

Migrant Marketplaces: Food and Italians in North and South America.

By Elizabeth Zanoni.

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290 pages.

What do migrants bring with them when they migrate? And how do they contribute once established in their new locales? Finally, and much more specifically, why is Italian food so ubiquitous in the United States and Argentina? In this engaging book, Zanoni tackles these questions by focusing on the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Italian diaspora. As the largest number of Italian migrants and products during that time went to New York City in the United States and to Buenos Aires, Argentina, Zanoni centers her research on these major port cities rather than on all of North and South America. She coins the term “migrant marketplaces” to describe these and other “urban spaces defined by material and imagined transnational linkages between mobile people and mobile goods” (2).

Materially, Zanoni focuses on the importation, promotion, distribution, and consumption of Italian foodstuffs. She argues that, in both New York and Buenos Aires, “food served as the central commodity around which migrants defined and redefined themselves as gendered and global consumers” (6). She also sometimes turns her attention to nonfood exports such as textiles, but *Migrant Marketplaces* is very much a food history that highlights the Italian diaspora’s profound impact on the foods people both within and outside of this demographic have consumed in Argentina and the United States.

One of the most important contributions of this book is that it allows us to better understand the experiences of Italian migrants (a term Zanoni prefers to *immigrants*) in New York City and Buenos Aires in the same analytical frame. Like Samuel Baily’s (1999) *Immigrants in the Land of Progress: Italians in New York City and Buenos Aires, 1870–1914*, Zanoni’s book reveals the particularities in each setting that shaped transient Italians’ experiences there. She infuses this fruitful comparison with a new focus that highlights not only Italian migrants’ entrepreneurial agency but also the intersectional opportunities and constraints they faced based on dominant ideas about race and gender.

By carefully combing the era’s Italian-language press from both New York City and Buenos Aires and drawing extensively on other sources, such as census data and relevant laws and legislation in areas like trade, the author illuminates commonalities as well as differences in migrants’ economic and social status in the two cities. For example, in chapter 2 she examines the factors that allowed Italian migrants in Buenos Aires to penetrate and influence the market there more thoroughly than their compatriots in New York City did. She argues that because Italian migrants in Buenos Aires outnumbered other migrant groups

to a greater degree than was the case in New York City, they were able to wield more political and economic influence outside their diasporic community in Argentina than did their counterparts in the United States.

Zanoni also demonstrates that divergent ideas about race and ethnicity played a large role in distinguishing migrants' experiences and their entrepreneurial potential in each locale. Whereas in New York City Italians found themselves and their foods considered as "other," in Buenos Aires Italians were able to use shared Latin roots (*latinità*) to position themselves and their products as familiar, even civilizing. In contrast, in chapter 3, Zanoni demonstrates that Italian migrants in New York City were better able to build upon the United States' more developed industrial and manufacturing sectors to produce and market a wide range of "*tipo italiano*" goods, such as cheese and pasta, made in the United States rather than imported from Italy. In the United States, this growing economy of domestically produced Italian food products often posed problems for Italian efforts to increase exports to New York City and other U.S. markets. Given the slower pace of Argentinian industrialization and the effect of *latinità* in turn-of-the-century Buenos Aires, the biggest threat to Italian imports was not from domestic products but rather from other imports (especially from Spain) that passed themselves off as Italian.

In the second half of the book, Zanoni shows how World War I changed the dynamics of Italian immigration and consumption, as well as Italians' and Italian migrants' ideas about the homeland. Before the war, Zanoni explains, Italian elites sought to bolster their nation's emasculated reputation within Europe (stemming in part from Italy's lack of a successful colonial empire) by exporting its men and markets. However, Zanoni demonstrates that even before the United States entered the conflict in 1917 World War I had had an impact across the Atlantic—curtailing male migration to *le due Americhe* (the two Americas) and instead promoting family reunification and Italian nationalism. For its part, the United States passed restrictive immigration laws in 1924, which significantly limited Italian immigration and pushed more migrating Italians to choose Argentina. Zanoni draws our attention to the ways in which Italian migrants in both South and North America understood Italian nationalism as embodied in their consuming Italian goods and sending American goods back to their "homeland in need." Such transnational dynamics helped feminize the migrant consumer marketplace in the 1920s and 1930s, alongside the gradual equalizing of gender ratios in Italian communities in the Americas.

Business interests from the United States stepped up their sales pitch to Latin American women, including Italian migrants in Buenos Aires, during the early twentieth century. In chapter 6, Zanoni argues that during the Mussolini era there was a keen tension between the Fascist government's desire to discourage Italian women abroad from U.S.- and Western-style consumption

and the leading role migrant women played as both producers and consumers in sustaining local migrant marketplaces and Italian identities. Like other local women, female migrants from Italy took the lead in deciding what their families would or would not consume as the mass market expanded.

In her powerful epilogue, Zanoni builds on pioneering works by Donna Gabaccia, Simone Cinotto, Jeffrey Pilcher, and other food historians to argue that the ubiquity of Italian food across the Americas should not be understood as simply the result of the expansion of Italian food culture but rather of a history in which Italian migrants had significant agency. More specifically, Zanoni reveals that the taste for pasta with red sauce in the United States—*pasta con tuco* in Argentina—did not happen by itself, but rather through the initiatives of Italian migrant entrepreneurs.

Building upon Bailly's path-breaking comparison, Zanoni's book takes our understanding of the Italian diaspora in some productive new directions. Perhaps most important, her study emphasizes that we should understand this transatlantic migration from Italy to the Americas as a movement not just of transient people but also of "mobile goods." Second, Zanoni extends her comparative analysis of the impact of the Italian diaspora in New York City and Buenos Aires beyond World War I through the 1930s, allowing us to see the differences that this war, family reunification, and female migrants made during this dynamic era. Third, by foregrounding an intersectional gender-based analysis, Zanoni shows us how specific, hierarchal ideas of gender and race shaped the particular dynamics of diasporic Italians' identity construction.

As *Migrant Marketplaces* effectively argues, "Italian migrants' choices and strategies drove the history of Italian food in the Americas, and they did so within large structures in Italy, Argentina, and the U.S.—labor demands, gendered assumptions about production and consumption, trade and migration policies, and racial hierarchies—that constrained and guided what, where, and how people ate" (189). Enriching our understanding of how migrant contributions and experiences are shaped in historically specific ways by national and transnational policy, food, consumerism, and ideas about race and gender, Zanoni's book will resonate for many scholars and students who study these topics in the Americas and beyond.

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Work Cited

Bailly, Samuel L. 1999. *Immigrants in the Land of Promise: Italians in Buenos Aires and New York City, 1870–1914*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.