

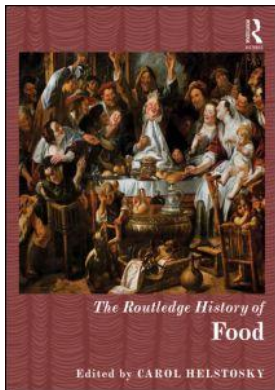
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Part III

1900–present

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THE EVOLUTION OF A FAST FOOD PHENOMENON

The case of American pizza

Bonnie M. Miller

Victor Ripp, an American author born from Russian emigrants, visited Moscow in the late 1980s and was struck by the Russian people's fascination with the "quasi-mystical" aura of American goods, including fast food cuisine. "People were still talking about the Astro Pizza truck that recently circulated through the streets around the Kremlin," he wrote, as if eating a slice of pizza enabled one to ingest the experience of being American, even for a fleeting moment.¹ Although Cold War communist ideology framed American materialist desires as wasteful, Ripp detected a note of "deep longing" in Soviet perceptions of American extravagance that seemed to coexist with an adherence to their own values (and food customs) as the "things that matter," to use the words of Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev in the famous kitchen debates with Vice President Richard Nixon in 1959. Just as Nixon touted the dishwashers and material goods in the American home for liberating housewives from daily drudgeries, fast food has taken on a similar symbolic resonance, as a byproduct of the quick-paced, mobile American lifestyle. George Ritzer calls this process the "McDonaldization" of society, whereas the values of fast food franchising have assumed a central place in American business and popular culture in the generations following World War II.² Fast food, he argues, connotes much more than quick preparation foods sold at low cost; rather, it is a business model that privileges efficiency, conformity, mobility, and convenience over quality, artistry, and consumer comfort. Fast food restaurants characteristically standardize food preparation techniques, often using frozen, precooked, and prepackaged food, limited menus, and self-service.³ Despite the culinary homogenization that the global conquest of pizza seems to suggest, makers of the cuisine exhibit remarkable national, regional, and local differentiation. The story of pizza, as it was reinvented from "Italian" to "Italian-American" to "American" cuisine over the last century, exemplifies how pizza's categorization as "fast food" and as an "ethnic food" has evolved over time in relation to important transformations in American diet and culture.

The fast food industry took off during the 1950s, with the rise of the big chains like McDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and Burger King, among others. Still, earlier roadside restaurant chains, such as White Castle, A & W Root Beer, Friendly's and Howard Johnson's, began peppering the American landscape as early as the 1920s and 1930s. By the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth, the Industrial Revolution had

created a market for feeding hungry workers, leading to the rise of lunch wagons and street vendors, which evolved into lunchrooms, cafeterias, diners, and chain restaurants.⁴

The fast food industry owes its spectacular rise, in part, to the capitalist ingenuity of franchising as a business concept. In a franchising model, franchisees buy into a system with already established name recognition, menus, food suppliers, and advertising. They exist as independent owners and managers but pay royalty fees to the franchisor based on a percentage of profits. By using the capital of small investors, franchisors facilitate the quick spread of a chain without assuming much personal financial risk. The system strives to create uniformity among units, in taste, menu, price, and branding by centralizing standards of operation and food specifications. Brand names provide an identity to restaurants that simplify the selection process for patrons. The ripple effects of franchising are felt not only in changing the pace and selection of the dining experience, but also behind the scenes, in revolutionizing food processing technologies, standardizing management and labor practices, and implementing assembly-line production techniques.

Franchising fast food chains multiplied rapidly in the economic boom of the post-World War II period, with the estimated opening of about 100,000 units nationwide between 1945 and 1960.⁵ As Richard Pillsbury has argued, this change suited the more individualistic urban-industrial society of postwar America, but it also had the effect of revolutionizing American eating habits on a national scale.⁶ Franchises benefited from the mass migration of people out of congested urban areas and into new housing developments in the suburbs. The proliferation of chain restaurants helped foster the customer base for a new suburban mode of eating, one that catered to families with disposable income and cars, who were attracted to quick, family-friendly eating options. As the suburbs grew, the construction of highways, strip malls, and roadside restaurants with sprawling parking lots reconfigured the American landscape. Many roadside eateries adopted identifiable architectural designs, such as the classic red roof of the Pizza Hut chains, with standardized exterior and interiors to build visual recognition of the brand. The continual growth of franchising during the 1970s and 1980s contributed to the shift in the nation's economy from a manufacturing-base to one oriented around a growing service sector. Greater participation of women in the paid labor force as well as new immigrants, after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 abolished the national origins quota system, swelled the supply of workers, many of whom found jobs in the service industry. The exodus of homemakers into paying jobs also had the effect of restructuring household dynamics, creating a need for shortening cooking preparation time. By the 1980s, expansion shifted internationally for many of the largest chains, exporting Americanized fast food across the globe.

While most studies of fast food focus on the transformations of the American diet in the post-World War II period, the essence of fast food, and for my purposes – pizza as a fast food – has had a much longer history. Antonio Pace, President of the Vera Pizza Napoletana, an association striving to preserve high standards for Neapolitan pizza, says with pride: “La pizza è il più antico fast food,” which means, “Pizza is the oldest fast food.”⁷ The culinary history of pizza goes at least as far back as the Greeks and Romans, with the consumption of flatbreads, often prepared with olive oil, spices, and at times toppings, as a mainstay of the Mediterranean diet. Pizza began to take more of its modern character in the city of Naples, with the introduction of the tomato to pizza.⁸ In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Naples, pizza became a staple of the urban poor because it was a cheap, filling food that could be sold on the streets to laborers. Purchasing food outside the home was necessary for many Neapolitans because many households did not contain kitchens

with hearths and ovens, in part due to the high cost of fuel.⁹ Bread, prepared with few ingredients, could satiate the poor at low cost. It was, even centuries ago, a quintessential food-on-the-run sold cheaply to the working class, not unlike the New York City pizzeria selling pizza by the slice to passersby on their lunch break.

Despite this history, the modern conception of fast food is most typically likened with the history of the hamburger chain, not the pizzeria. Activists, nationalists, consumer advocates, health officials, environmentalists, and other special interests have resisted the expansion of fast food chains around the globe, and their most visible target has been McDonald's. But many pizza chains, Domino's and Pizza Hut the two largest, have followed similar trajectories of domestic and global expansion as other big chains. *Forbes* reported in 2013 that there are over 66,000 units of US-based fast food restaurants outside the United States, just with respect to the ten largest fast food chains alone. Of these, three are pizza chains: Pizza Hut, with nearly 6,000 restaurants abroad, built 367 new international units in 2012; Domino's Pizza, with nearly 4,500 stores abroad, delivers pizza in over 60 countries; and the newest of the three, Papa John's, has nearly 800 international units and continues to expand.¹⁰ In addition to rapid expansion, the pizza industry experienced a similar process of consolidation as did other segments of the fast food industry in the 1970s and 1980s, with the absorption of smaller outlets by large food corporations; i.e. Pizza Hut sold to PepsiCo in 1977, Pillsbury acquired Totino's frozen pizza in 1975, and Kraft purchased Tombstone frozen pizza in 1986. This shifted ownership from smaller, family-owned businesses (many of which had ethnic ties to Italy) to large corporations. In many cases, the brand names remained intact after acquisition in order to preserve the label's associations with family, tradition, and rusticity – a marketing decision that likely had the effect of masking the corporatization of pizza for many consumers. The ultimate example of fast food conglomeration was the development of Yum! Brands, incorporating a portfolio of fast food chains (Pizza Hut, Taco Bell, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Long John Silver's, and A & W), with units in over 100 countries.

The pizza industry may have been spared the sharp criticism that other fast food chains face because of the remarkable persistence of independent pizzerias, particularly in the “pizza belt” of the United States (primarily New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut), in withstanding the economic pressures of the larger conglomerates. According to Robert Emerson's analysis of the fast food market in the 1970s, pizza was the only segment of the fast food industry that had yet to overtake the mom-and-pop stores.¹¹ In the 1980s and 1990s, in what some have called the “pizza wars,” standardized pizza chains faced intense competition with each other and independent pizzerias. Perhaps because of the continued coexistence of chain and independent pizza-makers, activists may not have felt as threatened by the power of the big franchises to drive out independent small businesses and limit consumer choice. Quite the opposite, Pizza Hut takes credit for opening up the Midwest to pizza. Brothers Frank and Daniel Carney started the Pizza Hut chain in 1958 in Wichita, Kansas in a region of the country with historically small Italian-American populations. Frank Carney noted that when Pizza Hut first opened, “most of the people had really not eaten pizza; they were experiencing it for the first time.” Pizza Hut assumed much of the risk in introducing the new food to the Midwest, which, according to Carney, paved the way for independent operators to set up shop in the region.¹² According to *Pizza Today's* analysis of the industry in 2007, independent operators continue to retain control of about 46 percent of the pizza market.¹³

For a long time pizza also managed to avoid as fattening a reputation as other popular fast foods, despite the high carbohydrate, sodium, and fat content in its typical preparation. This myth may stem from pizza's ethnic roots, as there was a popular notion that ethnic foods were naturally healthier, due to their reliance on vegetables as well as charbroiling, baking, and stir-frying cooking methods (rather than deep-frying).¹⁴ Livestrong.com, a website dedicated to supporting the health of cancer survivors, continues to peddle this view, praising pizza as a "complete, healthy meal" offering "all of the major food groups when loaded with the right toppings."¹⁵ While the perception of pizza as a "healthier" fast food option still has traction, it is less pervasive today than in past decades. The big pizza chains have trended toward adding more high-fat content items to their menus (like breadsticks, cheesy bread, and chicken wings) and pizzas loaded with greater quantities of meat and cheese. This business inclination likely reflects anticipated consumption patterns. Mintel's consumer research servicing the fast food industry (2012) found that 60 percent of respondents did not care if the pizza was healthy or not when they ate it.¹⁶ Some of Pizza Hut's bestsellers, for example, are its Pepperoni Lovers' and Meat Lovers' pizzas. If one were to measure fast food status by its health content, pizza has certainly caught up to its fast food competitors with respect to caloric indulgence.

Another reason why pizza does not easily conform to the "fast food" prototype is that, unlike the more standardized menus of the hamburger chains, the big pizza franchises learned that they could not universalize the product. The global expansion of McDonald's, by contrast, worked from the opposite mindset. According to John Love, McDonald's international operators had more success changing local eating habits by selling the American system than adapting their menu to suit local food patterns.¹⁷ The Carney brothers of Pizza Hut, however, after having great success with their thin crust pizza in the Midwest, struggled to penetrate the Northeastern market, a region with a larger Italian-American demographic. After researching local culinary preferences, the Carney brothers introduced their highly successful "thick 'n' chewy" crust in 1975 to better suit Northeastern tastes. Pizza styles varied even in states as close geographically as Connecticut and New York. Frank Carney noted that the company had to create two different pizza crusts to service areas that were within 100 miles of each other.¹⁸ The creation and celebration of different regional and local styles of pizza provided at least a superficial segmentation to the market, enough to evince the aura of diversification.

Finally, pizza's ethnic heritage makes it more the exception than the rule in the American fast food industry, especially in the 1950s and 1960s. Its success paved the way for fast food conglomerates to appropriate other Americanized ethnic cuisines, like Tex/Mex.¹⁹ For these reasons, pizza may not be the paradigmatic example of the American fast food industry. Its low production costs, quick preparation, and versatility of consumption have, nonetheless, turned it into a billion-dollar fast food industry, ideal to meet the needs of a mobile and culturally diverse society.

The evolution of pizza

In the mass emigrations of Southern and Eastern Europeans to the United States between 1880 and 1920 came multitudes of Southern Italian peasants fleeing from economic hardship. Many of the new immigrants coalesced into a poor, working class clustered into tenement homes in concentrated urban areas. Preserving familiar food customs was very important to these newcomers, but some adaptation was inevitable. The Americanization

of Italian cuisine first began with the accommodations they had to make to their cooking styles and recipes resulting from the different cookery, utensils, and ingredients available in America. Local food markets catering to Italian clientele served as important social centers in urban Italian-American neighborhoods. Early shopkeepers imported ingredients like olive oil, *salume*, and cheese directly from Italy and prepared breads and sausages in customary fashion for local *paesani*. One observer of the North End in Boston in 1925 demarcated the geographic limits of the area by “the red and green peppers [that] beam out from the shiny purple eggplants, and long strings of onions and garlic [that] hang over the great bunches of rhubarb, or carrots with feathery green tops.”²⁰ The distinctive colors, smells, and spices of Italian-American food staples gave justification to the ghettoization of their communities; largely denigrating the Italian-American diet as unhealthy and distasteful, dominant American middle-class culture, at least prior to the 1920s, perceived these food customs as emblematic of Italian-American social and cultural inferiority.

Italian-Americans in these ethnic enclaves, however, were generally resistant to the Americanizing efforts of social workers, nutritionists, and reformers, who utilized new concepts in home economics to try to bring their eating habits and living conditions more in line with American standards. Even the well-intentioned agents of Americanization cast Italian-Americans as an alien culture and a public health threat, using their food choices and oppositional response to signify the group’s larger ineligibility for social inclusion. Lucy Gillett, who made recommendations for improving Italian-American eating habits to the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor in 1922, took the premise that “The nutrition problem is not all a question of food.” She criticized Italian-American families for making ignorant choices that impacted their health, paying for expensive cheese from Italy, for example, at \$1.50 per pound when three times as much American cheese could be bought, thus forcing the family to sacrifice on items such as milk, causing deficiencies and disease in children.²¹ Likewise, in a study done for the Division of Neighborhood Agencies in New York in 1920, John Daniels put it best when he asked: “What can you expect of the Americanism of the man whose breath always reeks with garlic?” He wrote, “One’s very food affects his Americanism.” Once the new immigration restrictions of the mid-1920s slowed the mass emigrations of Southern Italians, however, these negative attitudes began to change.²²

There are many reasons why mainstream Americans began looking more favorably upon Italian-American food around 1920. For one thing, the scientific discovery of vitamins gave visibility to the preponderance of fruits and vegetables in the Italian-American diet. In addition to acknowledging the nutritional balance of Italian foodways, the US government’s rationing programs during World War I brought forth greater appreciation for the cost-effectiveness of Italian food. The Food Administration held up some Italian-American dishes, like spaghetti, as a model for the nation during wartime because they used little to no meat.²³ By the 1930s, many American cookbooks included recipes for spaghetti, touting the dish as an economical way to fill families in times of need. Also furthering a more inclusive posture toward Italian cuisine was a warming of American political attitudes toward Italy in the 1920s, with Benito Mussolini’s rise to power in 1922, at least until he aligned with Adolf Hitler. Many Americans as yet were unsure about the implications of fascism, and they saw Mussolini as a leader who could modernize Italy. “Spaghetti houses” opened in cities across America in the 1920s, making “Italian” restaurants the most popular “foreign” cuisine in America by the end of that decade.²⁴ Given the popular association between Italian-American food and low cost, it

is not surprising that Italian-American cuisine became the first ethnic food to break into the fast food industry.²⁵

Italian-American restaurateurs contributed to the assimilation of native cuisine by altering dishes to suit the tastes of a diversified Americanized clientele. In this process, they invented new dishes, like spaghetti and meatballs, fettuccine alfredo, and veal parmigiana, that would have been unknown to Italian immigrants by those names. Over time, this hybridized cuisine helped constitute the symbolic trappings of a new, more coherent Italian-American identity (which, at least for the first generation of immigrants, had been based more on village or town affiliation than any unified sense of national Italian identity).²⁶ At least up through the 1950s, many Italian restaurants widened their appeal to non-Italian consumers by capitalizing on stereotypical conceptions of Italian and Italian-American culture and cuisine. Exemplifying one of these establishments was a table d'hôte in Greenwich Village called Gonfarone's, catering initially to local Italians, then bohemian artists and writers in the Village, and ultimately serving an ethnically diverse crowd, according to Maria Sermolino, the daughter of one of the owners. Despite becoming one of the most popular restaurants in the area, the owners of Gonfarone's recognized that their success with non-Italian patrons hinged on performing the familiar roles and constructing the appropriate setting that met popular expectations of Italian dining. The owners, the bus boys, the cooks, and even the swarthy Tuscan bartender, had to speak and "act" Italian.²⁷

Pizza is emblematic of this new food pattern. Most sources cite Gennaro Lombardi's pizzeria on Spring Street, in the heart of New York City's Little Italy, as America's first pizzeria, having obtained the first mercantile license to sell pizza in 1905. Still, pizza remained largely confined to the Italian-American community before World War II. By the 1920s, there were a growing number of family-owned pizzerias in Northeastern cities, where the vast majority of Italian immigrants had settled. With little or no refrigeration, pizza-makers had to obtain all ingredients fresh, especially the mozzarella cheese, which had to be produced and consumed daily.²⁸ For many Italian-Americans, a traditional pizza was a flat, thin bread with salt and oil on it, occasionally with fresh tomatoes, onions, or anchovies added on top. This flat bread was (and still is) customary to the areas of Naples and Rome, known as *pizza bianca* to the Romans and *pizza di pane* to the Neapolitans.²⁹ It is likely that many Italian immigrants had not eaten pizza before arriving in the United States, but once here, the dish acquired a special importance in the building of Italian-American community life. In Cleveland, Ohio, for example, Italian-Americans formed voluntary associations that helped nurture a sense of ethnic group identity, and these were often called "pizza and sausage clubs" because food was integral to their shared experience. Many Italian-American families practiced the custom of exchanging pizzas with other families at Easter, embedding family names into the crust using strips of dough.³⁰

World War II, however, was a major turning point in broadening pizza consumption in the United States. Military service abroad acquainted American soldiers with new places and tastes, like Italian cuisine, sparking interest in ethnic cuisines at home. Even so, the American diet was not accustomed to certain spices and textures, placing limits on such culinary exploration. As pizza became more mainstream in the late 1940s and 1950s, the typical recipe changed to suit the American palate: less garlic, oregano instead of basil, larger pie sizes, and greater quantities of meat-based toppings. By 1957, the *Saturday Evening Post* had taken note of "the tremendous pizza craze that has swept over the country."³¹

The popular press in the 1950s celebrated pizza for becoming a mainstay of the American diet through mythic pronunciations of its lineage from Naples to America.

Exemplifying this story was a *Boston Globe* piece, published in 1954, describing pizza's roots as a dish born in the "fragrant kitchen" of "Mama" in Naples, as she prepared foods for "Papa," coming in from a long day of work in the fields. Of course, pizza historically was a street food in Naples, so the idea of Mama making pizza at home for Papa was an invented tale designed to sentimentalize pizza's domesticated origins. In America, the *Globe* continued, pizza transformed from its bucolic roots into a "special dish at lunch, supper, and parties" easily prepared by Americans of any ethnicity with "Quick-mix" packages. The article cast pizza in nostalgic terms, as a celebration of a glorified traditional past, that had now turned into a prepackaged, fast food ideal for America's quick-paced modern lifestyle.³² This imagined narrative of the food's evolution enabled Americans to take pride in the integration of adapted foods from its diverse ethnic cultures without conceding the homogenizing effects of Americanization and mass production.

Many historians of the immigrant experience write about the generational conflict that existed between first-, second-, and third-generation immigrants regarding the preservation of family customs, language, religion, and other aspects of group identity. Greater inclusion of Italian-American food into the dominant American diet as compared to other ethnic foods functioned to decrease the stigma attached to preserving their food patterns. Many Italian-Americans, particularly of the second generation, had to weigh their desires for acceptance with the cost of abandoning their ethnic traditions. Southern Italian immigrant and teacher Leonard Covello in East Harlem observed how school was a source of turmoil for young Italian-Americans, who faced the peer pressures of Americanization, creating feelings of shame and hostility for the culture of their parents.³³ In describing his own experiences as a schoolboy, he talks about his embarrassment by the "bulky sandwiches of crusty Italian bread heaped with salami, cheese or Italian sausage" sent from home that he felt he had to hide or eat before school.³⁴ The rise in popularity of certain dishes, like spaghetti and pizza, eased this sense of alienation and facilitated inclusion into the host society: Italian-Americans could perform their identities as American and as Italian-American simultaneously through consuming foods that were fast becoming a staple of American youth culture. According to Irvin Child's study of Italian-American immigrants in New Haven, Connecticut, a growing acceptance of Italian-American foods, even an affinity for it, enabled many second- and third-generation immigrants to retain their families' traditional food customs because they faced less outside resistance to restrict it than other ethnic groups.³⁵ Preparing and consuming pizza and other new "Italian-American" dishes helped cultivate a shared ethnic consciousness among a diverse and provincially-minded group of immigrants from Italy. It enabled them to take pride in holding onto their culinary roots, adapted as these might be, while also celebrating their ethnic food's ubiquitous rise in status in American households and restaurants.³⁶

Still, the Americanization of pizza took place, in large part, outside Italian-American communities. The significant impact of non-Italians on the growth and development of the pizza industry after World War II helped to reinvent the ethnic heritage of the dish. Americans of non-Italian heritage co-opted the dish, innovated new recipes for the sauce and crust, and utilized new technologies to maximize production. By 1975, for example, Greek entrepreneurs owned at least one pizzeria in nearly every rural township in Eastern Connecticut, comprising 39 percent of pizzerias in the state, despite the larger demographic of Italian-Americans than Greek-Americans in the state.³⁷ Irish-Americans Tom and Jim Monaghan opened up the first Domino's Pizza in Ypsilanti, Michigan, in 1960. Tom Monaghan built a successful empire based on applying mass production techniques

to pizza-making and creating a business infrastructure conducive to large-scale franchising, despite facing significant setbacks along the way. He kept the operation as simple as possible, offering no non-pizza items, besides beverages, and no dine-in service. When he described the pizza-making process, he did so in the language of maximizing efficiency: to handle the rush, he wrote in his memoir, “Each member of the team has to employ manual dexterity, economy of movement, speed, and quick thinking.”³⁸ Speed in pizza production and delivery time was Domino’s signature skill, itself emblematic of the new fast food culture that seemed to value time over quality. His success rested on cornering the market in college towns and military bases and seeking out more effective tools, like larger ovens and more durable pizza boxes, to streamline production. Peddling pizza’s Italian roots factored remarkably little in Monaghan’s marketing strategy.

The process of Americanizing pizza began with marking the important distinction between national variations of the dish. Symbolizing this break was President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s declaration of American pizza’s independence in 1953, when he publicly stated that he had tasted better pizza in New York than he had ever had in Naples, Italy, prompting a staunch defense of Neapolitan superiority by Admiral Robert Carney, the commander-in-chief of the North Atlantic Treaty Southern European Forces. Whereas pizza was largely unknown in America outside the Italian-American community before World War II, Eisenhower’s statement symbolized the appropriation of pizza as an ethnic food into American national cuisine, a trend that complemented the broader trend toward a homogenization of mass culture occurring in the 1950s. In 1954, *Look Magazine* proclaimed pizza’s newfound “citizenship,” denoting its graduation into Americanized cuisine as a new staple in the repertoire of dishes prepared and consumed routinely in American home kitchens.³⁹ By the early 1950s, pizza had become conventional, with at least 15,000 pizzerias in the United States and widespread supermarket circulation of ready-made refrigerated or frozen pizza.⁴⁰

Even as non-Italian restaurants and cookbooks subsumed pizza into the category of American cuisine, the popular press still hailed its Italian-American heritage. By the late 1960s, the nation’s growing interest in civil rights shifted cultural ideals toward a celebration of diversity and difference, particularly for the nation’s youth. Food became one means of showcasing American pluralism: pizza was all the more “American” due to its ethnic derivation and blend of globally-acquired ingredients. It was thus celebrated for its simultaneous performance of ethnic distinctiveness and mass appeal.⁴¹ Particularly as second- and third-generation ethnic Americans and participants in the counterculture grew dissatisfied with the homogenization of American culture in the 1960s and 1970s, criticizing the fast food industry for its contribution, many large conglomerates revamped their strategy and preached new messages of diversification. The ethnic fast food boom enabled second- and third-generation immigrants and Americans with broadening culinary tastes to share in “ethnic”-style dishes without sacrificing modern convenience.

This nostalgic turn toward the nation’s ethnic past raised the value placed on “authenticity” in food advertising. While this was new for many “ethnic” foods in the 1970s, pizza had blazed the path decades before. Pizza chains, as early as the 1950s, drew on the language and imagery of the “Old Country” to emphasize themes of tradition, distinctiveness, and quality. But the “staged authenticity,” to borrow Dean MacCannell’s term, driving ethnic fast food marketing reproduced a homogenization of another sort, an imagined construction of ethnic difference prescribed, in this case, by stereotypical images of Italian and Italian-American culture.⁴² Pizza Hut’s famous logo, for example, the icon of “Pizza

Pete,” was of an Italian-looking man with swirled moustache and red-checked apron, often tossing a pie into the air. Over time these commodified images of pizza’s Italian identity became so overused that they lost their currency. By the mid-1970s, Lippincott & Margulies, the advertising firm for Pizza Hut, urged the company to retire the little Italian character in favor of a logo featuring the outline of their roof.⁴³

For some pizza chains, like Paul Revere’s Pizza International, Ltd., with stores in Wisconsin, Iowa, and Texas, pizza seemingly lost its “ethnic” status altogether. Tom and Dick Mueller, who founded that company in 1975, marketed their brand with an icon of Paul Revere announcing, “The pizza is coming,” to mark a culinary revolution of a new sort. The Muellers’ playful placement of pizza at the nation’s founding, as part of a newly imagined historical heritage, signified its coming of age as an “all-American” food.⁴⁴ As one food writer in the 1980s put it, “America’s amoré for Italian cooking has been going on for so long and with such intensity that many no longer consider pasta and pizza to be ethnic.”⁴⁵ These renunciations of pizza’s “ethnic” standing due to its widespread consumption raises an important question: does a dish relinquish its “ethnic” status once it becomes a staple of mainstream American food culture? In the case of pizza, its claim to ethnic identification remains highly contested and malleable.

Pizza as fast food

Technological innovations of the 1950s and 1960s revolutionized the pizza-making industry. More efficient gas ovens replaced coal ovens, facilitating higher volume production. Machines designed to knead large quantities of dough replaced the need to do that work by hand. The coming of refrigeration enabled pizza shops to preserve dough and other ingredients for multiple days.⁴⁶ On the East Coast, Greek-American restaurateurs started rolling out the dough early in the morning and refrigerating the dough in the same ten-inch pans that they would bake in, a technique that sped up production. Pizza Hut, like many other big chains, offered franchisees access to a central commissary, providing already prepared frozen dough that could be baked quickly using conveyor ovens.⁴⁷ New food processing techniques, supply houses, mechanisms for distribution, and better cooking apparatus transformed pizza by the 1960s into a commodity for mass production. The effect has been a substantial increase in pizza consumption in the United States and abroad, but to many critics, the standardization and large-scale franchising of the pizza industry has been to the detriment of quality and taste.

Pizza is an ideal fast food. The dish facilitates a limited, single-dish menu while still allowing for significant creative variation through toppings. Different pizza restaurants can make their pizza distinctive by further varying recipes for sauce (from sweet to spicy) and dough thickness. The relative ease of production is coupled with its versatility of consumption, which can take place in a dining establishment, at home, in the car, on the street, at parties, or at school. To expedite delivery and take-out ordering in a culture increasingly reliant on cell phones and other electronic devices, many pizza chains currently utilize online and mobile phone ordering apps and promote through social media, like Facebook and Twitter. And lastly, pizza ingredients are relatively inexpensive, making it an economical option to feed a crowd. Whereas companies like McDonald’s devoted significant resources to driving down the costs of products like beef and potatoes in order to lower prices, pizza-makers had the advantage of cheaper production costs.⁴⁸ Pizza’s acclimation to the post-World War II American diet and lifestyle and its global exportation

stems from three general areas: first, quick preparation and service; second, contextualization as a social food; and third, regional and local differentiation.

Speed, convenience, and delivery

Pizza as a fast food made its mark on the industry with the innovation of home delivery. While the rise of home pizza delivery is generally associated with Domino's Pizza 30-minute delivery guarantee, first implemented in 1967, it was one of many pizza stores utilizing the practice in the 1960s and 1970s. And, in fact, the concept of home delivery can be traced back much further, to a popular practice in Italian-American neighborhoods of fresh bread deliveries from Italian bakeries.⁴⁹ Domino's specialized in free delivery, with no sit-down service at all. Monaghan initially targeted college towns and military bases, only later expanding into urban and suburban residential areas. With delivery, however, standardization and predictability of the end product was essential. Monaghan decided early on to offer one-size pizzas only, the 12-inch, to simplify production, though in recent years, Domino's has diversified its menu choices to include sandwiches, pasta, and chicken wings to remain competitive. He funded research into finding the most effective "hot boxes" and "hot bags," pizza containers with portable heaters to ensure that pizza arrived at the desired temperature at the customers' homes. Carefully monitoring delivery speeds, and even holding contests to award personnel for making the quickest pizzas, Monaghan constructed the Domino's brand on the promise of speed. This vision, though, had its liabilities. In the 1990s, Domino's had to relinquish the 30-minute guarantee after a series of costly lawsuits involving car accidents with delivery personnel.

Pizza chains struggled to formulate marketing strategies to edge out competition. Little Caesars, one of Domino's historic competitors, tried delivery for a few years and then opted for a primarily take-out-only operation. According to its founder Mike Ilitch, the son of Macedonian immigrants, "We feel that as long as society is mobile, and we're conveniently located in accessible spots, we'll do fine with our take-out operation."⁵⁰ Little Caesars oriented its marketing around the concept of good value for the price, selling two pizzas for the price of one. Shakey's Pizza, a chain based in San Francisco with over 460 stores in 1980, could not compete with the more limited-menu chains of Domino's and Little Caesars, and so it sought to mimic the dining experience of the mom-and-pop restaurants. Shakey's changed its dining concept in the late 1970s from a pizza parlor to a "new style" restaurant, offering a reasonably priced buffet with a salad bar, pizza, and a variety of other food options. Shakey's, like other chains of that period, also introduced Mexican-style pizzas (Shakey's called them taco-style pizarritos) as a fusion of Italian and Mexican fast food tastes.⁵¹ Shakey's did not survive, but new chain concepts emerged. In 1984, John Schnatter founded Papa John's, a growing pizza chain that defines itself by the motto: "Better Ingredients, Better Pizza." Schnatter said in an interview with *Fortune* magazine, "We realized early on that Domino's had the speed, Little Caesars had the price, and Pizza Hut had variety," so he created a chain concept that "acted like an independent as far as quality" in order to achieve "the best of all worlds." By 2008, the chain was ranked third in overall pizza sales at \$2 billion, behind only Pizza Hut and Domino's.⁵²

The technological innovation of the home freezer, which proliferated in the 1950s, made possible the rise of the frozen pizza market. By 1972, one in every three households had a home freezer.⁵³ The first frozen pizza brand came out in 1957, produced by the Celentano Brothers. Soon after, Rose and Jim Totino, of Minneapolis, who had opened a pizza parlor

in 1952, began producing frozen pizzas. Pillsbury acquired Totino's in 1975, giving them a nationwide market in frozen food distribution. By 1969, Totino's frozen pizza had cornered the market, with 75 percent of all frozen pizza sales, but it faced the competition of an emerging rival, Tombstone, bought by Kraft in 1986. Recognizing the potential convenience of frozen pizza, several major fast food conglomerates acquired smaller companies that sold frozen pizzas. Nestlé owns DiGiorno, the leading brand in pizza sales as of 2012. Nestlé also bought Tombstone from Kraft in 2010 and owns the rights to Jack's and California Pizza Kitchen frozen pizza varieties. In 1974 Nestlé's Stouffer's Food Division acquired the license to sell one of its most successful product lines, french bread pizza, a recipe innovated by street vendor Bob Petrillose on the Cornell University campus. Schwan Food Co. owns the number two brand in pizza sales, Red Baron, as well as the up-scale line, Freschetta. Nestlé and Schwan are battling for dominion of the frozen pizza market with their rival lines, DiGiorno and Freschetta, marketing what they called a "self-rising" crust to try to imitate the taste and consistency of pizzeria-style pizza.⁵⁴

The growth of the frozen food segment of the food industry broke down an important barrier for fast food. Fast food no longer had to be dine-in, take-out, or delivered; it could seemingly be "cooked" as part of a family's daily routine. In addition to providing pre-made pizzas in the frozen food aisle, food vendors offered items to simplify the labor of pizza preparation at home: pizza-making kits, prepackaged dough, canned pizza sauces, pre-shredded cheese, and even pre-cut toppings. The sale of home-making kits, such as sold by Chef Boy-ar-dee, and recipes for English muffin pizzas encouraged the idea of pizza preparation at home as early as the 1950s. The supermarket became an extension of the fast food chain, offering frozen foods that were precooked and could be quickly and easily prepared, with standardized results. For many families, this was even faster, or roughly equivalent, to awaiting food preparation at local restaurants or delivery.

The growth of the frozen food market accelerated the trend in American family life toward minimizing time allotted to food preparation. In the 1920s the average homemaker spent five to six hours a day preparing family meals. The development of packaged, convenience foods cut that time to an hour and a half or less by the 1950s, which is still three times as long as the average American devotes to food preparation today.⁵⁵ The invention of the microwave was, perhaps, the ultimate asset to quick food preparation, but it had its limits with respect to pizza, which does not generally heat well in the microwave. Although frozen pizza does not heat as quickly in conventional ovens as it might in the microwave, it has the added advantage of being cheaper than pizza restaurants; according to *Good Housekeeping's* survey of market prices in 1975, it found that Pizza Hut's pizza costs up to twice as much as homemade and between 25 and 50 cents more per pizza than frozen pizza.⁵⁶ Whereas the initial appeal of frozen pizza was its ability to feed a family for less, inexpensive brands like Tombstone, which cater to budget-conscious consumers have faced more recent competition from up-scale varieties, like DiGiorno and Freschetta. These brands target consumers willing to pay for higher-quality frozen pizza for the convenience of at-home preparation.

Like the big pizza franchises, a few key players dominate the frozen pizza industry. Ohio-based MaMa Rosa's has become the largest branded refrigerated pizza distributor in the United States, with annual sales of about \$70 million. They offer a variety of frozen pizzas, including a Lean Lifestyle brand aimed at health-conscious and diabetic consumers as well as packaged, refrigerated dough that could be made into pizza at home. Its genesis began in Ohio with Michael Gilardi, founder of Gilardi's Pizza Products, in 1979.

ConAgra Foods acquired it in 1998, transforming it into a configuration of brands: “MaMa Rosa’s,” “Mama Angelina’s,” and “Our Old Italian,” names calculated to conjure up the familial and traditional origins of the brand. In 2006, the company transferred ownership again, this time to Plaza Belmont Management Group LLC. Since then, the company grew through the acquisition of other frozen pizza and frozen food companies, like Amstar/Virga Foods in 2008, and was awarded a multi-million-dollar contract for servicing public schools and military bases in Puerto Rico in 2009.⁵⁷ The evolution of the company epitomizes the process of corporate and global aggrandizement that marks both the dine-in and frozen food sides of the fast food industry. MaMa Rosa’s now distributes to over 10,000 supermarkets, pharmacies, and convenience stores.

Yet surprisingly, the rise of frozen foods has not necessarily hurt fast food restaurant sales. To the contrary, the two trends have reinforced each other, promoting consumer desire for particular fast foods and deepening Americans’ dietary reliance on processed foods. Like other fast food chains, by the mid-1980s the large pizza franchises opened units in malls, department stores, workplace and college cafeterias, airports, and even hospitals. By the end of the decade, Americans were spending \$20 billion a year on pizza, 90 percent of which was purchased for dine-in and take-out and ten percent from frozen retail varieties at supermarkets, according to the National Association of Pizza Operators.⁵⁸

In 1960, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) approved pizza for meeting their guidelines for school lunches, and the most profitable school lunch menu item was born. The Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs declared its nutrients in exact accordance to USDA recommendations: 15 percent protein, 27 percent fat, and 58 percent carbohydrate.⁵⁹ A Virginia-based School Nutrition Association’s “Vote for School Lunch” campaign in 2006 found that based on the votes of thousands of school children, pizza was the landslide winner as the most popular lunch choice.⁶⁰

The fast food industry had conquered yet another domain – schools – so much so that some public schools have begun to contract out school lunch programs directly to fast food providers, like McDonald’s and Pizza Hut. Nonetheless, concerns over childhood obesity have raised public scrutiny of school lunch programs. While most schools are reluctant to get rid of a pizza option due to its popularity with kids, one up-and-coming Los-Angeles-based chain found an innovative way to break into the competitive market for these school contracts. Fresh Brothers, opening in 2007, created a recipe that blended vegetables into their pizza sauce, securing them contracts with several local districts. The competition for these contracts is fierce, with a number of companies, like Tony’s Pizza, LiveSmart, and Domino’s, offering healthier product lines intended to meet school lunch guidelines. Once again, pizza’s adaptability has safeguarded its longevity and opened space for small business operators to compete with the big franchises.

A comfort and party food

Vice President of marketing for the Nebraska-based Godfather’s Pizza chain recognized that the perception of pizza as a fun, family-oriented food is key to its successful promotion: “Eating pizza is a social, and sharing, occasion. It’s fun, and more than just a fueling occasion.”⁶¹ Classifying pizza as a party food was brilliantly calibrated to meet the needs of a working-class American culture: it could be obtained quickly, at manageable cost, and consumed by the “pie,” meaning it was meant to be consumed in social groupings. American sports culture provides one arena for shared pizza consumption. Entrepreneurs

in the industry targeted the consumer base of sports fans, particularly for delivery, because watching games is often a cause for social gatherings. Monaghan, of Domino's Pizza, became owner of the Detroit Tigers in 1983 and ran promotions in conjunction with the team. He sold the team in 1992 to Mike Ilitch, owner of Little Caesars Pizza, who followed Monaghan's lead. Papa John's became the corporate sponsor of the National Football League (NFL) in 2010 and has earned the designation as the NFL's official pizza. Papa John's has leveraged this relationship toward very successful promotional campaigns, particularly in relation to one of the biggest sales days of the year for pizza, Super Bowl Sunday.

In addition to sports fans, many families, particularly with parents between the ages of 25 and 44, have woven TV or movie pizza nights into their family routines, accounting for seven percent of total pizza sales according to a 2012 survey of pizza respondents.⁶² Movies have helped to institutionalize the social conventions of eating pizza, with recurring representations across film genres of kids and teenagers consuming pizza, ranging from *Mary-Kate and Ashley's Sleepover Party* (1995) to horror movies, like *Slumber Party Massacre* (1982). Some films depicted pizzerias as centers of community life, like *Do The Right Thing* (1989), or social networks, such as *Mystic Pizza* (1988). The aura of pizza also owes much to its legendary place in American celebrity culture, whether it is Joe DiMaggio wooing Marilyn Monroe with pizza or famous celebrities, like Jackie Gleason and Frank Sinatra, publicly celebrating their bottomless appetite for the dish.

Most fast foods, in fact, do not enjoy this social connotation; the perception of pizza as a social occasion has resulted from a history of calculated marketing campaigns equating pizza with entertainment – as a food that brings forth sentiments of comfort, friends, and good times. One of the earliest pizza franchises, Shakey's Pizza Parlor, founded by war veteran Sherwood "Shakey" Johnson and Ed Plummer in 1957 in Sacramento, California, tried to hook the dine-in crowd with musical performances. Set in an English-style pub with Dixieland music, Shakey's abandoned the prototype of the Italian-American pizzeria and created an atmosphere more akin to a bar. As early as the 1950s, restaurateurs recognized that shaping the atmosphere and social context of eating pizza was critical to successful promotion. Even with pizza delivery as opposed to dine-in, marketers emphasized the social aspect of pizza and helped inculcate the cultural notion of the "pizza party." Some smaller chains in the 1980s, for example, in their efforts to compete with Domino's, began delivering videocassette rentals to homes along with pizzas.⁶³ An evening of entertainment, therefore, could be acquired all in one package, at a low price. Gatti's Pizza, a Texas-based chain with over a hundred units in the Southwest, launched an advertising campaign in 2007 with the motto, "Getting Together Over Gatti's." Many of the units opened GattiTowns, entertainment centers featuring kids' rides, virtual reality games, and bumper cars in conjunction with their pizza restaurants. The intent was to create pizza destinations ideally suited for birthday parties and corporate outings.⁶⁴ The fusion of fun and pizza undoubtedly inspired the construction of the "Giant Pizza Playground" at the National Zoological Park in Washington, D.C., a 22-foot rubberized pizza-themed play area with oversized olives, mushrooms, and other toppings for children to climb on, fit with a cheese wedge slide.

During the "pizza wars," as businesses struggled to come up with new concepts to edge out the competition, many chains created gimmicks to appeal to children. Ray Kroc, founder of the McDonald's franchise, helped secure hegemony in the children's market through the launch of Ronald McDonald, who debuted on television in 1963,

spearheading the approach of targeting advertising to children.⁶⁵ One chain, ShowBiz Pizza, marketed itself through the concept of “pizza-and-family-fun,” integrating playrooms directly into its pizza restaurants. In 1977, Nolan Bushnell, founder of Atari video games, opened the first Chuck E. Cheese in San Jose, California, hoping to integrate his interest in video gaming with the restaurant business. ShowBiz and Chuck E. Cheese became primary rivals, and both competed for consumer attention by offering performances by animatronic robots and enticing playspaces. ShowBiz later bought out Chuck E. Cheese in 1984 after it went bankrupt, and the two chains merged. The incorporation of arcades, playrooms, and electronic entertainments into pizza restaurants (in these two chains and many others) helped to inspire the cultural association between kids and pizza. Such restaurants marketed themselves as ideal venues for birthday parties, and the success of their campaigns is clearly evident. Today even kids’ party places that are not pizza restaurants often contract out to local places to cater their parties or encourage families to have pizza delivered. Pizza has become almost as vital to kids’ birthday parties as birthday cake.

The illusion of choice

One reason why the pizza industry has thrived domestically and globally, in markets with very different culinary preferences, is its adaptability. It exemplifies *glocalization*, the modification of global production trends to suit local tastes.⁶⁶ Pizza franchisors did not universalize the product; they could instead adapt crust thickness, sauce spiciness, and topping choices to appeal to particular markets. The ease by which such superficial alterations could be applied to pizza has aided in the alacrity and success of its global profusion, countering perceptions of cultural homogenization yet fostering the economic domination of a handful of pizza chains around the globe. For instance, Pizza Hut, the chain with the greatest number of international units, floundered in the early 1980s in its attempts to break into Hong Kong in large part because cheese was not a staple of the local diet. It eventually achieved success by altering the recipe to use very light cheese and curried beef, seafood, or barbecued beef. By the mid-1990s, Pizza Hut had garnered nearly 80 percent of the market share in Hong Kong.⁶⁷ Most typically, pizza-makers acclimate to local food patterns through the creative use of toppings. Some of the most popular toppings internationally include: pickled ginger, mutton, and tofu in India; tuna in Europe; curry in Pakistan; coconut in Costa Rica; and red herring in Russia.⁶⁸ Similarly pizzerias around the United States offer distinctive varieties of pizza that suit local tastes, such as: taco pizza in Antlers, Oklahoma; crawfish tail cream cheese red pepper pizza in Ridgeland, Mississippi; and alligator-topped pizza in Oregon.⁶⁹

The regionalization of pizza and pastiche of multi-national and multi-ethnic influences has been an important factor in staving off criticisms of homogenization. Although many independent pizzerias stick to their particular regional styles, a number of chain restaurants marketing regional pizza styles have achieved success outside their geographic areas, such as California Pizza Kitchen, Uno’s Chicago Grill (deep-dish Chicago style), and Amici’s East Coast Pizzeria (offering New York-style pizza to West Coast consumers). Their strategy is to sell to transplanted consumers, longing for the pizza style they are accustomed to, as well as garner consumers seeking alternatives to the local norm. Some of these styles, like California and New York, have been more successful than others in external markets. In effect, the notion of regionalization rationalizes the coexistence of multiple chains

catering to different styles in all geographic areas and creates an illusion of choice within the pizza marketplace that advertisers can use to build consumer loyalty.

Many popular regional styles of American pizza cuisine are rooted in Neapolitan recipes. Chicago's deep-dish pizza, for example, has antecedents in Italian tortes, such as pitta, sfincuni, pizza rustica, and pizza pasqualina. In 1943, Ike Sewell and Ric Riccardo bought a pub and used this basic culinary concept to innovate the buttery, pan-prepared thick crust of their now-famous "Chicago-style" deep-dish pizza. Pizzeria Uno opened six months later, made famous by a *Chicago Tribune* reporter's rave review that the pizza was not only better than that which he had eaten in Italy, but that with a bottle of Chianti, was the best meal for the money in all of Chicago. Sewell and Riccardo began franchising Pizzeria Uno in 1979, and at present, there are 140 locations throughout the United States as well as a handful of units in foreign countries. Ironically, Uno Chicago Grill has only three Chicago locations, but Sewell and Riccardo helped define the regional brand, influencing many other local independent pizza-makers to adopt variations of the style.⁷⁰

Also based on Neapolitan-style pizza, New York pizza has a thin crust with a dense outer core. Because of the large Italian demographic in the city, pizzerias proliferated in the greater New York area. New York pizzerias are most well known for selling pizza by the slice. A leading innovator of this new trend was Patsy's, a pizzeria that opened in 1933 in East Harlem. Many pizzerias would showcase their pizzas in front glass windows to attract passersby, marketing slices as a quick snack or meal-on-the-go. Nearby New Haven, Connecticut, a city with a thriving Italian ethnic neighborhood around Wooster Square, also became a popular spot for pizza, a legendary favorite of celebrities like Frank Sinatra. In 1925, Italian immigrant Frank Pepe opened his Pizzeria Napoletana, offering its infamous white-clam pizza, and in 1938, Pepe's nephew opened up a rival shop, Sally's Apizza, in close proximity.⁷¹ In East Boston, Italian baker Francisco Santarpio began serving pizza in 1933 and Anthony Polcari opened Pizzeria Regina in Boston's North End in 1926, offering carryout directly to cars, a progenitor of the curbside-to-go fast food trend. Pizzerias, like Pepe's and Santarpio's, represent Italian-American family businesses with substantial consumer followings that have withstood the competition of the large franchises. But they hardly represent the norm of the Northeastern pizza marketplace. When Tim Monaghan, of Domino's Pizza, visited New York in the 1960s, he expected to learn about pizza from the Italian masters but instead was surprised to find that Filipino- and Jewish-Americans owned most of the shops.⁷² As stated earlier, Greek-Americans control a large stake of the Connecticut pizza market. Despite the legendary status of a few key places, then, the vast majority of pizzerias in the "pizza belt" are either franchised units of the pizza chains or independent operators, many of whom are not ethnically Italian.

Pizza was easily incorporated into new styles of cooking emerging in parts of the country, like California. Alice Waters is largely credited for initiating the phenomenon of "California-style" cuisine in her restaurant, Chez Panisse, in the early 1970s. She created sophisticated dishes that utilized local ingredients and fused Asian, Hispanic, Italian, French, Southern, and other regional and ethnic influences. Her protégés, particularly her partner Jeremiah Tower, innovated the culinary sensation of "California-style" pizza. California-style pizza typically had a thin crust and incorporated an array of unusual toppings, like tandoori chicken, wild mushrooms, or goat cheese. Austrian-born chef Wolfgang Puck, in his restaurant, Spago, put the dish on the map, offering non-traditional pizzas to an upper-class clientele. Rather than pigeonholing the dish as Italian-American, he integrated different ethnic food traditions into his recipes, including offering a smoked salmon

and golden caviar pizza he called “Jewish pizza.”⁷³ Marketers of California-style claimed their pizza to be antithetical to fast food in principle due to its inventive and varying set of ingredients, despite its mass production. The casual dining chain, California Pizza Kitchen, opened in 1985 and spread to over 250 locations in more than 30 states and 11 countries. Its menu offered “designer” pizza varieties peddling a fusion of global flavors: i.e. Peking Duck Pizza, Santa Fe Pizza, Spicy Korean Barbeque Pizza, Thai Chicken Pizza, and Jamaican Jerk Chicken. The *New York Times* dubbed the restaurant “gourmet fast food.”⁷⁴ Co-founder Richard Rosenfield defined the California Pizza brand as of a higher class than the typical delivery chains to appeal to consumers not merely seeking convenience, but seeking a more sophisticated, international pizza experience. This strategy, ironically enough, did not prevent the franchise from supplementing its dine-in brand with its own line of frozen supermarket-sold varieties, distributed by Nestlé USA.

Consumers in recent decades have grown more nutrition conscious, creating a market for “healthier” pizza options branded as “light,” “natural,” “lean,” “low-carb,” “vegan,” “whole-grain,” “gluten free,” and “organic.” Despite a marked increase in these nutritional claims, only about 40 percent of consumer respondents reported any concern about the health value of pizza when they ate it, which likely reflects the social context of eating pizza, taking place at parties or other social gatherings.⁷⁵ Nonetheless, the growing segment of the food industry dedicated to health-conscious selection has inspired the growth of new pizza businesses seeking to capitalize on this demand by remaking pizza into a more healthful choice – using thinner, whole-grain flatbreads, minimal cheese, vegetable and lean meat toppings. Chicagoan Ed Jacobson launched the franchised chain, Edwardo’s Natural Pizza, utilizing a hydroponic herb garden on premises to emphasize the fresh and natural ingredients in his deep-dish pizzas. Similarly, Vaughan Lazar and Michael Gordon founded Pizza Fusion in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, a pizzeria committed to organic ingredients and environmentally responsible processing, including hybrid delivery cars. Achieving \$60 million in sales in 2008, it appeals to consumers who are vegan, lactose intolerant, and allergic to gluten.⁷⁶ A number of new frozen pizza varieties have also been introduced, including the high fiber Kashi Four Cheese Pizza, the probiotic and multigrain Frozen Naked Pizza line, and Annie’s organic-rising crust pizza. These newer offerings strive to compete with the larger, more established corporations in the fast food marketplace, which are similarly clamoring to meet this growing consumer demand. Domino’s, in fact, was the first national pizza chain to offer a gluten-free crust.⁷⁷

In the 1990s, a number of independent pizzerias and up-scale chains asserted themselves against the power of large franchises by offering consumers “artisanal” or “gourmet” pizza, labels aimed to distinguish their product from the industrially-produced, standardized fare. They pledged more “authentic” preparation and use of higher-quality ingredients. A few even sought out official certification of Italian authenticity from an organization called the Associazione Verace Pizza Napoletana (VPN). Recognizing that purchasing food is an act of enunciating one’s identity, these marketing campaigns articulated a class-based system of pizza consumption, appealing to those who identify with culinary sophistication and designating the chains for the masses. Some businesses marketed their pizza for more sophisticated tastes by replacing or supplementing mozzarella cheese with feta, goat, gouda, asiago, and other cheeses, as well as incorporating international or fusion cuisine trends into their recipes. But the large chain restaurants fired back; Domino’s Pizza, for example, launched in 2011 its version of “Artisan Pizza,” a square shaped pizza with what they call “an artisan-style crust,” with such varieties as “Tuscan Salami & Roasted Veggie” and

“Chicken & Bacon Carbonara.” Pizza Hut in New Zealand launched a “gourmet” product line in 2005 to attract the business clientele of its up-scale competitors.⁷⁸ Such co-optation of the language of “artisanal” pizza complicates, if not blurs entirely, any neat distinction between “standardized” and “artisanal” pizza.

Pizza advertisements, from California Pizza’s Kitchen’s “hearth-based” pizza to Domino’s artisanal selections, emphasize, first and foremost, claims to authenticity. Pizzeria Venti, for example, a small Florida-based chain, markets its recipes as authentically Italian, even claiming to import water and extra virgin olive oil directly from Northern Italy to ensure quality.⁷⁹ The prevalence for which this label has been appended, and in many cases the laxity for which it has been adhered to, has had repercussions. Particularly in Naples, there is resistance to the ways that pizza as a cuisine has been changed, even corrupted, outside the city. In the mid-1990s, a delegation of Neapolitan pizza chefs traveled to the United States, acting as the “pizza police,” to quote the *New York Times*, to promote the rules of proper pizza-making conduct according to the trade group, the Naples Pizza Association.⁸⁰ Despite such protests, the food segment of Neapolitan tourism capitalizes on marketing to consumers’ desire to try the “real” thing. In 1995, for example, Antonio Bassolino, the mayor of Naples, created the tradition of a ten-day annual pizza celebration called “PizzaFest.”⁸¹ To be sure, there are regional variations of pizza styles in Italy as well as America (Neapolitan, Roman, and Sicilian are the most well known). The popularity of pizza in America and around the globe has bolstered the cuisine’s importance in Italian food culture, particularly with respect to international tourism.

The fiercely competitive pizza wars have certainly extended internationally, requiring flexibility and ingenuity not only in recipe selection but also in business approach. Pizza Hut and Domino’s, for example, are battling for dominion in India. Both chains have over one hundred stores and open about 50 new units there a year, quadrupling the average of other markets. Whereas Domino’s is primarily a delivery business and Pizza Hut has table service, the rivalry between the two brands in India has prompted both sides to crossover into the other’s domain. Domino’s has renovated many of its stores to include a dine-in option, which now yields at least 40 percent of its business, while Pizza Hut is making as much as 50 percent of its sales through home delivery.⁸²

Notwithstanding the varying stylistic differences in crust and toppings, the proliferation of pizza franchises domestically and globally and the persistence of independent pizzerias have facilitated a shared conception of what constitutes American-style pizza. The dish has become recognizable to consumers around the nation and the world, of all ethnic backgrounds. In fact, pizza appears as an entrée on more than one-third of all restaurant menus in the United States.⁸³ Yet, regional and local differentiation, which continues to evolve, thwarts perceptions of homogenization by creating the sensation of variety, even as a few large conglomerates retain hegemony in global markets.

Conclusion

“Fast food,” a phrase reviled by those in the industry for its implication of speed over quality, has transformed domestic, and potentially even global, eating habits. While pizza has its roots in Italy and Italian-American communities, today big industries export pizza globally as quintessential American fare, such as Pizza Hut’s Middle Eastern offering of its “Cheese Burger Crown Crust Pizza,” a pizza topped with ground beef, tomatoes and lettuce with a ring of mini cheeseburgers on top of the pizza crust. In Germany, Pizza Hut

offers a “Mac ’n’ Cheese Pizza.”⁸⁴ Toppers Pizza, a Wisconsin-based pizza chain with 20 stores in the Midwest, defined its brand with specialty pizzas, such as its Buffalo Chicken Pizza, Mac and Cheese Pizza, and “BL Frickin’ T” Pizza (a bacon, lettuce, and tomato topped pizza), all successfully launched in 2008.⁸⁵ These pizza franchises attempted to integrate classic American fast foods into their pizza recipes to create a hyper-Americanized food experience bound into one dish. What this history shows is that pizza businesses, whether franchised or independently owned, have been very deliberate in the imagery and ingredients they draw from in marketing their pizzas, whether relying on its “Old Country” ethnic past, peddling it as a cheap, filling, on-the-go option, emphasizing its healthy or wholesome quality, or selling the “bigger, bolder” American theme. Despite pizza’s Italian and Italian-American roots as well as its post-World War II emergence as a mass-produced food commodity, pizza entrepreneurs seemingly leverage pizza’s “fast food” and “ethnic” status as they see fit.

Food functions to enact ethnic and national identities. As waves of immigrants came to the United States from Southern and Eastern Europe, the vast majority of them emigrated to escape poverty and hunger. Hasia Diner’s research has shown how Southern Italian immigrants “measured their American lives against remembered Italian scarcity.”⁸⁶ Holding on to traditional cooking methods and dishes helped to ease new immigrants into their new surroundings, and these foodways developed over time into a new set of hybridized ethnic dishes that helped nurture a new group identity, one that identified as American with a sustained ethnic consciousness. Even if the dishes had transformed substantially from their European variants, their authenticity often mattered less than their symbolic importance, for they could still be celebrated for their ethnic origins, and in many cases, marketed as such.⁸⁷

For many immigrants America represented the promise of prosperity, and food abundance was a critical signifier of satiety, even if it was measured in quantity over quality. In many ways, fast food is the incarnation of the American dream: food that can be acquired fast, cheaply, and in “super-size” portions. Mikhail Gorbachev recognized the symbolic importance attached to American fast food, and in particular pizza, when he sought to mobilize the aura of American food culture to facilitate cross-cultural communication with the West. He paved the way for pizza’s introduction into Russia, appearing in a 1997 Pizza Hut commercial that depicted Russian consumers thanking him for bringing the restaurant chain to Russia, shouting, “Hail to Gorbachev!” What a powerful way to show the possibilities of cultural exchange with the literal consumption of American culture: Gorbachev raising up a slice of Pizza Hut pizza in salute.⁸⁸

Notes

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- 3 Fast food is typically dispensed at self-service counters or drive-through windows, but some chain restaurants, like Pizza Hut, offer menu dining service with waits as long as traditional restaurants. Robert Emerson, *The New Economics of Fast Food*, New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1990, p. 17.
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- 5 Thomas Dicke, *Franchising in America: The Development of a Business Model, 1840–1980*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992, p. 126.

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