁴ he never considers *who* is included within that community organizing. Newcomers, who are as embedded within historicized Italian *terroir* as kebabs and eggrolls, most certainly do not belong to the movement’s value of historical accretions of culinary tradition and gastronomic purity. We need only look back to Tomasik’s reading of French cultural-culinary theorists to see that “*terroir* thus also becomes imbued with the idealism of a cult authenticity in which only things with clear origins have value.”³⁵

Adrian Peace’s anthropological account of Slow Food’s 2006 Terra Madre event in Turin presents a contradictory illustration of how the Slow Food movement fosters distinct, spatially-rooted gastronomic cultures in ways that assert clear ontological conceptions of pure local identity. Terra Madre is a biennial conference in Turin that attempts to facilitate relationships between three groups of gastronomic actors:

Producers, the repositories of traditional sustainable food production and practices; Cooks, who, with their empirical wisdom, prepare food rooted in local traditions as well as adapt ideas to the changing tastes and needs of the consumer; and Academics and Researchers, who serve as catalysts for change across disciplines.³⁶

I do not deny Slow Food efforts like Terra Madre that foster a more gastronomically aware population of consumers, nor do I present efforts like these as intensely xenophobic congregations—in fact, quite the opposite! On the other hand, these projects “revitalize local culinary customs as a means of transforming globalization” from the local level up to the global system. Local culinary traditions are thus viewed as a way to contest subsumption into a

³⁴ Ibid 397

³⁵ Tomasik, 526

³⁶ Adrian Peace, "Terra Madre 2006: Political Theater and Ritual Rhetoric in the Slow Food Movement," *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture* 8, no. 2 (2008): 38.

homogenized, globalized mainstream way of being and eating, all in the interests of local gastronomic cultures.³⁷

At Terra Madre, amid much flag-waving and cheering, Peace describes the way an exhilarating sense of community was forged among delegates from over 150 countries.³⁸ These representatives were welcomed as actors who celebrate the individuality of their own local gastronomic traditions (their own notions of *terroir*) together. But after the event, they inevitably return to their homelands—indubitably better-informed than before—and the Italians can resume business as usual, continuing to inculcate authentic culinary ontological identities attached to specific places. Thus, the Slow Food movement’s promotion of the cultural accretions within locally-bounded notions of *terroir* lays bare a set of ontological identity traits that may fundamentally exclude outsiders in the specific territorial identities of Northern Italy.

Scholars generate a clear consensus about the connectedness of food to place (Craig and Parkins 2006³⁹, Helstosky 2006⁴⁰). The connectedness—“of place, people, history, culture”—represents a dynamic set of sociocultural relations that came under threat represented by “globalization and its capacity to erase cultural specificities,” which includes, in the current milieu, the presence of foreign immigrants and their cuisine.⁴¹ Petrini writes, “How is it possible to renounce the practices, the rhythms, the layers of cultural sediment that make up our history and our identity without running the risk of turning into barbarians?”⁴²

The accumulated culinary traditions throughout the history of a place occupy a central niche in the gastronomic philosophy of the Slow Food movement. Scholars generally accept this point. Capatti writes that “Slow Food is profoundly linked to values of the land and past...the preservation

³⁷ Schneider 399

³⁸ Peace 39

³⁹ Parkins and Craig, *Slow Living*, 2006

⁴⁰ Helstosky, Carol F. *Garlic and Oil: Politics and Food in Italy*. (New York: Berg Publishers, 2006), 158.

⁴¹ Craig, Geoffrey, and Parkins, Wendy. *Slow Living*. (New York: Berg Publishers, 2006).

⁴² Petrini, *Slow Food Revolution*, 101

of typical products [and] the cultivation of memory and taste education—these are all aspects of this passion...for time.”⁴³ The organization espouses a deep-seated sense of localism in the Northern Italian identification with food and place. Craig and Parkins (2006) argue that deterritorialization—a product of a globalized climate of human migration from abroad—encourages a cosmopolitan consciousness that in turn offers the possibilities of reterritorialization; locality is therefore a *reflexive* concept to globalization.⁴⁴ Pratt (2007) reminds us that we must remain critical of the political trajectory of movements like these:

Whatever the intentions of founders and the bulk of supporters, all these celebrations of bounded localities, culture, tradition, pedigree, and *terroir* provide a perfect terrain for the articulation of homelands and anti-immigrant rhetoric, and it is not surprising that right-wing neo populists come sniffing round the food stands.⁴⁵ (Pratt 2007: 292)

Indeed, Slow Food’s message is fundamentally a political one. The concept of “slowness” represents a discursive field linked to both critiques of modernity *and* an arena of practical action—culture and politics, respectively.⁴⁶ The organization’s value of traditional local foodways in Italy represents an “individualized expression of political value...a form of life politics”⁴⁷—culinarily politicized lifestyle choices that are influenced by the interaction between globalization and the local. As it emphasizes commensalism and communalism, remnants from its leftist politico-ideological beginnings, the Slow Food movement is inherently political.

Within the interplay between the culinary traditions rooted in specific places and Italian identity, Slow Food conceptions of gastronomic authenticity engage an *imagined nostalgia*, about which I elaborated in my prior theoretical framework of culinary anthropology. The very existence of a rather successful revivalist movement like Slow Food is symptomatic of the culinary

⁴³ Alberto Capatti, "Traces Left by Time," *Slow* 20 (April 2000): 2.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 71.

⁴⁵ Jeff Pratt, "Food Values: The Local and the Authentic," *Critique of Anthropology* 27, no. 3 (2007): 292.

⁴⁶ Leitch, "Slow Food and the Politics of Pork Fat, 455

⁴⁷ Ibid, 470

globalization it opposes because it rests upon a conception of authenticity that can only be defined and guaranteed by a “lack of contamination from the outside world.”⁴⁸ Miele and Murdoch (2002) provoke an important point about how the organization mobilizes to protect local, traditional foodways. The authors purport that traditional products, local knowledge, and regional cuisines are important features of cultural distinctiveness in culinary societies around the world. They write that “they need to be cultivated and protected, not for nostalgic reasons or because they are the latest fashion in high-class restaurants, but because they represent a rich cultural ‘heritage.’”⁴⁹ But the authors’ account of the justification for the preservation of cultural heritage misses the mark here. If the Slow Food movement’s philosophy is an inherently aesthetic one, then it is *entirely* nostalgic! The representation of a rich culinary “heritage,” which gives rise to the valorization of foodways is founded upon how a specific community’s historical, gastronomic trajectory is remembered and re-conceptualized to shape the gastronomic reality it currently propagates.

Throughout my examination of relevant scholarship, I have tried to show here that the Slow Food movement is not an overt disseminator of a xenophobic, anti-immigrant message in regard to food. Its adamant protection of traditional culinary authenticity, rooted in specific places, has created a nuanced conception of cultural integration which acknowledges that culinary traditions develop, adapt, and incorporate difference—but this process is local and accomplished by people within a particular locality. Immigration, while rarely if ever referenced, represents the globalization of foodways which has the capacity to profoundly alter culinary specificities—a prospect that is certainly a cause for alarm for the Slow Food movement. This scholarship about Slow Food sets the stage for my own ensuing exploration of its reassertion of locally-rooted culinary tradition.

⁴⁸ Parkins and Craig, *Slow Living*, 101

⁴⁹ Mara Miele and Jonathan Murdoch, "The Practical Aesthetics of Traditional Cuisines: Slow Food in Tuscany," *Sociologia Ruralis* 42, no. 4 (October 2002): 318.

The Lega Nord

Similar to the way that the Slow Food movement has conceptualized traditional cuisine to be exclusively authentic and connected to specific places, the notion of place is being employed in another manner in Northern Italy. Though it is far from a culinary movement,⁵⁰ the conservative Lega Nord political party has espoused an ethno-nationalist rhetoric that also emphasizes local traditions, regional economies, and sociocultural exclusivity. This subsection will elucidate pertinent arguments in a body of scholarship regarding the Lega Nord's rhetoric about an authentic Northern Italian identity. I begin with an exploration of literature about the Lega Nord's rather peculiar attachment to a specific place in Northern Italy, recalling the aforementioned concepts of imagination and nostalgia. From this literature, I then seek to understand how the Lega's prescription of pure Italian identity and clear exclusion of outsiders rests upon a long legacy of internal migration in Italy.

The Lega Nord makes unwavering claims to an incontrovertible epistemological identity—a firm notion of pure Italianness rooted in Northern Italy that is juxtaposed with clear delineations of unbelonging. As the Lega prescribes an authentic Northern Italian identity in their



"Qui nasce il Po"

discourse of power and knowledge, they promote an exclusive way of knowing who belongs and who does not. It is in this very obvious act of categorization that the Lega unwaveringly associates pure Italianness with historicized and memorialized locality in Northern Italy. And like the Slow

⁵⁰ However, food occasionally surfaces in the anti-immigration discourse. The title for this thesis, "YES TO POLENTA, NO TO COUSCOUS," is a phrase taken from a sign at a Northern League anti-immigration rally in 2002. (See Calavita, Kitty. "Italy: Economic Realities, Political Fictions, and Policy Failures." In *Controlling Immigration: A Global Perspective*, edited by Wayne Cornelus, Takeyuki Tsuda, Philip Martin, and James Hollifield, 345-380. (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 362)

Food parable of *bagna càôda*, a brief anecdote is a fitting introduction to a body of scholarship that explores the role of the Lega Nord to create an explicitly xenophobic, epistemological rhetoric of Italian identity in Northern Italy.

At Monviso, high in the foothills of the Alps in the Northwest region of Piedmont, the source of the Po River gurgles out from below a boulder inscribed with the words QUI NASCE IL PO—here, the Po is born. From this tiny trickle, the river courses eastward down the mountains and into the fertile Po River Valley, terminating in the Adriatic Sea near Venice. Every year in September, Umberto Bossi, the longstanding and charismatic leader of the Lega Nord comes to this little spring along with hundreds of his political brethren. In a heavily televised ceremony, Bossi fills a small glass bottle with the cold spring water and corks it under the admiring eyes of his followers. The procession makes its way for the next week through the Po Valley, tracing the length of Italy's longest river and holding public addresses and party events along the way. Bossi culminates the journey in Venice at the mouth of the Po, where he pours the bottle of water into the Adriatic to demonstrate the far-reaching extent of his political party. As Bossi travels the roughly 530-kilometer width of Northern Italy along the Po River, he traces the width of his own geopolitical creation: the imagined territory called Padania (see Figure 2⁵¹).

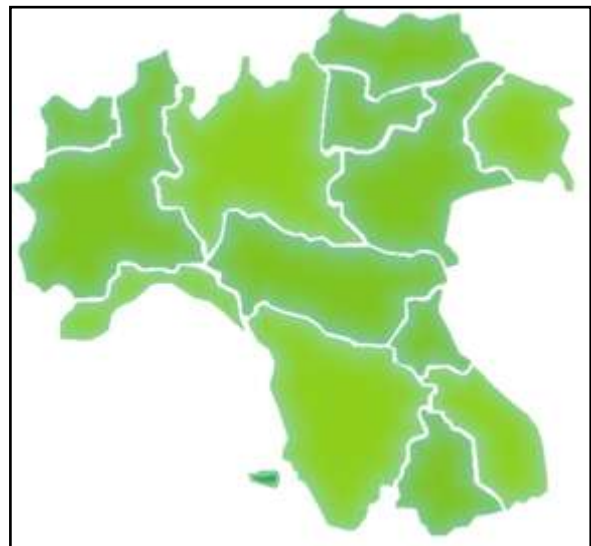


Figure 2: Umberto Bossi's Padania

This imagined geographic entity shall serve as the repository for a particular Northern Italian epistemology of ethno-regionalism that will be discussed throughout this section. The Lega Nord unabashedly prescribes a particular way of knowing a pure Northern Italian identity that is inherently

⁵¹ This map of Padania, taken from the Lega Nord's website, charts the regions in Italy it is politically active. (Accessed April 8th, 2010 from http://www.leganord.org/ilmovimento/elenco_sedi_2.asp)

connected to a particular, if imaginarily-bordered, place. Bossi and the Lega Nord have attempted to create a sociopolitical territory where there was previously no history of anything even remotely “Padanian.” The party’s rhetoric about this place and their role as the dominant political entity has ranged from federalist sentiments to demands for outright secession from the rest of Italy. In essence, Padania as a cohesive sociopolitical and ethnic territory has been created by the Lega Nord, and the cultural ingredients that give it meaning (i.e. traditional cuisine) are being selected and simmered together afterward to bring the various “Norths” together into one functional unit.⁵²

The idea of *territory* was a salient issue at the Lega’s inaugural Po River event in September of 1996. Posters throughout Northern and central Italy called the event the “self-determination of Padanian peoples,” and called upon an unspecified but presumably “Italian” people to participate “for the freedom of *your* land, to be the master in *your* house”⁵³ Giordano (2000) affirms the idea that the territory of Padania is home to a wide variety of *peoples* as he purports that the Lega Nord has given Padania territorial borders primarily to reify its claims to Northern Italian cultural purity even though the geographic contours of Padania are larger than the party’s actual zones of support.⁵⁴ Giordano continues to purport that Bossi and the Lega are more concerned with Padania’s representation of a common set of cultural values that distinguishes it and its people from the rest of Italy, rather than any precise cartographic boundaries. Joining the foray are Agnew and Brusa (1999), who contend that territory is indeed of crucial importance to the political imaginations of the Lega Nord, but that territory defines a singular culture associated with a variety of Northern Italian localities rather than a homogeneous “Padanian” culture defining a “Padanian” territory.⁵⁵

Therefore, unlike Agnew’s argument that Padania is designed to be a culturally normalizing

⁵² Ibid, 178.

⁵³ Ilvo Diamanti, "The Northern League: From Regional Party to Regional Government," in *The New Italian Republic From the Fall of the Berlin Wall to Berlusconi* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 76.

⁵⁴ Benito Giordano, "Italian Regionalism or Padanian Nationalism: The Political Project of the Lega Nord in Italian Politics," *Political Geography* 19 (2000): 467.

⁵⁵ John Agnew and Carlo Brusa, "New Rules for National Identity? The Northern League and Political Identity in Contemporary Northern Italy," *National Identities* 1, no. 2 (1999): 124.

construct, we must attempt to clarify Padania's epistemological contents. What kind of cultural ingredients are cooking in Padania?

As will be explored at length momentarily, the Lega Nord is unabashedly uninterested in the prospect of a multicultural, multiracial, or multiethnic Northern Italy. Its contempt for cultural pluralism has been related to its conception of Padania as a culturally homogeneous territory.⁵⁶ Giordano reconsiders this notion of North Italian unity, contending that the Lega attempts to construct a "neo-ethnicity" for a group of people who share an identity based upon similar socioeconomic values and attitudes, rather than a common history, culture, or language.⁵⁷ Moreover, Giordano posits that the Lega creates identities at various levels in a "complementary, rather than a competing, way." He argues that in Italy, where local identities have long coexisted alongside national affiliations, the assertion of Padanian citizenship does not actually destroy these local identities. Padanian-ness is simply another layer of Northern Italian identity, but one that may only be worn by Northern Italians. The Lega perceives Southern Italians and certainly foreign immigrants to be fundamentally incapable of possessing the cultural knowledge that defines a contrived notion of "Padanian-ness." Levi-Strauss' guidance to search for fundamental structural contradictions is useful here. This notion of pure citizenship to a Padanian nation is espoused as a *constructive* layer of identity: people from Piedmont, Veneto, Friuli, and Emiliana-Romagna are *all* considered by the Lega Nord to be "Padanian." On the other hand, globalization and immigration are touted to be *destroyers* of local, traditional Northern Italian identities; people from Sicily, Tunisia, Albania, or Morocco would find it much harder to be integrated into the Lega Nord's constructed territory.

Several scholars address how the Lega Nord conceptualizes the cultural purity of Northern Italians, and I read these as arguments that illustrate the epistemological assumptions that lie beneath

⁵⁶ Michel Huyseune, *Modernity And Secession The Social Sciences And the Political Discourse of the Lega Nord in Italy (Studies in Ethnopolitics)* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 190.

⁵⁷ Benito Giordano, "The Lega Nord and the Changing Politics of Identity," *Forum for Modern Language* Xxxviii (2002): 178.

a strong sense of authentic identity. The heuristic devices of memory and imagination that were explained in my theoretical framework of culinary anthropology materialize again here as they coalesce to form an imagined nostalgia about the mechanisms through which cultural purity is transmitted between Northern Italians. Huyseune contends that “the family is a crucial institution for the transmission of a northern cultural inheritance.”⁵⁸ Similarly, Agnew’s analysis of the Lega’s rhetoric explains how “family values” became a key ingredient in the party’s discourse.

Knowledge of cultural identity is fundamental: the Lega Nord points to exclusive Northern Italian cultural traits that are learned from childhood. Giordano (2000) and Appadurai (1993) separately suggest that particular cultural values are selected from the past and mobilized in contemporary practice to formulate contemporary cultural identities. Memory is *not* a solid bedrock of history, but a malleable construct that is remembered in order to shape the present—it is precisely through such cultural reproduction that a “collective memory” and a sense of regional identity is forged in Northern Italy, with the Lega Nord leading the charge.⁵⁹ These cultural markers then become naturalized, as the Lega Nord asserts a unifying “Padanian” identity for mainstream Northern Italians.

Most scholars generally agree that Padania’s geographic and cultural epistemology has its foundations in a deep legacy of internal migration. Between 1946 and 1976, around four million Southern Italians left their homes, and a majority of them migrated to the more economically developed Northern Italy.⁶⁰ These population dynamics are at the core of the Lega Nord’s claims to Northern purity and exclusivity. The literature about the legacy of North-South relations in Italy fall into two primary categories: arguments about the economic difference between North and South,

⁵⁸ Huyseune, *Modernity and Secession* 181

⁵⁹ Giordano, “Italian Regionalism or Padanian Nationalism,” 461, and Appadurai, “Consumption, Duration, and History,” 14

⁶⁰ I discuss the internal migration legacy further in my own ethnographic data analysis later in this thesis. Migration within Italy has occurred over a much longer time period, but the period in the second half of the twentieth experienced a notable increase in migration as Southern Italians moved to work in the Northern industrial areas after World War II.

and sociocultural perspectives that recognize the Lega Nord's cultural delineation between peoples, which they have reproduced into a xenophobic rhetoric.

A clear divide between Northern and Southern Italy is prominent, and it is frequently cited to be first an economic issue. Affirmations of Northern modernity and economic competitiveness are so widely acknowledged that they form a *habitus*, a *topos* that is repeated without much second thought.⁶¹ Scholars have widely pointed to economic issues which undergird North-South tensions in Northern Italy. Sniderman et al (2000) maintain that the Lega Nord internalizes the North-South economic disparity and subsequently argue that Northern Italy has been economically exploited by the South as Southern politicians wield control over the government, parliament, and political parties.⁶² Advocating an economic viewpoint, Gold (2003) argues that the party has maintained power in Northern Italy because it appeals to sectors of the middle and working classes who are most vulnerable to changes in the national and global economy. These workers perceive the forces of globalization to be threatening as they compete with immigrants—Southern Italian and foreign, legal and otherwise—who work for entrepreneurs on account of their skills and their greater flexibility and willingness to work for less pay.⁶³ (Gold 2003: 105, 111). As Southern Italians relocated in the North, they brought with them economic stereotypes that represented them as black market criminals.⁶⁴ These representations were soon crystallized into sociocultural attitudes in the North about the very nature of Southern Italians.

The Lega Nord's rhetoric about Southern Italian *cultural* backwardness is not new. Huyseune (2006) argues that the Lega Nord's delineation of the North from the South is

⁶¹ Huyseune, *Modernity and Secession*, 127

⁶² Paul M. Sniderman et al., *The outsider prejudice and politics in Italy* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton UP, 2000), 99.

⁶³ Thomas W. Gold, *The Lega Nord and Contemporary Politics in Italy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 105, 111.

⁶⁴ Talia, Italo. "Geographical and Anthropological Aspects of the Identity of Southern Italy." *The Cultural Turn in Geography*, compiled by Paul Claval, Maria Paola Pagnini, Maurizio Scaini (2003), <http://www.openstarts.units.it/proceedings/> (accessed May 28, 2009), 149

fundamentally contradictory, creating a rhetorical ambivalence that characterizes much of the Lega Nord's invective:

Padania is associated with unspecified liberty and an authentic life, it is imagined as a society where people will rediscover their *joi de vivre*, a model of efficiency and economic success, a society characterized by equal rights and duties and living in a viable environment. At the same time, their understanding of the Padanian nation is clearly based on the exclusion of outsiders, in accordance with the logic of their imaginary geography of modernity, which separates the modern, European North from the backward, African South.⁶⁵

Cachafeiro's ethnographic methods (2002) corroborate this cultural-cum-racial claim by suggesting that the Lega Nord portrayed their own identity as belonging to a "Celtic-Germanic culture" and a "European Italy," as opposed to the "Greek-Latin" culture and "African Italy" in the *Mezzogiorno*.⁶⁶ The party has made wide use of this cultural stereotype to circumscribe Southern Italians as decidedly Other. This scholarship is significant for this thesis because it lays a firm foundation for my ethnographic analysis of the legacy of internal migration, which I present later.

This facet of the Lega Nord's exclusive rhetoric displays the kind of fundamental contradiction within their xenophobic conceptions of authentic Italian identity in the midst of immigrants from abroad. Claude Levi-Strauss' aforementioned theoretical contribution stated that "the cooking of a society is a language in which it unconsciously translates its structure—or else resigns itself, still unconsciously, to revealing its contradictions."⁶⁷ Similarly, an examination of the assumptions that bolster the Lega Nord's xenophobic rhetoric also reveals their underlying contradictions. The Lega Nord simultaneously accepts the neoliberal premises of globalization, which places Padania among a community of other modern European states, but also rejects many of the *consequences* of globalization—especially the cultural ramifications, like the presence of foreign immigrants in Italy (Huyseune 2006: 180). As the political party advocates a pure Italian identity

⁶⁵ Huyseune, *Modernity and Secession*, 186

⁶⁶ Cachafeiro, *Ethnicity and Nationalism in Italian Politics*, 49. Note: "*Mezzogiorno*" is a colloquial term for Southern Italy.

⁶⁷ Lévi-Strauss, Claude. "The Culinary Triangle." *Partisan Review*. 33, (1966): 595.

that can only be known by “native” Northern Italians, the fundamental contradictions of such a stance are evident. I argue in my data analysis section later in this thesis that the spaces of contradiction within this locally-espoused identity make us reconsider the rigid boundary that ostensibly separates belonging from unbelonging.

The Lega sees cultural outsiders as the main threat to the purportedly homogenous Padanian community. Their political discourse is defined by vehemently anti-immigrant, xenophobic messages. To provide an even more nuanced picture of the Lega's exclusive conceptions of an authentic Padanian identity, Cachafeiro (2002) claims that advocates of multiculturalism are the “true racists” according to the Lega Nord because the party rejects the presumably destructive diversity of peoples and cultures. Whoever defends their own *ethnic* community are not *racist*, but *patriots* who are involved in a reactive defense against threats to their identity and their community.”⁶⁸ This is reminiscent of the Slow Food movement’s proposition that all traditional, local cuisines should be preserved from contamination from the rest of the world—but allowing them to be blended together at the whim of globalization is a culturally *destructive* practice.

This sub-section that cuts through relevant scholarship about the Lega Nord is significant for this thesis because it forms a foundation to understand the ways in which the political party has revealed a reflexive, locally-rooted claim to an “authentic” identity in Northern Italy.

Immigration Literature

I now examine a body of scholarship about the immigration situation in Northern Italy in the past two decades. By examining heretofore the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of the Slow Food movement’s and the Lega Nord’s disparate conceptions of an local, “authentic,” and “pure,” identity, this literature review has explored the scholarly conversation about the immigration situation from the perspective of the *receiving* society. Though the scholarship on immigration shall

⁶⁸ Cachafeiro, *Ethnicity and Nationalism in Italian Politics*, 137

still regard the political, economic, and cultural ingredients simmering *within* Northern Italy, I now turn my attention to the foreign migrants who reside there. These migrants are positioned in the same territory that also sustains advocates of “the local,” like Slow Food and the Lega Nord. Grasping these scholarly voices nicely prepares my subsequent ethnographic analysis of the contradictory spaces immigrants occupy beneath the hegemonic constructions of the local.

A review of scholarship about the driving factors of migration Italy begins with another often-cited reason for immigration: the country’s unique immigration policies. Italy’s national government has implemented a unique immigrant regularization program since 1986. Schuster (2005) points to the magnetic power of Italy’s immigration policies to attract foreigners, specifically by its frequent regularization programs introduced by governments ever since the mid-1980s.⁶⁹



Granted every several years, these amnesties grew in size until 2002, when nearly 700,000 previously undocumented migrants were regularized—the largest amnesty ever granted in Europe until then.⁷⁰ Schuster broadly explains these amnesties as laws that include immigrants in the Italian labor market based upon labor demand. Italy does not have a guest worker program like other European countries, but these amnesties generally correspond to a particular year’s need for labor.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Liza Schuster, "The Continuing Mobility of Migrants in Italy: Shifting between Places and Statuses," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 31, no. 4 (July 2005): 760.

⁷⁰ Giovanna Zincone, "The Making of Policies: Immigration and Immigrants in Italy," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 32, no. 3 (April 2006): 365.

⁷¹ Schuster, "The Continuing Mobility of Migrants in Italy," 761

Parati (1997) analyzes these immigration policies, known as *sanatorie* (amnesties), in a manner that stirs the underlying assumptions about a “pure” Italian identity.⁷² Italian amnesties do not make immigrants permanent citizens; migrants must usually renew their residence permit every few years. Though they may never fit into a pure Italian way of knowing, immigrants’ marginality is reduced in order to accommodate their useful niches within the Italian economy. These regularizing policies, therefore, may be digested as ways that the Italian state attempts to maintain its own epistemological conception of a “pure” cultural identity. These amnesties are important because they allude to political recognition of immigrants’ necessary utility in the Italian economy. As I will discuss later, these economic niches are often situated in the culinary underbelly of the hegemonic representations of “local” authenticity in Northern Italy.

Despite these ostensible acts of political goodwill, the predictable Italian amnesties have been tempered with a more malevolent political act, spearheaded by Umberto Bossi of the Lega Nord and Giancarlo Fini of the Alleanza Nazionale, a Center-Right political party.⁷³ Aptly named the Bossi-Fini Law, it essentially promoted increased control of immigrants in Italy, allowing authorities to immediately deport any undocumented migrant (as well as encouraging the Italian Coast Guard to destroy ships carrying illegal refugees).⁷⁴ The Lega Nord’s staunchly prescriptive notion of locally-embedded Northern Italian authenticity permeates the political field and overtly (and violently) excludes foreign immigrants.

⁷² She maintains that this word is borrowed from a rhetoric of *illness* and is infused into the national discussion of the “immigration emergency.” Based upon the assumption that “becoming a country of immigration involves the *contamination* of its (almost) monocultural past and present,” the *sanatorie* are culturally sterilizing measures intended to “neutralize...contamination” (read: illegal immigrants).

⁷³ The Lega Nord and the Alleanza Nazionale are both individual political parties within Italy, who have joined the complex foray over the past decade to forge alliances in order to pass legislation like the Bossi-Fini Law. Small political parties like these must court the party in power—namely, Silvio Berlusconi and his Forza Italia party. The Lega Nord has fallen in and out of favor with Berlusconi in recent decades, but are generally considered to be allies.

⁷⁴ Giorel Curran, “Mainstreaming populist discourses: the race-conscious legacy of populist parties in Australia and Italy,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 38, no. 1 (2004): 52.

A widely agreed-upon reason for the influx of immigration to Italy is that migrants pursue economic opportunities not available to them in their homelands (see Reyneri 2004, Ambrosini 2001, Calavita 2005, Ceccagno 2003, Ammendola et al 2004). The vast majority of migrants settle in Northern Italy, and Peró (1997) contends that these worker-migrants contribute to a high quality of life in the North.⁷⁵ Specifically, Reyneri's (2004) research has led him to conclude that immigrants are concentrated in the "least attractive manual labor jobs," which include dishwashers, waiters, and cooks in restaurants.⁷⁶ Ammendola et al (2004) describe many of these culinary vocations within the hotel and restaurant sector to be especially subject to seasonal employment.⁷⁷ As stated before, the difficulty with which immigrants receive legal residency causes them to occupy transient, mobile sub-citizen spaces within the mainstream Italian society. And as the scholarly arguments I marshaled earlier about the Slow Food movement made clear, a transitory, mobile culinary workforce is quite antithetical to a conception of time-honored, locally-rooted, traditional Italian cuisine.

Furthermore, a large portion of the foreign immigrant population in Italy is employed in the informal sector. This "shadow economy" has long defined Italian market activities, but it has become increasingly heterogeneous in recent decade due to the significant injection of foreign labor into the network, making it increasingly complex.⁷⁸ Although the informal sector represents an Italian economic phenomenon, the Lega Nord constantly criticizes it as being "impure," and a direct result of foreign immigration to Northern Italy, Reyneri (2004) posits that far from being the *effect* of illegal immigration, the Italian underground is in fact a *cause*.⁷⁹ In this way, the Italian "black market" draws immigrants into its shadow economy, but this trend has negative sociocultural effects on

⁷⁵ Davide Peró, *Inclusionary Rhetoric/Exclusionary Practices Left-Wing Politics and Migrants in Italy* (New Directions in Anthropology) (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 34.

⁷⁶ Emilio Reyneri, "Immigrants in a Segmented and Often Undeclared Labour Market," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 9, no. 1 (2004): 71.

⁷⁷ Carmelita F. Ammendola et al., *The Impact of Immigration on Italy's Society* (Rome: Centro Studi e Ricerche, 2004), 16.

⁷⁸ Ambrosini, Maurizio. "The Role of Immigrants in the Italian Labour Market." *International Migration* 39, no. 3 (2001): 70.

⁷⁹ Emilio Reyneri, "Immigrants in a Segmented and Often Undeclared Labour Market," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 9, no. 1 (2004): 72.

immigrant's reputation and social image. Ambrosini (2001) and Calavita (2005) concur that the "invading" immigrants remain useful as long as their usefulness is never explicitly admitted.

Similarly, their very Otherness, which keeps them in the informal sector in the first place, provides a hinge upon which xenophobic policies may swing. As cooks or fruit pickers or dishwashers, foreign immigrants are valuable yet unseen.

Many scholars have examined the effects of *visible* interactions between Italians and foreign immigrants. Saint-Blacat and Schmidt di Friedberg's 2005 study of Mosques in Northern Italy provides a useful starting point to explore the literature about the tensions between the global and the local in Northern Italy. After observing a vehement Italian backlash (led, once again, by the Lega Nord) to the proposed construction of a mosque in Lodi, a town in Lombardy, the authors maintain that "The problem resides in the progression from semi-clandestineness and an initial decision to remain socially invisible, to receiving the right (guaranteed to all religions by the Italian constitution) of practicing Islam 'in the open.'"⁸⁰ The authors elucidate a specifically Italian fixation for maintaining space as culturally authentic places for fear of invasion and pollution. Whether concealed behind the walls of a kitchen or hidden away in dark prayer rooms, immigrants are seemingly acceptable only in the shadows. Delving deeper into the issue, Saint-Blacat and Schmidt di Friedberg argue that,

The conflict that grew up around the mosque hides the real issues: it is not the fact of acknowledging the presence of a religious minority in the public space that is at stake; the issue is rather that of local citizens accepting the arrival in their midst of an Islam perceived of, and associated with, immigration factors, a 'foreign body' that should preferably remain temporary and in place only as long as it was advantageous to the economy.⁸¹

As the authors show, not only was the presence of the immigrant "other" made public, but it fundamentally represented an impurity within Italian culture that was hostile to the Lega Nord's

⁸⁰ Chantal Saint-Blancat and Ottavia Schmidt di Friedberg, "Why are Mosques a Problem? Local Politics and Fear of Islam in Northern Italy," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 31, no. 6 (November 2005): 1086.

⁸¹ Ibid 1089

representation of a “pure” Northern Italian cityscape. The conception of impure otherness has created an immigrant *topos* that collides into a Northern Italian episteme that many Italians refer to as *campanilismo*. As a conception of parochialism, it forms the substrate of local identity that surrounds the *campanile*, the bell tower, which is usually the tallest structure in town. A mosque minaret becomes a very visible representation of immigrant Otherness—the height of which literally and symbolically clashes with a defining, “pure” identity of *campanilismo*.

These epistemological and ontological underpinnings of a conceived “authentic” Northern Italian identity directly interact with the presence of foreign immigrants. But immigrants are not passive subaltern recipients of these xenophobic sentiments from the Northern Italian mainstream or political parties like the Lega Nord. As Gasparetti (2009) asserts in his case study of Senegalese immigrants in Northern Italian cities, these migrants construct and experience their collective identity as a reaction to the mainstream Italian identity and culture. They must constantly address the stereotypes and categories the dominant society imposes upon them.⁸²

A taste of the aforementioned anthropological framework surfaces here. Gasparetti’s identification of a causal relationship between the identities of Senegalese and Italians is effectively the collision of two competing yet mutually constitutive memories and imaginaries. Quite notably, Gasparetti identifies food as a venue and space for memories for Senegalese migrants.⁸³ Her analysis of food’s importance in the Senegalese migration context takes a page out of Mary Douglas’s aforementioned anthropological theory of food. Gasparetti writes, “In the migration context, food can also represent a means to gain social and economic power: women can cook at home and then sell the food in the street during the open market in the Porta Palazzo district.”⁸⁴ Similarly, Douglas’s

⁸² Fedora Gasparetti, *The Cultural Meaning of Food and its Polyvalent Role in the Construction of Identity Among Senegalese Migrants in Italy*, proceedings of Food and Migration, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, London, 9.

⁸³ Ibid 18

⁸⁴ Ibid 14

assertion, *that which is negated is not thereby removed*,⁸⁵ directly applies to Gasparetti's assertion. As the Lega Nord's conception of a pure local identity places migrants within a ritual frame that essentially denies their belonging in a pure Italian identity, the migrants are afforded spaces of agency in the shadows of a hegemonic local identity—which certainly materialize in the realm of food. This liminal power, in turn, disrupts the Northern Italian conception of cultural purity, starting the xenophobic loop over again. This final point gets at the core of my ethnographic argument later in this thesis.

Peripaolo Mudu explores the salience of cuisine in the immigration context even further and puts forth an argument about the culinary interaction between migrants and Italians. From his study of Chinese restaurants in Rome, he declares that Chinese cuisine has represented itself as a challenge to Italian gastronomy.⁸⁶ In turn, Mudu argues, the invention of “Italian culinary tradition” has evolved vis-à-vis “an artificial celebration of Italianness, the removal of the Italian migratory experience, [and] the movement of resistance to the destruction of alimentary heritage (for example the Slow Food movement).”⁸⁷ He insists that the existence of ethnic cuisine has entered the Italian gastronomic experience at a unique juncture, when Italians are attempting to remove or devalue the Italian migratory experience. Surfacing here is the Slow Food movement's assertion, as I explored earlier, that local Italian food is a natural, pure, endogenous construct, which belongs to a world of “culinary islands” that must preserve their local gastronomic traditions. Mudu argues that, in the current clime of attempting to wipe the history of migration off the Italian identity, the regional culinary differences in Italy

...are not considered the fruit of a migration process, but of a neutral exchange between people, and the ‘Italian’ culinary identity is constructed as a removal of a

⁸⁵ Douglas *Purity and Danger* 163

⁸⁶ Mudu, Pierpaolo. "The People's Food: The Ingredients of 'Ethnic' Hierarchies and the Development of Chinese Restaurants in Rome." *GeoJournal* 68 (2007): 205

⁸⁷ Ibid 206

fundamental part of the historical reality of migration with both its internal and international contamination.⁸⁸

Triandafyllidou's words about the Italian's experience with immigration offer a satisfying morsel to finish this gustatory discourse: "The encounter with the Other evokes reflections about who We are and how We should deal with Them and also the extent to which They put in danger the authenticity of Our culture and lifestyle."⁸⁹ These scholars certainly illustrate how the epistemological foundations of an "authentic," local Northern Italian identity tensely and usually exclusively interact with an immigrant population.

From my exploration of the scholarship about the Slow Food movement, I have explained how conceptions of authentic, traditional cuisine are fundamentally situated in local places and in the histories of social relations expressed therein. Authentic gastronomy is therefore a way of being that is remembered and imagined to symbolize culinary and cultural purity and history. Similarly, my exploration of the Lega Nord has investigated the significance of an imagined territory as the repository for a distinctly Northern Italian sense of belonging. The Lega prescribes a steadfast way of knowing identity that excludes outsiders. Cuisine, as a cultural marker that is as connected to geography as it is wrapped up in culture, simultaneously symbolizes identity and is shaped by a desire to preserve countenances of Italianness vis-à-vis the culturally destructive incursions of globalization—especially the presence of foreign immigrants. The next chapters situate my own ethnographic research in Northern Italy among the scholarly debates I have previously presented. Now let me briefly explain my methodology.

⁸⁸ Ibid 206

⁸⁹ Triandafyllidou "Nation and Immigration" 82

Research Methodology

Until now, I have presented a review of pertinent literature regarding my point of examination into the immigration situation in Northern Italy. In the next three chapters, I present my own data and analysis. In this sub-section, I shall explain my approach for the collection, presentation, and analysis of this data.

In one of my early conversations with an anthropologist at the University of Washington in the spring of 2009, I expressed my excitement to conduct my own ethnography of food and immigration in Northern Italy. She replied, “No, Luke. You are not going to do ethnography. You are going to use *ethnographic methods*, but that’s not the same thing as *ethnography*.” Her words rang true during my month-long whirlwind trip in Piedmont, Italy from mid-August to mid-September of 2009. The period of time I spent in the Langhe was a tremendously revealing time and yielded a significant amount of qualitative data, yet it was not nearly long enough to establish a level of deep ethnographic understanding of the multifaceted immigration and culinary field in Northern Italy, through my interlocutors. This thesis incorporates crucial qualitative data I collected in the field by employing ethnographic field *methods*. I used the research manual, *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction* (Glesne and Peshkin 1992), to shape my ethnographic strategies in the field. Specifically, I used this manual to structure my interview questions and to inform my interviewing style, which was relaxed and conversational.

My field data fall into two categories. The first category includes the unstructured and semi-structured interviews I conducted in Italy.⁹⁰ I include excerpts from five of these interviews, plus personal correspondence with an interlocutor. Four of these five interviews were conducted in Italian, which were recorded and subsequently transcribed with the help of a translator. As with most of the people I encountered in Italy, I met most these interviewees serendipitously, through

⁹⁰ After passing through the Internal Review Board of the University of Washington’s Human Subjects Division, these interviews qualified for exemption status under 5 CFR 46.101 (b) (2).

various connections and connections-of-connections of new friends. These interviews represent a crucial ethnographic ingredient for my argument because they provide voices that give depth and meaning to the ways in which a local, traditional Italian identity has been constructed in the face of foreign immigration.

The second category of field data includes unstructured observations I recorded throughout my experience. Hundreds of photographs, dozens of pages of field notes, and a number of anecdotal quotations grounded my argument in the everyday reality of various spaces in Piedmont. In the first chapter, I present observations in the area called the Langhe in order to get a better glimpse at the deeply-held sense of culinary localism the Slow Food movement has adopted in its discourse to protect local traditions. In the third chapter, I explore observations from the cosmopolitan urban spaces in Turin. These observations exhibit the contradictory, globalized immigrant spaces situated in the underneath of a local, “pure” Northern Italian identity. In this thesis, I present these observations honestly and descriptively in order to reveal a frequently puzzling reality that nuances my argument and pushes deeper than other authors’ conclusions.

To bolster this ethnographic data, I stir in other primary sources. My observations frequently serve as jumping-off points to this evidence, which I discovered after my field research mostly from online sources. For example, my observational wandering past the Slow Food *Editore* publications office in Bra allows me to delve into several issues of the journal the organization publishes, which I analyze as primary data for my argument. Much of this primary data was translated from Italian such as a newspaper interview, a report by the Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture of Turin, and a book.

I used several analytical tools to infuse these evidential ingredients into my argument. In short, I looked for instances of representational boundary-making. My previously discussed theoretical framework informed my analysis as I sifted through my interviews and observations in

search of statements or cultural spaces that clearly reaffirmed a representational boundary between “the local” and “the global,” between belonging and unbelonging, and between purity and contamination. I was most curious about the representational categories of immigrant otherness that resided in the shadows of a hegemonic construction of “the local” and “the traditional.” These glimpses of boundary-making I extracted from my data allowed me to then *critique* the boundary itself.

My method for presenting this mixture of ethnographic field data and primary data I encountered afterward weaves it together in the form of a narrative. I describe a journey from the Slow Food hub in Bra and the surrounding farmlands to the urban center of Turin. This narrative combines data from various field experiences throughout the month and distills it into a single journey. As such, it is not *temporally* accurate, but presents my data *spatially* as I traveled from Bra to Turin.

CHAPTER TWO: A LOCAL CULINARY IDENTITY

This thesis explores the ways immigration and cuisine are intertwined in Northern Italy in often puzzling and exclusionary ways. The culinary journey begins in the town of Bra, in the province of Cuneo. Here in the area called Langhe, settled among the rolling hills, this municipality of just under thirty thousand residents is also the home of the Slow Food movement's international headquarters. This chapter examines the culinary identity that Slow Food espouses and uncovers some of the ways that its reassertion of the local indirectly excludes foreign immigrants. I argue here that the Slow Food movement has mobilized and articulated a specifically culinary identity that exalts the local and the traditional and connects this notion of Northern Italian identity to the specific places out of which traditional foods have arisen. I do *not* argue that the Slow Food movement negatively or explicitly excludes immigrants. But its positive promotion of a specific local identity nevertheless leaves newcomers out.

Bra and the surrounding area provide fertile analytical ground for this chapter, which provides a spatial exploration of the mainstream food community in order to more clearly conceive of the local gastronomic identity professed by the Slow Food movement. Through this exploration of the ways in which the Slow Food's tenets of authentic, locally-rooted cuisine have manifested in the area's foodways, I shed light onto the latent boundary-making and powers of exclusion within this reflexive exaltation of locally-rooted cuisine.

The Slow Food movement has catalyzed this culinary boundary-making vis-à-vis the incursion and assaultive destruction of the global (i.e. immigrants) in a way that has reified the everyday practice of reproducing foodways as local traditions. Ultimately, this affirmation of "the local" as an organic identity to defend against the deleterious effects of "the global" has produced a unique form of culinary and cultural exclusion that *only* promotes the identities contained within "the

local.” Nevertheless, immigrants and their foodways have—perhaps necessarily—permeated this steadfast construction of “the local,” which illustrates the Slow Food movement’s imaginative fabrication of a territorially-embedded culinary identity in the first place. In short, Slow Food works to defend “the local” from the destructiveness of “the global,” in ways that exclude immigrants who permeate “the local” in order to fill an important economic and culinary niche. I hope to ultimately show by the end of my exploration of the Slow Food movement that this dichotomy between representations of “the local” and “the global” is not actually so distinct.

The Slow Food Headquarters

Situated in a cluster of old buildings that look over the narrow Piazza XX Settembre on the periphery of the city, the offices of the Slow Food movement’s international headquarters provide the administrative origins of the organization’s activities in Italy and across the globe. Small stone signs engraved with the image of a snail, the movement’s symbol, indicate its presence.

I took my first trip to Bra just two days after I arrived in Italy. Vincenzo, the farmer with whom I stayed, drove me into town so I could meet Carlo Petrini, his childhood friend. Still dirty with the gray earth of the Langhe, into which we had planted



cabbage starts earlier that morning, we passed through the gate of the headquarters and wound our way up the staircase that overlooked a well-kept courtyard ringed with offices. Our dusty appearance drew only fleeting attention from the receptionist; Vincenzo was simply another local farmer coming to talk about his food products.

We waited and made small talk with the receptionist outside a conference room. Petrini emerged and he beamed a toothy grin as I introduced myself. His charisma was palpable, and much of the success of the Slow Food movement in Italy and worldwide is attributed to his magnetic personality and widespread propagation of the Slow Food ethos. He nodded and smiled as I shakily describe my purpose there. “You young people are the future,” is all he said after I finished. “Your project is interesting.” Petrini swiftly turned me back over to the receptionist and disappeared into the conference room. I want to reiterate that I have no intention to portray Petrini or his organization as overtly racist or xenophobic. Nevertheless, my exposition of the Slow Food movement’s ideological underpinnings sheds an important light onto the immigration situation in Italy.

From Petrini’s office, down the narrow and cobbled Via Mendicita Instruita in Bra, another stone snail of the Slow Food movement marks its presence on the stucco wall. This little creature rests upon perhaps the most fortuitous yet irksome perch in the Slow Food empire, however, for its stony antennae are constantly subject to the arousing aromas that drift out the kitchen door of the Osteria del Boccondivino. The small restaurant opened in 1984 and was the first *osteria* recognized by Slow Food, which now catalogs hundreds of these small restaurants that serve local, traditional fare. The *osterie* occupy a central niche in Italian food culture, as they serve simple and relatively inexpensive dishes based upon local produce and culinary traditions.⁹¹ But even more significant for the Slow Food movement, *osterie* symbolize crucial social spaces where local fare is just one ingredient that reaffirms local identity. Restaurant ethnographers Beriss and Sutton make the point that,

Restaurants and the people involved in running them have become powerful cultural brokers and potent symbols for protests against a globalized and industrialized food system. Moreover, they form a bustling microcosm of social and symbolic processes

⁹¹ Craig and Parkins 19

focused on the formation and maintenance of identities in the context of highly sensory environments.⁹²

In this vein, I analyze the Osteria del Boccondivino as a site where the material and symbolic identity associated with local, “authentic” recipes is produced and consumed. The quaint *osteria* in Bra provides a real and representational view into the Slow Food movement’s specific identity discourse.

As a prominent symbol of the Slow Food movement’s value placed upon local eateries and the socio-culinary traditions contained therein, the Osteria del Boccondivino is a space where local gastronomic identity is performed and served up to locals and tourists alike. I visited the restaurant in the late morning before lunch service, but the inner courtyard was abuzz with activity. Apron-clad cooks scurried in and out of the front door, their arms full of boxes of local produce and products destined for the dozens of “authentic” recipes listed on their menu. And the menu itself was inscribed with a short list of some of the most renowned local dishes: various commonplace and locally-rooted traditional foods were listed as *primi piatti* of *lardo*, *salciccia di Bra*, or chopped *carne cruda*.⁹³ A *secondo piatto* on the menu, Piedmontese veal braised in the renowned Barolo wine of the Langhe, reveals the region’s beloved culinary connection to the local earth that sustains the Barolo’s particular grape varieties and the prized Piedmontese beef. *Osterie* like Boccondivino are important cultural vessels out of which we can comprehend recipes and traditions as local gastronomic artifacts that reveal a local culinary identity in reverence of territorially-rooted gastronomic traditions.

These artifacts originate in the specific soils of the land, are cultivated and crafted by local expertise according to accepted traditions, and are then codified and inscribed upon the menu. The

⁹² Beriss and Sutton in *The Restaurants Book* p. 3

⁹³ *Salciccia di Bra* are small sausages made according to strict local regulations—so much so, that its production is governed by the *Consorzio di Tutela e Valorizzazione della Salciccia di Bra*, the Consortium for the Protection and Promotion of the Sausage of Bra, which has created a trademark in conjunction with the Chamber of Commerce in Bra only available to producers who adhere to specific traditional methods. Generally eaten raw, *salciccia di bra* is a mixture of veal belly and shoulder and pork belly at a ratio of 4 to 1, along with a variety of spices like cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, coriander, and mace, packed in lamb gut.

Slow Food movement's clear promotion of this subtle transference of cultural patina from nearby land to culinary object to gastronomic subject, to borrow a morsel of theory from Appadurai,⁹⁴ demonstrates the articulation of an apparent culinary identity that exalts local products and traditions. As I mentioned previously, the Slow Food movement describes this place-based culinary identity as *terroir*. The concept of *terroir* conjures a specificity of place derived from its historical traditions, the uniqueness of local food cultures, and exclusive regional produce. It resides both in the land and in the cultural contexts that govern regional foodways. *Terroir*, then, also refers to the "accumulated history of the place through the human practices and social relations associated with it."⁹⁵ This concept of *terroir* is a socially constructed concept, but *osterie* like Baccondivino make this concept legible and edible. To conclude, the Osteria del Baccondivino is a real space that expresses the territorially-specific, "pure" culinary identity the Slow Food movement espouses.

Slow Food Editore

The snail sentinel outside Boccondivino gazed out across the cobblestoned road toward his gastropod counterpart perched outside the headquarters of the Slow Food Editore, the publishing office that oversees and disseminates a number of publications, both in print and online. It is from here that the media campaign to describe the Slow Food movement's philosophy to a larger audience is launched. And these written materials support my assertion that the Slow Food movement has articulated a noteworthy gastronomic identity in Northern Italy fundamentally connected to the specific places out of which "traditional" foods have been cultivated and cooked.

The official journal of the Slow Food movement, *Slow*, is an illustrative repository for the organization's localist ethos. Published quarterly and translated into six languages, *Slow* contains a wide variety of articles that define the contours of and probe deeply into the Slow Food's

⁹⁴ Appadurai 23

⁹⁵ Tomasik 525

ontological culinary identity. Of particular interest for my argument are the articles in *Slow* that pertain to the cultural rootedness of foods to specific places. I engage a number of articles as gastronomic inscriptions immensely valuable for their content, but also for their inherent position in a journal intended to propagate the global influence of the Slow Food movement.⁹⁶

If one theme related to the local specificity of traditional foodways is clear from a detailed reading of *Slow*, it is the Slow Food movement's persistent irritation with the phenomenon of "fusion cooking." This culinary genre peers out from the confines of cosmopolitan kitchens to the discrete food cultures in the world and hand-selects various ingredients and techniques, which are then fused together and served to adventurous patrons. An exploration into the prevalence, tensions, and contradictions that surround this globalized culinary genre warrants a thesis unto itself, but it serves an important purpose here. I assert that the Slow Food movement's attacks on globalized fusion cuisine serve to protect the gastronomic purity of locally-rooted culinary traditions. Understanding this adamantly-upheld boundary between the destructive "global" and the pure "local" gives meaning to the ways that this nuanced protective boundary-making excludes newcomers.

Northern Italian regional cuisines are themselves products of long historical trajectories of culinary fusion—as are the vast majority of global culinary traditions. And most relevant for this thesis, drawn-out courses of culinary fusion are inherently related to the migration of peoples who bring with them their gastronomic traditions and memories, which become subsequently adopted and calcified into new "local" culinary traditions. Such is the case in Italian cuisine throughout the peninsula. But the deliberate fusion of cultural foodways represents an anachronistic and destructive acceleration of this slow process, much to the chagrin of Slow Food adherents. More to the point,

⁹⁶ Volumes of *Slow* are available for public viewing on the Slow Food Editore website at http://editore.slowfood.com/editore/eng/slow.lasso?session=slowfoodstore_it:455B95690c6161E115kTv1FCA761&session=slowsitstore_it:455B95690c6161E115hhH1FCA763

“natural” culinary blending is a slow process. Conversely, deleterious globalized culinary (con)fusion is immediate and misplaced.

Slow devoted an entire issue of the journal to the topic of fusion cuisine. Its articles seethe at the culinary contamination wrought by the prevalence of fusion cooking. Fusion food destroys local gastronomic traditions and betrays territorial attachments to unique products and ways of cultivating and cooking food. Vercelloni’s traumatic experience at a well-publicized sushi restaurant in Milan bespeaks the Slow Food movement’s revulsion at territorially disconnected foodways:

In short, [the restaurant] Nobu has succeeded in the near-impossible mission of transforming a traditionally delicate cooking style, based on gently contrasting ingredients, into an aggressively spiced hotchpotch that relies on palate-numbing sauces. These work on the same principle as ketchup on hamburgers, with the same intrusive violence and nauseating redundancy. Only a palate of sandpaper could appreciate them.⁹⁷

In this case, the Japanese restaurant’s disconnectedness from what is understood to be culinarily “pure” and “correct” warrants suspicion and rejection. In another article, Gho dismisses the deterritorialization of fusion vis-à-vis the “relationship of food to territory,” promoted by Slow Food.⁹⁸ Yet a clear ambivalence arises in these *Slow* musings about fusion’s culinary contamination. Santich’s title, “Inevitable, Yes, but Desirable?”⁹⁹ exemplifies the simultaneous acknowledgement and tension within fusion food. Speaking for the Slow Food movement, Gho writes that, “We shy away from nostalgia and fundamentalism.” The organization does indeed realize the inherent historical necessity of blending foodways to create new ones, which become calcified to create new traditions. But the attitude of overall stiffness toward the immediate and ostensibly arbitrary construction of fusion cuisines nevertheless reveals a fear of globalized destruction of local specificities.

⁹⁷ Luca Vercelloni, “Searching for Lost Tastes,” *Slow* 31 (July 2002): 134

⁹⁸ Paola Gho, “Presidium Inflation,” *Slow* 31 (July 2002),
<http://editore.slowfood.it/editore/riviste/slow/EN/31/presidio.html> (accessed March 3, 2010).

⁹⁹ Barbara Santich, “Inevitable, Yes, but Desirable?” *Slow* 34 (November/December 2002): pg. #,
<http://editore.slowfood.com/editore/riviste/slow/EN/34/inevitabile.html> (accessed February 23, 2010).

Throughout my investigation of *Slow*'s catalog, only one article overtly addresses a way migrants factor into the Slow Food movement's conception of local gastronomic traditionalism. Alessandro Monchiero's "Roots Schmoots" describes two immigrant cooks who have integrated into the traditional culinary culture of the Langhe, the territorial birthplace of the Slow Food movement.¹⁰⁰ These newcomers, one Thai and the other Japanese, worked tirelessly to learn the mechanics of traditional Piedmontese cookery. Monchiero writes, "Masa [from Japan] makes notes of all the details: hand movements, measurements, ingredients. He is building a database of the Italian recipes he has learned in the kitchens of Boccondivino and reading the regional recipe books edited by Slow Food."¹⁰¹ These immigrants have been considerably successful in learning local recipes in Piedmontese kitchens, and they have amassed the technical skill and traditional knowledge that "rivals Langa housewives. What they don't have is the same eternal devotion, devoid of any higher aspirations, to the roots of the cuisine."¹⁰² The main point we can draw from this brief but telling bite out of *Slow* is that the movement is not overtly *against* the presence of immigrants in the traditional culinary culture of local places.

But I point to the more hidden nuances of the Slow Food movement's discourse on protecting local traditions: these immigrant cooks were acceptable, but they were also subject to an intense period of *taste education* in order to integrate into the kitchens of traditional Piedmontese *osterie*. Even after they proficiently learned the techniques, recipes, and ontological understandings of this gastronomic identity, these immigrant culinarians were nevertheless rootless. Their gastronomic existence and contribution, though geographically placed in the food traditions of the Langhe, were purportedly temporary. As a totalizing ontological food identity, the "eternal devotion...to the roots of the cuisine," does not apply to foreigners. Though the techniques may be translatable, foreign

¹⁰⁰ Alessandro Monchiero, "Roots Schmoots," *Slow* 39 (March 2003): pg. #,
<http://editore.slowfood.com/editore/riviste/slow/EN/39/origine.html> (accessed February 23, 2010).

¹⁰¹ Ibid

¹⁰² Ibid

cooks lack the fundamental connectedness to place that defines the Slow Food movement's local culinary identity.

From the pages of the Slow Food movement's official journal, *Slow*, we can expose the nuanced layers of the pure culinary identity the organization seeks to defend from the destructive homogenization of the global. Although it does not overtly exclude foreigners, this conception of a natural culinary identity nevertheless does not openly embrace newcomers.

The University of Gastronomic Sciences

From the offices in the town of Bra, a brief and terrifyingly fast drive on the narrow road down the hill, through fields of corn and rows of hazelnut trees, brought me to the Slow Food movement's school in Pollenzo, *L'Università degli Studi di Scienze Gastronomiche*, or the University of Gastronomic Sciences (UGS). A handful of old Pollenzo residents waved from the tables outside a corner café, smoking cigarettes and carrying on. These, perhaps, were the same denizens of this ancient Roman town who Carlo Petrini invited to a lunch in Ristorante Guido at the UGS the day before it was ceremoniously opened in 2004.¹⁰³ Surrounded by manicured lawns in a beautiful pink-stone palace, the UGS is currently located in the Agenzia di Pollenzo, the ancient estate of King Charles Albert of the House of Savoy. Though the institution was closed for the summer, I made contact via email with a recent graduate, "Laura." She provided insights into the ways the Slow Food movement approaches gastronomic education with a particular emphasis on the specific places out of which "local" and "traditional" foods are cultivated.

Food is the protagonist at the UGS. Laura stated that at the university, she studied the science and history *behind* gastronomy:

Gastronomy is always seen from the restaurant side. We studied the history of foods, their evolution, and their future. We learned about how traditions are formed and are

¹⁰³ Petrini, *Slow Food Revolution* 148

transforming in time. We talked to producers and tried to understand the histories of the areas of production.¹⁰⁴

Going further, a course description for the UGS Masters class, “History of Territory and Regional Products,” elucidates the way the Slow Food movement, through its educational project, articulates a particular culinary identity rooted in the local landscape:

This course develops the notion of building interpretative profitability using the guardianship of foodways—as a combined economic, social, and cultural fact—through the lens of geography. Each lesson will address one geographic stratum (the home, the community, the city, the region, the nation, and the globe as a whole), and the multiple links between food and these places.¹⁰⁵

This educational thrust of the Slow Food movement inculcates in its students not simply the kinds of foods that are cultivated out of particular places, but the sociocultural meanings that undergird them. “The local,” experienced through encounters with traditional cheese, meat, and wine producers in the Langhe region, is taught as an organic identity that must be defended against the deleterious effects of “the global.” Though the student body at the UGS is comprised of scholars from all over the world (40% foreigners and 60% Italians, according to Laura, who is herself a German national), the emphasis to recognize the concrete existence of historically-rooted gastronomic traditions remains fundamental.

I asked Laura how her education at the UGS has informed her perception of the effects of immigration on foodways in Italy. She replied that,

Italians have a very conservative food tradition, [and] that is how they were able to preserve their tradition the way they did today...But there *has* been an effect of immigration on the [consumption of] fast food. Even when [it has taken the form of] Italian food that has become faster and healthier.¹⁰⁶

Her association of immigrants and fast food, the Slow Food movement’s unabashedly clear nemesis, is not insignificant. Laura’s statement, like the rest of the Slow Food movement’s discourse on local

¹⁰⁴ Interview with a UGS graduate, January 19th, 2010

¹⁰⁵ University of Gastronomic Sciences, *The University of Gastronomic Sciences* (Pollenzo: UGS, 2008), 52.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with a UGS graduate, January 19th, 2010

food, does not *explicitly* exclude immigrants from a conception of pure cuisine rooted in the primordial culture of Northern Italy or anywhere else. But the point I make here is that the Slow Food movement's discourse on what is good to eat is far more nuanced than it appears at first glance. These deeper layers of meaning expose a process of culinary boundary-making vis-à-vis the incursion and perceived destruction of the global in a way that has *reified* the everyday practice of reproducing foodways as local traditions.

Because immigrants, as outsiders, are historically separate from the geographic—and therefore the culinary—specificity of Northern Italy, their integration into the gastronomic networks of the area are frequently relegated to the realm of “fast food.” The Slow Food movement attacks this category for its culinary *quality*, not necessarily the cultural composition of its laborers. Nevertheless, I maintain that the Slow Food movement's active reification of the *local* culinary identity in Northern Italy has fossilized the dual opposition between “local” and “global,” which tends to exclude the globalized and deterritorialized identities of modern migrants in Italy.

Slow Food Manifestations in the Culinary Everyday

After my exploration of various places that display the Slow Food movement's local culinary ideology, I now turn my focus to several examples of Northern Italian foodways in the area surrounding the Slow Food headquarters in Bra that parallel the organization's emphatic ethos of local gastronomic exaltation. First, a word on methodology. Let me make clear that I do not intend to whip *correlation* into an appealing yet ultimately airy assertion of *causation*. In Northern Italy, the Slow Food movement did not invent the notion of local culinary traditions; celebrations of traditional food existed long before the organization's inception. Rather, the snapshots of local gastronomy I discuss here illuminate the kinds of local traditions the Slow Food movement has *co-opted* and moved to protect from the destructive homogenization of globalized foodways.

After one of my frequent trips into the town of Bra, I waited at a bus stop near a central park across from a butcher shop and a bakery for a bus that, predictably, never came. I ambled over to a large billboard plastered with various community announcements, attracted by a giant poster that dominated the space. It was an announcement for a public celebration of “*Tradizionale Polenta e Salciccia, Gorgonzola, Crostata, Vino, e Caffè*.”¹⁰⁷ The poster’s major nod, however, was to the *polenta* and *salciccia*, boiled cornmeal and veal sausages, which have become commonly recognized local dishes in the region.¹⁰⁸ It depicted several cooks who stood above steaming copper cauldrons of polenta, slowly adding cornmeal and stirring the mixture with long paddles. In the summer months in the Langhe area, food and wine festivals that celebrate local specialties abound. Sarbre, an Italian housewife who lives outside Bra on the farm where I stayed, told me about a wine festival in the neighboring commune of Barolo that took place (alas) during the week before I arrived. “You pay for a glass and walk down the street and stop at the winemakers’ tables. They give you a taste and tell you about the grapes and the vineyards,” she said, beaming.



But I conducted my own vigorous participant observational research at a local food celebration in a local *paese*¹⁰⁹ called Verduno. The festival was called simply, *La Grigliata*, and the gastronomic protagonist of the evening was the general category of grilled meats. Several hundred

¹⁰⁷ Photograph 9/3/09

¹⁰⁸ In everyday conversations about food, the Italians with whom I spoke frequently mentioned *polenta* as a traditional Piedmontese dish, a food that has endured its humble roots as a cheap peasant dish to become a staple in Piedmont and other parts of Northern Italy.

¹⁰⁹ Italians in this area use the word *paese* to mean “village,” though it literally means “country.” Without digressing into a lengthy ethnolinguistic analysis of this correlation, I nevertheless find a tremendous parallel between these two ideas. Speaking of, and identifying with, *village* as *country* is one way that an extremely localized identity manifests in everyday conversation in the Langhe.

people from the surrounding communities gathered at row upon row of tables. A team of cooks energetically threw various cuts of meat into giant metal racks which were rotated, dripping with fat, over a wood fire. Beef ribs and pork chops were brushed with olive oil and given a liberal sprinkle of salt. Coils of *saliccia* were unwrapped. A pan of roasted potatoes, the faceless supporting actor in this saga, sat emotionless beside heaps of grilled meats. “*Tutta la carne è locale?*” I asked an equally salivating man in line to pay the ten euro ticket price. Is all this meat from nearby?

“*Senza dubbio! Provenienti da aziende in Piemonte,*” he replied, his voice reflecting the obviousness of this fact—without a doubt! It’s from farms in Piedmont. I sat at a table with a family and several of their friends, which I noticed was the way most people were clustered together, and savored the meal. The locals laughed and chatted as they devoured the Piedmontese meats and refilled their glasses with *Vino Pelaverga* from the surrounding vineyards. I wandered around to observe this conviviality, this collective celebration of Piedmontese meats and local wines. From my unstructured observations of the space, I overheard no snippets of language other than Italian and Piedmontese dialect spoken among the happily dining families.

Though there was no mention of the Slow Food movement’s sponsorship of the event, the *grigliata* exemplifies the kind of local foodways and cultural community that surround territorially-historic food traditions. It provided the kind of raw cultural ingredients the Slow Food movement reifies in its discourse as a steadfast identity rooted in the *terra ferma* of local areas.

Tradition at La Cascata

My earlier discussion of Osteria Baccondivino provided a clear instance in which the Slow Food movement’s active mobilization of a local, traditional culinary identity is directly codified and presented for consumption in a Slow Food-affiliated eatery. This sentiment is crucial because it allows us to define the contours of a territorially-bound culinary and cultural identity that the Slow

Food movement has actively strengthened in opposition to the vast and shapeless specter of “globalization.” In order to understand more deeply the local gastronomic identity in the Langhe, I went to the Ristorante La Cascata to interview the executive chef.

The restaurant illustrated the kind of local culinary identity that Slow Food has co-opted and catalyzed in its own discourse. Like the local food festivals I previously described, La Cascata expresses the local foodways and traditions that the Slow Food movement has mobilized to defend. The point I make here is that the conception of a “pure” culinary identity, rooted in the historical foodways of the local territory, is imagined in clear opposition to the deterritorialized integration and newly constructed culinary rootlessness of newcomers in the Langhe. I identify some of the ways the Slow Food ethos has permeated the gastronomic experience in this passionately traditional restaurant in the Langhe. I argue that Slow Food has reproduced and institutionalized this identity.

I went to La Cascata in the late afternoon, during the customary *riposo* time of the day when businesses close for several hours before opening up again in the evening. “Jester,” a summertime server at La Cascata, parked the car in the rear of the restaurant and led me through the back door. Two women wearing headscarves smiled fleetingly back at me as their plastic-gloved hands stacked plates from a steaming rack that emerged from the dishwasher. We walked through the kitchen, where white-clogged chefs wielded formidable cleavers, chopping mountains of mushrooms, onions, garlic, and peppers. After a curt *buongiorno*, one of the men hauled a massive pan of steaming *pasta al forno* out of the oven.

The executive chef, “Antonio,” removed his soiled apron and directed me to a small table in the foyer before a towering wall of wine bottles. From the kitchen, the clank and clatter of dishes and the sizzle of the stovetop provided a fitting aural backdrop for the chef’s lengthily articulated thoughts about food. Antonio was raised in the tradition of Piedmontese cookery. He fondly recalled the dishes of *bagna caôda*, *tajarin con tartufi*, *polenta*, and *saliccia* that he grew up with, and he

continues this local gastronomic tradition in his current role as the culinary captain at La Cascata. He said,

My experience is with local and traditional cuisine. Food that is foundational. Food from the local territory, but with a small undertone. We see fish that's not from this territory per se. Salmon that has come from Norway, swordfish from Sicily...or from who-knows-where. But the meat is from here, and all the essential ingredients are grown here, but sometimes we throw in a little something to alter food for the modern taste...the world has changed and we must change with it. We must stay afloat.

His statement illustrates a notable ambivalence within the ardent devotion to using local ingredients to create traditional dishes. Antonio makes no claims to culinary backwardness or to a reversion to an ancient peasant way of life.¹¹⁰ This is a frequent critique of the Slow Food movement—that they articulate an ontological identity that turns back the hands of time to a purer, more desirable era that denies the gastronomic contamination of the modern age. This is reminiscent of the concept of imagined nostalgia I presented in my theoretical section. I apply this notion of gastronomic remembering to the Slow Food movement's declarations of culinary purity are influential in their tireless insistence on continuing *territorially-bound* foodways.

“Has the presence of the Slow Food movement so close to La Cascata had an impact on the food here?” I asked.

“Yes, well the organization came out of this area first. It is changing the ways we taste, cook, drink, and find products to prepare. I think ultimately it has really made us *think* about the *way* we eat and drink. Slow Food is very well known and positive in this area,” replied the chef. Indeed, the menu was comprised of some of the same local specialties I had seen on menus in several other “authentic” *osterie*: Piedmontese beef braised in Barolo wine, *salciccia di Bra*, roasted rabbit, and *tajarin* with shaved white truffles. Furthermore, the restaurant had its own in-house butcher, who was

¹¹⁰ See Laudan, “Culinary Modernism.”

charged with sourcing meat from local farmers and butchering it with tremendous attention to quality and detail.

After a brief interruption by the tuxedoed and visibly flustered *maitre d'*, I shifted the course of the conversation toward the topic of immigration. “Can foreigners cook this traditional Piedmontese food?” The question was simple, and Antonio responded with a simple enough answer, but one that conveys the tremendous meaning contained within the conception of local, traditional, “pure,” cuisine. He said,

It is not easy. It is not *impossible*, but it is very difficult. This is not because the cuisine is complicated, but because we have been eating this since we were children. We have *known* these flavors. Look, if a Tunisian comes here and wants to learn how to make a great *bagna caôda*, or a great *fonduta*, he’ll learn. He’ll learn, but he’ll always put a little something of his own into it that won’t agree with us. We’re not machines. Everything we make is with our heads, hands, hearts—with *taste*. A foreign cook may come here to open a restaurant, but he won’t get very far. Without roots here, you won’t get very far! Even if he made *polenta con pomodoro* [a traditional dish], we wouldn’t like it.¹¹¹

“Do any foreigners work here in the restaurant?” I queried.

“There are no foreign cooks here. We don’t allow anybody without direct experience. Well, yes, there are foreigners, but they wash dishes. [Cooking] is very difficult for them. It’s easier for them to wash dishes.” That explained the women with headscarves.

According to Antonio, whose long culinary career has been steeped in the traditions of Piedmontese fare, the practice of preparing traditional cuisine is an exclusive category. The chef alludes to an ontological linkage between an identification with, and presence within, a system of local, traditional foodways and the very earth out of which they take root. Most notably, the chef’s words reveal a delineation between the process of *learning* gastronomic authenticity and a state of *being* gastronomically authentic. Like the description of the immigrant cooks in the *Slow* journal I previously discussed, Antonio’s statement suggests that outsiders can learn how to reproduce

¹¹¹ Interview with a chef, September 5th, 2009

authentic Northern Italian cuisine, much like learning a language. Yet they do not have the same kind of “eternal devotion...to the roots of the cuisine,” which is only attainable by birthright, and their culinary accent will be unmistakably distinct.

In these terms, spoken by a Piedmontese chef and echoed in the Slow Food movement’s discourse about preserving local and traditional culinary identities, the construction of a cuisine is fundamentally a product of an *imagined* historical process. Like Proust’s madeleine,¹¹² Antonio’s food connects him to his past and to the collective identity of Piedmontese foodways that are themselves products of a long-remembered custom. But the connection between culinary belongingness in Northern Italy and that which “we have been eating...since we were children” represents more than a mere Proustian moment of tasting the past. In the current Italian context, where the local is thought to be under assault from globalization’s deleterious homogenization and destruction of local specificities, this gastronomic remembering is used to actively reproduce cultural boundaries between “Us” and “Them,” between *here* and *not-from-here*, and between “edible” and “inedible.”

As I previously mentioned, I do not want to conflate assertions of correlation and causation here. Although Antonio made clear that Slow Food is an influential movement in the region, he did not point to it as the lone stimulus for a newfangled local culinary consciousness. I reiterate that I do not posit the Slow Food movement as a totalizing force for culinary exclusion in Northern Italy or anywhere else in the world. Slow Food is certainly influential and has had a role in the catalysis of this culinary boundary-making vis-à-vis the incursion and perceived destructiveness of the global (i.e. immigrants). But my dissection of the organization’s underlying ideologies is more valuable as a lens to view how territorially-bounded foodways are exalted to simultaneously reify the everyday practice of reproducing culinary practices as local traditions, and to exclude outsiders’ participation. My

¹¹² Marcel Proust, Lydia Davis, and Christopher Prendergast, *Swann's Way* (New York, N.Y.: Penguin Books, 2004), 48-51.

conversation with Antonio in a traditional restaurant reaffirms the exclusivity of this reflexive local identity.

Although Antonio was quite clear in this acknowledgment and valuation of specific gastronomic identities in his own area, he peppered his perspective with analogous examples from other places. He stated,

It's important to maintain tradition. Do we want the whole world to be the same? With the same language? And the same people? You go to a place to find difference....You can't put a red thing between two white things. Likewise, you can't put a white thing between two black things. The identity must be preserved, *a priori*. Not just *our* identity, but all of them—Russian, English, German, Muslim, Moroccan, Arab whatever. Think of making *crepe suzettes* in front of Mecca! The Arab bread would be better, no?

The veteran chef's words are really quite brilliant because they are situated at the nexus between the theoretical ingredients of imagination and memory I use throughout this thesis. Memorialized and reiterated here as an unyielding identity, the chef's conception of local, rooted cuisine—the food from his childhood and the collective upbringing of Northern Italy—is categorized as a territorially-bound cultural marker. At the same time, he imaginatively transplanted this general idea to every place in the world where people cook and eat food from the native earth. This world of discrete gastronomies, however, conflicts with the current Northern Italian reality that also accommodates deterritorialized migrants. Antonio told me that he thinks, “It's good to bring to other people your culture, your customs, your food, your dress, but with some rules,” and that “cultural exchange is a good thing—on a global scale.” As the Piedmontese chef made explicit, these “rules” are the grist for the Slow Food's mill that lays claim to preserving cultural specificities in Italy and in all traditional food communities.

In summary, Chef Antonio's interview is important for this thesis because it describes a local space that the Slow Food movement has identified and co-opted to formulate its professed identity of local, traditional food. But while the chef clearly values these local identities, as does Slow Food,

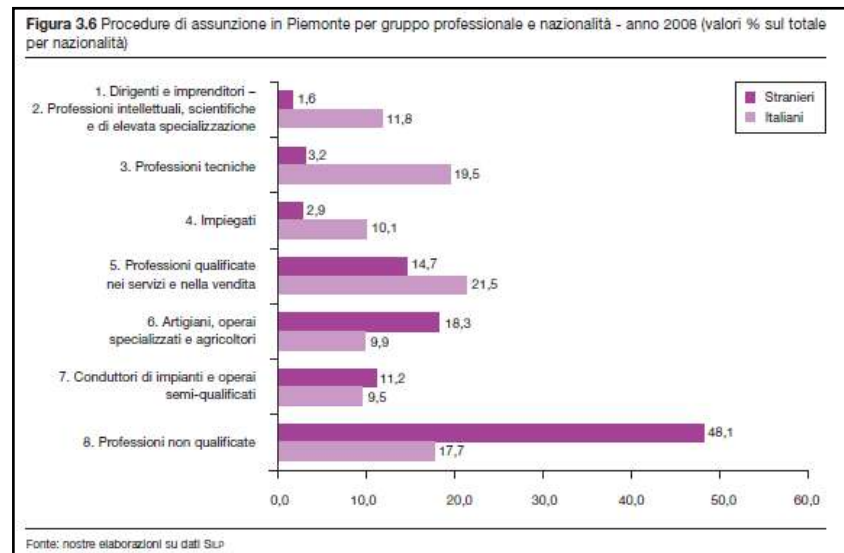
he reveals a fundamental ambivalence that shall become apparent in other places throughout my argument. With his acknowledgement of unmoving conceptions of territorially-bounded culinary identity *and* the global dynamic of human migration and their integration into local food systems contained within the same pot of alimentary modernity, the Piedmontese chef reveals an intrinsic contradictory space within an identity of “pure” and “authentic”—i.e. geographically-bound—cuisine.

Culinary Ambivalence: Global Incursions to the Local in the Langhe

Beginning with an observational and discursive investigation of the Slow Food headquarters in Bra and the surrounding area, this chapter has heretofore traced the outlines of the organization’s articulation of a specifically local gastronomic identity and how it manifests in culinary spaces outside the movement. But stopping my exploration there would exclude many of the significant caveats that nuance this thesis. Although my presentation of the “local” food culture in Northern Italy has positioned the notion of territorially-bound gastronomic specificity as an ardently-held value among the Italian mainstream, my experience within this food community suggested a more complicated reality. Specifically, I hope to show that the constructed hegemonic¹¹³ identity of “pure” local cuisines in Northern Italy has given rise to contradictory global spaces in the shadows beneath it. Ultimately, these immigrant incursions of the global into the local suggest that the imagined conception of “the local” is actually a fragile identity. In the face of immigration and the purportedly destructive nature of globalization upon the local, these contradictory spaces suggest that the boundaries erected to protect the purity of the local are permeable and ever-shifting.

¹¹³ Kate A. F. Crehan, *Gramsci, culture, and anthropology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 57.

On the same street as the Osteria di Baccondivino in Bra, I followed two women wearing headscarves into *Il Sportello Al-Elka*, an immigrant services center where I scheduled an interview with a public outreach coordinator. I sat in the diminutive waiting room across from a couple who spoke in Arabic as they rocked their child in a stroller. “Francesca,” an outreach coordinator at the Sportello (literally “the door”) agreed to speak with me about the office and the immigrant situation in



the area. According to Francesca, the organization offers assistance

Figure 3: Comparison of Italian and immigrant jobs, measured by percent of the entire population

to legal residents in the area in a variety of capacities ranging from language education to assisting people to find jobs. Of particular interest was the office’s annual multicultural festival that drew hundreds of immigrants from around the area. Francesca told me,

Every year, we hold our interethnic festival. We put on a soccer tournament, which is always a highlight. There is also a big dinner with typical dishes from all over the world. Hundreds of people come to enjoy the food....It’s a really beautiful experience!¹¹⁴

I asked her where these immigrants worked. She replied,

Most immigrants work in the agricultural sector. They work in the fields and the vineyards, which you’ve probably seen in this area. Also in this area, immigrants have opened restaurants. There are Chinese and Japanese restaurants, and many kebab places.

¹¹⁴ Interview with immigrant services office employee, September 9th, 2009.

Within the local culinary culture of the Langhe that holds its gastronomic traditions dearly, these immigrant populations have permeated the food and wine system to form a significant component part. I verified Francesca's statement with demographic information from a 2008 report conducted by the Regional Offices of Piedmont (See Figure 3).¹¹⁵ According to the figure, nearly half of all foreign residents in the region are employed in low-skilled jobs. In addition to supporting the agricultural industry, the bedrock of local cuisine and the important terrestrial connection to cultural foodways espoused by the Slow Food movement, immigrants insert their various global traditions into the local traditionalism of the Langhe. Al-Elka's interethnic festival that celebrated a wide variety of typical dishes from immigrant communities in the area was situated in the same gastronomic field that cultivated local food festivals in reverence of *polenta* and *saliccia*, or the *grigliata* I previously described. My point here is that the presence of Al-Elka amid the constant reaffirmation of the local contests the boundary between global and local. Immigrants' presence among and within the maintenance of local food traditions complicates such a clear dichotomy, despite the exclusivity of the Slow Food movement's local culinary identity.

I left Sportello Al-Elka into the late afternoon sun and followed my stomach according to the directions given to me by "Amanda," a Slow Food employee I interviewed several weeks earlier. "Ironically," she said, "There is a kebab shop right next to the Slow Food offices in Bra." Indeed a small kebab shop was located right down the block, and the enticing aroma of slowly spinning *döner* wafted out the door into the street and slunk sardonically into the upper windows of the Slow Food headquarters. I ordered a kebab sandwich and struck up brief conversation with the cashier, a Moroccan, as I waited. Business was good, he said. "The kebab is popular in this area." Amanda, who speaks Turkish, expressed sentiments about the role of the kebab in the local food culture of

¹¹⁵ Istituto di Ricerche Economico Sociali del Piemonte 33

Bra that exemplify the kind of culinary ambivalence expressed by the kebab's presence among local gastronomic traditions:

When I came...I didn't speak any Italian and I thought, well great, there are all these *döner* places around so [the employees are] going to be Turkish. I went around trying to speak Turkish to them and it was like a Chinese woman or some guys from Pakistan. So they're all using this *döner* but they're not necessarily from Turkey. I've seen a lot of Chinese, for example, in Parma where there are pizza *and döner* places together.

In and of itself, the kebab phenomenon is a perfect snapshot of the globalized hybridization of newcomers' foodways. When my kebab arrived, I was

surprised to receive what appeared to me to be a tortilla

wrapped around meat shaved off a spinning hunk of

lamb and beef, lettuce, mayonnaise, chili sauce, and

served with French fries. But, for the purposes of this

thesis, more important than the food itself are the

meanings behind it. Though the Slow Food movement

advocates a local culinary identity that finds parallels in

osterie and food festivals in the area, the persistent

popularity of the kebab presents a space of gastronomic contradiction that entertains tacit tolerance

within the conception of a local, "pure" Italian culinary identity. On the one hand, Kebabs are

decidedly *other*, demarcated outside the local and traditional boundaries in the Langhe.



Yet on the other hand, this globalized foodway, as a newcomer settled into the same regional

geography as historically constructed dishes, interacts with and reveals the ambivalence within a

notion of local, traditional, territorially-bounded gastronomy. Despite its constructed un-

belongingness, the kebab, as a representation of globalized foodways, has been absorbed into the

local food system. It serves as a clear culinary opponent that allows groups like the Slow Food

movement to more convincingly distinguish local from global. But its popularity among Italians also

suggests a local food identity that is less exclusionary, less locally-focused, and more open to the foreign and the global than the Slow Food movement would insist. To come to the point, the kebab's presence allows Slow Food to reaffirm the boundary between local and global. But its contradictory presence within the organization's espoused local, "pure" identity shows the boundary's impermanence.

Lega Nord Presence in the Slow Food Sphere

So immigrants' somewhat paradoxical presence in the underneath of the Slow Food movement's assertion of local culinary identity suggests that the gastronomic reality in the Langhe area is more complex than we can assume from the organization's discourse about the local and the traditional. I therefore propose that cultural scholars re-think the way this seemingly firm and organic identity of "local," "traditional," and "pure" cuisine is constructed vis-à-vis the presence of immigrant newcomers.

But what I want to suggest in this last sub-section about the purported gastro-territorial identity I found in the local cultural spaces in and surrounding Bra is the implicit presence of a *political* backdrop of exclusion provided by the Lega Nord. Though it does it quite differently than the Slow Food movement, the Lega promotes a similar kind of reactionary, locally-embedded identity.

On my walks to and from the train station in Bra, I passed by Caffé Posta, an insignificant little *gelateria* and coffee shop where people sat and sipped coffee and watched the people go by. I sat here several times also and sipped cappuccinos from coffee cups decorated with pictures of people marching underneath colored flags that read *PACE!*—peace. Directly above me, however, flew flags of a different kind. The sword-bearing medieval knight and the six-pointed *sole delle Alpi*, or sun of the Alps, the Lega Nord's chosen symbols for Padania, waved gently in the wind. These flags

adorned the edifice above and were surrounded by political posters that quite boldly proclaimed several of the party's key positions. A portrait of Gianna Gancia, the current president of the province of Cuneo, sat below the phrase, "*PIU VOCE ALLA NOSTRA AGRICOLTURA*"—more voice to our agriculture. On the opposite side was the most glaring statement: A portrait of a Native American in full headdress was framed by the phrase, "*LORO HANNO SUBITO L'IMMIGRAZIONE. ORA VIVONO NELLE RISERVE!*"—they have suffered immigration and now they live on reservations! The flags and posters were ominous allusions to the conservative political party that garnered significant support in Piedmont and the rest of Northern Italy.



These political statements certainly make no direct claims to local cuisine. But I analyze them as being a crucial part of the political field that also contains, just several city blocks away, the culinary movement of Slow Food *and* the Sportello Al-Elka office that supports immigrants amid such claims to political and gastronomic local specificity. The poster of the American Indian reflects the Lega's persistent refashioning of history in order to substantiate its own discourse of a violent immigrant assault on Italian soil. Gancia's claim to give greater voice to *our* agriculture gets to the root of my argument that the Lega Nord creates an exclusionary climate for immigrants by prescribing a local, "pure" identity that resides in the land of Northern Italy. Its possessive claim to agriculture is in fact not tremendously unlike the Slow Food movement's own drive to protect local farmers and alimentary traditions.

On the surface, the Lega Nord and the Slow Food movement, as I have consistently pressed in this paper, are very different groups with very different ideological stances. But a common assertion to territorially-connected identity does become evident when I peel back the layers of these movement's ideological platforms. In September 2008, an interview with the Slow Food president Carlo Petrini and the Lega Nord politician and current national minister of agriculture, Luca Zaia, was published in the newsmagazine *L'Espresso*.¹¹⁶ Titled "*Nostra Signora Terra*," (Our Lady Earth), the interview concludes with this noteworthy exchange on the topic of identity:

Zaia: I close with a thought of the Emperor Hadrian: 'The real birthplace is that in which a man sees himself for the first time.' I would apply this to consumers who still don't see themselves, their taste memories, [and] the context in which they live. When we do that, we will win the bet of Italian agriculture.

Petrini: I agree with this, but here is the problem for us on the Left. They copy us.

Zaia: The same was said of the Chinese. And as you have seen...

This brief quotation, following their conversation about the state of Italian agriculture, illustrates a fascinating interstitial space between the discursive identity stances of the Lega Nord and the Slow Food movement. Zaia and Petrini agree that people in the Italian food system need a strengthened awareness of the interconnectivity between their identity, their cuisine, and the local places in which both are sustained. Zaia's position as the Minister of Agriculture allows him to use some of the same values espoused by the Slow Food movement in order to fortify the robustness of Italian agriculture. However, these tactics are situated in the Lega Nord's epistemological field that also gives rise to xenophobic statements like those exhibited in the political posters in Bra. Zaia's last words allude to the Lega's position against the Chinese reproduction of Italian products, both agricultural and material (e.g. Italian designer bags). The Lega Nord minister jabs at the deleterious Chinese facsimiles of traditional Northern Italian goods and foods. This interview represents the ideological intersection of two figureheads—one from Slow Food, the other from the Lega Nord—that recalls the significance of local territorial specificities.

¹¹⁶ Stefania Rossini, "Nostra Signora Terra," *L'Espresso* (Rome), September 11, 2008.

Section Conclusion

My exploration of the culinary spaces in and around the city of Bra in Piedmont have allowed me to uncover the Slow Food movement's ideological layers that reveal an identity in reverence of a local, "pure" culinary culture. In its tireless reassertion of the local, the organization's fundamental, ontological impetus toward culinary tradition indirectly excludes people who are not historically rooted in specific places. But I have also shown that this exclusion is unique because it nevertheless affords immigrants room to exist in the underneath of the local gastronomic identity. Spaces of contradiction like the Sportello Al-Elka and the kebab shops in Bra suggest that the boundary between Northern Italian "local" and immigrant "global" is in fact not so distinct.

And though the Lega Nord's presence in Bra pales in comparison to the Slow Food movement's influential position there, the flags and posters that hang above a diminutive café almost as an afterthought pay homage to a political field in Northern Italy that directly excludes immigrants. In short, the Lega Nord's presence provides a backdrop of overt, politically violent exclusion to the Slow Food movement's more nuanced ideological boundary-making. Though these discourses are certainly different, they overlap in their strategies to profess a local identity rooted to specific places.

In the next section, I seek to historicize the current situation of culinary and cultural boundary-making in Northern Italy aboard a train that took me from Bra to the city of Turin.

CHAPTER THREE: A LEGACY OF EXCLUSION

In the last chapter, I explored the presence of a constructed local food identity in and around the city of Bra in Piedmont, and the spaces of contradiction that contest the boundary between “the local” and “the global.” In this section, I continue my spatial journey away from the peripheral towns of the Langhe countryside toward the cosmopolitan urban center of Turin. This leg of the journey takes the form of a brief train ride from Bra to the Piedmontese capital, and I delve deeply into the historical legacy of immigration in Northern Italy I explained in my literature review. Recall that my overall argument in this thesis is that the Slow Food movement and the Lega Nord are two dissimilar movements that have revealed their own reflexive, locally-rooted claims to an “authentic” identity in Northern Italy, which have produced an intersection between the notions of food, identity, and place in ways that fundamentally exclude foreign immigrants.

I propose here that the internal migration from South to North generated a legacy that was foundational to current tensions about international migration to Italy. The globalization of Northern Italy’s economy as well as the waves of foreign migrants who have arrived in search of work has been accompanied by a robust and complex revival of old fragments of identities which “become condensed at various levels of reference (ethnic, linguistic, religious, communitarian).”¹¹⁷ Mingione (1993) suggests that this ushers in the prospect of “a new period of racism and xenophobia,” as well as potentially violent ethnic and nationalistic confrontations.¹¹⁸

I ground my discussion of Northern Italy’s migration legacy in an impromptu interview conducted with a Southern Italian descendent on the train from Bra to Turin. In this case, my culinary lens provides an effective way to read food as a way to decipher the perceived otherness

¹¹⁷ Mingione, Enzo. “Italy: The Resurgence of Regionalism.” *International Affairs* 69, no. 2 (April 1993): 309.

¹¹⁸ Ibid 310.

between Northern and Southern Italians. This otherness has been constructed over a long historical span. I subsequently discuss the ways in which the Lega Nord's discourse against Southern Italian "immigrants" in the North further crystallized their prescribed Northern Italian ethno-regionalist identity firmly rooted in the soils of the constructed territory of Padania.

A Conversation on the Train

Like most of my Italian interlocutors, Stefano and I met serendipitously. We chatted in the crisp morning air on the train platform in Bra as we waited for the train to Turin. I was destined for the massive outdoor Saturday market in the heart of the city and Stefano was headed home, to a small suburb outside Turin. We carried the conversation into the train, where we sat together for the forty-five minute jaunt through small hamlets and dew-glistening fields in the province of Cuneo.

Stefano was born to parents who emigrated in the late seventies from Naples to Turin in search of work. Though he now considers himself to be properly *Torinese*, his narrative about his memories of food reveal the territorially-bounded gastronomic and cultural asymmetries between North and South that have catalyzed the legacy of internal migration to lay fertile ground for the current tensions



with foreign immigrants. This became especially apparent when he spoke fondly of his mother's role as the family's food provider and maintainer of culinary tradition. Though she finds herself in a very different local milieu than her home in Naples, she maintains the family tradition of preparing *sugo di pomodoro* for the whole family. Stefano told me that she had cooked the delicious tomato sauce just a week before:

My mother insists on using *only* Neapolitan tomatoes. The flavor, the quality—they're just better than anything you can grow here in Northern Italy, and especially better than any of the store-bought tomatoes [in cans]. My mother, and also my father now, work for two days straight to prepare the *sugo*. Then they put it in jars and give it to my siblings and me. The tradition in my family was always about food and providing for the family.

To borrow an analytical device from Lidia Marte (2007), Stefano's narrative may be conceptualized as a *foodmap*, a representational trace that connects him, his identity as a Southern Italian descendent living in Northern Italy, and the earth of Naples that bears the fruit of his mother's *sugo di pomodoro*. For his mother, maintaining the familial and culinary traditions of her homeland means sourcing the cultural and material ingredients from the soil of Naples. Her active imagining of traditional foodways, the amalgam of knowledge and experience that essentially attached her to the gastronomic terrain of Southern Italy, allowed her to retrace her culinary and familial history from its rootedness in Naples, through its migration northward, and up to the current-day. For Stefano, this process of imagining possesses even greater power, for it allows him to imagine and construct familial history through food in a way that locates him among the shifting identities of Southern Italian gastronomic heritage translocated to a new existence in the North. This legacy of representational boundary-making is, I argue, at the center of the current tensions between "Italians" and foreign immigrants.

I present Stefano's foodmap in order to expose, from a culinary perspective, the imaginatively constructed boundary between Southern Italian immigrants to Northern Italy. This shifting gastronomic identity boundary is part and parcel of a long legacy of representational distinction between the North and the South in Italy.

The Legacy of Place-Based Identity Making

To understand the current situation of cultural and culinary reflexive place-making in the face of increased foreign immigration to Italy, the representational traces of Italy's *internal* migration

in the second half of the twentieth century¹¹⁹ must be followed. My focus here is primarily on the Lega Nord. Michel Huyseune writes, “Italy cannot be understood without taking into account the imaginary geography of modernity that divides the country, which has in fact given rise to a whole tradition of interpretations. Viewing Italy through this prism is both unavoidable and dangerous.”¹²⁰ And indeed I venture into dangerous territory by analyzing the disjunction between Northern and Southern Italy as a significant point in the immigration narrative in the North. This is because I chronicle the ways in which the Lega Nord has constructed a discourse that excludes Southern Italian immigrants and simultaneously reaffirms Padanian identity, yet I do not really seek to historically disprove the problematic stereotypes that distinguish North from South.¹²¹ But what I am concerned about here is the *representational* disjunctions between North and South, not the “real” ones.

The Lega Nord’s discourse in the early 1990s about the differences between North and South (Rome serves as the dividing line between North and South in the Lega’s rhetoric) and its simultaneous reification of the pure identity held within the epistemological container of Padania provide a potent distillation of the symbolic and discursive power of territorial and identity boundary-making in Northern Italy. More specifically, Umberto Bossi’s speeches and propaganda throughout his career as the head of the Lega Nord illustrate the legacy of xenophobia toward Southerners in Northern Italy. To trace Bossi’s early xenophobic discourse in the North against Southern Italians, I use Margaria Gómez-Reino Cachafeiro’s data in her book, *Ethnicity and Nationalism in Italian Politics*. Her archival research nicely compliments her ethnographic data, and I use it in a similar fashion to bolster my own ethnographic research. In a 1988 pamphlet distributed

¹¹⁹ I specifically narrow my focus of internal migration to the second half of the twentieth century. The migration from Southern to Northern Italy that accelerated after World War II was not the first time that regions in the North has been exposed to different cultures. But this period is significant because it led directly to the Lega Nord’s imagining and construction of a unique North created specifically to exclude the South.

¹²⁰ Huyseune 125

¹²¹ For a discussion on the North-South dichotomy in Italy, see Putnam 1993. For discussions about why this dichotomy is problematic, see Gold 2003, Cachafeiro 2002, Huyseune 2006, Agnew 2002, and Lupo (In Gundle and Parker 1996).

by Bossi's then-Lega Lombarda (a precursor to the Lega Nord), the ethnic distinction between local, pure Northern Italians and immigrants was described as follows:

A centralized state is not in fact the state of all citizens, but it is a state which is controlled by the *ethnic* majority of a country, which for us is that of the Southerners. In the present situation in Italy it is [possible] for a party...to become automatically a party with a Southern hegemony and thus, a party driven to favor unilateral privileges that discriminate unfairly against the Cisalpine populations. A completely different question is the problem of black migrants because they are not an ethnic majority and therefore, they cannot become hegemonic. If ever, they will provoke serious problems of social disaggregation, but certainly not fundamental problems of hegemony and freedom.¹²²

In the same year, Bossi was asked the question, "Are you worried about black migrants?" He Answered, "No, that is a false problem. I think black people are nice. They cannot hegemonize us. In contrast, the Southerners can, because they have the state in their hands."¹²³ In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Bossi was quick to draw *ethnic* comparisons between the *terroni* (a derogatory term for Southern Italians), who he felt were invading the North, and foreign immigrants. This presents an immediate parallel that has prepared the sociocultural landscape of exclusionary boundary-making for the current immigration tensions with foreign immigrants. The overlap between discussions of both Southern Italian and foreign immigrants in the late 1980s suggests that the transition from *internal* migration tensions to *external* migrations was not just substitutive in nature. Instead, the overlapping boundaries that simultaneously cordoned off both Southerners *and* other foreign immigrants from a prescribed, locally-rooted Northern Italian identity suggest an equally important cross-fertilization, rather than an abrupt discursive replacement.¹²⁴

Cachafeiro's documentation of Bossi's invective shows a shift in the early 1990s from an *ethnic* distinction to a *cultural* distinction between North and South articulated in Lega Nord

¹²² Cachafeiro 133

¹²³ Ibid 134

¹²⁴ The constructed identities of Southern Italians and foreign immigrants continue to overlap. For example, the city spokesman in Lucca, the town that banned ethnic restaurants from opening in the historic city center, said that French food would not qualify as "ethnic," though Sicilian food would. It is influenced by North African and Arab cookery.

statements and speeches. Umberto Bossi's wrote in his book, *La Rivoluzione La Lega: Storia e Idee* (*The Revolution, The League: Story and Ideas*),

There is no doubt that in Italy two different cultures are confronted. They are diffused in the country without precise geographical boundaries but with primacy of one over the other. A European [i.e. Northern] culture—entrepreneurial, open, risk-oriented, and fundamentally liberal; and a Southern culture—Levantine, welfarist, entrenched in the bureaucracy and the parasitic classes...this is not a conflict between macroregions or ethnic groups; it is the conflict between two cultures.¹²⁵

As I mentioned previously, scholars of the Lega Nord agree that since the early 1990s, the party has prescribed an epistemological identity that sharply contrasts the modern, European North with a backward, African south. But what is most significant for the topic at hand is the ways in which the absolute, prescriptive identity of the South functions as negative identity marker in the active imagining of the territory of Padania.

In addition to marginalizing Southern Italian immigrants, who came to the more industrialized North in search of work, the distinction between Southern immigrants and authentic Northern inhabitants was grist for the mill of imagining a local territory. By the year 2000, at Bossi's annual Po River celebration in Venice (which I also described earlier), the imagining of Padania as a reflexive local identity constructed in opposition to the perceived incursion of newcomers is clear. At the festival, as Bossi poured the bottle of water from the source of the Po River into the terminal lagoon in Venice, he said, "We chose to start from the water, from the simple and natural things. From the basic *values* of natural things. Natural families, natural children, a natural Padania." Bossi called his leftist and Southern opponents "dirty...pigs."¹²⁶ My point here is that the legacy of South-to-North migration has been significant, on the one hand, for its distinction of newcomers (even if they were from the same Italian peninsula) from a prescribed, territorially-rooted Northern Italian

¹²⁵ Umberto Bossi and Daniele Vimercati, *La Rivoluzione La Lega: Storia e Idee* (Milan: Sperling and Kupfer, 1993), 206-7 quoted in Cachafeiro 134.

¹²⁶ *La Repubblica* (Rome). "Nazisti rossi e omosessuali A Venezia l' Invettiva di Bossi." September 18, 2000. <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2000/09/18/nazisti-rossi-omosessuali-veneziah-invettiva-di.html> (accessed February 18, 2010).

identity. On the other hand, the internal migration legacy is crucial because it allows me to scrutinize the Lega Nord's political boundary-making as a component part of *an active imagining of a locally-rooted identity*. The same kind of valorization of local specificities exists in the more recent immigration situation involving migrants from outside Italy.

My examination of the Lega Nord, and specifically of Bossi's rhetoric, serves as an extreme case of political, place-based exclusion in order to perceive the ways in which the legacy of South-to-North immigration in Italy provoked a reaction that prescribes a local place-based epistemological identity. Against the perceived invasion of quasi-ethnic labor migrants from the *Mezzogiorno*, who arrived speaking different dialects and who carried with them different cultural traditions, the imagined territory of Padania was *imagined*. Bossi and the Lega Nord have made the region and its history from scratch, and both have been defined in contrast with a *Mezzogiorno* that is fundamentally different. In geopolitical, ethno-regionalist terms, "a geographical entity [Padania] provides the basis for making a set of historical claims," rather than historical claims being foundational to geographical claims.¹²⁷

Padania as a cohesive sociopolitical and ethnic territory has been created by the Lega Nord, and the cultural ingredients that give it meaning (e.g. its traditional cuisines) have been selected and simmered together afterward to bring the various "Norths" together into one functional unit.¹²⁸ Northern Italy and a conception of authentic Northern Italianness were located at the intersection between place and imagination in the Lega Nord. This reemphasis on local territory and the social and cultural relations contained therein, I argue, was a constructive process of place-based identity making that created an auspicious legacy for the more current process of place-based identity construction vis-à-vis the impacts of globalization, namely the presence of deterritorialized,

¹²⁷ John A. Agnew, *Place and Politics in Modern Italy (University of Chicago Geography Research Papers)* (New York: University Of Chicago Press, 2002), 177.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 178.

transnational immigrants. The legacy of South-to-North migration in Italy thus set the stage for current-day place-making that excludes foreigners.

Porous Boundaries

As such, this simultaneous mobilization of imagination and memory to assemble a local identity has produced paradoxical spaces that point to the ambivalences within the taken-for-granted identity of *North*, superimposed against the similarly taken-for-granted identity of *South*. I return to Stefano's interview to explore this incongruity.

Stefano's narrative about his mother's tomato sauce represents a very real intersection between place, food, and identity that situates this Southern Italian culinary tradition outside the boundary of local food consumption and tradition in the North. But an important point I want to make here is that the *representational* boundary making, traced through his mother's maintenance of traditional foodways, is just as crucial as her material use of Neapolitan tomatoes. As the train rattled past a herd of impassively dozing cows, Stefano said to me,

In the South, the woman is the *protagonista di tradizione*. But in the North, life is too fast!—it doesn't allow for good eating. In the North, women must work, so there is no time for cooking or for family. My mother could make a good meal out of very few ingredients. She was a good economist. But my sister...she works for a bank now and she can't cook at all. She didn't learn anything from my mother! It is very hard to work and raise children at the same time...

What are important here are the representational asymmetries conveyed in Stefano's statement. The culinary, economic, and familial reality of the North is contrasted sharply with that in the South. The *Mezzogiorno's* incompatibility with traditional foodways in Northern Italy's imagined daily existence is so internalized that the familial inheritance of these traditions—from mother to daughter—has been extinguished by Stefano's sister's necessary economic occupation. But this very *disintegration* of Southern Italian foodways in Northern Italy further illustrates the active imaginedness and malleability of gastronomic traditions connected to local territories. When the culinary imaginers are

literally and generationally removed from the geographic soil of their gastronomic traditions, these foodways are likely to disintegrate. As deterritorialized Southern Italians have been *re*territorialized in the North, the boundary that historically excluded them becomes less clear.

This gradual disintegration of Southern traditions is the cost of integrating into a new lifestyle in the North. I have shown that Bossi's territory called Padania and the corresponding identity of Padanian, though they manifest in very real ways through political policy, territorial symbols, and the fundamental support for the Lega Nord, have been imaginatively constructed in opposition to a Southern "other." Stefano's narrative further solidifies this point, as his generation's ancestral otherness—shown in one way through his mother's imparted culinary tradition—dissolves as they integrate into the lifestyle of the North.

Later that day, Stefano invited me to his home for lunch in a suburb outside Turin to try his mother's tomato sauce, served simply atop a mound of pasta with a hearty adornment of grated *Grana Padano* cheese. Stefano twisted open a jar of the fruity and bright *sugo*, and said, "Aah, Napoli," with a smile. The sauce provided a fitting metaphor for his migration story: his family's culinary traditions, encapsulated in the ripe Southern tomatoes, were transported to and jarred in the North where Stefano, an integrated *Torinese*, could consume them as long as his mother continues to reproduce the culinary boundary between North and South.

Section Conclusion

In summary, the history of internal migration from Southern Italy to the North has left a legacy of place-based identity-making that is significant to understand the dynamics of identity creation today. My interview with Stefano laid a foundation to discuss the representational otherness between North and South. I then traced parts of Umberto Bossi's rhetoric that contrasts a pure Padanian identity with the contaminated identity of the South in order to argue that the current process of reflexive localism against the perceived incursion of the global is based on an imaginative

construction of local identities and a valorization of local specificities between North and South. But even in the historical legacy of internal migration, the rigid categorization of *North* versus *South* led to contradictory spaces beneath the local Padanian identity that suggest the boundary between North and South to be fluid. Southerners in the North, like Stefano and his sister, were more apt to integrate into society and shed their constructed otherness than racialized foreign immigrants,¹²⁹ which I explore further in the next section.

¹²⁹ There are two significant issues that are left unaddressed in this thesis and beckon further research. The first is the issue of changing gender dynamics in Northern Italy. Females, as guardians of gastronomic tradition in the household, are becoming increasingly compelled to work in order to support the family. Consequently, food traditions do not transfer generationally as they once did. The second issue is about racial dynamics. The Northern Italian discourse about ethnic otherness has shifted to emphasize *cultural* otherness between the North and the South. But foreign immigrants, on the other hand, are racialized and categorized ethnically. Southern Italians were able to shed their racial and ethnic otherness to be able to integrate into Northern Italian society. But for racially- and ethnically-demarcated foreign immigrants, the possibility of shedding this otherness is not the same.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE GLOBALIZED UNDERNEATH

In this final chapter, I plunge into the site of the collision between a constructed, “pure,” Northern Italian identity bound to specific local territory, and the equally constructed identity of immigrants who reside as deterritorialized interlopers in the former. Until now, I have explored the ways that a local, “authentic” notion of Northern Italianness has been constructed as a reflexive response to the perceived destructiveness of globalization and the presence of newcomers. I point to the Slow Food movement and the Lega Nord as two groups that provide, for the purposes of this thesis, clear and sometimes extreme distillations of this locally-constructed identity.

But now I explore contradictory gastronomic spaces that seemingly defy the representation of a local, authentic, territorially-embedded identity. More to the point, I explore immigrant food spaces. My analysis goes beyond a straightforward reification of the global-local binary, to suggest that these contradictory global spaces are at the same time excluded from, but also fundamentally *linked to* a conception of “local” identity. My culinary and cultural analysis of these spaces suggests that dichotomized representations of the deterritorialized global and the territorially-rooted local are *not* in fact so distinct. From my experience in these contradictory culinary spaces, I argue that immigrants reside in the shadows of the hegemonic reassertion of the local, but that these shadows have an important role in the existence and propagation of the local in the first place. What this boils down to is that in these ambivalent spaces, the global is actually part and parcel of the local. The spaces of contradiction I explore reveal the boundary’s porosity and the spaces for creative agency it affords to immigrants

Il Mondo in Una Piazza/ *The World in a Square*

After the train ride from Bra to Turin, Stefano gladly guided me toward to the massive outdoor market in the heart of the city, known as *il mercato Porta Palazzo*. Translated from Italian, the word “*porta*” means “door,” or “gate.” For my purposes here, the Porta Palazzo market serves as an analytical door, a portal through which I examine the ways in which representations of a territorially-based, local, authentic identity—culinary or cultural—are contradicted by the presence of immigrants in this gigantic gastronomic space in Turin. Moreover, Porta Palazzo illustrates the shifting identities that contest the seemingly solid boundary between local culinary purity and global contamination.

I use multifarious and multi-layered data for this chapter. I draw upon unstructured observational data I compiled on three trips to the Porta Palazzo market. I also make use of a 2009 report called “*I Viaggi del Cibo, Il Cibo dei Viaggi*” (“The Journeys of Food, the Food of the Journeys”), compiled by Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture of Turin and FIERI, the *Forum Internazionale ed Europeo di Ricerche sull’Immigrazione* (International Forum of European Research on Immigration), which quantitatively catalogs and qualitatively describes immigrant culinary businesses in the city, especially in the Porta Palazzo neighborhood. This report gives me insights into the immigrant food spaces in the city that I my ethnographic field methods were unable to detect due to time and linguistic restraints. In addition, I reference a book about Porta Palazzo called *Il Mondo in Una Piazza: Diario di Un Anno Tra 55 Etnie* (*The World in a Piazza: Diary of a Year Among 55 Ethnic Groups*), Written by Fiorenzo Oliva, the book chronicles his yearlong stint living in Porta Palazzo in order to understand more deeply the real, gritty existence of the community’s immigrants after he was attacked and mugged by two Maghrebi men. The book reveals an intimate view of the shifting and contested boundaries in the multicultural space of Porta Palazzo.

In short, Porta Palazzo is a *globalized* space, where people from around the world converge and their foodways flourish. Much to the consternation of the Lega Nord's prescriptive, primordial local identity discourse, and perhaps to the bamboozlement of the Slow Food movement's insistence on local culinary traditions, Porta Palazzo's globalized and multicultural milieu is a place of ever-shifting, contested boundaries between global and local identities. My place-based culinary analysis is extremely useful in this setting because it exposes the interstices between place, food, and identity that exist along and *beneath* a hegemonic local Italian identity.

As we walked down the sidewalk toward the growing din of the market, Stefano said, "I think you will like this place. [Porta Palazzo] is very interesting. Many Italians think it is too dangerous, too dirty. They think it is ugly. But I think it is beautiful." Turning a corner, I was confronted by the magnitude of Porta Palazzo, one of the largest and oldest outdoor markets in Europe. A maze of colorfully tented produce stands dominated half of the wide *Piazza della Repubblica*. The sensory barrage of noise, color, and smell was intense.

Visually, the market was a clear multicultural space. As I walked throughout the narrow lanes between produce stands, I was struck by the heterogeneous group of people—both Italians and immigrants¹³⁰—who reciprocally bought and sold products in the market. A tall Italian man yelled for passersby to try the sweetest apples the earth has ever grown; only two euros a kilo! A stooping woman who wore a long, dark robe shuffled past as she pulled a laden shopping cart behind her. Her dark-lined eyes and intricate bluish tattoos under her wrinkled lips suggested her background as



¹³⁰ My research here was unstructured and observational. I did not immediately ascertain the ethnic identities of the consumers, but I base their general regional origin upon the languages I overheard them speak.

Moroccan Berber, or perhaps another nomadic tribe from North Africa. Rapid-fire Arabic drifted among the tents and two vendors gesticulated to each other about the quality of the day's shipment of plump yellow peppers. Clad in an ankle-length gown and a small white cap atop above his elaborately scarred forehead, a looming West African man handed over a handful of coins to an Italian woman in exchange for a sack of onions. In Porta Palazzo, people from across the globe came to buy or sell the ingredients for the day's meal.

From a culinary perspective, the food and foodways in the market reflect the shifting and transitory identities of the migrants who live in the area and also the ease with which food travels across borders. On any given day, the 143 different nationalities registered in the city of Turin can be found buying ingredients at Porta Palazzo and in the hundreds of shops in the surrounding area.¹³¹ And the sheer *amount* of food sold in the market is astonishing. The rows of tents created a canvas ceiling, under which rows of stands were laden with mounds of produce of all kinds. What is important to note, however, is that the abundant mountains of fruits and vegetables did not vary much from stand to stand. Though the foodstuffs in Porta Palazzo were plentiful and relatively inexpensive, they were sourced from all over the country and beyond. In short, the market's wares evoked no sense of Torinese regional specificity, no locally rooted claim to "traditional" or "pure" Northern Italian identity. On just a single stand, I spotted grapes from Sicily, peaches and tomatoes from Puglia, bell peppers from Brindisi, apples from Trentino, and bananas from Brazil. There was little suggestion of



¹³¹ Vittorio Castellani, "Porta Palazzo, Turin," *Slow 31* (July 2002), <http://editore.slowfood.com/editore/riviste/slow/EN/31/Slow31.html> (accessed February 6, 2010).

local “Italian-ness” in the food here. The massive gastronomic space of Porta Palazzo, where the raw ingredients for dozens of ethnic cuisines were bought and sold, ran counter to the (Slow Food) conception of a locally-embedded, reflexive culinary identity I have discussed in this work heretofore. Moreover, the sheer magnitude of the immigrant population in Porta Palazzo destabilized a (Lega Nord) notion that Padania is solely for Padanians.

Around the periphery of the tented labyrinth, groups of men sold bunches of mint from great bundles they carried. Between their cries of, “*Menta! Un euro! Mennnnnta!*” they spoke in Arabic to each other. Since the early 1990s, the sale of mint has flourished in Porta Palazzo into a robust informal market. Currently there are four importers of Moroccan mint in Turin. These distributors fly the mint from Morocco to Milan, and transport it in vans to Turin every Wednesday afternoon.¹³² This process is clearly contrary to the Slow Food movement’s assertion of historically-based, locally-rooted gastronomic tradition, and the fact that immigrants conduct this transaction is antithetical to the Lega Nord’s prescriptive identity that excludes foreigners. The mint and its Moroccan sellers reside in a culinary space separate from this local, “pure” Northern Italian identity.

However, a deeper examination reveals how a space of contradiction has been carved out of this foreign food chain. An interview with a Moroccan mint seller reveals how he has adopted a creative strategy that complicates the representational boundary between local and global.¹³³ Imported Moroccan mint is stopped at the Malpensa Airport in Milan and checked through customs, a process that may take a day or two and diminish the herbs’ freshness. The interlocutor explained that he grows his *own* mint in Italy from March until September. He carefully applies the same farming techniques used in Morocco to get a product similar in taste, aroma, and appearance,

¹³² Forum Internazionale ed Europeo di Ricerche sull’Immigrazione (FIERI). “I Viaggi del Cibo, Il Cibo dei Viaggi: Le Iniziative Economiche degli Immigrati nella Filiera Alimentare.” (May, 2009), http://www.fieri.it/i_viaggi_del_cibo_il_cibo_dei_viaggi.php (Accessed March 3, 2010). 116.

¹³³ Ibid 116

thus avoiding the hassles of importing mint from Morocco.¹³⁴ In this instance, the man has innovatively shifted the boundary between the local and the global to add to the productive and commercial chain of mint production. On the one hand, he utilizes his Otherness as an immigrant mint seller to position himself definitively *outside* the mainstream local, “pure” Italian identity that is constantly reaffirmed by groups like Slow Food and the Lega Nord. On the other hand, he effectively integrates himself into the local food system, producing a *foreign* foodstuff in the *local* area to sell in the *local* market. Thus, the contested boundary between the “global” and the “local” becomes less clear.

I discovered another instance of this categorical and representational culinary boundary-blurring at the far end of the Porta Palazzo market. In contrast to the dozens of market stalls that sold generic, imported produce, there was a smaller section of the market reserved for farmers under the *mercato coperto*, or the covered market. It is there, amid the thirty or so market stalls that sold locally-grown produce for slightly higher prices than the other side of the market, that a Chinese farmer and his family crossed the boundary between global and local culinary identities.

The farmer sold Chinese vegetables that he grew locally. A basket of bitter melons and pumpkin-like squash sat on the ground. Several of his vegetable bins were labeled with the closest Italian equivalent: *cavolfiori cinese* (Chinese cauliflower), *coriandro cinese* (Chinese coriander, also known as cilantro), and *cavoli cinesi* (Chinese cabbage). I approached as four customers left in a final exchange of Chinese with the farmer. I asked his daughter, who accompanies her parents to the market on the



¹³⁴ Ibid 119

weekends, about their customers. She replied, “We mostly sell to Chinese. But Italians buy our things also.”

The Chinese vegetable stand in the farmers’ market represents a fascinating case of active boundary contestation in the contradictory space of Porta Palazzo. Because the vendors were ethnically Chinese, their presence in the Piedmontese capital removed them from the fundamentally space-based “pure” identity I have explored heretofore by uncovering Slow Food’s and the Lega Nord’s discursive layers. Through their process of migration, their foodways were deterritorialized from their Chinese homeland and *re*territorialized in a Northern Italy that is also home to discourses that reassert the salience of the local. Overtly, this process of reintegrating into the local Torinese food system confronts the exclusive boundaries of a local identity. The violent collision with a traditional gastronomic identity has materialized in other culinary ways: one Chinese immigrant interlocutor cited in the “I Viaggi del Cibo” report voiced his frustration at the stereotype widely propagated by the media that Chinese restaurants unabashedly serve St. Bernard puppies on their menus. He said,

It annoys me when a customer comes here and says, ‘Ah, you serve dog.’ These disparaging words toward immigrants certainly do their damage because people aren’t smart enough to think about what they read in the newspapers and they say, ‘Ah, ok, it’s true!’ and it eventually becomes a total loss!¹³⁵

Thus, the Chinese farmer, who sold Chinese vegetables in Turin, is positioned *outside* a culinary and cultural conception of locally-rooted identity. But in his liminal culinary space, the Chinese vendor engages the same locally space-based strategies that “traditional,” producers do. In this act of categorical contestation, the imagined, representational boundary between Italian “localness” and Chinese “globalness” (i.e. *otherness*) is actually quite porous. Despite his immigrant otherness, the Chinese farmer’s presence in Porta Palazzo’s underneath of traditionally “pure” Italian cuisine is a part and parcel of the local food system!

¹³⁵ Ibid 95

At first glance, the Chinese farmer's existence in Porta Palazzo amid such a mixture of coexisting ethnicities and foreign foodways recalls my earlier mention of the Slow Food movement's biennial event in Turin called Terra Madre. Like Porta Palazzo's multiethnic culinary composition, the conference invites hundreds of food producers, cooks, farmers, and academics from specific food communities across the globe to share their culinary wisdom with each other. After a five day-long conference of sharing knowledge of foodways from discrete food communities around the world, everyone simply goes home. The participants return to their respective homelands and the Piedmontese return to their reaffirmations of *bagna caôda* and *polenta*. Conversely, the Chinese farmer maintains his traditional ways of growing untraditional food in locally-bounded ways. His contradictory position as cultural outsider but territorial co-producer and resident of Turin allows him to *flourish* in his liminal culinary space, and the boundary that represents his culinary otherness becomes less solid.

Kebab Shops: Culinary (Con)fusion

I left the maze of tents and stands in the Porta Palazzo market and wandered down a side street through the surrounding neighborhoods. I passed by a dilapidated apartment complex that overlooked the market. Its roof bristled with satellite antennas and its stucco exterior, long besieged by Piedmontese winters, was peeling and chipped. I noticed a veiled woman lead her child by the hand through the front gate. On a return trip to the market, Jester, my Italian guide, said that the building historically housed many hundreds of Magrebi immigrants. "Like a ghetto, no?" he said.

Though it was still early in the afternoon, my stomach led me in search of sustenance. I followed the aroma of roasting *döner* into a kebab shop called Ristorante Kebab Cartagine Marrakech, two blocks away from the bustling market. The lone employee greeted me quizzically

and we chatted as he shaved off a layer of the spinning *döner* meat and prepared the kebab sandwich.

“Where are you from? Ireland?” he inquired in Italian.

“I am from the United States. Where are you from?”

“Morocco,” he said. “There are many more kebab shops here in Italy than in Morocco!”

“Isn’t kebab a Turkish dish?” I said.

“Yes, well that would make sense then.”

“What is a good Moroccan dish? *Tagine*?” I asked him.

“Yes! We serve *tagine* here too.”

Like the dozens of kebab shops that encircled the Porta Palazzo neighborhood, Ristorante Kebab Cartagine Marrakech was a locus of globalized and migratory foodways. The data presented in the “I Viaggi del Cibo” report confirm this.

In eight out of ten randomly selected kebab shops around Porta Palazzo, the menus featured dishes from many places from around the Mediterranean that, when inscribed and crystallized on the menu, suggest an imaginarily singular Mediterranean



cuisine: couscous, tagine, falafel, babaganoush, hummus, kofta, moussaka, and Greek salad¹³⁶ are often offered alongside the famous *döner kebab* sandwich. In addition, the majority of the kebab shops in the study imported the frozen *döner* meat from a single producer called Karmez

Dönerfabrik GMBH, founded in 1983 in Germany by three Turkish immigrants.¹³⁷ This fusion of foodways from North Africa, the Levant, and Turkey forms a puzzling culinary space in the *kebabberia*.

¹³⁶ Ibid 148

¹³⁷ Ibid 150

The curious kebab, a conflation of many different territorial gastronomic identities, is situated within the Northern Italian food system in a way that has provoked discriminatory political reactions in a number of Northern cities. In the walled Tuscan city of Lucca on Italy's eastern coast, the Lega Nord made a move in January of 2009 to ban any ethnic restaurants from opening inside the city's ancient walls. The same policy was followed in Milan and other towns across Lombardy, in a gesture that the newspaper *La Stampa* called "A new Lombard Crusade against the Saracens." Luca Zaia, the Lega Nord Minister of Agriculture I mentioned earlier, lauded the effort. He said that, "We stand for tradition and the safeguarding of our culture."¹³⁸ What is important in the case of the kebab is that its culinary hybridism does not necessarily allow the Lega to pinpoint exactly *which* immigrant category the kebab belongs to. Kebab shops simply symbolize *otherness* in sharp contrast to a territorially-linked local Northern Italian identity espoused by the Lega Nord. Similarly, the kebab's fusion of Mediterranean foodways and apparent lack of origin run counter to the Slow Food movement's own notion of what is good to eat.

In the Porta Palazzo neighborhood, kebab shops have come to represent yet another symbol of the cultural *otherness* of the place. Stefano's declaration that many Italians regard the Porta Palazzo neighborhood to be dangerous and dirty echoed the sentiments that a number of other people expressed in everyday conversation. Similarly, Fiorenzo Oliva's reflection about a kebab shop in *Il Mondo in Una Piazza* illustrates the culinary and cultural difference kebab shops have come to represent in Turin's food culture:

I have never seen an Italian go into [this kebab shop] and buy something, except on Saturdays, the day when one fearless person among thousands of people who come to the Balon [flea market] enters circumspect to order a kebab...The bar [i.e. kebab shop] is closed at night, obviously. Inside, there are only Romanians...I order a kebab and a coke. They all look at me with suspicion. *I am Italian and alone*. They are asking who I am...I also wonder who they are and from which direction they have traveled

¹³⁸ Owen, Richard. 2009. Italy bans kebabs and other foreign foods from cities. The *Times* Online. Retrieved from http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/food_and_drink/article5622156.ece

in order to drink a beer on a Sunday afternoon in Porta Palazzo... [emphasis added]¹³⁹

I decipher Oliva's words in order to define the contours of a specifically place-based identity. The kebab as a discrete representation of culinary otherness does not collide into Oliva's own notion of a "pure" identity here. What is most important about this insight is that it suggests the shifting boundary between belonging and otherness. On the one hand, Oliva does not belong in the *kebabberia* because he is an Italian who is assumed to shun the place's immigrant connotations. On the other hand, Oliva also calls into question the belonging of the Romanian immigrants who reside in the perplexing deterritorialized space of the kebab shop. Also, he represents just another Italian consumer who frequents *kebabberie* in the city. In that contradictory, global food space, situated within the broader Northern Italian field of identity that exalts localism and territorially-rooted tradition, there is no clear boundary between local and global, belonging and unbelonging.

Herein lies the moment of contradiction: the predominant customers in kebab shops around Porta Palazzo seem to be Italians. In the "Viaggi del Cibo" report, the authors conducted a random sample of ten kebab shops in the city. In four of ten cases, the number of Italian customers was equal to the number of foreign customers (mostly Egyptian). In three of ten cases, the number of Italian customers was greater than the number of foreign customers. Therefore, there were as many or more Italians eating kebabs in 70% of kebab shops.¹⁴⁰ Within the puzzling global space of the *kebabberia*, the representational category of immigrant otherness is essentialized, combined, and served *back* to Italian consumers.

It is truly a beautiful culinary paradox. Like the traditional Italian *osterie* that inscribe *local* traditions on their menu, *kebabberie* are spaces where immigrant otherness and *global* foodways are condensed, crystallized, and inscribed on the menu. Situated in the Torinese food system, the

¹³⁹ Fiorenzo Oliva, *Il Mondo in Una Piazza: Diario di un Anno tra 55 Etnie* (Viterbo: Nuovi Equilibri, 2009), 37-40.

¹⁴⁰ FIERI 147

culinary spaces of kebab shops are sites where an ethnic identity is performed that contradicts the hegemonic system of Italian localism, dialectically reified in the discourses of the Slow Food movement and the Lega Nord, and then serves it back to Italian consumers. In summary, these kebab shops in Porta Palazzo are sites beneath a reaffirmed Northern Italian identity that contest the boundary beneath global and local.

Co-Ethnic Catering and a Shakedown at the Asia-Africa Store

Whereas the many kebab shops that surround the Porta Palazzo market sell to immigrants and Italians alike, the side streets and alleyways in the adjacent neighborhoods are lined with businesses that cater predominantly to the ethnic populations that live in the area. The important point I want to make here is that these immigrant businesses reinforce the dichotomy between a “pure” local identity I have traced through Slow Food and the Lega Nord, and a contaminating global identity represented by immigrants and their cultural foodways. At the same time, however, these spaces of contradiction allow immigrants to contest the imagined boundary between the two representations.

Near the indoor portion of the Porta Palazzo market, where a variety of different meats and seafood are sold, *halal* butcheries offer meat slaughtered according to Islamic rite. These businesses cater to the significant Arab immigrant populations from the Maghreb and the Middle East in the Porta Palazzo neighborhood. Significantly, *halal* meat shops allow for the maintenance of cultural foodways from immigrants’ homelands. Furthermore, these places of gastronomic otherness vis-à-vis a purportedly traditional Italian culinary identity allow co-ethnics to create culinary boundaries between “ethnic” and other categories.¹⁴¹ This categorization seems to parallel the creation of locally-rooted culinary or cultural identities that exclude immigrants—in reverse. But the butcheries’

¹⁴¹ Ibid123

rootedness in the food system of Turin, populated mostly by immigrants, allows these culinary “outsiders” to simultaneously embrace the remembered culinary rites of their homelands while physically integrating into the urban landscape of Turin. To be brief, the global becomes rooted in the local, though it is kept dialectically and discursively separate. Through this process, the boundary becomes blurred between immigrants’ globalized otherness and the primordial purity contained within the local landscape of Northern Italy.

But another key point I want to raise is that these immigrant businesses that cater to the culinary needs of other immigrants in the city occupy in-between spaces that are also contested by Italian political power. I encountered an

intriguing business as I walked the streets around Porta Palazzo. Called the Asia-Africa Market, it was a store operated by a Chinese family that sold food products imported from a number of places in Asia and Africa. In the “Asia” section, jars of curry paste, bags of dried shiitake mushrooms, bottles of fish, soy,



and tamarind sauces, and dried rice noodles adorned the shelves. As I snapped photographs and jotted notes, I turned to see two beret-clad *carabinieri*¹⁴² officers stride down the aisle, their hands clasped on their belt buckles that supported batons and handguns. I walked toward the front of the store, where several of the Chinese employees watched an officer question the business owner. He clutched his People’s Republic of China passport and calmly answered the officer’s questions. Two other *carabinieri* perused the items on the “Africa” shelf with curiosity, grabbing cans and bottles and gesticulating bewilderingly to each other about their contents. A sixth *carabiniere* stood outside.

¹⁴² The Italian national gendarmerie.

Afterward, as we walked down the sidewalk away from the Asia-Africa Market, I asked my Italian friend Jester if the previous scene was a common occurrence. “Yes, it was a black market shakedown. It happens all the time in immigrant stores.” These “shakedowns” targeted and interrogated foreign businesses to verify the legality of their business transactions. We passed by a row of Chinese import stores and an Arab video rental stores. Facetiously, Jester gestured toward a front window mannequin clad in a five-euro blouse imported from China and said, “They’re probably next. Do you think we should warn them?”

Immigrant businesses around Porta Palazzo like the Asia-Africa Market represent globalized spaces where memorialized food products from migrants’ homelands are sold. These are spaces that allow for the maintenance and continuation of remembered culinary traditions from abroad in the new landscape of Northern Italy. The dried rice noodles and imported African cassava materially oppose a locally-rooted Italian identity constructed in different ways by groups like Slow Food and the Lega Nord. These stores become the targets of police surveillance because they *symbolize* immigrant otherness. Although the foreign food itself—the yams and dried fish that line the Asia-Africa Market’s shelves, for example—are not the direct objects of the importunate police surveillance in Porta Palazzo, it remains a central part of a broader category of difference that lies in the shadows beneath hegemonic constructions of Italian local identity.

And the *political* boundary between belonging and unbelonging in Porta Palazzo is strictly enforced by police surveillance,

alluding to a backdrop of immigrants’ political marginalization in Northern Italy. At the same time, however, the persistence of immigrant businesses that cater to immigrant populations around Porta



Palazzo contests and redraws the lines that separate a “pure” Northern Italian identity from a “contaminating” immigrant presence. In the shadows of this hegemonic local Italian identity, immigrants find spaces of creative agency to challenge representational categories in the food system of Turin, despite knowing that they will consequently become targets of state exclusion and surveillance.

More Lega Nord Posters: A Backdrop of Exclusion

I end my exploration of the analytical gateway of the Porta Palazzo market and its surrounding area with a brief discussion about importantly symbolic political posters that were scattered around the walls of Porta Palazzo. These posters recall the Lega Nord’s prescriptive exaltation of an exclusive and “pure” identity belonging to the imagined territory of Padania, and they provide a subtle yet dialectically meaningful backdrop to the multicultural space of Porta Palazzo. The first poster features caricatures of Umberto Bossi and Roberto Maroni, another Lega Nord politician, laughing down at a scene of an Italian patrol craft bearing down upon a boat



overloaded with immigrants. The heading says “KILLERS!” with a statement that reads, “We are going to tell Bossi and the Lega Nord supporters what we think of them.” This political poster speaks *against* the Lega Nord, but its underlying logic recognizes the violent exclusion the Lega professes in regard to immigrants in Italy. I found six others like it scattered around the market.

Past a Chinese “Import-Export” store, its storefront marred by graffiti that said “OCCUPAZIONI”—invaders—I found another poster with very elucidative meaning. This one was simpler: two grainy photographs were situated one on top of the other. In the first, a group of

African men marches in the street. Some wield sticks, and another appears to be carrying a traffic sign. Below it reads simply, “Castel Volturno, September 2008.” In the graphic below, an African man confronts Italian riot police in a photograph labeled “Milan, September 2008.” Indeed, riots broke out in both of these cities in September of 2008. In the Southern Italian city of Castel Volturno, a riot erupted after a clan of the Camorra organized crime syndicate murdered seven African immigrants.¹⁴³ In Milan, a riot broke out after an African immigrant from Burkina Faso was accused of stealing cookies from a café and beaten to death.¹⁴⁴

These posters’ political messages are important on two accounts. First, they serve as symbolic representations of the dichotomy between an imagined identity of pure “Northern Italian-ness” rooted in the region, and the polluting presence of globalized and deterritorialized immigrants in the same place. From these posters that pepper the walls of the market, a subtle yet explicit awareness of the discourse on immigrants’ political otherness championed by the Lega Nord cuts through Porta Palazzo. At the same time, these pictures symbolize a



kind of agential power that emanates from the gritty underneath of an exclusive local Italian identity and quietly contests the boundary that separates immigrants’ globalized position from the local.

Second, and quite significantly, these posters exhibit the overt expressions of violence contained within the dichotomized representations of, and tensions between, local and global

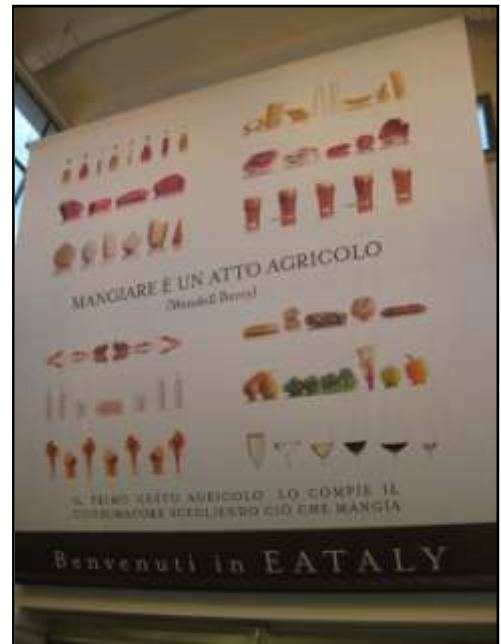
¹⁴³ Niccolo Zancan, "Castel Volturno, la' dove Gomorra resta padrona Un anno dopo la strage dei nigeriani nessuno osa parlare," *La Stampa* (Turin), September 18, 2009, http://archivio.lastampa.it/LaStampaArchivio/main/History/tmpl_viewObj.jsp?objid=9563216 (accessed February 14, 2010).

¹⁴⁴ Paolo Colonnello, "Morte a Milano L'Agguato All'Alba," *La Stampa* (Turin), September 15, 2008, http://archivio.lastampa.it/LaStampaArchivio/main/History/tmpl_viewObj.jsp?objid=8748295 (accessed February 14, 2010).

identities in Italy. I have adopted an analytical lens in this thesis that uses various aspects of territorially-bound culinary traditions in order to understand the immigration situation in Northern Italy. My exploration of identity has been fundamentally linked to notions of territorial belongingness. In doing so, I have attempted to express the more implicit forms of cultural and symbolic violence contained in the deep layers of ideology and identity representation. Nevertheless, the backdrop for this cultural and culinary exclusion of immigrants in Italy is frequently far more outwardly violent than I have discussed.

From Porta Palazzo to Eataly

My experience in the culinary and cultural underneath of Porta Palazzo's multicultural milieu revealed the seemingly unnatural presence of the global among the local. This last subsection contrasts the contradictory culinary presence of the global in Porta Palazzo by once again comparing it to the Slow Food movement's professed local and traditional "gastronomic" identity. I move from that massive multicultural market to an equally though differently symbolic market several kilometers away. Sponsored but not directly run by the Slow Food movement, the huge indoor food store called Eataly represents perhaps the quintessential performance of local and traditional foodways in Northern Italy gathered in one place.



I approached the edifice of the renovated Torinese vermouth factory and walked through the front doors of the massive Italian marketplace called Eataly to be greeted by an enormous sign

that displayed a quote by the American author and agriculturalist Wendell Berry: “*Mangiare È Un Atto Agricolo.*” Eating is an agricultural act.

Eataly is a store that specializes in only local and regional Italian food and wines. Despite its specificity, the breadth of its products was breathtaking. The store was divided into various categorical sections that featured traditional products as well as a small cafeteria counter where customers could pull up a stool and eat a meal that features the products in that specific section. Customers milled around these counters, and cooks furiously assembled plates of *La Carne* (from the meat section), *Il Pesce* (fish), and *I Salumi e I Formaggi* (cured meats and cheese). Near some of the most prized Slow Food presidium products, revered for their longstanding traditional craftsmanship, poster boards described the story of the farmer, the herder, the cheese maker, or the butcher who produced them. In the basement, a mind-bogglingly expansive wine cellar held thousands of bottles of Italian wine. Eataly was an encapsulation of the local, traditional foodways that have been revered and defended by the Slow Food movement.



I sat at the meat counter with Jester, who is an Eataly employee and sells the venerated *tartufi bianchi* (white truffles) during the growing season. We devoured piles of *carne cruda*, the raw Piedmontese specialty. He chatted amicably with a woman behind the counter who seared steaks on a grill until they were just barely warmed through. “*Molto raro,*” she declared.

“*Albanese,*” Jester murmured to me. Albanian.

“Are there many immigrants who work here?” I asked.

“There are many. Around fifty percent,” he said. Paradoxical indeed.

Jester's comment was nonchalant, but it cuts right to the contradictory core of a local culinary identity vis-à-vis the destructiveness of the global. In modern Italy, immigrants—the global transients who are represented outside a pure Italian identity—occupy particular spaces that necessarily *comprise* this local identity! Even in a place like Eataly that represents the most quintessential distillation of local Northern Italian culinary specificities, immigrants are an important component part.

After our *molto raro* meal, I conducted an unstructured interview with Eataly's resident gastronome, "Carlo." The author of several books on traditional Piedmontese cooking and a veritable wealth of culinary knowledge, the wizened old food writer proceeded to tell me his thoughts about the impact of foreign foodways on traditional regional cuisine. Slowly, with a thick Piedmontese accent, Carlo told me, "Like there is literary contamination, there is gastronomic contamination. We see a new form of cuisine that is not fusion—it is *confusion*! Enough of this 'modernity!'"



"Then is it possible for foreigners to cook traditional Piedmontese food?" I probed.

"If the cook is culturally prepared, he's a true professional. Too often recently in Italy, however, this cultural preparedness has been overlooked. People who have never touched a dish in their lives can become a cook overnight."

"What do you think is so unique about Piedmontese cuisine, compared to others?" I asked.

Piedmontese cuisine has always been eclectic...It has taken the best from other cuisines and has made it natively Piedmontese. Not all countries bring something...only those with a rich culinary tradition. It's always been a Piedmontese

tradition to make its own things that are not native and absorb them so well that they become as if they *were* native.

Carlo's words get at the crux of this thesis. From this wise old Italian food writer, a crucial theme becomes clear and helps clarify much of the ambivalent gastronomic position of immigrants in Porta Palazzo vis-à-vis a Slow Food-promoted notion of traditional, pure cuisine. The reflexive, locally-rooted claim to an "authentic" identity rooted in Northern Italy I have described thus far incorporates two fundamental ideologies. One can be described as primordialist, and this segment of the local identity is most potently distilled by the Lega Nord's discourse. According to this assumption, the claim to a locally-rooted identity is inherent simply to the state of being in a particular place for a long period of time.¹⁴⁵

But the second ideological foundation to this identity claim, as Carlo explained, is a concept in regard to the cultural and culinary *absorbency* of local food traditions. This is hardly a novel idea: the historical migration and subsequent agricultural and gastronomic reproduction of foods (pasta from China, tomatoes and corn from Mesoamerica, etc.) has given rise to the regional cuisines around the world we recognize today. From a detailed historical account, nearly *every* cuisine may be considered a product of gradual culinary "fusion." According to Carlo, and echoed in much of the Slow Food discourse I analyzed previously, the process of absorbing foreign traditions is appropriate as long as the transformation is *slow* and *natural*. Conversely, the (con)fusing *immediacy* with which the kebab scrambles gastronomic traditions and the *rapidity* with which immigrants arrive and coexist among Italians is incongruous with an understanding of slow, natural integration.

Even the Lega Nord, I argue, implicitly accepts this paradoxical integrative trajectory. The Lega's concocted territory of Padania is imagined to be among the rest of "modernized" Western Europe. Its high economic performance and cultural superiority relative to the rest of Southern Italy, for example, puts it in a league above. However, this discourse of modernity and cultural

¹⁴⁵ Though this duration is never really specified, and it beckons further research.

superiority does not explicitly account for the economic utility—no, the economic *necessity*—of immigrants in the local food system. The Lega's simultaneous rejection of immigrant outsiders and the party's aspirations to join the rest of a modernized Western Europe have given rise to contradictory spaces in which immigrants are situated. And as I have shown, the process of uncovering the ideological layers of the Lega's uncontested “pure” identity, rooted in the fertile earth of “Padania,” shows that immigrants are dialectically part and parcel of the dichotomy between “local” purity and “global” contamination.

Section Conclusion

To conclude, the contradictory global spaces around the Porta Palazzo market in Turin have revealed the contested and shifting boundary between “local” and “global.” As the Slow Food movement and the Lega Nord have constructed locally-rooted identities with respect to the deleterious global, they have constructed a boundary that simultaneously cordons off immigrants and their foodways but also affords them the cultural and culinary leeway to contest the boundary itself.

CONCLUSION

This work has combined a variety of conceptual and empirical ingredients drawn from the simmering immigration situation in Northern Italy. Theoretically, I grounded my exploration in an anthropology of cuisine; the heuristic devices of imagination and memory were especially important, as I have scrutinized how memories of food and culture embedded in the local landscape have informed current imaginations to construct place-based identities. The Slow Food movement and the Lega Nord were the empirical elements that allowed me to more deeply understand the ways that concepts like memory, tradition, imagination, locality, and legacies, have coalesced to form local hegemonies that appear to exclude immigrants. But along with the element of boundary-making, I have most notably explored the act of boundary-*breaking* in the globalized underneath of hegemonic representations of “the local.”

The central argument in thesis has stated that the Slow Food movement and the Lega Nord have each revealed their own reflexive, locally-rooted claims to an “authentic” identity in Northern Italy. These claims to a “pure” local identity have been situated at the intersection between the notions of food, identity, and place in ways that have both explicitly and implicitly excluded immigrants from assimilating into “the local.”

To summarize my undertaking, I began Chapter One with a review of literature broken into four parts that situated my own argument amid a scholarly conversation about food and immigration in Italy. My theoretical framework garnered pertinent concepts to show the ways that food is an essential and richly symbolic element of the human experience. As people make food in imaginative ways that evoke remembered repasts, food makes people respond in immensely symbolic ways that have allowed me to read deeply into parts of Northern Italian local society. I subsequently reviewed

scholarship about Slow Food, the Lega Nord, and immigration in Italy in order to situate my own intervention amid these conversations of culture, politics, and cuisine.

Chapter Two initiated my culinary journey in and around the city of Bra, the nucleus of the Slow Food movement. I investigated the ways that the Slow Food movement has passionately reified local traditions as a response to the perceived destructiveness of gastronomic globalization. After employing my own arduous ethnographic methods, I elucidated some of the local culinary traditions the Slow Food movement has co-opted into its own defense of “the local.” I then discussed the incursion of “the global” into “the local,” with the presence of immigrant foodways in the Slow Food sphere of gastronomic authenticity in the Langhe.

Chapter Three delved into the legacy of internal migration that has buttressed the current climate of exclusion as foreign immigrants arrive in Northern Italy. My conversation with a Southern Italian descendent aboard a train from Bra to Turin revealed the Lega Nord’s historical boundary-making against constructed “otherness.” Yet the boundary between a “pure” Northern identity and Southern Italian alterity has been contested as these migrants integrate into Northern society.

Chapter Four pulled us through the analytical portal of the Porta Palazzo market in Turin in order to unsettle the “pure” local identity I have traced through Slow Food and the Lega Nord. Porta Palazzo was an immigrant space in the urban landscape of Turin, a contradictory locus of globalized foodways situated in the underneath of a place-based identity representation that purportedly belongs in Northern Italy. I hoped to show that the immigrants in this contradictory space contest the boundary that separates “the local” from “the global” in ways that suggest the ultimate frailty of the boundary itself.

So the ultimate work I have assembled from these theoretical and empirical ingredients tries to make sense of the exclusionary boundary in Northern Italy that separates deterritorialized immigrants from identities rooted in the local territories of the region. But my real contribution to

the table that seats scholars of food and migration is that I move *beyond* the binary representations of “global” and “local” to perceive the ways that immigrants contest the shifting boundary between the ostensibly concrete categories of belonging and exclusion in Northern Italy.

My *modus operandi* for this thesis has scrutinized migration tensions through a culinary lens. But more importantly, my gastronomic vantage point has sought out the ways in which food is implicated in the exclusionary *representing* and symbolic boundary-making that constructs categories of “purity” and “contamination.” I have made wide use of the theoretical ingredients of imagination and memory that connect the trifecta of food, identity, and place. But I hope to avoid the line of reasoning that the representational exclusion of foreign immigrants is somehow unreal, a false invention that has no actual function in social relations in Northern Italy. On the contrary, the forces of exclusion and boundary-making manifest in real—and sometimes violent—ways. In many facets of their political, economic, cultural, and culinary lives, immigrants must confront xenophobia and exclusion in their new homes. Similarly, the conception of “traditional,” “authentic,” cuisine is equally experienced in the everyday gastronomic reality of Northern Italy, and perhaps does not warrant the number of incriminating quotation marks I have employed throughout this work.

But where does this leave us? My argument, though it probes deeply into the very powers of exclusion that boil and churn so vigorously in Northern Italy, has problematized the culinary and cultural boundary between belonging and exclusion in the region and has exposed a new strategy to comprehend the immigration situation. Yet we are still left between two seemingly contradictory propositions: On the one hand, this thesis is about culinary traditions. And I do not advocate a kind of Pangaeaic global foodscape, one that turns back the hands of time to embrace *all* specific culinary traditions as natural. The world’s gastronomic peculiarities have given rise to *polenta con salciccia* and to Moroccan *tagines*, and local traditions are crucial components of cultural identities *everywhere*. On the other hand, this thesis is about the tensions about immigration in Northern Italy, which have

frequently and unfortunately manifested as xenophobia and exclusion. These intolerant social relations are hard to stomach.

In the context of immigration to Western Europe, the Italian experience is unique for many reasons, owing largely to an idiosyncratic history of regional fragmentation and internal migration and the lasting legacies of both. But my work here is significant in a broader picture because it presents a new way of looking at the collision between locally-entrenched identities and immigrants as these people arrive in new places and attempt to integrate. On one hand, these locally-embedded identities become reified and further entrenched as protective barriers are erected to defend against the perceived invasion of the global. But on the other hand, this boundary-making puts subaltern immigrants in a position to creatively contest the boundary itself.

If defending locally-rooted foodways is a strategy that local groups employ to reaffirm their identity, and if constructed notions of “pure” cuisine serve as symbolic markers for specific cultures, then what I have shown is that the symbolic power of food can function the other way around for immigrants. In this thesis, I have described spaces of culinary contradiction within which immigrants actively contest the boundary that separates them from a territorially-rooted “pure” identity. Understanding the ways that food is implicated in this boundary-contestation is a revealing methodological strategy that can be extrapolated for further research in other places where immigrants encounter locally-rooted identities.

During the week before I was to depart the Langhe, the mid-September skies filled with dark, heavy clouds and it rained in torrential bouts. At some point in an afternoon downpour, Vincenzo, the Italian farmer with whom I lived, squinted worriedly at the sky. “This is not good for the grapes. They will fill with water and the wine will be bad, maybe.” The fat drops turned the gray

earth of the fields into a muddy slick that stuck to my shoes and crept underneath my fingernails.

But the vegetable plants on the farm reveled in the rain.

Shortly thereafter, as the airplane bore me from that rainy landscape toward an equally wet one in Seattle, I munched through the last bites of a sack full of ripe figs Sarbre had given me for the trip home. She also sent me with several bags of *biscotti* she baked in her wood burning oven and a couple jars of *dado*, her briny vegetable tapenade. With each deeply sweet bite of the dark green fruit, I remembered sitting in the shade of the massive tree in front of the farmhouse, its figs occasionally falling to the ground with an unexpected *plop*. The flight attendant handed me a UNITED STATES CUSTOMS DECLARATIONS FORM. Question number eleven asked me, “Are you bringing with you:

- a. Fruits, plants, food, or insects?
- b. Meats, animals, or animal/wildlife products?
- c. Disease agents, cell cultures, or snails?
- d. Soil, or have you visited a farm/ranch/pasture outside the United States?”

Smirking, my fingers sticky from the figs, and with dirt still under my fingernails, I marked “No” in each box. I left all those things in the muddy earth of the Langhe, where they “belonged.”

