

The American Taste of Globalization: The Case of McDonald's in Italy

Giulia Crisanti

*University of Gastronomic Sciences,
Italy*

Abstract: This article analyzes the history of McDonald's restaurants in Italy, in order to investigate the American constituents of globalization and address the question of how globalization reflects and spreads American values.¹ The analysis of the chain's expansion in the peninsula unveils how the American character of globalization resides, not as much in the exportation of McDonald's Big Mac and French fries, as in the global diffusion of specific American systems of production and consumption, as well as of those standardized operating procedures and business practices that are at the core of the so-called "McDonald's system."

Rome, Summer 2019. Two similar events have marked the hot days of the Roman culinary atmosphere. One went unnoticed, the other one attracted significant attention. The first was the announced opening of Italy's second "Five Guys" restaurant, a lesser-known American fast food chain, a few steps away from Fontana di Trevi.² The other event was the "it will not happen" opening of a McDonald's restaurant next to Terme di Caracalla. Of these two, only the latter encountered resistance, adding to the long history of polemics against the opening of any McDonald's restaurant in the Roman city center. But why did so many Italians protest against the arrival of one fast food chain, while mostly ignoring the other? The media gap between the two events points us to the recognition that McDonald's stands for much more than merely fast food. As Peter Berger has noticed, sometimes a hamburger is just a hamburger, but when it is consumed beneath the golden arches, it becomes "a visible sign of the real or imagined participation in global modernity" (Berger and Huntington 2002, 7). In other words, what makes McDonald's different is its having become a universal symbol of broader and global(izing) processes of capitalist transformation, which have gone on at least since the early postwar decades.

The goal of this article is to analyze these transformations using food, postwar Italian society, and McDonald's as case studies: focusing on McDonald's history in Italy can in fact help us

understand the relationship between the postwar Americanization process and the subsequent transition to globalization. My underlying assumption is that in embracing, as well as in opposing McDonald's, Italians were confronting not merely a brand or a multinational corporation, but a whole way of life, based on criteria of efficiency and productivity and affecting systems of food production and consumption, as well as (the pace of) people's daily life (Schlosser 2001). The fact that such of way of life resembles in its core aspects (productivity, democracy, and their translation into specific social practices) the American way of life points to a link between "McDonaldization," globalization and Americanization.³ The analysis of the chain's expansion in the peninsula will unveil how the American character of globalization resides in the global diffusion of U.S. systems of mass production and mass consumption, as well as of those standardized operating procedures and business practices that are at the core of the so-called "McDonald's system."

In a speech made in 1999, former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger remarked how globalization was nothing more than "another name for the dominant role of the United States" (Kissinger 1999). A few months earlier, in *The New York Times*, Thomas Friedman had similarly proclaimed "Globalization-is-U.S." (Friedman 1999). At the same time, anti-globalization protests, all around the world, were challenging the increasing influence

of American multinational corporations, giving a strong anti-American tone to the charges of imperialism directed against such corporations.

As noted by several scholars, however, even though the U.S. is indeed “the country with more assets and fewer liabilities” on the frontlines of globalization, globalization has not resulted in the homogenization of the world along American lines, nor in the predominance of the US as the only globally hegemonic power (Friedman 1999, 368; Barber 1995; Eckes and Zeiler 2003). On the contrary, the post-Cold War “age of globalization” has been marked by the political and economic rise of many non-American competitors, which have expanded their influence and presence. This trend has become particularly evident after the 2008 crisis, which unveiled many of the contradictions of America’s capitalist order, undermining the U.S. global hegemony and challenging American neoliberal paradigms of globalization (Nolan 2010). More recently, a few scholars have argued that globalization, rather than making macro-regional institutions like the EU more dependent, has made them more resilient and able to keep up their global role (Guinea and Forsthuber 2020). Or, alternatively, that globalization has caused a substantial retreat toward more nationalistic economic and political stances, increasing the popularity of right-wing protectionist parties throughout Western

Europe (Colantone and Stanig 2019).

Globalization has not only fostered increasing cultural homogenization and a more multipolar world. It has also proceeded hand in hand with a parallel push toward localization and greater cultural variety. Globalization means, thus, the relaunch of local and national cultures and the global circulation of many non-American models and products, from sushi to Mexican chili, from French baguettes to Italian cappuccino (Barber 1995). As a result, we now live in a more multicultural world than ever before and our consumption options have substantially increased.⁴ Even American hegemonic control over the Internet, and thus over one of the most influential agents of globalization, is increasingly challenged. Despite, in fact, the dominant role of giant American corporations like Google, Amazon, Facebook, and Apple, the U.S. no longer dominates the production and ownership of the Internet's material infrastructures (Winseck 2017).

There is therefore no doubt that the American "neoliberal corporate globalization is but one form" and that other non-Western paradigms of globalization exist (Sassen 2003, 2). But even if American neoliberalism's global influence is not unchallenged, it is however still unparalleled. All around the world,

people face American-driven expressions of capitalist globalization every day. Yes, the international success of products like *La Casa de Papel* or *Squid Games* points to the growing popularity and appeal of non-American cultural items and models. Nonetheless, these products owe their global circulation to American corporations and platforms like Netflix. In 2017, French historian Regis Debray argued that the Americanization of Western Europe can be considered a *fait accompli*. One year later, the Italian periodical magazine *Limes* addressed the issue of “where [meaning in what fields and over what aspects of the global order] do the Americans rule?” (Debray 2017; *Limes* 2018). Likewise, various scholars have pointed out American corporations’ persistent ability to exercise their “coercive soft power” (Cohen 2016) and impose American products, logistics, distribution and production systems, and consumption models (Ellwood 2020). Similarly, Paul Freedman has noted how, although the feared McDonaldization of the world “has not quite happened,” the United States continues to be the “transmission agent” for “diverse and mixed up dining practices. Sushi is originally Japanese, tacos Mexican, and pizza Italian, but their export and diffusion is via American heterogeneity” (Freedman 2021). Accordingly, scholars have called to “(re-) establish Americanization as a viable field of historical research” (Kuisel 2020).

These considerations suggest that addressing the nature of the relationship between Americanization and globalization is still relevant. How do we reconcile different perspectives, which either associate or separate globalization from enduring American hegemony? To what extent, outside the United States, is globalization perceived as having to do with some form of American global prominence? And how American is it actually? In order to answer these questions, I look at the relationship between Americanization and globalization from within the West, focusing on “intra-core” economic, cultural, and political connections and exchanges.

In particular, I have relied on three case studies. First of all, I have selected not simply an iconic American corporation, but a food corporation. Food has represented one of the major “fault lines of globalization” (Ellwood 2012, 460-461; Marling 2006). On the one hand, food products are extremely mobile. On the other hand, food is inherently local. As foodways are deeply embedded in broader economic and social infrastructures, practices of food consumption and their related systems of food production involve large (national and local) economic interests, the defense of which has played a crucial role in the resistance against globalization. Even more importantly, the way food is produced and consumed, and the cultural meaning attributed to the social act of eating

shape and define people's social, ethnic, cultural, and religious identities, transforming food practices into crucial sites of political and cultural confrontation (Bourdieu 1984; Mennell 1985; Gabaccia 2000; Diner 2003). This is particularly true in today's increasingly interconnected and globalizing world. Food globalization has meant greater variety of food choices, but also greater homogenization of foodways, leading people to cling to their traditional foods to maintain a connection to their contexts of origin (Brulotte and Di Giovine 2014; Long 2016).⁵ Looking at food consequently enables us to consider instances of cultural hybridization, as well as the homogenizing impact of American global corporations.⁶

Moreover, food has been a key element in the post-Cold War Italian debate over the effects of an American-driven globalization process. Italy's culinary traditions and foods have fundamentally shaped Italian cultural identity and economy, especially as part of the country's postwar reconstruction effort (Dickie 2009; Scarpellini 2014; Parasecoli 2014).⁷ In the last four decades, Italy has also transformed its food into a powerful cultural and economic trademark, globally enlarging its cultural influence and commercial presence through what David Ellwood has defined as an efficient "gastrodiplomacy" (2016). Italians have consequently feared and largely opposed McDonald's homogenizing threat to the country's identity, culture, and economy.⁸ In addition, the

branded regional character of Italy's culinary tradition has led several scholars to consider the Italian localist gastronomic model as particularly suited to resist the imposition of McDonald's glocal paradigm (Zamagni 1998; Montanari 2010; *Il Corriere della Sera* 1999; Counihan 2019). Italy provides therefore an illustrative case study to analyze the way in which, in order to make its entrance into the country, McDonald's needed to locally adapt its American formula and tame its globalizing effects. Such adaptations did not, however, alter the chain's business practices and standardized modes of production.

As for McDonald's, the reliance on the fast food chain to examine the American template of globalization is not entirely new. On the contrary, the concept of "McDonaldization," often used as a byword for globalization, was first introduced in the early 1990s by the American sociologist George Ritzer, who sought a "useful lens through which to examine globalization theory" (Ritzer and Malone 2000, 101).⁹ This association (globalization/McDonaldization) is, at least in part, connected to the role that American transnational corporations have played as major agents of Americanization, and that they still play as the main drivers of globalization.¹⁰ Within this framework, however, I contend that the possibility to use the history of McDonald's to reveal the American template of globalization does not depend on the

American origin of the company, nor on the Americanness of the products the fast food chain distributes. On the contrary, a primarily “multilocal” character has defined McDonald’s activities since the outset. McDonald’s has always been a franchising company, operating through a global network of local enterprises, and selling locally produced food items. Moreover, hamburgers originated in Germany, and while potatoes were indeed one of the most important articles brought to Europe from America, the Europeans had apparently been the first to fry them, so that one of the most iconic American foods is in fact called “French” fries.¹¹

But if neither the company nor its products are intrinsically American (i.e. if neither the agents nor the objects of globalization are American), then how, exactly, does McDonald’s help to explain the relationship between America and globalization? Just as the Americans did not create hamburgers and French fries, McDonald’s did not invent fast food. On the contrary, forms of fast food — from the French crêpes and croque-monsieur to the Italian pizza — could be found in most European culinary traditions long before the golden arches graced the cobblestone boulevards of the old continent. What, however, I believe McDonald’s has been responsible for is the global extension of a fast food system. That system, which I understand as both a way of thinking and a way of acting, profoundly transformed European

cultural habits, forms of food production and food consumption, and people's mentality. To signal such transformations, George Ritzer has efficaciously defined "McDonaldization" as "the process by which the principles of the fast food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society, as well as the rest of the world" (Ritzer 1993, 1). McDonald's influence thus goes well beyond the kind of food people eat, or the pace at which they eat it. The diffusion of its fast food system has more importantly implied the introduction of new values, new standardized principles, and new homogenizing practices.

Some studies on McDonald's commercial penetration abroad have however challenged Ritzer's idea that the global spread of McDonald's fast food culture represents a form of cultural imperialism. In particular, the examination of the chain's experience in East Asia has unveiled how local consumers "have transformed their neighborhood McDonald's into local institutions," forcing the corporation to adapt its offer and allow slower and hybrid forms of food consumption (Watson 2006, 6). These conclusions are in line with Roland Robertson's idea that globalization operates as a force of cultural heterogeneity and thus as a form of "glocalization" (Robertson 1992 and 2018; Roudometof 2016). According to this point of view, glocal companies like McDonald's do not simply respond to a pre-existing cultural variety, but also

contribute to its formation.

My study shifts the focus from East Asia to Western Europe, but similarly looks at an “economically resilient and technologically advanced society noted for its haute cuisine” (Watson 2006). In doing so, it partially draws the same conclusions reached by the analysis of “the golden arches East.” The conquest of Italians’ stomachs undoubtedly required a substantial “Italianization” of McDonald’s offer and the full implementation of the chain’s multilocal strategy. Nonetheless, focusing only on the chain’s adaptations to local tastes and habits – whether enacted by McDonald’s or imposed upon the company by local consumers – might lead to overlook the imposition and spread of McDonald’s unchanging operating principles. What I have therefore attempted to do is to look at McDonald’s local adaptations, while also underscoring the diffusion of McDonald’s unaltered fast food system. My consideration of Italian fast food chains as evidence of McDonaldization (i.e. as a variation and not an alternative to McDonald’s fast food system) represents an invitation to consider not simply to what extent McDonald’s has locally adapted, but also how local/national fast food chains have McDonaldized.

There is no doubt that McDonald’s is a successful global company

able to present itself as a confederation of locally autonomous retailers. Nonetheless, the analysis of its impact in Italy will cast light on the way in which McDonald's has contributed to the spread of American standardized production methods, consumption models, and business practices. The chain has thereby participated in the emergence of what the political theorist Benjamin Barber has defined the "McWorld:" a new, neoliberal, and consumerist global system, often associated to persistent forms of American hegemony due to the dominant American character of its global popular culture (Barber 1995, 83-84).¹² In fact, even in the face of increasing multiculturalism, no other national culture has been made as spatially unbound and popular worldwide as American culture. Somehow, then, globalization is unquestionably American, but, how, exactly? One useful answer lies — I believe — in the modus operandi of American multinational corporations like McDonald's, which have continued to set and spread the American logistics through which globalization operates. Such point of view takes the moves from William Marling's insight that "the real American face of globalization consists of methods and logistics" (Marling 2006, 190). In particular, Marling has argued that to understand how American globalization is, we should look not at the global spread of McDonald's, but at the worldwide diffusion of those American franchising practices on which McDonald's has founded its success. Compared to Marling, however, I believe that the American essence of McDonald's modus operandi does

not stop at its franchising structure. Rather, we can learn much by moving beyond logistics to a thorough analysis of the “McDonald’s System.” By proposing an efficient fast food service designed to reduce workers’ eating time, to be affordable to everyone, and such that every franchisee is given the opportunity to climb up the social scale, McDonald’s effectively expresses and exports two core American values, democracy and productivity.¹³ The American essence of globalization is consequently made evident — I contend — by McDonald’s universal application of the core principles of American capitalism in their McDonaldized version.¹⁴

The McDonald’s System

In 2010, the McDonald’s Corporation had 33,000 restaurants in 117 countries, serving an average of 64 million customers a day, with a net income of \$4.9 billion. McDonald’s today is not only the most famous and one of the leading fast food chains in the world; it is also the world’s largest owner of retail real estate property; the company actually makes more money from collecting rent than from selling food. Its popularity and global spread is such that *The Economist* has even come up with a so-called “Big Mac Index” to measure the purchasing power parity between different currencies. The secret of this incredible success lies at the very origin of the company.

McDonald's founding fathers were two brothers, Dick and Mac McDonald, who opened their first hamburger stand in Pasadena, in 1937.¹⁵ Three years later, they moved to San Bernardino and built a new barbecue drive-in. The first "McDonald's" was inaugurated on May 15, 1940. In 1948, they decided to entirely reorganize their kiosk, making speed the essence of their business. They fired the carhops, got rid of the flatware, and reduced the menu to only nine items. Even more importantly, they came up with a "new method of preparing food, designed to increase the speed, lower the prices and raise the volume of sales:" the "Speedee Service System" (Love 1995, 15). Resorting to food processing and assembly line techniques, they were able to streamline food preparation and service.

Their vision consisted in the full application of Taylorism and Fordism to food production and consumption, prescribing both a rigid division of labor and increased mechanization.¹⁶ The resulting McDonald's restaurant was a "fast food factory," intended to guarantee strict quality standards for food, service, and cleanliness: a "symphony of efficiency with no waste of motion," designed to perfectly serve the customers through forms of standardized and democratically priced mass consumption.¹⁷ The operation was a success. In the subsequent years, the McDonald brothers

expanded their business, replicating their “Speedee system” in a series of franchises.

The fast food system and the franchising system were therefore both in place when Ray Kroc made his first visit to San Bernardino, in 1954. Impressed by the Speedee Service System, Kroc convinced the brothers to spread it nationwide. He entered a contract with them, giving him the exclusive right to franchise the system nationally. In line with the McDonald brothers’ dedication to uniformity and rationalization, Kroc’s franchising company was conceived as a centralized organization that would set rigid standards for the franchisees. Each franchisee was provided with manuals explaining in detail how to run the restaurant and asking them to be loyal to the McDonald’s system.¹⁸ At the same time, however, the system designed by Kroc was intended to combine conformity with franchisees’ creativity and entrepreneurship, entrusting them with advertising operations, and remaining open to proposals for new product development. Kroc crafted, hence, a franchising formula that outsourced the costs for the brand’s expansion and enabled McDonald’s to preserve the core aspects of its system, while leaving free initiative and some autonomy to local businessmen. Such a line of action was consistent with his idea that franchising represented a form of democratic capitalism, the perfect key to a full realization of the American Dream.¹⁹

Moreover, a similar balance between corporate control and local initiative also was applied to the company's suppliers. In this regard, it is important to point out that the spread of McDonald's restaurants in the United States, as would be the case later internationally, did not only transform American food service, but also food processing, distribution, and packaging systems. Whenever local suppliers were not able or willing to respect the standards set by McDonald's, Kroc looked for new sources of supply and new processing methods, mostly relying on small suppliers willing to be McDonaldized. In doing so, McDonald's changed "the way farmers grow potatoes and the way companies process them; the way ranches raised beef and the way the meat industry makes the final product" (Love 1995, 119).

McDonald's was from its outset something more than a fast food chain, then. It was a whole and entirely new system of production, distribution, and consumption, influencing how food is produced and consumed, but also how we understand and define it. It represented a new mindset based on efficiency (rapid service, with no waste of time), control (standardization and application of strict norms), predictability (always the same product, prepared according to the same formula), and calculability (fixed affordable costs and prices).²⁰

In 1959, the 100th McDonald's restaurant opened in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. In 1961, Kroc bought out the McDonald's brothers for \$2.7 million (corresponding to today's \$23.3 million). In 1965, the company went public, with the first sales of McDonald's stocks. By then, McDonald's had sold two billion hamburgers and opened almost 1,000 restaurants. The following decade, the company began its international expansion. The first non-U.S. McDonald's restaurant was opened in Richmond, Canada, in 1967. Four years later, in 1971, McDonald's crossed the Atlantic Ocean for the first time, opening a restaurant in Zaandam, not far from Amsterdam. Shortly after, the golden arches also reached the German Federal Republic and Japan. According to Mario Resca, in its initial conquest of the European market, McDonald's hoped to leverage the lack of quality restaurants easily accessible to the middle and lower classes, making an effort to appear to be a local enterprise (Resca and Gianola 1998). To this end, the corporation extended its franchising concepts. The key to success in Europe was, in fact, considered the same as in the United States: entrusting local operators with the cultural translation of a specific US brand culture (Vignali 2001). As in the United States, however, local autonomy was balanced by the corporation's control over the uniformity of McDonald's procedures.

This loyalty to McDonald's standard formula did not mean,

of course, lack of adaptations. On the contrary, in Europe, McDonald's soon realized that its suburban expansionist strategy would not work, given the different urban and residential layouts of most European societies. The conquest of the European market was therefore soon reoriented toward city centers. Moreover, the tendency to recruit local entrepreneurs and leave them a certain degree of autonomy helped the company to develop distinctively European marketing strategies, combating the image of an intrusive American corporation. At the same time, however, the decision to stick to its fixed menu created the need, similar to what had happened in the United States, to McDonaldize Europe's food supply systems. Whenever it could not import the necessary equipment or food products, McDonald's was willing to develop and impose upon European food industries its methods of supplying, processing, and distributing food. It thereby triggered a series of social and economic transformations that went well beyond the change in Europeans' food habits. The reliance on local suppliers presented numerous advantages. First of all, it prevented McDonald's from incurring the high importation tariffs imposed by most European nations on food products. Secondly, and similarly convenient, it allowed marketing McDonald's menu as a homegrown product. It thereby helped in defending the restaurants from the persistent anti-Americanism of many Europeans. McDonald's experience in Italy provides perhaps one of the best examples of the merits, as well as of the limits, of such

multilocal lines of action.

McDonald's in Italy: Fast Food vs. Slow Food

By the time the golden arches landed in Italy, Ray Kroc's fast food chain had already opened its eight-thousandth restaurant and served its fifty-billionth hamburger. Italy was the last Western European country to host a McDonald's restaurant. When it finally opened, in 1985, McDonald's was simultaneously met with large protests and incredible enthusiasm. The delayed arrival in the peninsula was the outcome of several factors. In particular, the political tensions and the economic situation of the 1970s, characterized by the threat of terrorism, recurrent waves of strikes, and high levels of inflation, had prevented McDonald's from venturing into the Italian market. Likewise, until 1982 Italian labor legislation prohibited part time employment, one of the key aspects of McDonald's business, the so-called "McJobs."²¹ At the same time, there was a certain perplexity about entering a market that already had a strong fast (and non-fast) food culture of its own, especially given "Italians' chauvinism when it comes to food" (Resca and Gianola 1998, 48).

And yet, the presence of the typically Italian fast food culture of *bar* and *pizzerie* was also considered a potentially favorable factor,

providing fertile ground for McDonald's fast food formula.²² In this respect, Louis Mele, McDonald's representative in Italy in the 1980s, positively commented that "Italy has always been a fast food country."²³ McDonald's consequently aimed at offering, not as much a new kind of food consumption, as a new kind of "food service based on quality, cleanliness and attention to customers." The actual entrance into the Italian market proved anything but simple. This was mostly due to the long and complex bureaucratic procedures required to open a restaurant in Italy, which appeared incomprehensible to McDonald's United States officials. According to Jim Cantalupo, president of McDonald's International, "we struggled, and fought hard to establish ourselves," with the constant fear of losing all the money McDonald's had invested (Resca and Gianola 1998, 32-33).

To be fair, it should be pointed out that Italy was also not unfamiliar with American fast food culture. Well before McDonald's arrival, the creation of the Italian "Autogrill" restaurants had introduced Italian society to fast food service in 1947, offering standardized, frozen, pre-packaged food products, and characterized by a uniform corporate image.²⁴ Nonetheless, when the first fast food restaurants started to pop out in Italy's major cities, their main source of inspiration was indeed Ray Kroc's fast food chain. Despite, in fact, the proclaimed Italianness of most of

these early fast food companies, the ownership was usually their only Italian aspect. Such was the case for “Quick,” for “Wendy’s,” and for the various other small chains resorting to American sounding names like “Burger One,” “Kenny Burger,” “Big Burg,” or “Benny Burger” (Bartolini 1983; Alberini 1984).²⁵

Most of these were located in Northern Italy, particularly in Milan, which a newspaper called “a Burger City” in 1984 (*Il Corriere della Sera* 1984).²⁶ According to an Italian journalist, the city was literally swamped by a “hamburgermania”: a phenomenon “emulating the United States but with an economic foundation” (Salvadori 1986, 13). The leader of the sector and the first major Italian fast food chain was Burghy, controlled by Luigi Cremonini, owner of Italy’s largest meat industry, Inalca. By the time McDonald’s arrived in Rome, in 1986, Burghy already had twelve restaurants, serving 9,000 customers a day, and generating an annual revenue of twelve billion Lire (Salvadori 1986, 13).

Burghy’s success, like the mushrooming of fast food restaurants in all major Italian cities, was considered “a sign of the changing times,” an answer to the growing demand for extra-domestic eating outlets produced by the increasing pace of people’s life and work (*Il Corriere della Sera* 1984, 15; Salvadori 1983, 9). In

this regard, its administrators distinguished Burghy from the gastronomic offer provided by traditional restaurants. Rather than discussing the culinary arts, their marketing emphasized how fast food meals represented “a ritual of necessity,” intended to meet specific needs, propose a new and “young way of eating,” and create new jobs (Bartolini 1984, 19; Chiodini 1986, 17). As such, the spread of fast food in Italy mirrored and adapted to, but also promoted broader economic, social and cultural transformations, preaching and adhering to the dogmas of American productivity.

The postwar emergence of an industrial and modern Italian mass society had in fact gradually transformed the rhythm and organization of people’s work. Such trends came to full realization in the 1980s, creating fertile ground for the spread of a fast food culture. In particular, the rising number of women working outside the home, the growth of Italy’s service industry, increased urbanization, and the spread of the “long working day” contributed to sever the long-lasting relationship between the home and the family meal (Capatti et al. 1998; Scarpellini 2014). The new Italian society fostered individual food consumption and increased the amount of extra-domestic meals. Fast food service seemed therefore to answer “a real public demand,” in line with a new and increasingly neoliberal organization of labor, which required greater productivity and reduced time-wasting activities

(Della Rovere 1986, 24; Enriotti 1986; Lombardi 1986, 31). By the mid-1980s, according to Confcommercio, the Italian organization representing the companies of the service sector, seventeen million Italians consumed their lunch outside of home every day. Seven million of them resorted to commercial catering services, including the timely and economically convenient fast food restaurants (Bartolini 1983; Bartolini 1985, 6).

Italians became therefore increasingly accustomed to fast food precisely when Italy was going through its second — and even bigger — economic miracle of the postwar era. This was the age of the so-called “Milano da bere” (“Milano to drink”), and of the emergence of a new kind of youth culture, the one of the so-called “*paninari*” (“Sandwiches”), which soon became fast food’s greatest fans.²⁷ Besides the many office workers resorting to fast food for their short lunch breaks, the main customers and employees of this new kind of restaurants — in Italy, but also elsewhere in Europe — were the teenagers.²⁸ The *paninari* came to represent the best expression of the “*paninomania*” (sandwichmania) of the 1980s. Moreover, the fact that the *paninaro* was depicted as the symbol of an “increasingly Americanized” society points to the public perception of fast food as a vessel of Americanization, precisely at a time when the public debate’s focus was increasingly shifting from the Americanization paradigm to the

globalization one (Nava 1985, 3).²⁹

It was this favorable context in which McDonald's built its almost immediate, if also contested, success. It was founded on the ability to meet the new needs of an Italian society that wanted to enjoy the pleasures that American-inspired consumer culture could offer, and in which the time spent eating was increasingly less. But the 1980s was not only the era of the *paninari*. It was also the time of a new collective patriotic fervor. As effectively highlighted by historian Antonio Varsori, and as pointed out by the popular press of the time, during the 1980s, the concepts of "patria" and "nation" gained new legitimacy, fully entering Italian political and public debates (Nava 1985, 9; Romero and Varsori 2006). Italians' rediscovered patriotism was paralleled by the full development of the rhetoric of the "Made in Italy" —the successfully advertised, domestically and globally, Italian sense of style and way of life.³⁰

The Made in Italy rhetoric also invaded Italian food practices, contributing to the definition and institutionalization of a uniform Italian culinary identity. In fact, it was at this time that foods like pasta and *parmigiano* definitively became core components of Italians' identity.³¹ This explains why, in the 1980s, the arrival of McDonald's and its fast food formula was also perceived as a

cultural threat to Italians' "buon gusto" ("good taste"). Notably too, the spread of fast food strengthened the public push to launch, both domestically and internationally, Italian food, contributing to the Italian State's increasing political and economic investment into the country's gastronomic sector (Sassatelli 2019).³²

The homogenizing effects produced by both the definition of a uniform Italian culinary identity and the increased circulation of globalized food products generated a series of impactful resistances, even if the Italian economy and parts of society embraced fast food.³³ In particular, multilocal globalism triggered the (re)-discovery and promotion of (similarly constructed) Italian regional cuisines: *vis à vis* the threat posed by food industrialization and globalization, Italians attributed renewed importance to their local culinary traditions, transforming the regional character of their gastronomic patrimony into an added value. This renewal followed the emergence of several political and social movements intended to safeguard and re-launch Italy's variegated culinary heritage and its manifold local traditions and products. The most notorious of these was the Slow Food movement, born in reaction to the standardization of food production and food consumption embodied by McDonald's.

These divergent trends simultaneously provided fertile and hostile grounds for the diffusion of fast food. Now that I have outlined them, I can proceed to consider the main sources of McDonald's success in Italy, as well as of the various anti-McDonald's protests. As mentioned, the golden arches' entrance into the Italian boot was anything but smooth. The "McDonald's Italia srl" was created in September 1985, with the task of franchising restaurants in the "McDonald's System" (Camera di Commercio 1985).³⁴ A few months earlier, the CEO of McDonald's in Western Germany had proposed to Peter Schütz — German supervisor of the chain's restaurants in Munich and married to an Italian woman — to open and manage an outpost-restaurant in Bolzano, exploiting the large recognition that the brand already had in the Federal Republic (Schütz 2010). The eventual entrance in Italy occurred therefore on tiptoe, on October 15, 1985. No official inauguration was organized, as the company opted for a "silent opening." It might be because of this that the chain publicly recognizes its first Italian McDonald's as the one inaugurated a few months later in Rome.

Rumors of an opening in Rome had circulated at least since the beginning of 1985, with the press recurrently hinting at various possible locations, from Piazza Trevi to Piazza del Popolo or Trastevere. In December 1985, it however became official that the

golden arches would land in Piazza di Spagna, in the location of the former “Rugantino” restaurant, which had been closed and taken over by Jacques Bahbout (C.R. 1985, 25).³⁵ After the necessary construction works, the restaurant was officially inaugurated on March 20, 1986. It became the biggest McDonald’s restaurant in the world, with 450 seats, a game area for the kids, a piano, an innovative salad bar, marble adornments, wooden tables, and *sanpietrini* on the floor: all elements intended to appease the gastronomic and architectural tastes of the Italians (Laurenzi 1986).

The opening was an incredible success, with crowds in line from the early morning, and over 20,000 people showing up to have their “bite of America” (Lampugnani 1986). Similarly crowded scenes were replicated in the following days, exceeding all the company’s expectations. Success, though, brought protests. Neither, in fact, the general public’s excitement, nor Bahbout’s reassurances that the restaurant had no intention of altering the layout of the piazza saved McDonald’s from the large demonstrations that animated the weeks after the opening (C.R. 1985, 25). On the day of the inauguration, the crowd enjoying the “americanate” (things American) was paralleled by a hostile crowd, comprised of local shop and restaurant owners, Left and Right party members, political activists, environmentalists, trade unions representatives,

famous actors and singers, and members of the newly formed “Committee for the protection of the historical center” (Forti 1986, 31). In the following days, the Roman municipality received twelve different petitions asking to revoke McDonald’s license.³⁶

According to historian Emanuela Scarpellini, such protests resulted from a combination of several factors, including an enduring anti-American ideological tradition, the fear generated among local retailers by the arrival of a giant corporation, the increased public attention to healthy food, and the important role played by historical monuments and sites in the definition of Italian identity (Scarpellini 2014). A dive into the press of the time unveils, however, that it was mostly this latter aspect, the preoccupation for the city’s urban décor, that seemed to concern McDonald’s opponents. In this regard, *L’Unità* reported that critics argued that they could not “allow a section of Rome, the showcase of Made in Italy, to be offended by a horde of *paninari*, by embittered *borgatari*” (“suburbanites”) (Lampugnani 1986, 12; Lampugnani 1986, 17). This point of view is confirmed by the statements appearing in all other major newspapers, similarly lamenting how McDonald’s “marked another stage in the city center’s decline,” “upsetting the atmosphere of the most beautiful city in the world,” and “disfiguring” Rome (*Il Corriere della Sera* 1986, 34; Argiolas 1986, 17; Lampugnani 1986; Della Rovere, 1986).

Analogous protests had characterized the opening of most other fast food restaurants in the capital, and would continue to do so (Lombardi 1986, 30). In the case of McDonald's, however, the problem seemed to be, not only the "fast food invasion," but also its "Americanizing" effects (*L'Unità*, 1986).³⁷ In the weeks that followed the inauguration, several initiatives were consequently undertaken to force McDonald's to close and to prevent the opening of additional outlets. To this end, the Roman City Council unanimously voted to revoke McDonald's license. They also solicited clearer legislation on the transformation of traditional restaurants and cafés into fast food restaurants (Petacco 1986a, 27; Petacco 1986b, 30). McDonald's opponents did not however stop on the Campidoglio municipal steps. On April 20, they took to the streets of Rome, organizing a large demonstration headed by prominent politicians and entertainment figures, from Claudio Villa and Renzo Arbore to Renato Nicolini and fashion designer Valentino. The rally ended up with a collective "spaghetтата" in Piazza di Spagna.

On the one side, there were thus the *paninari* and the many young customers drawn to McDonald's to seek a form of cultural transgression. To them, the chain's fast food ways represented an

opportunity for emancipation: there, they could enjoy their new purchasing power, have a gathering spot, break the rules of adult behavior, and have a bite of America.³⁸ On the other side, there were the numerous demonstrators, to whom McDonald's fast food system represented an economic threat and a challenge to their cultural identity. Such reclaiming of fast food outlets as either sites of transgression or as places menacing embedded food practices and cultural habits confirms food's role as an instrument of political confrontation along – in this case – generational and class lines (Bendix and Fenske 2014).

Additional attempts to stop the fast food invasion took place over the course of the summer. None of them, however, significantly concerned or undermined McDonald's activity. As a matter of fact, a series of commentators noted how the very fuss and the polemics created by McDonald's opponents had further increased its notoriety. According to Bahbout's partner, Francesco Bazzuchi, "the more protests there were, the better the business went" (Resca and Gianola 1998, 120-121).³⁹ In 1986, the McDonald's in Piazza di Spagna was the company's most profitable outlet in the world. On its side, McDonald's rebutted all accusations and pointed out the way in which the architectural design of the restaurant had been adapted to fit the historic public square. It also pointed out the significant contribution made to the city's

economy through the employment of 250 workers.

It can be argued that the initial opposition to McDonald's, largely revolving around Italy's artistic patrimony, was barely connected to a larger discourse against the fast food system itself, or to the threat that fast food might have posed to Italy's culinary tradition. This surprised foreign observers. In the midst of the Piazza di Spagna protests, a British journalist tellingly asked his readers, "what indoctrination process could be able to convince Italians to eat dried meatballs when they have one of the most renowned cuisines in the world?" (Bernabei 1987).⁴⁰ The marginality of the concerns revolving around food production, food consumption and food quality does not mean, however, that the issue was completely overlooked. During the days of the protests in Piazza di Spagna, the opposition to McDonald's did not completely fail to include food-related considerations. Such was, for instance, the case with the public inquiries made in March 1986 into the quality of the meat used by McDonald's and other fast food chains (Salvadori 1986, 13). And such was the case with the anti-McDonald's demonstration organized by "Agrisalutis," in Piazza di Spagna, on World Food Day, in 1986 (Forti 1987, 30). At the same time, McDonald's opponents did not fail to negatively criticize fast food's connection to an American and capitalist vision of the world, which valued quantity, productivity, and profit over quality

and socialization. More than concerns about urban architecture, these critiques would become central in the following decade, making a significant contribution to the public discourse on the relationship between American capitalism, fast food culture, and globalization.

One year after the inauguration, commentators agreed that “McDonald’s has won the battle and the city centers are crawling with hamburger houses” (Grignetti 1987, 20; Franceschini 1987). Nonetheless, the second Roman McDonald’s opened only in the Fall of 1987 and was located in the non-central neighborhood of the “EUR” (Greco 1987, 15; Grignetti 1987, 34). Three years after its arrival, McDonald’s had opened only four restaurants in Italy, versus the 61 already existing in France, and the over 250 present in Germany and Great Britain. In the spring of 1990, McDonald’s finally opened its first restaurant in Milan. By then, the company seemed to have learned the lesson of Italian architectural “inviolability.” The chosen location, in piazza Duca d’Aosta, was deliberately “not close to the Duomo,” and McDonald’s had agreed to make a contribution to improve the surrounding environment by planting trees in the square (Po. 1990, 36). Two other Milan restaurants soon followed. In each of these, McDonald’s opted for “an elegant interior design” and made “a few concessions to the Mediterranean diet,” including in its menu

chicken, fruit salads, and caprese salads (*Il Corriere della Sera* 1990, 32).

Such partial adaptations to Italy's urban environment and taste characterized, in fact, all McDonald's restaurants in the peninsula, in line with the company's multilocal strategy and consistent with the will to "integrate ourselves in the country" and "become part of the community everywhere" (Grignetti 1987, 34; Franceschini 1988).⁴¹ In this regard, it is worth reminding that Kroc's franchising philosophy left a certain degree of autonomy to the franchisees, who could slightly adapt McDonad's formula to the needs of the territory in which they operated. At this stage of McDonald's European expansion, however, adaptations were still limited to slight variations and did not involve the inclusion of local food products. Moreover, the management of McDonald's operations in Italy was still entrusted to North American businessmen and not yet to Italian entrepreneurs.

By the end of the decade, then, the status of McDonald's activity in Italy kept swinging between ups and downs. On the one hand, the amount of McDonald's restaurants was still small, especially in comparison with all other Western European countries. On the other hand, however, McDonald's fast food formula seemed to

have caught on in the peninsula, with the number of American-like fast food restaurants progressively growing as well. Fast food's mix of success and resistance found expression in the development and spread of Italian versions of fast food, which simultaneously proved the influence of the American model, but also the selective appropriation and reinterpretation to which it was subject once abroad. Besides in fact the many copycats who offered hamburgers and fries inside American-like restaurants with American-sounding names, the arrival of American fast food led many Italian restaurateurs and food experts to look for a way to combine "the need for a quick meal with that of not losing their taste for quality food." To them, the goal was to elaborate an Italian alternative to fast food. In doing so, they could promote not only Italian food products, but also "an Italian food culture compatible with the demands of the present world" (Enriotti 1986, 16). Such calls for a "fast cibus" (cibus is the Latin word for food), which should combine quick service with the employment of typical Italian products, were consistent with the belief that for fast food to go "from being a fad to being a habit" and thus to become part of Italians' daily life, it was necessary to Italianize it (Zanini 1985, 6; Bartolini 1983).

The progressive application of the fast service formula to several Italian products, for example the "pizzerie al taglio," increased at

a greater pace than McDonald's did in the 1980s (Alberini 1985, 28).⁴² At the same time, there were several examples of fast food restaurants offering typical national Italian, or regional meals. The most significant elaboration of an Italian way to fast food was the one implemented by Luigi Cremonini with the launch, even before his acquisition of Burghy, of "Italy & Italy." This was a chain of 9 Italian fast food restaurants serving "sangiovese wine and spaghetti" (Bernieri 1986, 29; Lonardi 1988; Passerini 1988, 17). Cremonini's declared intention was to mix American rapidity and organization, with Italian cooking methods and products. His was, at the root, a fast food franchise chain that employed pre-packaged, frozen and standardized food products.⁴³ It was thus not — I argue — so different from McDonald's.

The spread of this kind of Italian fast food raises the issue of whether it is the employment of Italian food that makes a fast food restaurant "Italian/Italianized." Should this be the case, the parallel spread of US fast food chains offering an Americanized version of "typical" Italian meals and food products — from Pizza Hut to Olive Garden — would account for some Italianization of American society (Parasecoli 2014).⁴⁴ As however Cremonini himself noted, in his defense of "hamburger and French fries fast food" from charges of Americanization, the global spread of pizza or pasta had not led people abroad to feel "colonized by the

Italians” (Triani 1986, 14).⁴⁵ Cremonini missed the mark, though. Undoubtedly, the fact that the United States’ contemporary culinary culture is made up by a multiplicity of ethnic cuisines (Gabaccia 2000; Wallach 2014; Long 2016), the awareness that “the [American] national pie had foreign ingredients” (Hoganson 2007), as well as the fact that Americans originally considered Italian food (imported and spread by immigrants) as unhealthy (Diner 2003), are all factors that complicate any colonizing narrative when considering the relationship and mutual influences between Italian and American foodways.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, it was not because fast food has nothing to do with some form of cultural colonization that Americans did not feel “Italianized.” On the contrary, the very spread of fast food outlets serving Italian food products, whether in the United States or in Italy, proves not so much the development of successful Italian alternatives, as the effective McDonaldization of Italian food and food service.⁴⁷ It represents a merely adaptive variation to the dominant American model and thus testifies to — perhaps even more than the diffusion of McDonald’s outlets — the success of the American fast food system.

Based, therefore, on the belief that it is not the origin of the food offered that makes fast food chains either Italian or American, the extension of “the principles of the fast food restaurant” to

the Italian food sector accounts for the actual Americanization of Italian food practices. What makes McDonald's an Americanizing vessel of cultural change is not only (nor mainly) the commonly celebrated or lamented spread of the Big Mac or French fries, but the diffusion of those American systems and methods that are at the heart of McDonald's fast food formula.⁴⁸ In this regard, it is quite emblematic that "Italy & Italy" became a favorite destination for "those metropolitan tribes inspired by overseas rituals" (alluding to the *paninari*), and thus for teenagers going there to have a taste of America, rather than for people looking for an Italian alternative to American fast food (Bernieri 1988, 38).

The long-lasting effect produced by McDonald's, and more generally by the fast food system, arises not as much from the introduction of hamburgers and French fries into Italians' diets, as from the exportation of specific business practices and food production methods founded on efficiency, standardization, and on the expansion of the franchising system. When reflecting on fast food and its popularity, several Italian commentators illustratively pointed out the parallel spread of franchising. In particular, the historian and intellectual Giorgio Bocca defines Italian franchising as the expression of an "impressive cloning of America, or Italian multiplication of the American way of life." Using McDonald's as example, he commented how several experts had defined 1987

“the great year of Italian franchising” (Bocca 1987).⁴⁹

Only a few years later, in the new post-Cold War context, the Italian journalist Vittorio Zucconi commented: “the McDonaldization of the world is done: McDonald’s is the most visible symptom of the achieved rationalization of the world” (1997). There is no doubt that the end of the Cold War acted as a springboard for McDonald’s definitive transformation into an empire on which “the sun never sets.” If in 1975 only 8% of the company’s sales came from outside the United States, that percentage had rose to 25% in 1995. Five years later, at the turn of the millennium, McDonald’s was selling more abroad than in the United States, operating in 117 countries through 26,462 restaurants.

Within this positive context, Italy represented a partial exception. On the one hand, the chain had enlarged its clientele. The era of the *paninari* was over and McDonald’s was serving an increasing number of white-collar workers and families (Poloni 1992, 42). On the other hand, however, there were still only ten McDonald’s restaurants in Italy at the end of 1992, and the company registered a net loss of L. 1.608.113.881 (Camera di Commercio 1992). Two years later, the number of outlets had

risen to twenty-three: progress, but still an unsatisfactory amount compared to the almost 300 McDonald's existing in France and the over 500 in Germany and Great Britain. In a Western Europe increasingly enjoying its lunch beneath the golden arches, Italy seemed determined "to hold on against the invasion of Kroc's successors" (*Il Corriere della Sera* 1994). To quicken its expansion, the company decided to strengthen its multilocal strategy, starting the "Italianization" of the chain. The first step in this direction was made in 1995, when the management of McDonald's Italian operations was entrusted to an Italian businessman, Mario Resca, who had successfully managed several restaurants in Lombardia and headed one of McDonald's Italian franchised companies.⁵⁰

It was under Resca's guidance that McDonald's fully started its ongoing integration into the country's socio-economic and cultural fabric. To this end, he decided to enlarge the company's reliance on Italian managers (Donelli 1995, 21). In a similar way, he increasingly resorted to Italian suppliers, thereby intensifying the local look of the company.⁵¹ By 1996, the percentage of Italian producers among the company's overall suppliers rose from 20% to 75% (Tamburini 1996). At the same time, McDonald's entered a partnership with several Italian business groups, signing agreements with the important chains "Agip" and "Rinascente" to open its restaurants in all Agip service stations and inside UPIM shopping centers

(Grion 1994; Sa. 1995, 20).

Despite Resca's Italianizing efforts, at the beginning of 1996, McDonald's still only had thirty-three restaurants in Italy. Moreover, in terms of sales and presence, the golden arches lagged far behind Burghy, which had significantly expanded itself and turned over 400 billions Lire a year. The situation was, however, about to be unexpectedly reversed. In March 1996, McDonald's took advantage of Cremonini's financial difficulties to take over all Burghy and "Italy & Italy" restaurants, transforming them into McDonald's (Ce. 1996, 25; Brogi 1996, 40).⁵² In the blink of an eye, McDonald's tripled its presence and the golden arches seemed finally ready to conquer "the land of pizza," transforming Italy into what one newspaper called "a more normal country, in line with the others" (Taino 1996, 1).⁵³

Nonetheless, in 1997, the head of McDonald's International Division commented how the chain still held only a "fractional" section of the Italian food market. This was in a context in which Italians were spending only \$4 per capita a year on fast food (vs. the \$42 spent in France and the \$376 in the United States).⁵⁴ With a L. 458 billion turnover, the subsequent year proved McDonald's most profitable one since its arrival in the peninsula, instilling

confidence in further growth (Cavalli 1998, 17). The company continued to expand at a slow pace, failing to meet the goal of reaching 335 restaurants by the new millennium. Moreover, between 1999 and 2002, McDonald's was caught up in the protests realized by the growing Italian anti-globalization movement. The chain became a favorite target for the various constituencies of the movement, from Left to Right, including Catholics, animal rights advocates, environmentalists, trade unionists, and farmers.

On its side, McDonald's met its opposition by deploying its usual multidomestic arsenal. Despite in fact progressing at a slow pace, the company reiterated its confidence in its ability to gradually conquer Italian stomachs (Bagnoli 2000, 19). The fast food chain reacted to Italians' skepticism by further adapting to the local context. Against charges of deteriorating Italy's historical areas and city centers, McDonald's built outlets that fit better into the community and added value to the historical patrimony. For instance, the first McDonald's that is also a museum was opened on the Via Appia, south of Rome (Clemente 2017; Fiore 2017; Povoledo 2017).⁵⁵ At the same time, the company highlighted its contribution to Italian economy by underscoring its predominant employment of Italian products and suppliers.

Starting from the late 1990s, McDonald's Italian branch strengthened its multilocal approach by launching a series of initiatives addressing Italians' taste for fresh and quality food. To this end, the chain increasingly advertised itself as an Italian enterprise, committed to sustaining the growth of local producers and giving value to the traditions of the community in which it operated. This trend has been more substantially implemented in the last two decades, through the inclusion of various Italian signature food items in McDonald's menu. In 2008, "McDonald's became even more Italian" with the inclusion of *parmigiano* in its hamburgers.⁵⁶ A few years later, the company launched its "McItaly Burger," soon followed by a new "line" of burgers ("Adagio" and "Vivace") realized in collaboration with Italy's most famous Michelin-starred chef, Gualtiero Marchesi (Bernardi 2011; Scarci 2011; Ferrona 2011).

There were of course limits to the effectiveness of this "Italianizing" strategy. The declarations made by McDonald's about its 100% Italian supply-chain have often been considered a form of green-washing crafted to distort public attention (LaPira 2015). At the same time, the idea of McItaly has been criticized as a form of cultural appropriation and, as one offended critic said, "a monstrous act of national betrayal" (Fort 2010; Petrini 2010).⁵⁷ Moreover, not all of McDonald's attempts to include typical Italian

products in its offering have been successful. On the contrary, an experiment realized with “Pizza Mia” in 1999 was a total failure.

One of the most effective critiques aiming to expose the way in which McDonald’s multilocal strategy has not altered the homogenizing and globalist nature of the company came from the Italian Slow Food movement. This was born in 1986, in reaction to the golden arches’ arrival in Rome, and is now an international movement operating all across the world (Parasecoli 2003; Leitch 2003). Slow Food does not oppose globalization *per se*. The movement conversely praises globalization’s capacity to connect different local cultures. It however opposes its standardizing effects and the idea of a homogenous culture for all, which is considered the basis of McDonald’s activity. Slow Food rejects the fast food system as the epitome of a “fast life,” which “in the name of productivity has changed our way of being and threatens our environment and our landscapes” (Slow Food 1989). The opposition is not merely between foodways, but rather between ways of life: McDonald’s fast life, modeled on the machine and founded on productivity and profit, opposed to the slow pace of life of Slow Food’s snail, founded on the rediscovery of traditional local cultures. Carlo Petrini (i.e. Slow Food’s founder) and his fellows consequently favor local forms of fast food, as long as they are defined by their direct relationships with a territory

and sustain biodiversity against gastronomic homogenization.

This stance is consistent with Slow Food's effort to include the consumption and the production of food in a single discourse, arguing that what is wrong with fast food is not as much the pace of its consumption, as the overall capitalist system of production, distribution, and consumption behind it.

In line with such vision, Petrini has argued that McDonald's has diversified its offer in order to adapt to local tastes much less than it could. He has underscored how the corporation still relies on intensive monocultures and on the employment of selected and "high performance" breeds.⁵⁸ Even McDonald's reliance on local suppliers — he contends — does not entail the employment of local products. In this respect, Slow Food has recurrently accused McDonald's of imposing its standards globally, what the sociologist George Ritzer defined "vertical McDonaldization," spreading worldwide homogenous food varieties, at the expense of local ones. To oppose such a paradigm, the movement has promoted a series of initiatives, from the Ark of Taste to Terra Madre, aiming to reverse McDonald's kind of glocalization and create a vision for a non-McDonaldized global world. This does not mean, of course, that Slow Food's program is free of flaws. On the contrary, several scholars have underscored the movement's shortcomings, including modest instruments, especially when compared to

McDonald's, and the contradictions inherent in its mixed political agenda and commercial enterprises.⁵⁹ Nonetheless, Slow Food has effectively belied McDonald's multilocal rhetoric, outlining a different model of glocalization: while McDonald's localizes its global standards to uniformly and internationally spread them, Slow Food aims at globalizing local models, in order to locally preserve differentiated forms of food production and food consumption.

Conclusion: An American vessel of globalization

As argued by numerous scholars, the tendency toward localization is just as much intrinsic to globalization as that toward homogenization. This is because globalization triggers local reactions, empowers local communities, allows the global circulation of local cultural practices, and requires local filters and adaptations to be sustainable and accepted (Robertson 1992; Appadurai 1996; Cox 1997; Eckes and Zeiler 2003; Friedman 1999). The consequent localization put in action by global corporations such as McDonald's does not, however, alter their basically globalist nature. It is true that McDonald's does not offer (anymore) globally homogenous food in globally homogenous restaurants. It nonetheless serves its food globally through a homogenous system of production, distribution, and consumption. It is the global extension of such a system, not the alleged

homogenization of tastes generated by the universal presence of the Big Mac, that is the essence of McDonaldization. Within this framework, the Italian origins of McDonald's suppliers and products do not make it an Italian company. McDonald's offers food produced by local farmers, but it also imposes on them its global standards.

McDonald's fast food formula is hence much more than a rapid type of food service. When we speak of the McDonald's system, we are referring to ideas and models, such as productivity, which are part of the longer history of Americanization and Americanism.⁶⁰ Moreover, McDonald's has simultaneously been perceived as the symbol of America's global reach, and one of the main multinational corporations driving globalization. On the one hand then, McDonald's has deliberately inserted itself into American tradition, leveraging its association with the American way of life whenever it was convenient to do so. On the other hand, we have seen how, even in business terms, McDonald's is not as much an American corporation, as a federation of locally operated, semi-autonomous franchises, able to present themselves as inherently Italian (or French, German, Japanese, etc.).

McDonald's intensified glocalization has substantially and

successfully changed the company's outlook and structures. It has, however, not essentially transformed its (American and capitalist) operating procedures and, therefore, it has not altered its role as an American vessel of globalization. In this context, the "McDonaldization" of the world came to embody precisely such a U.S.-imposed kind of globalization. My examination has hence revealed that the key to understanding how globalization still reflects and spreads American values should not be looked for in the global circulation and acceptance of American products. In other words, the presently hegemonic global culture is not American in its origin, or in its contents. It is rather American by virtue of the global spread of specific business practices, and systems of production, distribution, and consumption.

To conclude, the analysis of McDonald's landing in Italy has highlighted how McDonald's fast food was immediately perceived as American and Americanizing. As such, it was viewed as threatening Italian cultural identity, heritage, and traditions and, thus, resisted. The opposition to McDonald's as a distinctively American menace was however counterbalanced by the widespread enthusiasm and fascination generated by fast food, especially among the new Italian youth, which went to McDonald's to taste and experience the American way of life. Moreover, we have seen how the spread of McDonald's fast food formula

contributed and was simultaneously favored by the broader social transformations undergone by the Italian society in the 1980s, which created an increasing demand for rapid forms of food service.⁶¹ In a similar way, the diffusion of fast food chains went hand in hand with the parallel industrialization of the Italian food sector, as well as with the emergence of large agribusiness groups. In this context, McDonald's expansion depended upon the company's capacity to McDonaldize its local suppliers. In enlarging the presence of the golden arches, McDonald's exported its American and standardized systems of production and consumption, the diffusion of which was confirmed by the emergence of several Italian imitators.

The Italian links in the McDonald's archipelago helps thus explain both Americanization and globalization, as well as the way in which the former became the latter. The secret is not in the sauce. It is in the system. How is McDonald's both American and global? In fact, it is neither. As shown also by other studies dedicated to the chain's expansion abroad, McDonald's is primarily multilocal (Watson 2006; Fantasia 2018). This is because the core structure of its business is represented by the reliance on its successful franchising structure. It is nonetheless this globally applied, but originally American franchising formula that — I contend — characterizes the McDonald's system as an American form of

globalization. In this regard, Marling has effectively argued how the “American ability to standardize the practices of decentralized business operation has had an enormous impact on globalization” (Marling 2006, 162). Adding, however, an additional consideration to Marling’s vision, it is my belief that the American essence of McDonald’s lies, yes, in its franchising structure, but also in the fast food system and in its principles, which McDonald’s has globally spread. McDonald’s offers transnational food items in locally adapted formulas, but the production, packaging, and distribution processes which sustain its offering are American. In other words, McDonald’s fast food is not American. But its globally extended fast food system is.

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Endnotes

1 Unless otherwise specified, all translations from Italian to English are mine.

2 To be fair, it should be pointed out that Five Guys has not yet been able to open its Roman restaurant. Interestingly, the first Five Guys' restaurant was opened in Piazza San Babila in Milan, the site of Italy's very first fast food restaurant, Burghy. For more on this, see the *Il gambero rosso* articles enlisted in the works cited section.

3 Of course, American culture cannot be reduced to these two values. On the contrary, the United States has expressed and spread a variety of, at times even contradictory, values. Nonetheless, it is my conviction that, especially after WWII, American notions of democracy and productivity fundamentally defined American culture and were at the core of United States officials' definition and projection of the so-called *American way of life*.

4 In this regard, Hunter and Yates have effectively argued how globalization has carried along the cultural heterogeneity of the Western world, which is now consequently less "monolithic" than it was during the Cold War.

5 Looking at globalization through food consequently represents a good way to cast light on the enduring dialectic between global and local dynamics (Ray and Srinivas 2012; Watson and Caldwell 2004; Wilk 2006)

6 In the words of James Watson and Melissa Caldwell, "as food practices change, notions of national identity are threatened, especially when American corporate interests are involved" (Watson and Caldwell 2005, 2).

7 Since the unification of the country, in 1861, food has represented a determinant component of Italy's national identity and a crucial instrument of its nation-building process. Such centrality finds confirmation in the extensive historiography dedicated to

food and its role in Italian history. Among the most important contributions, it is worth quoting the works by Andrea Capatti, Massimo Montanari, John Dickie and Emanuela Scarpellini. For further reference, see works cited.

8 As proven by the iconic scene from *An American in Rome*, in which Alberto Sordi gives in to macaroni, Italians' receptiveness and fondness for American consumer culture seems to have never extended itself to gastronomy.

9 Ritzer does not however consider McDonaldization as a synonymous of globalization. He rather retains it a form of globalization and "a specific type of globalization" (that is, the globalization process as driven by multinational corporations in their continuous ambition to grow).

10 On American corporations as the main drivers of globalization, see the chapter by James Davison Hunter and Joshua Yates in Berger and Huntington. The relation between Americanization, US corporations, and globalization is further confirmed by the incredible amount of studies dedicated to American global businesses and their contribution to globally spread American models and secure United States' global hegemony. See, for instance, the studies by Emily Rosenberg or Mira Wilkins.

11 The hamburger is an originally Russian food, brought to Hamburg by German sailors. According to one version of the story, German immigrants exported it to Cincinnati, where it became a "German delicacy." Another version is that the first to propose the hamburger sandwich with ketchup and mustard was Emeric Gruber, a German émigré originally from Hamburg and living in Chicago. On the origins of French fries there are various versions. According to the most common one, the Belgians were the first to fry potatoes, after the Spanish had introduced them in Europe. According to another version, fries became instead popular in France, thanks

to a French medical officer, Parmentier, who had been forced to eat potatoes while imprisoned in Prussia during the “Seven Years war.”

12 Eckes and Zeiler have less radically sustained that globalization represents a broader and longer process, which has significantly underlain, but should not be equated with the development of the American century. They have nonetheless acknowledged how the Cold War has somehow facilitated the spread of American-style globalization, so that, by 1989, American popular culture was indeed hegemonic in most of the world (Eckes and Zeiler 2003).

13 This point of view is in line with Eric Schlosser’s idea that fast food represents an inherently American view of life and way of doing things.

14 As previously stated, the intention here is not to reduce America’s culture to notions of democracy and productivity. These values have however fundamentally defined the American way of life, so that their spread can be considered as participant into the postwar Americanization process.

15 The reconstruction of McDonald’s history is mostly based on John Love’s study.

16 The Oxford Dictionary defines Fordism as “a system of production based on mass consumption and especially the use of the assembly line,” and Taylorism as a “the principles or practice of scientific management and work efficiency as practiced in a system known as the Taylor System.” As noted however by the Italian intellectual Antonio Gramsci, Fordism is not merely a mode of production. It rather represents a new “civilization,” a whole value system, which prescribes social behaviors oriented to sustain standardized mass production and standardized mass consumption. For more on Fordism and Taylorism, see the works by Frederick W. Taylor, Bruce Pietrykowski, Len Holden, Bruno Settis, and Daniel Watson.

17 Quote from the movie “The Founder,” directed by John

Lee Hancock, The Weinstein Company, 2016.

18 Failing to do so, or changes to the formula would result in rejections to renew the franchising contract.

19 A personification himself of the self-made man, Kroc conceived McDonald's as an enterprise offering to everyone the opportunity to become a successful businessman, embodying the individualistic essence of American capitalism.

20 According to Ritzer, efficiency, calculability, control and predictability are the core aspects of McDonaldization.

21 In this respect, Mario Resca would subsequently underscore how "traditionally and culturally, Italians are used to *il posto fisso*" (permanent employment/position), so that flexibility was usually faced with stiffness by Italian trade unions (Resca and Gianola 1998, 100).

22 The "pizzeria al taglio" is generally a small outlet, with no seats, selling pre-prepared pizza by the slice. The *bar* is a sort of café, which sells espresso, croissants and sandwiches. Pizzerie and *bar* are usually independent enterprises and not part of a chain. The fast food definition can therefore be only partially applied to them. They serve fast food, but they do not adhere to the fast food system.

23 Mele's words are reported by Mario Resca and Rinaldo Gianola.

24 A product of Italy's economic miracle and expression of the postwar mix between American models and Italian practices, the autogrill had been one of the symbols of the Italian way to modernity (Colafranceschi 2008).

25 Quick is a Belgium-based fast food chain, while Wendy's is a famous American fast food chain. Both entered the Italian market through a joint venture with major Italian groups, which formally owned the Italian restaurants of the chain. All these fast food chains

preceded McDonald's.

26 In this respect, it is worth pointing out that, ahead of the protests against the McDonald's in Piazza di Spagna, the issue of fast food restaurants' effect on the urban layout of Italy's historical city centers had been raised also in Milan. Here, however, any actual opposition had been prevented by the largely favorable opinion of the Milanesi, and by the trade unions' pressures to safeguard the jobs created by the many fast food chains.

27 The translation into "Sandwiches" is proposed by Victoria De Grazia. For a broader consideration of the *paninari's* subculture, see the study by Paolo Morando.

28 It is here worth mentioning Rick Fantasia's study on fast food in France. In the course of the 1980s, McDonald's main customers in the hexagon were the so-called *décalés* (the offbeats): a post-1968 generation of apolitical cultural rebels very close to the Italian *paninari* and similarly attracted to fast food chains by the opportunity to "taste" the American way of life (Fantasia 2018; Ariés 1998).

29 In 1983 Thomas Levitt had in fact introduced and popularized the idea of "the globalization of the market," tellingly commenting how the "general drift toward the homogenization of the world" induced by globalization was effectively exemplified by "the success of McDonald's from the Champs Elysées to the Ginza" (Levitt 1983).

30 Emanuela Scarpellini's studies have effectively underscored how Italian fashion, design and food came to be the core elements around which Made in Italy, and, more generally, Italians' cultural identity were defined.

31 On this, see the work edited by Alberto Capatti, Alberto De Bernardi and Angelo Varni.

32 It was illustrative, in this respect, the organization of Italy's

first food fair, Cibus '85, in 1985. According to its organizers, such initiative was supposed to internationally present Italy as the "Food Valley of the world." The food fair would be replicated in the following years and is still taking place (Mondini 1985, 10).

33 It is important to keep in mind that both the definition of a uniform Italian cuisine and the re-launch of regional culinary practices should not be considered a phenomenon comprised in the 1980s. They were conversely rooted in broader postwar socio-cultural modernizing processes.

34 Srl stands for "società a responsabilità limitata," which literally means "limited liability company." It is a kind of legal corporate entity in Italy.

35 The negotiations with Bahbout and his Italian partner, Francesco Bazzucchi, had actually been going on for a while, but an agreement was reached only in the course of 1985.

36 These included the one presented by Valentino, the famous fashion designer, lamenting that McDonald's stink would damage his next door atelier. The dispute with Valentino lasted until June 1986, when a group of experts definitively expressed itself in favor of McDonald's, denying any actual "olfactory" damage (Sanvoisin 1986b, 27; Bultrini 1986).

37 In this respect, it is worth pointing out Carlo Vanzina's opinion. Not alien to fast food (he was the writer and producer of the movie *Italian Fast Food*), Vanzina expressed his disdain for "those who want to Americanize our country," opposing the McDonald's in Piazza di Spagna to the "modern, enjoyable and cozy" layouts of Milan's fast food outlets."

38 In this respect, Rick Fantasia has effectively illustrated how, similarly to Italy, in France too, young people appreciated fast food's self-service formula and the possibility to eat with their hands and

at any time of the day. These gave them the impression of a “no-rules” eating environment.

39 On the day of the spaghetтата, the restaurant cashed in more than any other day.

40 In a similar way, the American Mike Cannon considered foolish those Italians that aspired to eat hamburgers and fries, when they could have Italian cuisine (Sanvoisin 1986a, 30).

41 Adaptations had ranged from the decision to start the conquest of the Italian market from the city centers (and not from the suburbs, as in the United States), to the marble and sanpietrini of the Piazza di Spagna restaurant, or to the introduction of the salad bar, which had been defined as “a specificity of McDonald’s Roman restaurants.”

42 As early explained, the “pizzerie al taglio” are generally small outlets and an independent enterprises. The fast food definition can therefore be only partially applied to them.

43 With its 9 restaurants, in 1987 Italy & Italy served an average of 2000 people a day. The spaghetti were pre-cooked and frozen, the restaurants were based on self-service and the menu was nationally standardized. As a result, the only thing that differentiated Italy & Italy from the more American-like Burghy was the food it offered. With the creation of Italy & Italy (but also, for instance, with the decision to include cappuccino and cornetto in Burghy’s menu), Cremonini somehow anticipated McDonald’s introduction, in the 1990s and 2000s, of typical Italian products in its menu.

44 The chain “Olive Garden” was born in 1982, founded by the General Mills Corporation. It went in the direction of offering Americanized Italian food also McDonald’s decision to experimentally launch the “McPizza” in 1989, on the wave of the popularity of two of its greatest competitors, “Pizza Hut” and “Domino’s Pizza” (respectively created in 1958 and 1960). The “McPizza” was

temporarily introduced only in Kentucky and Indiana, but it never caught on. To be fair, however, in the case of pizza, Italy's claims over it are complicated by the fact that, in many ways, pizza has become a "planetarian food product." On Olive Garden and the way it was perceived as "an Americanized version of Italian food, imitative of McDonald's bad taste," see Franceschini, 1987.

45 To be fair, it should be pointed out that the global spread of Italian food products has gone hand in hand with the circulation of Italian culture and people, and thus with forms of Italian cultural influence (Cinotto 2013 and 2014).

46 It was only in the second half of the 20th century that Italian food, following both the full integration of Italian-Americans into US society and the studies on the Mediterranean diet by Ancel Keys, acquired prestige in the United States and became increasingly popular (Levenstein 1985).

47 In this sense, neither Pizza Hut, nor Domino's should be considered the product of the Italianization of American fast food. On the contrary, the spread of more traditional pizzerie and/or Italian restaurants can be considered participant into the international success of Made in Italy and thus into forms of Italianization. Italian food, thanks to Italian immigrants, Italian food industry and the initiative of the Italian State has in fact played a major role in enhancing Italy's cultural influence and commercial reach around the globe.

48 Once again, the reference is to Marling's argument, according to which what makes globalization American are not its American "contents" (i.e. the global circulation of American goods), but rather the American logistics through which it operates. It is here worth pointing out how, according to Ritzer, the best indicator of McDonaldization is not the universal presence of American fast food chains, but the existence of indigenous clones, which testifies to the global spread of McDonald's operating principles.

49 In this regard, Victoria De Grazia has conversely pointed out how, in the “Age of Benetton” and thus “in the mid-1980s, exploiting decades of adeptness in adjusting to cross-border commerce, fleet-footed European merchandisers came to challenge superannuated American chains on their own turf.” She has hence commented how “to speak of the ‘Europeanization of American retailing’ indicated that European merchandisers had now not only learned the American game but become full-fledged global players.” The reference here is to an article published in 1986 by Joanne Legomsky. There is of course no doubt that the European appropriation of specific American models has at times proven more successful than the American model itself. Such Europeanization does not however take away anything from the previous Americanization of European practices (Victoria De Grazia 2005, 460-461).

50 Mario Resca had joined the McDonald’s family in 1992, when he had become the franchisee of the restaurant in Corso Vercelli, Milan. After having doubled his restaurant’s revenue, he was entrusted with managing other McDonald’s outlets in Lombardia.

51 And yet, it is interesting to note how in the list of McDonald’s Italian suppliers is included “Coca Cola Italia,” which raises some questions on the criteria based on which a supplier is considered “Italian.” “Coca Cola HBC Italia” is indeed, at least legally, an Italian company, but can Coca Cola be considered an Italian beverage?

52 The Burghy brand was valued L. 122.272.299.952. In consideration however of the inclusion of “Italy and Italy,” and of the supply contract established with Cremonini’s Inalca (i.e. Cremonini became McDonald’s exclusive supplier of beef in the peninsula), the overall transition – mediated by Banca di Roma – was considered worth L. 200 billion (Camera di Commercio 1996).

53 Although the conversion of Burghy's restaurants into McDonald's took a few years, the takeover allowed the company to quickly go from 33 to over 100 restaurants. At the same time, it enabled McDonald's to bypass many of the problems originating from its recurrently difficult relations with local public administrations.

54 The main cause for these low levels of fast food consumption was considered the spread of Italian "bar," defined as an "all-Italian anomaly" able to effectively compete with American-like fast food outlets.

55 The restaurant incorporates an ancient Roman street and the archeological remains surrounding it. In a similar way, the McDonald's in Pompei had been designed by local architects to be appropriate to the surrounding archeological area.

56 Parmigiano had made its first brief appearance in a McDonald's burger in 1997. See McDonald's Italia – History Section: <https://www.mcdonalds.it/mcdonalds-italia/la-nostra-storia> (Last Accessed: September 2020).

57 According to Petrini, the Mcltaly pretended to offer "a bite" of true Italian taste, whereas it represented in fact an erasure of Italian diverse culinary identities in favor of tasteless homogenization.

58 Giancarlo Terzano has similarly pointed out how McDonald's has been responsible for the global imposition of a specific type of potato (the burbanck), of the iceberg lettuce, and of selected cattle breeds: the potato might be produced locally, but its variety and production process are standardized (Terzano 2005).

59 In this regard, Alison Leitch has effectively cast light on the way in which Slow Food's campaigns to protect "endangered foods" have contributed to transform many food products, which were "once a common element in local diets," into "exotic" and

“privately patented” items for gourmet consumption (Leitch 2003). Even more radically, Kelly Donati has spoken of Slow Food’s exotic and nostalgic rendering of the cultural other and its fetishization of cultural diversity “to satisfy the appetites of a privileged minority” (Donati 2005). For other similar critiques, see also the study by Janet Chrzan and Marie Gaytán.

60 Within this interpretative framework, Fordism and Taylorism are posed as precursors of McDonaldization, which continues the (twentieth century) global spread of America’s capitalist system, but under the new heading of (twenty-first century) globalization. In this respect, some historians have even come to trace a long historical trajectory that goes from Fordism, via postwar Americanization, to present day globalization and “McDonaldization.” See the work by Robert J. Antonio and Alessandro Bonanno.

61 In this sense, McDonald’s took advantage of the incipient European de-industrialization processes and of the consequent progressive growth of the service sector.