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# *The Transnational Food Network of the Italian American Families. Business, Gender and Generation at the beginning of the XX century*

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## **Abstract**

This essay will focus on the relations between food, gender, and generation among Italian Americans at the beginning of the XX century. Four different issues are explored: the generational connections related to food consumption, the roles of wives/mothers, husbands/fathers, sons and daughters and their relations inside the ethnic family, the transnational business based on family-run companies and their Atlantic trade network, and the influence of the American society among second generation Italian Americans. Families had been the center of a generational shock, in which parents forced sons and daughters to accept an "invented" tradition to keep the power on new generations. Food also played an important role in family business development in Italy and United States. These transnational companies established a well-structured network that molded the Italian and American industrial landscape. This article will correlate cultural and social history of the Italian American families with economic and business history to show the way Italians shaped their ethnic identity in the United States.

**Keywords:** Food History, Transnational Studies, Italian Americans, Business History, Migration History.

## *1. Food and generational connections*

At the turn of the Century a growing number of Italians migrated from the newborn Kingdom to America. The first wave of Italian migration was mainly characterized by male temporary workers – sometimes they were defined "men without women" (Harney, 1979) and their wives "widows in white" (Reeder, 2003) – with a high percentage of return trips to Italy. After World War I, restrictions in the American migration laws, family reunifications and second-generation growth, helped the establishment of an ethnic resident community in America. Therefore, advertisements – and their messages – published on ethnic newspapers must take into consideration not only the classical categories of race, class, and gender, but

also generation, that caused conflicts, problems, and economic opportunities inside families and communities.

Cultural and historical experience of Italian migrants must be analyzed following the transnational approach, that provides tools to understand migrants as people who build bonds in the hosting country and from the land of origin. Members of the diaspora don't lose their original identity at all, even when migrations are permanent, and have ties to two worlds without being fully part of either (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc, 1994; Choate 2008; Green and Waldinger, 2016; Harzig, Hoerder and Gabaccia, 2009; Waldinger 2015). Ewa Morawska (2001) and Nancy Foner (2005) have shown how the duality of this phenomenon makes migrants both *im*-migrants – people that go *to* a country – and *e*-migrants – people that come *from* a country. Italian experience can be explained analyzing familial transnational networks in an age during which was taking place a national building process that consequently established connections with the identities of families “here” and “there”. Scholars such as Roger Waldinger (2015) have defined these dynamics “deterritorialized nation-state building”, where nation building goes beyond the geographical and political boundaries of a State and members of the diaspora are connected to two worlds(Choate, 2008).After Italian Risorgimento, the nation-state concept evolved to a community by descend, deeply linked to blood and kinship (Banti, 2011). Consequently, the national idea in Italy was structured towards the definitions of “us” and “they”, or “in” and “out” the familial community. In addition, during Italian Liberal Age, Governments tried to nationalize Italians bot hat home and abroad and to keep Italianness among second generations. During the first Italian Ethnographic Conference, Francesco Baldasseroni (1912, 179-81) talked about the ways millions of Italians could keep, lose, or modify their own traditions in the continuing exchange between the culture of their homeland and the hosting country. Food, with language and religion, emerged as a central element to keep tradition alive.

In the 20s and 30sthe second generation – who knew Italy just by the stories told by parents or through mass media and cinema – quantitatively surpassed the first one. This new generation, often disparagingly described as ‘hyphenated generation’ by the WASP élite, was more accustomed to American foodways and refused the culture of mothers and fathers, causing a generational shock. Parents forced sons and daughters to accept a

tradition to keep the power on new generations. Actually, the tradition they claimed to belong to, was an ideological construction suitable for the American life, that witnessed the decline of the patriarchal family. In this view, the culture, the tradition of familism and the idea that Italians eat “like a family” are invented traditions, and the Sunday dinner (Cinotto, 2001, 29-118) seems to be a generational compromise. In addition, during the interwar years, Fascism tried to foster national and ethnic identity among Italian Americans to pretend loyalty during economic and political campaigns, using a so-called parallel diplomacy (Luconi & Tintori, 2004; Pretelli, 2005) based on cultural (Baldoli, 2000; Carletti & Giometti, 2016; Cavarocchi, 2010; Frezza Biccocchi, 1970; Pretelli 2006), economic and political strategies (Pretelli, 2009, 2012; Santoro, 2003). Through this kind of diplomacy Italian Americans were asked to choose Italian food first to help the military, economic and political goals of Italy.

Food and foodways are essential to understand the transnational dynamics acting in migration processes. Foodways are one the most important elements that characterize a group. The illusion to cook and eat the traditional way fosters the myth of the authentic origins of food and practices, shaping and reinforcing the idea of fixed nature over time. Foodways go beyond the issues about “what” we eat or drink. It is essential, indeed, to answer “when”, “where”, “why”, “with whom” we eat or drink something. Buying and consuming specific products can define gender roles inside families, especially the relations husband/wife and parents/sons. Daily food practices are deeply connected with gender and generation categories, especially in the domestic sphere (Parsons, 2015; Cairns, Johnston, 2015; Beagan et al., 2014; Muzzarelli, Tarozzi, 2003; Garroni & Vezzosi, 2009). According to Giovanna Campani (2000, p.122) the lives of migrant women and their daughters cannot be merely described as a conflict between two cultures, but we need to focus on the combination of different and new cultural models, where generation is crucial.

Starting from the works of the main scholars who analyzed the political (Luconi 2005a), economic (Luconi, 2002, 2005b), cultural (Bevilacqua, 1981; Cinotto, 2001, 2008, 2010, 2018; Diner, 2001; Gabaccia, 1998; Teti, 2001; Zanoni 2010, 2014, 2018) and gender (Zanoni, 2012) issues that influenced the dietary customs of first and second generations and the notion of Italianness connected to food consumption, this essay will explore the transnational food networks established by migrant families and the

meanings connected to food and family in a diasporic background. Central historical sources will be the advertisements published on ethnic newspapers, that depicted and promoted Italian and American foodways influencing different generations and their families, and the interviews with second and third generation Italian Americans who described their childhood and adolescence in the ethnic neighbor during the 20s and 30s.

## 2. *Wives and husbands, sons and daughters*

After Italian national reunification began a process of gender distinction to define the masculine and feminine roles of the new “Italian” citizens. Following this trend, Italian food trademarks chose different representations of Italian productivity: the first one was related to emigration, especially masculine, and economic and commercial development. The second one depicted Italian women tied with the old-fashioned world of the countryside, alien from the industrial modernity and rationality, a sort of authenticity and tradition keeper. This is particularly clear among some Italian products recognized as symbols of Italianness, such as tomatoes. The trademark “La Napoletana”, for example, depicted a woman in traditional dress inside a tomato<sup>1</sup>. The images of tradition, Italianness and authenticity were therefore strictly connected.



Fig 1. Advertisement of “Pomodori La Napoletana”, in *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts*, 18 novembre 1922, in IHRCA.

<sup>1</sup> Ad in *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts*, 18 novembre 1922, in IHRCA.

During World War I, Italian women began to be depicted not just as simple migrants, but also as active consumers of ethnic products. Economic and cultural ties established between mothers, daughters, and grandmothers on the two sides of the Atlantic Ocean played a central role in shaping transnational consuming identities. This active role hardly fitted with the convictions of Italian and American ruling elite that considered female migration as a passive element of family reunification (Gabaccia, 1996). Ties built with the family left in Italy were deeply exploited by advertisements in the ethnic newspapers, that explained how women could maintain Italian traditions and commercial networks through consumption. According to Sarah Mahler and Patricia Pessar (2001) women operated in transnational networks building the so called “gendered geographies of power”. Thanks to this model scholars such as Elizabeth Zanoni developed an analysis where Italian American women consumption activities “connected the private domestic realm to a transnational public sphere of commerce and trade” (Zanoni, 2014, p. 79). Consequently, Italy was represented as a Nation both of male producers and female consumers. If one of the main purposes aimed to link consumption to support the workers of the land of origin the roles had to be strictly gender divided. In a 1937 Florio advertisement, while male workers were depicted in the factory putting labels on the bottles of marsala, women were shown farming and harvesting grapes in the vineyard. The commercial chain was therefore composed by a class of male workers who produced food that mothers and wives in the United States would have bought thanks to their ability to recognize Italian authentic quality. Food could also mold conjugal relations through advertisements that portrayed men suggesting women how to make husbands happy. In December 1926 the Banfi company, an Italian American import and retail company, published a “Love Letter” wrote by an anonymous husband who suggested women to buy four bottles of liquor for their loved ones for Christmas, an appropriate gift for men<sup>2</sup>. Atlantic Macaroni company published a letter wrote from Chicago by miss Rosina to her brother to thank him to have sent her a box of

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<sup>2</sup> “Che cosa offrirete all’uomo del vostro cuore il giorno della festa universale più intima e cara? Fate trovare sul tavolo 4 bottiglie una per qualità di: Marsala Florio, Ramazzotti, Fernet de Vecchi, Vermouth Cora che saranno 4 sorgenti di benessere e d’allegria per voi e per lui”. Advertisement in *Corriere d’America*, 23 dicembre 1926, in IHRCA.

maccheroni to make a “bella figura” with relatives, friends and paesani<sup>3</sup>. This kind of dialogue was an exception because the exchange of opinions about home economics or childcare was generally a female issue. In another advertisement Atlantic Macaroni reported a telephone dialogue between a woman and a grocer, underlining that the presence of the Maccheroni Caruso Brand could have brought back “Peace in family”<sup>4</sup>. In a similar way, John Fante (1938) described that spaghetti cooked by the mother of the young Bandini symbolized the rediscovered Italian family union.

Since the beginning of the century, furthermore, ethnic newspapers hosted sections specifically dedicated to women, such as *Per Voi, Signore*, then in 1933 *Per Voi, Signore e Signorine* maybe more appropriate to include younger generations, and *Nel Regno della donna* on the *Progresso Italo Americano*, *Per la famiglia e la casa*, on *Corriere d’America* and *La Guida della Buona Massaia* on *Tribuna Italiana d’America*. Often in these sections female became famous role models, for example Isabelle Kay, who gave information and suggestions on home economics and childcare, Betty Crocker (Marks, 2005) and Petronilla (Muzzarelli, 2013). The women depicted, anyway, were usually assimilated in the modern American consumption system but, being connected to Italian tradition, they could offer a correct and healthy life of the family. The wife was also e mother, a role that must provide sons the possibility to eat filling and healthy food, something that previous generations lacked. Images of women could also recall generational relations, for example the role of daughter. The Ronzoni Macaroni tagliatelle were as good as “your mother did”<sup>5</sup>, becoming therefore n authentic product that daughters, once became wives, could use to make their husbands happy. In food advertisements can be found dialogues between women about past generations know-how. This knowledge was perceived as an essential element to satisfy the tastes and

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<sup>3</sup>Advertisement in *Corriere d’America*, 19 dicembre 1926, in IHRCA.

<sup>4</sup> “Mandatemi subito 5 casse assortite di Maccheroni Caruso Brand ché non voglio mai più restar senza. Ho provato maccheroni di altra marca ed è stato un vero disappunto per me e mio marito, e, siccome non voglio altre spiacevoli sorprese, d’ora innanzi per la mia tavola vi è posto solamente per i famosi Maccheroni Caruso Brand che non mancherò di raccomandare ai miei parenti ed a tutte le famiglie che conosco”. Advertisement in *Corriere d’America*, 26 luglio 1925, in IHRCA.

<sup>5</sup>Advertisement in *Corriere d’America*, 14 novembre 1926, in IHRCA.

desires of men. In 1939, Caffè Pastene, on the *Progresso Italo Americano*, reported a dialogue between newlyweds particularly pointed to women readers. The wife asked to her husband how much lucky he felt to have married a woman that was able to cook so well and he answered that he was happy because the coffee was as good as his mother one (Zanoni 2012, p. 47). In this example Caffè Pastene tried to become the channel used by women of different generations to preserve the tradition of Italian coffee culture. In general, mothers had to be a sort of cultural transmission tool of the so called “belonging structures” (Gedalof, 2009), for example foodways, traditions and childcare (Bona, 2018; Cinotto, 2018; Giunta & Sciorra, 2014). Mothers tried, not always with success, to teach to their daughters to cook Italian and regional traditional recipes, such as ravioli. Often parents introduced their sons and daughters to traditional rites, keeping a strong gender division. Mothers taught to daughters to cook tomato sauce<sup>6</sup> and bread<sup>7</sup>, fathers brought along their sons to see the preparation of wine and cold cuts. According to the kind of education parents wanted to transmit to their daughters, to be a good Italian wife it was necessary to learn cooking, especially in the Italian way. Women were therefore depicted not only as mothers and wives, but also as daughters, who, once married, must follow the tradition of their ancestors, especially for what concerns foodways.

I learned everything from my mother. [...] Well, I learned how to make all these Easter pies or cookies and the different kind of cooking...everything Italian cooking. Now I got married. I was only 15 years old when I got married. And I... I got along. I knew how to cook. And when I'd make bread I knew how to do everything<sup>8</sup>.

Since childhood, the attentions of daughters had to be focused on their fathers. Felsina Ramazzotti, for example, pointed its Christmas message to daughters, suggesting them to give a bottle of liquor to their fathers as a useful and kind gift for the male breadwinner<sup>9</sup>. At the same time husbands, fathers and sons were offered roles too, especially safeguarding and care of wives. The VOV liquor, for example, suggested a man how to resolve the

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with G.B., in IHRCA, COHP.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with T.D., in IHRCA, COHP.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with R.C., in IHRCA, COHP, p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> Advertisement in *Corriere d'America*, 2 dicembre 1926, in IHRCA.

health problems of his wife<sup>10</sup>. Father had to teach male traditions to his sons, as showed by Chianti Melini wine. Sons had to learn traditions and responsibilities of their lineage and at the same time fathers had to transmit good hospitality manners<sup>11</sup>. According to an interview with a second-generation Italian American, however, there were some exceptions to this scheme. In his family the mother was the keeper of the tradition of wine making, because she learnt in Italy how to distinguish by touch the most appropriate grape to have the best wine quality<sup>12</sup>.

The roles showed were confirmed in the dynamics of the Sunday dinners, towards which second generations built – or refused – their Italian American identity. These images provided an ideological support and the confirmation that the Italian traditions were correctly followed in a public and private sphere, defining cultural boundaries between Italian neighbors and those of the “others”. The Sunday dinner ritual was used also to define the Italian “whiteness”, an ethnic group that ate “like a family”, in contrast to the newly arrived, especially Puerto Rican (Cinotto, 2001, pp. 29-145). Possibilities to keep bonds through food with kin in Italy could also be imagined or real. In 1926 Eugene Petrosecolo – an Italian American merchant – offered to Italian American consumers the opportunity to send Perugina chocolate to relatives and friends for Christmas<sup>13</sup>. In this way migrants could share with the Italian family a common rite through the consumption of a traditional Italian product.

### 3. *Business, networks, and transnational families*

The network established by recurring transatlantic voyages of people and ethnic entrepreneurs connected the familial relationships with the import-export marketplaces, feeding a wide movement of assets and goods. The letters sent to and from Italy reveal a high presence of packages containing beans, chestnuts, and dried mushrooms to the United States and coffee to Italy. These foods became the tools to keep bonds left at home

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<sup>10</sup> “Mia moglie allatta e ogni giorno deperisce maggiormente, cosa debbo fare?”, Advertisement in *Corriere d’America*, 31 gennaio 1926, in IHRCA.

<sup>11</sup> Advertisement in *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts*, 7 gennaio 1939, in IHRCA.

<sup>12</sup> *Interview with L.P.*, in IHRCA, COHP.

<sup>13</sup> Advertisement in *Corriere d’America*, 6 novembre 1926, in IHRCA.

alive and not to lose the original identity<sup>14</sup>. The letters helped also to inform specific branches of the family about economic conditions or working and commercial opportunities that could be established between the two nations<sup>15</sup>. Sometimes migrants attached photographs where they showed they ate as the affluent society did in their homeland – especially meat and white bread – witnessing an achieved richness in the hosting society (Cinotto, 2009). They often sent home remittances to improve family conditions and to try to move up the social and economic ladder of their sons (Corti, 2009), or to buy land or a new home. It commonly was a familial strategy structured on men leaving home for some years – five years on average – while wives invested remittances showing a specific agency in breaking social norms. If the male breadwinner could still decide how to share the remittances, women at home could get in touch with “public institutions, notary’s offices, took decisions about economic transactions and land commerce” (Corti, 2009, p. 312), traditionally considered specific occupations for men. This exchange of information, goods and assets could establish well-structured networks based on family relations, like the Argentinian one that involved the Solas, described by Samuel Baily (1988), or the three branches of the Zanones, Boggianos and Signaigos. These branches connected Sopralacroce, near Borzonasca in the province of Genoa, to California, Illinois, and Missouri<sup>16</sup>. The American branch of the Zanones can be found in America already in XIX century when Domenico and Erasmo Zanone started managing farms in Eureka, California. Sopralacroce remained the headquarter of all businesses, especially when Giovanni Battista Zanone began to work as attorney for relatives and migrated friends who owned plots of land in Liguria and in the province of Piacenza. The Boggianos established their prosperity capitalizing the earnings of sharecropping and financial credit. Agostino Boggiano used these assets to invest in some business not directly linked to farmland. The years covered by the correspondence reveal the presence of almost three little companies directly run by Agostino. The first one, in 1885, was the “Boggiano, wholesale and retail dealer in and shipper of foreign, California and domestic fruits”. Then, a restaurant and a pasta

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<sup>14</sup> “Epistolario Raffetto”, “Epistolario Lagormarsino”, “Epistolario Morello Podestà”, in Archivio Ligure della Scrittura Popolare (from now ALSP).

<sup>15</sup> Carteggio Costa-Rebizzo, in ALSP.

<sup>16</sup> Espitolario Zanone, in ALSP.

factory, “Uccello & Boggiano”, then known as “Chicago Macaroni Company” that won the special ribbon prize during the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, thanks to the production of sixty-five different kinds of pasta (Portaluppi, 2011). Steven J. Boggiano started a bar in St. Louis with his brother Angelo. The Signaigos, third branch of the family, were merchants and dealers of Californian and tropical fruit in St. Louis, working not only in the city market but establishing business relationships in Illinois, Indiana, Kansas and Kentucky, thanks to the American rail network. Family networks could also serve to establish multinational companies that deeply influenced the economic developments of both Nations. A paradigmatic example can be symbolized by the Del Gaizos, a family of Neapolitan origin. Vincenzo Del Gaizo, one of the first Italian exporters of canned vegetables, established a company in 1880 focused on the North American market. After Pure Food and Drugs Act (1906) he understood that his company had to follow the new American food production standards to defeat the competition in that market. So, he decided to split the company in two branches, an Italian one – ran by his wife and his three sons – and an American one – ran by himself. After his death, his sons developed the company establishing bonds with Italian and Italian American business communities, adopting modern and efficient means of production and promotion (De Ianni, 1998). The role the entire family, and especially Florindo Del Gaizo, played in the ethnic community went beyond the economic and financial milieu. Florindo took part in the “Serie Napoletana” of the Fernet-Branca campaign in 1926<sup>17</sup>, proving not only the importance of his family in the transnational food network, but also the centrality of family and entrepreneurship in the ethnic community. Family networks and the ability to adapt in different social and economic backgrounds were essential to develop the Locatelli company, especially when the sons of Giovanni Locatelli followed his path expanding the international market of the company. Umberto, in Italy, was the reference point, while Mattia from 1906 to 1915 lived in Buenos Aires to lead the Argentinian branch and Ercole opened new offices in New York (Mantegazza, 2005). These companies, born as little family-run business, once inherited by sons, became international corporations assimilated in the American capitalistic dynamics.

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<sup>17</sup>Advertisement in *Corriere d’America*, 28 marzo 1926, in IHRCA.

The ethnic entrepreneurship included not only big companies, but, above all, the small grocery store, often family run. Robert Foerster (1919) showed how easy was for a family to start a little fruit stand, because the start-up capital was limited, and relatives represented free labor that worked to develop the business. These stores were key actors in defining the borders of the ethnic neighborhoods because represented the presence of a specific ethnic community in that area. The ethnic grocery store also represented a landmark that could guarantee the authenticity and the quality of the products sold. This was particularly clear during the campaign against food sophistication and counterfeiting. Some advertisements asked consumers to buy olive oil boxes only from the local store<sup>18</sup>, that also provided home delivery to women that could not go away from home because of their job<sup>19</sup>. In addition, after the working day, the grocery store could become a place to hang out for men. A second-generation Italian American remember that her father's grocery store usually reopened at evening to let men talk about sport, politics, and smoke the cigar<sup>20</sup>. This role played by the grocery store made the family name known, respected and more powerful among the ethnic community. Pietro Pastene, from Genoa, for example, was honored on the *Gazzetta del Massachusetts* and described as a sort of new Columbus of Italian merchants. He established the Pastene company in 1874 in Boston and then his sons transformed it in a big multinational company, adapting it to the modern American economic structures<sup>21</sup>.

When the second generation grew up, relations with Italy became more symbolic and negotiated with the American culture, that included for example an increased attention to the nutritional and sanitary issues linked with production and packing of products. Consequently, advertisements underlined modern and sanitary qualities of the production – American qualities – connected with the Italian know-how. In 1915 Viviano & Bros Macarony Company – Chicago – highlighted its American hygienic

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<sup>18</sup> Advertisements in *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts*, 14 aprile 1934, in IHRCA.

<sup>19</sup> *Interview with N.D.C.*, in IHRCA, Chicago Oral History Project.

<sup>20</sup> *Interview with N.T.*, in IHRCA, Telegraph Hill Dwellers, San Francisco, Oral Histories Project, Box 2.

<sup>21</sup> *Pastene si trasferisce in grandiosa località*, in *La Gazzetta del Massachusetts*, 13 febbraio 1937, in IHRCA.

production process in the biggest pasta factory of the United States<sup>22</sup>, the Iowa Macaroni-Des Moines –was described as the one of the most innovative factories ever<sup>23</sup> and the Ronzoni Macaroni – New York – combined American modernity of the factory to the Italian know-how of the workers. Second generation ethnic entrepreneurs understood they could offer the so-called Italian style products to let Italian Americans experience Italy outside Italy. These products projected a national identity among migrants, offering images and meanings useful to deal with a daily life in a society that considered Italians at the bottom of the racial and economic ladder. Moreover, these entrepreneurs realized that Italian food demand did not imply authentic food but a symbolic consumption that could be obtained through specific marketing campaigns. Italian American manufacturers were aware of the prejudices about processed food by Italian consumers, especially first-generation women, who considered cooking a way to affirm their own identity and role inside the ethnic family and community. Consequently, they offered to consumers the possibility to go back home with imaginary and consume Italy outside Italy, fostering the sense of nostalgia among first generations.

#### 4. *Different food for a different generation*

During the interwar years Italian American ethnic newspapers showed a countertrend in depicting women if confronted with Fascist Italy. The regime started a campaign to distinguish the so-called “authentic woman” – a positive image where female identity was strictly related with farmland and with the roles of mother and wife – to the “crisis woman”, described as “pale”, “gaunt”, “transparent” and as a product of Hollywood (De Grazia, 1992). While in Italy Mussolini launched the so-called “fat campaign”, on the ethnic newspapers were often published advertisements of medicines to easily lose weight. The Oil of Koren reported the outlines of a man and a woman before and after the treatment<sup>24</sup>underlining that the Koren method was followed by the most popular cinema actresses, by businesswomen

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<sup>22</sup>Advertisement in *Il Risveglio*, 1915, in Immigration History Research Center Archive (from now IHRCA).

<sup>23</sup>Advertisement in *Il Risveglio*, 1923, in IHRCA.

<sup>24</sup>Advertisement in *Il Progresso Italo Americano*, 15 febbraio 1920, in IHRCA.

and housewives<sup>25</sup>. The Florio company directly targeted mothers and daughters, suggesting them to keep fit and young through Marsala consumption<sup>26</sup>. This company sometimes used strong messages, such as in 1926 when a woman could read “Pale women are pitiful. They usually are tired, emaciated, discouraged”<sup>27</sup>. These messages focused especially on second-generation Italian Americans because they were more influenced than their parents by the American culture. They experienced and assimilated it in the cinemas or in the meeting places where they hung out with friends. According to Pietro Bevilacqua (1981) meat consumption and, in general, the impact with the variety, and quantity, of available foods in America caused a deep anthropological change. Some observers noted that qualitative and quantitative improvements physically transformed second generations which had no more the appearance of their parents but they began to look like famous American actors, singers or sportsmen (Ruggiero, 1937; Mayor Des Plances, 1913; Siciliani, 1922). The American mass media judged the Americanization of Italians by their physical appearance or their daily diet. In 1939 the review “Life” described the assimilation of Joe di Maggio in terms of food preferences, sweet and sour chicken instead of spaghetti (Busch, 1939, p. 63-9). Consequently, was born a generational conflict about the public way to be American – and so accepted – and Italian – and so derided and considered something un-American and undesirable. The Italian American teacher Leonard Covello reported that his Italian students considered embarrassing the manners – and the smells – of their parents in the public sphere, so they started to refuse everything that could sound Italian (Covello, 1934, 1958, 1967). School became soon an important element of awareness because it was one of the first place where second generation Italian Americans experienced their otherness towards the Anglo-American world (Tirabassi, 1990). American authorities and institutions such as the Household Arts Education Department of Teachers College of New York and the Association of Practical Housekeeping Centers of Chicago considered public schools central places to assimilate the second generations. These

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<sup>25</sup>Advertisement in *Il Progresso Italo Americano*, 2 maggio 1920, in IHRCA.

<sup>26</sup>Advertisement in *Corriere d’America*, 9 febbraio 1926, in IHRCA.

<sup>27</sup>Advertisement in *Corriere d’America*, 15 novembre 1926, in IHRCA.

institutions organized classes to teach migrant girls how to cook in a better – and American – way.

Second generations were more inclined in consuming new American products such as chewing gum and Coca Cola. Some big American companies understood this dynamic and included some advertisements in the ethnic newspapers, balancing the American and the Italian elements. Coca Cola, for example, portrayed images where consumption was interlinked with morality, respectability, and American democracy. In 1926 Coca Cola published an advertisement on *Corriere d'America* that showed how this company was able to be integrated in the daily life of the ethnic community among gender, class, and generation categories<sup>28</sup>. A young couple is going to consume a glass of Coca Cola in a bar. Everything recalls the common American imaginary during the Prohibition Era. Through the open doors it can be noticed the scene of an ethnic working-class vegetable market. The caption at the bottom “everyone asks for Coca Cola” reveals the existence of an Italian consumption market of Coca Cola, depicted by second generation Italian Americans during a situation of “controlled” transgression. The open doors describe the ethnic background in which the scene is happening, and the first-generation readers are reassured that inside that bar there is nothing illegal or against the morality.

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, it can be asserted consumer society played an essential role for the structure of the Italian American family and the relationships between two generations. If parents in interwar years established real or imagined connections with families left in Italy and used the ideas of family and respectability to distinguish themselves from the newly arrived – African Americans and Puerto Ricans – their sons began to refuse the Italianness of their parents. Sometimes they mediated it with their daily American life, being Americans during the week and in the public sphere and Italians during the Sunday dinner and at home. At the same time, food business could be an economic opportunity to develop transnational networks where families on the two sides of the Ocean had to cooperate.

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<sup>28</sup> Advertisement in *Corriere d'America*, 4 maggio 1926, in IHRCA.

The Italian branch of the family began to produce food and send it to the American one that established a commercial network in the ethnic communities. This branch offered also permanent information about new trends on consumer tastes and new regulations about food production. In doing so, the “American” family molded Italian industrial production processes that had to change to be accepted by American society. Once established and structured the company in the United States the ethnic entrepreneurs started selling in the market some “Italian style” products to foster the sense of nostalgia among Italian migrants and to offer them to experience Italy outside Italy. In doing so, second generation Italian American entrepreneurs started to use American ways to manage their companies underlining in the advertisements a supposed, and invented, Italianness. As this essay showed, food and food practices had an important impact in the daily life of the migrant family becoming one of the crucial element of distinction between the first and second generation.

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