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**AMARO E PICCANTE:  
THE PRODUCTION AND USE OF TERROIR IN  
THE SCANDAL OF ITALIAN EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OILS**

by

**DANIEL GENE SHATTUCK II**

B.A., Anthropology, North Carolina State University, 2008

M.A., Anthropology, University of New Mexico, 2011

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy in  
Anthropology**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**December, 2019**

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**ABSTRACT**

This dissertation explores the revalorization of Italian extra virgin olive oils after a food scare that revealed some oils to be inauthentic or adulterated. In the process of distinguishing products, producers and tasters looked toward terroir or the “taste of place” as proof of their declarations of authenticity and as a method for differentiating oils. However, in this attempt, they engaged with other pervasive tropes of difference including those that intersected with belonging, the local and global, and race. This dissertation argues that terroir is a material-semiotic object; that while it may be grounded in the materiality of oils is chiefly produced through the discursive practices of identification and description. This conception of terroir breaks down categories of authenticity and quality as equally discursively produced, and allows for observing the ways personal taste experiences are connected to broader politics through the (re)production of axes of differentiation across scales and domains.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the first decade of the 2000s, publicity around the adulteration of Italian extra virgin olive oil came to a head with publications by Tom Mueller, followed by animated websites sensationalizing the news that the product was not Italian, not extra virgin, or not made of olives (Mueller 2008, Blechman 2014). Olives imported to Italy from elsewhere within and outside of Europe (Tunisia, Spain, Morocco for example) and then pressed and labeled as “Products of Italy” or “Packaged in Italy,” oils accused of not being extra virgin, and seed and vegetable oils became a boogeyman in not only the olive oil industry, but in the foodie world in general. This “food scare” (Jackson 2015, Stassart and Whatmore 2003) was similar to other events concerning adulterated comestibles or products that were not what they claimed to be; however, this scare struck at a product that was synonymous with Italian food, regulated by a system of denominations of origin supposedly built to guarantee authenticity of products that carried their labels, and illuminated the potential that Italians were complicit in the undermining of the industry. Other similar scares regarded adulteration or inauthentic products outside of the space of the Italian nation. For example, parmesan-style cheese or San Marzano-style tomatoes are marketed internationally taking advantage of the differences in intellectual property laws between the European system and the rest of the world (Parasecoli 2017). Still, the worries over olive oil seemed to be pervasive and paralleled other anxieties that were palpable in public discourse concerning food production more broadly but also the future of Italian society. At the same moment that fears around global, industrial, and inauthentic food consolidated in the olive oil scare, fears about immigrants and demographic change focused on the refugee crisis (Albahari 2015).

In investigating the olive oil “scandal,” terroir or the taste of place (Trubek 2008) emerged as a tool by which producers were attempting to revalorize their products. When labels were under scrutiny for not being a reliable source of information about authenticity and veracity of olive oil, terroir was a way for people to verify the truth of their oils. Supposedly, one can assess the extra virginity, clues to the provenance of the oil, and assess its overall quality through identifying and evaluating the terroir. The process of identifying and evaluating terroir was a highly regimented and specialized way of consuming a product that seemed to allow for the continued differentiation of some oils as high quality, heritage products in comparison to other lower quality and potentially inauthentic products. Expert tasters and amateurs alike would reference the same techniques, the same characteristics, the same processes of production, and the same foils of industrial, foreign, low quality, or defective oils. For someone like me without a refined palate for olive oil, and still to this day does not possess skilled tasting capabilities, terroir was very difficult to discern and mostly lived in the ways people talked about their oils. I wanted to learn more about how people understood the connection between specific flavors and what it told them about the product and why it was such an important aspect of olive oil to highlight for the fight against “fake” oils.

This dissertation project is shaped by three guiding research questions. First, how is the scandal of adulterated olive oil tied to broader social anxieties? Second, what is the function of terroir, the taste of place, in relation to those anxieties? Third, how is terroir constructed and evidenced? Ultimately, I argue that while it is grounded in materiality, terroir is chiefly produced through the circulation of discourses and practices regarding it. As people attempt to describe or understand the terroir of olive oils, they are actively

involved in its production and the connected linkages between peoples, places, and products. It is this bridging between materiality and discourse that allows olive oil with its terroir to stand as potent tool in negotiating boundaries of identity and other sources of social anxiety. At the same time, this project undermines notions of good and bad, real and fake, and authentic and inauthentic, exposing them as necessary oppositions that are constructed and circulate together to provide olive oil and other heritage foods with their social, cultural, and economic value.

In order to understand the construction of these distinctions, their relationship to terroir, and their ability to be produced as well as produce social categories, I draw heavily on linguistic anthropological approaches to examining differentiation and contrast as ideologized semiotic processes (Gal and Irvine 2019). I pay particular attention to processes of rhematization, the production of axes of differentiation, the fractal recursivity of those axes, and processes of erasure (to be discussed below) that allow for observing the connections between the flavors of bitter and spicy to larger order historically-informed differentiations that produce social groups and spaces (Gal and Irvine 2019).

According to linguistic anthropologists Susan Gal and Judith Irvine, communication in general depends on processes of differentiation, of contrasting one thing against another in order to render them both a knowable category; these processes are almost universal (Gal and Irvine 2019). These differentiations contrast between signs, social positions, historical moments, or projects, and are informed by ideologies that link differentiations between “expressive features... to cultural images, constructing stereotypes of people and activities, and rendering them convincing” (Gal and Irvine

2019: 2). Their approach is informed by the Peircean view of how signs function. First, and most simply put, a sign is something that stands for something to someone (Gal and Irvine 2019, Peirce 1955). Signs are identified in contrast to a background (a sign means something in contrast to and in relationship with its surroundings) and people make guesses or “abductions” as to their meaning. Each of these guesses triggers further hypothesizing and trialing of meaning to either expand the original guess or to revise it. Through this process, signs and their relationship to meaning grow and we gain knowledge of the world around us. As Gal and Irvine point out, the beauty of this logic is that it does not assume that signs are strictly linguistic materials (e.g. words or utterances), but that this semiotic logic allows for all kinds of signs including material signs – like polyphenols or the viscosity of olive oil. However, signs are imbued with meaning via contrast; no concept can exist on its own without comparison to an opposite concept or its own absence (Gal and Irvine 2019, Keil and Wilson 2000). In this project, I take a wide range of materials as signs ranging from actual linguistic signs in the way people talk about olive oil to the very bodily sensations involved in tasting, because they are all tied up in the same semiotic logic that produces a web of meaning and differentiations in which olive oil is situated.

Equally important to their approach, and mine in this project, is an attempt to understand how recognizing and interpreting even the smallest signs is a process organized and directed by existing regimes of value or ideologies (Gal and Irvine 2019). First, to even notice a sign requires attention and contrast; the attunement to signs and the ability to compare them against others are informed by perspectives and social positioning (Gal and Irvine 2019: 18). In this project, the process of noticing and

interpreting signs is most clearly demonstrated in tasting, particularly in the guided tasting experiences described in chapters three, four, and five. In a guided tasting of olive oil, participants are literally told where to focus their attention, which qualities in the oil warrant their attention, and then meanings are attached to them either through conjecture or the guide provides participants with one. For example, the qualities of spicy and bitter are two pervasive and important signs that my participants identified as characteristic of high-quality Tuscan extra virgin olive oil. The noticing of the qualities and their implicit contrast against their absence or opposites (possibly sweetness), along with their association with quality, Tuscan-ness, and extra virginity are all structured by an underlying ideology put into action by a tasting guide.

As will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, tasting, discussing tastes, and therefore the interpretation of signs are interactional processes. In these scenarios, participants position themselves vis-à-vis social roles and social positionings in relation to one another, as well as those outside of the direct interchange but whose positions and voices are available for reference (Goffman 1981, Bahktin 1981). In his project focused on wine-talk, Michael Silverstein shows that when we talk about aesthetic objects, we are not only talking about what they are, but we are communicating important information about who we are (Silverstein 2006). One such way is through the use of registers, recognizable and specialized linguistic repertoires that include not only terminology and verbal practices, but also nonverbal communications (Agha 1998, 2001, 2007; Silverstein 2003, 2004, 2006). Differing levels of mastery, the perception of expertise, and familiarity with aesthetic objects, like wine or olive oil, are part of how speakers position themselves in relation to others within the interaction, as well as their social position

more generally. There is a transduction of value from the object, in Silverstein's case wine and in this project olive oil, to those who claim expertise or connoisseurship regarding it. Tastings can be understood similarly as other "situated comparisons of cultural materials" that "create and reproduce politically powerful differentials" (Gal and Irvine 2019: 17). As Gal and Irvine explain, their position that comparison and differentiation of cultural materials is tied to the production of social groups and identities has a long history in Marxist tradition as well, where the cultural materials could be anything from popular culture to forms of speech to aesthetic judgements (Gal and Irvine 2019, Gramsci 1985, Williams 1977, Hebdige 1979). For Bourdieu, the distinctions connected to judgements of taste were intimately tied to class domination, where only the higher class could engage in producing and appreciating high culture, of which fine wine and olive oil could be considered examples (Bourdieu 1984). Gal and Irvine, however, try to open up these processes to look at ideologies underlying the distinctions made as indicative of partial and positioned perspectives rather than connected singularly to issues of class (Gal and Irvine 2019). This opens the conversation to allow for a multitude of interpretations of signs informed by infinitely varied regimes of value. This project is partially about the construction of Taste and taste communities, and therefore requires thinking about class distinction according to Bourdieu (Chapter 4) but is also concerned with the other historically produced differentiations that intersect with class distinctions in interactions focused on olive oil, like those of locality or race.

Four interconnected processes are critical to understanding the ways differentiations function and spread across contexts. First, rhematization refers to how a contrastable quality of sign is taken to be a contrast in the conditions that made it;

qualities of the sign are seen as innately part of the larger order category (Gal and Irvine 2019). For example, if a particular sound in speech is connected to a particular language, it has to be considered in contrast to another sound in another language. Through rhematization, the sound and its qualities are equated with the speaker who produces them; so sounds that may be typically French are thought to be reflective of French people (Gal and Irvine 2016). Terroir, the taste of place (Trubek 2008), operates in a similar fashion. The concept of terroir suggests that one can taste the context of production (provenance, methods of production, or cultural tradition) in a final food product. In terroir, tastes or sensations, perceived through tasting olive oils have an indexical function; as signs they refer to a relationship of causality. Things like spice and bitterness are assigned meaning, and their meaning is often in relation to the processes that produced them. Through rhematization, particular flavors are associated with how they were produced, and together they form the terroir of the product which is seen as a natural material part of the object rather than semiotically produced through interactions among those people who perceived and assigned meaning to flavors.

Second, rhematization produces axes differentiation for both signs and what they represent; it extends the contrast between individual signs and the larger categories to which they belong (Gal and Irvine 2019). These axes of differentiation can by multiple and operate simultaneously. For example, spicy and bitter are two signs observable within olive oil. They are connected to the ideas of Tuscany, extra virginity, and high-quality that are then read as qualities of the oil itself. We can think about the related axes of differentiation contrasting provenance (Tuscany vs. elsewhere), virginity (extra or non-extra), and quality (high vs. low). Alternatively, together they could be understood as



producing an axis of differentiation around authenticity and inauthenticity as will be shown throughout this work.

Third, the comparisons created by axes of differentiation are reiterated at varying scales through fractal recursivity; the categories are used over and over to contrast both subsets and encompassing sets of categories (Gal and Irvine 2019, Irvine and Gal 2000). In the current study, the fractally recursive differentiations can be observed both at varying scales and across different domains thanks to processes of rhematization. For example, as will be discussed in Chapter 1, differentiations between European vs. non-European, Italian vs. Non-Italian, North vs. South, region vs. whole are all repetitions of the contrasting pairs. These differentiations are carried across contexts from how people have historically construed some social groups as inherently backward to the way people talk about olive oil.

Finally, erasure is the process by which the elements that do not fit within categorization are either ignored or explained away (Gal and Irvine 2019, Irvine and Gal 2000). For example, in tasting olive oils, guides lead participants to pay attention to some characteristics and not others. Further, in the narration of olive oil as a heritage food product, some forms of labor are often subject to erasure – like that of immigrants producing traditionally Italian products (to be discussed further in Chapter 2).

The processes of differentiation and distinction, however, do not occur without context. The circumstances in which people conjecture about the meaning of signs and produce differentiations as well as those already present within history inform how we produce meaning. Axes of differentiation can persist across time as well as domains, but they can also shift (Gal and Irvine 2019). The first two chapters of this dissertation work

to set up some of the recurring fractally recurring differentiation that distinguish between and produce social groups. The rest of the dissertation focuses on how those differentiations are produced and reproduced through interactions around olive oil, pulling new signs into axes of differentiation that produce Italians and non-Italians, as well as categories of authenticity and inauthenticity, good and bad, real and fake. Attention to the processes of differentiation and distinction involved in Tuscan olive attune us to how signs and qualities that are seen at the microlevel, or understood as personal – like experiencing taste – are also political in nature or as Gal and Irvine state “how the intimate is linked to institutional forms, how capillary power works” (Gal and Irvine 2016).

In the context of social anxiety, processes of differentiation and distinction become increasingly important to reify categories that are seemingly undermined by forces that are outside of control. As will be seen in Chapter 2, anxiety around the scandal of olive oil is connected to anxiety around the industrialized food system and well as demographic and other social changes faced by the Italian nation. In the face of these anxieties people seek to reaffirm aspects of their lives, from food to identity, through processes of differentiation. However, rather than this process being seen as clinging to tradition or as simply a nativist move, I believe that my participants are interacting with axes of differentiation that already existed while creating others in relation to changing circumstances. As will be seen in Chapter 2, the Expo Milano is a great example of how countries turn to “tradition” and “artisanal” methods in combination with industrial scale to address the problems of sustainably producing food for a growing global population while dealing with climate change. The processes of differentiation in olive oil are tied to

other kinds of shifting contexts, where olive oil has become a ubiquitous household product and the small to mid-scale producers with whom I interacted are working to distinguish their products as elite, luxury, quality items tied to tradition and artisanal production. In attempting to identify and describe their products, to produce them as quality goods, my participants also engaged with other pervasive fractally recurring distinctions tied to ideas around authenticity and quality that included the ways people think about immigrants, people from the south, or even other regions.

### **Structure of the Dissertation**

The first two chapters of the dissertation set up the historic and social background for the second half where I dive deeper into specific ethnographic cases that illustrate the ways people identify and produce the terroir of olive oil, enact expertise, and construct authenticity. The distinctions found in the first half between Italians and non-Italians, northerners and southerners, regions and the nation, as well as between artisanal/traditional production and the industrial system are pervasive throughout the second half in how people talk about and experience olive oil. In the first chapter, I explore the history of Italian foodways to illuminate the constructed nature of heritage discourses. I argue that the project of Italian nationalism is always incomplete because of its insistence on unity through diversity. The diverse elements that the nation seeks to contain, in the form of regionalisms and local identity, resist containment; and while they are used to support national identity reveal its slippages. At the same time, the place of non-Italian immigrants within Italy is still yet to be fully negotiated, with them being actively held outside of Italian national identity because of their “unassimilability.” These

tensions recapitulate the infamous Southern question, with the role of the “other” played by southern Italy in relation to the north, the region to the peninsula, and immigrants in relation to Italians. In these configurations, the processes of erasure necessary for the ideological work of constructing an axis of differentiation between “Italy” and its “others” is often undermined by other pervasive distinctions between regions and localities. Olive oil figures into these relationships because as a heritage food it stands as a symbol of identity linking together people and place. It encompasses and is used in negotiating these frictions of identity.

Chapter Two expands on the anxiety produced through conditions of an incomplete national project, the tensions between regionalism and nationals, and the increasing presence of immigrants, to show how food is tied into a broader condition of social anxiety. Social anxiety encompasses not only the issues explained in the first chapter, but also concerns around an unfathomably large and complex global industrial food system manifesting in fears about safety and healthfulness of products. Throughout the dissertation, direct representation of the industrial food system in the form of ethnographic examples is noticeably absent. This reflects both the relative inaccessibility of these spaces during my fieldwork as well as the way the industrial food system is generally present in everyday life. It is at once immeasurably present in everyday interactions with industrially produced or globally circulated foods, but at the same time the actual processes by which those items come to be present in our everyday lives is mostly invisible. This invisibility and a circulation of misinformation (or rather non-circulation of information) about the industrial system is what fuels the anxiety around it. Food scares are a consolidated moment in which to see these anxieties come to a head. I

argue that the “scandal” of adulterated olive oil in Italy demonstrates the connections between realms of anxiety through discursive linkages equating foreignness with danger.

In my investigation into how people address the anxieties explained in chapters one and two, *terroir*, or the taste of place, emerged as a key tool used by producers, professional tasters, and even lay people in proving to themselves and others the origins and authenticity, and therefore safety and healthfulness, of olive oils. The indexical function of *terroir*, the supposed causal linking of signs (tastes) with their production fills the gap of knowledge that fuels anxiety around industrial products. *Terroir* is particularly powerful because the methods used to identify it are embodied, visceral, and tied to people’s personal perceptions of reality. Chapter 3 focuses on a public tasting course for parents and children in a community just outside of Florence. The course was designed to provide attendees with “rules of thumb” for discerning “high quality extra virgin olive oils.” These tips centered on reading labels and tasting the product to discover its *terroir*. Through the lesson, the instructor linked ideas about quality, health, and goodness with ideas about localness through the discursive tool of *terroir*. The ways in which she talked about *terroir* naturalized the concept as something to be discovered in the materiality of olive oils (chemicals, flavors, textures), but the fact that she was leading a lesson on how to discover them pointed to the necessity of guidance to observe these aspects and the construction of *terroir* not as materially grounded in a product but in the ways we talk about it. Through this chapter, I argue that *terroir* is 1) used a key tool for people who are concerned with evidence of origins, healthfulness, and safety in olive oil and 2) regardless of material reality, is chiefly produced through discursive practices. Further, tasting as a method for discovering *terroir* is a way in which *terroir* is further naturalized

into a product; terroir functions through the elision of its discursive roots by attaching meaning to sensory experience. People see terroir as an inherent part of the material reality of a product rather than a discursive or cultural artifact. In attempting to teach participants how to differentiate “quality” and “safety” the instructor also engages other pervasive distinctions between locality, nationhood, and belongingness set up in the two preceding chapters. This example demonstrates how even in attempting to differentiate some oils as quality versus the quotidian low-quality products, tasters engage in existing axes of differentiation furthering their recursivity into these microengagements with olive oil. Those differences are seen as a natural part of the oil as well, rather than historically situated or discursively produced. This argument is further developed in chapter four where I explore the discursive production of terroir and the ways in which it is made legible through a register of expertise. Chapter 4 focuses on a professional taster training course to illuminate the ways connoisseurs and experts use intersubjective agreement to approach objective evaluations of taste experiences. While these practices produce both terroir and the taste community, they also naturalize terroir as an object on its own rather than discursively produced as well as obfuscate experts’ and connoisseurs’ participation in the creation of social relations that structure their positions as experts and connoisseurs. What is interesting too about the efforts of the organization that sponsored the taster training, was that they were targeting spaces of consumption that figured closely with issues of class and tourism – restaurants. This focus was part of their underlying attempt to not only revalorize olive oils as authentic and high quality, but to differentiate certain kinds of olive oils as elite or desirable goods. These types of commodities are not part of everyday consumption, and so are caught up in circulations

that are not only highly classed but that rely on tourism for their global circulation. That circulation is also limited in that the products themselves most often do not circulate widely in markets across the globe (except for potentially in Eataly), but people that interact with them within the space of Italy, namely tourists, carry them home or carry the stories about their value. Together with Chapter 3, these chapters undermine the categories of good/bad, authentic/inauthentic, real/fake, or defective/quality in which participants are attempting to place oils.

Chapter 5 chapter focuses on ways in which authenticity is created for olive oil through the contexts of encounter, but chiefly through practices that produce transparency. This chapter builds on previous chapters' discussion of the discursive production of terroir, to argue that tasting is a type of ritual of verification that grounds transparency in materiality. Although just like terroir, authenticity and transparency are discursively produced, the act of tasting adds powerful material evidence to their production. First, the chapter described the ways in which transparency and traceability are produced and contribute to authenticity, especially within the context of social anxieties about food. The semiotic material available and presented within these types of encounters function indexically just like was mentioned earlier concerning terroir. They work to close the information gap between product and production for consumers – a key differentiation from the industrial system – and a major force behind the production of authenticity for consumers. Transparency in these contexts is all about foregrounding (honing attention to) certain information and downplaying (erasing) that information which does not fit. This chapter highlights taste as a method by which consumers further verify authenticity, through enactments of expertise concerning terroir. Regardless of

their successful use of the expert register or their individual ability to make terroir legible, the practice of engaging in the register is all that is needed to produce authenticity. This chapter includes examples from markets, laboratories, and tourist attractions to illuminate the multitude of ways authenticity is constructed through transparency and the involvement of taste as a critical component.

### **Tour of the Grounds at Poggio Borgoni**

As a way of introducing some of the overarching themes of this dissertation, we will begin with one of my first visits to the field. This story provides some grounding for us as we move forward into the rest of the project, introducing ideas about heritage, terroir, social anxiety, and authenticity that will be important in the chapters that follow.

One of my first visits to a farm took place in the summer of 2014 and immediately pointed to major themes I would need to take into consideration for my research: the connection between olive oil, heritage, and terroir; the tensions and anxieties involved in olive oil production; concerns around purity and authenticity; and expertise. Gianfranco responded to my inquiry with enthusiasm; the former professor was happy to welcome an anthropologist interested in learning more about olive oil production to his estate near San Casciano Val di Pesa, a little ways outside of Florence. However, thanks to Italian public transportation, I managed to miss the stop. After having been on the bus for what seemed like far too long, we stopped at a relatively unofficial looking station – just a concrete wall and a bench. I asked the bus driver if it was the right place and he pointed me back up the hill. In mid-August, this was not exactly the news I had hoped for. By the



time I worked my way back to the main square of the village, I was drenched in sweat from the unreasonably hot weather.

In the piazza, I was greeted by a thin grey-haired gentleman seemingly unaffected by the heat in his slacks and perfectly-pressed sky-blue oxford. Gianfranco and I exchanged our introductions and headed on our way in his small silver car. Within a couple minutes, we drove through large automatic gates into a square shrub-lined yard in front of a two-story white villa. Passing through a foyer that smelled like old wood and dust, Gianfranco ushered me into the living room to sit on an old blue velvet sofa, where a friendly white Labrador retriever jumped onto my lap. “Pimba! *Giu!*” Gianfranco commanded in a soft but firm voice, “Pimba! Get down!”

“My son Stefano is coming. You should meet him because he takes care of everything with the farm,” Gianfranco explained. Stefano had been recuperating their unused land and trying to grow the olive oil production of the estate’s 2,000 trees. The trees were spread between the 200 hectares around the house and then a bit more land elsewhere closer to San Casciano. As Gianfranco began telling me about the land, he excitedly asked me again about being an anthropologist. A few years back he had discovered what he believed to be Etruscan ruins on a nearby hillside that he had been slowly excavating: “You know the Etruscans used to make olive oil! Maybe you can come take a look?”

Before I could thank him for the invitation but explain that I was not that kind of anthropologist, Stefano came into the room and quickly shook my hand to begin his interrogation. Rapid fire questions about who I was, what I wanted to know, and why I was there eventually gave way to a calm, warm, and welcoming demeanor more similar

to how his father had greeted me. While we spoke, Gemma, Gianfranco's wife, brought a small tray of coffees; and as if she was my own grandmother, scolded me for taking too little sugar.

After the coffee, Stefano offered to take me on a tour of the grounds. As we walked he explained the layout of the estate or *fattoria*. The grounds undulated west, east, and north away from the house, with some ripples covered primarily by olive trees and others by neatly ordered grapevines, creating a patchwork across the landscape. Down the steep hill behind the house was a smaller old gray stone building and a newer metal workshop. "The families that lived there used to take care of the land in this area. Everything they needed was down there, there's an oven, sleeping areas, living space, and there was a barn there, but we've made that building now for the tractors and equipment." The stone building was a remnant of the *mezzadria* sharecropping system. The landowning family lived in the villa that Gianfranco and Gemma now called home, and then the family responsible for working the land and harvesting would live in or use the space of the stone house below. The landlords owned the means of production, the workers would provide the labor, and they would theoretically split the harvest evenly. This was a similar set up in many of the other farms I visited throughout Tuscany; they were either large estates that were still intact or they had been broken up into smaller individual farms.

Stefano guided me over toward the nearest group of trees and pointed down at the base of one where had been cut off. Newer growth sprang up from the stump forming the seemingly mature tree in front of me. As he explained, due to Tuscany's position relatively north in the peninsula, it was close to the edge of where olives could be

cultivated. Every so often they would have a bad freeze that would kill of trees. Luckily, like this one, olive trees will grow back eternally as long as the roots were still good. This tendency toward resurrection and immortality has made olive trees a symbol of endurance. Even the Uffizi, the main art gallery of Florence, planted an olive tree in the center of the city to commemorate the Mafia's attempted bombing of their landmark museum in 1993 as retaliation against the government's crackdown on organized crime. The tree standing before Stefano and I had been badly damaged in the last freeze of 1995, but now looked healthy as ever.

We continued through the grove with Stefano pointing out the various types of olives for me: *frantoio* were little, bright green olives; *moroloio* were a bit larger, round, and a slightly darker, earthier green; the *leccino* were similar to frantoio in color but have an ovular shape. Stefano explained that traditionally olive oil would not be a monocultivar product, an oil made from just one specific cultivar: "The fields are all mixed up! It would be crazy!" So, most oils that are marketed as traditional or that have a specific denomination of origin, Chianti Classico DOP<sup>1</sup> or Toscano IGP<sup>2</sup> for example, are made from a mixture of the varieties present within the environment. "Each variety is what gives it a complex taste," according to Stefano. In recent times, producers have begun experimenting with different mixtures, purposefully playing with the flavor profiles of their oils, and producing ones that are monocultivar. These experiments produce oils that are variously flavored without the use of other additives; for example,

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<sup>1</sup> *Denominazione di origine protetta – protected denomination of origin*

<sup>2</sup> *Indicazione geografica protetta – protected geographic indication*

flavoring oils with lemon or artichoke. The oils he and his family produce, Stefano explained, were naturally perfumed and flavored only by the type of olive and the surrounding environment.

He drew my attention to the grounds around the trees and their arrangement. “In classic cultivation there aren’t clear rows or neatly spaced trees. There’s no irrigation.” In these fields, the rows were relatively regular but still no signs of a formal irrigation system. “We rely on the rain to water the plants,” he continued, “Here we have them really close together, around 500 trees in one hectare. Around the house, they are nicely spaced out but some other fields aren’t as nice.”

During my visit, the undergrowth was relatively high. For Stefano’s fields and many others in Tuscany, they elected to let the undergrowth grow and would clear it out a couple times a year, making sure one was right before the harvest so collection nets could be placed and moved around easily without getting caught. At their farm, the grass clippings and clippings from pruning were allowed to stay on the ground and then they pass through with a machine that mulches everything to return the organic material to the soil. Not only is this a more efficient way clearing between the trees, but it saves them money on fertilizers. As Stefano explained, the other option would be to till the soil which is much more time consuming and risks damaging the roots of the olive trees because they grow so close to the surface.

The trees themselves were pruned every three years or so to keep them a manageable height. If they got too tall, they would have to use ladders to harvest olives. Stefano spoke up, “You see those old photos of people climbing up into the trees to harvest olives? Yeah? We don’t do that. In the older days, people used to walk around the

trees with small baskets tied around their waists and they would strip the olives from individual branches by hand. They would use ladders to climb up into the trees to get to the higher branches.” According to Stefano, this practice eventually changed and now they use mechanized pickers that mimic the motion of hands, shaking branches, and stripping the olives. The olives fall into the large nets spread beneath the trees and are easily collected in a bin.

As we walked through more of the field, Stefano paused to pull an olive from a low branch and draw my attention to a small hole, slightly white around the edge and then spreading into a brown color. Pointing at the hole he explained the process by which the *mosca olearia* or “olive fly” lands and lays eggs inside the olive. He then dug his fingernail into the skin and pulled it back to show the “caterpillar’s tunnel.” The flesh went from a light green color to brown around where the maggot had burrowed. He then pulled at the flesh a little more and out popped a small white pill-shaped creature. Smashing the insect between his fingers, he flicked the decimated olive and dead bug to the ground.

“There are two main threats to olives in Tuscany: winters and bugs. The winters sometimes have freezes that kill the plants like you saw over there. Every ten to fifteen years. And then the ice [hail] that falls can sometimes effect the olives.” He plucked another olive from a tree and pointed at a bruise. We had just had an intense hail storm the week before and this was one of the consequences: bruised olives. Also, if bad storms occur while the plants are in bloom, the damage to the flowers could decrease pollination and result in a poor yield. He continued, “The bugs are not as big of a

problem as in the south because the climate here is a bit cooler. But there are still the flies.”

In recent years, the organic trend has become popular; many farms have become “biologico” or incorporate aspects of organic cultivation. “We’re not organic, but we only use pesticides when it’s completely necessary.” Stefano’s farm manager kept track of the effects of the bugs and when it reached the point that maybe 10-15% of the olives on a single tree or in a particular area were affected, they would spray to kill the bugs. As he explained, the main problem with the bugs is not that they eat the olives but that they begin the oxidation process by breaking the seal that the skin provides and there is no way to remove the larvae before the milling process begins. So, there may still be some remnant of the bugs in the final product that changes the quality and the taste of the oil.

Stefano turned us back toward the house and added that in the process of making the oil, too, there was risk of degradation or contamination. “The best oil is that which is still in the olive, it’s a dogma.” I would later learn just to what lengths producers go to ensure that they can preserve the oil as closely as possible to what is inside the olives - untouched and uncontaminated. As we walked back toward the house, we diverted down the hill to collect his car. He wanted to take me on a tour of the nearby cooperative mill that handled the processing of oil for most of the surrounding estates. During the harvest season, they would take the olives to the *frantoio* every day for milling: “The longer they sit, the longer they have to ferment or for oxidation to happen, which in the end decreases the quality of the product.” Wasting time would increase chances of the oil not meeting the strictly low levels of acidity needed for extra virgin designation, not to speak of the coveted Chianti Classico denomination of origin.

We pulled up to the Frantoio del Grevepesa and parked beside the chain-link fence surrounding the facility. The *frantoio* was a short industrial building with a large parking lot and behind the building you could see a cluster of metal containers. We walked through the front door passing the small office space and stopped in the hall outside the bottling room. The machine inside moved bottles along a small conveyer belt, filled them, sealed them, and then labeled them. Further into the building, we walked through a small room with a fireplace, a table, and some snack machines. That room opened into another space with churning machines, the centrifuge, the machine that removed water, and the steps leading down to the basement. We continued through to the back of the building where the olives would normally be dropped off. There was no one there but Stefano assured me that the place turns into a nuthouse during harvest season with people rushing about; the mill runs around the clock to process all the olives that arrive in a timely manner.

At the back of the building Stefano pointed to low metal-lined pits where the olives would be dumped, then to the conveyer belt leading to a machine that separates out leaves and small twigs with a vacuum (or as he said “*un Hoover*”). The olives are then moved to another station where they climb up another conveyer belt. Stefano was mindful to say that despite the continuous processing, they are very careful to make sure there is a clear separation between different loads of olives with spacing and set appointments. This ensures that the olive oil at the end is specifically theirs and not accidentally mixed with anyone else’s. Another conveyer belt led up to a washing station where water bubbles around the olives. The olives move along yet another conveyer belt

out of the washing station, rinsed with fresh water, and dried. From there they finally make it into the mill.

The milling section itself was surprisingly a lot smaller than I had imagined. In my mind, I still had the image of a giant stone wheel grinding the olives into a paste. It was only about two feet tall and maybe two feet wide. The exact inner workings of the “mill” was lost on me, but Stefano used his hands to demonstrate – palms facing each other with fingers bent inward, and hands twisting in opposite directions representing the mechanisms that ground the skin, the flesh, and the pit. The resulting pulp is then moved to a series of machines that churn the material in the *gramulazione* stage.

The churning machines were long tubes with windows in the top where you could observe the circular blade churning the pulp into a consistent paste. Stefano explained that the oxygen could be removed from these tanks, but that they did not do that at this particular mill. He explained that a little air is good for the extraction. The oxidation process takes away from the quality of the oil, but a little is necessary for its extraction. The oxygen breaks down the “sacks” that hold the oil within the olive flesh and improves the yield.

“These containers never get above 20 degrees<sup>3</sup>,” Stefano explained, “If you see ‘cold pressed’ it means that at no point during the process has the material gone over 28 degrees<sup>4</sup>.” Heat and other chemicals can be applied to extract more oil, but it lowers the quality and likely it will not meet extra virgin standards. After churning, the paste is

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<sup>3</sup> 20 degrees Celsius is equal to 68 degrees Fahrenheit

<sup>4</sup> 28 degrees Celsius is equal to 82.4 degrees Fahrenheit



moved to a centrifuge, spun, and on one end the solids exit and on the other the liquids. The liquids are then moved to another machine that extracts some of the remaining water from the oil.

Once the oil is finished, it is moved into metal tanks filled with gases like nitrogen or argon, to protect against the oxidation process. The oil is then tested and designated as extra virgin or not, as well as given a denomination of origin. Extra virgin designations require exceptionally low acidity ( $<0.8\%$ ) and passing a panel taste test to determine the absence of any defects. At this facility they could produce Chianti Classico DOP or Toscano IGP because it was located within the two overlapping terroir regions. Stefano took me downstairs to check out the storage space. He fumbled with turning the light on, so he took out his cellphone and switched on the flashlight function. We walked through the door and the strong sweet pungent smell filled my nostrils. Moving through the room, Stefano's light shown on the stainless-steel tanks lining the walls, forming rows throughout the spacious basement. Each container was labeled with a white sheet of paper taped to its front with the type of oil it contained and what farm it was from scribbled in black permanent marker. This cooperative mill had between 300 and 350 members according to Stefano's estimate, and processed well over 5,000 tons of oil each year.

When we arrived back at the farm, Gianfranco was waiting outside for us to walk down to the cellar or *cantina*, where he lamented the changes he had seen in how people could buy wine and olive oil: "It used to be that you could go to a producer and buy their oil directly. They kept the oil in large terracotta pots in cellars to keep it cool and people would refill containers that they brought from home." Nowadays, with the influence of

EU level food safety regulations and other measures at the state level, this is technically not legal anymore. According to the EU, you can only sell oil in sealed containers up to 5 liters. Other regulations put into place in recent years included to introduction of the tamper-proof lid for olive oil that prevents refilling.

Gianfranco asked Stefano if he had explained to me that their oil was DOP. He had, but Gianfranco continued anyways explaining that “the smaller the area, the higher the quality.” He gave examples of Mediterranean oil in comparison to oil produce with EU-community olives, Italian versus Tuscan oils, and finally Chianti. With each increasingly smaller area, the level of traceability and hopeful assurance of quality increases.

Stefano handed his father a couple of small cups and filled each with oil from a bottle that was tucked in a cabinet behind a large stainless-steel container. “Fresh oil is bitter and a little bit sparkling and not clear,” Stefano pointed out before we proceeded to taste the samples. The spicy, bitter flavor had me coughing immediately. The oil burned my throat, which was not a sensation I was prepared for. The spice was a hallmark of Tuscan oil. Gianfranco then offered for me to try some of his homemade wine. It was made with 100% San Giovese grapes, the staple of Chianti Classico wine. He poured a few sips-worth of the strong-smelling wine for each of us – just enough to make my still-empty stomach turn.

After our tasting, Stefano offered to drive me back into town explaining that he needed to drop off a delivery of oil to a restaurant near the city center anyways, so it would be easy for him to take me back at least as far as Porta Romana on the south side of Florence. Gianfranco invited me to come back anytime to ask more questions or see

what was going on at the farm. Before we left, Pimba ran out of the house and jumped up to say goodbye. “He’s a regular dog, not a DOC<sup>5</sup> Chianti dog,” Stefano joked. I laughed probably a little too hard in response - I knew people extended the food term of DOC to refer to themselves indicating that they were truly from a specific place, but this was the first time I had heard someone use it to refer to a dog.

On the way back to town I thanked him for saving me from the bus and we talked about the upcoming harvest. There were a few local guys that would be coming to work for him, a couple men from Albania, who had helped the past few years, as well as one of their sons who was about my age. He encouraged me to come back in the coming months whenever they started harvesting, which was always a slightly moving target. First would be the grape harvest followed by the olive harvest a couple months later. We paused briefly when we reached Porta Romana to say goodbye and he continued to a part of the city further to the east.

The goal of this brief story was to not only help situate this project within the space of Tuscany, within olive groves, and with producers, but introduced some of the major themes with which I grapple in this project. The first is heritage; the self-conscious production of narratives that ground products in a specific place with particular people and transform them into economic and social resources. Second, is the concept of terroir, the taste of place (Trubek 2008), that emerged as a key way that people understood and used olive oil. Third, is an underlying theory of social anxiety. As will be explained, we

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<sup>5</sup> *Denominazione di origine controllata* – denomination of controlled origin

can directly observe the intersection of various realms of social anxiety through olive oil and the food scare associated with it. Fourth, I am concerned with ideas about authenticity and verification, especially those processes that involve tasting. Fifth, is an interest in enactments of expertise, the construction of connoisseurship, and the use of expert knowledge by amateurs.

## **Heritage**

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's theorization of heritage identified five main components to what heritage is. First, heritage is a "mode of cultural reproduction in the present that has recourse to the past" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995: 369). As was demonstrated by Stefano and Gianfranco's talking about their farm and products, the past is strategically used to generate a narrative of something to give it meaning in the present. Etruscan ruins, Roman agriculture, and middle age modes of production all contribute to the romanticization and placing of the farm in time and space, producing a clear link to the past that explains conditions in the present. Food scholar Massimo Montanari points to this phenomenon as being part of an "alimentary postmodernism" (2014: 62), whereby symbols of the past are unmoored from their original contexts and meanings to be used for purposes within the present. For example, as will be seen in the first chapter, the fascist regime of Italy between the world wars used regional traditions as a way to produce a particular kind of nationalism that was instrumental in their need to control the populace. These traditions had less to do with where they came from than their purpose in the present.

Second, heritage is a value-added industry (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995). Heritage preserves and transforms cultural artifacts that would have otherwise not survived the test of time; transforming ways of life or products that may not be, or were never, economically viable into valuable economic resources. As will be described in Chapters 1 and 2, Tuscany is an incredibly harsh region to grow olives for olive oil, and through various political, social, and economic initiatives it remains a regional product despite difficulty. In the present, its role as a heritage food has propped up artisanal production in the face of more mechanized or industrialized mass production.

Third, heritage produces the local for export (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995). Although much of the discussion in this dissertation is around olive oil consumption mainly within Italy, the products I am concerned with are produced to be circulated widely beyond local consumption. Preservation of some food commodities has hinged on the ability of producers to access larger or even global markets to support continued production. Systems of designation of origin, discussed below, are one such mechanism that enables this global exportation of the local.

Fourth, there is a problematic relationship between heritage objects and their instruments; meaning that they are often represented out of context in some way such as in a museum (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995). For olive oil, a product that has its natural, pure, local qualities continuously highlighted, is often represented in markets, fairs, online shops, or other arenas that do not necessarily link directly to the romantic idea of an individual producer provisioning themselves or their neighbors. And last, heritage involves virtuality (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995). Whether a product or a tradition is “real” or “invented” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), matters very little because

authenticity is continually (re)constructed in the face of changing circumstances, consumers desires, and producers needs. These aspects of the construction of heritage, nonetheless, add up to a way that people are represented to themselves and others that can become very powerful economic, social, and political tools.

Food, when designated as heritage takes on the role of “edible chronotope” binding groups together in space and time in opposition to other groups (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004: xiii; Hall 1999; Di Giovine 2009; Brulotte and Di Giovine 2014; Bakhtin 1981). In Europe food has emerged as a central object in the construction of local, national, and cosmopolitan culture (Castellanos and Bergstresser 2006, Wilson 2006). Anthropologists and food scholars have pointed out the ways in which gastronationalism has appealed to the concept of *terroir* and protection systems as part of nationalist and local identity formations (DeSoucey 2010). These ideas that food effectively reflects the people and places it belongs to in such deep and innate ways also rears an ugly head through gastroracism, allowing for the discrimination against certain groups to be enacted through the discrimination against particular food practices like the regulation of kebab stands (Cavanaugh 2013) or Latinx-owned food trucks (Fouts 2018).

In my fieldwork, food as cultural heritage came up in two dominant ways. First, food as heritage was used to represent Italians and Italian identity to others. Second, food as heritage was used to represent Italians to themselves, as a form of social memory and a touchstone for identity. These two uses often occur together, and the politics over who can claim ownership of, benefit from, or be represented by cultural heritage are often murky, left largely unresolved, and are productive of new cultural forms (Grasseni 2016).

For many places, and especially Italy, heritage is intimately tied to tourism. As Ronda Brulotte and Michael Di Giovine note in their volume on intangible cultural heritage and food, alongside the heritagization of foods there has been a rise in global culinary tourism, where travelers seek out engagements with alterity through food (Brulotte and Di Giovine 2014). For some consumers, culinary tourism is about experiencing food in “a mode that is out of the ordinary, that steps outside the normal routine” and “to notice difference and the power of food to represent and negotiate that difference” (Long 2004: 20). As some scholars have posited, the experience of the other through food is tied to a quest for authenticity; searching for something more real or genuine than the everyday lives they lead (Lindholm 2008, McCannell 1999). Other scholars have pointed to this engagement with the other as a form of self-fashioning in the name of cosmopolitanism or as “foodies” (Sammells 2014, Long 2004, Johnston and Bauman 2010).

Tuscany, in particular, has a long history of tourism extending well beyond the Grand Tours of the 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> Centuries where young men and sometime women would travel Europe including Tuscany to be educated in culture through to contemporary times where Tuscany is represented in popular books and films like “Under the Tuscan Sun.” In Tuscany, local politics have favored tourism in the countryside through promoting such efforts as agritourism (Ascione 2012), where tourists can live and eat on farms. A number of my research sites were these types of farms that could host visitors for a few days. These visitors were a considerable way they could sustain their agricultural activities. For many, the way I was able to engage with some sites was through paths that tourists had created – guided tours and tasting courses.

## **Terroir**

Terroir, or the taste of place, is based on the idea that the contextual factors of production such as geography, geology, climate, and a number of other environmental and physical factors impart idiosyncratic characteristics to the products grown or elaborated within them (Beriss 2019, Wilson 1998). Recently, anthropologists and other food scholars have brought social context and cultural process into the fold for considering influences on terroir and an attention to how terroir is used to describe and value products and the past (Trubek 2008, Barham 2003, Filippucci 2004, Demossier 2011). The idea of terroir is mobilized in heritage discourses to establish the grounds for designations of origin: “Terroir, as rural heritage, is often presented as harmonious, coherent, respectful, original, natural, threatened, a setting in which people, space, and time are organically connected” (Demossier 2011: 687 citing Filippucci 2004). Through terroir, a link is made between people, place, and time through products.

Terroir and the designations of origin that it enables, effectively binds geography, people, cultural practices, and products into legal systems and intellectual property regimes (Parasecoli 2017). These products are part of the heritage-scape (Di Giovine 2009), where they circulate and encounter a variety of actors, all the while carrying with them the immaterial and symbolic charge of representing a people and a place. Terroir helps ground that immaterial duty in the materiality of the product by assuming that material-physical properties of the product are directly linked to its origins in perceivable ways. As Cristina Grasseni points out in her study of heritage cheese production in northern Italy, there is a “conceptual short-circuit” in Italian when it comes to



translating “terroir” (Grasseni 2017: 42). *Tipicità* (typicality) is generally used in reference to the phenomenological, affective, cultural connections between a product and place; while *territorio* is used to describe the geological and environmental factors more closely associated with the more strict traditional understanding of terroir. However, *territorio* is commonly used to try and encapsulate both the geographic and cultural environment in describing products. At the same time, it symbolically binds people, products, and places together, performing the same discursive function as terroir, regardless of the use of *tipicità* in product labelling.

In their work on terroir, sociologists of science like Genevieve Tiel, recognize that “terroir and its tastes are not predefined ‘things,’ ‘data’ already there, ready to be perceived by the different tasters’ sensory apparatus” (Tiel 2012: 490). The existence of terroir for scientists is in fact highly questionable and they pose that it may not be a reflection of natural external causes (Deloire, Provost, and Kelly 2008, van Leeuwen and Seguin 2006). Rather, it is a cultural artifact (Gade 2009), a human production (Berard and Marchenay 2000, Demoissier 2000, Crenn and Techoueyres 2007, Gade 2004). Some scholars go so far as to say that terroir is nothing more than the idea that tasters have of it (Josling 2006). Regardless, terroir has been shown to have very real social and economic effects (Basset, Blanc-Pamard, and Boutrais 2007, Barham 2003, Techoueyres 2007).

Practices identifying terroir, like tasting notes, ranking, or the regimentation of methods for identifying it all work to naturalize terroir as an object to be sought out and make legible rather than produced through the very practices that attempt to find it (Teil 2010). These practices offer objective proof to its existence. Through practices like measuring flavors on scales, using specialized language, and talking about tasting

experiences, terroir is intersubjectively produced (Black 2018, Shields-Argeles 2018). By conceptualizing terroir as chiefly produced through discursive practice, it makes it possible to observe the ways in which actors link peoples, places, and products along with their associated anxieties. Foods like olive oil then, both elicit anxiety at the same time that they are a tool in negotiating it.

A combination of heritagization and terroir is what animates the systems of designation of origin mentioned by Stefano and Gianfranco at their farm. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, France set forth to control the prices and quality of wines produced in their country; this system was formalized in the 1930s into the systems of Controlled Appellations of Origin (AOC, or in French, Appellation D'Origine Controlee) (see Demossier 2011, Trubek 2008). Italy followed suite in 1963 with the creation of two regulations: DOC (Controlled Denomination of Origin, or Denominazione d'Origine Controlata) and DOCG (Denomination of Controlled and Guaranteed Origin, or Denominazione d'Origine Controlata and Garantita). Italy later added a third category of IGT (Typical Geographic Indication, or Indicazione Geografica Tipica) allowing for a wider range of products to be protected. These indications, originally applied to wines, quickly expanded to include more products, especially after the 1992 European Union regulations that allowed for the registering of products as PDO (Protected Designation of Origin, or DOP, Designazione d'Origine Protetta) and PGI (Protected Geographical Indication, IGP or Indicazione Geografica Protetta). A third category of TSG (Traditional Specialty Guaranteed, or STG Specialita Tradizionale Garantita) was also created but does not outline specific geographic origins like PDO or PGI.

PDO is the stricter of the denominations, concerning the name of a region, specific place, or country describing a product originating in that same place. PDO specifically includes the quality or other characteristics that are essential or exclusively due to the specific geographical environment and all production of the must be carried out in the geographic area. Conversely PGI allows for the fame or notoriety of a product to influence its use. It applied to the name of region, place, or country describing a product not only originating in that place, but that possesses a quality or reputation that is specifically due to the geographical environment including all natural and human components. Another key difference is that for PGI, only one phase of production needs to take place in the geographic area indicated by the name. In 2003, the EU expanded the products that could be labeled as PDOs and placed more strict regulations on certain aspects of the production processes like packaging.

In Italy there are currently 299 PDO, IGP or STG products not including the 523 DOCG, DOC or IGT wines<sup>6</sup>. Forty-seven of the PDO, IGP, and STG products are extra virgin olive oils. Five of those oils are from Tuscany: Toscano IGP, Chianti Classico DOP, Terre di Siena DOP, Lucca DOP, and Seggiano DOP. These systems codify linkages between peoples, places, and products through appeals to terroir and heritage in a way that contributes to their circulation and value beyond local consumption.

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<sup>6</sup> For a complete list of products with denominations of origin in Italy, see the Ministero delle politiche agricole alimentari, forestali e del turismo at [www.politicheagricole.it](http://www.politicheagricole.it)

## **Social Anxiety**

A focus of this dissertation is on the connection of olive oil to social anxiety. Human geographer Peter Jackson articulates a theory of social anxiety that describes it as “a physically embodied state involving mental and emotional distress, combined with a more diffuse sense of uneasiness about impending future events” (Jackson 2015:39) that is both the function and result of the social and cultural contradictions and tensions in which people live their lives (Jackson 2015, Wilkinson 2001). This idea of social anxiety is different from individualized psychological diagnoses because it lives in and is expressed through the interrelations of people and institutions and is produced and perpetuated through discourse focused on risk and threat, all the while individual people may not feel anxious or fearful themselves (Jackson 2015, Beck 1986). These anxieties are also not the product of specific events or circumstances, but rather are expressed through them. Fears about demographic change and immigration are produced and circulated in discourse about immigration, not in specific instances dealing with an immigrant – it is in those instances where the fears and anxieties are expressed. The same relationship exists for anxieties around food.

Anxiety around food and the unfathomability of the global industrial food system are produced and circulated at a discursive level but find expression in specific “food scares” (Jackson 2015, Stassart and Whatmore 2003). In her work on industrial and sustainable food systems, Alison Blay-Palmer demonstrates how social life is characterized by a growing physical, social, and intellectual distance between food and consumers which is exemplified in the trope of the industrial food system (Blay-Palmer 2008). The industrial system is differentiated from local or sustainable systems in

distance between steps in their articulations, but also in the ability to know the exact locality and processes of articulation. The industrial system is talked about as an ever present but ever removed chain that brings food to people but that is grounded in a multitude of locals, production is broken into a chain of steps across the globes. It can be everywhere and nowhere at the same time. That ambiguity produces anxiety around the safety of food through popular distrust of institutionalized powers' ability or desire to protect consumers.

In addition to anxiety around the existence of this system, Sean Hier points to a growing tension between expert knowledge and rationalities and the realities of everyday life – or “social realities” (Hier 2003). In the context of the U.S. , Harvey Levenstein elaborates on this division illuminating American’s fraught relationship with food, scientific understandings, and nutritional advice (Levenstein 2012). The constantly shifting advice coming from “authorities” as well as popular sources is not seen as the products of changes in knowledge, but as uncertainty in what is actually fact. This gap between “expert” level information and what lay people know in a context where individuals are responsible for their own choices about how to eat healthily and sustainable, in short morally, leaves a lot space for anxiety to foment and filter into everyday choices. The exaggeration of individual agency leads to consumers being blamed for their lack of knowledge and skills resulting in their unhealthy or unsustainable diets rather than the holding of powerful institutional actors accountable for the ways they put consumers at risk in the first place (Hier 2003). Further, food has been theorized as a window through which to observe social anxiety because of its connection to and transgression of the intimate boundary between self and the outside world (Goodman and

Sage 2014, Lavin 2013). These anxieties combine to erupt in moments of “moral panic” (Ungar 2001) where consumers are faced with a threat and have to negotiate strategies for dealing with it – but that possibly do not have any bearing on the causes because of the division between individual responsibility and the power of institutionalized systems.

One way that individuals navigate this anxiety is through “rules of thumb,” where they simplify information and make choices rationalized in terms of larger order issues of health and sustainability (Green et al. 2003). Chapter 3 explores the ways that expert level information is simplified into usable forms that consumers can leverage in their everyday lives to rationalize purchases as part of a healthy, responsible lifestyle in the face of a panic about the veracity of the products they thought were good for them. The intervention of education around food is a particularly powerful way in which various actors intervene in the politics of food. Gustatory education is particularly powerful because it links pleasure in eating to larger order issues of morality, sustainability, and healthfulness, as can be clearly seen in the work of Slow Food (Counihan 2018). A major part of their efforts is to educate consumers on the pleasures of slower food in contrast to fast food, drawing lines between “local” or “traditional” products and those that are industrially or mass-produced. It is these acts of differentiation that most convincingly produce the very systems they are meant to describe. Through educating consumers, axes of differentiation produce the industrial system and its supposedly more sustainable, localized, moral opposites. As Gal and Irvine point out, the process of rhematization, the transmission of qualities from sign to production, “is most powerful when it attributes perceptible qualities to something that is not directly observable” (Gal and Irvine 2019). Taste and taste education does this. In gustatory education and tastings assign meaning to

qualities sensed within foods and those qualities are transmitted to the systems that produced them. As will be seen in Chapters 3 and 4, positive qualities are attributed to local, artisanal, traditional production, while negative are attributed to industrialized production. The two systems in that moment are produced discursively by tasters with particular ideologized views. Throughout this dissertation, the industrial system is mainly presented through the eyes of participants with a bias against it, given their roles in producing olive oils that are supposedly the opposite of the low-quality or potentially harmful products. These interactions that produce opposing systems of production and their attached values are what make the opposing sides real for the consumers in my project.

Food scares and “scandals” about adulteration are consolidated moments in which we can interrogate anxieties around food, broader politics, the ways they interconnect, the way they are framed and interpreted by stakeholders, and the ways people negotiate underlying anxieties in their everyday lives (Green et al 2003). I focus on the food scare involving the adulteration of olive oil to investigate how it illuminates underlying anxieties about food and social change in Italy, as well as how those anxieties get linked in discourse around olive oil, and the ways people negotiate fears about olive oil but through olive oil.

### **Authenticity and Verification**

This dissertation concerns two connected definitions of authenticity. First, authenticity in terms of products’ and experiences’ connections to people, place, and the past – the chronotopic qualities leveraged in heritage discourses (Bahktin 1981, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004). These connections, and therefore authenticity, are actively

constructed through linguistic and material means (Cavanaugh and Shankar 2014, Silverstein 2005). For example, in their studies on northern Italian salami and Japanese car commercial aimed at Chinese populations in the US, Jillian Cavanaugh and Shalini Shankar show the ways products are linked to particular contexts in order to produce authenticity. In the case of the salami, material linkages are produced with descriptions of ingredients and explanations of provenance connecting the product with the town in northern Italy; for the car commercial, the use of a Taiwanese pop singer singing an American song is an attempt to appeal linguistically to their target audience (Cavanaugh and Shankar 2014). In the current study, both material and linguistic connection communicated to consumers are important linkages to take into consideration, because they are both caught up in the same semiotic processes that produce the categories of authenticity and inauthenticity particularly in reference to food. Further, authenticity is highly malleable, variable, and requires continuous reconstruction (Lau 2010, Lindholm 2008, Trilling 1972) according to the needs of the origin community in response to market demands (Paxson 2010, Paxson 2013) as well as consumer evaluations (Vann 2006).

This first type of authenticity informs the second type, whereby authenticity means quality, verifiability, and genuineness (Jackson 2013). The first kind of authenticity is often discursively linked with the second, where foods that are locally-emplaced, have traceable roots, the production processes are known, or at least are represented as such, are considered higher quality, safer, and healthier than those foods that do not carry those markers of authenticity (Blay-Palmer 2008, Orlando 2018). These linkages between ideas of “good” and “local” have been exemplified by the work of



scholars focused on food movements like Slow Food (Capatti and Montanari 1999, Scarpellini 2011, Leitch 2003, Counihan and Siniscalchi 2014, Counihan 2018).

Because authenticity relies on the existence of inauthenticity, it often requires evidence and verification. Much like how discursive practices focused on terroir create their own evidence, so too do discourses of authenticity. In regard to the authenticity of food, transparency and traceability become paramount and are produced through documentary practices (Cavanaugh 2016) and opening up of production spaces to public view (Strathern 2000). In Jillian Cavanaugh's study of salami production in Bergamo, she demonstrates the role of documentary practices in proving the safety and authenticity of products; the papers and files become the material evidence that these intangible characteristics exist (Cavanaugh 2016). Marilyn Strathern and her colleagues demonstrate the ways in which processes of auditing have called for opening up the internal workings of institutions like the European Commission or the International Monetary Fund, to public view as a form of accountability (Strathern 2000). In this dissertation rather than finances or information, it is the production spaces of olive oils that require opening up either literally through tours or through the sharing of information in labeling or marketing practices for which documentary practices become important. I consider the act of tasting to be a ritual of verification (Douglas 1992) that produces transparency. It is in the act of tasting that the discursively produced experience of taste is grounded in the product itself (Perullo 2016, Teil, Hansen, and Grant 2012). Taste sensations validate the information given to tasters because they are engaged in a bodily experience that proves its existence and therefore what it means.

## **Expertise, Connoisseurship, and Amateur Knowledge**

Throughout this dissertation I discuss expert knowledge in the context of olive oil production and professional tasting. Following from E. Summerson Carr's description of expertise's treatment in linguistic anthropology, I consider expertise as "something people do rather than have or hold" (Carr 2010: 18). However, the ways in which expertise is enacted and the language ideologies involved in shaping those enactments, naturalize expertise as something present within the actor or as something that can be possessed (Carr 2010). This tendency toward naturalization obscures the social relations produced through the processes of enacting expertise leading participants to misrecognize them as natural or divested of their own interests (Carr 2010; Bourdieu 1984; Bourdieu and Johnson 1993; Irwin and Jordan 1987).

First, as is discussed in this dissertation, expertise requires intensive interaction with objects of knowledge that are culturally valued or valuable, as well as other people who have had similarly intensive relationships to facilitate mastery of a register used in interpreting those objects (Carr 2010, Knorr Cetina 1999, Lee and Roth 2003, Urban 2001). Registers are recognizable and specialized linguistic repertoires that include not only terminology and verbal practices, but also nonverbal communications (Carr 2010; Agha 1998, 2001, 2007; Silverstein 2003, 2004, 2006). According to Asif Agha's work on language and social relations, these registers "link diverse behavioral signs to enactable effects, including images of persona, interpersonal relationship, and type of conduct" (Agha 2007: 145). The registers people are able to command have direct impact on their engagement in different social practices; those social activities function alongside registers to differentiate people. In some spheres of activity, these registers are

used to index one's intimate knowledge about classes of culturally valuable objects (Urban 2001), like art (Myers 1994), wine (Silverstein 2004, 2006), or in the case of this dissertation, olive oil. As Chapters 3 and 4 discuss, professional tasters and others involved in the olive oil industry have worked toward building a register with which to communicate about the product borrowing from existing structures like those around wine. A key aspect of this communication is the focus on the *terroir* because it requires the intervention and interpretation of experts to become accessible and legible to lay people. In his study of brain-imaging, Joseph Dumit shows how PET scans move as meaningful objects across contexts, yet rely on and provide opportunity for would-be experts to interpret them and distinguish themselves from lay people who are unable to do so (Dumit 2004). At the same time that they give an object meaning through interpretation, they position themselves as experts. In this reliance on expertise to make an object legible, artisanal olive oil becomes an "expert object;" it offers opportunities for the enactment of expertise through its aspects that are considered generally illegible for non-experts.

Second, expert knowledge is naturalized as something people can possess or have, or as information that simply exists rather than being actively produced. Expert language is "devoiced" (Mehan 1996) and as an expert opinion or as expert knowledge it can exist as a citable fact rather than attached to the speaker. This feature facilitates the entextualization and contextualization of expert knowledge; it is rendered into a text that can be removed from its original context and then placed within another (Urban 1996; Bauman and Briggs 1990; Carr 2010; Collins 1996; Gal 2005; Hanks 1996; Kuipers 1989; Mehan 1996; Philips 2010; Silverstein and Urban 1996). Institutions play an

important role in organizing this expert information and in its naturalization (Brenneis 1994). Institutions assist in creating the impression that expertise is something one can possess and is evidenced through achieved qualifications, that in themselves become a form of the constant reenactment of expertise to sustain one's status as expert (Carr 2010). In Chapter 4, I focus on a training program that offers participants the chance to "gain" expert knowledge. However, their engagement in the course is based in enacting expertise through making representative declarations (Hancher 1979) about olive oil, demonstrating their ability to appropriately adopt the register of expertise in describing and making judgements about their object of knowledge – olive oil.

Third, the existence of these registers and enactments of expertise relies on their fundamental functioning to differentiate between types of people - the expert and the layperson – based on the knowledge they supposedly contain or control and the accessibility of the objects of knowledge (Carr 2010). In this dissertation, I differentiate between expertise, connoisseurship, and amateur knowledge. Each relies on differing levels of control, containment, and familiarity with olive oil knowledge. Further, even if the same information is circulated by actors in different categories, their expertise is enacted differently. Experts have institutional support, requisite experience, and mastery over registers for communicating about olive oil and are therefore able to make decisions on its social, cultural, and economic value. Those with expertise sit on tasting panels for chambers of commerce or consortia that designate extra virgin status or other denominations of origin, are researchers for labs or universities that determine purity and authenticity standards for oil or run organizations that support the spread of education around olive oil. Connoisseurs are those that experts, beyond themselves, communicate

with about olive oil. Connoisseurs are those people that are becoming intimately familiar with a knowledge object but for them the primary focus is on the knowledge object as a pleasure object. Part of their joy in engaging with olive oil comes from being able to leverage expertise within proper modes of consumption. For example, experts would sit on tasting panels to decide if an oil is extra virgin or not; connoisseurs would write the tasting notes for an oil in a process separate from or after the designation of extra virginity is made. They may also, for example, make recommendations about the best ways of pairing olive oils and foods informed by their expertise in understanding details of terroir inaccessible to the lay person. Amateurs are those people who only occasionally engage in the register of expertise around olive oil and are only partly committed to proper modes of consumption. Amateurs often use distilled pieces of knowledge passed on from experts and connoisseurs that do not necessarily require intimate familiarity with the knowledge object or the long-term engagement of apprenticeship. Chapter 3 demonstrates the dissemination and use of amateur level “rules of thumb” while Chapter 4 shows the construction of those rules of thumb within the discursive practices of expertise and the building of connoisseurship.

### **Fieldwork and Field Site**

During the years 2014-2016, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the Italian region of Tuscany, using Florence as my home base. I visited the city for the first time in 2008 working with another anthropologist researching issues of heritage, cultural identity, and change in the San Lorenzo neighborhood of Florence, focusing on the market as a key illustration of changing relationships among native Florentines and the influx of immigrants the neighborhood had seen over the past 20 years (Schiller 2008,

Schiller and Shattuck 2011, Schiller 2016). I returned to Florence for several summers formulating a dissertation project that I thought would have continued connection to the San Lorenzo Market (the outdoor portion) and the Mercato Centrale (indoor). In 2010, the second floor of the central market building went through a massive renovation and reopened in May of 2014. When it reopened, it was a glittering modern food court style space – a shocking change from the rustic wooden floored fruit and vegetable stands that had occupied the space for innumerable years. The new stands offered all sorts of heritage food products, boasting their origins and histories, and promising their traceability and quality. This got me curious about where these products came from and why this sense of knowing where foods came from seemed to be so prominent and so intimately tied to ideas about quality. So, I decided to begin investigating where certain food products came from, the chains that led to their presence in a market like the Mercato Centrale, and what parts of that process were evident in the final product.

Being located within the Chianti region, two of the foods most boasted about were wine and olive oil. These two are also intimately connected to Italy in the popular imagination. Olive oil captured my attention quickly. I was struck by its prevalence in both the market space and everyday life, the way it was presented as both a necessity and a luxury good, and its strong tie to multiple nested geographies (Florence, Tuscany, Italy). Like many other foods with place-based labels, olive oil's terroir was foregrounded in many encounters I had with it. However, unlike many other foods, olive oil was presented as completely natural, not processed in any way. Most other foods that I found within the same spaces as olive oil required human intervention in order to create the final product: cheese, wine, meats. The common discourse around olive oil, however,

was that it is literally just what happens when you press olives. From the outset, people who talked about olive oil almost always made references to or were preoccupied with the scandal that had recently occurred about Italian extra virgin olive oil. The parallels between anxieties I observed around olive oil extending from the scandal and those I had observed about other social changes, including increasing number of immigrants, struck me as interesting and I wanted to learn more.

For my first few visits to Florence, I lived in apartments near San Lorenzo but as my personal network expanded and my research took me further outside of the city center into the countryside, I rethought my living arrangements. In one of my attempts to make some non-research related friends, I connected with a group of young professionals including several expats. One of which, interestingly enough, was named Florence. She was a Belgian woman about my age living in Florence studying design after leaving her career as an engineer. After becoming fast friends, she offered for me to move in to her spare bedroom in the Oltrarno, the “other side” of the river from the city center. From there it was easy to access transportation services and offered a more relaxed neighborhood in comparison to the busy, tourist filled streets around the central market.

Throughout my time in Italy, I spent a considerable amount of time improving my language skills. Prior to fieldwork I had taken several courses on Italian language at the University of New Mexico. In the field, a primary resource was the Lorenzo de Medici Institute. I quickly worked my way through several levels of language education in their intensive program, often involving individual lessons and consultations with instructors. On occasion, especially at the beginning of fieldwork, I worked directly with their language program director, Laura Lamponi, and administrator Manuela Conti to

formulate curricula specific to my needs. By far the best support in my developing competent Italian language skills was my interactions with my research participants who often took time to explain themselves in great detail, which helped not only in learning unfamiliar vocabulary and phrases but in understanding the content of our conversations in more depth.

## **Methods**

Given the dispersal of the activities I was interested in, from olive orchards to tasting rooms to conventions, I employed a multi-sited approach (Marcus 1995). By following the flow of olive oil from early points of production through to final consumption, I was able to engage actors at each of the stages, understand both material and discursive processes involved in the production of the product, and the practices surrounding consumption. At each site, my participation and interests would shift from researcher, to tourists, to participant, to professional taster. In total, between 2014 and 2016 my fieldwork included 16 months of this multi-sited, polymorphous engagement. As part of my fieldwork I made regular visits to olive growers throughout Tuscany with several visits to other sites in the regions of Liguria, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Veneto, Emilia Romagna, Lazio, and Campania to understand a somewhat larger context of olive oil production. Visits to farms initially included tours of the properties, production facilities if they were on site, speaking with the owners and workers, learning about the history of the groves, the cultivars present, and tastings. Further visits included interviews with owners, managers, and workers, as well as participation in and observations of harvest and production activities.



I attended as many public events focused on olive oil as possible. In these scenarios, I was able to engage with a variety of actors within the olive oil world simultaneously, as well as observe the types of topics that dominated conversations. Events like food festivals, olive oil conventions, rural expos, the Expo Milano, heritage exhibitions, and new oil festivals gave insight into the ways a wide range of participants represented and understood olive oil in Tuscany and Italy in general. Valuably, these events allowed for speaking with consumers of olive oil not only people involved in a professional capacity. An element present in most of these events that primarily concerned non-professional consumers, and highlighted in chapter three, was education on the product. These educational moments regularly included information about production, origins, and quality of extra virgin olive oil, but almost always featured a tasting component. In addition to these concentrated efforts to engage in the world of olive oil, my preoccupation with the product sensitized my attention to it in my everyday life from the grocery store, to the stand where I bought produce, to the display of olive oil bottles at the corner pizzeria. In addition to food-centered and olive oil-centered events, I attempted to keep a close tab on public sentiments around immigration because of my interest in demographic change in Italy. I attended protests, public lectures including the release of the 2015 national demographics report, as well as markets and events that either attracted or featured the immigrant population of Florence and surrounding areas.

I used a combination of semi-structured formal interviews with unstructured informal interviews. Formal interviews were recorded and transcribed, sometimes with assistance from my language tutors Matteo Ralli, Luca Zocca, and Daniele Franchi, while informal interviews were recorded using jot notes and expanded on in fieldnotes. Data

were also drawn from conversations and discussions had as part of my participant observation, ranging from shorter encounters with salespeople to afternoon long talks with farmers while working in fields. Some of my participant observation also facilitated group discussions in class settings, around dinner tables, and among attendees at olive oil events that became impromptu group interviews or focus groups.

A key feature of my research methods was my participant observation influenced by sensory ethnography (Pink 2009). Since it featured so heavily in how my participants experienced their interactions with olive oil, I followed suit attempting to take the senses, specifically taste, seriously and as a central component of how I should engage with olive oil (Culhane and Elliot 2016, Howes 2006). This influence from sensory anthropology dovetails with Gal and Irvine's proposition that anything, any contrastable difference, could be a starting point for their approach to thinking about semiotic processes of differentiation and that researchers should engage in the same practices of construal and comparison as their participants (Gal and Irvine 2019: 270). This commitment to taste led me to participate in public tastings and tasting courses, as often as I could possibly manage. To fully understand the experience of taste and of understanding terroir, I enrolled in a course for aspiring professional tasters run by the AIRO and facilitated by experts across multiple fields all enamored with olive oil I enrolled in a training course for professional tasters (the focus of Chapter 4). The course was the first level in what was at the time a two-level program. Since my participation the course expanded in not only locations where it was offered but added new levels and specializations depending on if you were training to be specifically a taster or a producer as well. The group also sponsored an annual extra virgin olive oil competition that sought to honor what they

determined to be the highest quality extra virgin olive oils in Italy. Other professional tasters with whom I engaged worked for various consortia, governing bodies, and olive oil companies, including the Chianti Classico Olive Oil Consortium, the Florence Chamber of Commerce, the group in charge of the Toscano IGP designation, Gonelli, and the Citta dell'Olio.

In addition to participant observation focused on taste, I participated as often as I could in the cultivation and production of olive oil. Due to the timing of the harvest and the sensitivity of many of my research participants to adhering to labor regulations, I was mostly only allowed to observe. On several occasions I was allowed to assist in moving nets and carry crates. Only occasionally did my participants feel confident that I would not hurt myself and I was allowed to use shears for pruning or shakers to knock olives from branches – every single time erupted in jokes about me needing to count my fingers before and after tasks to make sure I had not lost one.

Related to my participant observation on farms, I regularly engaged in ethnobotanical walking tours with farm owners, managers, or workers where the fields themselves would serve as an elicitation tool. As we would tour the grounds, I was able to ask questions about history, production, the people who worked there, their interests, and gain an understanding of the landscape and processes that were supposedly evident in the terroir of their products. Additionally, for individuals that were willing to participate in my research but uncomfortable in a formal interview, these tours provided an efficient entryway into deeper conversations.

Finally, I collected printed materials and other ephemera from the farms, lectures, conventions, festivals, markets, and other locations I visited on a regular basis. I collected

materials that ranged from advertisements for eco-resorts, to pamphlets outlining the denominations of origin found in a certain region, to agricultural magazines that explained ideal growing seasons or innovations in pest control, to catalogues for olive oil milling machinery. These materials provided a clear image of how olive oil and other aspects of the industry in Tuscany are represented to tourists, other consumers, producers, and retailers.

### **Contributions**

This dissertation contributes to the anthropology of food in three central ways as well as the anthropology of Europe and Italy. First, it contributes to the literature on food as cultural heritage, addressing some of the key questions around the politics of identity in which heritage and food are embroiled (Brulotte and Di Giovine 2014, Grasseni 2017). Although here it is not necessarily a question of ownership or the right to produce certain products; my questions are chiefly around the ways in which food stands in for identity and the ways people negotiate their positions in the world through their talk about food. Narrating olive oil is a way of narrating the identity and relationships it symbolically stands for.

This dissertation also contributes to arguments about terroir as a culturally, socially, and discursively produced object rather than simply an extensive of materiality (Tiel, Hansen, Grant 2012). I do not deny that it may have material underpinnings, but it is the meaning making practices that occur regarding materiality, chemical compounds, and taste experiences that produce what we think of as the taste of place. By thinking of terroir in these terms, we allow for thinking about how terroir is used in relationship to

other realms of discourse. Terroir becomes a way for us to see how people link ideas about foreignness and danger in opposition to locality and safety; the connection of which extend far beyond just food items to be applied to people.

Third, this dissertation attempts to keep taste and taste sensations as a central object. In their recent book *Making Taste Public*, Carole Counihan and Susann Hojlund explain that “the concept of taste expresses a relation between humans and their food. When taste is put at the forefront we are looking for definitions, interpretations and experiences of this relationship” (Counihan and Hojlund 2018: 2). In this dissertation I wanted to privilege the sense of taste, subverting dominant hierarchies of the senses where sight and hearing are seen as the most objective (Korsmeyer 1999). Taste is a critical way in which we experience, understand, and produce our worlds (Chau 2008, Berger and Luckman 1991). This work continues the call by David Sutton to examine “everyday life and the multiple contexts in which the culturally shaped sensory properties and sensory experiences of food are invested with meaning, emotion, memory, and value” (2010: 220). Taking taste, the contrasting of flavors within microengagements, as a starting point illustrates also furthers Gal and Irvine’s work by taking something seemingly personal is intimately connected to larger order processes of differentiation and politics (Gal and Irvine 2019). Especially within the anthropology of food, taste needs to be re-centered as not only an object of inquiry but a methodology (Pink 2009, Howes 2006, Counihan and Hojlund 2018). I have aimed to do both with this project.

Within the anthropology of Europe and Italy, this dissertation contributes to ongoing inquiry into the cultural politics of the region and the ways people think about social change, in particular regarding immigration. Chapters 1 and 2 speak most directly

the ways people have historically constructed difference by naturalizing culture into biology as immutable difference (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991, Cole 1997, Angel-Anjani 2002, ). The “southern question” breached by Antonio Gramsci is a fractally recursive dichotomy of difference that has divided Europe and Italy into nested orientalisms (Irvine and Gal 2000, Gal and Irvine 2019, Agnew 1997, Moe 1998, Petrusiewicz 1998, Schneider 1998). This project seeks to illuminate yet another way for accessing how people think about and negotiate alterity within the nation.

## **Chapter 1 The Italian National Project and the Place of Olive Oil as a Heritage Food**

The simple tour of the grounds around Gianfranco's estate ushered me through time from the Etruscans, to the Romans, swiftly through the Middle Ages, world wars, and fascism, to the breakdown of the *mezzadria* sharecropping system, through the industrial revolution, the creation of the Common Agricultural Policy and European Union, to the most recent generation of agriculturalists, and the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Stefano and Gianfranco's use of history built a seemingly smooth narrative establishing olive oil as a heritage food. This chapter illustrates that the history behind such heritage products is anything but a natural, timeless connection between past and present. Historically, Italy's national project has been heavily marked by comparisons between Italy and the rest of Europe, divisions between the North and South, as well as tensions between regionalism, localism, and nationalism. Most recently, these fractally recursive divisions (Irvine and Gal 2000, Gal and Irvine 2019), or the oppositions projected from one level to another, are extended to immigrants within the space of the nation state.

In this chapter I argue that the national project of Italy is always incomplete because of its very grounding in the idea of unity through diversity and that those tensions are directly observable in the ways people engage with olive oil. In its position as a heritage food, olive oil stands as an icon for both nation and region, and the ways in which people talk about it rehash themes of alterity extending from Gramsci's southern question. Through its function as a symbol of identity, problematic as it may be, olive oil is further implicated in discourses of alterity concerning immigrants as they enter into the

continually-in-process national project of Italy. These fractally recursive dichotomies, produced through history, still have weight in the present day as Italy faces challenges of moving forward into an uncertain future. As new challenges like uncertainty in sustainability, changing demographics, and the threat of disappearing tradition, weigh heavily on the nation, Italians turn to the past in order to move forward. The history discussed in this chapter demonstrates this same recourse to the past throughout the national-project of Italy in order to understand the current construction of olive oil as a heritage food and the processes of differentiation and distinction involve.

First, I discuss the divisions between north and south, regions, urban and rural, and connected issues of class. The chapter then moves into a discussion of some of the major projects of national identity such as language standardization and the origins of a national cuisine, as well as the influence of emigration. Third, the chapter focuses on the influence of the fascist period on the preservation and resurgence of regional identity within the state's nationalist project, including the lasting impacts on foodways. Finally, the chapter closes with a focus on olive oil as a heritage food. The discussion is continued in Chapter 2, where olive oil's symbolic relationship to identity politics is a critical component of its role in social anxiety concerning demographic change, globalized food systems, and authenticity.

A pervasive trope in Italian society is that of Southern alterity (Schneider 1998). According to some scholars, the South or *Mezzogiorno* was painted as intrinsically backward compared to the North and the rest of Europe as early as 1848 (Petrusewicz 1998). Others point to the emergence of the North-South divide after unification (Moe 1998) because of its supposed role in preventing the nation as a whole to move forward in



economic and political progress equal to other nation-states in Europe. Despite when it first occurred, the legacy of perceiving the backward South as holding back the progressive North is a pervasive structuring device for everyday life from the separatist movement of the Northern League to derogatory nicknames for southerners (Maher 1996). Historically, Southern Italians have represented “the dirty, provincial and ignorant ‘others’ within the national body” (Albahari 2009: 143).

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries, as ruling elites in the northern part of Italy, as well as industrializing centers of northern Europe began to critically inquire into the differences between Italy and its neighbors, including questions about agriculture and nutrition. The underlying assumption was that Italy and its population were backward and in need of repair and reform to bring them into the industrialized present. The *contadino*, the peasant, rose as the representation of the undernourished, under-developed Italian and the descriptions of local foods that emerged at the time tended toward describing populations in terms of deficiency, painting them as in need of state assistance (Helstosky 2004: 20). Further, the division between northern and southern Italy was a key point of comparison that reflected broader patterns in Europe, where the industrialized and wealthier northern areas tended to have better food provisions in terms of both quantity and quality (Helstosky 2004). There were two overlapping problematic populations, peasants and southerners. These studies intersected with other efforts to define the southern “others” and other ethnic minorities within Europe as naturally criminal, ignorant, and backward based on biology (Gould 1981, Carter 1997, Albahari 2009). In fact, the work of Italian social theorist and physician Cesare Lombroso in defining the atavistic characteristics of Southern Italians quickly expanded to include a wide array of

humans in whom he sought “signs of apish morphology” to explain their criminality (Gould 1981). His formulations were picked up and, along with other evolutionary anthropological theories, became a dominant ideology in defining the undesirable populations of Europe, basing difference in biology. However innate, these differences between populations could hypothetically be overcome to some degree by social scientists digging into foodways and making recommendations for state interventions into their diets. Academies, like the *Accademia dei Georgofili* in Florence, dedicated to the study and debate of rural and agricultural matters prevailed in implementing changes to increase productivity, including shifting the way crops were arranged in fields, changing irrigation methods, and improving pruning and cultivation methods (Gaggio 2017).

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, olive oil in southern Europe attracted the attention of bourgeois and elite families from the north, who wished to capitalize on the growing demand of the rapidly industrializing north for olive oil as fuel for lamps, as lubricant for machinery, and as a food product (Mazzotti 2004, Vossen 2007). In addition to fueling the economy of the north, Italian reformers saw the modernization of olive oil production as key to improving the southern economy, overcoming the south’s intrinsic backwardness, and disciplining its workforce to help the country enter the ranks of properly advanced European states (Mazzotti 2004; Petrusiewicz 1998; Moe 1998). Generally, southern olive oil was not considered high-quality until the interventions from the north; but once established, this high-quality oil was desired all over Europe. The largest importers of *olio fino* were the English and the Dutch who used the oil domestically as well as shipped it to their colonial holdings. Higher-quality oil, that which was low in acidity, was more desirable because it traveled better, was less likely to

go rancid because of its resistance to external changes, worked better as an industrial lubricant, burned more efficiently in lamps, and eventually became associated with bourgeois taste (Mazzotti 2004). According to historian Massimo Mazzotti, reformers rarely stressed the industrial uses of olive oil: “they framed the modernization of oil production as a project of national economic reform, stressing the local uses of high-quality oil in lighting, cooking, and medicine. They placed a great emphasis on the superior taste of low-acidity oil, and on its beneficial health effects” (Mazzotti 2004: 292). By stressing these local and traditional uses, the bourgeoisie could effectively appeal to the long history olive oil had within the region to draw the southern workforce in “new bonds of trust and subordination that could replace the traditional ones” that were disappearing with the dissolving of feudalism in the south (Mazzotti 2004: 292). Despite their efforts, the southern bourgeoisie and the northern reformers ran into resistance in the transferal of technology in some southern regions. This difficulty in getting producers to adopt newer technologies was understood as a “troubling symptom of deeper resistance to the enlightened new order” (Mazzotti 2004: 299), reinforcing understandings of the south as inherently backward.

This emphasis on differences between the North and the South still live on today in the olive oil world. The South was often referred to by my participants in Tuscany in terms of potentially lower quality oils that are produced *en masse* and with a heavier influence on industrial harvesting – a shocking contrast to the push in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to implement more modern methods of production. They also pointed to a lack of perceived diversity in olive oil production in the South stemming from the cultivars used and the ways the oil is produced. One agronomist explained to me that in Tuscany they have “a

legacy of working in teams” and producing through cooperatives and consortia where they share knowledge, strategies, and the costs of production to some extent (through cooperative mills), and so it preserves the multitude of farms and the ways the oils reflect the thousands of microclimates of the region. In the South, “they have a history of not working in teams” and production becomes a larger endeavor squashing out the potential diversity of many smaller farms. Regardless of whether or not these perceptions are true, my participants continued the narrative of the south as being backward in comparison to the center and north specifically in how they perceived and talked about olive oil.

In addition to the North-South divide, Italy has a long history of local and regional divisions stemming from the fourteenth century when Italy had more independent states than the world in 1934 (Duggan 2004: 2). These regions, having gone through mutations of provinces, kingdoms, and Papal States, although politically united as a country in 1861 did not immediately cohere as such culturally. In their volume on multiculturalism in Italy, Ralph Grillo and Jeff Pratt explain that “Italian unification was not the unification of a people who shared a common culture, but of the territories of an elite who thought they shared a common culture” (Grillo and Pratt 2002: 28). The phenomenon of a unifying elite class occurred within an extensive network of urban centers that extended back to the Middle Ages (Montanari 2013). Members of the upper class could circulate, bringing with them the modes of behavior, language, and eating that formed the basis for Italian culture and cuisine before the idea of Italy as a nation-state took hold (Montanari 2013). Another way of thinking of these divisions is through what scholars have termed *campanilismo*. Campanilismo is “a preference for those within the sound of the local bell tower and a disdain for those who originate beyond it [and] is part

of a very complex structure of difference that operates particularly in Italy along regional, sectional, and linguistic lines” (Carter 1997: 12). Anthropologist Donald Carter (1997) sites families that migrated to Turin from the south, yet even after decades are not regarded as and do not consider themselves Turinese (12). In many cases Italians will “downplay their association with the country, and some go so far as to renounce their association” altogether in favor of localism (Castellanos 2010: 68).

A notable characteristic of this network model was that it took root in the central and northern parts of the peninsula more so than in the south, where “a relatively centralized kingdom... acted as a hindrance to autonomy of the cities and concentrated politics, the economy, and culture within” Naples (Montanari 2013, 16). Due to this political reality, one city stood as a symbol for the whole region compared the many city-states of the central-northern parts of the country. The symbolic role of the city lives on today in the ways delicacies, heritage foods, and other place-based labels function (Montanari 2013, 2018). Many specialties from the center and north are associated with a particular urban center (*bistecca fiorentina*, *prosciutto di Parma*) versus products from the south that are either specifically associated with Naples or bear regional or landscape-based names (*pizza napolitano*, *limoncello di Amalfi*).

The division between and subordination of the rural to the urban, as well as differentiation between upper and lower classes is key to understanding the formation of contemporary Italian gastronomy. Cities became loci of interactions between the popular and elite, urban and rural, and between the elites of various other nodes in the urban network (Montanari 2013). The elite employed the lower classes, and those that worked as cooks would circulate among noble houses. As a result, the elite classes of Italy were

constantly in contact with popular foods; however, when they encountered a food that was both delicious and considered as only fit for poorer classes, they invented a multitude of ways to ennoble it and dress it up to the level deserving of their tables (Montanari 2013: 23). This dressing up of *contadino* or peasant food within urban centers resulted in products and dishes that were simultaneously reflective of both haute cuisine and popular food. As Italian gastronomy became codified later in history through cookbooks and world-wide recognition, it effectively reflected the diversity of the peninsula.

A peninsula highly fractured by divisions between the north and the south, as well as between urban elites and rural peasantry, posed a difficult problem for northern elites, intellectuals, or others that had a stake in a cohesive national body. One major project of unification was establishing a standardized Italian language (Nesi, Morgana, and Maraschio 2011). The architects of unification chose Tuscan, specifically the version used in Florence and in Florentine literature, as the guide for the standard language. At the time of unification, estimates of the percentage of the Italian population that spoke Italian range from only 2.5% to 12% (Maiden 1995: 8). Over time, mechanisms like migration, military service, the educational system, and mass media helped to spread the standardized version across the peninsula. Further, regional languages were discouraged in institutional settings, like schools, adding a negative association to local language. In contemporary times, however, local languages are used with a sense of pride to differentiate oneself from others. Particularly in marketing of products, local words are used to geographically and culturally place products and firms. For example, using “ramerino” rather than standard “rosmarino” for rosemary, or “poggio” instead of “collina” for “hill.”

A second and more food-specific project was the creation of Italian national cuisine through the spread of cookbooks and other print media. The codification of food and the circulation of cookbooks often play an important role creating a cohesive identity for imagined communities (Anderson 1983, Appadurai 1988, Brulotte and Di Giovine 2014, Neuberger 2017, Rosenberg 2007). Often these efforts are not uncontested, with scholars pointing out the tensions of cultural appropriation of local foods for national cuisines (Sugimoto 2018, Doonan 2018).

In 1891, Pellegrino Artusi printed “*La Scienza in Cucina e L’Arte di Mangiar Bene*” (The Science of Cooking and the Art of Eating Well) with expressed interest in unifying the country through its gastronomic practices (Artusi 1960). Artusi’s work reflected the wide diversity of foods across the peninsula, emphasized seasonality, and a general order to meals. According to historian Carol Hestotsky, Artusi’s impact would take years to develop but “his formula of middle-class sobriety, simplicity of presentation, and attention to regional difference proved to be the right formula for a national cuisine” (2004: 28). Part of his success was designing a cuisine based on local flavors and allowing flexibility, which can be dramatically contrasted against the rigid codification of French cuisine (Montanari 2013). His Italian cuisine reflected the networked and fragmented nature of the peninsula, yet unified it through common practices and ideals about food. Artusi did not find immediate success in publishing the book, but it eventually gained popularity within the reading masses; through the world wars and still to this day, it is a staple in the Italian culinary world, referenced as the beginning of Italian cuisine. Several of my own research participants pointed to this book as the source of their own knowledge about seasonality and the proper form of the Italian

meal. Some go so far as to assert that his work did more to unify Italy than the language project because it allowed for diversity in its cohesion (Camporesi 1970).

Another significant influence in the consolidation of Italian national identity and cuisine was the mass emigrations of the late 1800s through the 1900s. Italians began leaving in search of greater economic opportunities elsewhere, particularly in the Americas. These populations, although from different regions, found themselves grouped together in their new host countries as Italians, as opposed to Sicilians, Florentines, or Romans. According to some scholars, this external perception alone may have done more to create a national identity than the efforts internal to the nation-state (Duggan 2004; Harney 2006). Specifically related to food, emigrants were creative about recreating many of the foods they loved from home, leveraging their gastronomic practices to help establish and maintain ties as a social group (Cinotto 2013). The use of food as social tool can be contrasted to the use of food back home; Italians in the nineteenth century, “may have come together on feast days and other special holidays, but every other day, peasant and worker consumed foods hurriedly and usually alone” (Helstosky 2004: 31). The ritual of the entire family gathering for a home-cooked meal was not a typical occurrence due to work and other obligations, in addition to general scarcity effecting the ability to produce elaborate meals on a daily basis. “Thus, food and acts of consumption became ways to reproduce an identity not quite rooted in experience, but perhaps rooted in how previous experience should have been” (Helstosky 2004: 31).

In their pursuit of recreating dishes, emigrants became a growing consumer group demanding Italian products (dried pasta, canned tomatoes, and olive oil); as the demand for these products grew overseas, they started being produced and marketed domestically



was well. “Ironically, it was because of the ‘imagined community’ outside Italy that the food industry inside Italy produced the goods that became the foundations of Italian cuisine” (Helstosky 2004: 28). The pressure of populations outside of Italy, greatly influenced the homogenization and popularization of products; for example, the growing American market for olive oil bolstered its Italian production through the first world war (Helstosky 2004). In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries we see the production of Italian foodstuffs in direct relationship to spaces and people outside of Italy and in reference to nostalgia based on the way things should have been rather than reality.

In these instances of either concerted effort to produce Italian national identity or, in the case of emigrants, produced through circumstance, there are tensions between the diverse regionalisms and the nation as a whole that are not completely resolved. In terms of language, the standardized Italian language was based on a very specific regional dialect. As will be noted in Chapter 3, regional language is still used to this day to signal specific identity differences between speakers based on who understands variations in vocabulary or pronunciation. The production of a national Italian cuisine is based on the inclusion of diverse regional dishes that in themselves negate the cohesiveness of a national identity. Emigrants founded their identity on external perceptions of difference that grouped them into one category of “otherness,” and their own socialization was based on the necessity for forming community in a foreign land. All three instances demonstrate tensions between “Italian” and other identities.

After the First World War, the fascist regime in Italy recognized these tensions and the ways they could be leveraged toward the political unification of a country worthy of fascist nationalism, but strategically prevent class unification through promoting

regional identity and divisions. This tension lives on today in surprising ways. Many of the markers of regional identity and cultural heritage that have become attractions for locals, as well as domestic and international tourists have survived in part because of fascist intervention in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

During the First World War, the state continued its legacy of interventions to improve people's eating habits. One solution was state subsidies into wheat production, making grain and its associated products, namely bread, inexpensive. This action freed up household finances for use on other items like pasta, dairy products, olive oil, meats, sugar, prepared foods, and wine (Helstosky 2004). Despite this new financial freedom, economic crisis began to build during and after the war with the redirection of resources away from the countryside and agriculture to cities and the front (Snowden 1989). As inflation cut into consumers' purchasing power, the country exploded into riots. These protests "not only demonstrated intense political instability in the face of economic crises; they reflected a unification of consumer desire and expectation based on the transformation of diet during the war" (Helstosky 2004: 59). A population accustomed to scarcity that was then given considerable purchasing power and improved ability to feed themselves and then lost that power, proved a grave threat to the state.

The liberal regime of the First World War, who had attempted and failed to control prices and provide food security, gave way to a fascist regime that focused on using food to "promote public order, popular health, and social equality" (Helstosky 2004: 63). One such effort was Mussolini's "Battle for Wheat" where Italy was to become self-sufficient in grain production and imports were subject to heavy tariffs; the result was soaring prices for wheat, dropping prices and availability of other crops, and

further strained tensions between sharecroppers and landlords with pressure to move to monocrop grain production rather than subsistence crops (Preti 1986, Counihan 2004, Gaggio 2017). Finding it difficult to restructure Italian capitalism and stabilize the economy, the government found themselves in a trap, from which they saw escape in the creation of a stronger nationalist attitude throughout the country (de Grazia 1981).

In the late 1920s the regime turned their focus toward a social education of the masses through the use of mass culture, especially through pre-industrial folk traditions which could be “genuine cultural survivals of the preindustrial community, long-extinct customs exhumed by diligent fascist ethnographers, or ... pseudo-popular festivities choreographed by the [Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro] itself” (de Grazia 1981: 202). The *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro* (OND) was a national agency founded in 1925 that was given the mission of promoting the healthy and profitable use of workers’ leisure hours (De Grazia 1981: 35). For the fascist regime, a socially valuable education would “have as its primary aim the retention of those traditions that lend cohesiveness to a nation and individuality to its people” (de Grazia 1981: 202). Among the traditional forms that the fascist regime, via the OND, put great efforts into reviving and supporting were harvest festivals, patron saints’ days, and historical commemorations. Given their interest in designating “folk manifestations as the one cultural pastime where the people ostensibly gave spontaneous and free expression to its individuality, the OND tended naturally to obscure the degree to which it was actually involved in their revival” (de Grazia 1981: 202). The OND was at its most creative when it involved itself in the staging of annual municipal festivals and saint feast days. In some places the local organizing committees of celebrations would join the OND, and in others like Naples and Rome where the

festivities played a major role in civic life, the OND would take over the coordination of the event, producing a much more elaborate and impressive celebration stripped of political or other oppositional significance (de Grazia 1981: 209). Historian Victoria De Grazia notes that by the mid-1930s most of the major cities were celebrating OND supported or controlled festivals.

Concerning food, in addition to promoting protectionist, nationalist policies around food, the fascist government worked broadly to promote particular forms of consumption through domestic economy literature, utilized social scientific data for nutritional recommendations, and conducted propaganda campaigns promoting food made in Italy (Helstosky 2004: 63). According to historian Carol Helstosky, “the ideal fascist diet was based on carbohydrates, not animal protein, and supplemented by fresh produce, legumes, olive oil, citrus fruit, and wine” – the basis of what is now considered the Mediterranean Diet (Helstosky 2004: 63). This kind of diet was already widespread across the peninsula and so, “fascism reinforced already existing consumption patterns but tied them to political allegiance and national identity” (Helstosky 2004: 63). At the same time, the fascist regime welcomed regional differences by promoting the consumption of local products; further reinforcing the linkage of identity with food and pushing forward a type of unification through regionalism. The goal with fascist interventions that promoted regional identity through festivals and food was to unify the nation but to maintain enough regional difference that the peasantry would not unify as a class (de Grazia 1981).

This tension of trying to bring the masses into the nation, while at the same time preventing actual class revolution was particularly intense in Tuscany (Savlemini 1967).

Despite being the region where the fascist regime had met some of its strongest resistance, they looked toward Tuscany as a ‘model region’ because of its long history with the *mezzadria* sharecropping system, which had structured peasants neatly into hierarchical, paternalistic relationships with landlords (Gaggio 2017: 17). The region was a shining example of the rural peasantry the fascist regime held up as the symbol of their national strength. This system was ripe for an injection of public money to increase production, especially in moving farms away from their traditional mixed agriculture toward increased productivity of grains for the good of the nation. At the same time, Tuscan sharecroppers were voicing demands such as the right to unionize, assigning cultivation expenses to the landlords, to limit evictions, to increase their managerial role on farms, and to get rid of additional contracts that forced peasants to provide unpaid labor (Gaggio 2017:40). In this way, “Tuscan sharecroppers could be simultaneously understood as class enemies to be redeemed and models of class deference to be imitated throughout the peninsula;” which was one of the strongest paradoxes carried throughout Italian fascism (Gaggio 2017: 40).

Throughout WWII, Italian foodways were marked by shortages, high prices, and consumer deprivation. Italy’s failed attempt at colonization in Ethiopia in 1935 drained the national budget, skewed exports to Africa, and caused boycotts of their own exports elsewhere; resulting in the radicalization of fascist food policies. During wartime, the regime’s approach to food shifted from increased productivity and the health of the nation, to figuring out how little the national body could subsist on (Helstosky 2004). According to Helstosky, the influence of propaganda and sheer necessity stressed the role of local produce and the creative use of all materials available, such as using all parts of

an animal or stretching ingredients through soups. These creative responses resulted in the legacy of frugality, simplicity of preparation, and pride in regional cooking in the contemporary Italian diet.

In the post-war era, thanks to loans from the US, assistance from the rest of Europe, the devaluation of currencies, the renewal of industry, new and cheap energy sources, and the distribution of new mass consumer goods, Italy saw rapid expansion in its economy with little to no inflation – referred to as “the economic miracle” (Goddard 1996). At the same time, the rest of Europe saw rapid growth in its industrial economies and the Italian population quickly became a source of labor for this expansion both externally and internally. Externally, Italy along with Finland, Ireland, and other Mediterranean countries exported labor to Western Europe; while internal migration from the south fed the labor supply demanded by the northern industrial cities of Turin, Milan, and Genoa (Merrill 2011).

Even though it had already been in decline for a couple decades, 1964 saw legislation that officially signaled the end of the mezzadria sharecropping system. The law stipulated that no new contracts could be made and existing ones would be grandfathered into a system that finally answered some of the demands sharecroppers had been making since the end of World War I. The new system officially recognized sharecroppers as entrepreneurs, allowed them to make some agricultural innovations on the land they worked without approval of the owners, the landlords could no longer interfere in their family lives, evictions became more difficult, and a slight majority of revenue (58%) was assigned to them (Gaggio 2017: 147). According to anthropologist Carole Counihan, the end of the mezzadria was a turning point for Tuscany, marking the

entrance to modernity because with the increasingly industrializing economy, the focus of workers shifted from family-based agricultural production to goods and services away from the family for wages. Wages and industrialized production became a gateway toward the normalization of conspicuous consumption (Counihan 2004: 55-56).

In this new atmosphere of relative abundance and freedom, consumers began experimenting with new foods including cocktails and complicated desserts, and eating out at restaurants became fashionable. However, as Italian foodways incorporated these new elements, they essentially did not change much; rather than shifting completely to new goods, Italians ate more of the same foods that they already enjoyed and prepared them in familiar ways (Helstosky 2004: 129). It was also during this period that Italians gained a renewed interest in regional traditions and folklores, that had previously been capitalized on by the fascist regime, but this time as a form of conspicuous consumption. Guidebooks cataloguing local food festivals known as *sagre*, *feste*, and *fiere* became incredibly popular for Italians as well as international tourists (Helstosky 2004: 146). This trend continues today with bookstores and newsstands providing a plethora of guidebooks, all featuring local food no matter what the overall focus of the guide may be, as well as pasted posters on city walls advertising local fairs. Even older materials still hold allure for locals and tourists; at the famed antiques market in Arezzo in 2016, I ran across stand after stand selling maps and guidebooks from the 1960s cataloguing each region of Italy down to where one should buy types of cheeses or wines. So, while there was a move away from family-centered consumption and an increase in industrialized food stuffs, an interest in local artisanal foodways held firm and even blossomed.

Sagre today are still implicated in the tourism economy and the products they feature are often shaped by concerns around which are the most representative of local culture and tradition (Ascione 2017). However, sagre are not just economic resources, but rather can play an important role in revitalizing local communities socially and culturally (Di Giovine 2014; Ascione 2012a, 2017). In his work in Pietrelcina, Italy, anthropologist Michael Di Giovine shows how food plays an integral part in the revitalization of a town, working in concert with a number of other deeply connected cultural phenomenon like the figure of Padre Pio or pilgrimage, and serving almost as a type of antidote against the influences that have sent their culture off track (Di Giovine 2014). Foods, through sagre become rearticulated into heritage discourses, promoting them as sociocultural and economic resources for reviving community. These sagre can even revive traditions, bringing them back into popularity despite the greatly changed social context, as has been shown in Elisa Ascione's work on Easter bread (Ascione 2012b). So, contemporarily sagre play a dual role of preserving and reintroducing traditions to new publics within and from outside local communities as well as an economic resource through their connections to tourism (Ascione 2017). The connection of specific products with localities achieved through practices like sagre can become so powerful that iconic dishes themselves can serve as rallying points well beyond the local level. For example, Di Giovine and Ascione describe the role of Amatriciana as a symbolic resource turned economic resource for the town of Amatrice in the aftermath of the 2016 earthquake (Di Giovine and Ascione 2016). Amatriciana, a pasta dish specific to Amatrice, became the subject of a fundraising campaign where restaurants far and wide were challenged to add the dish to their menus and donate a portion of the proceeds to Amatrice's recovery



efforts. The campaign, in addition to bringing attention to Amatrice's predicament and garnering social and financial support, also lent itself to re-attracting tourists, serving both economic and social cultural purposes after the tragedy.

The Italian economic boom of the post-war period was followed in the 1970s by severe recession, unrest among workers that marked a shift in the industrial economy, and the oil crisis that caused many other European countries to close their borders to immigration. Beginning in the 1960s and into the 1970s, labor disputes were spearheaded by the skilled workers of northern industry, the southern workers who were new to mass industry, and those involved in the women's movement advocating for recognition of the unwaged labor within the house and family (Colatrella 2001: 256). In response to the recession and unrest, many industries reduced the size of their factories and began distributing the work to subcontracted, smaller, semi-autonomous and often family-based firms. This "outwork" allowed employers to avoid taxation, safety and health regulations, trade unions, and applying a minimum wage (Goddard 1996). The transition to outwork, the robust formal economy, and *lavoro nero* are recognized as helping central Italy maintain its relative economic stability during this period (Carter 1997; Goddard 1996; Yanagisako 1997). Especially in central Italy this has facilitated the reliance on smaller scale industry, small-scale agricultural production, and artisanal producers all aimed at either local consumption or export to the global economy (Colatrella 2001).

In addition to outwork and smaller firms, many people in all regions turned to the long-established informal labor market and *lavoro nero* to find work (Carter 1997, Goddard 1996, Yanagisako 1997). In the informal labor market, people found work outside of major industries, in homes, and away from formal contracts that protected

certain workers' rights. Especially in the south, organized groups like the Cosanostra or the Camorra, made up a sizeable part of the informal economy (Lucht 2011). The informal economy was both cause and effect of the economic environment of the 1980s and 1990s. It allows for employers to avoid the regularization of employees, especially immigrants, but its expansion through the proliferation of off-the-books self-employment creates the labor shortages in larger industry that facilitate the employment of immigrant labor (Colatrella 2001: 267).

In the 1980s, Italy found itself for the first time a country of immigration rather than emigration. Along with the increase in immigration, in 1993, for the first time since WWI, Italy's native population growth became negative (Lanzieri 2011). Today Italy's birth rate remains low with sustained negative native population growth, fueling ongoing debate about the state of the nation (Krause 2005; Krause and Marchesi 2007; Marchesi 2012). Additionally, despite entering economic crisis again in 2009, with the GDP dropping to the lowest in Europe and unemployment skyrocketing, immigration to Italy has been relatively steady. This is partly due to the country's tradition of economic segmentation and an expansive informal sector. The spaces in the economy that were once filled by internal migration from the south are filled by external migrants while Italians are moving into more highly skilled sectors, emigrating for jobs elsewhere, or remaining unemployed.

Since unification, Italy has seen itself as a country of emigration, with large portions of its native population fleeing and living outside of its national borders. This self-image arguably lasted well into the 1980s even though immigration had outnumbered emigration since 1973 (Zincone and Basili 2013). In the late 1970s and

early 1980s, immigration to Italy was mostly by people of Italian origin that had been living in other parts of Europe, North America, and South America, most of whom were also economically well off. It was not until the period between 1984 and 1989 that immigration really gained recognition in Italy when a large surge of nearly 800,000 immigrants arrived, of which approximately 350,000 were without proper permits of stay. In fact, it was not until 1986 that the first governmental body was established in Italy to manage immigration (Zincone 1999).

In formulating their treatment of immigration, Italy has proven to be no exception to the pervasiveness of the “new racism” that defines the situation of immigrants throughout the rest of Europe (Cole 1997). The processes of racialization freeze cultural differences into immutable and fundamental differences between Italians and immigrants, reminiscent of the way alterity was defined by biology in the previous century. These recurrences of the same types of differentiation are evidence of the pervasiveness of axes of differentiation and the fractal recursivity of contrasts through time and across scales (Gal and Irvine 2019). The same categories persist, those of “modern” and “backward,” but the bodies that fill those spaces change. The differentiation moves across scales from Italy as backward compared to Europe, to southerners in comparison to northerners, to nationals immigrants. This definition of others is partly due to the incomplete nature of nationalism, which in Italy is even more fragile, whereby “the racial-cultural identity of ‘true nationals’ remains invisible, but it can be inferred (and is ensured) a contrario by the alleged, quasi-hallucinatory visibility of ‘false nationals’” (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991: 60). These “visible” differences, more often than not, get criminalized, particularly in reference to those with more striking phenotypical differences like dark skin (Angel-

Anjani 2002). The images of the African thief or prostitute are dominant stereotypes in conversations about the immigration problem (Grillo and Pratt 2002). The criminalization of racial characteristics and the assumption that immigrants are incapable of assimilation (or that they need to assimilate) that undergird xenophobia inform the creation of official policy.

The importance of economic integration of immigrants into the informal labor market eventually led to the Martelli Law, which in 1990 allowed immigrants to freely participate in the private labor market on equal terms with Italian natives (Ambrosini 2013: 177). However, the legislation established the requirements of economic necessity and cultural preference in immigration. First preference for work permits was granted to nationals and European citizens; second, to European unemployed residents; third, to non-European immigrants already resident within Italy; and last, to non-European citizens still resident in their home countries (Zincone 1999). The regularization campaign and the stricter regulations created a large surge in illegal immigration, defeating its intended purpose to stop irregular immigration.

Citizenship legislation is currently dictated by the 1992 Citizenship Act, which is not much different than the original 1912 Nationality Law. Many European countries utilize *jus sanguinis* (citizenship by blood) and *jus conubii* (citizenship by marriage) for conferring citizenship but have incorporated laws regarding *jus soli* (citizenship by birth location) at and after birth to facilitate the incorporation of second and third generation immigrants (Vink and Groot 2010). Informed by the “familial” model of citizenship (Walzer 1983), Italy generally reserves nationality and citizenship for the national community regardless of where they are born, denies *jus solis* at birth for those born to

non-Italians, and has continually tightened the rules regarding incorporation of foreign children. Others wishing to gain citizenship must prove uninterrupted legal residence within the country for varying lengths of time depending on their country of emigration. For EU citizens, there is four-year residency requirement. For immigrants of Italian heritage from anywhere in the world, the requirement is only three years. For stateless peoples, the act requires a five-year residency period. Finally, there is a ten-year residency requirement for non-EU immigrants. This last category was increased by the 1992 Act from originally only requiring five years of residency. The same act declared that children born in Italy to foreign parents have the right to petition for citizenship, however, only at the age of 18 and if they can prove uninterrupted legal residence in the country. Additionally, the length of marriage required for applying for citizenship was raised from six months to two years. While these restrictions were being raised, the process by which people with Italian heritage living outside of Italy (according to *jus sanguinis*) were able to claim citizenship was somewhat simplified. This meant that people born and living outside of Italy were actually granted the right to vote in national elections, over immigrants born and living in the country (Zincone and Basili 2013).

In 2002 the Bossi-Fini Law placed stricter rules on work and immigration, requiring immigrants to have long-term work contracts to either enter the country or renew permits of stay. This policy, though superficially seemed to welcome immigration, was designed in contradiction to the actual situation (Ambrosini 2013). Most immigrants worked with temporary contracts, entered the country legally but without immediate work, or worked in the informal economy where paperwork was sparse. This created a situation in which most immigrants spent at least some stint of time in a “paperless”

status, which “is considered almost normal – sometimes long, certainly difficult, but surmountable” (Ambrosini 2013: 177). However, despite the surmountability it still produces constant conditions of precariousness for the vast majority of immigrants.

The “illegal immigration” problem came to a head in 2008 when newly re-elected Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi declared a “National State of Emergency” and deployed troops to major cities and the coast to stop the flow of illegal immigrants (Merrill 2011: 1544). The economic necessity of immigrants, the paradoxical policies regarding their integration, and the popularity of xenophobia create for a complex situation for immigrants today in Italy (Ambrosini 2013). The promise of finding work in the informal economy is often what draws immigrants to Italy and it is those spaces where they are needed most (Triandafyllidou and Kosic 2006) but the conditions for this integration are actively worked against by official immigration policy, which pushes people into conditions of illegality and therefore open for ant-immigrant sentiment.

When the economic crisis hit Italy in 2009, the GDP dropped to the lowest in Europe, unemployment skyrocketed, and severe inequalities between the North and South reemerged. Sociologist Nicola Montagna has outlined four basic effects the crisis has had on immigrant laborers in Italy (2013). First, the demand for immigrant labor, although in past economic hardship had remained steady, dramatically dropped. Second, the rise in unemployment rates differentially hit the Italian populace with immigrants suffering the largest and most rapid increase. Third, migrants lost their jobs sooner and remained unemployed longer compared to native Italians. Last, the increase in demand for skilled migrant labor that occurred early on in the 2005-2010 period came to a rapid close. The conditions for immigrants within Italy under economic crisis became more questionable

than at previous moments, however they were unevenly precarious for different populations. For example, in 2009 when the economic crisis hit, the Italian government passed a law to regularize only immigrants working in the domestic sphere caring for the elderly and children, ignoring all other immigrants (Montagna 2013). The segmentation of the labor market into areas where immigrants and nationals competed for jobs and areas in which they do not, ensured certain types of laborers a small amount of privilege in the economic crisis.

More recently, more legislation has effected immigration by placing heavier restrictions on entry and stricter punishments on undocumented status. The restrictive Bossi Fini Law of 2002 was bolstered by the 2009 Security Act. These two legislations established irregular stay as an aggravating circumstance for crimes, illegal or undocumented status as a crime itself, prohibition on administrative acts like marriage for undocumented immigrants, and extended the maximum detention period for undocumented immigrants to six months. Additionally, the law required long-term work contracts for immigrants hoping to enter the country. This component, meant to validate the economic importance of immigrants while stopping illegal immigration, actually ran against the reality of immigrant work in Italy. Most immigrants work in the informal economy and in seasonal or temporary jobs where contracts are either short term or non-existent (Triandafyllidou and Ambrosini 2011; Zincone and Basili 2013). The Bossi Fini Law and Security Act also established the requirement of an integration agreement that must be signed in order to receive the first permit of stay, along with a language test after two years to renew the permit, as well as a more advanced language test to stay longer (Zincone and Basili 2013).

Recently proposed reforms to citizenship and immigration legislation would ease the restrictions imposed by Bossi Fini and the Security Act, but they have been continually struck down. Every time the parliament changes over, the reforms come back in some shape or form. Different regions within Italy have started giving honorary citizenship to immigrant children, demonstrating the shifts in popular sentiment in some areas about immigrant integration. Despite these glimmers of change, actual policy affecting rights of immigrants remain unchanged. Immigration and citizenship policies work in tandem with specific ideologies about nationality to produce the marginalization of immigrants. Not only is it difficult to gain entry into the country but also the laws and economic reality actually push immigrants into undocumented status at least at some point during their stay. Citizenship laws, guided by old notions of ethnic nationality and *jus sanguinis*, ensure difficulty of gaining political and social integration for those immigrants legally present within the country. Most recently, events around the refugee crisis illuminate the continued influence of extreme xenophobia across Italy and Europe, as well as the pushes to resist the devaluation of lives based on the racialization of cultural differences (Albahari 2015, Feldman 2012).

Tensions around the acceptance/nonacceptance of immigrants have constantly boiled to the surface during my time in the field. Within the San Lorenzo market, protests would erupt arguing for the removal of illegal vendors, almost all of whom were African. Large signs posted throughout the market would warn against buying anything from them. Still, in other instances, cities and citizens associations tried to work toward producing understanding and communication between immigrant and Italian populations. For example, in 2016 I attended the Festival of Lights in Prato, a town in Tuscany,



celebrating their Chinese population. The festival centered on a showcase of Chinese lanterns throughout the Chinese neighborhood of the city; however, a primary function of the event was to get non-Chinese people to experience the neighborhood itself. Components like walking tours, collaborative neighborhood mapping, street clean ups, and children's educational festivities were organized by event planners to get Chinese and Italian people together in the same space. The neighborhood was known for being rather dangerous and dirty, stemming from the Chinese population's supposed disregard for their new home. Even other immigrants like a Peruvian research participant of mine talked about how the city had to paint walls red in order to keep the Chinese inhabitants from posting advertisements or graffitiing the entire town; the thinking was that Chinese people revered the color red and so would leave those walls alone. The Festival of Lights was aimed at breaking down these harmful stereotypes about both the neighborhood and its inhabitants through dialogue and shared experience.

The lines of division in Italy's history have shifted between north and south, regions and the nation as a whole, to most recently between Italians and non-Italians. However, this shifting does not mean the past divisions are gone. Rather, as the figure of the "Other" is constantly applied to new populations, the old lines remain. The purpose behind exploring this history is to illuminate the ongoing politics of identity in which heritage foods are embroiled. The connections between people, places, and products that are narrated in heritage discourses are in themselves social, political, and economic constructions that have shifted through time.

### **Extra Virgin Olive Oil as Tuscan Heritage**

They was Stefano and Gianfranco described their farm and their olive oil, grounded the product in time and space in very specific ways. The major touchstones of Etruscan and Romans from ancient history, the iconic mezzadria system of the middle ages, up to the contemporary discourses of threat regarding changes in agri-food systems and changing biological-climatic conditions. Each step in time contributed to not only to the placing of olive oil in this space but was a place-making practice in itself.

Originating along the eastern Mediterranean coast, the olive species spread west throughout the entire Mediterranean region including southern Europe and Northern Africa. Olive trees, olives, and olive oil have a wide-ranging ability to narrate the history and culture of the region, with their religious associations, the role of oil as food and fuel, and its involvement in the changing of landscapes through human settlement and colonization (Meneley 2007, Meneley 2008, Gaggio 2007). The prevalence of the plant is due to not only the favorable climatic conditions but the intervention of agriculturalists selecting for traits that would make the fruit desirable and easily propagated. The Romans were instrumental in the spread of olive trees and olive oil production throughout the region (Vossen 2007). Often my participants would point to the layout of their fields as evidence of their origins, explaining that the “disorganized” ones were much older and originated with the Romans who would have prized the oil for mostly utilitarian, health, or religious purposes rather than consumption (Vossen 2007). Conversely, the well-organized fields with trees spaced evenly and in relatively straight lines were much newer, planted most likely within the last couple of centuries.

In conversation with multiple producers, they harkened even further back to the Etruscans in explaining their ideal oils. Some people aligned themselves with the old

ways saying that, although historically unlikely, the Etruscans produced the best oil; “the Etruscans discovered how deliciously bitter and spicy oil could be.” The director of one prominent firm with whom I spoke lauded the Etruscans for being “on trend” before modern people understood the real value in the taste of Tuscan oil: “They were ‘tastemakers’.” Other participants claimed that the old ways of selecting and pressing olives could not compare to the quality of oil we could now obtain thanks to modern technology but still gave credit to the ancient people for passing down the discovery of the product. Its history in Italy is linked with ancient peoples that have stood and still stand as an important reference point in historicizing the nation.

In Tuscany, it was during the late middle ages that we can see the first large growth in olive cultivation and olive oil production since ancient times. Before then, the poorer classes used mainly animal fats and olive oil was an urban “luxury,” circulating mostly from Liguria, Marchia, Campania, and Puglia. The rough, microclimactic terrain of Tuscany, coupled with the greater and more difficult economic investment in plants that would not yield for years after initial planting, made olive growing a slow-moving development in the region (Cherubini 2002: 13-14).

This first significant increase in olive growing beyond sporadic cultivation to a level that could exceed local domestic consumption and allow olives and olive oil to enter the budding agrarian capitalist market is credited in part to the *mezzadria* sharecropping system that dominated central Italy (Cherubini 2002: 17). This peasant mode of production was based on landlords who owned one or multiple estates (*fattorie*). These *fattorie* were then divided among and worked by *contadini*/peasants. Gianfranco and Stefano’s estate was a remnant of this system. Theoretically, landlords and peasants

shared the cost of production and the harvest; however the imbalance of power and ownership over the means of production (land, tools, seeds, mills, and buildings all belonged to the landlord) meant that this 50/50 split was rarely a reality. The *contadini* often bore more expenses than landlords, with their hard work resulting in precarious subsistence (Counihan 2004, Snowden 1989, Clemente et al. 1980, Apergi and Bianco 1991).

The system, however, due to the highly variable landscape and high incidence of microclimates within Tuscany, relied on *contadino* knowledge and close attention to the land in addition to their manual labor for its success (Counihan 2004: 37). Each hillside required (and still requires) a certain amount of localized, practical knowledge in order to cultivate crops to their fullest potential. The variability in landscape and the embeddedness of knowledge within that landscape has lasting effects for Tuscan, Florentine, and Italian cuisines; for example, the multitude of overlapping and concentric terroir regions (e.g.: Toscano, Chianti, Chianti Classico, Colli di Firenze, Chianti Ruffina), as well as the diversity of regional food that does not necessarily fall neatly within administrative borders like Tuscany.

The medieval period is significant not only for advances in olive oil production, the foundations of Italian cuisine, and a labor system that has lasting effects, but it is the time-period that most contemporary producers allude to in their descriptions of their products and estates. Glancing through brochures for producers, producers' websites, and even bottle labels, one can observe references to ancient history quickly transitioning to the Middle Ages where time freezes. Brand name formulations like "Castle of" or "Seal of" harken back to this specific time-period because of the picturesque and easily

accessible images that ground their companies and products in a specific space-time that communicates authenticity.

In Tuscany, olive cultivation became a pointed source of tension during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries between landlords and the *contadini*. With the growing importance of agrarian capitalism and the rising price point for high quality olive oil, landlords were increasingly interested in growing olives for profit. At the same time, those people who worked the land and lived off the harvest, desired subsistence crops that could feed people but were much less lucrative for landlords (Counihan 2004; Lo Russo and Pratesi 1999). Tensions over agricultural production would continue to build throughout the rest of the 19<sup>th</sup> and into 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries, contributing to massive agricultural strikes, the *mezzadria* movement, and assist with ushering in fascism (Counihan 2014). Specifically, for the olive oil industry in Tuscany, the freeze of 1956 decimated olive trees across the region, adding further incentive for *contadini* to abandon their fields (Gaggio 2017).

However, in this void some estates could grow, such as the Gonelli company. They could expand their operations and invest in some of the most important technological advances for olive oil production; namely, the centrifuge. These larger companies would then employ wage laborers, making a major shift away from the fading *mezzadria* system. By the early 1970s, “Tuscany’s departed sharecroppers had vacated approximately 800,000 hectares. One-fourth of this land had been completely lost to agriculture” (Gaggio 2017: 152). The remaining land had been split between land cultivated directly by its owners and land purchased by companies employing wage laborers (Gaggio 2017: 152).

In response to the abandonment of lands, local, national, and supranational interests found themselves pulled toward figuring out how to, on the one hand, reclaim land and its potential productive value, and on the other, conserve the natural landscape. In favor of reclaiming productivity, local governments set out to evaluate and reassign land that was considered neglected. Current owners of neglected land could apply for funds if they could prove a plan for cultivation, but most efforts to redistribute land was focused on young agriculturalists who were interested in cooperative production. However, most applicants were rejected due to a lack of qualifications (Gaggio 2017). At the same time, national and supranational money flooded areas like the Chianti region to restructure vineyards and olive growing to increase productivity. However, those receiving the funds were largely non-local. These actors, ranging from small scale industrialists taking on a passion project in wine-making to multinational companies, took advantage of public support in rebranding and marketing local products and were seen as beneficial to the countryside because of the intense care they gave to their lands as opposed to the abandoned areas in the same region (Gaggio 2017: 155). Other experiments of the time involved trying to increase beef production and the proliferation of sheep herding thanks to thousands of Sardinian shepherds migrating to the region. Surprisingly, both experiments failed to prove productive in the long-run but resulted in the popularity of Chianina beef (the beef used for the famous *bisteccha fiorentina*) and the creation of *pecorino di Pienza* cheese from sheep's milk (Gaggio 2017).

People construct narratives to ground products in time and space, producing narratives that border on teleological to show the natural connection between the product and the place. For olive oil, actors can access a deep history extending to ancient time.

Regardless of the actual historical influences on the product in form or flavor, the goal is to create a link between it, the locality, and the people that live there. This connection is further grounded in the natural environment through discourses of terroir. The taste of place tends to discount human interventions and for olive oil, human intervention tends to be downplayed. As one producer loudly proclaimed to me, “Vino si fa, olio è” – Wine is made, oil is. An emphasis on the naturalness of olive oil reinforces the naturalization of terroir as an inherent quality of oils rather than a human product.

Because of this relationship with such a wide range of geographic space (the entire Mediterranean region) and depth of time within it, olive oil has an interesting position as a heritage food. In the process of heritagization for olive oil emphasis is placed on the methods of cultivation, processing, and especially on the tastes and qualities of the final product that are a result of its production within a particular area, its terroir. Thus, the use of denominations of origin as a method for claiming olive oil as a form of cultural heritage. Further, processes of distinction from other products are tied to region as well. For example, the references to inferior oils coming from the South made earlier in this chapter by a consortium official demonstrate the pervasiveness of these differentiations across domains from people to products.

Conversely, its characteristics are used as proof of quality (to be discussed in more detail later) of the product regardless of whether it has gained a denomination of origin. In Tuscany, pride in extra virgin olive oil comes from their perception that their oils are of highest quality (Meneley 2004). Repeatedly my participants claimed that while denominations of origin are helpful in guaranteeing aspects of production and to some extent quality, above all the oil should speak for itself in terms of quality through taste

which feeds directly into differentiating it by its eventual use, as a raw ingredient for foods rather than as a cooking agent – to preserve the taste. However, the distinctions between low and high quality in terms of taste ran parallel to those made between Tuscan and other regional oils. This similarity allows for the reterritorialization of qualities to the oil as innate in the product rather than necessarily tied to politics; however, it still works to reproduce these same differentiations between localities.

Another layer of considerations regarding extra virginity is also in play when thinking about olive oil as cultural heritage for Tuscany. It is only the highest quality oils, those that are considered extra virgin, that gain a place in the pantheon of heritage foods. Oils that do not qualify as extra virgin are seen as inferior and, interestingly, most references made to these types of oils were regarding their origin elsewhere – as if non-extra virgin oils did not exist or were not produced in Tuscany. Part of the designation of extra virginity too, hinges on a taste test to evaluate the characteristics and qualities of the oil; if any defect is found, extra virgin status is withheld. For olive oil in Tuscany, its place as a heritage food involves a complicated relationship between terroir, designations of origin, extra virginity, and overall quality. These considerations, according to my participants, center on one particular aspect: taste. Origin, quality, and extra virginity are observable through taste in the final product. Heritage in essence is tasted through terroir.

This chapter has examined the ongoing process of nationalism in Italy that is always incomplete, due to the nature of Italian nationalism being based in diversity. The nation cannot contain the regionalism and divisions it actively promotes as part of its own construction. Fractally recursive alterity extending from the old north-south divide is extended to immigrants within the peninsula. As a heritage product, olive oil stands in as



a symbol of identity for Italy, but as we will see in later chapters, the grounding of olive oil as hyperlocalized, complicates that relationship. It stands for both the national and the local. In terms of Tuscany, the processes of heritagization have transformed extra virgin olive oil into an important commodity in which ideas about quality, goodness, and authenticity are tied together and evidenced through taste. The next chapter examines the underlying social anxiety of Italy stemming in part from its incomplete nationalism and the presence of immigrants. The food scare of the early 2000s regarding olive oil is a consolidated moment in which to observe social anxieties and the implications of olive oil as a heritage food.

## **Chapter 2 Social Anxiety and Olive Oil in Italy**

In 2011 Nicholas Blechman, an illustrator and the art director for the NY Times Book Review, launched a website entitled “Extra Virgin Suicide: The Adulteration of Italian Olive Oil” that outlined the inauthenticity in the production of Italian extra virgin olive oil (Blechman 2014). The author’s sensationalized website built on the work of Tom Mueller (2008) to explain the three-part adulteration of Italian olive oil. First, what we think of as Italian extra virgin olive oil is actually not Italian; olives are imported from elsewhere like Tunisia, Spain, and Morocco, and once in Italy are then pressed and labeled as “Packaged in Italy” or “Product of Italy.” Second, the extra virgin olive oil we consume is not actually extra virgin because they do not meet the strict standards of lab tests or tasting panels. This could be because the olives were overripe or damaged before milling. Still, other oils are not extra virgin because they are extracted from the olive pomace left over after the extraction of extra virgin olive oil. Third, the oils may not be made purely out of olives. Cheaper seed oils or vegetable oils are added to augment supplies of extra virgin olive oil. They are also sometimes processed with chlorophyll, flavors, and perfumes to make them look like extra virgin olive oil.

This exposé sent shock waves through the foodie community as well as Italian olive oil producers. In response, directors of Coldiretti (Italy’s largest agricultural organization) sent several bottles of fine DOC extra virgin olive oil to the editors of the NY Times to illustrate that Italian olive oil production is well and good. However, the anxieties around the adulteration of the product still seem to haunt the world of olive oil and Italy. The olive oil scandal reached far beyond a concern for purity and veracity of the product, seeping into and exposing anxieties around health, environmental

sustainability, and identity. In moments like the olive oil scandal, a variety of actors including producers, professional tasters, agronomists, marketing professionals, educators, and the media frame the scare as well as cultivate responses to it. The anxieties that the olive oil scandal rubbed raw, remained heightened even as a new understanding about the olive oil industry was put into place. I argue that the scandal around Italian extra virgin olive oil reveals is an underlying anxiety about our food: where it comes from, its safety, healthfulness, authenticity, and sustainability. In Chapter 3, I will show how olive oil is in turn used in negotiating these anxieties. One reason that the anxieties around olive oil persist is because the very responses to fears about adulterated oil perpetuate the fear as an integral part of themselves.

Human geographer Peter Jackson articulates a theory of social anxiety where anxiety is both a function and result of the social and cultural contradictions in which individuals live their lives (Jackson 2015, Wilkinson 2001). Anxiety for Jackson is a “physically embodied state involving mental and emotional distress, combined with a more diffuse sense of uneasiness about impending events” (Jackson 2015: 39). This future orientation is key, in that it could be about the consequences of specific events or a general sense of unease about the future, yet it informs actions and understandings about the present. The social aspect of social anxiety is important to keep in mind as well to differentiate it from the individual psychological diagnosis; anxiety affects institutions and is expressed and revealed through interrelations of people regardless of if individual actors personally experience anxiousness (Jackson 2015).

Others have cited anxiety as symptomatic of modern life (Bauman 2006; Dunant and Porter, 1996; May 1950; Wilkinson 2001); however, Jackson cautions that “the

characterization of our present times as uniquely anxious is highly contentious and such claims should be closely examined” (Jackson 2015: 11). As has been seen in the previous discussion, Italian history is riddled with constant ruptures between past, present, and future, where moves toward modernity necessitate a constant renegotiation with the past. The incomplete nature of the nation-building project, the position of Italy within Europe, the changing demographics of the country, globalization, and shifting ecological concerns can all be understood as contributors to an underlying social anxiety.

Food is a powerful lens through which to examine social anxiety because of the ways in which it mediates and transgresses boundaries, including one of the most fundamental – the boundary between the self and the outside world (Goodman and Sage 2014, Lavin 2013). The moment in which we eat, consume, and integrate the outside world into ourselves, “offers a singular opportunity for examining understandings of identity, authenticity, and responsibility... a distilled and intensified terrain for thinking about the more generalized questions of ethics, aesthetics, ecology, and politics” (Lavin 2014: x-xi). Anxieties around food swirl together in popular as well as scholarly media including the growing distance (physical, social, and intellectual) between food, producers, and consumers; an industrial system too large to manage and understand; confounding and conflicting scientific understandings and nutritional advice; and issues around consumer-responsibility for ethics and sustainability (Levenstein 2012, Guthman 2011, Blay-Palmer 2008, Pollan 2009, Pollan 2006, Hier 2003). Some scholars have called this period “post-Pasteurian” in reference to the breakdown of boundaries between nature and society; society can no longer manage and maintain dominance over nature because of the very measures it created to do so in the first place (Paxson 2012, Latour

1988). Heather Paxson in her studies of cheese production outlines the way Pasteurian and post-Pasteurian politics relate to food scares (Paxson 2012). Louis Pasteur was a French scientist most famous for his work in microbiology and his breakthroughs regarding germs and the possibilities of vaccinations. After Pasteur's discoveries, the state was given the mantle of protecting individuals from the invisible threats of bacteria and viruses through food safety; however, post-Pasteurian politics questions whether the state can protect us, has our best interest in mind, and most importantly, whether natural forces like bacteria can be controlled (Paxson 2008, Dunn 2007). When there are specific threats that come to the public's attention, these kinds of post-Pasteurian questions come to the forefront.

Food scholar Peter Akins, like Jackson's caution, reiterates the need to not consider anxiety, specifically food anxiety, as symptomatic of the contemporary moment. There is a trove of data that shows the historical persistence of anxieties around food (Atkins 2013, 2008; Ferrières 2002; Scholliers 2008). In short, even though social anxiety and anxieties around food are nothing new, they are still powerful and pervasive.

What does seem to distinguish these anxieties, according to theorists of our "age of anxiety" (Dunant and Porter 1996) is the ability of anxieties to spread well beyond the bounds of their original contexts. In late modernity, risks are detached and deterritorialized, opening the possibility for them to affect the entire planet (Beck 1986). Contrasting abstract and artificial or manufactured risks like food scares with localized natural events like earthquakes or hurricanes, human ecologist Giovanni Orlando explains that "the effect of risks today cannot be localized; they escape physical and

political borders”; the power to do so is derived from the “spatial incalculability of the effects of industrial society” (Orlando 2018: 46).

Around food specifically, broad anxieties circulate connected to globalization, industrialization, safety, and the disappearance of tradition. Starting before, but arguable most-notably beginning in the 1980s several major shifts hit Italian food and foodways. Agricultural, industrial, and consumer changes that had been building since the end of World War II led to a decoupling of foodways and the localized agricultural production that had supported them (Taddei 1998). Large multinational corporations dominated much of food production, and consumers shifted their purchasing power away from small mom-and-pop stores to larger super markets (Grassivaro 1991; Counihan 2004). Even in my own observations over 8 years (2008-2016), the center of Florence saw a significant increase in the number of larger supermarket-style stores, including Eatlay, Conad, and Carrefour, as well as the proliferation of smaller supermarket-chain style stores. These smaller versions of the larger markets mimicked the older style of mom-and-pop stores to squeeze into limited city space. An important piece of this process has been the presence of mass-produced foods, multinational or American companies like McDonalds or Starbucks. In the face of these shifts, some social movements and institutions began to think more critically about sustainability and protection of traditional foodways. The most notable of which is Slow Food.

Efforts like Slow Food have made sure that discourses on food are framed by the loss of diversity and tradition, healthfulness, and connection to fairness. Born in Italy, in the 1960s as a loose association opposing the growth of American-style fast-food and cuisine and then gaining notoriety in the 1980s and 1990s, Slow Food is dedicated to

promoting the politics and pleasure of “slowness” in comparison to the “fast life” represented by entities such as McDonalds. Slow Food’s emergence can also be connected to broader economic and political transformations taking place in Italy and in Europe during the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, including declining cultural influence of political parties, labor unions, and the Catholic Church, as well as economic growth through the expansion of organized leisure and cultural power being consolidated into the hands of the economic elite (Leitch 2008, Counihan & Siniscalchi 2014). At the same time, increasing concerns around food safety feed directly in to food anxieties encouraging people to turn to local food as an answer (Cheng 2016). The advent of the European Food Safety Authority in response to worries over genetically modified foods, the increased use of antibiotics and growth hormones in meat production, and incidences of disease, meant that producers were faced with expensive safety tests, new technologies, increasing policies and standardization (Leitch 2008, Busch 2004). Increasing policies and standardization around food production and safety risk squashing out smaller, traditional productions through not only the necessity of producing for a larger market, but the promulgation of risk discourses (Beck 1986). Regulations like denominations of origin and their disciplinaries helped protect specific products from being copied or mimicked and hygienic standards protect the public from potentially dangerous contaminations, but at the same time producers desire freedom from harsher regulations to use methods they deem traditional and appropriate (Cavanaugh 2007, DeSoucey 2010, Roseman 2004). In this context, local, artisanal, traditional productions become valorized as at risk of being snuffed out by integration, globalization, and standardization.

However, to defend against the potential extinction of valuable local products, movements like Slow Food offer a different, more “virtuous” version of globalization (Andrews 2008, Leitch 2012). Through their Presidia program, Slow Food identifies local products that are representative of local traditions and environments, supports their production, and facilitates their access to the global market. These Presidia create a link between the local and the global in order to support the production of products that are at risk of disappearing because the global market has ignored them, created similar products that are cheaper and more easily accessible, or has created conditions in which their production are not cost effective (Parasecoli 2017). The products around which Presidia are formed, according to Slow Food, not only represent important traditional or cultural knowledge, but also represent important environmental factors like regional plants or resources. In this way, Presidia not only protect local cultural products but the ecological setting from which they emerge, protecting global cultural and biological diversity. A critique of such interventions into the global market is that such efforts increase prices of products to the point that local communities cannot afford them (Van Esterik 2006, Parasecoli 2017). Movements like Slow Food then run the risk of catering to those who already have some economic power within local communities and those who can engage in the global market as consumers, supporting firms that already have the capital necessary to gain important designations of origin, organic certification, or large enough productions to satisfy circulation on the global market (Meneley 2004).

There are further concerns that the scaling up of local food effort also runs against their grounding in quality and authenticity (Furman and Papavasiliou 2018, Tewari et al. 2018, Wittman et al. 2012, DeLind & Bingen 2008, DuPuis & Goodman 2005). If local



production grows too big or local products are distributed too widely, it negates the ideas of localness and environmental sustainability by no longer being local and incurring similar environmental costs as mass production. In response, there has been a growth in food movements like the *gruppi di acquisto solidale* in Italy (Grasseni 2013; Cembalo, Migliore, Schifani 2013; Graziano and Forno 2012) the *associations pour le maintien d'une agriculture paysanne* in France (Lamine and Perrot 2008), and community supported agriculture (Andreatta, Nash, and Martin 2011; Gross 2011; Tookes, Bartlett, and Yandel 2018). These locally-grounded organizations rethink financial responsibility through creating a network of local producers and consumers that share in the endeavor of food production (Grasseni 2013), and renegotiate the ways local food engages in socioeconomic and political systems.

In the summer of 2015 I visited the Expo Milano where 145 countries and several international organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and multinational companies came together to address the theme of “Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life.” My brother Trevor and I were among the 21.5 million visitors that invaded the newly constructed city-sized exhibition between May 1 and October 31 of that year. Only around 30% of the visitors were recorded as foreign, meaning that a primary audience for the expo was the Italian public. After trudging over a giant white metal bridge from the train station in the sweltering July heat, we came to the entrance of the park and were greeted by giant Arcimboldo<sup>7</sup>-inspired statues – people constructed out of various fruits and vegetables.

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<sup>7</sup> Italian painter known for creative portraits made out of objects like fruit and vegetables.

We wandered through the first pavilion that served as an entry way to the rest of the expo. This first pavilion, “Pavilion Zero,” was designed as a springboard into the themes of the overall expo. Beginning with a three-story tall library wall (“The Archives of Memory”), the pavilion’s monumental construction consumed visitors, moving them through detailed displays like a field of sheep, massive video screens, and interactive exhibits on the birth of agriculture, the importance of biodiversity, sustainability, and the future of food.

Within the expo grounds, intricately and impressively designed pavilions representing individual countries, organizations, or themes of food lined two intersecting “streets.” For example, the United Kingdom pavilion was designed as a path through a traditional orchard leading to a giant aluminum “bee-hive” in the center, filled with LED lights that buzzed in unison with a real bee-hive in the UK. Its central theme was the vital role of the bee within the global ecosystem; the technology featured could have innovative implications for monitoring the health of hives. Colombia’s exhibit took visitors through their five climatic zones. As we reached the “altitude” of each new zone, the environment inside the rooms would change – the temperature would shift rapidly, humidity levels would flux, and the wall-displays would describe the arrival point. Each pavilion, while educating visitors on their contributions to solving issues of global food security and energy production, also featured a restaurant, bar, or gift shop where you could sample products from the host country.

As host, Italy had the largest and most impressive presence at the expo with their pavilion-building coupled with displays like individual regional stations sponsored by Eataly, a wine museum and tasting space dedicated to showcasing Italian wines and their

origins, an olive oil market featuring Coppini Arte Olearia (an olive oil company near Parma that boasts quality, traceable, and sustainable products), and a “Supermarket of the Future.” The main Italian pavilion, Palazzo Italia, a hypermodern white biodynamic concrete building resembling a nest, was conceptualized as the “Nursey Garden of Italy.” Inside, visitors learned about the history of food production in Italy “revealing the country’s ability to imprint a qualitative difference, making good use of the ideal bioclimatic conditions of the territory with techniques and equipment that combine quality and efficiency, excellence, and safety” (Expo Milano 2015). The Exhibition of Italian Identity focused on how the great diversity of regions, autonomous provinces, and territorial administrative authorities contribute to the Italian cultural project.

The Palazzo took visitors on a journey where you encounter kaleidoscope rooms projecting immersive panoramas of picturesque terrains, mannequins that come to life to relate a specific testimonial of an artisan or a food producer representative of their region or profession, and interactive exhibits showcasing delicacies from across the country. Four main themes run throughout the exhibit: 1) the power of know-how, focusing on skills and embodied knowledge of the Italian population; 2) the power of beauty, focusing on the countryside of the “bel paese” or “beautiful country;” 3) the power of limitation, focusing on Italy’s history of agricultural and artisanal businesses thriving despite difficult conditions like terrain that is difficult to cultivate; and 4) the power of the future, focusing on the mixture of tradition and innovation. Throughout the building there was a constant tension between maintaining and capitalizing on traditions and know-how of the past, but looking forward to the future in innovative ways to face challenges like food security and sustainability. The answers to the challenges of the

future, according to the exhibit, could be found in engaging creatively with the what the past has provided.

Nearby the Palazzo Italia, was the Future Foods District featuring the “Supermarket of the Future,” a collaborative endeavor between the COOP supermarket company and a technological design firm. The store was provisioned like a “normal” supermarket however, the goal of this space was to decrease social distance between customers and between customers and products through structural changes and the implementation of technological innovations. First, the physical space was adjusted to be more open and shelves and cases were lowered to remove physical barriers between customers. Second, when a customer waved their hand, picked up a product, or pointed to something, a screen overhead would light up with information about the product. The “augmented label” shared the product’s origins, nutritional facts, the presence of allergens, waste disposal instructions, related products and promotions, and the environmental footprint of the product. The goals of this new kind of market borrowed from perceptions of traditional markets in attempting to recreate intimacy among consumers who no longer lingered over products and chatted about the best ways to cook a potato. At the same time that the exhibit tried to return sociability to the marketplace, it attempted to close the informational gap between consumers and products, allowing them to make better informed decisions in promoting a healthy and sustainable lifestyle (and knowing which other items that paired well were on sale).

The Expo in general, but the Italian Pavilion and Supermarket of the Future in particular palpably expressed social anxieties around the growing distance of contemporary food systems. They sought to address not only the alienation consumers

feel from one another, but the gap in the knowledge consumers have about their food from origins to safety to healthfulness. By trying to fill the void of information that consumers feel about the industrial system, the designers and sponsors of the Expo attempted to reestablish trust in the products consumers engage with. They also sought to address questions around how to produce food on a mass scale for a growing global population while facing the challenges of climate change, yet staving off the problems the industrial system has – lack of transparency and global environmental impact. The exhibits pointed to possible solutions through recourse to the past and to highly localized traditions; or simply put, heritagized elements of Italian culture and foodways. In this way, the Expo tries to bridge the gap between local, traditional, artisanal production and the mass production necessary for the future – increasing information sharing for the large-scale production processes while looking to traditional practices as attempts at sustainability.

Food is primed with these anxieties from a philosophical, metaphorical approach about how it transgresses boundaries of the body and the outside world, anxieties concerning the scale and unfathomability of the globalized food chain, to fears about the disappearances of local traditional products or environmental resources, to very real worries about safety and hygiene. There are even tensions in regard to the plethora of ways people have sought to address these anxieties, offering no clear consolations. Within this context, there are moments that erupt producing heightened and distilled instances of anxiety: food scares.

## **Food Scares**

“Food scares” are one way in which social anxiety becomes expressed in an event or set of events – they are a well-suited for illustrating the way anxiety extends between the individual and society (Jackson 2015, Stassart and Whatmore 2003). Food scares are particularly “effective in rupturing the fabric of everyday life, disrupting established routines and rhythms, and persisting until a new order of understanding is put into place” (Jackson 2015: 47). The intimacy of food with our embodied experience within the world and its presence within our every day, make it a powerfully impactful object to suddenly become a threat. Food scares have run the gamut from salmonella tainted eggs, to Foot-and-Mouth Disease infected meat (Van Zanenberg and Millson 2003, Ward et al. 2004), to more recent scares like horsemeat accidentally making it into the food supply, or chemicals commonly found in yoga mats or pesticides suddenly being discovered in Subway sandwiches or breakfast cereals. An important component of food scares is not that they are necessarily dangerous or pervasive, but how they circulate in public discourses. Aspects of the scare – whether GMOs, chemicals, or even the idea of “fakes” – become “icons of risk” (Beck 1986: 39). They are easily identifiable components of discourse that transform whatever they are attached to into something potentially dangerous. This circulation of scares and the proliferation of icons of risk is enhanced by the contemporary era of globalized communications.

Adulteration is a certain kind of food scare (Atkins 2013); it is where the purity and authenticity of food products comes into question. The immediate bodily threat of the food is not necessarily articulated, but an upshot in anxiety over the veracity and authenticity of products can have similar social effects as scandals dealing with direct threats to health. Both types of scandal are powerful because of the intimate relationship

between food, the self, and the everyday. Although there is a long history of public fear of adulteration with some cases causing illness and death (Filby 1934; Brown 1925; Burnett 1958, 1989; Phillips and French 1998, Coppin and High 1999; Atkins 2013), the indeterminacy of the truth and purity behind a product, regardless of actual potential bodily harm, can be perceived as doing damage. We make the leap from inauthenticity to danger. Take for example the 2015 scare about Chinese tomatoes in Italy.

On an evening in September my phone rang with my friend Federico calling: “Daniele! Turn on the television! Le Iene is on. It’s about the Chinese tomatoes!” I ran to turn on my little rabbit-eared television, clicked through the static until I found the right channel. A thin woman with blonde hair in a slim-fitting suit was sitting at a white table, speaking rapidly, holding a tomato impaled by her fork. Nadia Toffa, the speaker, was questioning the origins of tomatoes in Italy. The program continued uncovering the origins of tomato concentrate used in products like sauces, claiming that many come from China, are processed in Italy, labeled as “Product of Italy” or “Made in Italy,” and then shipped out to other EU and non-EU countries (Toffa 2015). Over the following few weeks, the debate exploded with many of the points made in the program being disputed, like the presence of pesticides and other contaminants in Chinese tomato concentrate and the impression that the importation of tomatoes from China was a great deal larger than it actually is. One reporter wrote that in 2014 only 10% of the 144,000 tons of imported concentrate came from China, which represents only about 0.28% of the tomatoes processed in Italy and the majority of the tomatoes imported to Italy are from California, Spain, Portugal, and Greece (La Pira 2015). Despite the refutation of certain claims, the petition proposed by the program to label products more clearly, using a system similar to

the one used for olive oil where they are required to report on labels if olives are from Italy, from the EU, or from outside the EU, gained around 330,000 signatures. This explosion of controversy around the origins of a popular food product, regardless of which claims were actually true, shows the Italian public's general anxiety or readiness to be anxious regarding the origins of their food. It also demonstrates how the one fact – that tomatoes that came from China were in the foods labeled as Italian – spread rapidly to encapsulate issues about health and safety. In this instance, the “foreignness” of the product and the falsity of products labeled as “made in Italy” were discursively and effectively linked to danger.

As has been discussed, the immense scale at which risks are produced allows them to spread well beyond locality and realms of risk. The Chinese tomato scandal shows how multiple anxieties underlying Italian society bundled together, making for a particularly powerful scare. The scary possibility of fraudulent products consumed and incorporated anxieties about China and immigration, transferring xenophobic fears onto a food product, moving it from potentially fake to potentially dangerous. The larger project here demonstrates how multiple realms of anxiety and risk are encapsulated in the scandal around Italian extra virgin olive oil. What starts as a concern about adulterated oil can be understood as demonstrating much broader anxieties encompassing health, social change, immigration, globalization, and the environment.

### **Olive Oil Scandal**

In 2008 Tom Mueller outlined the inauthenticity in the production of what we think of as Italian extra virgin olive oil in his book “Extra Virginity: The Sublime and



Scandalous World of Olive Oil” (Mueller 2008). This was then picked up and sensationalized by the New York Times, where it grabbed global attention. First, what we think of as Italian extra virgin olive oil is actually not Italian; olives are imported from elsewhere like Tunisia, Spain, and Morocco, and then pressed and labeled as “Packaged in Italy” or “Product of Italy.” Second, the extra virgin olive oil we consume is not actually extra virgin, but “inferior” oil that is passed through falsified analyses. These falsified oils could include oils that are extracted from olive pomace left over after the extraction of extra virgin olive oil through the application of heat or chemicals. Third, the oil is not actually entirely made of olives. Cheaper seed oils or vegetable oils are added to augment supplies of extra virgin olive oil. They are also sometimes processed with chlorophyll, flavors, and perfumes to make them look like extra virgin olive oil.

This exposé sent shock waves through the foodie community, but most importantly throughout the Italian olive oil industry. Despite constant attempts from agricultural unions, consortia, and individual producers to quell rumors, the anxieties around the adulteration of the product still seems to haunt the world of olive oil and Italy today. In fact, in March 2016, at TASTE, a major international culinary event hosted in Florence by Pitti Imagine, a featured talk of the “TASTE RING” discussion forum was focused on how to defend against such scandal. In a session entitled “How do we defend Italian extra virgin olive oil from fakes, adulterations, and denigrating campaigns abroad?”<sup>8</sup> several participants including Amedeo De Franceschi, commander of the food

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<sup>8</sup> Come difendere l’olio extra vergine italiano da truffe, adulterazioni e champagne denigratorie all’estero?

quality corps of the Italian Forest Service<sup>9</sup>; Piero Gonnelli, president of the Italian Association of Oil Millers<sup>10</sup> and owner of Gonnelli; journalist Maurizio Pescari; Michele Bungaro, a representative of the Italian Olive Oil Consortium UNAPROL; and chef Gianfranco Vissani debated the current state of scandal and how to better deal with these issues. They cited recent laws, including one concerning non-refillable bottle tops, raids like the one carried out in Grosseto a few weeks earlier, and the renewal of the industry under difficult conditions and reputation. A similar theme was discussed at Olio Capitale, a large olive oil industry convention I attended in Trieste in 2016. Representatives from the government, agricultural unions, and producers' cooperatives all came together to openly discuss the crisis of olive oil. More often than not, they landed on one common tool they believed would help: consumer education.

Another concern brought up in these conversations was the importation of oils from other countries and that the EU and Italy were not helping the appearance of the scandal by continuing to do so. The chief complaints were around importation of oils from the countries specifically suspect of sending subpar products. In 2016 and 2017 the EU imported massive quantities of oil from Tunisia as an effort to support their struggling economy. Despite these benevolent intentions, nationalist groups like 5 Stelle were against the importations because they supposedly undercut national production. Whether or not their claims are true is not necessarily important, but rather their wide circulation and debate did not help assuage fears about fake oils on the market.

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<sup>9</sup> Nucleo Agroalimentare e Forestale

<sup>10</sup> Associazione Italiana Frantoiani Oleari

A final aspect of the scandal that was brought up in both these larger events and in conversation with producers was the impact on varying sizes of producers. My participants perceived the larger producers as not having as much of a struggle with the scandal as smaller ones. The smaller artisanal producers did not have the production volume or product diversification needed to absorb a decrease in sales like larger firms. While visiting with the head of one olive oil consortia, I asked her about the company just a few kilometers away that had a massive building surrounded by a high fence. “No, we don’t talk about them” was her answer. Throughout our conversation she kept insinuating that they were part of the problem of fake oils in the first place and that their production was big enough that it didn’t really matter: “I want to make sure to support *aziende* (firms) that make real quality extra virgin oil.” Other producers echoed these sentiments that smaller producers had a harder time. They work hard to sell their products locally and when possible, internationally via tourism, online shops, or exports. Their prices are generally a bit higher because of the scale of their production, and they lean on their oils’ reputations as local, artisanal, Italian, extra virgin, and high quality. They maybe produce only a handful of products. Any force in the market that would drive sales down, would adversely affect them more so than the more resilient larger companies either in Tuscany or elsewhere.

### **Added Fears: Geography, Biology, Climate**

The fears concerning the scandal build on top of already existing issues with olive oil production in Tuscany. The region faces difficulty in cultivation because of its terrain (reducing overall productivity) as well as climatic and biological issues. This context of

threat contributes to anxieties concerning olive oil production in Tuscany, but at the same time contributes greatly to the construction of Tuscan extra virgin olive oil as a limited, high-quality, and luxury commodity extending from a history of resiliency in the region.

As been explained to me by Stefano at his farm and on several other occasions, the landscape and climate of Tuscany is not conducive to easy cultivation of olives for olive oil. The dramatic terrain contributes to Tuscany's relatively low level of production as compared to other areas of Italy, especially the south. Tuscany only contributes to around 2% of the national olive oil production, while areas in the south like Puglia, Calabria, Sicily, Campania, Basilicata, and Sardinia produce the vast majority, closer to 90%. The Tuscan countryside is incredibly hilly and the altitude shifts dramatically. As was explained to me by numerous farmers, the methods of production they use for this terrain are relatively traditional. Only a certain level of mechanization is possible without destroying the trees. In other places where they have larger swaths of uniform land, mechanization is a bit easier and allows for higher production. So on the one hand, the terrain forces attention to traditional forms of cultivation, on the other, it puts a limit on the production possible.

The highly variable terrain in Tuscany contributes the creation of highly localized microclimates; all the way down to farmers explaining that one side of a hill could be different than another based on irrigation, temperature, sun exposure, and direction of the wind. These conditions make it hard to monitor the health and progress of growth within or across plots of land. However, these conditions create variations in olive flavors contributing to the terroir or taste of place that is so prized in such products; it allows for mixing of olives from different areas to produce unique mixtures of oils and gives each

individual farm's oils characteristics to differentiate themselves from the rest of the market.

Aside from the landscape itself, the positioning of Tuscany in the north-central part of the peninsula, places it at the edge of the cultivation zone for olives. There are areas further north where olives can be successfully grown, but they are not generally widespread because growing conditions are dependent on outlier microclimates (these areas are abnormally warm compared to surrounding areas due to geographic conditions). This positioning means that Tuscany is susceptible to freezes, which my participants regularly bemoaned.

Freezes, according to farmers with whom I spoke, did not historically happen often but they do occur with regularity every ten years or so and they had dramatic effects. The freeze of 1956 decimated olive trees and assisted in spurring rural exodus. The shift from mixed agriculture to monocrops had already transformed the landscape, creating more precarity if a crop failed. The freeze killed off an important source of income that would take a considerably long time to recuperate to maturity (Gaggio 2017: 271).

The freeze that most of my participants referenced when lamenting climatic conditions was the one that occurred in January of 1985 where temperatures dropped well below -20 degrees celcius for several nights. The damage caused was so severe that debates erupted focused on whether or not the event could be used to restructure cultivation practices. According to historian Dario Gaggio, around forty thousand farms applied for relief from the regional government and the European Community (Gaggio 2017: 271). A complete overhaul of cultivation practices widely considered to be too

traditional at the time was not possible. Many areas that were more likely to suffer from freezes again and areas that were already difficult to cultivate due to steep slopes or rocky terrain were abandoned. On several occasions while driving from one farm to another, my friends would point out fields they had never seen being cultivated; these were areas of the Tuscan countryside that were left after that last big freeze. The trees had grown back but were untamed. Producers in areas that were most promising, cut trees to the base and chose their strongest to be the basis of new growth (Gaggio 2017). The tree that Stefano had shown me upon arrival to his fields was a remnant of this kind of process.

As was explained to me by olive oil producer Matteo Mugelli, son of famed olive oil expert Marco Mugelli, there were a few principle problems for olive cultivation – *occhio di pavone*<sup>11</sup> (a fungal disease named for its effects on leaves making them look like peacock feathers) and the *mosca olearia*<sup>12</sup> (a fruit fly particularly fond of olives). It took some clarification to understand the issues around the *occhio di pavone*, but the basics are that the disease slows the growth process, prevents the plant from producing olives, and infects those olives that are produced, destroying the outer skin and starting the oxidation process which raises acidity levels preventing the oil from attaining extra virgin status. The *mosca*, as had been shown to me by Stefano on his farm, lays eggs inside of the olive fruit and the resulting maggot eats away at the flesh and the skin destroying what chances the oil within the olive has for being extra virgin by starting the oxidation process. Additionally, if there are larvae inside the olives at milling, not only

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<sup>11</sup> “peacock eye”

<sup>12</sup> “olive fly”

will the oil most likely not be extra virgin, but one could taste the leftover bugs in the final product. In fact, in working with a group of professional tasters, one had identified the flavor of *verme* in one of our oil samples. I had actually refused to believe him at the time, but multiple producers and tasters backed him up that it was possible to taste the proteins in the oil leftover from the crushed insects.

During a discussion with Marco and a group of producers in June of 2016, debates about the success of that year's crops got slightly heated, with one participant pointing out that they were already 15 days behind the growth patterns of 2014. That did not seem that bad to me until Matteo explained that 2014 and 2007 were the worst two years in recent memory for oil production, mostly because of the destruction caused by the *mosca*. Production was really low in general and the oil that qualified as extra virgin was even lower. The 2015 harvest had been a semi-miraculous rebound from 2014. The excitement was palpable in the many events surrounding the new oil, including one particular festival in Pontessieve, a small town just up the river from Florence. The festival drew hundreds of attendees from the surrounding area, many of which, in addition to the producers, sang the praises on the harvest joyful that they would access to “olio buono” (good oil) for most of the following year.

During the time of my fieldwork, there was a new growing plight that producers were beginning to worry about; it had not yet become a full-blown threat in Tuscany. In 2013, the first cases of *xylella fastidiosa* in Europe began to appear in Puglia, Italy (Almeida 2019, EMPPO, Saponari et al 2019). The pathogenic bacterium, thought to have originated in the Americas, invades xylem vessels and interrupts the transportation of water and soluble mineral nutrients from the roots to the rest of the plant (EMPPO).

Versions of the disease are some of the most dangerous plant bacteria in the world, wreaking havoc on grapevines, peaches, citrus plants, plums, almonds, and coffee, but the main economic host of the bacteria within the Mediterranean is the olive (EMPPPO). The disease starts with plants showing extensive leaf scorch, that looks like regular dry leaves, but eventually leads to massive dieback. It is difficult to diagnose the disease because of its resemblance to other normal conditions of plants and requires testing to confirm the presence of the bacteria (Almeida 2019, Chen et al 2019, Stockstad 2015).

The disease uses cicadas as its vector and the only real intervention is to create buffer zones in the hopes that they could control the insect population. Even after obviously infected plants are removed, asymptomatic plants can act as a reservoir for the bacteria (European Commission). Until March 2018, buffer zones were thought to work, but more cases were detected and the buffer zone was expanded. Some environmental groups have protested the measures taken to eradicate the disease because they require the decimation of seemingly healthy trees to create the buffer zones, and some farmers refuse to believe that it's really xylella that is causing the damage (Stokstad 2015, Borunda 2018). At the time of my fieldwork, xylella was a threat only in the south and Tuscan producers tended to not worry about it believing it was controlled and would be contained to the southern parts of the peninsula. However, the disease made its way into agronomic publications and was a common topic of conversation at olive oil events and my meetings with groups of producers where we debated the major challenges to production. The true threat of the disease may not have made its way north in 2016 but it had arrived within the discourses of threat that circulated around olives.



## **Paradox of “High Quality” Olive Oil Production in Tuscany**

These threats and difficulties in production paradoxically contribute to the high quality of Tuscan extra virgin olive oil lauded by professional tasters, producers, oil consortia, and prizes like the International Olive Oil Competition. First, the environmental stressors put on the plants from the altitude, latitude, terrain, irrigation all being suboptimal supposedly produces all of the chemical responses that make the oil higher quality: “They have to work harder. The plant is stressed but still wants to make the same fruit and oil – they try harder” explained one farmer in Reggello. The stress on plants increases the phenolic production, which translates to higher levels of phenols in the oil, which means that the oils are spicier, more bitter, and have increased healthful qualities because phenols are powerful antioxidants. The stressors make it hard to produce oil, but the oil produced is of high quality because of that difficulty.

This bit of the paradox feeds directly into issues of quantity. Producers constantly talked about their production quantities in terms of either how little they produced or how surprisingly large their production was while still being extra virgin. The methods for producing extra virgin olive oil in themselves limit the quantity of oil that can be extracted from olives. There is a careful calculation that producers to perform to decide exactly how far to push their methods, maintaining quality but improving overall yield. As one producer explained to me, “It’s a dance. If I want more oil, I can heat it up. But that risks ruining the oil. If I want better oil, I keep it cool. But that means less oil. I have to decide where I want to be between quantity and quality.” Together, the methods of production, the conditions of production, and then threats like bugs or disease place a

limit on supply. Following the dynamics of simple supply and demand, this would lead to an increase at least in economic value of the high quality extra virgin olive oil available.

Recently, the presence of “fraudulent” products has paradoxically contributed to the value of supposed high quality extra virgin oils. The supposedly higher quality oils gain something to contrast themselves against to prove their value, and discerning or at least fearful consumers start to seek out those higher quality products. Additionally, the education that goes into helping people recognize “high quality” olive oil helps to justify the higher cost of those products, at least to some extent. Like other valuable goods, there must be lesser valued or fake oils to justify higher value, quality, and authenticity of others. This contrast is evidenced by the work done by agronomists, producers, and professional tasters to differentiate their products from mass-produced, lower quality, or imported oils that will be discussed throughout the rest of this dissertation.

Along with the bolstering of economic value for high quality extra virgin olive oil, the idea that the market is saturated with fakes helps contribute to the social value of oils and consumers’ ability to discern high quality. Fears about fakes coupled with fears about diseases and bugs decimating production is what caused the 2015 new oil festivals in Tuscany to have such a seemingly renewed vigor. I attended the Olio Nuovo festival in Pontessieve, just a little ways down the Arno river from Florence’s city center, in November of 2015. The small town center was taken over by stand after stand selling food and drinks. My personal favorite part was the giant chestnut roasting pit that made the entire chilly town smell earthy and warm. Well over 20 producers had stands offering *fetunte* (bread with oil) to passersby to taste their new oil, of course in the hopes that we would pay a hefty price for the new oils that had “just arrived from the mill.” At the

information kiosk, the organizers were handing out agricultural magazines like TerrAmica. The volunteers handing out printed materials, the printed materials themselves, and the producers all lamented the fears about production for that year – the fly, fungal diseases, bad storms, the temperature. The expression of these worries gave a sense of relief and excitement to the event. One attendee reflected, “We’re always happy for new oil. That is to say, it’s a wonderful tradition and this year the oil is really good. There’s always the possibility it won’t be. So we’re always happy when we do.” Part of the excitement over the oil and part of its economic and social value is the threat of scarcity. The value of oil according to my participants, derives from a delicate balance between stressors and difficult conditions that make cultivation difficult but improves oils, production methods that place a limit on the quantity that can be produced, and finally a constant fear that at any point the balance can be thrown off and there will be either no or very limited quantities of the high quality extra virgin oil that people are so happy to get every year.

The olive oil scandal, similar to the tomato scandal above, spread well beyond the bounds of exposing Italian extra virgin olive oil was not what it claimed to be. This scandal hit at many realms of anxiety for Italy and the broader global community, but here we will narrow in on health, environmental sustainability, and identity for the Italian population. As concerns about obesity and questions about the general healthiness of mass-produced food grow, olive oil has found itself as being “on trend” with healthy eating. Part of the products renewed fame comes from its close association with the Mediterranean Diet as well as the attention of celebrity chefs in spreading education

about its healthful qualities. Olive oils reputation of being heart healthy is due to two of its main chemical characteristics: high oleic acid content and the antioxidant compounds.

Oleic acid is a naturally-occurring, beneficial monounsaturated fatty acid present in extra virgin olive oil. Other sources of beneficial monounsaturated fat, as opposed to potentially harmful polyunsaturated fat, are red meat, whole milk products, nuts, and high fat fruits like avocados. Thanks to the high levels of oleic acid - around 75% in olive oil – extra virgin olive oil has been shown to be highly cardioprotective, reduce total and LDL cholesterol, increase the resistance of LDL cholesterol to oxidation, and increase good HDL cholesterol (Serra-Majem, Ngo de la Cruz, Ribas, and Tur 2003; Psaltopoulou, Naska, Orfanos, Trichopoulos, Mountokalakis, and Trichopoulou 2004; Terés, Barceló-Coblijn, Benet, Álvarez, Bressani, Halver, and Escribá 2008).

In addition to oleic acid, extra virgin olive oil also has high levels of phenolics, important antioxidant compounds. The phenolics found in extra virgin olive oil, such as hydroxytyrosol and oleuropein, conduct potent free-radical scavenging activities in the body (Brill 2009; Visioli, Bellosta, and Galli 1998). The intake of phenolics leads to the resistance of LDL to oxidation, the inhibition of platelet aggregation, increases in nitric oxide production, and the stimulation of anti-inflammatory agents (Visioli, Bellosta, and Galli 1998; Visioli, Bogani, Grande, and Galli 2005). While olive oil generally has these phenolic compounds, extra virgin oil has the highest levels and therefore is most closely associated with the correlating health benefits (Brill 2009).

One way in which extra virgin olive oil has found its fame and connection to healthy eating is through the institutionalization of the Mediterranean Diet. The Mediterranean Diet was inscribed onto the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and

Cultural Organization's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2013. The diet, characterized by high consumption of olive oil, vegetables, fruits, breads and cereals, legumes, nuts, and seafood has been showed to ward off chronic disease and premature death (Alvarez-Alvarez, Zazpe, Pérez de Rojas, Bes-Rastrollo, Ruiz-Canela, Fernandez-Montero, Hidalgo-Santamaría, and Martínez-González 2018; Davis, Bryan, Hodgson, and Murphy 2015). Medical studies have shown a relationship between the style of eating and a reduction in risk for coronary heart disease, diabetes mellitus type 2, hypertension, embolisms, osteoporosis, and various types of cancer including breast, stomach, colorectal, and prostate (Bach, Serra-Majem, Carrasco, Roman, Ngo, Bertomeu, and Obrador 2006; Brill 2009).

These benefits of olive oil go beyond just consuming it as part of a healthy diet. On many occasions, I observed displays for pharmaceuticals and skin care products made from olive oil in pharmacy windows. I stopped more than once thinking that it was a store selling actual olive oil only to be surprised that it was a skincare line or a weight loss product. One olive oil producer I spoke with explained that her firm had created a new brand within their production that was now distributed widely in pharmacies throughout Switzerland and Northern Germany, thanks to a group of Swiss doctors who prescribe their oil (with high phenolic content and vitamin E) for athletes' diets, especially those who do cycling and running. In pop-up markets around Florence, there were regularly stands selling soaps and lotions made from olive oil alongside essential oils and herbs. The healthful quality of the oil is seemingly transferrable to other forms that the product can take on.

According to my participants, in addition to actually being made out of olives, key to producing extra virgin olive oil that retains all of these healthful qualities were the production and conservation of the oils which was thrown into question with the scandal of adulteration. Oils that were not made from olives, did not have the same healthful qualities of olive oil. Oil that was not extra virgin, did not have low levels of acidity or the phenolic content to have any healthful qualities. The importation of oils and olives from supposedly unknown places throws all of these elements into question. The health claims by scientists and others were based on knowledge of what was in products. As the contents of products returned as an open question, it threw the healthfulness of some products into question while legitimizing the health claims of those that had documentation and shared information about origin, contents, and processes of production.

An unavoidable area of anxiety when it comes to food is the environment. With an eye toward sustainability, throughout the 1980s protectionist legislation concerning the landscapes, and particularly the iconic landscape of Tuscany, prevailed and by the mid 1990s half of the region was under some kind of protective regime with 8% designated as reserve and subject to strictest regulations (Gaggio 2017: 245). However, in the debates over productivity and conservation, a new sensibility emerged that incorporated productivity as part of conservation in the form of sustainable development. Sustainable landscapes were not immutable and available to become frozen in museum exhibits, “but one whose structural rules of development were inherited from the past, consensually rearticulated in the democratic process, and respected for the benefit of future generations” (Gaggio 2017: 245-246).

Continuing concerns for sustainability, the most recent rounds of supranational and national interventions in agriculture through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the EU focused on growing economic, environmental, and territorial challenges. These challenges include food security, globalization, declining productivity, price volatility, resource efficiency, soil and water quality, threats to habitats and biodiversity, and the economic, demographic, and social developments faced by rural areas such as depopulation (DG Agriculture and Rural Development 2013). In answer to these challenges, CAP reforms for the 2014-2020 cycle focused on greening, sustainability, and rural development across Europe with a strong emphasis on direct payments, which have historically proven to be the most effective intervention for CAP policy implementation (DG Agriculture and Rural Development 2013; Ciliberti and Frascarelli 2015). Specifically in Italy, direct payments are aimed at existing farmers as income support and younger farmers to help cover start-up costs, in the hopes that it will improve crop diversity, maintaining grasslands, and conserving areas of ecological importance (DG Agriculture and Rural Development 2014). Along with direct payments, a substantial portion of the national budget is dedicated to greening and improving productivity in the olive oil sector (Ciliberti and Frascarelli 2015).

As has already been discussed, many food activism efforts and trends have underlying environmental sustainability concerns. However, global interventions like Slow Food, run the risk of working against their own environmental mission of safeguarding biodiversity and promoting sustainability by scaling up their efforts in the movement of products from locations dispersed across the globe to centers of consumerism often located in major cities. For example, the chain of stores opened by

Slow Food, Eataly, that have products all made in Italy and certified by Slow Food. Yet, the availability of these products in Los Angeles, São Paulo, or Tokyo contradictorily means that they may have a hefty carbon footprint. The “food miles” connected to transporting products from their points of origin to final consumption has become an increasing concern for consumers (MacGregor and Vorley 2006; Weber and Matthews 2008). This attention has shifted some local food efforts to focus on “zero mile” or “zero kilometer” diets; efforts that attempt to decrease the distance between food production and consumption.

The dilemma of local food movements and ethical eating at such a scale is that they are still highly classed (Goodman 2012). The labels of ‘local,’ ‘organic,’ ‘regional,’ ‘alternative’ are still embedded in market logic and accessed most easily by those with economic power (Goodman 2012; Grasseni 2013) as consumers but also as producers. As was noted by the mother-daughter oil producing team from Empoli, organic certifications are expensive, not only in the label itself but in the costs of producing organic products versus conventional agriculture. On the consumer side, desires for organic products are founded on varying motivations including misinterpretations about what organic means and what it can do for you (Orlando 2018).

In the case of olive oil, the preference for local oils fights against the environmental costs associated with transporting olives long distances, sometimes from the southern part of the peninsula, sometimes from across the Mediterranean; or the costs of transporting and packaging large quantities of inferior oils in plastic containers. Further, the preference for higher quality oils that only come from these small to medium producers, fights against the environmental impacts of large scale production, such as the



dramatic changes like flattening out land, made to landscapes so that fields are easier to harvest. All of these negative environmental impacts are things represented as involved in the oil scandal.

Italian identity is a precarious thing marked by regional identity as discussed in the previous chapter, as well as a desire to differentiate between Italians and non-Italian. These processes of differentiation occur in reference to people and products in mutually informing ways. Historically, regional identity has been a source of both discrimination and pride. For example, standardized Italian was not taught in schools until after the end of WWII and speaking in one's own dialect would incur punishment in the centralized schooling system. Yet, there is a sustained pride in regional food, local cultural and religious events, and local history extending from the Middle Ages and fascist influence. Over the past couple of decades, there has been a resurgence of localism and regionalism in the face of European integration (Castellanos 2010). During integration, Europe moved toward preserving regional cultural differences as its own European identity. Rather than seeing itself made up of distinct national traditions that could potentially undermine the saliency of a European identity, one movement was for it to be designed as a patchwork of regional diversity (Holmes 2000).

The historical development of regional identity, through unification, fascism, and into European integration, has gained renewed importance as a defense against globalization including global flows of people, culture, and food through propping up valuable resources for local communities to engage in these newer flows of capital and people, such as through tourism, the production of food products with various forms of

“place-based labels” (Parasecoli 2017), and the (re)invention of heritage food products (Grasseni 2017).

During fieldwork, I fell into an age cohort (late 20s/early30s – a Millennial) where many Italian youth felt torn between older traditions and newer. While my peers often wanted to go for the markedly cosmopolitan choice of sushi, they would scoff at high schoolers piled into the McDonalds eating Big Macs. Their parents, however, would have been disgusted by either option. Both sushi and McDonalds are emblematic of the expanding global foodscape that Italy finds itself a part of. The tendency toward these food options is met with either excitement or disgust based on what they are perceived to communicate about the consumer. For people my age, sushi was seen as a hip, cosmopolitan option that communicated those aspects about their identity. For those same people, McDonalds was a disgusting mass-produced, industrial food that signaled that they were potentially uncultured. In Florence in particular, McDonalds was associated with tourists, mainly American ones, that did not know any better than to eat there. For just slightly older generations, both marked a transition away from family-based consumption, traditional foods, and toward unhealthy and sometimes markedly American styles of consumption.

Additionally, as has been discussed in the previous chapter, since the 1980s Italy has found itself the focus of immigration. Along with immigrants came new foodways that many Italians considered to be, at best, unappetizing. The increase in immigrants meant two things: an increase in the number of foreign foods available and an increase in the number of non-Italians involved in food provisioning. Xenophobic or otherwise

gastronationalist sentiments can be seen in regulations around businesses like has been seen in Lucca, Milan, and Florence to name only a few instances.

As Carole Counihan observed in Florence from the 1980s to the early 2000s, “foreign restaurants” in the city moved from just a handful of Chinese restaurants to an exponentially larger number representing a plethora of other cuisines (2004). My own observations of the city since 2008, were that not only did the number of foreign-food-focused businesses increase, but they had paradoxically gained in popularity and drawn attention as being rather invasive to the city.

A number of cities have turned toward legislation that variably affect the presence of “ethnic” food within city centers. For example, in 2009 Lucca passed a law banning new ethnic restaurants from opening within the historic city center and shortly after Milan passed similar legislation (Wong 2018). Justifications for these types of bans were based in concerns for historical preservation but with very real components of fear concerning the presence of non-Italian Others, unhygienic conditions, and other food safety issues. In 2015, the city council of Florence passed legislation requiring all new restaurants, grocery stores, or other food-related businesses in the historic city center to use at minimum 70% locally sourced products (*prodotti di filiera corta*) or regional products (*del territorio*). The city cited the center’s role as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the desires of its citizens for ensuring the quality of their food sources as the driving forces behind the decision. However, some people worry that this move would make opening a mini-market or an ethnic restaurant more difficult and inequitably affect non-Italian business owners (Ferrara 2016; Ferrara and Montanari 2016). These efforts have much less to do with preserving identity or protecting populations from safety risks,

and much more to do with anti-immigrant sentiments and the beliefs that Italians can be contaminated or injured through consuming particular foods (Giuliani 2017).

Coupled with the growing availability of non-Italian food, non-Italian workers are increasingly involved in the production of Italian foods. For example, in 2011, the New York Times ran a story entitled “In Italian Heartland, Indians Keep the Cheese Coming,” that outlined the critical role Sikh immigrants play in maintaining the production of *grana padana*, an iconic Italian cheese (Povoledo 2011). The article quoted a chapter president of Coldiretti, Italy’s largest agricultural organization, who described the Indian immigrants as indispensable to the industry. Similar statements can be made about numerous other national groups that have worked their way into Italy’s agricultural sector, such as Pakistani and Moroccan immigrants who package ham, or immigrants from Africa who work in the orange economy of the south. Other concerns are often raised around immigrants producing iconic Italian foods, like pizza (Lo 2005)

For the scandal, fraudulent and low-quality products were flowing from some of the same places that a large number of immigrants to Italy were coming from. Some of the accusations as to how these products were getting into the country followed along the same lines of how people were getting into the country – across the Mediterranean, smuggled at night, assisted by the Mafia, Ndragheta, or other organized crime networks. Ideas about criminality and illegality of products mixed with and were informed by ideas of criminality, illegality, and racism that circulated around bodies that followed similar paths. Not only does olive oil serve as a form of cultural heritage that symbolizes local and national identity in the face of integrative forces within Europe and the influence of a globalizing food scape, but the threats to its purity as a product directly parallel

discourses about the purity of the nation based on xenophobic and racist ideas about people from the Middle East and Northern Africa.

It is important to note that fears and anxieties do not need to be well articulated and specific to have impact. It is because they are amorphous, multiply articulated, and sometimes unclear that they are able to circulate so broadly and perpetually (Goodman and Sage 2014, Orlando 2018). This transgressive aspect too allows them to be encapsulated within events and discourses seemingly unrelated, like the olive oil scandal.

The proliferation of the oil scandal was due to the mechanisms that kept discussions about it circulating, like mass media and the special events that drew attention to it, and the ongoing coverage of scandal-related activities in news outlets. Jackson's formulation of a theory of anxiety says that "anxieties are framed by different 'communities of practice,' including news media, government bodies, regulatory authorities, scientists and other kinds of 'expert.'" (Jackson 2015: 47). Not only are they framed by these communities, but the continual talk about them perpetuates the anxieties until a new order of understanding about them takes hold (Jackson 2015).

Thinking about the media sources that have sparked much of the anxiety about the olive oil scandal, one can observe the influence of class. The news was broken in a book and in the New York Times. Two major events during my fieldwork already noted, the TASTE Ring and Olio Capitale, spoke directly to a very particular set of consumers. Although the scandal itself was not framed in terms of class, it was those that were tuned into the foodie world that were most concerned; meaning those that controlled purchasing for stores, restaurants, and people with enough economic capital to worry about their \$10 bottle of olive oil. However, as the scandal continued to be publicized through newspaper

articles talking about raids, new regulations on production and packaging popped up, and local food organizations using the threat of the scandal to promote their own products, more and more people beyond the traditional foodie world became aware and paid attention to what they were purchasing.

What needed to happen in response to the scandal was for a new order of understanding to be put into place. As my participants noted to me, after the initial expose, the efforts to educate the general public on extra virgin olive oil that had already to some extent been taking place increased. In these efforts, taste took center stage. The scandal had thrown into question labeling as a legitimate source of information about the products they were attached to. Within the discourse of the scandal too, lab tests had been brought under fire for being easily falsifiable (Blechman 2014). However, an understanding of how to evaluate oils based on taste allowed consumers to judge for themselves the quality and veracity of extra virgin olive oils. Supposedly, the police in charge of raiding production plants and checking products used the same tactic (Blechman 2014). The rest of this dissertation focuses on this process of putting a new order of understanding into place with taste as its central focus.

There is, however, a lingering paradox that will be present in the discussion of attempts to counter the anxiety of the oil scandal. Namely, the ways in which the scandal and underlying anxiety are mediated, actually perpetuate the continued anxiety as a necessary part of their own continued existence. This extends from the idea of scarcity and threat of fakes as propping up the value of high-quality extra virgin oil. The value really only exists insofar as those products are differentiated from others. Efforts based on educating consumers on how to identify extra virgin Italian olive oils that are in fact

high quality, extra virgin, Italian, and made out of olives necessarily requires there to be a drive to identify those that are not.

Further, this differentiation ties into price points as well discourses of threat and disappearance of traditional or artisanal cultivation and production. By having adulterated or fake products on the market, it underlines the economic, social, and cultural value of those that are being counterfeited. Throughout the rest of this work, this tension between anxiety, efforts to resolve the issue, and its perpetuation will not be resolved. The next chapter discusses the ways in which people create, communicate, and potentially use “rules of thumb” (Green et al 2003) in navigating these anxieties in their everyday engagements with olive oil.

### **Chapter 3 “Rules of Thumb”: The Amateur Use of Expertise to Identify Terroir in Negotiating Quality and Authenticity**

Part of the response to scandal and then generalized anxiety over extra virgin olive oil has led to endeavors like public education about the product, how to identify authentic and quality products, and the benefits of consuming them. Framed by multiple actors like producers, the media, olive oil consortia, and food activists, attempts at putting in to place a “new order of understanding” included educational outreach at local fairs, professional tasting training courses, public classes, and in schools. Gustatory education is used to change relationships between people and their food by increasing the information they have about products and how to enjoy them, therefore increasing their individual pleasure of the food or in shifting their product choices all together (Perullo 2016). Carole Counihan has shown how gustatory education centered on the pleasures of taste is leveraged by food activists like Slow Food (Counihan 2018). Generally, however, education around food is key for illuminating and then filling the gap of knowledge between food and its processes of production. For the artisanal or smaller/mid-sized producers as well as people who work with consortia or specialized interest groups discussed in this project, education around their products is how they differentiate themselves from industrial production. This act produces value for their own products through not only providing information about the authenticity, veracity, quality, or safety of their products, but throws light on the fact that this information is largely missing from the system they are differentiating themselves from. Through shifting relationships with olive oil in gustatory education, those that host or organize the educational opportunities are framing the anxieties of the olive oil scandal and attempting to help people navigate



those fears. Here, I examine one instance in which oil took center stage in a taste-focused public educational opportunity. Through a public tasting course, the instructor and sponsoring organization teach the audience how to identify a high-quality, extra virgin olive oil through examination of labelling and, most importantly, through taste and identifying characteristics of the product's terroir or "taste of place" (Trubek 2008). Quality "refers to particular attributes of a product and at the same time makes a presumptive judgement that is positive" (Harvey, McMeekin, Ward 2004). In an environment where food sparks anxiety and there is generalized distrust of industrially or mass-produced foods, quality is "associated not only with an identifiable place of origin, knowable and traceable sources of supply, and exceptional flavor and texture, but with guarantees regarding safety, nutritiousness and accessibility" (Harvey, McMeeking, Ward 2004); so it is the disclosure of information that is part and parcel of "quality" designations. Through this lesson, the appreciation of terroir becomes part of a method for identifying the veracity of a product, revealing its identity and therefore quality and quelling fears about its origins, healthfulness, and safety. Reading labels and tasting become "rules of thumb" for navigating anxieties (Green et al. 2003). However, at the same time that it tries to alleviate fears about fake, low-quality, high-acidity, and foreign oils, these rules of thumb reinforce those fears to produce importance and value for products considered to be high quality. While transparency is produced for these products through education, it simultaneously produces a realm in which transparency, and therefore quality, does not exist.

In this chapter I argue that terroir is discursively produced through interactions and the practices used to identify and interpret it. This discursively produced object is

naturalized as present within the oil, through the ways the participants talk about it. Terroir then can be used as a linking mechanism between olive oil and ideas about locality/foreignness, good/bad, and authentic/inauthentic. This chapter further argues terroir and techniques for identifying it for amateurs are effectively “rules of thumb,” daily practices that negotiate the underlying social anxiety explained in the first two chapters. By finding oils that are authentic, high quality, good, and healthy, participants are protecting themselves from the products that are inauthentic, low quality, bad, and unhealthy. The paradox in this negotiation is that both authenticity and inauthenticity, good and bad, high and low quality, and healthy and unhealthy oils and the ideas themselves, must exist together in order for those categories to have any meaning. The practices of identifying the “defects” or signs of inauthenticity in oil are what prop up the abstract idea that there is a “non-defective” or “authentic” oil. Extending the discursive production of terroir to the discursive production of the very things that terroir is meant to signal. This discussion is furthered in Chapter 4 where I explore the way expert knowledge is leveraged within connoisseurship through examining the construction of the registers of expertise that are accessed by connoisseurs as well as amateur tasters in their “rules of thumb.”

**“How do you make a good olive oil? How do you recognize one?”<sup>13</sup>**

A group of about 30 people gathered in the Spazio Più meeting room of the town library in Bagno a Ripoli, a small suburb town perched in the hills just on the eastern edge of Florence. Most were parents, with a few children (aged between 6 and 8). When I arrived, a petite older woman with short white hair representing the library, Anna, politely asked me to sign in and then followed up inquiring if my parents would be attending. Standing next to her, Maria, a representative from the *Servizi Integrati Area Fiorentina* (SIAF)<sup>14</sup>, smiled widely and pointed out to her that I was an American there to learn more about olive oil. “But you’re not from here? Not even your family?” Anna clarified, seemingly confused as to why I would be attending the event or even how I spoke Italian.

The public lecture today was titled “*Come si fa un buon olio d’oliva? Come si fa a riconoscerlo?*” (How do you make a good olive oil? How do you recognize one?) The *Centro di Documentazione Educativa del Comune di Bagno a Ripoli* and SIAF had organized the free course for local families to learn about extra virgin olive oil and the values of good, *local* olive oil with the highlight that they would be offering a *fetunta* (bread with oil), a snack that the children consume during their daily break at school.

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<sup>13</sup> “Come si fa un buon olio d’oliva? Come si fa a riconoscerlo?”

<sup>14</sup> SIAF, the Servizi Integrati Area Fiorentina, is a mixed public-private collective catering company, established in 2002 by the Municipality of Bagno a Ripoli, the Azienda Sanitaria Locale 10 – Florence, and Gemeaz Elior SpA. They provide locally-sourced meals to a multitude of organizations in the Florence area such hospitals, residential living facilities, private businesses, and schools including the elementary schools of Bagno a Ripoli.

This was the second session they were offering after impressive interest and attendance at the first.

The people milling around the room slowly took their seats and Lucia, a professional olive oil taster for the Florence Chamber of Commerce and agronomist/farm manager for Fattoria Ramerino, took to the front of the room with Anna and Maria by her side. Lucia's confident and poetic way of speaking immediately grabbed the attention of the crowd. She introduced the presentation as "not a presentation" but "an encounter, a conversation to know oil better." Her goals were to teach the participants how to read labels and recognize oil of excellence and defects. She explained that "oil is a product that is derived from the cultivation of olives, and it is very important to know the factors that influence its quality: environmental factors, agronomic factors, and technical factors." Lucia had studied agronomy at the Università di Firenze with a great interest in olive oil. Despite growing up in Bagno a Ripoli, where the farm she currently worked at is located, she and her family had not had their own olive groves or garden to tend to growing up. Entering university, she became infatuated with olive oil production and in her words "the science and art of it" and decided to study more in depth to work in agriculture. A few years prior she had become trained as a professional taster for olive oil, gaining membership in the national tasters' association after passing rigorous tests to prove her abilities, and soon became a taster associated with Florence Chamber of Commerce to designate extra virgin status for oils produced in the region.

In her introduction, she made a passing remark toward me to apologize if her speech became "un po' toscano" (a little Tuscan) and for me to just ask if I needed clarification. Her comment was met with a ripple of soft laughter around the room. The

Tuscan dialect, even though close to standardized Italian, was still difficult for me to understand at times because of pronunciation and word choice. Tuscans themselves were very aware of this. For example, my friend Matteo made a point to teach me the Tuscan version of some words and like the folks in the room that day, acknowledged that people from outside of Tuscany, not necessarily non-Italians, would have difficulty understanding some things. He and my other Tuscan friends found it endlessly entertaining to create situations in which I could use a Tuscan word in public. On a different occasion, Lucia has clarified the name of her farm was Tuscan: *ramerino* is *rosmarino* in Italian or *rosemary* in English.

Throughout my fieldwork the Tuscan language kept up as a way for people to express their Tuscan identity. In Italy, because of the specificity of their geographic distribution, accents and dialects are used in everyday conversation to negotiate the sociogeographic landscape (Cavanaugh 2005). In particular Tuscan appeared as a way to differentiate from Florentines (the capital urban center of the region), other Italians, and non-Italians. Some of the key differences between Tuscan and “standard” Italian as explained to me were around vocabulary and pronunciation. For example, the word for watermelon in Italian is “anguria” and in Tuscany it is commonly referred to “cocomero.” Among other features, phonetic changes like the pronunciation of “c” as an “h” was a popular one that people often used in jest to describe Tuscan to me. The most popular example was “Hoha-Hola” as an exaggerated version of Tuscan pronunciation of “Coca-Cola.” This differentiation between Italian and Tuscan could be further broken up by even smaller areas of Tuscany like Lucca (Lucchese), Siena (Senese), or Grosseto (Grossetano). I fell into the non-Italian category but apparently spoke with a Florentine

sensibility as pointed out by several participants and was probably what Anna had picked up on that confused her. The contrast between Florentine and Tuscan is important to note because of the long history of the countryside's submission to urban centers (Montanari 2013). Despite being a separate town, Bagno a Ripoli is still tied closely to capital and relies on resources that it provides, even as simple as bus transportation. However, it relies on products produced in the outlying areas like Bagno a Ripoli to feed its population and visitors. It was also important to specify that her word choice and pronunciation was specifically Tuscan to differentiate against other potential versions of Italian I may have been familiar with (for example, when visiting Naples I had no idea what anyone said to me the entire time) or to ground her language as Italian so that I did not misinterpret it as a sign of her being from somewhere other than Italian. In this setting, however, the use of Tuscan was a method of adequation for signaling social similarity (Bucholtz and Hall 2004). Use of the language signaled that folks that understood it and spoke in the same way were all part of the same social group. Judging from participants' entertainment at her mention of her speech being "un po' toscano," they understood and were familiar with the use of Tuscan as a signal of "us" and "them" as well as of "evoking cultural authenticity" (Cavanaugh 2005). It also firmly grounded the concerns over olive oil and the motivations for the class as local. The person leading the class was not an outsider, but someone from the community and proved it in the way she spoke.

The use of Tuscan also grounds products in a particular locality extending cultural authenticity from speakers of Tuscan to the material objects. Use of local languages can help locate products within vast global, national, or regional landscapes while at the same

time, their association with particular locales through language adds value to them as they circulate beyond their origins (Coupland and Kelly-Holmes 2013, Cavanaugh and Shankar 2014, Cavanaugh and Shankar 2017).

Lucia reached over to the computer, pressed a key, and clicked her way through a couple slides as she continued talking. The screen behind her flashed at first a map of Tuscany and then historical photos of olive trees and people perched precariously on the ends of ladders trying to harvest them, then to more recent photos of trees with tightly-woven blue and orange nets laid out on the ground beneath them.

The first segment of the “encounter” was focused on the environmental factors: climate, water, and terrain. As Lucia explained, “In some cases we can intervene to modify the characteristics of the *territorio*, in others, no. They are often enough uncontrollable.” These geological and climatological components are all parts of traditional formulations of *terroir*, or taste of place (Trubek 2008). The environment, the soil, the water, and the air all impart particular characteristics to agricultural products as a result of their growing or processing within that space (Beriss 2019, Wilson 1998).

Second, she then moved on to the “controllable” agronomic factors, specifically mentioning that producers can choose the variety of olives to cultivate. However, while chosen, the varieties already widely present in the Tuscan countryside extend back for hundreds of years. So, while they are controllable, they are generally what is already present. These factors are part of *terroir* too in that they are mostly grounded in the material context of production. What is interesting in her description of the olive cultivars and their selection for inclusion in oil production is that she grounds their origins far in the past. This was a common way that people explained the circumstances of their farms.

Even when visiting her farm, Lucia explained that the lay out of the trees could tell you a lot about the origins of the fields; disorganized meant ancient, possibly Roman origins contrasted with the newer fields that were more organized. Even “new” meant that the fields were probably a couple hundred years old. Lucia, in particular, had a way of bouncing between these romantic notions of how her fields came to be the way they were and a more pragmatic sensibility drawn from her deep knowledge about olive cultivation. Within a few minutes of telling me that her fields were descendants of a mezzadria era estate (the sharecropping system that persisted in Tuscany from the middle ages to the 1960s), she was careful to explain that each cultivar and their placement and identification within the fields had a purpose in oil production. Some trees offered stronger flavored olives, others were smoother or sweeter, and others were there for pollination purposes. Her trees had labels identifying each of the trees’ cultivars so that they could be managed specifically according to their purpose. As her presentation continued, Lucia kept the discussion moving from immutable and only somewhat malleable natural conditions, to historic circumstances and human involvement, further into human involvement and skill in production.

Lucia’s third group of factors were the technical factors involved in the harvesting, storing, and processing of olives. She explained that nowadays olives are collected directly from the plants using *agevolatori* (facilitators) or *scuotitori* (shakers) to knock the olives loose. This allows for collecting them before they have ripened enough to fall to the ground. From there, the storage was important, underlining that the containers needed to breathe and piles could not be too large because “the metabolic activity of the olives continues even when detached from the plant, and little by little the



mass warms - provoking fermentation of the flesh.” If the olives are warmed the oil supposedly will have the defect of *riscaldo* (heating).

As part of her discussion of technical factors, Lucia explained the complicated relationship between yield and quality: “If I want to get a lot of oil from the olives I will not have a high quality, because I have to collect at a late stage of the season. But this causes the fat molecules inside the olive to degrade. If I want a quality oil with low acidity, low peroxides, and high polyphenols, then I have to work the freshly picked olives. The sooner you work, the better. It is a compromise for quality, even with regard to temperatures. A higher temperature during milling yields more oil, but degrades it, vice versa, the low.”

Lucia turned to the slide behind her showing an older stone mill and a hand-cranked press, clicked, and in place of the donkey-driven or human-powered machinery appeared a diagram of modern metal equipment with lines showing the flow of olives throughout its various parts. She elaborated on the production process, focusing primarily on the speed, temperature, and amount of contact with the air; all of which must be carefully monitored for a quality product. Generally, the kneading segment of the production cycle is done under vacuum or with inert gases, but Lucia pointed out that a little oxygen, even though damaging to the oil, was in fact needed: “if you work in inert environments or in a vacuum you risk *tirare via meno profumi* (pulling away less scents), and out comes a perfect oil from an oxidative point of view, but with few perfumes and few flavors.” An oil that was oxidatively perfect but boring and would not be considered “of quality.”

The discussion of know-how and skill in the production high quality extra virgin oils grounds the terroir of those products further into locality by assuming the natural environment, history, and then human intervention all impact the final quality of the product. The hallmark of Tuscan oil is its reputation for being of high quality (Meneley 2007) which up until this point in the lesson had remained largely undefined. However, the term denotes specific characteristics and a judgement that is generally positive (Harvey, McMeekin, Warde 2004). So far, Lucia had established quality as something without defect, but that the final judgement and specific characteristics informing it were still rather ambiguous – “perfect but boring.”

At the same time that Lucia needed to set up quality as a product of natural and human elements, she also engaged in what I have earlier referred to as the paradox of oil production. She outlined the delicate balance that has to occur between producing oils of quality through specific techniques and the limiting of production that comes along with those specific techniques. She also then spoke to some of the potential issues brought on by pests. She explained that of the agronomic factors, the phytosanitary defense,<sup>15</sup> like pesticides, heavily influences quality “because if you have healthy olives you obtain a product of elevated quality.” She continued, “In the case of attack by the olive fly,<sup>16</sup> the key pest of the olive tree, the olives have oxidized flesh and you obtain an olive with an elevated acidity or with elevated peroxides. The *difesa fitosanitaria* becomes therefore a

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<sup>15</sup> *difesa fitosanitaria*

<sup>16</sup> *mosca*

strategy for having a quality product and sometimes we tasters<sup>17</sup> have also tasted the *verme*, a defect in the oil.” The *verme* she referenced is fly larvae. The laying of the egg in the olive and the subsequent hatching and exiting of the new fly degrades the flesh, oxidizes it, and produces poor oils or oils where the larvae was milled along with the olives.

In bringing up the fly, Lucia touched on a well-known threat to extra virgin olive oil in Tuscany appealing to long-standing discourses of threat that prop up the value of high-quality extra virgin oils. It further grounded the idea that quality can really be understood through taste by providing the example of the fly being present in the final taste. Those things that could potentially make an oil defective not only disqualify them for extra virgin status but are actually a part of the way we experience them in tasting.

By including natural and human elements all in the same conversation, as part of the same narrative line leading to the final product, Lucia drew a discursive line connecting the production of “quality” to the space and place of production – a key element in the construction of terroir. Her presentation also engaged in the propping up of “quality” and its connection to value by underscoring the limitations on production, hinting at scarcity and threat. Above all, it was education around products that did the heavy lifting when it came to differentiating them from industrially produced products. Later when we would taste oils, these lines of logic would be grounded specifically in the locality of Bagno a Ripoli.

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<sup>17</sup> *assaggiatori*

### **Rules of Thumb: Techniques for Identifying Quality and Navigating Fears**

After having made a discursive connection between high quality and the processes that lead to the terroir of extra virgin oil, Lucia turned her attention to providing participants with “rules of thumb” (Green et al. 2003). What had been conspicuously missing from the conversation up until this point had been the motivations behind the class. The lesson itself was meant to be on how to recognize high-quality extra virgin olive oils. The unspoken part of this was why we needed to be able to do it; because there are low quality oils that are not extra virgin or made out of olives and that these are bad in some way either for health or safety. These potential pitfalls in buying olive oil became more explicit through her provisioning of techniques for identifying them. The techniques, or rules of thumb, are ways in which consumers can negotiate anxieties in practice, despite the possibility of anxieties not being clearly articulated or even explicitly expressed. Fears are intimated through careful consideration of food labels or sensory judgements (Green et al 2003, Jackson 2015). The techniques for identifying oils that Lucia shared focused on reading labels and on sensory evaluation, both of which could hopefully be incorporated into participants’ everyday interactions with olive oils.

### **Rules of Thumb: Labels**

Directing our attention to one of the handouts that Anna and Maria had passed out, examples of labels from the front and back of a container of olive oil, Lucia began to speak about labeling practices. She touched on important information that had to be visible on the packaging itself including provenience: “Most of the oil we consume in

Italy is not Italian, but for a few years now we have a law that obliges us to write on the label the origin of the olives, and the origin of the oil. *Olive comunitarie* means that they were bought in the European community, mainly Spain and Greece. As a taster, I can taste some Spanish varieties, because the olives have a recognizable characteristic.” *Olive comunitarie* were contrasted against those coming from outside of Europe, *olive extracomunitarie*.

She pointed toward the example of the back label explaining that this was the one that had the most important information such as the plant headquarters and where it was bottled. “It is important who packs it! Who puts the label is responsible for what is inside the bottle, the manufacturer can be anyone, but the important thing is who has put the oil inside the bottle and packs the product. If I open the bottle and there are pieces of glass inside, I go to look for the bottler, who must take back the product if it has any problems and is dangerous to health. Often the name of the bottler coincides with that of the producer, because bottling and production take place in the same company.”

From here she talked briefly on the difference between an expiration date and a “best by” date, noting that oil does not really have an expiration date: “I guarantee you the product for 18 months, at the 19th month you cannot tell me anything anymore; if you find that the oil has lost some perfumes, I cannot do anything about it.” She also mentioned we should never buy oils in transparent bottles, because they are horrible for storing oil. The clear plastic bottles attract customers with the color of the oil, but “they make the oil degrade with more speed, especially under the shelf lights. The conditions increase acidity and increase bad tastes.”

As Lucia clicked to the next slide, I instantly recognized the oval seal with “Toscano” in white laid over an olive branch for the Toscano IGP, the green circle with a black rooster indicating the Chianti Classico DOP, and the green stars in the shape of a leaf indicating organic production. It was important for her to note that from a taste perspective there is no way to specifically identify an organic oil. Consumers would have to pay close attention to labels or know the producer personally. She pointed to the Toscano IGP label and explained how designations of origin like this one worked: “In Italy there are extra virgin olive oils and then there are the DOPs, protected designations of origin, and IGP, protected geographical indication. To boast this brand and to put the name of the area where they come from, these oils must voluntarily adhere to a disciplinary. I must cultivate the olive tree in a certain way, I have to do the pressing in certain types of crusher, and the supply chain must be within the territory established by the specification. I cannot write on a label "Olio di Bagno a Ripoli" or "Tuscan oil" if I do not adhere.”

The rules of thumb Lucia establishes around labelling are meant to help participants navigate the products offered on the market to find ones of highest quality, however the strategies for evaluating labels have much to do with knowing about safety and regulatory information and the origins of products. Together safety and origins make up the majority of what labels communicate about quality, and so they regularly overlap and are conflated to the point that origins are supposedly informative of safety.

Lucia’s emphasis on place-based labels helped ground the idea of quality in locality, and her examples grounded quality specifically in Italy and in Tuscany. First, her differentiation between Italian, non-Italian, and non-EU olives appealed to fears about

products coming from outside of increasingly unregulated and foreign areas. These concerns extend from a kind of xenophobia expressed in gastronationalism (DeSousey 2010) common to the olive oil scandal and anxieties around food in general. Michaela DeSousey defined gastronationalism as “the use of food production, distribution, and consumption to demarcate and sustain the emotive power of national attachment, as well as the use of nationalist sentiments to produce and market food” (DeSousey 2010: 433). For example, Castellanos and Bergstresser (2006) examine the establishment of the European Food Safety Agency to illustrate the politics intertwined with food in Europe. During the EU Summit in 2002, Berlusconi took a shot at Finnish culinary knowledge arguing that Parma was the proper place for the EFSA to be located because Italians are the culinary superiors. The ensuing “Prosciutto War” revealed underlying anxieties of Italians about the intervention of the EU into food safety, claiming that the Europeanization (Borneman and Fowler 1997) of food would destroy regional diversity. The EU, however, was only interested in putting in place health regulations and rules regarding labeling of products, many of which Italian producers already followed. This same kind of axis of differentiation found in these politics (Italians vs. Non) can be seen in the ways “foreign food” is regulated for fear of the unhygienic conditions of production stemming from fears about immigrants (see Chapter 1). At the same time, these fears about foreignness and pride of culinary superiority come together with fears about an industrial system that is increasingly displaced and globally articulated to produce complex feelings about food and where it comes from. If quality meant knowing where a product came from versus the low-quality of an industrial global food chain, then the further away from home a product came meant less quality and potentially higher

safety risk. Olives or olive oil coming from outside of Italy was possibly lower quality and less safe than from within Italy, and from outside of Europe was even worse.

Within Italy too, Lucia's description of place-based labelling such as DOP or IGP underscored the possibly increasing of regulation, safety, and therefore quality as the specific region from which a product came was increasingly smaller. These same ideas popped up continuously throughout my fieldwork and in other research on place-based labels. The smaller the area, the more quality is assumed because of the increase in authenticatable origins, the potentially smaller production, and the further the distancing from large scale industrial and globalized food (Harvey, McMeekin, Warde 2004, Parasecoli 2017). Gianfranco, when visiting his farm, assumed I did not know anything about olive oil or wine production in Italy, and made the increasing quality with increasing geographic specificity one of the first things he told me. So as a rule of thumb for participants, labels were a possibly effective way to gauge the safety and quality of a product based in part on its origins.

However, labels are not always a sufficient method for assessing quality. Otherwise, Lucia's presentation could have ended at this point. As became glaringly evident in the olive oil scandal, despite products being labelled as Italian, extra virgin, or made of olives, it does not necessarily guarantee that they are. These fears extended to place-based labels and denominations of origin the same as they extended to products without those specific accolades. So, what was needed was another way to assess for quality, safety, and origins that did not rely on labels and the olive oil world already had methods for this grounded in tasting.



## **Rules of Thumb: Sensory Evaluation**

The second part of the education Lucia offered for how to recognize high quality oils was focused on the sensory evaluation of the oils. She introduced this section by explaining that how she would teach us was the same way that professional tasters evaluate oils for official designations as extra virgin. For an oil to be determined extra virgin it did not only have to pass lab tests proving purity and acidity levels, but had to pass a panel test where defects in flavor would disqualify the oil. She worked with the Florence Chamber of Commerce as professional taster. The sensory evaluations, dependent on your training as a taster, were more reliable than labels and was more difficult to falsify than lab tests. This was an important point because of the recent scandal involving adulteration as well as the potential for oils to degrade over time in improper conservation. Additionally, in hoping to show participants how to appreciate the flavors of high quality extra virgin olive oil and their connections to health and localness, she would be driving home a desire for such oils in the future.

### ***Positive Qualities and Local Terroir***

Lucia turned her attention toward the flavors and the way we perceive them, clicking over to a slide with the rating scales professional tasters use. Some lines denoted levels of bitterness, spiciness, and fruitiness, while others marked the presence of defects. Anna and Maria quietly shuffled around the room handing out papers: an example rating sheet and a page with example labels.

She focused on the positive attributes of bitter and spicy first: “Bitter, because the olive is bitter and the oil is nothing but a fruit juice obtained from the pressing of an

olive. We must expect it to be bitter, if it is not then it is degraded. If you feel the spicy oil in your mouth then the oil is rich in polyphenols and tocopherols, a proper oil.”

Additionally, the oil should smell like olives, but we would also sense other aromas, such as cut grass, leaves, cypress, artichoke, green apple, oregano, tomato leaf depending on the variety and where it was grown and processed. The negative attributes we would test are associated with poor quality due to the oil degradation, such as fermentation and oxidation; derive from poor sanitary conditions of the raw materials like wormy olives; or are from poor extraction and storage methods.

Lucia explained some of the most common defects that we would be able to easily identify point to either poor production or poor conservation. The long list of defects she moved through would disqualify an oil from being classified as an extra virgin oil, even in the slightest perceptible quantity. The defects included heating, mold, sludge, rancidity, metallic, hay, wood, coarseness, cooked, overcooked, winey, and the water of vegetation. Many of her descriptions required a bit of imagination. For example, for *il fieno* we had to imagine the smell of wet hay and then project that smell onto what its flavor might be. The defect was a taste that was retronasally perceived like all the others; meaning that it was not just a smell or a taste but the combination of perceptions between the nose and the mouth.

The focus on defects was a common theme throughout much of the tasting education I participated in and was particularly important in this lesson. Positive attributes underlined the healthy nature of the oils and why we as consumers should want them. However, the defects were the characteristics that were most important because any of them meant that the oils were bad. After our overview of the scents and other qualities

we should be paying attention to, Lucia wanted us to try it out for ourselves. Attempting a sensory evaluation of the oils would ground our learning in embodied experience, making a much deeper impact on us and hopefully help us retain the information.

At this point, Lucia signaled for Anna and Maria to come back to the front of the room to assist her in passing around little cups, about three inches tall and made of white plastic. As Anna and Maria made their way around the room slowly with a tray of the samples, trying ever so carefully not to spill while each person gingerly took one, Lucia began to explain the next segment of the lecture. We would finally start to taste some examples of the oils about which she had been speaking. She would be moving us through tasting, in her words, an oil that is “correct, fruity, spicy, bitter, perfumed” and a “supermarket shelf oil.” She also pointed to a couple brown alchemist bottles saying she had defects for us to smell – and not to taste – as well as one oil with a defect to taste.

When about half of the room had received their first sample, she began to explain some of the basics behind tasting including use of isolation cubicles as work spaces, the dark glass cups used for tasting, and the balance between subjectivity and training of tasters: “A little subjectivity is clearly in the tasting, but we are trained not to be influenced by personal taste, but to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the oil, and at what intensity.”

The first phase of the tasting was the “smell” portion. We were to warm the oil between our hands, holding little white plastic cups with one hand underneath and the other over the top to trap the aromas. Then, swirl the cups gently in small circles, turning it with the top hand. When we could no longer feel a temperature difference between the cup and our hands – an approximation of the perfect temperature, we thrust our noses

inside the cup to inhale the smells. Lucia paused looking up at the class waiting for a brave volunteer to offer suggestions of perceivable aromas.

One mother spoke up from the back of the room “Olives!”. The suggestion was met with immediate laughter. Lucia smiled and nodded warmly. “Yes, ok. Green olives or mature olives?” she followed. She led the class through a discussion of the different possible smells and what they meant.

For this first oil we smelled green olives, fresh grass, and a little lemon. As she explained, “green things” like fresher olives, vegetation, or fruit were signs of a good oil that is probably extra virgin. Mature things like dark olives or tomatoes meant an oil made was with more mature olives (ones that weren’t milled when they were still green), increasing the possibility of higher acidity levels, and therefore potentially not extra virgin. Things like cheese, animal products, feet, or no smell at all meant the oil was bad or not extra virgin.

We then moved on to the actual tasting of the oil. The taste test comprised of taking a small amount of oil into our mouths, swirling it around to coat the inside, then quickly inhaling through our teeth making a horrible slurping-hissing noise. This makes the air move quickly through the oil and stimulates your olfactory sensors to be able to smell/taste the different aspects of the oil.

After the class all took their noisy tastes, with a few coughing as a result, she waited for another brave volunteer. One of the folks who had coughed raised his hand “It’s spicy!” Lucia excitedly explained that because of the types and quality of olives used, it will have a spicy, bitter taste – it was a good quality Tuscan oil. We identified again green olives, grass, and lemon, as well as artichoke. As Lucia explained, the smells

and flavors of the surrounding vegetation permeate through the oils to give them their particular profile: “You can taste the bitter, the spicy, the taste of the olive, a bit of artichoke: these are the characteristics of the oils that are made in our hills.”

This oil, Toscano IGP, was cultivated, milled, and bottled just about a couple kilometers from the school at Lucia’s farm, the Fattoria Ramerino. The flavors they were tasting were the flavors of the local environment, Bagno a Ripoli, and the oil from there could not be replicated anywhere else.

In addition to being a relatively funny experience, the tasting of what Lucia determined was a high quality oil and then the revelation that the oil was in fact local to the village of the school, made a strong connection between the positive attributes we identified in the oil and the origins. Positive qualities like spice and bitterness were associated with healthful qualities, such as high phenolic content and a strong presence of vitamins. The other potentially pleasant attributes had to do with the environment in which the olives were grown and processed: Fattoria Ramerino in Bagno a Ripoli.

I had first visited the farm at Lucia’s invitation a few weeks after the tasting course at the library. She walked me around through the trees pointing out the different cultivars: frantoio, moraiolo, leccino, pendolino, and americano. It was late spring and much of the undergrowth around the trees had gotten high – a big contrast the beautifully manicured look the fields gain a couple times a year after the mowers have passed through. The trees had just started to bloom, sprouting tiny white wind-pollinated flowers.

The farm itself was perched on a hill overlooking the valley – one could just barely see Florence’s Duomo bubbling up in the center of the city. Down the hill from the

road, through the gate, was a small house that served as the operating facilities for the farm, including the business offices, the mill, the storage area, and a few historical artifacts in the basement. Ramerino's trees had been there for centuries, surviving frosts and yielding olives. Reportedly, they had found tools and other farm equipment including a terra cotta jar called a guadagnòlo: the namesake of the firm's extra virgin olive oil brand. The use of the name guadagnòlo, according to Lucia, honored the historical importance of olive oil production at the farm. During one of my visits, she pointed out a replica guadagnòlo, hanging a ladle over the side to demonstrate the placement of tools so that the remnant oil could drip off the metal implements into the pot for collection. The current owner had acquired the farm in 2000, after it had been abandoned for many years and converted it to organic farming, gaining official recognition in 2004.

The rows of olive trees extended from the road, down past the house, further down the hill, with a clearing to one side of the house and grape vines rolling back up the next hillside. In the clearing, grew other fruits and vegetables that were used to provision local schools. The grapes were sold to another company that produced the wine. In the field as well, were a few bee hives that had been moved there by a local beekeeper; the honey was then sold locally.

While at the farm, Lucia and I examined more samples of her olive oil. Walking me carefully through the tasting process, she helped me identify more of the same characteristics that we had found during the lesson at the library. This time as we identified different flavors, she pointed out the door of the cellar where we were tasting to the various components that contributed – grass, the plot of land where the vegetables grew, and the slope of the hills in relation to the sun and the way rain water would flow.

Without actually being present at Fattoria Ramerino, participants in the library should have been able to pick up on characteristics in the oil that correlated with all of these material aspects of the place. By tasting the oil and attributing positive aspects to locality, Lucia tied together quality with place through taste. The terroir of Bagno a Ripoli was our example of high quality, reinforcing the discussion of increasing quality and safety with increasing specificity in geographic origins started by our investigation of labels.

### ***Defects and Non-local Terroir***

“So now,” Lucia began, “another oil.” Anna scurried around with a tray of yet more little white cups. The oil looked basically the same as the first. This time as we walked through the swirling, slurping, and evaluating, people made slightly off faces. The oil did not taste bad per say, but no one could identify any clear flavors other than just oil. She asked if anyone would just eat this oil raw, dress a salad or soup with it. No one volunteered. Lucia lead us through thinking more closely about the oil. She drew our attention to the relatively unpleasant feeling of the oil in our mouths explaining that the composition of the fatty acids in a poor-quality oil creates a pastiness. It also burned more intensely – not a pleasant spice, but irritation lower in the throat. Quickly she also added that the unfamiliar aroma that we were sensing was because the oil was *olio comunitario* (oil made of olives from the EU) and included some Spanish olives. “It is an oil, in sum, correct - it’s not very good, but has no real flaws.” She revealed that this was the basic oil that you find in the large jugs on the lower shelves at the grocery store.

These were the oils people are more likely to buy because they are cheaper and are labeled olive oil – which appeals to their desire to use a healthier option than other oils made from seeds or palm oil. However, if the oil is not a higher quality extra virgin oil like the first, they will not be getting any health benefits.

From there Lucia passed around the two brown bottles that she instructed us to keep closed until it came to us. They were samples of *il riscaldo* (heated) and *l'avvinato* (winey).

“Now I’ll have you smell the odor of *il riscaldo*, which comes from fermentation, and olives that have suffered damage,” explained.

Everyone watching closely as the first person opened the *riscaldo* bottle. He unstopped the top and lifted the bottle inhaling deeply. Big mistake. He gagged a little and everyone started laughing. Lucia continued, “If I think of *il riscaldo*, I think of the smell of closed mills, where residues of paste remain and ferment.”

I recognized the smell when it was my turn to take a sniff. It was the same scent I experienced basically anytime I had entered storerooms or processing areas for olive oil—the damp and yeasty odor of fermentation. It was not a completely unpleasant smell unless you had a whole bottle of it shoved under your nose.

The second brown bottle made its way slowly around the room with everyone being a bit more cautious about how deeply they inhaled the contents: “*Avvinato inacetito* [winey vinegary] is a defect easy to find in the oils, because you sniff it immediately. They are the acetic fermentations that take place in the water of vegetation that remains diluted in the oil.”



This bottle had a tangy smell to it, like vinegar but a bit more mellow. While the bottle of *avvinato inacetito* made its way around the room, Maria and Anna came around with another tray of little white cups. This time we were advised that we did not need as much as the first couple tastes since it was now a defective oil that we would be testing. This oil was representative of rancidity.

We again swirled, sniffed, and tasted. The defect was immediately recognizable. It tasted like feet. I felt slightly ashamed that I had most definitely tasted this defect in oils at home but had thought nothing of it. Lucia pointed out that even if we have purchased a good quality oil, if we do not store it properly away from light and heat, it could become rancid sooner than the “best by” date on the container. The risk increases if we purchase oil in large quantities and constantly pour from a large container, because it has contact with the air every time we open it which can also increase the chances of it going rancid.

Lucia closed by talking about *lampante* oil, or oil that has high enough levels of acidity or defects that sometimes disqualify it from being considered edible. She took this point and ran with it, explaining that if we buy the generic oils, that are not certified extra virgin or locally produced, we are buying an inferior product and one that we cannot be sure where it came from or even what it is made of. She pretended for a moment as if her olives had been very sick that year and she had obtained a low-quality oil: “So what do I do? I send it to rectification where it is modified and cleaned. It remains only fat and if mixed with a percentage of virgin oil or extra virgin olive oil becomes olive oil and can be put back on the market. Olive oil is therefore not obtained by pressing, it is a rectified

oil. It is not obligatory to say the amount of virgin or extra virgin olive oil I put there, it could be very low. So, you understand how the quality of olive oil is really low.”

The dramatic contrast of the defective flavors not only made the positive attributes even more pleasant to have tasted, but it reinforced a contrast between local terroir and non-local oils as well as made the potentially dangerous nature of low-quality or defective products tangible for participants. Lucia allowed for terroir to not only be about positive qualities but rather qualities that show up in the product as a result of their origins – she can identify Spanish olives. In this situation, the terroir of the oil is part of its general description as low-quality. Tying together foreignness and low quality through taste creates a gastronationalist stance in the evaluation of the oil. Foreign equals bad.

The discursive move of tying foreignness to low quality in turn reinforces the connection Lucia made earlier between locality and quality. The Bagno a Ripoli oil and the potentially Spanish oil are set up as foils for one another. The dramatic taste difference and the supposed roots of those differences in the terroir of the oil grounds the quality of the oil in differences that occur as a natural and innate part of the oil as a result of origins. The good taste and therefore quality of Bagno a Ripoli oil is unchanging characteristic just as the bad taste and therefore low quality is an unchanging characteristic of Spanish oil. By the same discursive logic, if low quality equals unsafe, then foreign equals dangerous.

The focus on defective characteristics made the potential danger of low-quality products tangible for participants. As a rule of thumb, this was the most powerful part of Lucia’s lesson. The danger and threat of low-quality products was brought out of abstract

thought and grounded in specific sensations that participants experienced; none of which were pleasant.

The mention of rectified oils complicated the way in which participants could identify low quality oils from specifically looking for defective qualities in flavor to needing to find the positive attributes, because neither the negative or positive attributes may be present in rectified oil. A small amount of the positive ones may be there because of specific additives, but the mention of how oils are corrected left the audience feeling uneasy still about how to clearly identify them.

The actual dangers of consuming oils that either possessed defective qualities or rectified oils were never clearly articulated either in this class with Lucia or anywhere else in my fieldwork. The danger of these products was always framed in terms opposite of what positive attributes indicated. The spice is from the phenolic content that is good for your heart; the absence of spice means that there is no phenolic content, which means you are consuming fat without heart healthy properties and other unknown consequences. The danger of the products to health paralleled the dangers extending from origins in that there is something threatening about the unknown.

### **Teaching Taste**

After the talk, we were all invited to taste the same snack that SIAF provides for children in the schools: a classic fetunta - olive oil on bread. As the group slowly made our way to the back table, Maria and Anna explained that they always have this snack of olive oil with a filiera corta (short chain) for the children to get them accustomed to the taste of quality local olive oil and to reinforce the importance of the taste of oil from their

community. “Bitter and spicy are not necessarily tastes that come naturally to kids, they have to get used to them.” Maria got particularly passionate about how important it was to use olive oil from their communities, encouraging parents that if they liked the oil, they too should use it at home to help grow students’ liking of the spicy, bitter flavors. Some of the parents in the group took notes on the name of the olive oil, presumably to find it later at the store, and some even went to Lucia directly to get her contact information for following up later. Other folks grabbed pamphlets about SIAF before heading out the door.

Maria’s acknowledgement of the difference between what is considered good and what children actually like is somewhat telling. As was explained to me and was demonstrated in the class, the flavors of a good extra virgin olive oil are not necessarily naturally pleasant to children, or even some adults, nor are they self-evident. Thus, the need for this course.

We can identify two ideas of “good” here that inform formulations of quality in extra virgin olive oil. On the one hand, something that is pleasing to taste and on the other, a socially constructed category that includes local, low acidity, free of “defects,” and healthy – all of which can be assessed by participants using the techniques taught in Lucia’s lesson. However, nothing inherently about the tingly feeling of the polyphenols tells us this oil is from Bagno a Ripoli and therefore good for me. The taste is “dressed up” with this information (Perullo 2016).

Part and parcel of this course being successful in providing rules of thumb for selecting high quality extra virgin olive oils is the cultivation of Taste within participants and within their children. Taste (with a capital T) has to do with judgements and

preferences that are highly classed and malleable (Bourdieu 1984, Korsmeyer 1999). In order for this discernment of quality and therefore a preference for local products to sustain, cultivation of Taste through the refinement of taste was happening not only at the level of parents but for the children in schools.

Refining taste, as in the experience of pleasure or ability to identify characteristics of oil through tasting, is shaped in multiple ways. First, participants had to be guided through identifying the sensations they were tasting. Attention had to be drawn to specific aspects. Second, education is a key component. The information with which taste was dressed up resulted in understanding the terroir of the products, the work behind them, and the dangers and threats associated with limited production as well as lower quality products. Terroir is not self-evident and requires the training of attention to particular aspects and then the sharing of information about them. Terroir became the component that held together quality and locality both for the high quality Bagno a Ripoli oil and the lower quality non-local oils. The ability to discern terroir through tasting was the equivalent of being able to make judgments about the quality of the product. Third, within the school's repetition and exposure was a goal to get students used to, to eventually like, and then desire the taste of local products. Olive oil is an especially interesting product because it is not necessarily a pleasant flavor; children, and adults alike, have to be trained to find pleasure in consuming the spicy and bitter substance. The result of this refining of taste, at least in the way Lucia hoped it would work, would be the establishment of Taste – the ability to discern and make judgements about quality.

## **Conclusion**

Lucia provided rules of thumb for the participants in the class to identify high quality, extra virgin olive oils. The assumption was that quality mean that the oils could be contrasted strongly against industrial products; they were local, had characteristics of that local terroir, and were local to the area which the participants were from. Terroir, the taste of place, was tool that Lucia leveraged to tie ideas about quality and taste to locality. Terroir could taste in a specific way that signified that a oil was healthy, meaning it was of quality; or the terroir could be perceived as tasting in a way that meant the oil was not so health, meaning it was not of quality.

A key point was that the ability to recognize terroir and therefore make judgements about quality had to be taught, it had to be cultivated within participants. There is nothing self-evident about the taste of oil that tells the one sensing them anything about the product. The requirement for guidance means that terroir is discursively produced with reference to materiality. These ideas are examined further in the next chapter.

Throughout her lesson, Lucia used terroir as a platform for participants to self-identify with local, high-quality, extra virgin olive oil (Demossier 2011). Her discursive linkages drew lines between locality and quality and between locality and the people in the room; oils were healthy and good if they were not just local, but local to where the participants were from. The end message was that they should consume products that were emblematic of their own origins. The rules of thumb that she provided them, would steer participants towards local products. This guidance not only addressed fears about safety and healthiness of the oils brought on by fears about industrial production and a global food chain exposed through the olive oil scandal, but it addresses underlying

anxieties grounded in the need to differentiate oneself from others either at national or regional scales.

For participants in this course, terroir was presented as a natural part of oils that simply needs to be read in the right way for them to see the truth of their food. Terroir is in fact produced through the use of practices meant to identify it. These “rules of thumb” that amateurs use leverage expert knowledge about terroir, making it partially legible for consumers. The framing of terroir in this course made it a useful tool for negotiating boundaries of self and other, between good and bad, high and low quality, safe and dangerous. By reading labels, tasting the product, looking for defects, consumers are at the same time producing and using terroir, to navigate the boundaries that are equally constructed. By grounding terroir and the ideas connected to it in the materiality of olive oil, the discursive production of them is erased and they become naturalized as objects in the world.

## **Chapter 4 Becoming an *Assaggiatore*: Enactments of Expertise, Taste Community Register, and the Discursive Production of Terroir**

I met Filippo at 9 am in the Porta Romana car park, a short walk from my apartment. Filippo Falugiani was president of the Associazione Internazionale Ristoranti dell'Olio (A.I.R.O.) and ran the course for “aspiranti assaggiatori dell'olio,” or aspiring olive oil tasters, that I had been attending for the past couple weeks. Outside of his role with A.I.R.O, his primary job was running his family's restaurant in San Casciano.

We had decided to take a drive around the area south and east of Florence to visit a few oil producers, and I learned more about A.I.R.O. as we drove. He had first learned about oil from Marco Mugelli, a leader in the olive oil world, internationally-known expert involved in advancing technology for producing extra virgin olive oil, former chief taster for the Florence tasting panel for the legal designation of extra virgin status and featured prominently in Tom Mueller's 2012 best seller “Extra Virginity: The Sublime and Scandalous World of Olive Oil.” After becoming enthralled with the work that Marco Mugelli was doing, Filippo and Marco's son, Matteo, founded A.I.R.O. to continue the spread of “olive oil” culture through promoting knowledge of high-quality extra virgin olive oil, beginning with restaurants to help the people running them better understand oil. “The restaurant is the first line of this type of awareness,” as Filippo explained, “The oil in stores is horrible, bad quality, and full of tricks and oil that isn't what it says it is. If consumers see high quality oil in restaurants, they will begin to mimic that use at home.”



A.I.R.O. and its members believed that high quality extra virgin oil should be distinguished from other products because of its organoleptic qualities and natural nutritive and healthful properties. The goals of the organization were a) to disseminate knowledge of excellence in extra virgin olive oil in cooking and on the olive oil sector in general, b) to create a network between restaurateurs and olive oil producers to stimulate and inform consumers about quality oils and their correct use in the kitchen, and c) to carry out research activities on olive oil. To these ends, A.I.R.O. collaborates with professional agronomists, expert technicians, professional tasters, manufacturers of cutting-edge machines for producing extra virgin olive oil, and chefs interested in the correct use of olive oil in the kitchen.

A.I.R.O.'s mission is to expand the taste community around olive oil by building, channeling, and spreading expert level knowledge. This is partly in response to the fake oils and scandals around olive oil production and the underlying anxieties around food that those scandals unearth. In the face of poor quality products at lower prices, imported from elsewhere in Europe or the Mediterranean region, their efforts attempt to justify costs of the "real thing" and to promote local production. They are actively (re)producing forms of sociality through educating people on how to talk about a product that can then be used in a multitude of ways, including addressing anxieties around food and olive oil.

By drawing heavily on my own participation in A.I.R.O.'s course for aspiring professional olive oil tasters and from interviews with experts in olive oil, this chapter focuses on the production of a taste community (Donner 1991, Shapin 2012), how one is initiated into it, and the role of connoisseurs. It continues the conversation started in the previous chapter about the cultivation of Taste and the methods used in taste experiences

for identifying quality in extra virgin olive oil through discussing the ways in which tasters perceive sensations in the oil relying on tools and their training to increase objectivity in their assessments, reduce unnecessary contaminating subjectivity, and produce objectivity through intersubjective agreement (Rorty 1987). The process of developing the skills to be a professional taster involves the incorporation of *techné* (knowledge as art and craft) and technoscience (knowledge as scientific and regimented) as mutually informing and legitimizing (Heath and Meneley 2007). Ultimately, I argue that the processes involved in evaluating oil and the register (Agha 2007) of the taste community produce the very object they claim to be evaluating, *terroir*. This register is leveraged in amateur encounters with olive oil as demonstrated in the previous chapter as well as the chapter that follows. This recognition of the discursive production of *terroir* undermines the categories of real and fake, high and low quality, good and bad in which actors are placing oils, as well as the enactments of expertise that structure the social relations of the taste community.

### **Taste Communities and Connoisseurship**

Taste communities are groups that coalesce around somewhat stable ways of designating characteristics of commodities or experiences and determining their associated value (Donner 1991, Shapin 2012). Being a member of such a community entails becoming proficient in and using those standard methods for describing experiences of the pleasure object; in this case, of extra virgin olive oil. The initiation process involves working closely with connoisseurs and experts as well as direct, repeated, and guided experience with the commodity in question and using standardized

methods for speaking about one's experiences. Becoming a member of this taste community also signifies the cultivation of Taste, the ability to discern and make judgments on quality.

In his description of opera fans, sociologist Claudio Benzecry explains that they enjoy opera not because of some natural affinity but because they believe that they need to learn about it to fully appreciate it. He emphasized that “while learning about opera is an eminently social activity, what is learned is a romantic understanding of operatic consumption, which teaches how to be one with the music, in a highly personalized and individualized way” (Benzecry 2009: 134). In other words, to fully appreciate the object of consumption on a personal level, they learn a socially determined mode of consumption based on education about the appreciable aspects of the object. This idea of learning to consume properly through socialization with those who know how to consume properly already can be extended to gustatory education where professionals who are well-versed with products teach about them and how best to consume them. We see this often in tasting events, from wine to whiskey; each has its associated methods for tasting deemed best to perceive the complexities of the product and for pairing them with other foods.

It is false to assume that our appreciations are strictly socially produced, there must be something grounded in our material experiences that draws us to an object or that produces “naked pleasure” (Perullo 2016) before the influence of socialization. For example, Benzecry underlines that “a purely social explanation would make the pleasure object something ambiguous at first, which does not produce effects during the first few interactions or at least until fans are taught how to consume and enjoy it properly”

(Benzecry 2009: 138). In his study, most interviewees described an intense attraction at the outset before becoming ensconced in the world of opera. Food philosophers, like Nicola Perullo, have held that this same Ur pleasure exists for food. While our appreciation of food can be enhanced or highly influenced by the way it gets “dressed up” with information, there is an originary “naked” pleasure that starts the process (Perullo 2016). We like something, but the more we learn about it, the deeper that appreciation can go. At the same time, scholars such as Bourdieu, have argued that the cultivation of Taste is centrally about processes of class distinction (1984). Becoming proficient in speaking about particular elite commodities and engaging with them in particular manners of interaction and consumption is a way of navigating and distinguishing ones social positioning visavis others in the community as well as those from without.

There is a mutually constitutive relationship between the role of individual pleasure and the role of socialization such as education about a pleasure object. Benzecry’s useful example of opera fans, his participants often proclaimed that they “didn’t know enough,” which signals “the active intention to find a more complete ‘effect,’ one that pays attention to the body but also tries to go beyond personal sensation into the realm of the work and its explanations” (Benzecry 2009: 140). For those involved in the olive oil taste community, their infatuation with the product has driven them to seek out more education to enhance personal individual experience, which can be leveraged for personal prestige, economic gain, or to guard against being duped by so-called fake oils.

Becoming an educated member of a taste community and becoming a connoisseur within that community are connected but different achievements. While socialization and direct experience are required for becoming a part of the taste community, they are of heightened importance to connoisseurship. We can draw a comparison between olive oil and wine here. As anthropologist Michael Silverstein explains, “wine lives a cultural life at once as commodity produced, marketed, and consumed, and aesthetic form one experiences with sensorium and judgment, however ‘naturally’ sensitive, as well potentially ‘refined’ through training, cumulative experience, and the subtlety of aesthetic memory” (Silverstein 2006: 483). Olive oil has taken on a similar role as a prestige commodity and aesthetic form; indeed, the taste community is modelled after the world of wine.

Similar to wine, olive oil is “subject to a social organization of value determining connoisseurship” (Silverstein 2006: 483). Connoisseurs, because of their intense and prolonged education hold the privileged position of providing the representative declarations that are part and parcel of the valuation of their focal objects. The representative declaration involves a claim or judgment of reality that stands as truth, like a jury finding a defendant guilty regardless of actual guilt or innocence (Hancher 1979: 3). The evaluations of connoisseurs stand as truth claims about the reality of a product.

For olive oil, these representative declarations determine value in two ways: designation of extra virginity and designations of excellence or quality. These decisions are based on previously established structures of authority that support extra virginity and certain assemblages of properties as characteristics of quality oil. Those structures of

authority (i.e. history, science, and historical and contemporary experts) are then drawn upon by connoisseurs to back up their own authority in making decisions about quality.

The course offered by A.I.R.O., run by those who occupy the position of connoisseur, appeals to structures of authority through the course's content, while relying on their instructors to be in-person embodiments of that authority. This brings participants into direct relationship with those whose representational declarations determine the value of olive oil, after whom they can model their own participation in the taste community. The course creates and expands the taste community to anyone willing to learn as well as opens a door to becoming connoisseurs.

### **Becoming an Assaggiatore dell'Olio: A.I.R.O.'s "Course for Aspiring Tasters"**

I became interested in taking A.I.R.O.'s course for *aspiranti assaggiatori dell'olio* after speaking with professional tasters from the Florence Chamber of Commerce, the Tuscan Olive Oil Consortium, the Chianti Classico Consortium, and other private tastings about their training and qualifications. This course was divided into four periods over several weeks, held at a cooking school in the Santo Spirito neighborhood of Florence. The first level in a three-level series, offered in coordination with the National Association for Professional Olive Oil Tasters (known by its Italian acronym ANAPOO<sup>18</sup>), covered the basics of tasting techniques, the supply chain of extra virgin olive oil from agronomics to conservation, practical tests of oils, and an introduction to

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<sup>18</sup> *Associazione Nazionale Assaggiatori Professionisti Olio di Oliva*

oil-food pairings. The second level dove deeper into the topics covered in the first, including methods for enhancing extra virgin olive oil, the positive attributes, use in the kitchen, the nutraceutical aspects of oil, with more practical taste tests of oils, and food pairings. The third level was mainly comprised of practical tests focused on the identification of three main defects in all their forms (heated, rancid, and winey<sup>19</sup>) and two main positive attributes (bitter and spicy<sup>20</sup>).

I had seen the advertisement for the course in Firenze Urban Lifestyle (FUL) – a local magazine that I usually picked up at La Città, a caffè/bookstore in the San Frediano area of Florence. After emailing to inquire about enrolling, I found out that the tuition would be \$150, a discounted rate from the normal \$200 for readers of FUL. Since my time in the class, the course has grown to be offered in multiple cities including Rome and Milan, as well as a new course focused on production technologies with MORI-TEM, a technology firm specializing in oil production machinery. AIRO has also published their own impressive manual on how to use olive oil including instructions for tasting, tips for pairing oils and foods, and recipes from celebrity chefs (Leonardi, Falugiani, Provenciali 2016).

The course, as I experienced it, elaborated on the production and sensory evaluation of oils as an integration of techne and technoscience. As explained by Heath and Meneley, “techne” encompasses those forms of knowledge closely associate with art, craft, and skill, while technoscience refers to knowledge as systematic classifications

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<sup>19</sup> *riscaldo, rancido, and avvinato*

<sup>20</sup> *amaro, piccante*

(Heath and Meneley 2007: 594). Used together, the two sides of knowledge production are “legitimizing strategies aimed at establishing practices of distinction in the production, consumption, and circulation of products” (Heath and Meneley 2007: 594). Specifically, in regard to olive oil, a critical differentiation between the two sides occurs in the distinguishing of oils as extra virgin (Meneley 2007). Technoscientific standards of laboratory tests are not enough, a taste panel must approve the products. However, as this chapter will show the two sides are mutually informing and justifying. Technoscientific discourse is leveraged to support the *techne* of tasting through regimentation, standardized tools, practice, and chemical analyses. At the same time, these practices are not enough and the *techne* of tasting is what provides the thrust behind distinction; the incorporation of such practices and abilities into one’s *habitus* (Bourdieu 1984) is a critical complement to the use of the technoscientific tools available.

## **The Lessons**

Each work station in the classroom was set up with six samples in little white plastic cups covered with lids carefully arranged next to the evaluation sheet. At our places were also a cup of water, a napkin, and three slices of green apple. The acidity of the apple would cut through the oils better, but our tasting guide advocated for the water because it would not leave a residue in our mouths.

The cooking school space was divided between a large, stainless-steel kitchen area, enclosed by glass walls, and the area where we met, a dining area with three large rustic wooden tables and a low couch snuggled in the corner. Most of the people in the room were involved in olive oil production except for a Dutch woman living in Italy



while writing a book. There were 14 participants in total, along with Filippo (president of A.I.R.O.), Simona (another A.I.R.O. representative), the speaker for the day, Pietro, an olive oil producer, Giudita, and our tasting guide, Adina. One pair of participants was a couple (man and woman in their 20s), another was a mother and her daughter Martina. The rest were all men ranging in age from mid-30-60s.

As we settled in and waited for the course to begin, Filippo moved swiftly around the room placing various small containers on the tables in front of us. These were scent samples. Each was to serve as a tool for us to identify particular smells. The cups closest to me held samples of rosemary, sage, artichoke, almond, and tomato leaves.

The first presentation was by Pietro Rosselli, the former mayor of San Casciano, who now works for the city of Florence: “Breve storia dell’olio d’oliva, produzione ed usi nei secoli” (A brief history of olive oil, production and uses in the centuries). Pietro’s passion for the history of olive oil was evidenced through his expressive voice and his waving arms. The maps he projected demonstrated the origin and spread of the olive tree throughout the Mediterranean region, especially thanks to the Romans who, he said, brought the development of olive cultivation to its pinnacle. In his retelling of the past 6,000 years, he emphasized the role of Tuscany in the preservation of olive oil traditions: “In some places, they cultivate only one or two varieties of olives, but in Tuscany there are over 150 cultivars.” He spoke about the importance of l’Accademia dei Georgofili, the state agricultural archives, in preserving knowledge of olive cultivation and oil production. The history outlined in our training materials even included that Marco Mugelli had passed away in 2014.

This section of the class provided participants with a way to connect products with origins not only in geographic area, but in deep time within that place. Discourses of terroir often appeal to an unchanging and enduring linkage of product, place, and people (Demossier 2011). Pietro provided participants with some of the most important synecdoche (de Certeau) of history; the individual points were able to stand in for the wider range of time. With only a few bullet points worth of history, participants could draw a direct line between what they had in their tasting cups and the ancient Romans.

After Pietro's talk, Filippo welcomed Giudita from l'Azienda Agricola La Ranocchiaia to the front of the room. She quickly ran us through information about her firm's experimentation with various new kinds of equipment, including a new decanting system and a new washing system, as well as the types of filters they use, the history of their farm, and their production. At the conclusion of her presentation, the class moved into the tasting portion of the session.

Adina, a professional taster with ANAPOO bounced to the front of the room. She was a round woman, dressed in a black frock, and her fluffy brown hair was pulled into a messy bun that kept moving around her head as she talked. She was giggly and a little out of breath for most of her presentation. "Before we begin, I just need to say: Aristotle in the constitution of the Athenians said that killing an olive tree is a crime punishable by death." She wagged a finger at us to underscore the severity of the crime. She smiled and the class broke into laughter, "Now that I've warned you, we can begin."

As she walked us through the official tasting protocol, how to fill out a tasting form (*scheda di assaggio*), and then each of the day's five samples, she kept referring to ancient philosophers and historical experts on olive oil. For example, in her description of

the different types of modern oils, she started in ancient history, “The Romans divided the oil into five types: viride, ex albis ulivis, oleum maturum, first pressing, and second pressing,” while describing potential defects, “Catone<sup>21</sup> said that one had to be careful touching the olives. ‘As soon as you tap the surface, the fermentation starts.’ That’s why you have to be quick from the field to the mill.” And when talking about the maturation of the olives at harvesting: “As Pliny<sup>22</sup> said, ‘The greener they are, the better the oil.’” With each quote she would raise her index finger to the sky as if summoning the authority of ancient philosophers for her proclamations.

The remaining lessons ran similarly to this first class. We would begin with an educational portion with a guest speaker on a topic regarding olive oil in general, followed by an explanation of the oils that we would be tasting either by the producer themselves or someone familiar with the product. The orientation to the oils would include the production process, provenance, cultivars, and any other important background factors that play a role in what we should discern from the olives or to establish the standards against which we should be tasting them. For example, if I know an oil is made with *coratina* olives, it should have that flavor. If not, there is something off. We would then move on to tasting and evaluating several samples, some perfect, some defective.

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<sup>21</sup> Catone: Catone the Elder (234-149 BC), Roman senator and historian, *Dei Agri Cultura*

<sup>22</sup> Pliny: Pliny the Elder (23-79 AD), Roman author and natural philosopher, *Naturalis Historia*

Throughout the following weeks we worked with several experts. Cristian Marinelli, a chemist and professional taster with the Florence Chamber of Commerce, presented an Olive Oil 101 lesson, including an introduction to four different types of oil (extra virgin, virgin, *lampante*, and *olio di sansa di olive*), a brief explanation of where flavors came from, the importance of language in describing oils, and examples of defects.

In another period we heard from Simona Pappalardo, an agronomist and one of the A.I.R.O. staff, who started with basic statistics about olive oil production, including which regions produced the most. Tuscany produced only 2% of the national production of olive oil, with Puglia, Calabria, Sicily, Campania, Basilicata, and Sardinia together producing 88%. However, Tuscany, Umbria, and Lazio have the highest diversity of olives. Simona continued to detail the parts of the tree, parts of the olive, the phases of cultivation, processes of irrigation, fertilization, and protection against pests and diseases.

In our last class period, our guest speakers were flavorist Donato Creti and chef at Osteria di Passignano and manager of the Il Magnifico olive oil competition Matia Barciulli. Donato explained that he was an *aromatiere*, a flavorist, with Giotti S.p.A. (a flavor company recently acquired by McCormick) who studies and is responsible for all the factors influencing the experience of flavor. His lesson was filled with tables and diagrams showing chemical breakdowns and technical language that I struggled to understand in English let alone Italian. Matia's discussion was chiefly on the use of olive oil in cooking. He explained that his fascination with oil began in 1997 when he met Marco Mugelli. Specifically, he was interested in the “*abbinamento dell'olio a piatto*,” the dressing or pairing of food with oils. He explained “that it was important to know

when to use “particular oils for a particular purpose in a particular dish.” “This is the key to future of cuisine – the future is small and intense. Oil turns up the volume on the flavor of things!” he announced to the class with a dramatic flair.

During the course, we tasted over twenty-five oils under the guidance of several professional tasters including Franco Pasquini, president of ANAPOO. The oils ranged from rancid, to *avvinato*, to perfectly balanced, to overpoweringly spicy, to tasting like bananas and included filtered, unfiltered, IGP, DOC, monocultivars, local, and not-so-local-yet-still-Italian oils.

These lessons, covering agronomics to *abbinamento*, informed our tasting by providing us background knowledge on what the source of flavors (defective and positive) were. Our presenters repeatedly drew on existing structures of authority, much like citing another scholar, including history (Pietro), historical figures (Adina), chemistry (Donato), and biology and agronomy (Simona and Matteo). Our professional tasters all relied on the biggest proof of all to establish their authority—our own direct personal experiences of the oils that they sought to enhance.

### **Coalescence of a Taste Community and the Intersubjectivity of Taste**

Taste communities coalesce around standardized ways of communicating about properties of a given product and producing judgments about its ‘goodness’ or quality (Donner 1991, Shapin 2012). This includes the tools and mechanisms they create as part of this standardization. For example, the Wine Aroma Wheel is a widely-used tool developed by Ann Noble to assist in the classification of sensations in wines ([www.winearomawheel.com](http://www.winearomawheel.com)). The circular tool moves from broad categories of aromas

in the center to more refined descriptions towards the outer edge. For examples, “fruity” is divided into several categories including “tree fruit,” which is then further broken into several specific aromas including “cherry” or “apricot.” The purpose of the aroma wheel is to facilitate communication around these qualities through standardized language. As Shapin explains, “the point is not taste objectivity; it is taste intersubjectivity. The Aroma Wheel is a homespun intersubjective engine. Taste communities coalesce around practices like that – practices that refer to mutually accessible external properties as the causes of internal states” (Shapin 2012: 178).

Accessing and gaining proficiency in the use of these standardized tools as well as the internalization of their rules is key to joining the taste communities that coalesce around them. The tools offer a way of taking subjective experiences and moving them in to the realm of objectivity, where these internal states are communicable to others. This process is crucial in producing the representational declarations that underpin connoisseurship.

For olive oil, these tools include strict guidelines around the tasting process, the types of cups that can be used for tasting, the temperature at which oil should be tasted, the order of evaluation (visual, odor, taste, retronasal), descriptive language, and the *schede* or forms used to record experiences. By creating this structure and standardizing the process, tasters can communicate about internal subjective experiences of taste.

As previously mentioned, the evaluations of oil using these tools have critical ramifications for value in two ways. First, a taste test performed by a panel of experts is the determining factor in oil designation as extra virgin. The oil must meet certain standards of purity and acidity that can be determined in chemical analyses, but the

lynchpin in its final designation is a taste test that finds the oil free of any defects. This test is a representational declaration by the panel that determines the oil's value within a market that deems extra virginity as the desirable designation. Second, for oils that are already designated as extra virgin, the evaluations by professional tasters can further elaborate on the assemblage of properties in the oil. This elaboration can help the oil gain renown as excellent or 'of quality' through guide book descriptions, winning further statuses or winning olive oil competitions.

Despite the fun atmosphere of the AIRO course, tasting was serious business. The ritual of conducting an official taste is disciplined and regimented to increase accuracy in the evaluations of oils. The panel test is comprised of a group of no fewer than eight tasters. During each seating, they are to give their judgement for, on average, five samples and they report the positive and negative characteristics of the oil, their intensity, and classify the oil. There are rules regarding when tasting can occur, the types of cups to be used, and other aspects of the tasting that need to be controlled to obtain a "correct" tasting. For example, according to Adina during our first lesson, the rules of the International Olive Council require that tasters refrain from smoking at least 30 minutes before the scheduled time, to not use perfumes, cosmetics, or soaps whose smell persists at the time of the test, and to not eat anything at least an hour before or during tasting. Tasters must work individually and as silently as possible to not disturb or influence each other's' assessments.

The first step in tasting protocol is to heat the oil to approximately normal body temperature in blue tulip shaped glasses. As Adina explained, "You take the glass and it heats up in the palm of your hand. It's time to taste when you no longer feel the

difference between the glass and the hand (about 28° C or 82.4° F). We swirl the cup to bring out as many substances as possible.” The blue color to the glass prevents the oil’s appearance from influencing tasters’ perceptions. For example, a yellow color could signal a lemon flavor or the taster may think that it should be green and therefore defective. Second, the taster performs the smell test to figure out the olfactory characteristics, sniffing through one nostril and, if necessary, both. Then they proceed to taste.

According to Adina, the taste is broken into two parts. “The primary sensation is that inside the oral cavity, then there is another, which is learned over time. Having this sensation in the mouth, you can try to review it from behind the nose, to have even more sensations.” Taste is what you can sense in the mouth and retronasal perceptions.

These sensations are registered on a *scheda di assaggio*. The focus of the *scheda* (plural: *schede*) is identifying defective qualities and to capture the balance between the positive attributes of *fruity*<sup>23</sup>, *bitter*<sup>24</sup>, and *spicy*<sup>25</sup>. In the first section of the *scheda*, tasters indicate the intensity of the negative attributes with a mark along a line. The further to the right, the higher the intensity. Several professional tasters with whom I spoke, explained that they would even use a ruler to mark a number of centimeters to show the intensity on a ten-point scale. The defects listed on our example *schede* were *riscaldo*, *muffa*,

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<sup>23</sup> *fruttato*

<sup>24</sup> *amaro*

<sup>25</sup> *piccante*



*avvinato-inacetito-acido-agro, morchia, metallico, rancido*, and “other.” The second half focuses on quantifying the positive attributes in the same manner.

If an oil is already classified as extra virgin, the taster can use a second *scheda di assaggio* that further defines the positive characteristics. This expanded *scheda* is what was primarily used in the A.I.R.O. course. The oils we tasted were already classified as extra virgin and the course was specifically designed for growing an appreciation and knowledge of these types of oils. The *scheda* outlined all the nuanced flavors and notes within the oil so that we could effectively communicate them to other tasters, customers, producers, or chefs.

A major determinant of how these types of oils are designated as “of quality” or as “excellent” oils is the balance between the most prominent sensations. Also, depending on the standard they are measured against, an oil can be considered more or less excellent. For instance, Tuscan IGP oil is expected to be spicy and bitter according to the cultivars and production methods required by its disciplinary. If those flavors are not present, it can keep the designation of Tuscan IGP but could potentially be considered “not that excellent.” If those flavors are present, then they are judged based on persistence and balance. The exact persistence and balance were somewhat up for debate among tasters. However, if the flavors are balanced and the persistence is just right, the oil is considered “of quality.”

In the first *scheda* used for determining extra virginity, there is a division between the perceptions of defects and the perceptions of the positive attributes. The second *scheda* is divided into the *esame visivo* (visual exam), the *esame olfattivo* (smell), *esame gusto-olfattivo* (taste and smell), and the *esame gustativo-tattile* (the gustatory tactility

examination). These differences tease out the qualities of an extra virgin olive oil even further into more refined and specific descriptors. The visual exam consists of checking the viscosity, the clearness of the oil (clear to cloudy), and the color (from brilliant green to dark yellow). It follows that the glasses used by A.I.R.O. are clear rather than the traditional blue of the panel tests. The color of the oil in this context is an important descriptor, not a potentially contaminating component that would influence a taster's opinion. The *esame gustativo-tattile* provides a space for the taster to evaluate the astringency of the oil, the viscosity (this time by mouth), and the sensations of bitter and spicy. The sensations of bitter and spicy are sometimes in this category because they are thought to be a feeling rather than a taste. While bitter is a *sensazione gustativa* (a gustatory sensation) perceived as a feeling in the mouth, spicy is understood as a *sensazione trigeminali* (trigeminal sensation) perceived by the trigeminal nerve's agitation.

These two *schede* diverge in significant ways because of their different purposes. The emphasis of the first is on defects, the presence of which immediately disqualifies the oil for extra virgin status. If there are no defects, then the focus turns to evaluating the sensations that do exist and those qualities that could have influenced the initial evaluation for extra virginity (color, clearness, viscosity) are brought back into consideration.

Other common tools are glossaries of flavor terms and example scents. In our second class period, during Olive Oil 101, Cristian led a discussion on the importance of language when talking about olive oil. Cristian pointed us to a list of flavor terms in our

manual and stressed that it is critical for us to correctly identify and effectively communicate about sensations.

The most important flavors for us to become familiar with were those of the defects. For example, Cristian instructed us to pick up an oil and give it a solid smell—it would not take much to discover what he wanted us to sense. We all lifted the cups up to our noses and immediately everyone made disgusted noises. The oil smelled like paint or wet rotten wood. This was the smell of rancid oil. Cristian then encouraged everyone to taste the oil. It was critical that we knew what rancid oil tasted like. I took a little bit into my mouth and immediately the flavor of what paint smells like covered my tongue. Cristian offered the flavor of almond oil as a comparison for the taste.

In another lesson, we tasted an oil with a hint of *riscaldo*, which made it smell like dirty feet or cheese. Martina, the younger girl setting next to me, spoke up suggesting that it smelled like pasta with parmigiana, which to her was good and she had not realized it was a sign of defective oil. Matteo Mugelli jumped in to explain that *riscaldo* occurs when heat has been applied either purposefully or on accident to the oil. He gave the example of a *frantoio* turning up the heat a little in the production process to increase yields.

Positive attributes were also elaborated on using example scents and suggestions of scents. At one point, Cristian requested we try an oil that, to me, tasted like the smell of tomato leaves. Cristian offered bananas as a flavor that we should be able to perceive retronasally (behind our nose at the top of our throat). A little surprised at this suggestion, I raised the cup to take another sip but before I could, Martina shouted out “Oh yes! I can taste it! Really! Bananas!” The class erupted into laughter at her enthusiastic reaction. I

wanted to taste for myself, so I took another small sip, closed my eyes and slowly the flavor of banana revealed itself. I could not quite tell if it was because I tasted banana or because Cristian had directed our attention to that as a possibility. Later in another class, a flavorist would confirm that we were in fact tasting banana because of a specific compound present in that oil.

Creating standardized vocabularies, *schede*, and the training that goes into identifying sensations all lend themselves to increasing intersubjective agreement; e.g. we all call our experiences by the same name, therefore they are the same. Other mechanisms, like the guidelines around the tasting process, the temperature of the oil, the color of the glasses, limit the potentially negative influence of subjectivity by trying to standardize through elimination. In the first instance, tasters understand and talk about experiences similarly for intersubjective agreement; in the second, they eliminate the possibility for agreement or disagreement altogether. These tools and methods establish a manner of communicating about internal experiences around which taste communities can coalesce.

### **Bundled, Shifting Qualisigns and Contexts**

What is it that tasters are attempting to capture and describe through these tools, language, and training? In her work on olive oil, Anne Meneley describes the role of bundling qualisigns, or signs that represent qualities that can when presented together have a meaning different than when presented individually, in perpetuating the use of olive oil as a religious symbol (Buchler 1955, Meneley 2008). To this end, she focuses primarily on a few key qualisigns, including immiscibility with water, luminosity,

liquidity, durability, and capacity to cleanse. However, she notes a shift where other qualisigns, primarily color, taste, and smell, become central “salient sensory dimensions in contemporary olive oil organoleptic evaluations, which are necessary for an olive oil to attain ‘extra virgin’ status” (Meneley 2008: 320). Following Meneley’s proposition, I argue that these qualisigns, their ‘unrealized potential,’ their ability to be bundled, and their shifting value are central to the overall quality of olive oil. Taste communities coalesce around ways of communicating about the internal subjective experiences of qualisigns and making value judgements based on the perception of qualisigns bundled together in particular assemblages.

Qualisigns are qualities, as opposed to sinsigns, which are actual existing things or events, or legisigns that are laws or rules (Buchler 1955). For example, bitter and spicy are qualisigns; they are sensuous qualities of olive oil, but as qualisigns they exist in any number of other places or objects. In certain systems of value, qualisigns may hold a privileged position as signs (Munn 1986). However, the problem with qualisigns is that they are unrealized potential as a sign; they must be embodied as iconic signs in order to carry meaning. The qualisigns of bitter or spicy alone mean nothing unless embodied in olive oil. They then gain the ability to index other things, including, for example, the type or the maturity of the olives used in production.

Donato, the flavorist, began his lesson by explaining that in fact there are many factors that influence the experience of flavor like texture, the way something looks, or the noise it makes. “We respond to many different stimuli. Like for chips, they have studied the importance of the sound the chip makes. Within a certain frequency and duration, the chip is good. Outside of that scale, we think the chip has gone bad or is too

hard. Thus, the use of inert gasses in bags to preserve that specific crunch,” he explained, “The main things effecting our experience of flavors are the smell, the tactility, and the way it looks.”

Donato clicked through a couple slides projecting on the wall behind him to graphs showing the chemical composition of olive oil: the largest component was tryglerides, followed by diglycerides, then monoglycerides, and then minor components that made up less than one percent in his data. The minor components were phenols, tocophenols, phospholipids, pigments, volatile organic compounds, hydrocarbons, sterols, aliphatic alcohols, and triterpenic alcohols. As he explained, the volatile organic compounds are the ones responsible for the smells and flavors that remind us of any number of other things. The polyphenols (the phenols, tocopherols (vitamin A), sterols) are all part of what makes a good oil bitter and spicy. Out of 10kg of oil, only one gram is made up of the volatile compounds. He clicked to another slide showing the breakdown of this one gram, pointing to each item and telling what they were responsible for. In each oil, there are possibly 250-300 of these compounds all competing for attention and their assemblages create the flavors and odors we experience.

Donato used the allegory of music to explain how this all functions: “We have the notes, the volatile compounds, and it matters which ones we have. But how they are arranged... that gives us the final flavor, which is like a piece of music.” He gave another example: “What do we get when we mix together carrots, onions, beef, pork, garlic, tomato, and red wine?” The class started yelling out an incredible number of dishes that contained the ingredients. One gentleman offered up “Bolognese!” to which Donato smiled and pointed. This was the answer he was looking for: “When we add all those

ingredients together and cook them in a particular way and order, they give us Bolognese. But if we change it... although it's the same ingredients... it becomes something else. Nature plays a game in the oil. Picking and choosing and arranging. It's up to us that understand how it works to discover what's there."

Beyond their embodiment as an iconic sign, the indexicality of qualisigns must come with some sort of instruction (Hanks 1996). This instruction comes in the form of a semiotic ideology, which is a set of "basic assumptions about what signs are and how they function in the world" (Keane 2003: 419). In olive oil, the underlying semiotic ideology points to which qualisigns are even considered signs and determines what, if anything, they index as part of their embodiment in oil. For example, 1) bitter is a quality and 2) it means that olives were harvested while still green. It is this ideology that allows indexicality to function socially and for qualisigns to have ramifications in the world of value.

For extra virgin oil, the value of that oil (its status as extra virgin) is determined by an assemblage of qualisigns embodied in the oil, not so much by which qualisigns are present as the absence certain ones: defective qualities. Defective qualisigns have heightened importance compared to other potential qualisigns assembled within the oil. It does not matter what other signs are bundled with them, because their presence negates the possibility of extra virginity. They have a kind of negative indexicality; they point to what the oil is not. However, there has to be some underlying instruction to understand that the qualisigns embodied in oil index negative quality. The example of the oil tasting like pasta with parmigiana is a prime illustration. Cheese would have been a positive sign if it was embodied in a pasta dish, but our instruction on the semiotics of oil teaches us

that that qualisign, when embodied in oil, indexes deficiency. It may taste good, but it signifies the exact opposite.

In the absence of negative qualisigns, tasters move on to perceiving and evaluating the presence of other qualisigns bundled within the oil. These too shift in relevance depending on how one is evaluating. Recently, there has been a shift to thinking about oils outside of the designations that have previously held the most prestige, such as denominations of origin. Taste communities, like the one coalescing in part through A.I.R.O., are increasingly concerned simply with “excellence” or oils “of quality.” These oils are still extra virgin; however, the evaluative criteria are focused on the harmony of the positively valued qualisigns within the oil, regardless of what they may be. So too are members of the taste community concerned with how the oils (excellent and of quality) match with foods, regardless of provenience. For example, as chef Matia Barciulli of Osteria di Passignano explained, “The tasters’ taste can sometimes be a bit too technically correct. For *abbinamento*, there needs to be a different scale and decision making process. You look for oils that are delicate, *piacione*, *un po di tutto*, and *particolarmente particolare*.” His point was that, even though an oil would be considered excellent by tasting standards, they needed to be considered in terms of their future use rather than only their stand-alone qualities. We were to consider the future bundling of qualisigns embodied in a complete dish rather than the individual ingredient.

Qualisigns shift in importance and relevance depending on the context, namely the evaluative schema in which it is involved, and the same oil could be evaluated completely different based on what a taster is looking for. The underlying semiotic



ideology tells us what in the oil is a sign and what it could signify. It is through these articulations that qualisigns are brought into relevance for social value.

### **Beyond the Tasting Course**

The intersubjective methods discussed here for communicating internal experiences of tastes are a “mediating tertium a quo” (Silverstein 2006: 484) between tasters and olive oil. Drawing on Silverstein’s explanation of wine-talk, the community of tasters is not mediated directly by the material presence of the oil but rather the discursive, intersubjective representations of it (Silverstein 2006). Internal experiences of a commodity cannot be a social force but talking about them can.

Differing levels of mastery of the tools and language associated with representing and evaluating olive oil, creates stratification within the taste community. We can see this in the tasting course where new initiates fall into the mentorship of experts and connoisseurs who in turn draw on even more established structures of authority beyond their own techne to include technoscientific interventions like regimented tools, standardized language, documented history, and chemical analyses. The taste community coalesces around these tools, methods, and language, but it is those very mechanisms and the proficiency in their use that create differentiation among the members based on fluency.

When we talk about aesthetic objects we are not only talking about what they are, but we are communicating important information about who we are (Silverstein 2006). Using registers that we have mastered (or not) allows or (prohibits) entry into spheres of social activity (Agha 2007). Within realms that are constructed around aesthetic objects,

our ability to masterfully talk about and evaluate them through the register appropriate for that space grants us permission to take part in that process in the first place. As part of our engagement in these interactions, we position ourselves vis-à-vis other speakers and social roles as well as reference materials and speakers that are exterior to the direct interaction (Goffman 1981, Bahktin 1981). In speaking about wine, the ability to reference specific attributes and to evaluate them in relationship to past personal experience, positions the speaker as knowledgeable about a highly-valued aesthetic object. The speaker says a lot about the object, but also produces themselves as an expert. According to Silverstein, “this semiotic consubstantiality facilitates the transduction of value across the realms of commodity/experience and commodity/experiencer” (Silverstein 2006: 485). Simply put, we as tasters take on the prestige and value of the prestigious and valuable commodity about which we can communicate fluently. These proficiencies connect with what Bourdieu identified as the distinguishing function of Taste (1984). The ability to distinguish oneself and therefore your products has very real economic consequences for producers.

For the olive oil producers and sellers attending the A.I.R.O. course, they were chiefly interested in how the prestige gained by becoming a professional taster, or at least the skills and knowledge of a professional taster, could be leveraged within the consumer encounter. By proving fluency in the register of the taste community, participants could either cite the authority from which they draw their expertise or cite themselves in marketing their products. They are better equipped to describe oils in a way that is intersubjectively agreed upon and therefore effective, as well as in a way that appeals to consumers looking for prestige commodities. They become a point from which

representative declarations about their oils radiate to a broader audience taking advantage of the transduction of value between the oil and taster. The value of the oil they are able to communicate gives them prestige and authority, which in turn can be channeled back to the oil through further value-giving representative declarations.

The knowledge gained through training can also be transferred backward along the chain of production to enhance the qualities in the oil that are subject to the evaluative criteria. For example, if a producer is trained to know an oil with bitter and spicy qualities will achieve a higher price, they can adjust their production process to achieve that outcome. The same could be said for any other desirable quality. We know what produces a particular assemblage and how it is valued, so we can change to producing similar assemblages. This process reinforces the socially produced preference for certain assemblages, like the continued value of designations of origin, through material reproduction.

Qualisigns, because of the necessity for further instructions to direct their indexicality and their tendency to shift in relevance across contexts, are open to use for a variety of purposes. The evaluative schemas that guide the interpretation of qualisigns can be closely connected to other ideological projects that appear to be a step removed from olive oil tasting. For example, as has been discussed elsewhere, designations of origin or other forms of binding between locality and commodity are closely connected to particular philosophies of intellectual property, nationalism, and localism (Parasecoli 2016). The preference for an I.G.P. (Indications of Protected Geography in Italian) or D.O.C. (Denominations of Controlled Origin in Italian) oil and upholding that particular

flavor profile as symbol of quality and excellence, is colored by broader ideologies of locality and belonging whereby the oil stands in for the region or nation.

However, the A.I.R.O. course works toward the building of expertise and connoisseurship as part of cultivating Taste, which is elite and limited. While their claim is that they are trying to make it possible for anyone to become a member of the taste community and to make their own representative declarations about oils they encounter, only those privileged enough to engage with these commodities can make those judgements. The distinctions between expert, connoisseur, and amateur are critical in shaping the ways that products are evaluated. In the next chapter, I will explore contexts in which amateurs are able to make some judgements about oils but the impact of those declarations is limited to own experience and in fact reinforce the representative declarations of those from within the taste community.

In the face of scandal in the world of olive oil, one of Filippo's hopes is that this process can be a boon against fake and fraudulent oils. However, this process of distinction from fake or fraudulent oils is what allows the oils that Filippo, AIRO, and the taste community are chiefly interested in to hold such prestige. For them to be high quality, it requires there to be a low-quality oil available for distinguishing against. The creation of the taste community and the methods and registers of connoisseurship are not simply a way for describing high quality oils but are a way of creating them. By being able to talk about oils, their terroir, and describe them in ways that gain a boost from technoscientific interventions creates the very object of focus. The object around which the community coalesces is a creation of its coalescence. Not only does the enactment of expertise around terroir naturalize terroir as part of oils rather than produced through

interdiscursive processes, it obfuscates the production of the social relations that such enactments enable. The next chapter will take a look at taste as a ritual of verification within broader practices of transparency in the creation of the category of high quality extra virgin olive oil.

## **Chapter 5 Tasting as Ritual of Verification: The Production of Authenticity and Transparency in Extra Virgin Olive Oil**

We climbed out of the car and Marco led us over to the offices, through the front door toward the back of the building to a round table set in a nook between bookshelves filled with paperwork and books. He reached up and pulled down a stack of poster-sized papers and laid them out on the table. The large glossy diagrams were of the new facilities to be built on the same sight within the next five years. The blue-prints and dazzling full-color renderings illustrated a museum/show room/conference center with their olive oil production as the central focus. The U-shaped building walks guests along the production line, from the delivery of olives, to the milling, to filtering and bottling, all displayed on the other side of glass walls.

Marco began pointing at the first diagram, “This would be the visitors’ entrance with all the parts – restaurant, beer, wine, vinegar, and oil – all visitable.”

Marco continued tracing his fingers over the image outlining the shape of the building, that looked vaguely like a barn but with more glass and a sleeker impression: “Architectural elements that recall old barns and agriculture... The concept is agricultural... silos, old barns... but also modernity...” He walked his hands through the exhibits explaining each stop, “Here, the olives arrive in a refrigerated area, then washed, then milled, extraction area, the storage area, bottling, and the storeroom. The storeroom has oil bottled ready for sale and also wine, bottled wine – we won’t make wine here but it’s there for sale too.”

As we moved through the different areas of the mill, he pointed out the elevated walkway that guests follow so they can see “right, left, and inside” of the whole process without getting in the way of the workers. The processing areas are visible from the walkway through giant glass walls so that the noise from the machinery doesn’t fill the rest of the building. He continued, pointing out the exceptionally large professional kitchen and the restaurant with a covered terrace. Below it you could visit the areas where vinegar and beer are made. Despite these other attractions, he explained that the oil is the central focus. The food in the restaurant is made with their own products but specifically designed around the oil. Even the beer will be made with water recuperated from the olive oil production.

“Earlier you talked about the importance of research and quality in producing oil. Is there place for that in these plans?” I asked.

“Yes, yes, yes!” he replied, turning the paper around so I could get a different angle on the plans, “Here we have a laboratory – 265 square meters – very large, for analyses. The idea is for it to function for research but also, above all, for our activities here.”

The conversation continued with debating the placement and type of plants around the outside the property. It seemed to be an important aspect with concerns about blocking views but also making the center feel like a part of the surrounding environment. From the large windows facing northward it would be possible to see hillsides covered with the olive groves from which the olives being processed right in front of you came.

“This place will be a multifunctional center dedicated to oil, where the great protagonist, of course, is oil. This is the project of the future. We hope in the next three years to be able to make the Dievole oil project, which with this infrastructure, the developed market and the historical image of the company, into a company that is avant-garde, but representing the whole cultural path. It's not just cutting-edge, not just innovation: it's the evolution of tradition and the challenge is to create a center on oil.”

“And the tasting?” I asked.

“Of course!” Marco exclaimed and flipped the page to another diagram, “Of course visitors will taste! We have this whole area dedicated to professional tastings of all of our oils led by real professionals. Visitors will follow real protocols and everything. Taste is the most important part!”

The discussion of this future building concluded with Marco excusing himself to speak with some folks that came into the office. Filippo turned to me to make sure I had understood everything that he had told us, “I had no idea they had all these plans! It's incredible.” I agreed and joked that it would turn the place into a mini Expo Milano for olive oil.

The Dievole oil project seems to be a space where the authenticity of the product will be produced through a number of transparency practices. Marco's explanation was that people, domestic and international consumers, want to see where their products are coming from. The increased demand for transparency and traceability of foods has heavily influenced how they plan to expand the presentation of their product. This new encounter would offer visitors grounding in the history of olive oil production in Italy (with emphasis on Tuscany), the ability to see the full production line, and



knowledge on how to taste and evaluate EVOO in the tasting room. Additionally, with glass walls offering views of laboratory facilities, visitors are given a year-round view of the production cycle, including the creation of new oils through the combination of various cultivars, which they can then taste to distinguish the subtle differences.

Further, it capitalizes on the Tuscan landscape by allowing it to play a primary role in shaping visitors impressions of the space: large windows and impressive views were a focus for Marco as he walked Filippo and I through the exhibit's blueprints. The whole experience culminates in a guided tasting of oils where visitors would gain expert knowledge about how to taste and evaluate oils for themselves. This one tour provides consumers with an “authentic” experience of an authentic product, as evidenced by the knowledge they gain about extra virgin olive oil, their personal experience of the production site and landscape, culminating in a tasting experience.

This chapter focuses on ways in which authenticity is created for olive oil through the contexts of encounter, but chiefly through practices the produce transparency. This chapter argues that tasting is a type of ritual of verification that grounds transparency in materiality. Although just like terroir, authenticity and transparency are discursively produced, the act of tasting adds powerful material evidence to their production. First, the chapter described the ways in which transparency and traceability are produced and contribute to authenticity, especially within the context of social anxieties about food. It highlights taste a method by which consumers further verify authenticity, through enactments of expertise concerning terroir. Regardless of their successful use of the expert register or their individual ability to make terroir legible, the practice of engaging in the register is all that is needed to produce authenticity. This chapter includes examples

from markets, laboratories, and tourist attractions to illuminate the multitude of ways authenticity is constructed through transparency and the involvement of taste as a critical component.

The authenticity consumers are seeking in this sense, are the chronotopic qualities of products (Bahktin 1981). Actors involved in the production of products construct linguistic and material connections for their products between the past and present based on what is shared across time and space (Cavanaugh and Shankar 2014, Silverstein 2005, Dick 2010, Stasch 2011). This type of authenticity is increasingly valued on the global market (Weiss 2012) and finds expression in such phenomena as place-based labelling (Parasecoli 2017). Authenticity however is highly variable, malleable, and continuously in need of being (re)constructed (Field 2008, Lau 2010, Lindholm 2008, Trilling 1972) according to not only to the needs of the origin community but in response to specific market demands (Paxson 2010, Paxson 2013) as well as in response to consumer evaluations (Vann 2006). So, products considered “authentic” are given that label based on not only where they come from and how they are made, but according to the changing ideas of those who consume them and the needs of those who produce them.

Authenticity is linked to an anxiety over the food that we ingest as part of contemporary society (Lavin 2013) as well as “an assurance of predictable high quality and irreplaceable tastes” (Cavanaugh and Shankar 2014: 59). Anxieties around food are derived from the unfathomability of the global industrial food system (Orlando 2018, Blay-Palmer 2008), where origins, processes, and pathways of foods are all open for questioning making the nodes of the system seem rather deterritorialized and opaque. Authenticity is antithetical to this system – it assumes that provenance is “genuine and

verifiable” (Jackson 2013: 27). Since the 1950s, food production in Italy has become increasingly industrialized, so the quality of food is perceived to be on a decline except for the foods that have proven themselves as local, artisanal, ‘heritage,’ or quality products through such innovations as place-based labelling or the influence of local movements like Slow Food (Capatti and Montinari 1999, Scarpellini 2011, Leitch 2003, Counihan 2017, Counihan and Siniscalchi 2014). In the face of these anxieties, consumers look for evidence that products, olive oil in this case, are what they claim to be.

### **Transparency as an Answer to Authenticity**

Traceability and transparency have become major tools in evidencing the authenticity of products. Traceability means that a product can be traced backward from consumption to its point of origin; there are records and information that may or may not be transmitted to the consumer in some fashion that proves the trajectory of the product to their hands. Transparency is what is produced through traceability practices and other forms of audit. For transparency or the appearance of transparency to be produced for the consumer, they must be privy to authenticating products of traceability and audit practices. In the cases that follow, those authenticating products are things such as labels, information shared about production practices, personally meeting producers, physically occupying production spaces, and tasting experiences.

Food production in Italy contends with contemporary audit culture (Dunn 2007, Riles 2006, Strathern 2000) in intimate ways as producers navigate not only safety and quality regulations from the provincial, national, and European Union levels (Cavanaugh

2016) but also the desires of consumers to access foods that speak to traditions and histories in simultaneity with modern tastes (Counihan 2014, Grasseni 2014). As anthropologist Jillian Cavanaugh explains, there are two types of documents that are highly valued in the contemporary historical moment as they are assumed to make visible processes of production and therefore increase safety and quality: documents used during production and documents used to describe. These documents are performative in that “they constitute what they purport to depict” (Cavanaugh 2016: 691).

Much of the concern in audit culture is for these types of documentary practices, however, I would like to broaden considerations here beyond material documentation to include information transmitted verbally, information communicated indexically and symbolically through contexts in which items are found, and the bodily experience of consumers in tasting as their own way of participating in producing and perceiving transparency. In the cases that follow, documentary practices are combined with other forms of consumer education through contact with salespeople, tour guides, tasting guides, and producers. Labels, signage, and printed materials alongside direct communication from actors convey information about origins and production processes. The physical materials leverage well-known certifications, place-based labelling, and family names to reinforce their authority. As has been seen in the previous chapter, in the case of the public tasting course in Bagno a Ripoli, educating consumers is a critical component in changing consumption patterns, establishing rules of thumb, and cultivating Taste whereby consumers can determine quality and veracity of local products.

Another important aspect to transparency in these contexts is the closing of the distance between production and consumption. A mark of modernity concerning food is the alienation of consumers from the origins of their food (Meneley 2007) which is a considerable component as to why the global food system is imbricated in anxieties around food (Blay-Palmer 2008). Efforts to address these anxieties regularly focus on attempting to reverse this alienation, but often times focuses on the increased fetishization of food products rather than actually decreasing distances between producers and consumers. Food objects are imbued with the power to stand in for the relationship between producers and consumers, through education about the product; specifically knowledge about production processes, origins, the people who made it, all attempt to close this gap. Even the spaces where people buy foods are designed to impress upon them de-alienation.

The Supermarket of the Future featured at Expo Milano was an example of how big businesses like COOP supermarkets are seeking to address this alienation between producers, consumers, and their foods. This is achieved symbolically in the practices mentioned above, whereby consumers learn more about where their food comes from. The actual physical distance between production and consumption is collapsed in some cases where consumers encounter products in the origin communities or environments. The social distance between producers and consumers too is collapsed in instances where interactions occur with producers in markets or at production sites like olive orchards. The opening of production spaces to public view is a way producing transparency of operation, which is considered everywhere as a sign of integrity (Strathern 2000: 2) and therefore is an authenticating force behind products.

## **Taste as Ritual of Verification**

For olive oil, tasting has become a central component of communicating authenticity. A wide spectrum of tasting activities can function for this purpose, from a simple cube of bread with oil to a more robust professionally guided tasting. In a context where consumers in general are suspicious of the individuals with whom they are interacting, doubtful about the production processes or origins of products, or question the value and quality communicated through labelling, tasting becomes a type of ritual of verification (Powers 1997, Douglas 1992) itself. Even where trust in measures and information falls apart, tasters rely on bodily experience as a non-deceptive mode of assessment. However, as has been seen in previous chapters, tasting is not a completely objective experience, but rather a culmination of the total tasting experience that includes the information about the product, past experiences, and the context of the tasting. Most aspects of the tasting experience are malleable, but still result in a transformational ritual of verification whereby the oil can become what it claims to be.

This chapter focuses on two dramatically different contexts in which transparency and taste as a ritual of verification feature. The first is a market where the production of transparency is chiefly aimed at consumers through marketing materials, the setting, and interactions with people but tasting is a dominant form of evidence for consumers about the authenticity of their foods. The second, is production spaces and laboratories where the environment is highly regimented and documented, yet tasting can trump all of the other practices of transparency. The project proposed by Dievole at the outset of this chapter, demonstrates how both contexts and a mixture of the types of practices of

transparency used in each are increasingly being used together to further a mission of projecting authenticity.

### **Central Market of Florence**

Hanna, a friend of mine from Vienna living in Florence on a university exchange program, and I had become sort-of experts at bobbing and weaving through the streets to get from point A to point B a little quicker. However, as we entered the San Lorenzo market, the outdoor market space surrounding the Mercato Centrale, foot traffic came to a stand-still as consumers perused the plethora of leather jackets and bags, scarves, key chains, and soccer jerseys. After several minutes of starting and stopping through the slow-moving shoulder-to-shoulder crowd, we finally made it the couple blocks to the steps leading up into the market building. Passing through the southeastern doors, we were hit by the smell of roasting pork, ripening fruit, flowers, and fish. The bottom floor of the central market was full of individual businesses ranging from butchers displaying pillowy mounds of tripe to cheese mongers and produce stands to shops specializing in wine, oil, and vinegars. According to a couple chef I had spoken with, this is where many of the local cooks come to get their ingredients for the day. If we had been there even earlier we would have seen the cooks scurrying around taking their pick of the best daily offerings. There are also small restaurants serving simple pasta dishes, lampredotto, or porchetta to locals from the surrounding neighborhood as well as the steady stream of tourists.

We made our way to the center aisle, where there were several stalls that specialized in wine, olive oil, and vinegars. Hanna had already been eying the bottles

with large stickers with “Toscana” printed in large yellow letters and the bottles with the green circle surrounding a black rooster - the Chianti brand.

“So what’s the difference again? Toscana is from Tuscany and the Chianti one is from Chianti right?” she asked.

Before I could confirm that she was right, an attendant spotted us lingering over the oil selection laid out across a bar that lined the wall of the open-air stall. She quickly moved towards us, “Very good oil. This one is 100% Tuscan, this one 100% Chianti, these....” she pointed at the other none IGP or DOP labeled oils, “are also very, very good.” She spun around to grab a plate that she then thrust toward us, offering up little squares of bread soaked in yellow-green oil.

Hanna reached out to take a sample and instructed me under her breath, “Tell me what you think...” I extended a hand out to take a sample as well as Hanna popped the little cube into her mouth. “Actually...” she started, “Yeah no...” She was immediately unimpressed with the selection. “It’s not that it’s bad it’s that I just can’t tell a difference between this and other oils.”

The attendant continued with her explanation of the oil repeating, “This one is Tuscan, 100% Tuscan.” She lifted the bottle towards us and pointed at the label, running her finger across the neck of the bottle to underline “Toscana.” She was already turning her head looking around at other customers while she displayed the bottle for us. When all we did was smile and nod, her smile disappeared, and she moved on to the next customer. This was a common interaction in the market. Salespeople tended to move quickly between people unless they seemed like they were really going to buy something instead of “just looking.”



After a few more stalls and being presented with bottle after bottle of varying sizes and prices of “100% Tuscan,” we took a break for another coffee. Observations of this market over the past few years revealed a definite pattern in the way olive oil, as well as other items, are displayed and demonstrated to visitors. The key elements to a sales pitch, whether seemingly half-hearted or more enthusiastic, were explaining to at least some extent the provenance of the item and then offering a taste. During my observations, tasting was mostly reserved for foodstuffs like oils and vinegars, with the occasional dried fruit. Other “free samples” were much less likely to be offered.

The types of markets represented by the Central Market of Florence, specifically the bottom floor, are highly inefficient methods for food distribution, retail, and gaining profit, which has led anthropologists to ask why they still exist (List 2009; Black 2012). In the face of the increasing role of supermarkets (Humphrey 1998) and the delocalization (Giddens 1991) or the disembedding (Polanyi 1944) of social life, markets offer something of value beyond the impetus of profit making (Black 2012). Markets are a “hub of social relations... With fewer spaces of sociability in cities, markets provide important meeting points for local residents, the elderly, farmers, tourists, and immigrants” (Black 2012: 7). Linked with their role in the maintenance of localized social life, these markets are centers for the preservation of cultural heritage. Daily participation in the market is linked to embodied cultural knowledge as well as the self-conscious representation of national and local identity to the community itself, the nation, and to the international public in the form of tourism (Schiller 2008; Schiller and Shattuck 2011). The Central Market of Florence is a primed example of this dual function of promoting sociability among locals as well as the representation of identity. Had we

been there earlier in the morning, we would have run into a much different crowd of people – primarily locals picking up the supplies they needed mostly to run their businesses in the surround areas, but some people still used the market for supplying their homes with fresh foods or to pick up specialty items.

In the face of the representative function of the marketplace, the Central Market made a move to renovate its top floor, replacing the produce area filled with stalls perched on rickety wooden floors that I had observed since my first few visits to the market in 2008, transforming it into a sleek, modern, food-court style space. In the “Primo Piano,” the performance of “quality” is first and foremost the focus. Here, quality encapsulates everything that could contrast the food displayed with food coming from an industrialized food chain with above all “traceability” as its banner.

Around the outer edges of the top floor, the stands followed from meat, to fried foods, to seafood with a small vegan food stand and a restaurant on one side and then mozzarella, other cheeses, gelato and desserts, bread, pasta, pizza, and a Chianti Classico themed-shop with wines, oils, and vinegars. On the northern wall, there were the double Eataly shops, foodstuffs in one and kitchen wares in the other, with a bank in between. On the south wall between the entrance and exit, there was the Fiorentina shop where you can pick up a jersey or tickets for the next game. Nestled in the center were a cocktail and coffee bar facing one direction and a beer-specific bar facing the other. Also in the center was a bookstore, shipping station, and spots specifically for truffles and lampredotto. The scene changed often with some of the stands swapping out for a new one like the vegetarian stand changing to a smoothie place or selling aranchini. Often the changes followed the season or aligned with whatever holiday was coming up.

Above each stand a large white sign displays what they sell, along with the name of the firm or the family that runs the business. For example, the “Il Fritto e le Polpette” is run by Marco Rosi and Paolo Soderi, or “La Carne e I Salumi” is by the Famiglia Savigni. Recently they had added Chianina specific goods, like burgers or raw meat to take home, provided by La Torraia. Chianina are an Italian breed of cow originating from the Valdichianina and raised in Tuscany, Umbria, and Lazio mainly for beef. The large white cows could be seen in processions associated with the Festa di San Giovanni in June, and are used to make bistecca fiorentina (my personal favorite form of the infamous beef and staple of Florentine cuisine). In recent years, the meat has become more and more fashionable with chain restaurants like “Old Wild West” (an American West themed burger restaurant) jumping on the Chianina wagon offering “Tuscan burgers.”

Around the entire top floor, an emphasis is put on “Qualità” and “Tracciabilità” (Quality and Traceability). The buzzwords could be seen in signage, television screens hung above the bar, and on printed materials like the market map available at the entrance. The map, one’s “Passport to Quality,” was printed with the slogan “Quality is a Value. Spread the Word!”

In 2015, the market launched its *i Magnifici* promotion to draw attention their “cozy streetfood” and the people who make them. The promotion’s slogan, “Gli artigiani si uniscono e nascono i Magnifici,” (Artisans unite and *i Magnifici* are born) highlights the relationship between the food items sold, how they are made, and the people who make them. Signage around the market points to specific items among the general fare that are part of *i Magnifici*. For example, Parol’s 36-month parmigiano reggiano shavings on Bedu’s bruschetta torchon with Savigni’s lardo and greed apple; Beduschi’s gelato

cup with Bedu's San Lorenzo bread; Mendolia's basil spaghetti with tomato sauce and Campomaggiore's buffalo stracciatella; or Bodini's Tramezzino with pistachio bread, Savigni's mortadella and tuma del Bric matured by Parloa.

Each item was a new twist on a "traditional" Italian food item, using artisanal typical products, and combining the efforts of multiple of their artisans present on the primo piano. For example, Nigro's lampredotto in Bedu's curry-flavored cereal bread with Savini's truffle sauce. Lampredotto is a typical Florentine food, made from a cow's fourth stomach.

Around the city, you can find trippaio kiosks serving lampredotto, trippa, and other foods made from offals. On one occasion, while having lunch at a trippaio in the Gavinana neighborhood, a woman came up and ordered an assortment of raw meat to take home. When asked what they were, Lorenzo, the handsome salt-and-pepper haired trippaio that had been running this kiosk for about twenty years declined to answer, telling me that I didn't want to know. Later I found out that they were random parts of the cow including the uterus. The trippaio, according to Lorenzo, is part butcher part lunch counter – a spot for working class folks to grab ingredients or street food. He maintains that street food is a central part of the identity of real Florentines because they are the popular foods, the affordable foods, the traditional foods. Among his list of dishes were lampredotto, trippa, ribollito, and papa al pomodoro. For lunch, he offered me a lampredotto sandwich on a small loaf of bread with a glass of wine. The lampredotto had simmered in a broth with vegetables and, despite the reddish color of the liquid, did not have any tomatoes in it. Scooping up a chunk of the meat and slopping it onto a metal dish, he gave it a rough slicing. "Has to be on a metal plate" he said. The reasoning I

didn't quite get, but chalked it up to his individual flare. The bread was cut in half and he quickly dipped the top in the broth – a split second – just long enough to give it flavor but not long enough for it to become soggy. Piling the lampredotto onto the sandwich he asked, “Rosso o verde?” but then splashed on both the red and green sauces. At this point his wife came around the kiosk and both waited for me to take a bite and report my findings (neither knew I had had lampredotto before). “Mi piace! Ma, è un po' piccante... (I like it! But it's a little spicy...)” I declared. They both smiled approvingly at my ability to eat strange meat.

On the primo piano however, this traditional street food is elevated to a new level with the addition of a curry-flavored cereal bread in the place of the simple white loaf and truffle sauce instead of the red or green sauces made from peppers or parsley. Additionally, as customers we are given the identity of the sources for each component: lampredotto from Nigro's, the same as the lunch counter on the bottom floor of the market where it is still served in traditional style like the way Lorenzo made mine; bread from Bedu, the mercato's bakery; and truffle sauce from Savini, a family owned truffle brand dating back to the 1920s.

Although the i Magnifici version is highlighted, at Nigro's stand on the primo piano you can get your traditional fix as well. The information of the mercato's website explains the importance of the dish and the lineage behind it: *To visit Florence and not taste lampredotto would be a crime!* Many stands around the market offer printed materials on the sources of their goods. Still others have demonstrations on how their products are made. The mozzarella stand had a large glass-walled facility directly behind the counter where workers formed balls of cheese by hand.

When we arrived at the top floor, Hanna and I moved as quickly as we could through the crowd toward the Chianti Classico stand, swerving around the large wooden tables dodging backward moving chairs as patrons stood quickly to leave without warning. There we found a cheerful blonde woman about our age with a tray just like the one downstairs – little cubes of bread soaked in a yellowy-green liquid. Again we were offered *un assaggio*, to taste the oil. These were specifically Chianti Classico DOP oils, observable from the prominent black rooster on the label. The symbol looked exactly like the Chianti Classico wine label except instead of a red background, it's green.

As we each reached to take a sample, the attendant gladly offered up an explanation of the oil, which olives were used in its making, and directed our attention to the large map of the Chianti region emblazoned on the wall. She was careful to explain the spicy and bitter flavors that we might experience in the oil stating that they were the characteristics to look for.

As Hanna continued to chat with the saleswoman and look at the various bottles and tin containers, I turned to view the market space. The Chianti Classico stand was tucked in the corner and from there you could see clearly around most of the area. The wall closest to us was covered in a mural explaining the provenience of various products represented by cartoon figures (both the products and who made them), as well as language about the importance of “tracciabilità” and “qualità.” The same words flashed repeatedly on the screens above the bar with the cartoon versions of food and people coming to life.

In the context of the Central Market, quality is closely interconnected with traceability, and the perception of both are generated through different aspects of the

marketplace. First, and most noticeably on the first floor, is the presence of raw ingredients on display. Take for example meat counters: the chickens with heads still fully intact, the displaying of a pigs' feet, or the rabbits that still have their teeth. In other supermarket spaces like Conad or COOP, meats would already have been processed to the point that it would not have been directly recognizable as a particular animal. Authenticity in terms of veracity for these types of products draws on their ability to closely resemble what they purport to be, quelling most fears that they could potentially be something else. Although the site of skinned rabbits piled in a cooler is a little scary for other reasons.

In the Primo Piano, however, while it does have some raw ingredients, the concentration is primarily on prepared foods and, so, the focus for generating perceptions of traceability and quality shift to other methods like the displaying of preparation phases or attempts at educating consumers on products or producers. The individuals and families behind the foods are prominently highlighted in the names of individual stalls, to the promotional materials on specific products, to the cartoon murals with their faces, and then seeing those same faces at the counters. Along with educational materials on the backgrounds of products and signage explaining their provenance, all aspects of the market are cultivated to generate perceptions of traceability and therefore quality.

Tasting is a critical component in this environment. In addition to all of the other marketing-based strategies for generating perceptions of traceability, the physical act of tasting grounds the information being transmitted to the consumer in material, bodily experience. Market organizers believe that if consumers can experience the "quality" for themselves, they are more likely to believe that their experience and the product are

indeed authentic. Food is a particularly powerful way to engage with environments because it transgresses the boundary between the self and the outside world (Lavin 2013 , Goodman and Sage 2014); through eating we literally incorporate the world around us into our bodies. Conversely, by consuming something representative of a place, we feel a sense of not only having experienced something typical of the area but that we have in some way become a part of it ourselves.

However, consumers engaging with these products do not necessarily have connoisseur or expert level tasting knowledge; they are not necessarily part of the taste community as discussed in a previous chapter. In the market, I often heard people talk about how they did not know if the oils they were trying were of any quality. Here tasting is judged primarily on individual preferences combined comparison to previous experience or the guidance of someone perceived to have the right knowledge. Taste still however can become a ritual of verification.

As we have seen in previous chapters, the experience of taste is highly influenced by the information that is attached to it. On a very basic level, consumers can either like or dislike the taste. They are entitled to make a judgement based on personal preference. However, if consumers are told that the oil is of high quality, they are in an environment that is signaling authenticity either through its rusticity or through animated cartoons on television screens, and they are given information about its production that generates a sense of traceability, tasting becomes reminiscent of the representative declarations of those from within the taste community. Amateur tasters play the part of a connoisseur. Their like or dislike of the product extends beyond just what they tasted, to a like or dislike of the terroir of the product, to a judgement about the overall quality. For a



moment they are able to assume the social positioning of someone from within the taste community. In this way, taste becomes a ritual of verification regardless of if it reveals anything about the authenticity of the product, but it is more about the allowance of consumers to engage with the product and each other in terms of making judgments about quality.

Further still, if guided tasting takes on another level of verification. Tasting guides prompt consumers to sensations and flavors they should be able to perceive in the oil based on various aspects of production or the terroir. If the consumer can taste those things, it can confirm that the guide was correct and therefore the oil is authentic. Even if the consumer cannot taste those aspects, the act of engaging and searching for those qualities can act as a type of proof. Many amateur tasters with who I interacted complained of not being good at tasting – they could not find the lemon or the artichoke flavors. The recognition that one is not able to taste something versus that flavor not being present is an important distinction. It is a recognition that special skill is needed in order to do so; one must be a member of the taste community of that product in order to properly appreciate it.

Taste is a critical ritual of verification for producing transparency around extra virgin olive oil in the context of the Central Market. It allows consumers (amateur tasters) to play the part of a connoisseur to make their own judgements about quality; conversely it can confirm that special skill is necessary in order to appropriately appreciate oils, contributing to the perceptions of their being “di qualita.” It can also, thanks to the guidance of producers or professional tasters, simply confirm the terroir of a product,

which is promoted to be the hallmark of transparency – one can directly experience all of the information about provenance, processing, and quality through the taste.

### **BravoItalia Lab**

In contrast to a space where transparency and traceability is assumed through representations of it, and therefore authenticity and quality is produced, the laboratory setting and the processes of industrial production rely on other types of practices of transparency like documentation and chemical analysis. However, these can be trumped in the end based on the experience of taste.

Filippo and I walked down the broad hallway of the olive oil consortium passed offices and a glass walled room filled with cubicles, to the end of the building. We slipped inside sliding opaque glass doors to the interior of the BravoItalia Laboratory, an independent lab house within the consortium's building. We were greeted by a short mousey woman named Farida who could barely keep her glasses on the bridge of her nose and her white lab coat swallowed her whole – she appeared like something out of a cartoon. She began the tour immediately and moved swiftly speaking at a rapid pace to keep us moving through the space. “Here is where the sample are organized and subdivided according to type. We do all kind of analyses of olive oil, wine, water, soil, leaves, basically anything that is needed by clients. Here we subdivide and organize according to priority.” To the left were cabinets containing samples of what looked like mostly wine at the time of our visit. As we turned the corner to a larger lab space, more people were moving around in white lab coats. A dot matrix printer's high pitched-buzz filled the room.

Farida dove into telling us about the analyses they carried out for wine, but Filippo politely stopped her asking that we could focus mostly on olive oil. “Of course” she responded, before restarting where she left off with the analysis of wines.

We eventually made it to the analysis of olive oils where Farida explained that analyses were based mostly on what was required in the disciplinaries of denominations that individual clients were trying to obtain, which for them was majority folks seeking the DOP or IGP designation but not all. The printer continued to buzz loudly in the background as she listed off the types of analyses from measuring peroxides, polyphenols, vitamins, the pH, to the composition of fatty acids, and the aromatic compounds. explained that clients hoping to obtain denominations had to provide lab results proving that they meet the standards laid out in disciplinaries, the rules and regulations that have to be followed to gain the denomination. Disciplinaries for olive oil do not only outline the cultivars to be used, the geographic space of production, or the methods to be used, but actually list chemical composition characteristics that have to be met. For Chianti Classico DOP oil acidity has to be lower than .5%, peroxides have to be lower than a maximum of 12, labs have to measure extinction at ultraviolet K232, oils must have a high oleic acid content of around 72%, oils must have a high total phenolic content of more than 150 ppm, and high tocopherolic (vitamin E) content of more than 140ppm.

“We analyze of course the DOP, IGP, and then, of course, the oils that we want to export need to have these types of reports, and then of course if we get any from elsewhere, very unlikely that they come here but maybe, they have to be analyzed too” Farida carried on. The lab processed mostly oils from the surrounding area, which for

them would be the Chianti Classico DOP and Toscano IGP regions, but some farms chose to produce without the denominations or were from outside the technical zonal boundaries.

In addition to the critical characteristics necessary for obtaining denominations, Farida explained that they could further analyze oils to give producers the breakdown of aromatic or volatile chemicals in the oil. While phenols and tocopherols were hallmarks of Tuscan oil, the products that made it spicy and bitter; and while oleic acid, acidity, and peroxides had the most to do with extra virginity in terms of defectiveness; the volatile compounds were the ones that really made the oils taste differently. I recognized these compounds from the flavorist Donato who had spoken during the AIRO training course. “Not unless you’re really experienced do you know what to do with these kinds of results. Most people use them in helping to understand how oils should taste. Like if I taste something, I can look and see exactly what compounds are creating that flavor. Most people use them for tasting notes. But unless you actually taste the oil, these compounds will not help you much,” explained Farida.

The mention of tasting led her to the second part of the analyses that the oil undertakes but that they did not personally oversee. “We do all this and we will catch if phenols are not high enough or that peroxides are too high but in the end, the taste test is important. That can reveal things that the lab test maybe did not or there is something else that happened to the oil that causes defects.” Farida led us quickly out the lab, back down the hallway, and then out the sliding doors through which we had come. Once outside she slipped back in to remove her lab coat and to put down a clipboard she had managed to pick up somewhere in route of our tour.

We walked back down the hallway to the glass room filled with cubicles I had observed on the way in. “The tasting room” she announced. This was the space where the panel of testers would gather to evaluate oil samples and deem them as either defective or defect-free. I was intimately familiar with the process after working with Filippo and AIRO. “So you know,” Farida nodded, “If there is a defect in the oil, even if the lab says it meets all other criteria....” she trailed off drawing a line across her throat with her thumb. She had relaxed considerably after she took her white lab coat off. The disqualification Farida indicated with her gesture was a disqualification for both extra virgin status as well as any hope the oil had for gaining a denomination. The second part of the characteristics section of most disciplinaries right after the chemical characteristics were the sensory ones to be assessed by professional tasters.

In the lab, technoscientific interventions like chemical analysis and detailed documentary practices are methods for creating transparency; they are meant to reveal and record the truth of what the product is in minute details. Increasingly in the face of anxieties about food safety, technoscientific methods of regulation bear the badge of increased public trust. Data and reports are given heightened weight as evidentiary support.

However, despite the focus on and effort in providing these types of analyses and reports, taste is still the final test. The perceptions of professional tasters can negate the work of chromatography and dot matrix printers. While tasting would seem to fit well within the realm of *techne*, as a form of bodily knowledge, it too is highly regimented and structured, attempting to insert a technoscientific boost to judgements based on skill. As I had learned from the AIRO course, tasting involves repetitive experience, standardized

measures and methods of recording, careful control of the environment in which tasting occurs, and other lengths to improve the objectivity of the process. Despite the effort to give tasting the trappings of a technoscientific endeavor, the bodily experience of tasting is still the final ritual of verification for high quality extra virgin olive oil either through conferring extra virgin status or including the product in denominations of origin.

### **Big Oil in Chianti**

As we pulled up to Castel del Chianti, Filippo warned me that I would not be allowed to make an audio recording inside because they had supposedly been involved in some of the scandals around olive oil. He did not know if the rumors were true, but thought it was best to follow their lead as to if I could take pictures or notes; he promised to help me piece everything together afterwards if I was not. As we waited inside the small, ficus-infested lobby, Filippo struck up a conversation with the woman coming through the door, the sister of the man that we were going to meet, who in turn was the son of the “big boss.”

Massimo came down the stairs and started our tour through their facilities, which was overwhelming. Giant metal oil cannisters at least 10 feet tall filled the warehouse space. Each cannister was labeled with what it contained and its origins. As we walked, I observed labels indicating Italy, Tunisia, Portugal, Spain, Greece, and Morocco. “This is the holding area” Massimo explained. From the holding area we moved to down some steps into their labs where they tested the oils that came from all over the world. “We do our own testing because it’s easier and we can test for a lot more,” Massimo explained holding up a lab report outlining what they test for. Page after page, he kept flipping and

when he finally told us it was pesticides, both Filippo and I were shocked at the amount. He explained that they test for 500 pesticides. The wall behind him was covered in binders all filled with these types of reports.

We moved on to the next step of their process to a room with a metal pipe coming through the wall and connecting to a large humming machine. Massimo directed our attention to a window the underside where we could see oil flowing through slowly. This was their cleaning station, where the oil was filtered to remove any potential contaminants from either their origins or the shipping process. He explained that the oils arrive from various places unfiltered, then once testing is complete, the oil passes through cellulose filters, stored and blended with other oil supplies, then shipped out to various sellers and consumers. In the next room, even larger metal cannisters lined the walls at least 30 feet high. These containers had detailed sheets taped to them that Massimo explained contained their origins, which mixture was in the cannister, batch numbers, and other critical tracing information. From there they were bottled. Massimo showed us large wooden palettes piled high with bottles, each one swaddled in plastic sheet wrap. I recognized a few brands including ones sold at the grocery stores near my home in Albuquerque, NM.

In this context, tests, reports, and documentation appeared to have an even heightened importance than in the lab or any other production setting I had visited during fieldwork. The practices here contrasted dramatically against other contexts beyond simply volume of documentation but that they were documents used specifically in the production, processing, and tracking of oils rather than for the purposes of describing the product (Cavanaugh 2016). These types of documents proliferate often times to replace

trust (Shore 2008). Especially in a production facility that was representative of the globalized, industrialized foodscape, trust is not necessarily in great supply.

These documents, because of their material presence and ability to endure beyond the presence of the oils they are attached to, create traceability (Cavanaugh 2016). At the same time, as they track and report attempting to produce transparency, they produce a “conceptual space beyond the control of audit” (Dunn 2007: 37 cited in Cavanaugh 2016). While a great deal of information is recorded, it opens the possibility for other information to not be recorded. Tracking olive oils from various parts of the Mediterranean, running tests to verify they are olive oil, tracking them as they pass through the building, checking for pesticides, all shrink in this context to the fact that they had to perform these checks because the life of the oil prior to arriving at the facility was not accounted for in as great of detail within their documentary practices.

Tasting was also conspicuously absent from this context. The facility was not generally open to the public for visiting and based on Massimo’s explanation to me, most oils were bound for export. In essence it fills a very different niche in the oil industry than places like the Fattoria Ramerino or even the larger producers like Dievole. For those types of companies and the oils they produce, documentary practices describing their products and tasting are critical components for producing their reputations as quality and authentic; it is a key way that they differentiate themselves from producers/distributors like Castel in Chianti.

## **Conclusion**



The plans Marco described to me regarding Dievole's planned olive oil facility appeared to be facilitating the generation of transparency to an extreme extent, using practices found across all the contexts discussed thus far – the market, the lab, and the industrial facility – in order to communicate authenticity to visitors and consumers in general. At the market, the performance of traceability hinged on the interactions of consumers and producers, the supposed closing of the gap produced by modernity in our food system, and the alienation of modern life in general. At Dievole, this de-alienating presentation is taken a step further and places consumers not only in contact with producers but is situated in the very origins of the product itself. Olive oil presented in the space of Dievole is produced from the trees that visitors can observe directly outside the windows.

Dievole also made a conscious choice to make all parts of the production process visible to visitors through glass walls, attempting to (literally) create transparency. Here the documentary practices of production are important for internal operations of the facility, but the performance of the same tasks reported in them become visible to visitors. Education around those processes too is passed on to visitors, similar to education that occurs in the market space. However, here visitors can learn about and witness production for themselves.

While the openness of the production facilities and grounds to visitors is not unique to Dievole, as can be observed at any number of other farms or ecotourism sites throughout Italy, what is a unique aspect is the inclusion of the laboratory in the field of vision for visitors. These spaces are usually in separate locations not attached to production facilities, like the BravoItalia lab, and not open to the public. In the case of

Dievole's proposal, the lab and the technoscientific interventions into olive oil production and quality control would be made transparent for consumers. This does double duty – producing transparency through the production of chemical analyses but also in the presentation of those processes to a public.

Generally, Marco hoped that the intensity with which he intended to expose all parts of their olive oil production would translate into equally intense transparency for consumers, who would take it in combination with their education gained through the exhibits as evidence of authenticity. However, it was critical to him that tasting be involved. For one, it was a crucial part of the production and certification process, and two, it served as a way to further ground verification of authenticity in the bodily experience of visitors. As discussed before, tasting could provide a ritual of verification for the product in allowing participants to play the role of connoisseur and make their own judgements on quality, confirm that they are unable to detect aspects supporting the need for specialized training and recognizing the oil as an elite product, or confirming the presence of specific characteristics indicative of terroir. However, for this exhibit, taste would be highly regimented much like a professional tasting to help lend it a technoscientific boost by using proper protocol and tasting tools. Tasting, because of its combination of techne and technoscience, assumes an important role in not only production and certification but in communicating authenticity to consumers.

## Conclusion

One of the most common questions I get when people hear that my dissertation is about olive oil is “Well which olive oil should I use?” Usually we laugh and I’m able to shake off the inquiry, but my honest response is that I have no idea. What my research illuminated for me was that the categories of real/fake, good/bad, authentic/inauthentic are constructed, reconstructed, and shift according to the ideologized perspectives of those with whom I was interacting. The engagements around olive oil, tasting and discerning terroir, were acts that produced the very axes of differentiation (Gal and Irvine 2019) used to understand how to describe and categorize the product. Taste sensations of particular flavors, chemicals, and textures within oils did not inherently carry with them meaning, but rather require meaning-making practice. The signs and sensations were assigned meaning according to perspectives on quality and authenticity that were then rhematized (Gal and Irvine 2019) into the oils. The tastes were understood to reflect their points of production and stand in for systems of production that could be contrasted based on authenticity, scale, quality, and industrialization.

In the context of social anxiety and panic around olive oil, various actors including those that appear in this work, vied for a position to influence the revalorization of the product. When regulations and labelling seemed to be failing to protect the public, individuals were saddled with the responsibility to figure out what oils were authentic. Efforts to distinguish high quality olive oils from the everyday cooking oils intersected with these anxieties. The people with whom I worked, turned to terroir, “the taste of place” (Trubek 2008) as an answer to the desire to distinguish their oils. Terroir functions through the perception of signs (flavors) as being indexes of their

contexts of production. Particular flavors are associated with how they were produced, and together they form the terroir of the product. Terroir is then seen as a natural material part of the object rather than semiotically produced through interactions among those people who perceived and assigned meaning to flavors.

Terroir was presented as an answer to anxiety and a way to distinguish oils because of the perception that it was an inherent quality of the product. Whatever labels or marketing materials said about a product, one could taste the differences for themselves. However, along with the distinguishing of the product through acts of differentiation, actors also produced different social bodies. The enactments of expertise tied to the perception, description, and comparison of terroir produce not only the object of terroir and therefore the quality of oils, but also the social structures that support the taste community that consolidates around it. This desire to distinguish products as high-quality appears to be at the forefront of the efforts by groups like AIRO (Chapter 4). We see a disregard for terroir as a strictly geographic term as long as it meant quality. As Chef Matia Barciulli disclosed to me one day after an AIRO lesson: “honestly, I don’t care where oils come from as long as they are good and people use them correctly.” His statement to me was said in almost a hushed way as if his opinion might not go over well with other participants in the course. However, his emphasis on “good” (meaning quality as well as pleasurable to eat) and correct usage pointed right to the ways that people distinguish some olive oils as elite, quality products from those that people use incorrectly or that may not be “good.” These same distinctions came up every time someone told me to not cook with olive oil, or how to store it, or the flavors I should be appreciating. All things that did not matter for or were absent in industrial or low-quality

products. Another hint as to the primacy of this effort is in the areas where efforts like AIRO are focusing- restaurants, chefs, sommeliers, cookbook writers. These actors all engage in arenas that are highly classed or intersect with the tourist economy in powerful ways.

However, because terroir is so intimately tied to geography and culture, these axes of differentiation around quality were always already intertwined with other axes of differentiation that intersect with the concept. For example, the tying of quality to localness imbricated ideas about the contrast between localities, between regions, between Italians and non-Italians. As we have seen, these axes of differentiation extend through time and across scales, connection how people talk about olive oil to how they contrast between the north and south, between regions, and between Italy and elsewhere. In Chapter 3, even in her efforts to communicate how to identify quality and safety in olive oil, Lucia engaged with multiple axes of differentiation linking ideas of authenticity, goodness, and quality to places and people. In identifying and attaching meaning to taste sensations, one can observe how people produce the association of local with good and foreign with dangerous. That simple construction extends well beyond food in the underlying social anxiety of Italy, running parallel to fears about the presence of immigrants. Heritage foods, like olive oil, whose narratives already contain elements of the potential for disappearing, gain renewed importance in times where the people and places they represent seem to also be at risk.

In chapter 1 I explored the history of Italian foodways to illuminate the constructed nature of heritage discourses. I argue that the project of Italian nationalism is always incomplete because of its insistence on unity through diversity. The diverse

elements that the nation seeks to contain, in the form of regionalisms and local identity, resist containment; and while they are used to support national identity reveal its slippages. At the same time, the place of non-Italian immigrants within Italy is still yet to be fully negotiated, with them being actively held outside of Italian national identity because of their “unassimilability.” These tensions recapitulate the infamous Southern question, with the role of the “other” played by southern Italy in relation to the north, the region to the peninsula, and immigrants in relation to Italians. Olive oil figures into these relationships because as a heritage food it stands as a symbol of identity linking together people and place. It encompasses and is used in negotiating these frictions of identity.

Chapter Two argued that the “scandal” of adulterated olive oil in Italy demonstrates the connections between realms of anxiety through discursive linkages equating foreignness with danger. It expanded on the anxiety produced through conditions of an incomplete national project, the tensions between regionalism and nationals, and the increasing presence of immigrants discussed in Chapter 1, to show how food is tied into a broader condition of social anxiety. Social anxiety encompasses not only the issues explained in the first chapter, but also concerns around an unfathomably large and complex global industrial food system manifesting in fears about safety and healthfulness of products.

In Chapter 3 and 4, I argue that terroir is 1) used a key tool for people who are concerned with evidence of origins, healthfulness, and safety in olive oil and 2) regardless of material reality, is chiefly produced through discursive practices. Further, tasting as a method for discovering terroir is a way in which terroir is further naturalized into a product; terroir functions through the elision of its discursive roots by attaching

meaning to sensory experience. People see terroir as an inherent part of the material reality of a product rather than a discursive or cultural artifact. While Chapter 3 dove into amateurs' usage of "rules of thumb," Chapter 4 focused on a professional taster training course to illuminate the ways connoisseurs and experts use intersubjective agreement to approach objective evaluations of taste experiences. While these practices produce both terroir and the taste community, they also naturalize terroir as an object on its own rather than discursively produced as well as obfuscate experts' and connoisseurs' participation in the creation of social relations that structure their positions as experts and connoisseurs. These chapters undermine the categories of good/bad, authentic/inauthentic, real/fake, or defective/quality in which participants are attempting to place oils. Finally, Chapter 5 argued that taste is a central ritual of verification in not only the production of terroir but in producing transparency and authenticity of products and experiences. Regardless of their successful use of the expert register or their individual ability to make terroir legible, the practice of engaging in the register is all that is needed to produce authenticity.

In conclusion, this dissertation shows that while through the discursive production of terroir as a tool for identifying authenticity, quality, and veracity, actors in the very same moment are also involved in producing the foils of inauthenticity, defects, and falsehood. Neither side of these dichotomies could exist without the other. Attempts at identifying the clues that prove that an oil is "real" in the "scandal" of adulterated oil requires that there is the threat of an oil being "fake." Producers and consumers use terroir to prove to themselves and others the veracity and authenticity of products, and therefore upholding the cultural and economic value of their oils. These processes

naturalize these categories as already existing rather than constantly reconstructed social products – which leads people to ask questions about which oils are real and which are fake in the first place.



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