

Film Reviews

Food on the Go.

By Mercedes Cordova.

Brava Cine and 39 Films, 2017.

66 minutes. Streaming format, color.

Food on the Go, directed by Mercedes Cordova and available on Netflix, is an engaging exploration of what happens to cuisines when migrants carry ingredients, traditions, and food memories from their home regions to countries abroad. Cordova spotlights Italians in Argentina and the United States, the two countries that received the majority of Italy's overseas migrants during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While the focus is on Italians, *Food on the Go* raises questions about food and migration for other groups of mobile people, both historically and today. The film illuminates issues that will be familiar to food studies and migration scholars: how culinary cultures transform with migration and integration; how food traditions factor into the making of both identity and community in the diaspora; how supplying familiar foods to conationals offered migrants entrepreneurial opportunities; and how migrant foodways influenced the consumption habits of eaters in their host societies. *Food on the Go* covers these topics and more in an accessible and lively manner while inviting audiences to feel mobile themselves as they zip back and forth between Italy, Argentina, and the United States.

The strengths of the film are threefold. First, *Food on the Go* contrasts the insights of experts—academics, chefs, and food industry professionals—against the voices of ordinary immigrants and their descendants—mainly home cooks and entrepreneurs. This combined top-down and bottom-up perspective provides a wide range of viewpoints while rendering visible the tremendously contested nature of food. For example, the film opens in the kitchen of Hillary Lindsay in Chester, New York, who is preparing a “very Italian meal” of spaghetti and meatballs, using her Italian grandmother's recipe. The film then cuts to Sara Jenkins, a Tuscan immigrant, trained chef, and owner of the trattoria Porsena in Manhattan, who notes that “nobody ever ate spaghetti and meatballs in Italy.” While both women use food to celebrate family rooted in Italy, their divergent opinions over this particular dish reveal how mass migration has influenced understandings of what constitutes Italian food. Similarly, the film takes viewers to Naples, where they are introduced to Antonio Pace, president of the Associazione Verace Pizza Napoletana (the True Neapolitan Pizza Association), whose goal, in Pace's words (translated in the subtitles), is to “defend the parenthood of pizza in the city of Napoli” by

training pizza chefs in the art of genuine pizza making. Neapolitan pizza, Pace argues, is “the fakest of all the fake Italian products in the world.” The film then carries us across the southern Atlantic to two well-known pizzerias in Buenos Aires, where *porteño* (of Buenos Aires) pizza makers declare that Argentines have improved on traditions of pizza eating brought by Italian migrants. Horacio Bortilla from El Cuartito pizzeria tells the camera, “It’s like we think that pizza is from here. Ours, let’s say, Argentine.”

Rather than take sides, *Food on the Go* embraces the contradictions that emerge from the juxtaposition of these various and conflicting voices, challenging viewers to raise their own questions about connections between migration, eating, and cuisines. The film is at its best when it takes us into the modest kitchens, clamorous street festivals and markets, and busy restaurants of New York City and Buenos Aires, where we get to hear the stories that everyday descendants of Italian migrants tell themselves about their role in the creation of cuisines, both Italy’s and those of their host countries. Italian culinary gatekeepers like Maurizio Maddaloni of the Premio Ospitalità Italiana in Rome (who calls Italian-style Parmesan cheese “American garbage”) and Ruggero Larco of Milan’s Accademia Italiana della Cucina (who describes pasta carbonara made with cream as an example of a “dangerous” variation of the true Italian dish) may come across as less sympathetic, due to their bombastic denunciations of migrant variations, but the film takes their concerns seriously, as should viewers. The film encourages audiences to think critically about issues concerning food and globalization, such as culinary tourism, authenticity, cultural appropriation, and unregulated capitalism.

The film’s second strength is its focus on both Argentina and the United States as migrant destinations. *Food on the Go* cleverly rebuffs the idea that any single nation-state can claim full ownership over a global cuisine. Its comparative framework demonstrates how migrant food cultures, and subsequently global perceptions of “Italian” food, were shaped not only by ongoing ties to Italy but by nation-specific differences in these two societies. The film takes us to the Argentine Pampas where we meet Marta de Bauducco in the town of Humberto Primo (Santa Fe province) who prepares *asado* (BBQ) beef ribs *a la parrilla* (on the grill), and we learn about how Italian migrants hurriedly increased their meat consumption, helping make *asado* the Argentine national dish. We visit local celebrations, the result of past chain migrations of *paesani* from villages in Italy to the Americas, such as the Festival of the Bagna Cauda in Humberto Primo, where *piemontesi* celebrate their version of the hot Italian dipping sauce, or the annual religious *giglio* feast in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, started by immigrants from Nola (Naples province, Campania), where today people enjoy *zeppole* (fried dough balls dusted with powdered sugar) and fried calamari. Just as viewers learn about the importance of regionalism in Italian

cuisine, they come to appreciate how place matters in migrant foodways and how those foodways were transformed by new and absent ingredients in their host countries.

Food on the Go's third major contribution is the least explicit but perhaps most important. By showcasing migrants in Italian and Italian-style food businesses today—both those in the diasporas and in Italy—the film makes critical connections between the historic movements of people from Italy and contemporary migrants while showing how non-Italians contribute to “Italian” cuisine and global food systems more generally. We meet Mexican migrant Arturo, who works at Cozzi Pizza in Brooklyn. “Mangia pizza. Tacos,” Arturo says lightheartedly to the camera. At the restaurant Spiagge di Napoli in Buenos Aires we meet a Paraguayan migrant who “started with nothing” and learned everything he knows about Italian cooking from the owner. The film’s ending features a Sikh family working on a farm in Villafalletto (Cuneo province), Piedmont; a young Indian woman there explains that she feels, as do other Indians in Italy, “like fish out of water.” *Food on the Go* flips the script, reminding viewers that today, Italy—like the United States and Argentina—are migrant-receiving, rather than migrant-sending, countries and argues that immigrants play a needed, but not necessarily welcomed, part in agricultural and food businesses worldwide.

That migrants feel like fish out of water in Italy’s food industries is one of the less optimistic aspects of migration and food. *Food on the Go* would have benefited from a more robust reflection on how discrimination and racism also shaped migrants’ food experiences and the construction of an Italian cuisine. The lack of attention to prejudice could have been solved with additional historical context. Engaging, critical commentary is provided by food studies scholars such as Hasia Diner, Fabio Parasecoli, Massimo Montanari, Patricia Aguirre, and Daniel Balmaceda. However, the film could have extended their conversations to better situate Italian migration within a longer history of nativism. For instance, the film gives viewers the impression that Italian migration to the Americas was a mostly post–World War II phenomenon; this is suggested in the film’s opening, which presents news footage of war-torn Italy and forlorn-looking migrants entering receiving centers in New York City and Buenos Aires. A broadcaster’s voice proclaims that Italians “quickly incorporated into the economy . . . they are home now.” But this did not reflect mainstream societies’ attitudes toward Italians, most of whom arrived in the Americas before the war, when anti-immigrant sentiment led to much social, political, and economic marginalization of them along with other groups. How did discrimination, as well as integration, both before and after the war, influence migrant foodways and ideas of “Italian” cuisine? The film’s predominantly celebratory tone detracts slightly

from its otherwise brilliant treatment of cuisines made possible by circulating people and food.

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Borsalino City.

By Enrica Viola.

Una Films, 2016.

78 minutes. Streaming format, color.

Enrica Viola's *Borsalino City* is a fascinating and much-needed documentary about the history of the renowned hat company—a tale of feuding cousins, calculated brand development, and the power of cinema. The birthplace of this global brand was the Italian city of Alessandria (Piedmont region), and its father was Giuseppe Borsalino.

Borsalino City moves chronologically through the company's history, which began in 1857 after its founder returned from apprenticing at Berteil, the famed Paris-based hatmaker. Giuseppe and his brother Lazzaro caught fashion and fortune at just the right time. Their hats became wardrobe staples of the elite, topping the heads of kings and statesmen literally around the world. Quality was Borsalino's calling card. In order to expand, they diversified their offerings and audience, sent salesmen around the world, won prizes at the world's fairs, and built an enormous factory in Alessandria. Borsalino cleared the way for "Made in Italy" to dominate the luxury goods market.

The story of the company itself is upstaged by amazing archival footage of factory life and by oral histories of laborers, taken in the mid-1950s. The main strength of the movie is the richness of these historical sources. The stories of the people themselves, their feelings about their work, and their respect for the leaders of the firm paint a picture of a company town where the workers actually liked the bosses. In this respect, we are reminded of the paternalistic mentality of many Italian family-owned fashion companies (Zenga is another example). In *Borsalino City*, we see the exceedingly rare synergy that can exist between owners and laborers and a respect that comes from the reciprocity of need. This respect is largely absent from the history of the clothing industry, and it exudes from this film.

Whereas these remarkable sources give the film its heart, the strong tie to the history of cinema gives it intellectual breadth and, at many times, depth. Borsalino grew as the world of motion pictures grew, and its hats were worn by